RELATIONS AND AGENCY IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT: THE AFGHAN DIASPORA AND ITS ENGAGEMENTS FOR CHANGE IN AFGHANISTAN

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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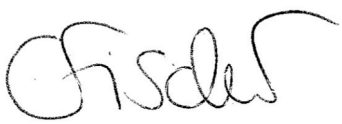
Candidate's signature:  Date: 14th July 2015

ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the lives and civic engagements of Afghans in Germany and the UK. It shows how Afghans living in these two countries relate to Afghanistan, and to what extent they engage in transnational action aimed at promoting change there. In particular, it explores the emergence of diasporic communities and how members exercise agency as development actors in Afghanistan. The research rests on a qualitative case study conducted among Afghan populations in Germany and the UK. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were primary methods of data collection. Relational sociology is used to capture emerging social identities, patterns of social organisation and forms of social engagement. A first notable finding is that Afghan populations abroad are fractured and cannot be seen as a united diaspora. People tend to coalesce in narrowly defined subgroups rather than under a shared national identity. Second, Afghanistan remains a crucial reference point, notwithstanding fragmented social organisation. Home country attachments tend to be tied to a desire for change and development in the country. Third, despite these shared concerns, transnational engagements are typically carried out by small groups and directed towards confined social spheres. Although people may take action in the name of an imagined Afghan community or an imaginary Afghanistan, this imagined community does not provide a basis for social mobilisation. Thus Afghans do not act as a cohesive diaspora. Fourth, transnational engagements are often a response to the specificities of the social environments in which people are embedded, notably their host countries. The findings show that a relational approach can specify how different dimensions of people's social identities drive social action and are shaped in interaction with various elements of their social context. Such an actor-centred perspective helps to improve our understanding of how members of diasporas come to engage with their countries of origin.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AS	Afghanistan Schools (civic organisation registered in Germany)
APN	Afghan Professionals' Network (civic organisation registered in the UK)
APS	Annual Population Survey
AWA	Afghan Women's Association (civic organisation registered in Germany)
BAAG	British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group
CUREC	Central University Research Ethics Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
ECI	Enabled Children Initiative (civic organisation registered in the UK)
GDR	German Democratic Republic
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NASS	National Asylum Seeker Support System
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official development aid
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This thesis is about the lives and civic engagements of Afghans in Germany and the UK. I show how Afghans living in two specific destinations of the wider diaspora relate to Afghanistan. More specifically I scrutinise the emergence of diasporic communities and explore how people engage in transnational activities through which they aim to contribute to change 'on the ground' in their country of origin.

I came to this research from a previous study of Afghan civic organisations in Germany, which I conducted between 2006 and 2007 as part of my diploma degree in Sociology at Bielefeld University. My aim then was to explore how Afghans in Germany contributed to peace building in their conflict-ridden homeland. I discovered that all over Germany there were many small groups of Afghans who were involved in transnational initiatives in Afghanistan. My informants took part in concrete activities including projects that aimed to improve access to education, medical care and satisfy basic requirements such as drinking water. In the literature such activities are widely framed as diaspora engagement for home country development. However, big terms such as 'diaspora' and 'development' seemed far too nebulous for the small organisations I was studying and their very focused work. In fact, most of the organisations I encountered worked in very specific areas regionally as well as professionally. Given the multiple concrete objectives of the observed activities, I was reluctant to subsume them under a generalised heading such as 'development' or 'peace building'. Rather I developed a curiosity about what transnational engagements actually meant to Afghans living outside their

homeland. Also I wondered whether people saw themselves as belonging to a wider Afghan diaspora that might together improve conditions in Afghanistan.

The research I conducted for my diploma thesis revealed a wealth of insights into the activities of Afghan organisations in Germany, and I was able to specify how informants thought of their work as contributing to a more peaceful Afghanistan. Yet I had to acknowledge that my study had yielded many more questions than I was able to answer. These unanswered questions formed the starting point for this thesis and for another, closer encounter with the Afghan 'diaspora'. In particular I was curious to find out more about the drivers of engagement. Given that Germany is home to more than 100,000 persons of Afghan origin, I was eager to establish why some of them engage in organised civic action while others do not. In other words I developed an interest in questions of agency and the social structures that enable or constrain agency. I thought there would be a great deal to learn from a more fine-grained analysis of contextual engagement and agency. Looking at action and its environments (Alexander, 1988) promised new insights into the ways actors negotiate the world around them. To capture the specificities of social context for my research population I decided to extend my study to include research sites in the UK as well as Germany. The two countries represent different immigration contexts in Western Europe, and are home to distinct groups of the wider Afghan diaspora.

1.1 Diaspora: An analytical perspective

Most accounts of Afghan displacement are concerned with the millions of people who live as refugees in countries adjacent to Afghanistan or are internally

displaced (Koser, 2014; Macleod, 2013; Stigter & Monsutti, 2005; Turton & Marsden, 2002). In both cases humanitarian needs often remain unmet, which partly explains the attention paid to these groups. However, it should be acknowledged that migration and displacement from Afghanistan is a global phenomenon as growing numbers of Afghans are seeking resettlement in different destinations worldwide. In the literature the notion of *diaspora* is used as an umbrella term for such living conditions.

Diaspora as a concept and category of existence first evolved around paradigmatic cases of populations that experienced traumatic dispersal and processes of regrouping in different places around the world. Regrouping essentially occurred around a specific set of aspects (Brubaker, 2005; Cohen, 2008; Van Hear, 1998):

i) A collective memory – and perhaps myth – about the (ancestral) home country.

ii) A group consciousness, which is upheld over a long time.

iii) A sustained network of social relationships with members of the group living in different countries of settlement.

Relations to people and relations to places thus feature centrally in paradigmatic understandings of diasporas. Such relations – as the title of this thesis suggests – stretch across borders in geographical as well as socio-cultural terms, which implies that diaspora has to be conceived of as essentially transnational phenomenon (Faist, 2010; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Van Hear, 1998). As long as we adhere to ideal-typical conceptions, the emergence and characteristic features of diasporas are relatively straightforward. However, thinking of diasporas as social

entities that evolve around triadic relationships between home countries, host countries and transnational diaspora communities (Brubaker, 2005) implies a puzzle as to how changes occurring at one of the three levels may affect or interact with the other two. This calls the substances and determinants of diasporic relations into question and urges us to rethink diasporas as social entities that are inherently changeable and can wax and wane depending on the respective contextual specificities.

In the literature we find a gradual shift of attention from diasporas as social forms to diasporas as social actors. Among the growing number of studies on diaspora engagements, home country relations, transnational activities and impact gained attention. Forms of diaspora involvement are often cast as drivers of development and change in countries of origin. They include so-called hometown associations, remittance sending (Orozco, 2013; Vertovec, 2004), and the transfer of social, cultural and political ideas and artefacts (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt, 1998). Conflict-induced diasporas are often seen as 'players in the global political economy' that may contribute to peace building or protracted warfare in their countries of origin (Brinkerhoff, 2011b; Koinova, 2011a; Horst et al., 2010).

Yet, many of the numerous substantive case studies of diaspora engagement do not fully acknowledge diaspora communities as social entities (Turner, 2010). Why people coalesce into diasporas, how they frame their relationship to their country of origin, and why and how members of diaspora communities choose to engage in homeland-oriented activities often remains unquestioned (Horst, 2013; Page & Mercer, 2012; Lampert, 2009; Lindley, 2009; Kleist, 2008). This is exacerbated by inflationary semantics, which blur the idea of diasporas (Brubaker, 2005). Empirical accounts on diaspora engagement tend to attribute the observed

activities to simple mechanisms like 'strong sentimental and material links' (Sheffer, 1986, p. 3) that diasporans maintain with their countries of origin. Connected to this is the assumption that '[d]iaspora members share a self-awareness or diasporic consciousness: they identify with each other as members of a dispersed identity group with continuing common ties to the homeland' (Brinkerhoff, 2012, p. 76).

The fixity of their conceptual underpinnings leads many studies of diaspora engagement to take for granted that individuals necessarily have a motivation and the agency to engage with their countries of origin. However, I argue that it is critical that, before any such assumptions are made, researchers first need to understand what shapes migrant agencies and motives. In this work I therefore strive to unpack the effects of the time-, place- and group-specific contexts in which diasporas evolve (Morawska, 2011). It helps to develop a more nuanced understanding of potential links between diaspora and development or – more generally – diaspora and change (Castles, 2010; Turner & Kleist, 2013; Van Hear, 2010). Ultimately I aim to show how the specific social embeddedness and modes of social organisation of diaspora populations are inextricably intertwined with the way people exercise agency in engaging with their origin countries. Throughout the thesis I use diaspora as a way of 'looking at the world' (Kalra et al., 2005, p. 28). It is a concept that allows us to survey dynamics of identity formation, social organisation and engagement. My empirical case study of Afghan populations in Germany and UK elucidates the social processes behind such abstract wording.

1.2 'Why Afghans…?'

My study attempts to bring together theories of diasporas as social forms and social actors with the in-depth study of Afghan populations in two specific countries of settlement. Many informants for my research asked how I came to do a PhD on the experiences of this particular group. Principally my choice of empirical case was motivated by two reasons. First, Afghanistan is the origin of one of the largest refugee populations in human history (Koser, 2014; Turton & Marsden, 2002). Whilst Afghan migrant populations are growing across Western Europe – with Germany and the UK being the most important destination countries – there is relatively little knowledge about the lives of Afghans in exile. Second, the history of Afghan migration and displacement challenges the concept of diaspora. There was not *one* historic break event that caused large parts of the Afghan population to be displaced and dispersed. Rather a sequence of political events, each of which triggered a renewed episode of violent conflict, led to various waves of migration (Centlivres, 2010). Hence Afghan migrant and refugee populations incorporate people with different migration experiences, representatives of different generations, and people from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Moreover they are diverse in terms of ethnic descent and political affiliations. I discovered further aspects of heterogeneity, which derive from different levels of integration into the respective receiving society and varying levels of intensity as far as people's ties with Afghanistan are concerned. Against the backdrop of the turbulent and complex history of Afghan migration and the heterogeneity of Afghan migrant populations, I examine the elements influencing how people relate to each other and their countries of origin and reception.

Since the late 1970s Afghanistan has been a scene of violent conflict and an extended period of repressive governance through the fundamentalist Taliban regime. An international intervention in 2001 sought to enhance stability and democratic modes of governance, but success has been limited. Decades of conflict left scars on the country, its people and its infrastructure. Conditions of political instability still prevail today and Afghanistan remains dependent on international aid. It is against this backdrop that Jazajery (2002, p. 243) notes

> [t]hough relatively small as opposed to overall refugee numbers, the diaspora will have very different contributions to make to the future development of Afghanistan should they return. Composed of many different sections of Afghan society, ethnic, and religious groups, they have different skills and aspirations from most of their fellow refugees in Pakistan and Iran.

With this statement Jazajery explicitly refers to the Afghan diaspora in Western countries. While alluding to its internal heterogeneity she holds that this Afghan diaspora can make valuable contributions to the origin country. But to what extent is this true? What are Jazajery's underlying assumptions when referring to the Afghan diaspora as an asset for the future development of Afghanistan?

Jazajery's paper and other previous studies on Afghan populations in Western countries (Gaur Singh, 2010; Muller, 2010; Oeppen, 2010; Braakman & Schlenkhoff, 2007) largely overlooked the constitutive elements of diasporic communities in different destinations, the determinants and effects of internal heterogeneity, and the ties people maintain with their country of origin. It is therefore unclear to what extent Afghan migrant communities across the world qualify as a diaspora in the general sense of the term (Cohen, 2008; Safran, 1991) and based on what premises they engage with their country of origin. Rather than assuming that Afghans in Western countries are eager and able to meaningfully

engage with conditions in their country of origin, I explore the relationships and settings that constitute the precursors and contexts of transnational activities. I scrutinise how agents negotiate the world around them by articulating their sense of belonging and their membership of certain groups or a wider social entity. This way I disentangle elements of agency with respect to people's self-perceptions and engagements with their country of origin.

I look at Germany and the UK because they are popular European destinations for Afghan migrants and refugees. More than 130,000 people of Afghan origin currently live in Germany (Destatis, 2012a) and over 65,000 are officially registered in the UK (ONS, 2011b). However, the history of migration to the two countries differs markedly. Germany has been receiving Afghan migrants and refugees for over four decades while the UK became a popular destination only from the mid 1990s on. Most Afghans who came to Germany during the 1970s and 1980s represent Afghanistan's former urban elite. In contrast, the majority of Afghans in the UK are onward migrants who lived in Iran or Pakistan before moving to Europe. This implies not only different migratory experiences of Afghans living in Britain[1] and Germany, but also deviating average levels of education and socio-economic backgrounds. However, over time, the migratory and socio-economic backgrounds of Afghans coming to both countries gradually diversified. Compared with Afghans living under conditions of protracted displacement in countries such as Iran and Pakistan, people migrating to Europe come from more affluent backgrounds, enabling them to move to European destinations in the first place. These similarities and differences suggest that Afghan populations in Britain

[1] Technically 'Britain' just refers to England, Scotland and Wales – where 'UK' also includes Northern Ireland. In this thesis I use both terms interchangeably but specify the exact geographical locations of my research sites in Chapter 4.

and Germany constitute distinct facets of a wider diaspora which lend themselves to a comparative inquiry.

1.3 Empirical and theoretical puzzles

Interest in diasporas as actors who actively engage with their countries of origin and settlement has grown over the past decade. In particular diasporas are now cast as agents of change in international development thinking. Transnational engagements of diasporas are framed as the panacea for alternative routes to development and change (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Kapur, 2004). The African Union, for instance, allegedly went as far as recognising the 'African Diaspora' as the 'sixth region in Africa' (Turner & Kleist, 2013). Such moves draw attention to two general trends: an understanding of diasporas as coherent social entities, and a shared belief in the ability and eagerness of diasporic groups to engage in home country development and act in what is thought to be the best interests of that country.

Such approaches to diasporas as (development) actors have been criticised for adopting a top-down approach as far as the conceptual underpinnings of their understanding of both diaspora and development are concerned (Sinatti & Horst, 2014; Raghuram, 2009). But little effort has been made to develop a more nuanced understanding of diasporas as actors who may frame their social environment and any engagement with it in different terms than outside observers. Hence, many studies of diaspora engagement display a narrow understanding of connections between engagement and agency. In fact agency of diasporas is usually only assessed

in terms of the impact people have on conditions in their country of origin (see for example Brinkerhoff, 2011a).

The celebration of diasporas as actors has been substantiated by numerous empirical studies on diasporic groups in different regions of the world. At the same time, the concept of diaspora has been put to the test. Contributions to the literature on diasporas as social forms engaged in critical conceptual re-evaluations, focusing particularly on complex identities (Anthias, 1998; Brah, 1996), multi-directional ties (Clifford, 1994) and hybridity (Kalra et al., 2005; Hall, 1990). Likewise conferences and workshops have been dedicated to endeavours such as 'dismantling diasporas' (RGS Annual Conference, 2012) or 'rethinking diasporas' (ODP Conference, 2013). There seem to be two academic camps: one seeks to question and adjust concepts of diaspora, while the other expands on and often praises identified potential capacities of diasporas as taken-for-granted social forms.

Against this backdrop a small number of studies attempt to shed light on accounts of diasporas as social actors by focusing explicitly on their particular set-up and the contextual determinants of specific active engagements (Horst, 2013; Lindley, 2009; Kleist, 2008). My study contributes to such attempts to reconcile a focus on diasporas as actors with a more systematic approach to diasporas as context-specific social formations. We cannot understand how members of diasporas come to engage with their origin countries unless we adopt an actor-centred perspective that explicitly takes into account the interplay between social embeddedness, identity, social organisation and social engagement. To address this problem, my empirical case study of Afghan populations in Germany and the UK is based on the following research questions:

i) How do people of Afghan origin who live in Britain and Germany come to see themselves as part of a wider diaspora?

ii) How do people of Afghan origin who live in Britain and Germany relate to change in Afghanistan?

iii) Why do they engage (or not engage) in Afghanistan-oriented action?

iv) How do the lives of Afghans in Britain and Germany and the ties they maintain with Afghanistan shape their engagements in transnational action?

At the outset these research questions may seem largely descriptive, but I developed them with the aim of delving into more deep-seated theoretical problems. Examining the nature of ties and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion among Afghan populations in Germany and the UK draws attention to the origins and effects of mutual perceptions and emerging social relations. This in turn helps us understand patterns of inclusion and exclusion and the formation of sub-groups among wider diaspora populations.

A more nuanced approach to the dynamics and patterns of social organisation among Afghan diaspora populations helps us situate people's relationships to their home country and their perceptions of change and development. People's personal backgrounds and their incorporation into their receiving society affect the meanings they ascribe to their places of origin and settlement, and their perceptions of membership and belonging more particularly. I found a sense of attachment with Afghanistan to be widely shared among informants in both countries, which indicates that informants' relationships to their country of origin form an integral building block of Afghan diasporic identity. Conversely to understand how

informants frame change and development and whether or not they strive to engage in transnational action requires us to consider further aspects of diasporic livelihoods.

My work thus focuses on the inner workings of diasporic identity and agency. I claim that identity and agency are intrinsically related, meaning that they stem from the multiple ways in which people are connected to one another in society and embedded in structural contexts (Hall & Lamont, 2013). I substantiate this claim throughout my empirical chapters. Moreover I specify how people's social embeddedness and complex diasporic identities shape the internal structure of Afghan populations, which in turn affects forms and areas of transnational engagement.

1.4 Connecting diaspora studies and relational sociology

In answering the research questions, my study contributes to a better understanding of how relationships between diasporas, their countries of origin and their current contextual environments unfold, and how these relationships are reflected in homeland-oriented action. These puzzles are at the heart of social theory. Surprisingly, sociological accounts of diaspora are very limited. Most contributions to the study of diaspora come from cultural studies (Cohen, 2008; Clifford, 1994; Hall, 1990), social anthropology (Sökefeld, 2004, 2006) and, more recently, politics and international relations (Brinkerhoff, 2012; Koinova, 2012; Shain, 1999) and human geography (Gamlen, 2008a; Mercer et al., 2008). In the following paragraphs I give a brief outline explaining how I employ key themes of

sociological inquiry to illuminate the links between the central aspects of diasporas as social forms and diasporas as social actors.

Examining how people of Afghan origin who live in Britain and Germany come to see themselves as part of a wider diaspora invokes questions of social being and social consciousness (Somers, 1994). I focus on dynamics of community formation within specific temporal and local contexts. Perceptions of 'self' and 'other' and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are at the heart of community or group formation. Such themes cut across the history of social theory. They have been central to the work of classical sociologists such as Durkheim (1969) and Tönnies (1935) and their theories of communitisation or 'Vergemeinschaftung', which created the basis for contemporary and recent work on social integration (Alba, 2005; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Jenkins, 1996; Elias & Scotson, 1965). By focusing on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion among Afghan populations themselves and with regard to their integration into the receiving societies, I show how people's social embeddedness informs their perceptions of self and the world around (see also Levitt, 2005).

I offer an alternative to fixed concepts of diaspora by showing that there are multiple categories which shape people's identities. Some of these identity categories conform with the idea of diaspora while others contradict it. Research on diaspora engagement tends to view diasporas as types of communities which display specific characteristic features like material and emotional commitments to the place of origin (Page & Mercer, 2012). However, the narratives of the people informing this research present us with a more complex set of features which unfold in the context of social relations in which their lives are embedded (Somers, 1994). The diasporic narratives I encounter suggest that the categories which inform self-identification

and external classification among Afghan diaspora populations are often conflicted (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Elias & Scotson, 1965). Acknowledging the complexity of diasporas as social forms then constitutes the puzzle how we have to approach the study of diasporas as social actors.

Making social action intelligible requires us to recognise that people act amidst structural and cultural relationships (Levitt, 2005; Swidler, 1986). Within these relational contexts people develop certain teleologies, which may revolve around the situation of their origin country. Whether and how people act upon their goals and inclinations, however, depends on opportunities and restrictions that emerge from the respective relational setting (Somers, 1994) and which determine how people use available resources. Agency thus is a relational response to the situations in which actors are enmeshed. This prompts the question as to what we recognise as agency in the context of diaspora. Based on my empirical findings I argue that agency is expressed in micro contexts of action rather than concrete outcomes of transnational engagements, because the latter provide no information about the way people frame and act upon their aspirations.

1.5 Contributions of this work

This thesis aims to contribute to various areas of inquiry. There is a lack of in-depth research on Afghan migration and refugee movements to Western countries. However, a few notable exceptions merit attention. Most of these have either concentrated on very broad questions (Jazayery, 2002) or focused on narrowly defined issues such as female identities among Afghans in Germany and India (Gaur Singh, 2010), remittance transfers (Hanifi, 2006), the (re)organisation of Afghan

families in contexts of displacement (Muller, 2010) or trajectories of social integration of a so-called diaspora elite (Oeppen, 2010, 2013).

My study adopts an actor-centred perspective. Based on my empirical findings I argue that the reality of Afghan life 'away from home' rarely comes close to an ideal-typical diaspora in terms of informants' perceptions of self and others. Instead informants mobilise different identity categories when positioning themselves amidst the (local) Afghan population or towards their countries of origin and residence. For instance, informants rarely refer to themselves as members of an overarching Afghan diaspora but suggest that social ties between people of Afghan origin primarily derive from family backgrounds, class, political affiliation or ethnic origin. A different sense of collective identity is invoked if people position themselves vis-à-vis a 'generalised other' such as British or German society. In addition, aspects such as events in Afghanistan and living conditions in the receiving societies enhance or reinforce the salience of certain identity categories. Based on these observations I infer that the social and temporal embeddedness of Afghan populations in Britain and Germany prompts a dialectic interplay of solidarity and exclusion. As a result the Afghan diaspora has (at best) an emergent quality but this is largely overlaid by more narrowly defined categories of difference, which determine patterns of social organisation.

For many reasons the Afghan diaspora may constitute an extreme case (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In fact the turbulent history of Afghan migration and displacement, the prevalence of contested identities among diaspora populations and low levels of institutionalisation may call the adequacy of diaspora concepts into question. I show that it is not despite but rather because of these distinct features

that the Afghan case lends itself to challenging assumptions underlying much of the work on diasporas and diaspora engagement.

As far as practical engagements in Afghanistan are concerned, I do not concentrate on the quantity and quality of transnational contributions to the home country economy. Rather I focus on the meanings of engagement for those taking action. This way I bring together the elements that have shaped Afghan migration and settlement with perceived key elements of life in the diaspora and transnational practices. Narratives of engagement reveal profound insights into the way people exercise agency amidst their different contextual environments. One of the preeminent discoveries in this context is that agency is not solely expressed by concrete activities and impacts. On the contrary, agency has much more to do with the way people actively position themselves amidst the opportunities and restrictions of the relational setting in which they are embedded. This discovery crucially complements some of the widely held assumptions, according to which the diaspora are a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI), market development, technology transfer, philanthropy, tourism, political contributions, and more intangible flows of knowledge, new attitudes, and cultural influence (Newland & Patrick, 2004). While not refuting such claims altogether, I hope to add explanations to such assertions and contribute theoretical and conceptual refinement to the literature on diaspora and development.

To rectify the missing link between studies of diaspora and social theory I suggest that central elements of relational sociology (Mische, 2011) offer a new way of looking at processes of diaspora formation and diaspora engagement. These are relations and transactions (Emirbayer, 1997), configurations and boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Jenkins, 1994; Elias & Scotson, 1965) and structure and

agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Sewell, 1992). For each of these subfields of relational sociology I identify the relevant concepts and apply them to dynamics and processes of diaspora formation, relationships between diaspora populations and their origin countries, as well as forms and objectives of concrete engagements. Based on the empirical data I generated and analysed, I evaluate these theoretical approaches in terms of their explanatory capacities.

Methodologically, this work contributes to the empirical specification of a retroductive research strategy (Blaikie, 2010). Among the conceptual accounts on retroduction there is a lack of empirical examples that would illustrate the research strategy in practice. Through a series of iterative steps theoretical concepts – such as diaspora (Cohen, 2008), relations and transactions (Emirbayer, 1997), development (Kothari, 2005; Crush, 1995), structure (Sewell, 1992) and agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) – are contrasted with empirical data that add new and partly unexpected facets, which facilitate theoretical refinement. I iteratively identify multi-level relationships between diasporas and change, which enables me to explain forms of diaspora engagement with reference to critical underlying phenomena. The fine-grained account contrasts with essentialist approaches, conceiving of diaspora engagement only as a rational response of agents to their ascribed identities and the situation in which they are enmeshed (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Newland & Patrick, 2004). This way I develop a novel take on the relationship between diaspora and development.

1.6 Methods, scope and limitations

Studying Afghan diaspora populations in two distinct national settings allows me to explore their inherent diversity and identify some specificities of each of the two settings as well as overarching patterns (Ragin, 1987). The multi-sited aspects of my research (Marcus, 2011) feature in each of my empirical chapters where I draw comparisons and highlight similarities wherever applicable.

55 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with people of Afghan origin living in Germany or the UK are my main data source. I conducted these interviews between February 2012 and January 2013. In the UK, the Greater London area has been my main field site. A small number of additional interviews were conducted across the north and south of England as well as the British Midlands. My field sites in Germany were scattered across the country. I interviewed people in Hamburg, Frankfurt, the Cologne-Bonn area, Berlin and Munich. In addition I was a participating observer at occasions that allowed me to capture additional facets of my informants' social environment, including events arranged by Afghan community organisations in both countries.

Afghan populations in Germany and the UK are inherently diverse. I capture facets of this diversity by selecting informants from different socio-economic, ethnic and political backgrounds. Yet my sample is selective because many interviewees come from families who formed part of Afghanistan's educated elite or upper middle class. This is connected to my primary focus on people who actively engage in activities through which they strive to improve conditions in Afghanistan. About two thirds of the people I interviewed are actively engaged in community organisations, religious associations and initiatives that aim to contribute to the development of Afghanistan. However, the life trajectories of my interviewees and

their experiences of war, migration, dispersal and settlement in Western Europe differ greatly. These specificities limit the scope of this work but sharpen its focus as far as my analysis of the relational embeddedness of transnational engagements is concerned.

1.7 Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 gives an overview of my topics and arguments, explaining how they relate to the literature. More particularly I review accounts of diaspora formation and forms of diaspora engagement, and I assess the scopes and limits of the existing literature on 'diasporas and development'. I challenge the assumption that diasporas necessarily have an interest to (collectively) engage in development in and of their origin countries. To this end I argue that there is a need to specify how concepts of 'diaspora', 'development' and 'change' can be brought together and conclude that a more nuanced account for the effects of time-, place- and group-specific contexts in which diasporas evolve is helpful to disentangle case-specific links between diaspora and development or – more generally – diaspora and change. I conclude the chapter by introducing a relational approach as a framework for analysis.

Chapter 3 describes my empirical case based on historical accounts and official statistics. I start by sketching out the history of mobility and migration in the Afghan context. I draw an outline of historical mobility patterns within and beyond the territory of Afghanistan and subsequently illustrate how war and conflict have altered the scale of migration out of Afghanistan from the late 1970s onwards. Following a summary of historical events and the phases of migration connected to

them, I turn to the history of Afghan migration to Britain and Germany. To this end I primarily draw on national statistics, which I substantiate with data from reports and various first-hand accounts of persons informing the empirical chapters of this work. This is complemented by a summary of historical relations between Afghanistan, Britain and Germany. An overview of the demographics of Afghan populations in both countries concludes the chapter.

In the fourth chapter I describe and justify my empirical methods and the retroductive research strategy in which they are embedded. I outline my sampling framework, my criteria for selecting informants and the structure of my interviews. Next, I describe my strategies and experiences of accessing the field in Britain and Germany and reflect on my various ways of establishing contact with informants. I also provide a description of different interview settings and experiences of interacting with informants. I draw attention to the strengths of my data but also point at potential shortcomings. Subsequently I sketch my approach to data processing and analysis. Finally I reflect on the ethical challenges I encountered during the research process and explain how I overcame them. I also examine my approach to 'reflexivity' and how my position as a researcher may have influenced the data collected.

Chapter 5 highlights the empirical specificities of 'diaspora' for the case study of this thesis. I examine what is at the heart of self-identification, external categorisation and emerging ties among Afghans in Britain and Germany. At the same time I show how the macro-level transitions which mark the recent history of Afghanistan interact with micro-level elements of social life such as mutual perceptions among Afghans living in western Europe. Understanding the set-up of the structural environment in which informants are situated is instrumental to

answering the question of how people of Afghan origin who live in Britain and Germany come to see themselves as part of a wider diaspora. The social configurations that structure Afghan diaspora populations are subject to temporal and local variations. I elaborate how time and localities account for observed variations and contribute to the inherent changeability of Afghan diaspora populations.

The sixth chapter focuses on informants' perceptions of Afghanistan and their relationships to the country. First I explore different forms of inter-personal contacts my informants maintain in their original country, including return visits. I examine how informants describe changes in their contacts and networks and the perceived consequences. I then focus on how informants refer to Afghanistan and what meanings they attach to the country in their day-to-day lives. Starting with informants' memories of life in Afghanistan, I move on to their assessment of the current conditions in the country. Here I focus particularly on how informants articulate their ideas of and hopes for change and development. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how life in the diaspora (re-)shapes people's relationships with their home country. It emerges that informants' relationships with Afghanistan in conjunction with dynamics in local communities are crucial factors in transnational engagements.

In Chapter 7 I shift the focus to practical engagements that involve transnational flows of money, goods, skills and ideas. To unpack the complexity of home country engagements I adopt Van Hear's differentiation of three spheres of engagement, which feature different combinations of the private and public (Van Hear, 2013, 2015). The sphere of the household and the extended family is largely private and personal. The 'known community' sphere is more public as it delineates

collectives of people who know each other or know of each other. Lastly there is the largely public sphere of the 'imagined community'. It includes ethnic, national and other allegiances. In this chapter I give a purely descriptive overview of *what* people do. Subsequently I proceed to explain how Afghans in Britain and Germany use their capacities as agents by drawing on sets of particular resources available in these time- and place-specific environments (relational settings).

Building on the description of transnational engagements and different spheres of engagement, I investigate in Chapter 8 why people take action in certain spheres of engagement. I argue that concrete forms and 'contents' of agentic capacities are shaped by sets of particular resources available in time- and place-specific settings in which people live and by specific configurations of habitual, projective and practical evaluative considerations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). These are seen as agentic considerations (Morawska, 2009). This chapter thus substantiates the descriptive account of different spheres of engagement in Chapter 7 by an in-depth analysis of the context within which the observed forms of action are initiated and carried out. I specify how and to what extent people are affected by the structuring elements of their relational settings, how they evaluate different structuring elements and exercise agency respectively.

In the conclusion I synthesise the arguments and findings of the foregoing chapters. Referring to the literature review in Chapter 2, I highlight the implications of my findings for scholarship in the fields of migration and diaspora studies. This chapter also offers an explanatory overview of the similarities and differences among Afghan communities in Britain and Germany. I conclude the thesis with a summary of empirical, theoretical, methodological and general implications.

CHAPTER 2

Diaspora and diaspora engagement: a multi-layered relationship between mobility and change

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature which has informed this study and to which this study aims to contribute. I first engage with the literature on diaspora and empirical work on diaspora engagement. Subsequently I develop a theoretical framework based on a relational approach, which conceptualises diasporas as social forms and diasporas as social actors.

Rather than assuming that diasporas are pre-existing entities that are 'out there' in social reality, I see diaspora formation and diaspora engagement as an example of the relationship between mobility and social change. This may appear tautological because mobility already implies change. However, there are several aspects which turn the formation of diasporas and the social dynamics within a distinct diaspora into a specific example of entanglements between human mobility and social change. The conditions leading to the formation of diasporas, their incorporation into receiving societies and the dynamics among groups of co-nationals at various destinations are fundamentally intertwined. They co-determine people's ties to their country of origin, their experiences of reception at the destination and their aspirations and capabilities to engage in action oriented towards the origin country (Mohan, 2002).

I first explore how and under which circumstances the movement of people leads to the formation of diasporas. Acknowledging that diasporas as social formations can be rooted in different types of movement draws attention to the

substance of 'relationships despite dispersal' (Vertovec, 1997) and calls diasporic identities and – more generally – diasporas as social formations into question. Section 2.3 of this chapter therefore focuses on debates around the essences of diasporic identities and the changeability of ties linking people and places.

Subsequently I review key literature on diasporas as agents of change. Most attention has been paid to diaspora engagement in home country politics and development, and I narrow the focus of my literature review accordingly. I also highlight some of the specificities that have been identified with regard to the engagements of conflict-induced diasporas. I argue that it is crucial to distinguish between forms, spheres and targets of diaspora engagement (Van Hear, 2015; see Mohan, 2002). The social settings in which these engagements are carried out also need greater attention.

In the last section I integrate the empirical and theoretical literature which informs this thesis. I develop a relational approach, which serves as the guiding framework for analysis throughout the empirical chapters. A relational approach rejects the idea of discrete, pre-given units such as the individual or society as analytical starting points. Instead, individual persons are assumed to be inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded (Emirbayer, 1997). A relational framework for analysis hence enables a more nuanced assessment of diaspora engagements and their potential as 'agents of change' (Turner & Kleist, 2013). Fundamentally, a relational approach is able to weave together the facets accounting for the complexity of diasporas as social entities and forms of diaspora engagement. It therefore informs the epistemological assumptions and methods of empirical analysis I use.

2.1 Social transformations and diaspora formation

Diasporas emerge as a result of population mobility. However, as Bakewell (2008) argues, migration does not automatically lead to the formation of diasporas and not all people in diasporic populations are necessarily migrants. Though mobility is at the heart of diasporas it does not explain what is distinctive about them as social entities. Therefore it is crucial to examine *how* and *why* different forms of movement lead to diaspora formation and how the formation of diasporas has been linked to broader transformation processes.

Studies of diaspora have gone through various phases, which are distinct in terms of the identified reasons for diaspora formation and the characteristics of diaspora populations respectively. Early or classical notions of diaspora were restricted to populations that had shared similar experiences of involuntary dispersion from their homelands as a result of traumatic experiences of expulsion (Tölölyan, 2012; Cohen, 2008). Paradigmatic examples are the Jewish experience of Babylonian exile following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC (Cohen, 2008; Boyarin & Boyarin, 2002), the African slave trade of the 19th century (Gilroy, 1993), and the dispersal of Armenians following Ottoman-inflicted massacres in the late 19th century and the subsequent Turkish assault during the First World War (Tölölyan, 2002). In addition, the Irish migration following the great famine from 1845 to 1852 and the eviction of Palestinians from their homes and lands in the aftermath of the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 are considered as examples of classical diaspora populations (Cohen, 2008).

These prototypical diaspora populations were mainly defined by their *experiences* of forced mobility and dispersal. They all underwent a decisive 'break event', forcing them to leave the homeland. Although the historical circumstances

prompting these ruptures were distinct in each case, they were relatively congruent in terms of the effects they had on the displaced populations. Against the backdrop of their historical experiences of forced displacement, victimisation, alienation and loss (Vertovec, 1997) these early diasporas can be described as victim diasporas. They are found to be marked by a strong ethnic group consciousness, a troubled relationship with their host societies, a sense of empathy with other co-ethnic members and, lastly, the possibility of an enriching or creative life in the diaspora (Sheringham & Cohen, 2013; Cohen, 2008). Accounts of prototypical diasporas are mainly concerned with traumatic instances of dispersal, which forge solidarity and cohesion among those regrouping at different destinations. However, little attention is paid to internal heterogeneity among diasporic groups and the implications this may have had for people's lives in exile and their relationships to the origin country.

Studying paradigmatic ideas and cases of diaspora entails several points of conceptual use. Whilst broadening our understanding of circumstances that may promote the development of diasporas, such extended definitions still apply primarily etic perspectives, describing diasporas as social forms with certain features. But they are not particularly revealing when it comes to emic questions such as the meaning people assign to being part of a diaspora, which may be subject to considerable variation. The recent history of Afghanistan is marked by a series of upheavals, which have led to large-scale population dispersal and re-grouping at different places across the globe. Linking mobility with people's control over resources such as financial or social capital (Van Hear, 2004) helps explain why different groups of Afghans have moved to specific destinations at certain points in time. However, the fact that there are groups of Afghans living in different locations does not automatically imply that there is an Afghan diaspora. Drawing broad

connections between global transformations and the emergence and dissolution of diasporic groups is useful to situate them historically and geopolitically. This way, however, we only account for exogenous drivers of diaspora formation, while the internal structures and dynamics within displaced populations and the types of ties and flows that connect people across borders remain opaque.

Over the last two and a half decades the notion of diaspora has been moved out of this specialist corner (Bakewell, 2008). With reference to these paradigmatic cases, 'diaspora' was subjected to a conceptual stretch insofar as the notion was extended from being a set of shared experiences to the *characteristics* of dispersed populations. Safran (1991) was among the advocates for an expansion of the diaspora concept. He argues that many ethnic groups experience circumstances of dispersal for a variety of reasons (see also Tölölyan, 2012). Conceiving of diaspora as a social form means that the reasons underlying people's dispersal vary so that the term includes groups with different experiences of mobility and dispersal (Vertovec, 1997). They may be linked to local or global transformations of different kinds. Examples include political events and conflicts, but also historical episodes such as imperialism and colonialism, and international trade or globalisation. Such incidents promote different forms and volumes of population mobility. To retain the descriptive usefulness of 'diaspora' Vertovec (1997) argues for a distinction between diaspora as social form, diaspora as type of consciousness, and diaspora as mode of cultural production. Vertovec's 'three meanings of diaspora' (Vertovec, 1997) are a useful approach to analytical differentiation. By capturing distinct processes and developments among dispersed populations they are particularly valuable for empirical studies of diasporas as I will demonstrate when examining relations of

social identity and social organisation among Afghans in Germany and the UK (Chapter 5).

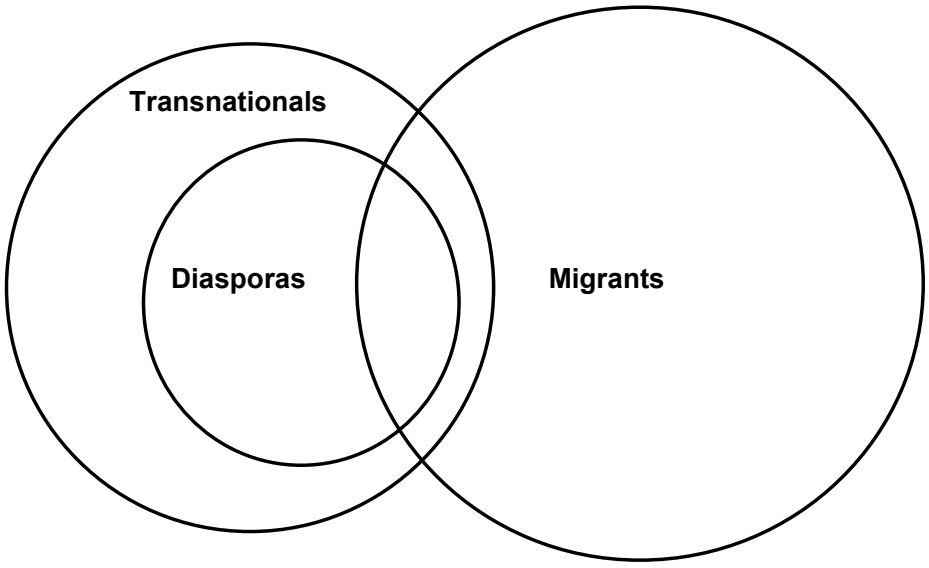
Once emerged, diasporas are not necessarily there to stay but are best conceived as continuously evolving social entities. The evolutionary process is open-ended and contingent on a range of endogenous and exogenous elements. In fact Cohen (2008, p. 141) states that 'diasporas are in a constant state of formation and reformation. Their situation can change, often dramatically, in response to tumultuous events and more subtle changes in religious epicentres, homelands and hostlands'. Also cumulative effects of longstanding pressures such as ethnic, religious and national aspirations can generate or facilitate international migration flows, which promote the emergence of new diasporas (Van Hear, 1998). Push and pull factors are linked to transformations in the country of origin or changes occurring at a global scale. Further factors accounting for the changeability of diasporas arise from the context in which people are immersed (Baumann, 1996). Geographies of dispersal are also shaped by differences in wealth resources and social capital as a result of which people are able or unable to migrate to certain destinations (Van Hear, 2004, 2009).

Contingent makeups of diasporas are being exacerbated in the contemporary period, which has been loosely described as the global age (Appadurai, 1996). Advances in information and communication techniques, and a globalised economy have led to a surge of global interconnectivity, which bears profound implications for 'general' drivers of migration (Van Hear et al. 2012) irrespective of the conditions prevailing in specific places at certain points in time (de Haas et al., 2009). In this context new forms of international migration are based on intermittent stays abroad and sojourning rather than or as an alternative to

permanent settlement. At a political level Van Hear (1998) holds that the end of the Cold War was accompanied by ethnic, religious and nationalist forces rising from the often violent disintegration of nation-states and their reconstitution. Such forces have combined with features like the revolutions in global communications and transport to generate new patterns of migration which opened new and distinct opportunities for diasporas to emerge, re-emerge, survive, thrive or disintegrate.

These developments not only altered mobility patterns in general but also enhance the scope for diaspora formation, which is an aspect that has come to be vividly discussed, particularly in relation to the emergence of transnational social spaces (Faist, 2000). In fact, diasporas and transnationalism are often used interchangeably, although they reflect different intellectual genealogies (Faist, 2010). While diaspora is an old and transnationalism a relatively new concept, both terms, as well as their underlying subjects, have fuzzy boundaries, which often overlap – as Figure 2.1 below illustrates.

Figure 2.1 Relationships between diasporas, transnationals and migrants. Adapted from Bakewell (2008)



The most obvious contribution of the transnational literature to a study of Afghan mobility, diaspora formation and (potential) diaspora engagement is its focus on shifting intensities and volumes of cross-border flows. It illuminates changing forces which support the emergence of and changes within Afghan diasporic groups. Also, the literature on transnationalism reveals important insights to forms of active engagement of migrants with their country of origin (e.g. Faist et al. 2011; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Vertovec 2004). However, it is important to note that the nature of transnational ties cannot be explained by technological innovations. Rather, transnational ties vary according to the specific context and the events leading to dispersal in the first place. In sum, studies of transnationalism reveal little about the 'substance' of ties people maintain with their origin countries and co-nationals at other destinations. Also the meanings that are being ascribed to transnational ties often remain unspecified and we gain little insight into the aspects that enable people to act upon their specific ties.

One of the key questions of this thesis relates to the self-perception of Afghans in Britain and Germany as part of a wider Afghan diaspora. It draws attention to two interrelated puzzles: the essences of people's identity as well as the constitutive elements of community.

2.2 Diasporas as complex and changing social entities

In the context of the transnational turn the usage of the term 'diaspora' has multiplied rapidly, which calls its actual meaning into question. Scholars of various disciplinary backgrounds, including anthropology, history, sociology, political science as well as psychology, literature and religious studies (Safran, 2004), delved

into research on diasporas as social formations and social actors. Clifford (1994, p. 303) observes the emergence of an 'unruly crowd of descriptive/interpretive terms [which] now jostle and converse in an effort to characterize the contact zones of nations, cultures and regions: terms such as *border, travel, creolization, transculturation, hybridity* and *diaspora* [italics in original]'. Against this backdrop Safran (2004) argues that the conceptual stretch of diaspora has reached a stage at which it covers almost any ethnic or religious minority that is dispersed physically from its homeland. While acknowledging complexity as a characteristic feature of contemporary diasporas, Vertovec (1997) nevertheless suggests that they ultimately form identified groups that retain relationships despite dispersal. However, the surge of references to diaspora in different bodies of literature (Brubaker, 2005) calls the substance of 'relationships-despite-dispersal' into question and reiterates the puzzle as to how people come to see themselves as part of a diaspora, which is central to this thesis. In Chapters 3 and 5 I will discuss how Afghan displacement and dispersal occurred in intervals and under different conditions in Afghanistan. People have settled at a range of destinations and adapted to their receiving society to varying extents. This suggests that there is a need to examine the nature and effects of internal heterogeneity within diasporas more closely.

2.2.1 Contesting 'diaspora'

Acknowledging the complexity of diasporas is a first step towards disentangling the nature of diasporic identities and binding ties between people. Subjecting 'diaspora' to a conceptual reevaluation, Anthias (1998) points out that concepts of diaspora tend to overemphasise notions of ethnicity by privileging the place of origin as a source of identity and solidarity. This, she claims, overshadows

trans-ethnic commonalities and relations as well as the impact of factors such as gender, class, distinctive trajectories of migration and settlement, and internal differences of power position or claims (Anthias, 1998). Similarly Soysal (2000) criticises conceptual accounts of diaspora for their underlying naturalisation of belonging. Brubaker (2005, p. 10) reinforces such concerns stating that '[d]iscussions of diaspora are often informed by a strikingly idealist, teleological understanding of the nation-state', which is reflected in nationalising and homogenising approaches to diasporic populations. Assuming that the perceived attachment to an ancestral home and a teleology of origin and return constitute essential bonds between people across borders and generations seems short-sighted. Baumann (1996) moreover contends that defining groups of people simply in the light of their 'culture' and (perceived) 'community' neglects their agency and turns culture into a determining force (see also Bolognani, 2007, 2014).

Clifford makes a case for considering decentered, lateral connections alongside different narratives of a shared origin and the desire to ultimately return. In addition he underlines that 'a shared ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin' (Clifford, 1994, p. 306). He therefore proposes to adopt a 'diacritical' approach focusing on the borders of diasporic groups and what they define themselves against instead of attempting to identify essential features (Clifford, 1994). Diasporas thus entail a wealth of different experiences, which are expressed through different narratives of culture, ethnicity, origin and belonging (Anthias, 1998). However, questioning the essences of diasporic identity, as Hall (1990, p. 222) notes,

> is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact […] we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside representation.

The diaspora experience is not one of essence or purity but it evolves and changes over time. As a result diasporic identities are more likely to live with and through rather than despite difference. They constantly reproduce themselves anew through transformation and (encounters with) difference (Hall, 1990).

Such concessions to ideal-typical ideas of diaspora bear implications for the questions around which this thesis revolves. There may be many ways in which people come to see themselves as part of an Afghan diaspora. Or, put differently, there may be many different aspects that link people of Afghan origin with co-nationals and their home country. This does not mean that it is necessary to discard the ideal-typical concept of diaspora altogether. On the contrary, as I will show in Chapters 5 and 6, the idealtype informs the specificities and changes of diasporas in 'real life'. The fluidity of diasporic identities has been subject to much empirical research, which identified a range of aspects that explain continuities and discontinuities. Tensions between preservation and change derive from various factors, including adaptation to host societies, and perceptions and definitions of home, both of which are subject to inter-generational transitions and relations.

2.2.2 Tensions between preservation and change

Based on a study on Alevi groups in Germany, Sökefeld (2004) argues that with regard to people's cultural and religious identity one cannot identify a simple contrast between home and host country. Rather he observes a 'broad cultural continuum of ongoing change in both the home country as well as the diaspora' (p.

151). To him, rhetoric of identity preservation 'obscures the fact that actors constantly re-constitute and re-invent (or refuse to re-constitute) what is imagined as simply continuing' (p. 151). As a result 'community' cannot be taken for granted, because actors answer questions of community from different points of view. With regard to the Alevi diaspora in Germany, Sökefeld (2004) holds that the diverse propositions and ideas of what Alevism is become themselves an essential aspect of Alevi culture. Hence change of diasporic identities is incremental and may be an inherent feature of a population, which is linked to external events and processes at the same time.

Tensions between preservation and change find their perhaps most pronounced expression in the relationships that people maintain with their country of origin or ancestral home. In the light of the complexity and internal heterogeneity of diasporas it seems reasonable to assume that also people's relationships to the homeland are heterogeneous and complex. Acknowledging the inherent changeability of diaspora, Brah (1996) states that the concept nevertheless embodies a subtext of 'home' and she makes a case for scrutinising the implications of this subtext. 'Where is home?' is one of the questions to be asked in this context. Is 'home' the ancestral region and thus perhaps a mythic place of desire? Or is it rather the lived experience of a locality here and now? And when does a location become home (Brah, 1996)? Similar to diasporic identities, the concept of home emerges as highly contextual and ambivalent.

Whether home is a place, a space, feelings, practices or an active state of being (Mallett, 2004) is contingent on a person's position in time and space as well as his or her social context. Hence instead of the homeland being a clearly defined and meaningful reference point, ideas of home are constructed differently in different

diasporic community spaces (Fog Olwig, 2004). There is a need to examine more closely the social relations and emotional attachments that people cherish as well as their place-related teleologies. In addition, rather than just illuminating perceptions of home and belonging in their own right, it is important to shed light on their implications. Chapter 6 therefore focuses on meanings of and attachments to Afghanistan as place of origin. It unpacks how they shape informants' perceptions of current conditions in Afghanistan and how they relate to these conditions as actors.

Ideas of home and relationships to the country of origin are subject to inter-generational variation. For the first generation, homeland relationships are based on memories and personal experiences of disruption and displacement (Brah, 1996), but this is different for the second generation, which is born in the diaspora. Based on research among Pakistani communities in Denmark, Rytter (2010) observes a growing cleavage between generations with regard to their identities and sense of belonging, which also affects internal dynamics within families. Rytter identifies different and changing forms of community solidarity among members of the older and younger generation, which are reflected in distinct identity configurations of what it means to be Pakistani and what it means to be Muslim (see also Alinia & Eliassi, 2014).

In addition Bolognani (2014) draws attention to more ambiguous relationships between second generation migrants and their ancestral home. Based on research among Pakistanis in the UK, she argues that some British Pakistanis take advantage of the separateness of the two worlds they live in. They utilise resources of the original country to reaffirm their power, for example by 'develop[ing] a cheap holiday format where it is possible to rent nice cars, consume alcohol and secure women at a fraction of the price in the UK' (Bolognani, 2014, p. 114). In sum,

previous research suggests that the basis upon which a person's relationship to their home country unfolds has important implications for the way they relate to its current conditions. Such claims have prompted me to unpack how relationships to Afghanistan and – more specifically – ideas of change and development are shaped by people's lived experiences of the country.

Changing relationships and feelings of attachment to the country of origin also reflect varying degrees of integration into the receiving society. Members of the first and second generations are found to differ regarding their integration into the receiving society and their sense of belonging. For members of the first generation, life in the diaspora often implies a sense of alienation and otherness. Once they arrive in the destination country, migrants not only confront the need to sort out their immigration status but also have to settle into an unfamiliar, perhaps alien society. Falling into specific immigration categories can directly impact on their processes of integration (Binaisa, 2013). Certain immigration statuses are often stigmatised as a result of hostile public (and media) discourses that depict obstacles to integration in the receiving society as self-inflicted (Ehrkamp, 2006). Based on research among Ugandan immigrants in Britain, however, Binaisa (2013, p. 894) argues that '[w]hilst migrants acknowledge the challenges of bridging the institutional divide to belonging, many of them feel that they are already integrated into British identity'. Migrants' perceptions of having arrived at or even settled into the receiving society and become 'one of them' may not necessarily be mutual. Many receiving societies have been found to persistently uphold boundaries between 'natives' and 'others', even across multiple immigrant generations (Ehrkamp, 2006; Alba, 2005).

People's diasporic experiences of loss, marginality and exile may be reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement (Clifford, 1994). Life in the diaspora or – more specifically – in a receiving country may confront people with the distinction between 'natives' and 'diasporics'. While some scholars account for such challenges with broad generalisations between 'successful' or 'unsuccessful migration project[s]' (Nieswand, 2011), others subject peoples' responses to life in exile to more fine-grained analyis. With regard to the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden, Alinia and Eliassi (2014) discover that both younger and older generations mobilise Kurdish culture in terms of language, common memories and experiences as a resource for creating a Kurdish diasporic identity. This identity helps them find their place in the Swedish society; it becomes an imaginary location in the diaspora.

The findings that emerge from empirical studies of diasporic groups in different settings suggest that people's embeddedness in society not only affects their relationships with co-nationals but also shapes their approaches and attachments to the particular country of origin. To some extent we can speak of a dialectic relationship between embeddedness, identity and attachment to place of origin. Horst (2013) therefore argues that the specific relationships between diaspora groups and their country of origin are inextricably tied to people's position in their country of settlement. In Chapter 5 I further unpack how and why relationships are structured and maintained in various ways. I show how people are at the same time part of different social contexts (such as families, ethnic groups and political alliances), which are delineated by distinct yet intersecting ties. How people's place in society and their networks of social relations affect their sense of attachment with Afghanistan and their inclination to actively engage with current conditions in the country is subject of the subsequent empirical Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

2.3 Diasporas as agents of change

Beside the continuously expanding interest in diasporas as social formations and types of consciousness, another prominent theme in the diaspora literature is developing around diasporas as social actors. In this context different forms of diaspora activities in countries of origin and reception have been explored, which pursue different targets and are oriented towards different sites of engagement. Usually these engagements are studied with regard to their political and/or development impact. For more than a decade the 'migration-development nexus' (Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002) has been employed as a catchphrase that captures different forms of engagement and different types of transnational flows. Since the turn of the millennium diasporas are increasingly celebrated as development agents and extended members of their home nation (Sinatti & Horst, 2014; Gamlen, 2008b). Whilst interest in home country engagements predominates, a number of studies focus on engagements undertaken within the receiving country or within networks of people living in various locations (Mohan, 2002).

2.3.1 Forms and targets of diaspora engagement

The World Bank's 'Global Development Finance' report of 2003 led to a decisive increase in consciousness regarding the role migrants play in redistributing wealth and promoting development. In particular the report quantified the value of remittances that migrants send back to their countries of origin (The World Bank, 2003). Subsequently the number of studies and reports focusing on migrants as players in redistributive activities multiplied rapidly (Raghuram, 2009). A shared feature of the studies undertaken is that development is framed as an outcome of

migration rather than the other way around (de Haas et al., 2009). One core area of concern for both the academic literature and policy initiatives is the role diasporas play in development (Raghuram, 2009). International organisations are contributing their share to promoting an image of diasporas as agents (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Brender et al., 2011). It has been argued that the emergence and promotion of diasporas as development actors fits well with neo-liberal development paradigms and policy frameworks (de Haas, 2010).

Engagements of diasporas include a range of activities of, for example, an economic, political, social and cultural nature. They can be distinguished according to whether they are direct or indirect (Horst et al., 2010). In cases of direct engagement, diaspora groups or individuals directly transfer money, goods or ideas to their country of origin. Conversely indirect engagement occurs when diaspora groups or individuals lobby or urge third parties such as government officials or NGOs to take action to benefit the particular origin country. Below I will selectively discuss key contributions to the literature on specific domains of transnational practice, which have been identified as particularly important when it comes to promoting change in origin countries.

With regard to *financial transactions*, most attention has been paid to remittances, donations and investments. In the wake of the 2003 World Bank report (World Bank, 2003) the volume and (assumed) impact of remittances attracted much interest. Distinctions are drawn between collective and household remittances. Household remittances are sent by migrants to family members at home (Landolt, 2001), whereas collective remittances are monetary and material contributions that are sent by organised groups of diasporans to communities back home (Orozco & Lapointe, 2004). Such collective monetary transactions have attracted special

interest. They are seen as having a wider communal or social benefit (Lampert, 2012). Orozco and Rouse (2007) support this argument, stating that such collective donations are mainly channelled to the poor. The engagement of hometown associations is often mentioned in this context. Research has also focused on diasporas as brokers of investment relationships (Brinkerhoff, 2012).

There is little doubt that economic contributions flowing from diasporas to (certain) origin countries are significant, if only for their volume (Orozco, 2013; Kapur, 2004). However, so far there has been little research on the volume and impact of remittances sent to Afghanistan. Based on a study of Afghan communities in California and the UK, Oeppen (2010) holds that sending money to relatives in Afghanistan or Pakistan was common practice among her informants. Similar observations were made by Jazajery (2002), Monsutti (2005) and Muller (2010) with reference to Afghans living in western countries, the Gulf States and Iran respectively. In addition, Hanifi (2006) explores the networks and practices which are at the heart of remittance flows between Afghans in the United States and their kin in Afghanistan. Previous work has emphasised that remittances 'are not "just money"' (Lindley, 2009, p. 1331) but embedded in specific cultural and transnational contexts. Hence it is important not to neglect the determinants of the transnational social texture amidst which remittances are produced (Lindley, 2009). What remains opaque in the Afghan case is why people choose to remit money rather than engage in other forms of transnational engagement. Also it is not clear to what extent remittances are being linked to broader ideas of 'development and change'. In Chapter 7 I will present findings which suggest that remitting money is a widespread practice among Afghans in Germany and the UK. However, the

reasons for people to engage in such practices vary and may be largely detached from wider ideas of change and development.

Social transfers include flows of ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital from receiving to sending countries, for which Levitt (1998) coined the notion 'social remittances'. It delineates a range of transnational practices through which diasporans aim at transferring progressive ideas, values and behaviours from abroad that they have adopted or 'hybridised'. Such practices include phone calls, return visits and running collective contributions to community development. With regard to the latter, Levitt (1998, p. 933–935) distinguishes between 'normative structures' such as norms about the role of clergy, judges or politicians, and 'systems of practice', which include leadership styles, strategies of political participation and patterns of organisational behaviour. Likewise diasporans were found to take up employment in the home country development industry as part of which 'they have come to be seen as important allies in furthering key strategic objectives in hegemonic visions of international development steeped firmly in Western liberal notions of progress' (Lampert, 2012, p. 150). Examples of concrete objectives in this context include women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equity.

Whilst social remittances may play a crucial role in community development aid, their concrete forms and underlying objectives vary according to the senders' backgrounds and their embeddedness in both sending and receiving societies. Portes and Zhou (1993), for example, found migrants' interpretive frames to be altered according to their interaction with the receiving society, which in turn depended upon their socioeconomic characteristics. Consequently social remittances are contingent on people's social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). In Chapter 7 I show that the transmission of social remittances among Afghans in Britain and

Germany tends to be restricted to people who know each other and who are connected by social ties (see also Levitt, 1998). However, the underlying objectives of social remittances as well as mechanisms of transmission are subject to variation. Observed variation results from people's socioeconomic backgrounds and resource endowments and their respective age group.

Diasporas have also been studied with regard to their engagement in different forms of *political action*. Electoral participation, either as voters or candidates, is one example, which is of particular relevance for the Afghan case. The former president, Hamid Karzai, as well as other prominent figures of Afghanistan's administration have spent much of their lives abroad (see also Oeppen, 2010). It has also been argued that diasporas may serve as important constituents of or advocates for homeland governments, for example by supporting specific political campaigns (Brinkerhoff, 2012; Shain, 1999). Lobbying host country authorities, however, is likely to be subject to certain preconditions and opportunity structures on the part of those engaging in lobbying activities. In my analysis of political engagements of Afghans in Britain and Germany I therefore focused particularly on the effects which individual backgrounds and people's embeddedness in the receiving society have on the activities undertaken.

Political involvement of diaspora groups is not necessarily framed in constructive terms (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). It is often observed with ambiguity. Instances of long-distance nationalism attracted particular attention. Faist (2008, p. 34) holds that 'claims towards national self-determination waged by diaspora groups constitute [a] visible threat to the interests of states'. This is because refugees, exiles and members of stateless diasporas may maintain troubled relationships with the home country establishment or seek to rectify the absence of state structures

respectively. As a result such groups can emerge as protagonists of new nation-states or nation-states to be reformed or revolutionised (Faist, 2008; Van Hear, 2003b).

With regard to diaspora involvement in homeland conflict there has been a tendency to primarily focus on negative roles of diasporas that act as 'war mongers' or 'peace wreckers' (Koinova, 2011b; Kapur, 2007; Smith & Stares, 2007) by fuelling and supporting conflict in their homelands. People and groups in the diaspora are not exposed to the immediate consequences of conflict and can therefore adopt more hardline positions (Horst et al., 2010). Protagonists of certain political views and generally more politicised parts of a population tend to be among the first to be exiled. At the same time such individuals and groups are likely to continue fuelling their political cause from abroad.

More recently such negative assessments of diaspora involvement in homeland conflict have been countered by more nuanced takes on the subject. These highlighted more constructive diaspora engagements, like relief efforts or support of peace building and post-conflict recovery (Brinkerhoff, 2011b; Horst et al., 2010). But 'constructive' engagements of conflict-induced diasporas are diverse and subject to a range of conditions, which I have tried to specify for Afghan populations in Britain and Germany. It emerges that attempts to get involved in home country politics not only depend on the situation 'back home' but also on people's position and legal status within their receiving societies as well as their membership in networks of co-nationals.

Diaspora engagement in homeland conflict depends strongly on the opportunities and constraints faced in the origin country. Koinova (2011) argues that it is insufficient to examine conflict-induced diasporas in the light of displacement-inflicted trauma. Instead of subjecting such populations to

generalisations it is necessary to adopt a more nuanced perspective to examine their relationships to particular political contexts in their homelands. By focusing on opportunities for and restrictions on political participation, I also illuminate the distinct spheres and purposes towards which political engagements are directed and examine to what extent they relate to overarching ideas of change and transformation.

A review of the literature on diaspora engagements reveals a plethora of different activities which are connected to specific targets. This raises the question of how 'development' or 'change' and their underlying requirements are being defined. Over the last two decades the mainstream understanding of development has changed and become more inclusive. Roughly speaking there has been a shift from defining development exclusively in terms of economic growth as an end in itself to viewing economic growth as a means to promote human development (UNDP, 1996). However, there is a gap between development as an overarching idea and development (aid) as a distinct area of practice. The latter is tied to clear goals and carefully designed strategies, which are implemented by professionals who work for development organisations.

Regardless of the general trend towards more inclusive notions of development, there still is a strong emphasis on political economy, which is largely divorced from the insights of cultural studies and its emphasis on contextual and historical contingencies (Zack-Williams, 1995). Understandings of development tend to limit who is qualified to engage in development for certain reasons and what constitutes reasonable development practices. As a result understandings of development exclude a range of ideas and practices that can be observed among diasporic actors (Mercer et al. 2008). Moreover, outside observers may frame

diaspora engagements as 'development' regardless of whether or not this captures the actual objectives of the activities in question. In fact, individuals in diasporas are often viewed as autonomous decision-makers whose home-country engagements are motivated by rational economic or psychological considerations. This perception of diaspora is essentialist as it conflates territory, ethnicity and belonging. It reifies the assumption that diasporas have roots in a certain place and that they share a group identity with those originating from the same place[2].

Essentialist perceptions of diaspora obscure the fact that underneath a surface of objective relationships, dispersed populations can be fractured. There may, for instance, be differences in the ways people experience loyalties and affiliations with place, nation and diaspora (Schnapper, 1999; Anthias, 1998; Brah, 1996). While different forms of transnational activities are widely accounted for, the backgrounds and objectives of the actors behind these engagements are little studied (Bakewell, 2009; Lindley, 2009). Also it remains largely opaque how specific forms of engagement tie in with the heterogeneous and changeable character of diasporas as social entities, which incorporate manifold narratives of attachment to the country of origin. Many accounts of diaspora engagement seem to reflect what outsiders are able to make sense of rather than the aspirations and aims of those taking action. But how do people in the diaspora and – more specifically – Afghans in Britain and Germany frame their home-country relationships and engagements? Forms of diaspora engagement differ not only according to types and underlying objectives of

[2] It is necessary to acknowledge that over the last decade such rigid connections between diaspora and development have been subject to poignant criticism. Critical voices are, for example, expressed in the work of Bakewell (2009), Horst (2013), Mohan (2002, 2008), Nyberg-Sørensen (2012) and Page and Mercer (2012). One point which the accounts of these authors have in common is the plea for a more nuanced understanding of diasporas as actors, which implies a fundamental re-thinking of the notions and causalities which the 'diaspora-development nexus' is based on.

activities, but also in terms of the social contexts in which they are carried out and the groups towards which they are directed.

2.3.2 Spheres of diaspora engagement

In a recent paper Van Hear (2013, 2015) draws attention to the controversial role of diasporas in homeland conflict and post-conflict settings. He suggests that one way to analytically refine the debate is to disaggregate diaspora engagement and the public and private spaces in which it may occur. He identifies three *spheres of engagement*, which 'feature different combinations of the private and public' (Van Hear, 2015).

Spheres of engagement situate transnational practices considering people's social embeddedness. They illuminate not only the practices themselves but also the context towards which they are directed and the types of transnational ties they are based on. First, the *sphere of the household and the extended family* is largely private and personal and is restricted to members of the extended family. Second, the *'known community' sphere* is more public as it delineates collectives of people that know each other or know of each other. Most engagement in the 'known community sphere' is directed towards spaces one has a personal connection to. It addresses wider groups than households and extended families – it is the realm of associational life, including community-based and civil society organisations. Lastly, there is the largely public *sphere of the 'imagined community'*, which refers to wider social entities such as the nation with which one has an affinity without necessarily knowing its members personally (Anderson, 1983). The imagined community may include ethnic, national and other allegiances.

In my analysis of transnational engagements of Afghans in Germany and the UK I draw strongly on Van Hear's concept of spheres of engagement. It allows me to capture how spheres of engagement vary in terms of the number of people involved in certain activities and the kind of target group or population addressed. The scale at which people choose to engage with their country of origin depends on the type of relationship between people and place, on the resources they are able to mobilise as well as on their membership of social networks of actors.

Diaspora engagements are not always or not exclusively directed towards the country of origin and are not necessarily transnational. Civic and political action may also be oriented towards countries of settlement. In fact Horst (2013) argues that the focus on transnational activities tends to ignore that ultimately this civic engagement is happening in the places of settlement. Also diasporic groups can be found to engage in issues of national or global importance (Horst, 2013). Based on research among Afghan, Chinese, Eritrean, Sri Lankan and Sudanese immigrant groups in Canada, Brender et al. (2011) argue that diaspora stakeholders contribute to improving Canadian foreign policy. Civic participation in countries of origin may thus be an expression or result of civic participation in the country of settlement (Binaisa 2013; Snel et al. 2006). In other words, transnational engagements can be understood as active contributions to public affairs in the country of settlement (Shain, 2007).

Distinguishing between different spheres of engagement is useful because it helps to systematically differentiate between various scopes and forms of engagement, while at the same time establishing a connection between the two. The typology, however, is largely restricted to the receiving end of engagement and it does not include an analysis of the groups of actors involved in different kinds of

activities. Yet, as I will show in Chapter 7, there is a strong connection between the types of ties between people in the diaspora and the forms of engagement they partake in.

In a critical assessment of diasporas as 'agents of change' Turner and Kleist (2013, p. 195) hold that 'the positions adopted and the engagements performed by diasporas signal agency, authenticity responsibility and resources'. However, if, to what extent and why this is true for specific diasporic groups is a different question. Similarly Lampert (2012) holds that celebrating and engaging diaspora organisations as new development partners tends to be based on rather limited knowledge. Rather than assuming that characteristics such as agency, authenticity, responsibility and resources unanimously apply to any (self-declared) diaspora population, they should be the actual puzzle and focus of inquiry.

Approaching diasporas from a relational perspective, which seeks to understand the identities and actions of people in connection to other individuals and groups and further contextual factors (Tilly, 1995), seems to be a way forward. More specifically this means situating the study of diasporas amidst social relations, which not only encompass interpersonal ties and specific links to the countries of origin and reception, but also includes politics, economy and culture at the global as well as the national level. This way it is possible to grasp the dynamic nature of ethnic bonds and the way they intersect with issues such as gender, class and generation or other inter- and intra-group divisions. In a comprehensive review of the literature on transnationalism, Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) state that there is a need for 'a thick and empirically rich mapping of how global macro-level processes interact with local lived experiences' (p. 143). This, however leaves us with the

question of how to conceptually integrate these levels of analysis in empirical research.

2.4 A relational approach to the study of diasporas

The conceptual and empirical work on diasporas as social formations and diasporas as social actors I reviewed above underlines the contingency of identities and self-perceptions within diasporic communities suggesting that not only the binding ties among people but also the relationships between people and places are diverse and changeable. Acknowledging such contingencies urges us to identify analytical tools which help us specify

i) under which conditions certain characteristics of diasporas become salient or fade

ii) how and under which circumstances people establish certain relationships with their countries of origin and co-nationals at other destinations

iii) how these relationships form a basis upon which people take up concrete forms of engagement.

There are few attempts to link substantive studies on diasporas as social formations and social actors with broader theoretical frameworks. To rectify this lack of theoretical engagement I draw on contributions from the field of relational sociology. Before explaining what a relational approach adds to the study of

diasporas as social forms and diasporas as social actors[3] in greater detail, I will introduce some general principles of relational sociology.

2.4.1 General principles of relational sociology

Relational sociology is an antecedent to social network analysis. Yet, as Mische (2011) argues, it is possible to discern a broader relational perspective within sociology to which scholars relate without using formal network methodology. The fundamental elements of this theoretical orientation have analytical and explanatory power beyond specific methodologies, which I will demonstrate throughout my empirical chapters. Theorists adopting a relational perspective hold that 'social structure' is intrinsically relational (Hall & Lamont, 2013). This means that they reject the idea that 'entities', 'essences' or 'realities' have 'independent existences present anterior to any relation' (Cassirer, 1953, p. 36) cited in (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 287). As a result White (1992, p. 3) holds that

> Effective theory of social relations is hindered by assuming that social action comes only from individual biological creatures – humans – as a consequence of their nature and consciousness as persons. This mirage of the person as an atom breeds an obverse mirage of a society as an entity.

While White refers to the relational nature of society in a wider sense, his claim also applies to more narrowly defined social entities such as diasporas. Building on White's early advances in relational thinking and drawing on the

[3] Karp (1986) specifies the distinction between actors and agents. He defines actors as persons whose action is governed by or oriented towards rules. Conversely agents exercise power through their ability to bring about effects and (re-)constitute the world. Karp considers actor and agent as two distinct aspects of the same person or as two different perspectives on the actions of any given individual. In this work I refer to actors who exercise agency as a response to the rules inherent in their social context.

pragmatist philosophy of Dewey and Bentley (1960)[4], Emirbayer (1997) develops his *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* in which he introduces a relational perspective as fundamentally opposed to substantialist approaches, whose perhaps most prominent representative is rational choice theory[5].

Relational sociology is an umbrella term for a number of concepts that have more specific explanatory capacity. In particular I draw on concepts of relations and transactions (Tilly, 2005; Emirbayer, 1997; Somers, 1994), configurations and boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Jenkins, 1996; Elias & Scotson, 1965) and theories on structure and agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). These three subsets of relational sociology have been selected because they hold the potential to address the puzzles presented in the previous sections.

Relations and transactions

A relational approach rejects the idea of discrete, pre-given units such as the individual or society as analytical starting points. Instead, individual persons, their identities and practices are assumed to be 'dynamic' and 'unfolding' (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 278) in transactions. Transactions are based on relationships between at least two persons who are part of specific contexts. Social, cultural and political peculiarities of these contexts affect the way the transacting parties relate to each

[4] In 'Knowing and the Known' Dewey and Bentley (1960) develop a terminology to talk about knowing. The work further elaborates Dewey's idea that knowing is not a relation between mind and world but an activity. It is a transaction in which living beings and other elements of nature participate. The concept of transaction in turn is central to Emirbayer's approach to relational sociology (Emirbayer, 1997).

[5] According to Emirbayer (1997) substantialist perspectives draw on substances, meaning things, beings or essences as fundamental units of inquiry. These self-subsistent entities come 'preformed' and subsequently involve themselves in dynamics. Rational choice, more specifically, is based on the assumption that there are rationally calculating actors who have fixed interests, goals and preferences. Consequently social institutions and social change are explained with reference to the action and interaction of individuals whose underlying interests and identities remain unaltered.

other and which resources they have at their disposal (Sewell, 1992). The actors involved in transactions should not be seen as interacting entities. Rather transactions imply that actors mutually have to make sense of each other amidst the elements constituting their particular context.

Framing relations as transactions[6] means that the persons and units involved derive their meaning, significance and identity from the role they play within that transaction (Tilly, 2005; Emirbayer, 1997). This implies that 'others' are constitutive of rather than external to identity (Somers, 1994). Such interdependencies remain obscure as long as we think in terms of self-subsistent entities, which act under their own power (Dewey & Bentley, 1960).[7] To make intelligible what is at the heart of social consciousness and social action Somers (1994) introduces the concept of 'relational settings'. She strives to locate actors' social narratives and agency in temporal and spatial configurations of relationships.

> A relational setting is a pattern of relationships among institutions, public narratives, and social practices. As such it is a relational matrix, a social network. Identity-formation takes shape within these relational settings of contested but patterned relations among narratives, people, and institutions.
>
> (Somers, 1994, p. 626)

Relational settings cut across different levels of analysis and bring together in one setting the effects of, for example, state policies, local political dynamics and community practices. Within relational settings, persons are socially constituted over

[6] Some – for example Tilly (2005, p. 14) – use the terms 'relational' and 'transactional' interchangeably. In this thesis I prefer to use transaction whenever relations involve social action such as speech acts (Searle, 1995) instead of just linking different nodes. For example transactions start with two or more persons entering a conversation. The persons involved not only have to react to their counterpart but these counterparts also influence how they react. Relations thus constitute the overall analytical category of which transactions are a specification.

[7] Such thinking is common practice for approaches that adopt methodological individualist perspectives to understand and explain social phenomena. Rational choice theories are a primary example, which have also been applied to the study of diaspora engagement (Sinatti & Horst, 2014; see Page & Mercer, 2012).

time and space and through their ties with the constitutive elements of the specific setting. Although Somer's idea of relational settings seems somewhat overburdened, a reduced version of the concept is useful to delineate the social, institutional and local contexts in which transactions unfold and social identities take shape.

A focus on relations and transactions yields a number of useful insights to this work. Studying diasporas in the light of their historical, social and local contexts not only reveals connections between triggers of migration and experiences of leaving the home country and arriving at the destination, but also helps to explain people's social positioning in the receiving society. How individuals and communities (symbolically) construct internal links and establish connections to their places of origin and residence is an outcome of transactions, because events they relate to in the sending and receiving countries have repercussions on the patterns of social organisation and the practices among individuals in the diaspora. Examining such instances of relational embeddedness enables a historically contingent conception of identities and teleologies unfolding within diasporas (see Tilly, 1995; 2005).

A relational approach helps to unpack and redefine the intersection of large social processes with micro-level elements of social life, like changing identities within a socio-political context. Peoples' identities are not fixed but adapted to changes occurring in their social context as a result of which self and others are re-evaluated. With regard to the particular case of Afghan diaspora populations I examine how people establish or maintain relations with their countries of origin and reception in the light of particular experiences of uprooting, dispersal and settlement. This allows me to make intelligible how the trajectory of events that mark the recent history of Afghanistan ties in with subsequent waves of

displacement, dispersal and settlement at different destinations and peoples' self-perception as part of emerging diasporic groups.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I show how ties and perceptions of belonging are shaped by events leading informants to migrate and by living conditions and institutional arrangements at the destination. For instance, drivers of migration (Van Hear et al., 2012) and situational embeddedness, which in turn are reflected in different cohorts of migrants and refugees from Afghanistan, shape people's ties with co-nationals and feelings of coherence and solidarity. At the same instant intersecting elements of relational settings, including class, ethnicity and age also impact on mutual perceptions and the fabric of social ties among Afghans in the diaspora. Likewise contextual changes and evaluation of context can lead to new, plausible courses of action as I will further elaborate when exploring forms and aims of transnational engagement in Chapter 7.

Conceptually relations and transactions yield useful insights as far as the constitution of diasporic identities is concerned. But how exactly do social identities affect processes and patterns of social organisation among members of diaspora populations? In the following I will introduce two specific subsets of relational analysis, both of which are particularly important to addressing my research questions. These are concepts of boundaries and approaches to the relation between structure and agency.

Boundaries

To a large extent social organisation develops around dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984) as well as the position of group members. Such

dynamics have been referred to as 'boundary work' (Jenkins, 1996), because they forge the construction of collective identity by means of differentiation (Lamont & Molnar 2002; Pachucki et al. 2007). Boundaries exist within and across groups and societies. They are shaped by context, particularly the cultural repertoires, traditions and narratives that individuals have access to (Lamont 2000). Boundaries, in other words, are contingent on people's embeddedness in relational settings. It is important to distinguish between different potential qualities of boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions according to which actors frame the social world in certain categories. Conversely social boundaries derive from objectified social differences as a result of which actors have unequal access to resources and opportunities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Seeing dynamics of inclusion and exclusion as an integral aspect of relationality is crucial for understanding how actors are situated within their social environment and how they come to coalesce into social groups towards which they develop a sense of responsibility (Wimmer, 2008).

The idea of boundaries is central to Elias and Scotson's study of social configurations (Elias & Scotson, 1965), although they do not explicitly mention the term. Elias and Scotson examined the formation of opinions about 'self' and 'others' among inhabitants of an industrial urban area. They found that – as a result of perceived differences – the wider community falls apart into configurations of sub-groups, each of which is subject to certain claims and (self-) images. The authors particularly highlight the interdependencies of social configurations, developing a relational argument that no perceived grouping could have become what it is independent of others. Configurations are one particular outcome of transactions. People encounter each other against the backdrop of past experiences and present

contexts. Both affect mutual perceptions and relationships such as emerging alliances.

In their study Elias and Scotson observed how the arrival of new residents not only impacts on the self-perception of established groups but also shapes their framing of others (Elias & Scotson, 1965). Although the overall context is very different, one can discern similar dynamics among Afghan diaspora populations. The concept of boundaries thus significantly advances our understanding of the social fabric of the wider Afghan diaspora. It allows me to shed light on the types and effects of transactions between informants and their social context, including (groups of) co-nationals and the receiving societies. I highlight the interdependence of different categorical groups which form part of the wider Afghan diaspora while keeping in mind the context in which mutual perceptions and social boundaries unfold in the first place. In this way, I disentangle the basis of shared understandings, which in turn drive instances of social mobilisation and engagement among informants in both countries (Hall & Lamont, 2013).

Much of the literature on social boundaries has focused on ethnicity as a boundary marker (Wimmer, 2008; Jenkins, 1996; Barth, 1969). Instead of accepting ethnicity as a cultural given, the authors consider it as an outcome of social processes. Recently a number of studies have focused on boundaries and the social organisation of difference within the context of migration and integration. Korteweg and Yurdakul (2009) examine how public discourse on Muslim immigrant integration in Germany and the Netherlands contributes to the discursive construction of boundaries between immigrants and the majority society. Based on a study of Asian American community organisations, Okamoto and Jones Gast (2013) moreover show how some organisations construct extended group boundaries for

purposes of advocacy and political empowerment. The definition of the particular communities is broadened as a result and hints at actual and expected relationality of agency and group identities. Shared bonds do not necessarily imply that those forming part of a specific configuration like each other. However, in relation to outsiders, shared bonds enable people to stand together (Elias & Scotson, 1965; Wimmer, 2008). Such dynamics become salient whenever Afghans in either country position themselves vis-à-vis a wider social entity such as the British or German society (Alba, 2005).

Based on the analysis of personal social networks, Dahinden (2013) studies how boundaries emerge among groups of migrants themselves. She argues that emerging boundaries result from the interplay of regional origin, education, local establishment, mobility type, religion and 'race'. Such findings offer important insights for my study. Diaspora populations may be subjected to boundaries drawn by the receiving society because they problematise the relationship between nation, state and territory. As a result they may be instrumental in the redrawing of boundaries based on national identities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Likewise diasporas may be sites of boundary drawing between different sub-groups.

Relations have social outcomes and boundaries are one example of such outcomes among many others. Boundaries, in other words, are implicated in relational settings but whether or not they are enacted is contingent on the specific circumstances in place. Boundaries can be seen as relational facts. They specify relations and become social institutions, because they are shared by many and in turn define their relations and structure social engagement.

Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion underline that diaspora and diasporic identities remain incessantly open to interpretation and renegotiation, because they

rest on unfolding relations (Emirbayer, 1997). In part this results from the interplay of defining what is internal and what is external (Jenkins, 1969), which diasporic groups are subjected to and which implies boundary drawing. As a result any diaspora may involve a range of distinct subgroups. In Chapter 5 I elaborate on a set of elements, which are conducive to binding ties among people of Afghan origin. Based on empirical findings I highlight the importance of ties forged – for example – by family relations, ethnic descent or political affiliations. But the boundaries between the identified subgroups are not fixed. They may shift as a result of changes in the relational setting of the larger group and changes within the population, such as generational transitions.

A relational approach thus helps find the key to variation and change of diasporic identities and definitions of diaspora. It allows for systematic thinking to bear on real cases of contested, changing identity and to specify the differences between diaspora as social form and diaspora as social consciousness (Vertovec, 1997) for the Afghan case. This distinction, as I will show in Chapter 7, has important implications for social mobilisation and transnational engagements.

Structure and agency

In this work I examine how my informants exercise agency while entering into relationships with surrounding persons, places, meanings and events (Emirbayer, 1997). More specifically I seek to explain which aspects of a person's social embeddedness are involved in shaping his or her perceptions of belonging and social (transnational) engagements. Agency is inseparable from structural environments but entails concrete transactions with elements of relational settings in which actors are embedded. In the following I discuss my approach to the constructs of structure

and agency. I explain why they are integral to relational thinking (Mische, 2011) and why they form an important dimension of the puzzle this thesis strives to address.

The definition of elements of social structure and their relationship with social action and agency is one of the most deep-seated problems in social theory. Sewell defines structures as 'sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action' (Sewell, 1992, p. 19)[8]. Placing the relationship between schemas and resources at the centre of structure, Sewell aims to show how social change or stasis is generated by the enactment of structures in social life (Sewell, 1992). Structures – composed of schemas and resources – are 'hardened' into social institutions as they are repetitively enacted in people's everyday actions. Examples are the economic, political and cultural systems, which, in turn, exert an influence on actors' choices and shape their opportunities. But, following Sewell's notion of schemas, structures also include more informal and implicit codes, which inform actors' thinking and behaviour. Structures thus appear in many shapes and forms, ranging from organisations to strong or weak (informal) networks which are more or less stable and durable.

There are various approaches to conceptualising the way social actors are shaped by or navigate within their structural environment. The approaches all acknowledge the importance of social structures in understanding social actors and social action. However, considerable variation can be observed with regard to the room left for agency and actors' ability to enhance social change (Bakewell, 2010).

[8] Unlike for example Bourdieu's idea of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) – which conceptualises structural contexts and agents' orientations as deeply intertwined – Sewell's definition allows for an analytical distinction between aspects of structure and practice (Archer, 2010; Sewell, 1992).

Theorists like Archer (2010), Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984) have developed sophisticated accounts of how structure shapes practices and is reproduced and transformed by practice. Their approaches vary with regard to the constraining effects and properties attributed to structure. While providing rich accounts for the relationship between structure and agency, none of these approaches illuminates what agency really is and why, depending on contextual conditions, it might be limited or enhanced. However, it is precisely this question that is important to much social research. It is also key to my work, because I aim to tease out how informants become engaged in certain issues amidst the structural conditions in which they are embedded. This requires me to develop an approach that helps to examine how agency is exercised at a given moment and how people frame and act upon the relational setting to which they belong.

In search for a richer conceptualisation of agency and its inner workings I have leaned heavily on the definition put forward by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). With the aim of responding to the variable and changing ways in which actors relate to structure these sociologists provide a nuanced account of human agency, which they define as the

> engagement by individuals of different structural environments which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing situations.
>
> Emirbayer and Mische, (1998, p. 970)

This definition of agency encompasses three constitutive elements, the so-called *'chordal triad'* which express different temporal orientations.

i) The *iterational* element is manifested in actors' abilities to recall and apply tacit schemas of action that were developed through past interactions.

These include corporeal, affective and cognitive patterns, which are reflected in embodied practices and forms of social organisation (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 975).

ii) The *projective* element of agency underlines that actors not only draw on (habituated) past routines but also invent new possibilities for thought and action. This creative dimension of agency enables actors to distance themselves from schemas and habits and to act in accordance with evolving desires and purposes (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 983–84).

iii) Finally, the *practical evaluative* element responds to situational demands of the present. Through practical evaluation actors adjust routine dispositions or newly imagined projects to their respective real world circumstances. This dimension of agency is essentially about contextualising social experiences (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 994).

Although instances of empirical action entail all three constitutive dimensions of agency to varying extents, one is likely to predominate in any given situation (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The tripartite definition of agency is relational because agency is considered inseparable from the unfolding dynamic of situations, which require actors to simultaneously engage with different layers of structural environments (Emirbayer, 1997). Through such engagements, however, structures are reproduced and perhaps transformed in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. Agency, the authors argue, 'is always agency *toward* something' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973, emphasis in original), by means of which actors can enter into relationships with surrounding persons, places, meanings and events. These relationships in turn can be expressed through narratives (Somers, 1994). Consequently Mische (2011) states that a focus on the

conversational enactment of relational settings, patterns and constraints makes it possible to unpack strategic and perhaps transformative manoeuvring of embedded actors, which ultimately elides the traditional dichotomy between structure and agency. With respect to this fundamental methodological consideration I am not directly examining home-country relations and transnational practices as they unfold and are carried out. Rather I analyse informants' narrative accounts of their engagements and draw inferences from these.

Conversely, drawing on the tripartite conceptualisation of agency enables me to approach diaspora engagement from an actor-centred perspective. The literature review suggests a surprising lack of actor-centred perspectives in conceptualisations of diasporas as (development) actors. Most accounts on transnational involvements recognise structural opportunities and restrictions (Lampert, 2009) but ignore how actors themselves frame their engagements considering the relational environment in which they are embedded. The concrete forms and 'contents' of agentic capacities are shaped by sets of particular resources available in specific times and places in which people live and by specific configurations of habitual, projective and practical evaluative considerations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). But actors' considerations or orientations may vary according to the different structural situations to which they respond (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). This is reflected in narratives, which not only give expression to individuals' relational embeddedness but also reveal how they navigate within their respective social environments and make use of the resources available.

Research on diaspora engagements often fails to account for internal dynamics and mechanisms of cohesion within diaspora populations. As a result the constitutive elements of diaspora agency tend to remain unquestioned. A relational

approach lends itself to bridging both areas of diaspora research by shifting the interpretation of action from an *a priori* categorisation to a focus on contingent narratives of meaning. This implies a switch from fixed notions of agency to relational analyses of identity formation (Somers & Gibson, 1994). Throughout this thesis informants discuss their perceptions, aspirations, options and engagements within the parameters of the social context in which they consciously position themselves. In Chapters 7 and 8 I demonstrate how social relationality is reflected in shared memories, (competing) social identities and transnational engagements as well as underlying opportunities and restrictions.

Ultimately I show that we cannot assess the agency of diasporic groups by focusing exclusively on the transnational practices directed towards the origin country. The primacy of practices, which dominates studies of diaspora engagement, turns a blind eye on the instances where agency is exercised. How and when people exercise agency only becomes intelligible if we broaden our understanding of the multi-layered conditions under which members of diasporic groups act upon their specific relationships with the origin country and the ideas of change and development that emerge from these relationships.

There have been previous pleas for adopting a relational approach to the study of diaspora engagement. Koinova (2012) argues that more theoretical elaboration of diaspora politics can be achieved by adopting a relational perspective articulated by the concept of positionality. Positionality, she argues, 'refers to the relative power that diaspora entrepreneurs perceive as deriving from their social positions occupied in a specific context' (Koinova, 2012, p. 101). It is a perceptual and relational category at the same time, which allows us to consider gender, class and other aspects or identities as relational positions rather than essential qualities

(Maher & Tetreault, 1993). In the case of diaspora actors, social positions and capacities to act are contingent on a range of relational characteristics. These include people's position and status in the receiving society, the comparative advantage of their place of residence and their connection to other networks and actors (Koinova, 2012).

However, while such relational characteristics seem promising for analysing diaspora politics and people's agentic capacities to engage in specific forms of action, no such reflections have been instantiated by empirical research.

Summary

In this chapter I highlighted three themes that are salient in the literature on diasporas: i) diasporas as outcome of local and global transformations, ii) diasporas as changing social entities and iii) diasporas as agents of change. My aim is to understand how Afghans based in Germany and Great Britain coalesce and relate to social change, conflict and development in Afghanistan. This not only requires me to consider each of the three themes but to unpack their interdependencies. Analysing diasporas as an outcome of broader social transformations suggests that their situation can change in response to tumultuous events or more subtle changes in homelands and hostlands, which leaves them in ongoing formation.

The inherent changeability of diasporas as social entities was the subject of section 2.2, where I focused specifically on the tensions between preservation and change in diasporic identities. I argued that diasporas entail a wealth of different experiences and thus feature different narratives around ethnicity and culture, attachment and belonging.

With the aim to further investigate claims that diaspora attachments with their country of origin are coupled with a self-perception as moral and political agents, section 2.3 then shifted the focus to diaspora engagements. A survey of the literature on diaspora engagement suggests limited understanding of diaspora communities as social entities (Brinkerhoff, 2012; Turner, 2010). Most studies do not address the questions as to why people coalesce into diasporas, how they frame their relationship to their country of origin, and why and how members of diaspora communities choose to engage in homeland-oriented activities (Horst, 2013; Page & Mercer, 2012; Lampert, 2009; Kleist, 2008). Instead, studies of diaspora engagement often presuppose the agency and motivation of individuals to engage with their countries of origin. They do not sufficiently acknowledge that empirical action is multiply determined and undertaken by social actors who are situated in time and space.

Studies of diaspora engagement also tend to reify the assumption that diasporas have roots in a certain place and that they share a group identity with those originating from the same place. Postmodern critiques of diasporas claim that there is a need to break down the isomorphism of people, ethnicity, place and sense of belonging. However, such claims rarely propose theoretically or methodologically refined approaches to diaspora, which would ensure that all relevant dimensions of their identities and practices are captured. Based on a case study of Afghan populations in Britain and Germany, I use the following chapters to demonstrate that a relational perspective lends itself to examining the elements at play in the making and unmaking of diasporas. A relational approach to diasporas enables us to stay clear from categorical identities as it calls for a conceptualisation of diasporas as consisting of actors who are embedded within relationships among institutions,

public narratives and social practices, as well as people and stories that shift over time and space. It provides a theoretical substantiation of the links between diasporas as social forms and diasporas as social actors.

Studying the emergence of diasporas in the light of broader social change also highlights the relational embeddedness of diasporic groups engaging (or not) in action. It is crucial to understand the broader context of Afghan migratory movements before attempting to grasp the emerging dynamics of interaction among Afghan migrants at specific times and places, because of such wider embeddedness. In the next chapter I sketch out how political developments changed traditional mobility patterns and prompted the emergence of Afghan refugee populations at various global destinations, with a particular focus on Afghan immigrant populations in Germany and the UK.

CHAPTER 3

Mobility and spatial dispersion: Afghan populations in Britain and Germany

Introduction

In Chapter 2, I demonstrated how diaspora formation is linked to higher-level change such as conflict or other forms of political transitions. Such connections between (political) transitions and mobility are of particular relevance to my study of the Afghan case, because recent Afghan population movements to Western countries are inextricably linked to subsequent phases of war and conflict in Afghanistan. To grasp the magnitude of changes inflicted by protracted upheavals I will briefly sketch traditional mobility patterns, which have been described as inherent characteristic of the Afghan society (Koser, 2011; Monsutti, 2005). I then discuss how political developments of the last four decades changed traditional mobility patterns, leading to refugee movements of unprecedented scale (Turton & Marsden, 2002) and the emergence of Afghan refugee populations at various global destinations. I then trace the development of Afghan immigrant populations in Germany and the UK. Before outlining the demographic profile of Afghan populations in both countries I review essential features of Germany and the UK as contexts of reception. Here the focus is mainly on relevant changes in immigration and asylum legislation. This is followed by a brief review of the history of bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Britain and Germany respectively. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the key points as well as the similarities and differences between Afghan populations in Germany and the UK, which make the study of these two sites of the Afghan diaspora particularly compelling.

3.1 Afghanistan: Geography, people and society

To better understand the dynamics among Afghan diaspora populations it is helpful to shed some light on the aspects that have been shaping the modern state of Afghanistan. Geographically the landlocked territory of Afghanistan is situated between Pakistan (south and east), the Islamic Republic of Iran (west) and Turkmenistan (northwest). In the north Afghanistan shares borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China.

Figure 3.1 Map of Afghanistan



Source: (United Nations, 2011)

The Afghan population resembles a colourful mosaic of different ethnic groups. Over centuries they have settled in the area which became the State of Afghanistan in the mid-18th century. Pashtuns form the largest section of the

population at over 40 per cent. Pashtun lands cover areas on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. With an estimated 27 per cent of the population, Tajiks form the second-largest group. They live scattered across the country but agglomerations can be found in the northeast. Uzbeks and Turkmen are the main Turkic ethnic groups in north Afghanistan. Their size is estimated at 9 and 3 per cent respectively. Hazaras are distinctive for their Mongolian appearance. They make up about 9 per cent of the Afghan population and traditionally populate the central parts of the country. Further small ethnic groups include the Aimak (4 per cent), Baloch (2 per cent) and others (Vogelsang, 2008). Linguistically Afghanistan is equally diverse. There are two official languages: Dari, an Afghan version of Farsi, and Pashto, which is spoken by the Pashtun groups of the population. However, Uzbeks and Turkmen mainly speak Turkic languages and there is a wealth of minor languages and dialects, which are spoken in certain regions and by specific groups. Although around 99 per cent of the Afghan population are Muslims, religion adds further facets to the overall heterogeneity. Most Afghans are adherents of Sunni Islam but up to 30 per cent, particularly members of the Hazara ethnic group, are Shi'a Muslims (Schetter, 2004).

While ethnic diversity is an important feature of Afghanistan's population, it is important to acknowledge that is not necessarily the central building block of social identity. Many Afghans attribute primary importance to their place or region of origin as well as to family or tribal relations (Schetter 2004). Glatzer (2002) holds that in the northwestern parts of the Asian subcontinent and in West Asia the term 'tribe' is used as a marker of nobility. Tribes are based on shared ancestry. Genealogical ties and primordial obligations structure tribal networks. Often this is used interchangeably with the terms clan or lineage. However, the latter terms have

unilineal descent and – usually – exogamy as a defining criterion, which is not obligatory with tribe. In addition, clan and lineage tend to be associated with more or less localized social units.

Numerical estimates of Afghanistan's present population are notoriously vague. According to the CIA World Factbook it is estimated at just under 32 million. With a growth rate of around 2.3 per cent the Afghan population is expanding rapidly. The Afghan society is also very young: the average age is estimated at 18 years. Conversely the average life expectancy at birth does not exceed 50.5 years. Average levels of education are low, too. Literacy rates range around 43 per cent for Afghan men as opposed to around 12.6 per cent for Afghan women (The CIA World Factbook, 2014).

Afghanistan is a very poor country and highly dependent on international aid. The Human Development Index value for Afghanistan places the country in the low human development category at position 169 of 187 countries and territories (UNDP, 2014). Large parts of the population face shortages of housing, electricity and employment opportunities, and have restricted access to clean water and medical care. Main sources of income vary according to region. Nearly 80 per cent of Afghanistan's labour force works in the agricultural sector, about 6 per cent work in industry and roughly 16 per cent are employed in the service sector. Afghanistan heavily relies on imports, most of which come from Pakistan, the US, Russia, India and China. A weak government, endemic corruption and poor public infrastructure exacerbate the country's economically weak situation (The World Bank, 2014).

3.2 Afghan mobility and migration transitions[9]

3.2.1 Mobility: An inherent characteristic of the Afghan society

Although the main focus of this thesis is on conflict-induced migration from Afghanistan it is important to note that mobility patterns have been described as an inherent feature of the Afghan population. Schetter (2012b) points out that Afghan migratory movements have existed for centuries and are hence deeply engrained in the memories of many Afghan communities. Mobility distinctly shapes the Afghan social and cultural landscape and has been a key livelihood strategy (Koser, 2011; Monsutti, 2008). Afghanistan has never been subjected to state-building processes that included all levels and groups within the Afghan population. Large parts of the population thus attach more importance to spatial mobility than local identity (Schetter, 2013). Until the 19th century Afghanistan was a site of mobility because of the many criss-crossing caravan and trade routes, which formed part of the Silk Road. In addition the seasonal mobility patterns of vast nomad populations still prevail today. Such features make the people of Afghanistan a paradigmatic case for a non-sedentary society .

With regard to contemporary Afghanistan, Monsutti (2008) observes a general tendency among Afghans to give different and often plural reasons for their decision to migrate (Schetter, 2012b). Reasons frequently mentioned include security concerns, for example relating to armed conflict or threats people receive from personal enemies, or economic reasons, like the search for work, trading or business opportunities. Further reasons for migration are more personal and derive, for example, from a need for medical treatment, family formation or family

[9] See Appendix I for focused timeline of events in Afghanistan, Germany and the UK.

reunification. Cross-border journeys are also undertaken for religious reasons. Schetter (2012) notes that in addition to pilgrims, many *malangs* (hermits) and *tablighis* (itinerant preachers) move about the country. Internal displacement formed part of the strategies of various power holders who sought to enhance the power of the central government by weakening local governance structures (Sharani, 2013).

Afghanistan's characteristic features as a non- or semi-sedentary society are not unique. Similar characteristics apply to other nomads and traders across the world. What makes the history of Afghan mobility worth mentioning in the context of this thesis is that it sets the scene for periods of conflict-induced mass migration starting from the late 1970s. In the following sections I will outline four phases of Afghan displacement but narrow my focus to movements directed to Western countries.

3.2.2 Displacement under communist rule

The middle decades of the 20th century was marked by faltering moves towards a modernisation of Afghanistan under the reign of the Musahiban dynasty[10]. Modernisation was not restricted to infrastructural projects but also encompassed administrative reforms and a restructuring of the governance system, including the writing of the 1964 constitution. In practice, however, governing power remained concentrated in the hands of the king[11] and the elitist families who

[10] The Pashtun Musahiban dynasty ruled Afghanistan from 1929 until 1978. It included three subsequent leaders: Nader Shah (1929–1933), Zahir Shah (1933–1973) and Mohammad Daud Khan (1973–1978). The period of Musahiban rule has made history as one of the most stable episodes in modern Afghanistan, because the Musahibans allegedly recognised the significance of local power, which does not apply to later regimes (Jones, 2009).

[11] Afghanistan's monarch Zahir Shah was at the forefront of Afghanistan's modernisation during the 1960s. In 1973 he was dethroned by his own cousin, Mohammad Daud, who staged a military coup against him. Daud subsequently proclaimed the creation of the 'Republic of Afghanistan'.

formed part of the Kabul establishment (Saikal, 2004). As a result people from rural areas had practically no chance to get involved in political decision making. Such exclusionary mechanisms prompted mounting tensions between the urban centre of Kabul and the rural hinterlands. Although Kabul's educational institutions became increasingly open towards students from rural Afghanistan, they continued to be denied access to the political establishment. Such inequalities turned into a major driving force behind radical political movements, which set out to topple the Kabul establishment (Saikal, 2004; Schetter, 2004).

Following a coup against the king in 1973, the 'Republic of Afghanistan' was proclaimed but centralist and authoritarian rule – based on military support – continued (Schetter, 2004). In this context Afghanistan's first communist party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), was secretly created in Kabul during the early 1960s. Towards the end of the 1960s the party split into two increasingly antagonistic branches: the mainly Dari-speaking *Khalq* (mass) and the Pashto-dominated *Parcham* (flag). Regardless of growing hostilities, both *Khalq* and *Parcham* fiercely opposed the central government under President Daud and waged active campaigns against it. Under the influence of the Soviet Union the two branches reunited in 1977 to confront the Kabul government more effectively (Shah, 2001). This led to a bloody yet successful coup in April 1978, which became known as the *Saur Revolution*, named after the second month of the Persian calendar, during which the uprising occurred. Soon after the PDPA took power, internal quarrels within the regime's own ranks resurfaced. With the aim of stabilising the situation, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. The intervention marked the beginning of a ten-year occupation (Barfield, 2010).

Prior to the *Saur Revolution* and the outbreak of war, members of the PDPA party engaged in repressive action against the traditional Afghan establishment. In particular people who maintained ties with the royal family and members of the religious elite were targeted. As a result, people from these social groups were the first to flee Afghanistan after the change of government. Later on, the PDPA started persecuting liberal-minded Afghans alongside Maoists and people advocating for more moderate versions of socialism (Arbabzadah, 2013; Schetter, 2004; Shah, 2001).

Following the communist coup and the subsequent Soviet invasion in 1979, Afghans fled their country in large numbers. It is estimated that around one million Afghans had left the country by autumn 1979 and more followed. Afghan exile following the communist coup of 1978 took various forms and encompassed a range of destinations (Centlivres, 2010). Broadly speaking Afghan émigrés of the post-1978 period form two groups which correspond to Van Hear's distinction between a near and a wider diaspora (Van Hear, 2003a). Members of the near diaspora almost exclusively came from rural areas of Afghanistan. Shi'as living in western and central Afghanistan mainly went to Iran, while Pashtuns constituted the vast majority of refugees in Pakistan[12]. By 1981 estimated numbers of Afghan refugees to Pakistan and Iran had reached 2.3 and 1.5 million respectively (Turton & Marsden, 2002).

[12] Refugee movements prompted significant shifts in the size and distribution of ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Pashtun nomads, who used to graze their livestock on pastures in central Afghanistan, had to succumb to Hazaras who took control of the area. Large numbers of Pashtuns living in northern Afghanistan fled to Pakistan. As a result Tajiks constituted the largest ethnic group from the early 1980s until the mid 1990s, accounting for 30–40 per cent of the population. The Pashtuns in turn were degraded to an ethnic minority and Pashto became merely a regional language (Schetter, 2004).

In comparison, the numbers of Afghans leaving for destinations further afield, including North America, Europe and India were relatively small. They were mainly persons or families who had formed Kabul's urban and professional elite (Turton & Marsden, 2002). A large number of them had been trained in the English-, French- or German-speaking high schools of Kabul or other major cities (Centlivres, 2010). Following their privileged high school education some went on to pursue higher education in Western countries[13] (Rostami-Povey, 2007b), from which they returned to take up professional positions in Afghanistan. Centlivres (2010) emphasises the importance of their educational biographies for the migration decisions of Afghanistan's urban middle class. As far as it was possible, members of this group left for countries whose language was the one they had learned during their secondary or higher education. The most important destinations in the wider diaspora were North America, Australia and Germany (Hanifi, 2006). For some, moving to a destination in Europe or North America was a matter of seeking personal protection from political persecution. This particularly pertained to people belonging to the Pashtun aristocracy who vehemently opposed communist politics (Shah, 2001). In other cases people had fled their homes because general levels of insecurity constantly intensified, especially when the Soviet offensive was met by counter-reactions of Islamist mujahideen factions.

The tactic of Soviet warfare changed towards the end of the 1980s. To curb the resistance coming from within society, troops began to heavily bombard villages, irrigation systems and agricultural lands. Such assaults caused large parts of the

[13] In the aftermath of World War II, Afghans moved to Western overseas destinations to benefit from educational opportunities. Overseas migration, however, was largely restricted young men and a few women from well-situated families. From the 1950s onwards, increasing numbers of those who left chose not to return (Naby, 2005).

rural population to move to the cities or flee to a neighbouring country or a destination further afield.

3.2.3 Displacement during the civil war

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan mobilised a mass opposition, which Barfield (2010) describes as pervasive but decentralised. Different Islamic factions became the public face of anti-communist resistance. These Islamist guerrilla fighters are known as 'mujahideen', a term borrowed from the Arabic *mujāhidūn*, which literally means 'those engaged in jihad' (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014).

On the ground the warring parties adopted multiple strategies, too. The opposition movements carried out frequent attacks on cities and particularly focused on Kabul, where Afghanistan's wealth and foreign embassies were concentrated. Arbabzadah (2011) notes that 'The mujahideen were part of the realm of traditional politics in which a conquered region is a turf that can be exploited by strongmen, who call themselves mujahideen so as to appear respectable'. Meanwhile Soviet forces engaged in 'scorched earth' warfare, which included the bombardment of villages as well as the destruction of irrigation systems and agricultural land. Such interventions particularly affected Afghanistan's rural population (Schetter, 2004).

For many mujahideen and militias alike, local and tribal ties took precedence over political affiliation. Sharani (2013) holds that this led to a gradual politicisation of identities with familial or *quam*[14] affiliation being strategically deployed. What had initially been personality clashes and rivalries between the different resistance parties turned into open and violent combat from the mid-1980s onwards. Besides personal

[14] Solidarity group based on kinship, common occupation and/or place of residence (Schetter, 2013).

rivalries, antagonisms mainly derived from the aim to seize power. Over time tensions also increased among the Kabul government, which are said to have largely been caused by ethnic rivalries (Schetter, 2004). The communist government collapsed in 1992 and warlords and their militias came to replace the state's monopoly of power, seeking to set up their own independent petty states. The disintegration led to a complete loss of security and the onset of arbitrary violence. Kabul became the epicentre of armed combat with the civil population being the main victim. Repeated shelling, torture, rape and street combat that resembled ethnic cleansing became the new reality of a city that had remained relatively unharmed during communist rule (Schetter, 2004).

The period of civil war in Afghanistan prompted the greatest refugee exodus worldwide since World War II. It is estimated that in the mid-1980s out of 15 million Afghans, almost every second person was a refugee. In addition there has been a significant population of registered internally displaced persons (IDP), though the true scale of external displacement is estimated to exceed existing numbers by far (Koser, 2011). Initially the collapse of communism prompted mass return movements of those who had fled to Iran or Pakistan. Nearly one million people were observed to cross the border back into Afghanistan. However, these return movements quickly began to cease once it was clear that the subsequent mujahideen government spearheaded a descent into even greater chaos rather than enhancing prospects of political stability (Turton & Marsden, 2002). Throughout the mid-1990s conditions of anarchic violence inflicted by the armed conflict between mujahideen parties caused a renewed exodus. Around 65,000 people, mostly residents of the Kabul area, left for Pakistan or other parts of Afghanistan (Turton & Marsden, 2002). Smaller numbers of people fled to Western countries. Germany

and the United States remained popular destinations but countries like the UK and the Netherlands increasingly began to attract refugees from Afghanistan (Muller, 2010).

School teachers represented a particular target group for mujahideen assaults because they were seen as symbols of the reforms the PDPA had advocated for. Another target group were former officials of the communist regime alongside people who had worked as civil servants. They began to leave Kabul in the early 1990s. Some of them were able to fly directly from Afghanistan or Pakistan to a Western destination. Others spent transient periods in a neighbouring country while waiting for relatives already living in the West to collect the funds necessary for travel and document expenses. Some, who had been students or trainees in the USSR, managed to proceed toward Western Europe once communism in Afghanistan had collapsed (Centlivres, 2010).

Over the years fewer and fewer people who left Afghanistan with the desire of moving to a Western destination were able to travel there directly. Temporary periods of life in Iran, Pakistan[15] and sometimes the Soviet Union became increasingly common. Often this involved a (temporary) separation of families. In many cases one family member – usually the male head of the family – took on the role of pioneer. Once he had secured his own livelihood at the destination, attempts

[15] In Pakistan the vast majority of Afghan refugees live(d) in camps, most of which are located close to the Afghan-Pakistani border. They received support from the international community and the UNHCR played a major role in coordinating and allocating aid flows. Over time refugee camps were transformed into refugee villages as people started building their own mud houses. A small number of Afghans from more affluent social backgrounds lived outside the camps in cities like Lahore and Karachi. By the end of 1990 the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan had risen to an estimate 3.3 million persons (Turton & Marsden, 2002). In Iran only relatively small numbers of Afghan refugees live(d) in camps. Most were expected to find their own accommodation and ended up living in the poorer neighbourhoods of Iran's major cities (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007). The Iranian government granted them access to education and basic health care and welfare entitlements. Also refugees were allowed to work in selected menial occupations. By 1990 around 3 million Afghan refugees were estimated to live in Iran (Turton & Marsden, 2002).

were made to get the rest of the family to come and join him. The case of Mehraban (late 20s) and his family exemplifies such trajectories. Mehraban is a graduate student who has been living in Germany since the late 1990s. During my interview with him Mehraban described the stepwise process that eventually brought them all to Germany:

> *Well my mum and siblings [and I] came to Germany in 1996. But my father had been in Germany since 1989. So he came to Germany seven years before us. He was an asylum seeker at first but started to work later on and earned money which he set aside and saved. After seven years he brought us to Germany. In the meantime we – my mother and siblings – lived with my uncle in Pesharwar, Pakistan.*

Initially family reunification was largely restricted to the nuclear family. Often, however, members of the extended family benefited from assistance provided by kin at Western locations and gradually followed their footsteps. Centlivres (2010) holds that Afghan migration to Western countries was increasingly based on family networks or relationships people established with Westerners in Afghanistan. Often the latter ties are of economic or academic nature. In addition it is important to note that changing asylum and immigration legislation across Western Europe also played an important role in shaping people's migration decisions.

3.2.4 Displacement during Taliban oppression

Amidst the chaos of the civil war, which pitted Muslim against Muslim, the Taliban movement came to play an increasingly important role from the mid-1990s onwards. Barfield (2010) considers the emergence of the Taliban as part of the legacy of Afghan displacement. Many adherents of the movement had a refugee background – Afghans born in Pakistani refugee camps (Barfield, 2010; Centlivres, 2010). Determined to end the disorder created by the civil war, the Taliban strongly

drew on the discontent of the population living in areas of prevailing political chaos. Another reason behind the rapid ascent of the Taliban was the lack of opposition from a central government or coherent military force (Barfield, 2010). The movement began to expand from 1994, spreading from the south to the north and east of Afghanistan (Schetter, 2004). Initially lauded for bringing peace and security to the regions it controlled, the Taliban soon became unpopular, particularly in the cities, because of its rigid social and religious policies. The Taliban era was marked by the absence of state structures and radical ideas of social order. Over time Afghanistan turned into an important node of a global yet loosely structured network of militant Islamists, who represented a crucial source of revenues for the regime, which had been isolated by the international community.

From the late 1990s onwards, Taliban attacks displaced thousands of people within Afghanistan and to neighbouring countries (Turton & Marsden, 2002). A severe drought beginning in 1999 further aggravated the overall conditions and led to increased displacement. Until 2001 a continuous flow of involuntary migrants left Afghanistan for the neighbouring countries. They were no longer *mohajerin*[16] but poor people forced to leave their homes (Centlivres, 2010). At the same time, however, international agencies scaled down their level of support for refugees in the neighbouring countries, shifting the focus of their work to repatriation. Receding international assistance combined with continuous movement of Afghans to both Pakistan and Iran led the administrations of countries to harden their attitudes, not

[16] Episodes of flight and life in Pakistani refugee camps prompted a gradual erosion of Pashtun tribal structures. Pashtun refugees struggled to uphold a sense of autonomy and often experienced a loss of social status. Islamic concepts offered some compensation. A *mujaher* (refugee) was seen as acting like the Prophet who himself had to flee from Mecca to Medina. *Mujaherin* who engaged in jihad in defence of the lost homeland turned into *mujaheddin* who followed the footsteps of the Prophet (Schetter, 2004).

only towards new arrivals but also towards existing refugee populations (Turton & Marsden, 2002).

From the late 1990s the Iranian government refused to register new arrivals from Afghanistan and subjected Afghans living in the country to intensified police scrutiny. The frequency of deportations increased alongside growing public resentment towards the Afghan migrant and refugee population (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007). Similarly Pakistan adopted a tougher attitude towards refugees from Afghanistan from the late 1990s onwards. From early 2000, newly arriving Afghans were no longer recognised as refugees, which had so far provided the grounds for privileged treatment. In late 2000 Pakistan officially closed its border with Afghanistan, claiming an inability to absorb the flows of refugees who were seeking a safe haven from the Taliban regime. Similar to the situation in Iran, Pakistan reverted to casting Afghans as economic migrants rather than people fleeing conditions of political persecution (Turton & Marsden, 2002). The mounting restrictions and increasingly unwelcoming climate in Iran and Pakistan prompted people seeking to leave Afghanistan to consider alternative destinations. In the same vein, onward mobility from Iran and Pakistan to Western destination countries increased throughout the 1990s. While Germany remained a popular destination throughout this time, the UK, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries attracted growing numbers of Afghan migrants.

3.2.5 A decade of continuing out-migration

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the international response entailed drastic changes to the situation of Afghan refugees. Initially the prospect of restoration and return to life in normality prompted an enormous wave of

repatriation. By 2005, however, the pace and scale of return mobility decreased significantly as it became apparent that the security situation remained volatile and economic recovery was faltering (Monsutti, 2008). Beside its consistently complex security situation, Afghanistan continued to face significant humanitarian challenges. High levels of insecurity at economic, humanitarian and political levels contributed to and were exacerbated by rapid urbanisation as a result of which poverty and unemployment increased in Kabul and other urban centres across Afghanistan (Monsutti & Rodriques, 2013).

Further obstacles to repatriation derived from the fact that neither the interim government nor the international agencies operating in Afghanistan were able to present a viable solution for the reintegration of large numbers of people into a ruined and largely dysfunctional country. Upon arrival in Afghanistan many returnees faced difficulties in recovering their land and found themselves exposed to the shortage of housing (Macleod, 2013). Such deficiencies explain the enormous number of returnees moving to the overcrowded capital Kabul (Koser, 2014). However, agencies like the UNHCR unabatedly continue to facilitate voluntary repatriation, which is the centrepiece of its 'Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees' (UNHCR, 2012). International migration continues to be a way for Afghans to respond to the insecure and quickly changing contexts in which they live (Koser, 2014; Schuster & Majidi, 2014). Migration as a livelihood strategy is largely based on mechanisms of solidarity and mutual support, because the social ties between Afghans are often more efficient than the solutions that the international humanitarian regime can offer (Monsutti, 2012).

3.3 Livelihoods of Afghan migrants in Western countries

As shown in the previous section, Afghans living in Western countries form a relatively small – albeit growing – proportion of Afghanistan's expatriate population. Jazajery (2002) assumes that this group makes up around 5 per cent of the total population. Large spatial distances and socio-cultural differences between Western destination countries and Afghanistan imply a break with the socio-cultural and religious environment prevailing in the region and among Afghan migrant groups in the neighbouring countries (Centlivres, 2010). Another important and consequential feature of Afghan exiles in Western countries derives from their social and socio-economic backgrounds. Unlike the majority of Afghan migrants in Pakistan and Iran, people leaving to Western countries are mainly members of the urban upper and middle classes. Moreover historical and political entanglements between Afghanistan and receiving countries as well as job opportunities have played important roles in the emergence of destinations for Afghan migrants (Berg Harpviken, 2009).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s the wider Afghan diaspora expanded significantly, including in Europe. Besides the desire of living in safety, generous immigration policies (see section 3.3.2) and the prospect of legal protection, pre-existing social ties at a specific destination often served as additional pull-factor. Jazajery (2002) assumes that about half of the Afghan immigrant population in Western locations have a secure and permanent residence status. This particularly applies to the cohort which left Afghanistan during the 1980s and early 1990s, before the mujahideen seized power. However, conditions of reception changed over time. Especially in Europe, asylum seekers from Afghanistan are increasingly

given temporary and revocable permits, which are contingent on developments of the situation in Afghanistan.

While the conditions leading to different waves of emigration and the emergence of Afghan refugee populations are important, the way communities develop and establish themselves also depends on the receiving context. Rostami-Povey (2007a) illustrates this with her comparative gender analysis of Afghan refugees in Iran, Pakistan, the UK and the USA. She points out that receiving contexts shape people's access to entitlements, services and infrastructure in many ways. While many Afghans residing in Iran and Pakistan are deprived of any citizenship rights, substantial numbers of Afghans in the West are now in possession of two passports. Yet many Afghans who arrived at Western destinations experienced a stark contrast between legal entitlements and professional opportunities. While their recognition as refugees was relatively straightforward, their chances of finding employment suited to their academic and professional qualifications were restricted (Hanifi, 2006). For many Afghan refugees life in exile hence entailed experiences of class demotion. People who had occupied high positions in Afghanistan were denied access to similar work in the receiving country and moved into low-wage, unskilled sectors instead (Rostami-Povey, 2007a).

The diversification of migration trajectories not only led conditions of 'refugee-ness' (Braakman & Schlenkhoff, 2007; see also Omidian, 1996) to change gradually but also prompted an increasing diversification of Afghan immigrant populations in Western countries. Such changes, however, cannot solely be attributed to the growing complexity of migratory experiences and the increasing heterogeneity of Afghan populations respectively. Likewise conditions in receiving countries – in particular policies and legislation underlying conditions of

immigration and reception – play an important role in shaping experiences of being a refugee. In the next sections I turn to the specific cases of Afghan populations in Britain and Germany. I review the history of Afghan immigration to both countries and examine which changes have occurred that affect conditions of immigration and reception respectively.

3.4 The Afghan immigrant population in Germany

3.4.1 The history of Afghan immigration to Germany

Historical accounts of Afghan immigration to Germany are patchy (Baraulina et al., 2006). Likewise statistical data are arbitrary, because they do not differentiate between foreign-born people and natives but only between foreign nationals and German citizens. Until 2005 no data on numbers of foreign-born or naturalised German citizens was available[17]. Since 2005, however, German statistical offices have been collecting data on German citizens with migrant backgrounds as part of the so-called *Mikrozensus*[18]. Nevertheless statistical figures on Germany's Afghan population are best read as estimates.

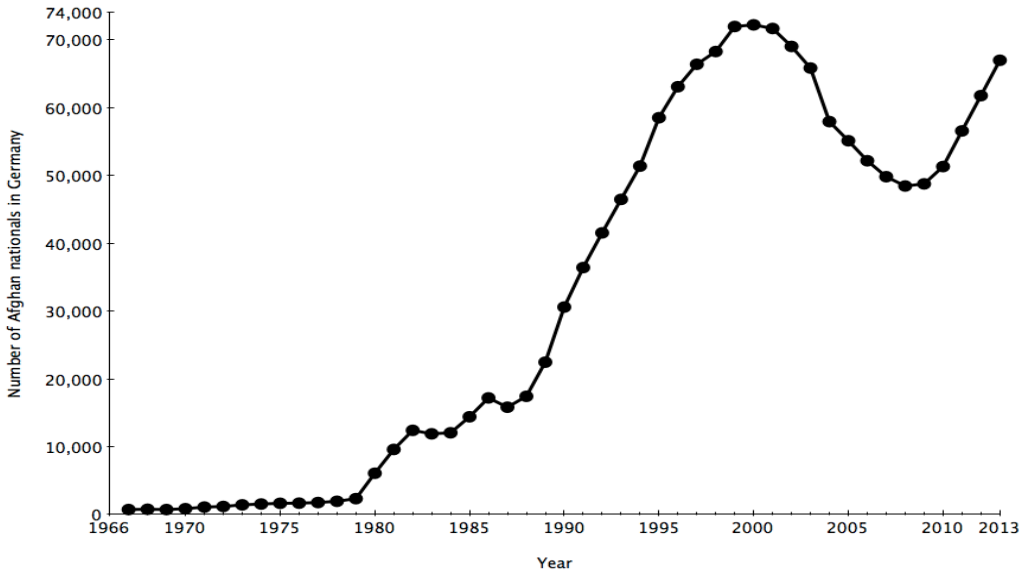
Afghan migration to Germany is a relatively long-standing phenomenon. However the influx of Afghan migrants was not continuous but occurred in waves,

[17] Official statistics provided by Germany's Federal Statistical Office include foreigners born in Germany, immigrants with a secure legal status, temporary residents, asylum seekers and tolerated refugees. It is important to note that immigration status does not necessarily correspond with length of stay. There are many cases of immigrants who have lived in Germany for more than a decade without having been granted secure residence status (Cyrus & Vogel, 2007).

[18] As part of a reform of the legislation underlying the *Mikrozensus,* the collection of data on migrant backgrounds has been extended. More specifically respondents of the *Mikrozensus* are asked to disclose information on personal migration experiences, citizenship and the migration experiences of parents. The official definition of German nationals with migrant background includes 'all persons who migrated to the Federal Republic of Germany after 1949, all foreigners who were born in Germany and all those German nationals with at least one parent who came to Germany after 1949 or who was born in Germany as a foreigner' (Destatis, 2006).

which largely coincided with specific political regimes and periods of conflict in Afghanistan between 1978 and 2001. But not all movement from Afghanistan to Germany was driven by war and conflict and – as a result – not all Afghan migrants are adequately labelled as refugees. Prior to 1979 fewer than 2,000 Afghans lived in Germany. Most of them were either businesspeople or students. The trade city of Hamburg and its warehouses attracted numerous Afghan carpet dealers who subsequently settled with their families (Stroux, 2002; Steinbeis, 2001). Some families who were among the traders that came to Germany at an early stage still run businesses in the warehouse district of the city (Stroux, 2002). Others came as businesspeople in other sectors, as diplomats or university students, many of whom were previous graduates of Kabul's German-speaking high school (see section 3.2.3). While business and tradespeople mainly settled in the commercial cities of Hamburg and Frankfurt am Main, diplomats and other political representatives went to Bonn, the then-capital and administrative hub of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the number of Afghans seeking refuge and asylum in Germany increased sharply. Figure 3.2 below illustrates the stark increase of refugees from Afghanistan.

Figure 3.2 Number of Afghan nationals in Germany



Source: Destatis (2010, 2014a)

Between 1980 and 1982 numbers grew by around 3000 persons per year. This was followed by a short period of receding numbers, before another wave of immigration set in from 1985. Following a few years with lower or receding immigration rates, numbers start rising sharply again from 1989 onwards in the wake of the civil war in Afghanistan and due to mounting restrictions for Afghans living in Iran and Pakistan. Throughout the 1990s immigration continued with the rise of the Taliban and the establishment of its fundamentalist regime (Baraulina et al., 2006). After reaching a peak in 1995 numbers of incoming migrants from Afghanistan declined for several years but began to rise again from about 2008 onwards. Similar to other European countries (Boland, 2010), Germany has been receiving increasing numbers of unaccompanied Afghan minors throughout the last decade.

In the wake of continuous conflict, persecution and displacement in Afghanistan the vast majority of Afghans came to Germany as asylum seekers. Many who came with an early immigrant cohort were first granted refugee status,

but later on successfully applied for German citizenship. Until very recently Germany did not allow dual citizenship (Die Zeit, 2014) and adopting German nationality meant people had to officially drop their Afghan passport. Others were able to get an indefinite leave to remain but did not proceed to apply for citizenship. Many of those coming to Germany more recently have a refugee or subsidiary humanitarian status.

It is important to note that Afghan refugees came to the FRG but not to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). This is due to several factors, the most important of which is that the GDR effectively closed its borders to immigration from non-socialist countries (Cyrus & Vogel, 2007). The GDR did accept small numbers of asylum seekers, which are by no means comparable to the numbers registered in the FRG. Asylum was primarily granted to people who were persecuted because of their political, academic or cultural activities or their participation in the 'fight for social and national liberation'. This included, for example, Chilean refugees who fled their country after the military coup in 1973 (Bade & Oltmer, 2005). However, there is no evidence that the GDR provided training to students or cadres or offered asylum to political officials or activists from Afghanistan after the end of the communist era in Afghanistan. In the following section I shift my focus to the characteristics of Germany as a receiving context because modes of immigrant incorporation into receiving societies play an important role in the making and un-making of diasporas (Brah, 1996). I mainly concentrate on asylum policies because most persons of Afghan origin enter Germany as asylum seekers.

3.4.2 The context of reception

Since the end of World War II, the German Basic Law *(Grundgesetz)* contained a constitutional provision for people who were politically persecuted[19]. This provision made the FRG unique compared to other countries in Western Europe (Schuster, 2003) and proved beneficial for Afghan refugees entering Germany from the late 1970s onwards. During the first half of the 1990s the FRG received large numbers of migrants who had a right to housing and basic income. At the same time the numbers of asylum seekers multiplied continuously until 1992. During the early 1990s, however, pressures were created by a number of coinciding events, including German reunification, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the escalating war in Yugoslavia. These pressures were reflected in restrictions and public reservations with regard to asylum seekers. In 1993 the constitutional right to asylum was restricted significantly, for example by designating 'safe' third countries (Schuster, 2003). In addition border controls were completely reorganised so that net immigration drastically declined by the end of the 1990s. This was reflected in declining numbers of Afghans seeking asylum in Germany (Figure 3.3 below) and the increase of Afghan asylum applications in other European destinations.

Throughout the 2000s German immigration politics gradually came to a turning point. A gradual departure from the *jus sanguinis* and a greater openness towards the *jus solis* marks an important milestone (Meier-Braun, 2013). With reference to the context of globalisation, immigration was recognised as a fact that requires proper managing. Although the events of 9/11 prompted a setback and a more conservative turn in debates on immigration, questions relating to integration

[19] Articles 1–19 of the post-war Basic Law enshrine rights for German citizens. Article 16(2)2 is the only one that does not apply to German citizens but to aliens or stateless persons.

came to be vividly discussed from the early 2000s on[20] and annual 'integration summits' have been held since 2006. Informants state that they experienced the effects of such developments in their daily lives, where debates about Islam as an emerging part of German society occur frequently.

With the main emphasis of recent German immigration debates being on questions relating to integration, refugee and asylum politics were sidelined for some time. In recent years, however, they resurfaced as the numbers of refugees from conflict-ridden countries who seek asylum in Germany and other EU member states have continuously been increasing. Since 1999 EU member states have been working on a *Common European Asylum System* with the aim to harmonise member states' legal frameworks. In this context the so-called *Dublin Regulation* was adopted in 2003 to ensure that one member state is responsible for the examination of an asylum application and to deter multiple asylum claims (ECRE, 2014). The effects of the Dublin regulation are most palpable for Afghan refugees seeking to reach destinations in northern Europe by travelling over land. Many of them get deported to countries like Greece or Hungary or whichever state was their first point of entry to the EU. Although none of my German informants directly experienced the effects of European immigration regulations, some showed great concern about the destiny of Afghan refugees entering or trying to reach Europe.

The immigration policies and legal frameworks in place impact on people's experiences of arrival and life in Germany. Overall the economic integration of immigrants in Germany is problematic. In early 2000 the unemployment rate

[20] The place of Islam in German society constituted an important focal point in these debates, from which several policy initiatives emerged. In 2005 a new Immigration Act, the *Law for Managing and Containing Immigration and for the Regulation of the Residence and Integration of EU Citizens and Foreigners* was introduced. The 'National Integration Plan' followed the Immigration Act in 2006 and in the same year the *Deutsche Islamkonferenz* (German Islam Conference) was established to initiate a long-term dialogue between state and Muslim representatives and to promote cooperation and social cohesion.

among foreign nationals was 20.1 per cent as opposed to an overall rate of 11.7 per cent. In addition foreign nationals do not possess full civic rights. They are excluded from political decision-making but are entitled to services of a number of legal and social institutions. While the right to assemble in public and establish associations is reserved to German citizens, non-citizens are free to set up an association, launch political activities and establish their own organisations. This, however, is subject to German associational law and restrictions can be made for security reasons or to preserve 'peaceful coexistence' (Cyrus & Vogel, 2007).

With regard to the particular group of Afghan immigrants, more subtle influences are at work too when it comes to integration into German society and the general social climate people confront. These are influenced by the historical relationship between Afghanistan and Germany.

3.4.3 Afghan–German relations

Afghan–German relations have a long history. Official diplomatic ties were first established in 1919 and Germany played a key role as a 'partner' in the modernisation of Afghanistan under the Musahiban dynasty (Möller, 2008). Besides trade relations, more than 200 German experts worked in Afghanistan to support infrastructure development projects including the construction of canals, dams, telegraph lines and road expansion. In 1924 the Nejat (later Amani) High School opened its doors to the sons of Kabul's upper class. For some of its students the school was a springboard to higher education at a German university (Aly, 2002). It is noteworthy that until the Communist coup in 1978 every administration included at least one member who had graduated from the Nejat (Amani) School and/or a German university.

In 1926 Afghanistan and Germany signed an official friendship treaty. Afghanistan was granted voluminous credits to finance the building of factories, which were, however, linked to obligatory supply contracts with German companies, including enterprises like Siemens and IG-Farben (Möller, 2008). Bilateral relations were upheld during the Nazi regime, including the establishment of a direct Lufthansa connection between Berlin and Kabul in 1938. However, the German attempt to involve Pashtun tribes in a rebellion against British India temporarily tainted the benevolent relationship between the two countries. In the aftermath of World War II, Afghanistan again ranked high on the agenda of German foreign policy and development efforts. Under the reigns of Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daud numerous treaties for economic and technical cooperation were signed and various German enterprises undertook private investment. In addition to economic relations several German and Afghan universities engaged in academic cooperation and set up exchange programmes for Afghan students.

The events of 1978, however, brought the flourishing cooperation to an abrupt standstill. By 1984 all German professionals, development consultants and teachers had left Afghanistan. The situation changed again, however, following the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and the international intervention in Afghanistan, Germany hosted the so-called Petersberg or Bonn Conference in November 2001 under the auspices of the UN. German troops have also been an integral part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Since 2003 Germany has concentrated its military and reconstruction efforts on northern Afghanistan. Building on 'old traditions' Germany has been partly in charge of training the Afghan National Police and engages in infrastructural development at a large scale

(Möller, 2008)[21]. Alongside official government-led contributions to the 'reconstruction' of Afghanistan many (Afghan) German civil society organisations are active in the country. Interest in Afghanistan and a certain affection for the 'Afghan people' is relatively widespread among the German middle class, especially among members of the so-called 1968 Generation. Many of those currently engaging in development activities in Afghanistan had travelled along the 'hippie trail' during the 1970s (Caryl, 2013).

3.4.4 The Afghan population in Germany: Further characteristics

Legal status

Most Afghan-born persons in Germany have a temporary permission to stay. Holders of such a status are required to extend their residential permit according to the criteria stated at initial issuance (BMI, 2015). But a significant share of Germany's Afghan population has been granted indefinite leave to remain, including people who came through family reunification or family formation schemes. Asylum seekers hold residence permits for the duration of the individual asylum application procedure. Often people whose asylum application is refused are unable to leave the country. In such cases they are granted a so-called 'toleration' or *Duldung* status, meaning a temporary exemption from deportation. Table 3.1 presents a snapshot of the different legal statuses that Afghan nationals in Germany held in 2014.

[21] At present Germany invests an annual amount of up to 430 million Euro in civilian reconstruction and has committed to continue these payments until 2016 (BMZ, 2014).

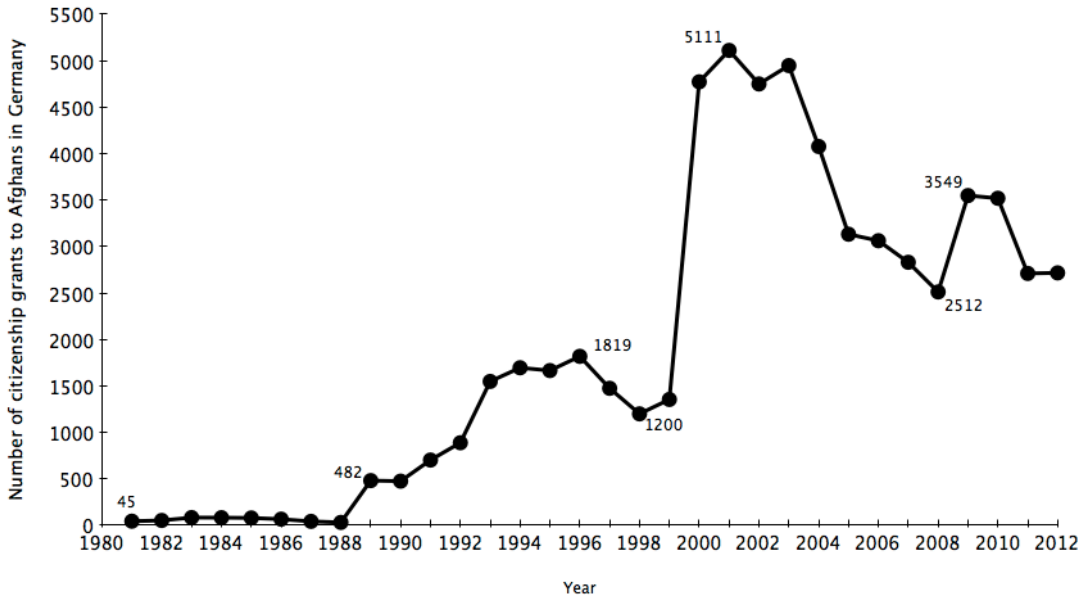
Table 3.1. Overview of legal statuses of Afghan nationals in Germany

Total number of Afghan nationals	Permanent residence permits	Temporary residence permits	Toleration (Duldung)	Temporary leave to remain	No leave to remain or toleration	Other
66 974	14 312	30 050	2 743	14 350	3 330	2 189

Source: Destatis (2014b)

Fairly modest at first, the number of naturalisations increased markedly from the late 1980s, which is likely to be connected to the continuous aggravation of the situation in Afghanistan. Once they obtained German citizenship, persons of Afghan origin disappear from the immigration statistics. To get a clearer idea of the overall population development it is helpful to add naturalisations to the overall numbers of Afghans living in Germany.

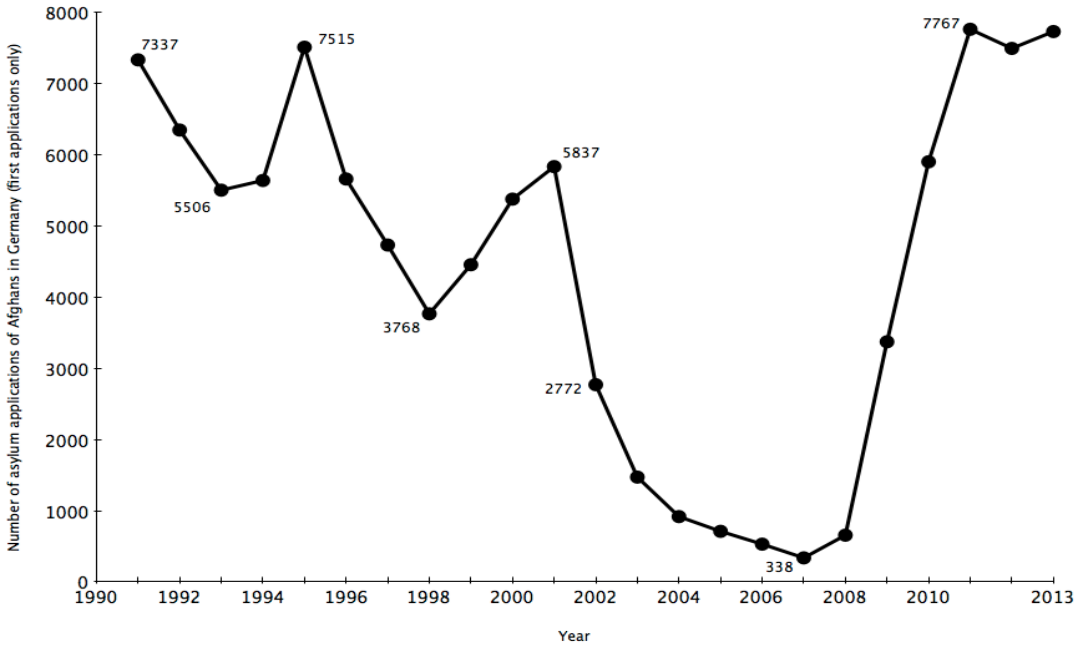
Figure 3.3 Number of citizenship grants to Afghans in Germany



Source: Destatis (2000, 2012b)

The numbers of Afghan immigrants – mainly asylum seekers – who arrived in Germany dropped markedly between 2000 and 2007. In recent years, however, numbers sharply increased, even exceeding the rates registered in the 1990s.

Figure 3.4 Numbers of asylum applications of Afghans in Germany



Source: BAMF (2005, 2006, 2013)

Irregular immigration of persons of Afghan origin is said to have increased throughout the same period. This development is congruent with a trend that can be observed across Europe. Estimating numbers of undocumented Afghan immigrants is difficult. They largely derive from oral accounts and cannot be corroborated by official statistics. Whilst undocumented migrants from Afghanistan form an important group within Afghan populations, they are not the focus of my research. I will further expand on this in Chapter 4 when introducing my research participants.

Age structure, gender distribution and living arrangements

With an average age of 30.4 years Germany's Afghan population is relatively young. Among Afghan residents who do not hold German citizenship there is a gender imbalance with males outweighing females by roughly 10,000 persons (Destatis, 2013a). Most Afghans arrive in Germany with their family but, according

to the oral accounts of my informants, individual immigration of Afghan men has become more common in recent years. The gender distribution is likely to be more balanced among native Afghans who acquired German citizenship, because most of them were part of early immigrant generations who left Afghanistan as a family.

Afghan families tend to be larger than average German families. However, compared to Afghanistan, where the average fertility rate is extremely high at 6.6 children per woman (Mojumdar, 2012), I found Afghan families in Germany and the UK to rarely have more than four children. Intermarriages and mixed partnerships between people of Afghan origin and native Germans are rare but more prevalent among pre-1978 immigrants and the younger generation. The vast majority of married people have an Afghan spouse. I discovered that for those who were unmarried at the time they came to Germany, family contacts with people living in the diaspora or in Afghanistan itself tend to be an important way of finding a partner and arranged marriages are not uncommon (see also Muller, 2010). Whether or not these marriages are perceived as coercive or undesirable strongly depends on the individual assessments and the power relations within a specific family. At the same time, many people of Afghan origin find their partners and future spouses independent of their family. Children of Afghan families often live at home and with their parents until getting married. This implies that young Afghans still live at home while going to university or doing vocational training. Although such living arrangements are widespread, increasing numbers of young Afghans now move away from home once they finish high school and start higher education or vocational training. There is a general tendency for (extended) Afghan families to settle in the same city or geographical area.

Occupational profiles

As far as educational and professional backgrounds of Afghans in Germany are concerned, those who formed part of early immigrant cohorts were highly educated and often occupied high-ranking positions in Afghanistan. A significant number had worked for the government, while others were academics, doctors or teachers (Centlivres, 2010; Hanifi, 2006). Despite being highly educated, professionally trained and experienced, many Afghans who came to Germany as part of an early immigrant cohort were unable to find work in an occupational field that would match their professional qualifications. Many only found work in the low-skilled sector and the image of the former Afghan doctor or government official who has spent decades working as a taxi driver has emerged as a telling metaphor (see also Hanifi, 2006). Although experiences of professional downgrading are widespread there are contrasting examples of Afghans who gradually worked their way up the professional ladder. Some of my informants, for example, set up small or medium-sized enterprises or found higher-level employment after participating in (re-)training programmes. The German employment system is highly restrictive when it comes to accommodating 'foreign' professional qualifications. In addition, a lack of German language skills proved to be an obstacle for Afghans trying to find a job that would match their qualifications.

The situation is quite different for Afghans who came to Germany during the 1960s and 1970s for higher education purposes. The majority of persons within this group had no intention of staying in Germany after completing their university degree but aimed at returning to Afghanistan as trained professionals. The outbreak of war, however, made return impossible for many and staying in Germany was the most logical option for them to choose. Many applied for German citizenship and

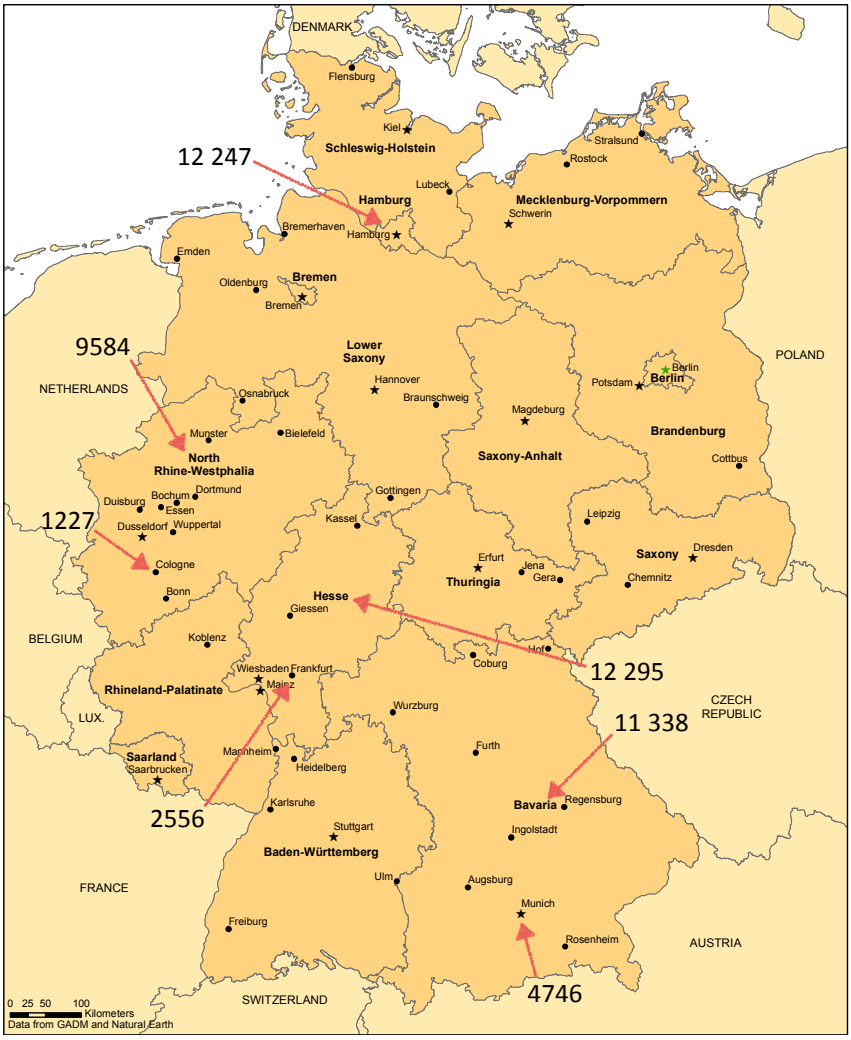
successfully started a professional career. Employment in academia, engineering or medicine are particularly widespread among this group.

Over time, levels of education and professional backgrounds of Afghans arriving to Germany became more diverse. On average, however, Afghans in Germany constitute a relatively well-educated immigrant population. This also applies to the younger generation, who came as (small) children and subsequently received their primary, secondary and higher education in Germany. The numbers of young Afghans who completed secondary school and went on to pursue higher education are disproportionately high. To some extent this reflects the aspirational attitudes of Afghan parents who are eager for their children to experience the professional fulfilment which they were denied after leaving Afghanistan. This information largely derives from oral accounts of my informants and I have not been able to find official data to corroborate such observed trends.

Regions and cities of residence

There are several areas of condensed Afghan settlement across Germany. At a municipal level the city of Hamburg hosts by far the largest number of persons of Afghan origin, followed by Munich, the Greater Frankfurt area and the Cologne-Bonn area. At the federal level the state of Hesse registers the highest number of Afghan residents as Figure 3.5 shows:

Figure 3.5 Regions of condensed settlement of Afghans in Germany



Source: Destatis (2013b)

Both Frankfurt and Hamburg are international cities and have a reputation of being more welcoming to people from different national and cultural backgrounds than other areas of Germany, which may make it easier for migrants to establish themselves socially and professionally. Many Afghans living in the Cologne-Bonn area came to Germany soon after the Soviet invasion and the outbreak of war in Afghanistan. At that time Bonn was the capital of the FRG and, beside consulates and embassies, many important political and media outlets were located in the city. It seems that such aspects made the Cologne-Bonn area an attractive destination for migrants who used to represent Afghanistan's political elite. While these urban areas

and their surroundings continue to feature the largest Afghan population in Germany, the geography of Afghan settlement became increasingly scattered over time. This also reflects the politics of dispersal of asylum seekers (Schuster, 2003). In general there seems to be a tendency for Afghan migrants to settle in parts of Germany that feature higher concentrations of people with migrant backgrounds.

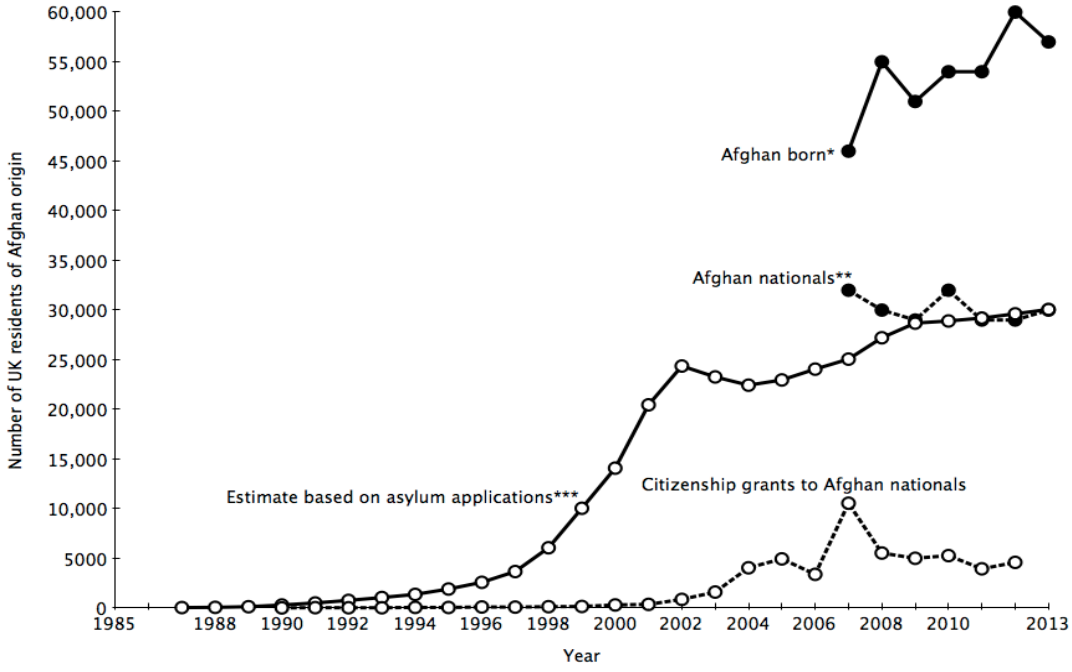
3.5 The Afghan immigrant population in Britain

3.5.1 The history of Afghan immigration to Britain

Britain's Afghan population has been developing over the last 30 years (BBC, 2014). Prior to the 1978 war only small numbers of Afghans lived Britain. Most of them were business or tradespeople alongside Afghan state representatives, who settled in London. Since the onset of war, conflict and insecurity, however, the number of Afghans in the UK immigrant population gradually began to increase. Sajjad (83) was my oldest informant. He has been living in Britain since 1978 and thus followed the history of Afghan immigration to the country from close proximity. He told me that after the Soviet takeover in Afghanistan many political activists came to the UK and joined a small number of Afghan businesspeople who were already in the country. It was not until the late 1990s that Afghans came to Britain in greater numbers. The 2001 census identified 14,890 Afghan-born people in Britain (BBC, 2005). Numbers rose to roughly 65,300 residents from Afghanistan by 2011, when the most recent census was conducted (ONS, 2011b). The most significant increase in numbers took place in one year: there were fewer than 17,000 Afghan residents in 2006 but 46,000 were recorded in 2007 (Jones, 2010). At the time of writing it is estimated that around 57,000 persons of Afghan origin live in

Britain (ONS, 2014). This number includes Afghan-born persons only. Most of my UK informants assume that the actual size of Britain's Afghan population exceeds official estimates by far. Some mentioned numbers as high as 90,000 but it is difficult to reliably corroborate such estimates. Prior to 2001 Afghans almost exclusively came to the UK as asylum seekers. Afghanistan has been among the ten main states of origin of asylum applicants in the UK since 1998 and remains so today. Large numbers – perhaps the majority of Afghan immigrants in the UK – did not come directly from Afghanistan but had spent some time living in Pakistan. They moved on as it became obvious that an improvement of the political and security situation in Afghanistan was not in sight and as living conditions in the near diaspora grew increasingly restrictive.

Figure 3.6 Numbers of Afghan nationals in the UK



Sources: ONS (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2012, 2013); Home Office (2013a)

*, ** ONS collects data on country of birth and nationality from the Annual Population Survey (APS) which covers residents of the UK. The ONS does not hold any data prior to 2000. For the period 2000 until 2006, Afghanistan was included within a specific country grouping and not listed individually.

*** Graph based on own calculations derived from aggregate numbers of asylum applications, excluding refusals.

Most Afghans continue to enter the UK as asylum seekers. More recently, as of the mid-2000s, Britain has become one of the main destinations for unaccompanied Afghan minors. Although only a small percentage of Afghan youths making their way to Europe actually arrive in the UK, their numbers have been increasing over the years (Gladwell & Elwyn, 2012; Boland, 2010). Over the last decade there has also been a trickling influx of Afghan students who come to the UK to obtain a degree in higher education. This constitutes a reverse trend compared to Germany where students formed the first cohort of Afghan immigrants. Most of the students in the UK hold a scholarship and come directly from Afghanistan. Although expected to leave the UK upon completion of their degree, some of them manage to obtain a residence status allowing them stay on. But what kind of receiving context in terms of structures and regulations did people confront upon arrival to the UK? In search for an answer to this question the following section focuses on characteristics of the UK as a receiving context. As in section 3.4.2 I largely restrict my analysis to asylum policies.

3.5.2 The context of reception

In Britain immigration controls have been accompanied by the Race Relations Act, which first came into force in the mid-1960s to mitigate discrimination and set out a vision for British society as not only integrated and multiracial but also a realm of equal opportunities. While the Race Relations Act was designed to create an integrative, non-discriminatory environment for immigrants and their descendants (at least on paper), British immigration control became increasingly restrictive over time (Bloch, 2002).

The fact that during the 1980s asylum seekers became the single largest category of people coming to Britain reflects the growing curtailment of other 'voluntary' migrant groups. Consequently asylum seekers became the focus of immigration legislation and rules (Bloch, 2002). Until the late 1990s regulations for asylum seekers were rather generous in the sense that people were entitled to work, claim state benefits and freely choose where to live. In fact, before 1993 Britain had no primary legislation dealing with asylum but ad hoc responses were given to the situation of particular refugee groups. Numbers of asylum applications increased sharply in the late 1980s and early 1990s and Britain, alongside other European states, sought to reduce the volumes of applications.

The 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act and the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act were designed to restrict the incentives for people to call on Britain in search for asylum (Schuster, 2003). As part of a refined Immigration and Asylum Act a policy of compulsory dispersal was introduced alongside a 'one-step appeal' process and a separate welfare system for asylum seekers, the National Asylum Seeker Support System (NASS), which regulates (collective) accommodation and minimum provisions. Asylum applications increased until the early 2000s but their role in overall immigration began to decline from 2004. Overall, asylum claims in the UK are below the European average. In 2011 the UK received 0.41 asylum applications per 1000 inhabitants, compared to 0.65 across Europe (Binder, 2013).

Acquisition of UK citizenship is contingent on a minimum legal stay of five years and the applicant must have been holding an indefinite leave to remain for at least one year. A new set of naturalisation requirements was introduced in the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act. During the 1980s and 1990s efforts were made to enhance immigrant rights and participation and counteract exclusion,

discrimination and racism. In general the UK does not pose any legal restrictions to the civic participation of foreigners, immigrants or refugees. Major political parties and unions actively encourage the participation of ethnic minorities. However, political activity can be restricted on anti-terrorism, -crime and security grounds. Voting rights are based on nationality and residence (Düvell, 2007).

More recently, in the wake of the economic crisis hitting Britain in 2008, public discontent about immigration has increased significantly and claims for more immigration restrictions are widespread. The coalition government, which has been in power since 2010, conducted a spending review and introduced drastic cuts to Britain's social and welfare budget. According to oral accounts of my informants this has gravely affected the work of both immigrants and immigrant support organisations. In addition a series of policy changes stepped up entry and welfare restrictions for immigrants themselves. The coalition agreement foresees an annual limit to the number of non-EU economic migrants, which was followed by a series of welfare restrictions for migrants from European countries over the last couple of years (Migration Advisory Committee, 2012). To complement this overview of the UK as a destination country for Afghan migrants and refugees the next section briefly reviews the history of British–Afghan relations.

3.5.3 Afghan–British relations

British–Afghan relations have an even longer history than the relations between Afghanistan and Germany. However, Anglo–Afghan relations have been far less amicable, with controversies being rooted in the 'Great Game' of the 19th century. In a nutshell, Great Britain was driven by the fear that another European power would claim supremacy over Islamic Asia. In particular the British worried

about the southward march of the Russian Empire. Consequently the Great Game unfolded out of a complex of disagreements between Britain and Russia (Fromkin, 1980). The struggle over hegemony in Central Asia led to the gradual formation of the state of Afghanistan[22].

Throughout the Great Game, Britain attempted to install a ruler in Kabul who would be sympathetic towards the British Empire and support its interests. Yet political miscalculations and communication problems between the British and Afghan *emirs* (monarch) led the Empire to face the limits of its colonial policies at the Hindu Kush. The first Anglo–Afghan war (1838–1842) resulted in a complete defeat of the British Army. Another devastating defeat in the second Anglo–Afghan war (1878–1880) forced Britain to acknowledge that the potential economic and geopolitical gains it could get from controlling Afghanistan were disproportionate to the military efforts and sacrifices (Schetter, 2013). BBC journalist Leithead describes Anglo–Afghan relations as always having been 'on a knife-edge' (Leithead, 2008). He suggests that explanations for the persistent discontent can be found in history.

> The British have a long and bloody history in Afghanistan – both of killing and of being killed. And it's not only the Taleban who invoke memories of the great British defeats of the 19th Century as propaganda. Afghans know the stories of subterfuge and betrayal that accompanied this 'Great Game' as British and Russian empires fought for influence in Afghanistan. And the mistrust of the past is not lost on the present. This is a place where rumour, conspiracy theory and paranoia make a heady cocktail. Some mothers still tell their children 'be good or the British will get you' in the same way the 'bogey man' might, and Pashtuns often use the same word for 'Satan' as they do for 'Briton'. Then there's a mistrust about Britain's dealings with Pakistan.
>
> (Leithead, 2008)

[22] In 1747 Ahmad Shah Durrani founded Afghanistan by unifying Pashtun and non-Pashtun tribes populating the territorial unit of today's nation state (BBC, 2014).

Current discussions of British–Afghan relations, however, primarily focus on the post-2001 period and the efforts of the UK as part of the international military campaign. Besides being part of ISAF, Britain also joined the US-led 'Operation Enduring Freedom', which launched its first military strikes against Afghanistan under the Taliban rule in October 2001. British troops have mainly been operating in the south of Afghanistan. Since 2006 military efforts on the ground concentrated on Helmand province, which has the reputation of being a heartland of Taliban insurgency and Afghanistan's most violent province.

The reopening of the British embassy in Kabul in November 2001 ended a 20-year period during which official diplomatic ties were on hold due to the wars in Afghanistan (Embassy of Afghanistan, 2014). From 2001 British service people were deployed to help develop the Afghan National Security Forces and cooperated with Afghan authorities to help strengthening institutions for governance. Alongside military activities Britain has been supporting a wide range of projects to improve education, health care, economic growth and local governance in Afghanistan, whereby the UK has been cooperating with the European Union, the World Bank and UNDP. Following a complete withdrawal of its military forces by the end of 2014, the British government is committed to continue supporting Afghan reconstruction and development until 2017 (gov.uk, 2014).

At a civil society level there is no equivalent interest in and commitment to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan that can be found among certain parts of society in Germany[23]. However, more recently awareness of the situation of

[23] Since 1987 the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), an interagency network of around 30 humanitarian, development and human rights organisations, has been operating from London. While not being a representative platform of Afghan diaspora organisations or the Afghan diaspora in a wider sense, BAAG is unique in the sense that it constitutes an umbrella organisation for a range of international actors that aim to encourage good practice and policy in development and humanitarian work in Afghanistan.

unaccompanied minors of Afghan origin has been increasing across the UK and British non-state agents working in the field of refugee support have stepped up their efforts to address the needs of this group. Most of the work carried out in this area aims to directly support young unaccompanied immigrants by means of counselling, education and mentoring initiatives. In addition there have been efforts to increase the public awareness of the destinies and experiences of this particular immigrant group[24] (RSN, 2014).

3.5.4 The Afghan population in Britain: Further characteristics

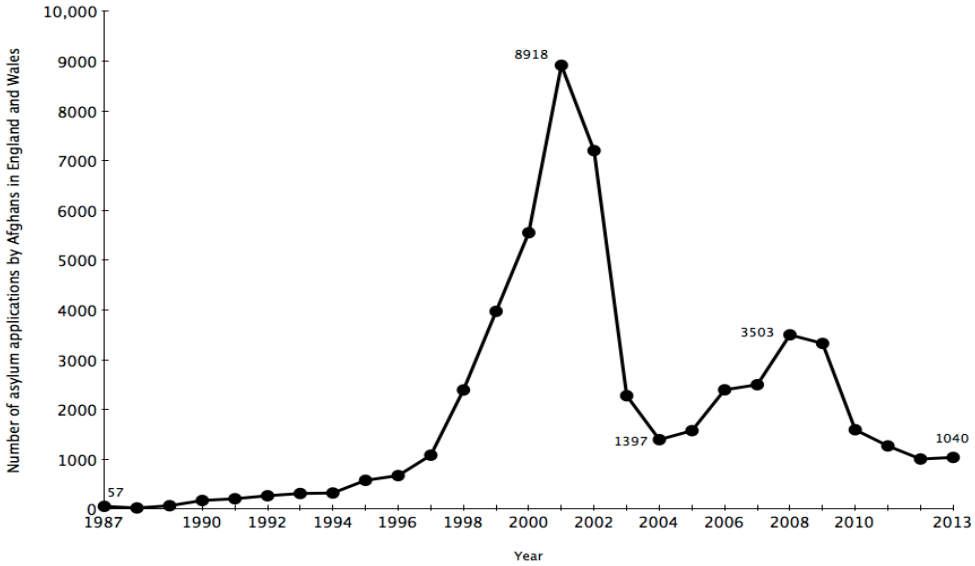
Legal status

British statistical offices do not provide an overview of any immigrant population as far as their legal status is concerned. It is therefore not possible to provide an overview of the distribution of legal statuses among the UK's Afghan immigrant population. Most Afghans enter the country as asylum seekers. Between 1987 and 2013 a total number of 53,736 applications were recorded (Home Office, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2013a). The majority of asylum seekers are granted discretionary leave to remain, which allows for periods from six months up to three years of confirmed residence. Re-applications are necessary once the period has expired. These procedures allow for transient periods of residence to be created (Binder, 2013), which depend on assessments of the conditions in Afghanistan. Since 2000 Afghanistan was among the top nationalities in asylum requests in the UK.

[24] In her documentary *Hamedullah: the Road Home*, the British film maker Sue Clayton tells the story of Hamedullah Hassany, a young teen who fled from Afghanistan to the UK. For several years he lived and attended school in Canterbury. Once he turned 18, however, Hamedullah was arrested by the Home Office. He spent several months in detention before eventually being flown back to Afghanistan. Although Clayton's documentary conveys her version of one particular story it gives insights into the experiences and prospects of young undocumented Afghans in the UK and beyond.

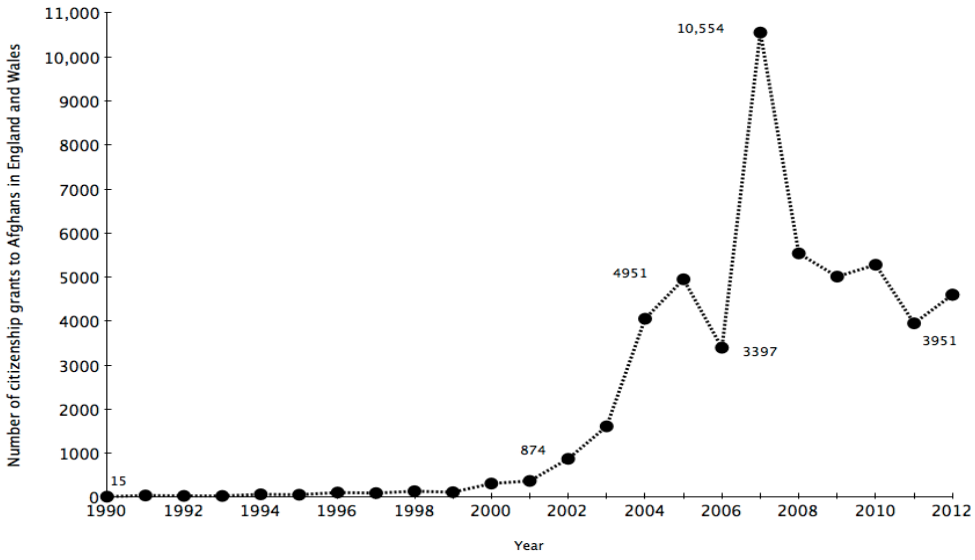
However, after reaching a peak of nearly 9000 applications in 2001, numbers have been declining consistently (Home Office 1995, 1996, 2000, 2013).

Figure 3.7 Number of asylum applications of Afghans in England and Wales



Source: Home Office (1995, 1996, 2000, 2013)

Figure 3.8 Number of citizenship grants to Afghans in England and Wales



Source: Home Office (2013b)

Citizenship grants to people of Afghan origin have increased markedly since the early 2000s. Figure 3.8 illustrates this trend. Since 1990 a total of 55,818 persons

of Afghan origin were naturalised. This number is likely to include many persons who came to the UK through family reunification.

Age structure, gender distribution and living arrangements

The largest group of Afghan-born residents in Britain are between 30 and 34 years of age. Most children of Afghan descent who are born in the UK are primary school age or younger. The proportion of male persons of Afghan origins significantly outweighs that of females (ONS, 2011b). This reflects the migration pattern that has been most common for Afghans coming to the UK from the late 1990s onwards. According to oral information obtained from my informants, large numbers of Afghan immigrants came to Britain on their own, although many of them are married with their wife and children living in Afghanistan, Iran or Pakistan. Once the pioneering person has settled in the UK, usually after being granted indefinite leave to remain, spouses are brought to Britain through family reunification schemes. A significant number of those who were unmarried upon arrival and obtained indefinite leave to remain in Britain went back to Afghanistan or one of the neighbouring countries to get married. In many cases they married a woman their family selected. Through family formation schemes, couples that marry abroad are able to return or move to the UK together.

Occupational profiles

The average level of education and professional qualification among Afghans in Britain is relatively low (Khan, 2013). Though this may be a dominant characteristic of the population it is by far not all encompassing. It is possible to

roughly distinguish between three groups: i) highly qualified professionals, many of whom came to Britain before the onset of mass migration, ii) persons who had received primary, secondary and sometimes even higher education in Afghanistan or one of the adjacent countries, and iii) persons who received elementary education or less in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Oral accounts of my informants suggest that the latter group constitutes a majority among the Afghan population in the UK.

Most Afghans in the UK work in the medium- and low-skilled sectors. This is regardless of their educational background, which might formally qualify many of them for employment in an advanced sector. Within the low-skilled sector, many Afghans have found work in fast food shops or as taxi or minicab drivers. Difficulties in finding employment in a field suited to educational qualifications and previous professional experiences are often amplified by language deficiencies. Many Afghans who came to the UK as adults have poor English language skills, which puts an additional hurdle between them and the types of employment they might aspire to (Khan, 2013). Nevertheless informants, especially those with a high level of education, describe professional opportunities in the UK as more easily accessible than they are for their counterparts in Germany. In addition, compared to Germany, the UK's economic environment features a lower degree of regulation (Düvell, 2007). Low taxes and more entrepreneurial freedom make it easier for people to set up their own businesses.

Educational and professional qualifications tend to be completely different among Afghans who came to the UK at a young age and completed all or most of their education within the UK system. They not only tend to speak English as their second (if not first) native language but also have easier access to professional employment matching their educational qualifications. In addition, high educational

and professional aspirations are widespread among young persons of Afghan origin. Similar to the situation in Germany, parental attitudes and ambitions often amplify the educational and professional performance of their children. Modes of Afghan family life in the UK reveal more parallels with the German context. Intermarriages between Afghans and persons of British or other national backgrounds are rare. The second generation, which has spent most or all of their lives in the UK, is still very young and it is difficult to say to what extent they will be perpetuating this trend. With few exceptions children live with their families until they get married, although the number of Afghans moving away from home once they finish high school and enrol for a university degree increases constantly.

Regions and cities of residence

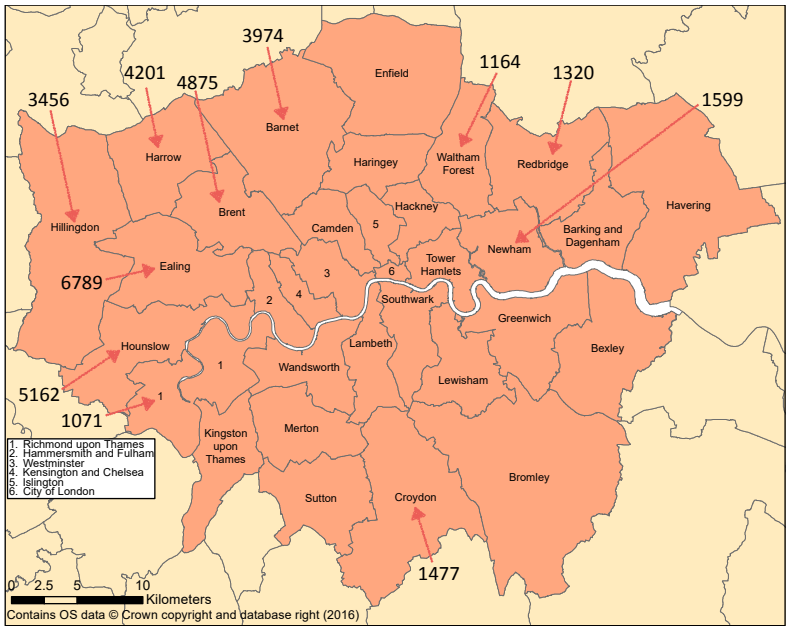
Britain's Afghan community is predominantly based in and around London. The 2001 census found that 70 per cent of Afghans are residents of this area, with the primary agglomeration areas being Southall, Greenford, Heston and Isleworth (Kyambi, 2005). Further areas of aggregate residence include Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds and Liverpool. In 2001, however, none of these cities hosted significantly more than around 100 Afghan immigrants (BBC, 2014).

Figure 3.9 Areas of condensed Afghan settlement in the UK



Source: (ONS, 2011b)

Figure 3.10 London boroughs with Afghan population over 1000



Source: (ONS, 2011b)

Summary

My aim in this chapter was to show how certain historical periods, cohorts of Afghan migrants and movements to specific destination countries are intertwined. Overall Afghan populations in Germany and the UK represent two facets of the Afghan diaspora, which reflect distinct moments in Afghanistan's recent history as well as the socio-economic and political stratification of Afghan society.

Seen from a demographic perspective, there are a number of differences between the Afghan communities in Britain and Germany that affect the processes of diaspora formation. Besides the difference in population size, Afghans in Germany are dispersed across the country while in Britain they are mainly concentrated in and around London. In the UK reinforced immigration of Afghan nationals is a relatively recent phenomenon and many of my informants consider themselves as 'new arrivals'. Germany has received many representatives of Afghanistan's former elite who were compelled to leave the country after the Soviet invasion. Conversely, most Afghans in the UK left their country during the civil war and many spent extended periods in Pakistan or Iran. Such life and migration trajectories are also reflected in people's material resources and social networks. As a general tendency, however, Afghans in Germany and the UK alike are more advanced in terms of their educational biographies and materially better off compared to co-nationals living in Pakistan or Iran.

With regard to Germany and the UK as immigration countries we can observe both differences and similarities. For a long time UK immigration policies were marked by a strong emphasis against discrimination. Conversely in Germany 'integration' has been the main impetus in recent years. In reality, however, immigration policies in both countries have become increasingly restrictive. With

regard to applications for and grants of British or German citizenship we can observe similar trends in both countries. These indicate that large numbers of Afghans come to Western Europe with the intention to settle.

It is helpful to be aware of the different historical entanglements between Afghanistan and Germany and Britain respectively. As I will show in Chapters 7 and 8, these historical relations bear some important implications for the set-up and the activities of Afghan organisations. Afghan–German relations and formerly generous asylum legislation are likely to be a main reason why early refugee cohorts mainly came to Germany. The elitist background of early Afghan refugees further adds to the explanation of Germany's welcoming attitude. More recent cohorts of migrants and refugees from Afghanistan consider the UK a more attractive destination. Compared to Germany, the UK labour market is more easily accessible for foreign-born persons and so are other institutions such as political parties.

The trajectories of Afghan migration and settlement constitute an important backdrop to the questions of diaspora formation, Afghan diasporic identities and forms of engagement, which I discuss in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Throughout the next chapters I will focus on people's narratives of attachment and engagement, which emerge in these two settings and reveal insights to the relational nature of Afghan diasporic identities and engagements. Before moving on to the presentation and discussion of my empirical findings I will outline the research methodology I have employed to tackle the underlying puzzles of this work.

CHAPTER 4

Research strategy, case study approach, data sources and field sites

Introduction

Having introduced the general puzzle of my research and its empirical, theoretical and historical context, I am now outlining my empirical approach. My aim in this study is to specify how people's social embeddedness and complex diasporic identities shape the internal structure of Afghan populations, which in turn affects forms and areas of transnational engagement. Although I focus on the perspectives, experiences, motives and evaluations of individual persons, I am concerned with the ways social ties and transactions are reflected in their narratives and meaning making. This requires me to adopt an intensive approach to my empirical research.

Sayer (1992) distinguishes between *extensive* and *intensive* research design. While extensive research tends to apply a broader focus and aims to establish regularities and general patterns across a population as a whole, the rationale behind intensive research is to learn from informants what the significance of their circumstances is for them. This information is then used to build upon knowledge gained through a study of the literature (see Chapters 2 and 3). An intensive approach necessarily relies on qualitative methods.

In chapter I will first elaborate on my research strategy and the adopted case study approach. I then outline the scope of this study and discuss the sampling strategy I pursued. Subsequently I turn to semi-structured interviews and participant

observation as actual methods of data collection. I then elaborate on my approaches to accessing the field and gaining informants' confidence and trust. Here I also discuss some of the challenges I encountered during fieldwork. A brief section on applied methods of data analysis is followed by a reflection on research ethics relevant to this study.

4.1 Retroduction

There are many ways to approach research questions. Logics of inquiry differ according to their underlying ontological assumptions, which determine the starting point and general logic of social research as well as the use of concepts and theory (Blaikie, 2010). In terms of an ontological perspective this work builds on the assumption that social reality is formed by social relations (Mason, 2002). Epistemologically these are expressed through narratives, identities and practices.

How an empirical inquiry is integrated with existing bodies of theory is a question of research design and research strategy. There are different ways in which theory can be brought into play. My study, for example, does not put theory first in the sense of testing it on or measuring it against my empirical findings (Mason, 2002, p. 180). I can therefore discard a deductive research strategy, which essentially sets out to test theoretical propositions or hypotheses through empirical falsification (Blaikie, 2010). Likewise I do not inductively move from the particular to the general by deriving explanation and theory directly from the analysis of empirical data, a process usually associated with 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Instead my inquiry proceeds in an oscillating movement, bouncing back and forth between broader substantive concepts (diaspora) and higher-level concepts (relationality,

structure, agency) and the experiences and meanings captured by means of empirical research. To facilitate this continuous iteration and integrate empirical data with higher-level theory, I adopted a retroductive research strategy (Iosifides, 2011; Blaikie, 2010; Sayer, 1992). Retroduction is involved when approaching empirical cases in the light of conceptual propositions. Instead of serving as explanatory blueprints, such propositions are held loosely and can be amended or abandoned as a result of interactions with the field. Scholars such as Blaikie (2010) and Iosifides (2011) thus argue that a retroductive research strategy facilitates theoretically grounded in-depth understanding of empirical phenomena[25].

Retroduction is particularly useful for revisiting concepts of diasporas as social forms and diasporas as social actors which emerge within specific relational settings. The research strategy allows for continuous iteration between such theoretical conceptualisations and empirical data. Throughout the processes one single theory or hypothesis is not forced upon data, but several are tried out, which are subsequently either refined or discarded (Easton, 2010).

My substantive point of departure is the ideal-typical diaspora, which I seek to unpack in order to identify the types of ties and relationships leading people to conceive of themselves as part of a wider social group. Following the logic of retroduction I engaged in continuous iteration between the study of existing

[25] The lines between my retroductive approach and other research strategies may be blurred at times throughout the research process. Overlaps with abduction are especially likely. As part of abductive research strategies the researcher takes on a learning role and seeks for education through the people studied. Lay accounts of the social world are subsequently re-described in scientific terms. The essential objective of this approach is to describe and understand the phenomenon under observation (Blaikie, 2000, p. 77). Overlaps may also occur with inductive procedures which aim to derive empirical generalisations from particular observation and ultimately move on to theory building (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). If at all, induction will become relevant towards the end of my research and draw on the data collected rather than informing my first encounters with the field. Deduction as another widely applied research strategy is largely irrelevant for my project. It emphasises hypotheses, prediction and testing (Blaikie, 2000, p. 76) which does not match the more explorative setup of my study.

accounts on diaspora formation and diaspora engagement, the historical specificities of the Afghan case, the content of the data I collected and concepts of relational sociology. This procedure proved very helpful to uncover the key principles around which people of Afghan origin coalesce at the two sites under study (Chapter 5), establish and maintain relationships to their country of origin (Chapter 6) and engage in transnational practices aimed at contributing to change and development in Afghanistan (Chapters 7 and 8). This process of inference was not straightforward but involved some backtracking as preliminary findings led me to reconsider initial conceptual assumptions.

Initially – in an attempt to frame diaspora-home country relations as a question of causal mechanisms – I drew on contributions from critical realism (Elder-Vass, 2010; Bunge, 1997, 2004; Sawyer, 2004). While conducting fieldwork and during subsequent data analysis I discovered that relational aspects dominated over mechanistic explanations and I began to revise my explanatory framework accordingly.

An additional challenge lies in defining the conditions for closure in retroduction. Blaikie (2010) holds that the most pragmatic way of handling this challenge is to close when there is no plausible alternative for the time being. While this may be logical reasoning, the challenge of establishing the 'right moment' for bringing empirical analysis and theoretical substantiation to a close prevails. Hence the retroductive process which this study set into motion may extend well beyond this thesis as the refinement of theoretical arguments which are informed by 'real life research' (Robson, 2002) is an ongoing endeavour.

4.2 Case study approach

A case study approach corresponds well to the logic of a retroductive research design because it facilitates the interaction between theoretically shaped perspectives and empirical material as they unfold in practice. Ragin and Becker (1992) assert that theoretical ideas help in structuring descriptions of the selected aspect of the social world. At the same time Ragin (1992) highlights the prominent role empirical cases play in this context.

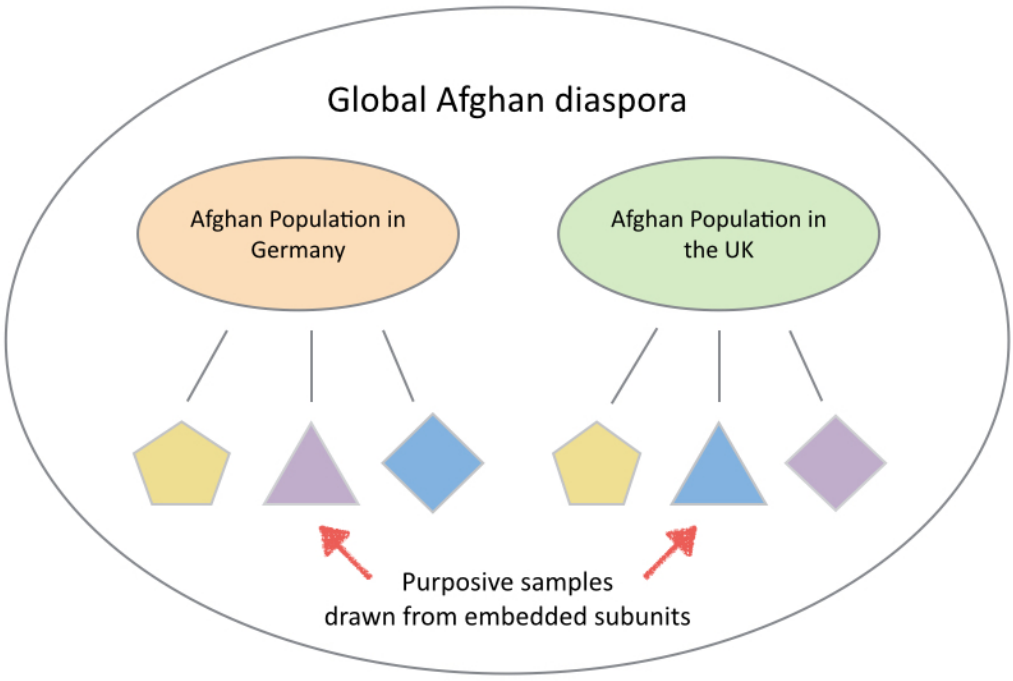
> In short, ideas and evidence are mutually dependent; we transform evidence into results with the aid of ideas, and we make sense of theoretical ideas and elaborate them by linking them to empirical evidence. Cases figure prominently in both of these relationships.
>
> (Ragin, 1992, p. 218)

A case study enables us to examine contextualised units of analysis. Cases thus generate concrete and practical context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Depth is achieved through exploring the particular project from multiple perspectives using various data sources and data generation methods (Thomas, 2011; Simons, 2009). Flyvbjerg (2001) adds that case studies usually entail a substantial element of narrative, which unveils complexities and contradictions of real life and thus serves as a corrective or specification of ideal-typical conceptions of social phenomena. 'Diaspora' is the ideal-typical concept which is central to this research. More specifically the case of this thesis is the relation of diaspora formation and diaspora engagement among Afghans in Britain and Germany and not the Afghan diaspora as such.

My research engages with two distinct sites, which is why I followed the logic of an embedded case study design (Yin, 2009). Afghan populations in Britain and Germany feature different demographic characteristics in terms of overall numbers,

migration and immigration history, ethnic and socio-economic composition, as Figure 4.1 illustrates. They are distinct subsets of a wider Afghan diaspora, which account for its overall complexity. The two countries are among the most important European destinations for Afghan emigrants. But – as we saw in the previous chapter – they have distinct structural environments and different immigration regimes (Wihtol de Wenden, 2004; Castles & Miller, 2003). Equally relevant are the sets of historical, political and economic structures that connect Britain and Germany as areas of inward migration and Afghanistan as a country of outward migration. All these elements constitute important embedded subunits of the overall case (Yin, 2009). This, according to Thomas (2011, p. 152), confronts us with the puzzle of how subunits connect with other subunits and the whole.

Figure 4.1 Setup of embedded case study



By focusing on two distinct research sites I expected to gain insights into the extent that people frame their past and present differently in specific receiving contexts and how different contexts resonate with transnational engagements. My

embedded case study gains its explanatory value from illuminating and contrasting the units as part of the wider case. The accounts of individual informants are integral and at the same time constitutive elements of an Afghan diaspora in a wider sense.

4.3 Data sources

In her reflections on case studies, Mason (2002) distinguishes between the case of interest, concrete data sources and methods for generating data from those sources. Based on my research questions, I identified four types of complementary data sources: people, settings and environments, events and texts. Each of these data sources captures a distinct facet of the structures and dynamics of Afghan diaspora populations, individual diasporic identities and people's relationships and engagements with their origin country. Table 4.1 further specifies the information I obtained from the various data sources considered.

Scholars such as Stake (2008) and Yin (2009) argue for triangulating multiple data sources to reduce the risk of imposing theoretically plausible, but empirically wrong, propositions on the object studied and maintaining a bias towards verification. However, data sources need to be complementary and integrated in the eventual explanation of the problem studied. The data sources specified above allowed me to access individual life stories, experiences and objectives. They also offered insights into the way people present themselves in public and interact with each other at occasions dedicated to Afghanistan and Afghan culture.

Table 4.1 Data sources of the case study

Data source	Specification	Information obtained from the source
People	Persons of Afghan origin who reside in Britain or Germany	Experience of life 'in the diaspora' Emergence of Afghan community in receiving country Change of Afghan community over time Relationship between Afghan diaspora and change in Afghanistan Factors influencing relationship between Afghan diaspora and change in Afghanistan Individual relation to Afghanistan Visions of/aspirations for change in Afghanistan Motivation to engage in activities Links to/perception of Afghans in the near and wider diaspora Action, behaviour Perceived opportunities and restrictions relating to action
Settings and environments	Afghan institutions and community organisations in Britain and Germany	Way of representing Afghans abroad/the 'Afghan diaspora'; extent of community cohesion Representation of Afghanistan and relationships between Afghanistan and its diaspora Motivation for (Afghanistan-oriented) collective action Assessment of and response to 'the needs' of Afghans in Britain and Germany Interface between immigrant community and the receiving society
Events	Organised by Afghan institutions and community organisations in Britain and Germany	Representation of the Afghan community to the receiving society Expressing collective relationship to Afghanistan Ways of fostering (selective) community bonds and links with external actors
Texts	Official statistics and other archival data	Overview of the history and structure of Afghan diaspora groups in both countries, including their respective legal and living conditions; clarify the ontological status of my case study

4.4 Scope and sampling

My research questions and the analytical framework introduced in Chapter 2 define what I am empirically looking for and thus give an indication of the categories guiding my sampling strategy. When selecting informants I largely followed the logic of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012; Mason, 2002). My approach to sampling was based on two overarching categories: sampling of *contexts* and sampling of *participants*. Sampling of context means that I included various cities because I expected dynamics of interaction and group formation processes among people of Afghan origin to vary at different places of residence. Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 79) refers to such approaches as 'information-oriented' as the selection of cases is based on their expected information content.

The sampling of participants was guided by two main criteria, which are implicated in my research questions. One is involvement in local or transnational activities and the other is diversity of backgrounds. I was eager to make sure that informants represent different waves of emigration from Afghanistan, different ethnic backgrounds, different gender and age groups (including second-generation immigrants), and different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Given the suggested heterogeneity of Afghan emigrants (Schetter, 2005) I expected informants from different backgrounds to reflect a variety of perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) as far as mutual perceptions and relationships with Afghanistan are concerned.

The crux with purposive samples, however, lies with the need to exhaustively define the criteria of selecting research participants (Bryman, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2001). The set of criteria to be covered by my sample outlined above was based on my review of the literature on Afghan migration and data obtained from statistical

offices in Germany and the UK. Further criteria emerged during fieldwork and I amended my sampling principles accordingly. For example, I tried to include representatives from a growing variety of Afghan organisations as I gained a more comprehensive overview of the landscape of actors. At a more advanced stage of my fieldwork I began to focus more on the narratives of young informants. Based on earlier interviews, they emerged as an important facet of my overall case. Specifying key characteristics of informants and the Afghan populations in a wider sense thus turned out to be an integral part of my fieldwork.

In addition to purposive sampling I drew on snowball sampling methods, designed to facilitate access to research participants I initially expected to be hard to study (Adler & Adler, 2001; Lee, 1993). I was prepared to encounter significant reservations of prospective informants when interacting with me as a researcher who approaches them with an interest in their lives and attitudes. Once in the field, however, I encountered much greater openness towards participating in my research than initially anticipated. Nevertheless it often proved helpful if informants referred or introduced me to further potential interviewees.

Another rationale behind snowball sampling was that it allowed me to reach out to groups of participants who share similar experiences in terms of fleeing Afghanistan and arriving and settling in Germany or Britain. The technique was also useful to recruit informants who share other relevant characteristics such as gender, age, involvement in certain forms of activities or representing specific political views. Snowballing became a central component of the sampling framework I purposively designed and continuously refined. To ensure that my research participants would not only represent one particular facet of the Afghan community, in both countries I restricted the number of referrals per informant.

One of the major challenges I faced was to establish the exact number of people to be interviewed. During the initial phases of fieldwork the number of informant characteristics that my sample needed to cover increased rapidly. As I progressed with my data collection, narratives on the issues addressed in the interviews became increasingly redundant. Through initial coding I was able to establish recurrent themes addressing key issues of my research and identify information gaps, which I tried to fill with a series of targeted follow-up interviews.

4.5 Field sites

My selection of field sites, as stated in the previous section, was essentially informed by my sampling framework. Information obtained from statistical offices, own research and referrals of informants helped to further refine my sampling criteria and pick the areas around which I concentrated my fieldwork. Reaching different field sites turned out to be more convenient in the UK than in Germany. Most of my UK informants live in Greater London, so that I could undertake day trips from Oxford. Some informants lived further afield, but it was still possible to travel to their place and back on the same day. The train journeys back to Oxford allowed me to think through the respective encounter and interview, write a memo or even begin transcribing the recorded conversation. Figure 4.2 provides an overview of my UK field sites and Figure 4.3 contains the same information for Germany.

Figure 4.2 Overview of field sites in the UK



Logistics in Germany were more challenging. I planned my trips according to regions of condensed settlements of informants I had previously identified. Most of these regions have relatively large Afghan populations, so that I counted on conducting more interviews than the ones scheduled in advance. I allocated 1–2 weeks for my stay in each region, during which I stayed either with friends or in youth hostels in a central location from where it was easy to reach more remote places of residence. To Hamburg and Munich I went only once, while undertaking several visits to the Cologne-Bonn area as well as the Greater Frankfurt area.

Figure 4.3 Overview of field sites in Germany

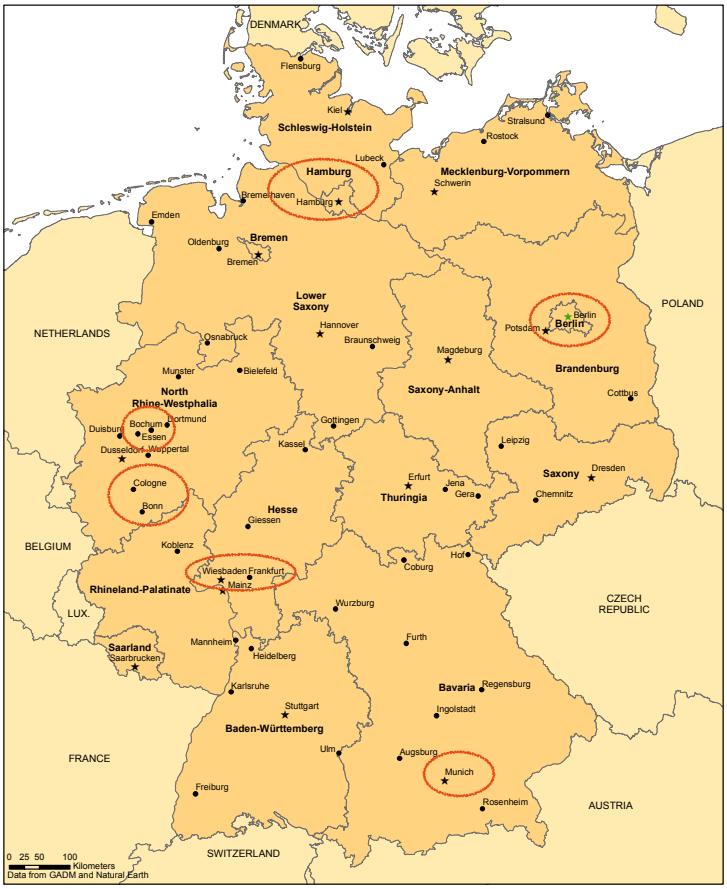


Table 4.2 specifies the number of interviews I conducted in different regions of the two countries.

Table 4.2 Number of interviews conducted at different localities

GERMANY

Berlin	6
Cologne-Bonn Area	6
Hamburg	11
Frankfurt am Main	4
Munich	1
Rhineland-Palatinate	2
Ruhr Area	2

UNITED KINGDOM

Cambridge	1
Greater Birmingham	1
Greater London	14
Leicester	1
Liverpool	1
Manchester	1
Nottingham	1
Oxford	3

4.6 Methods

4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews as core data generation method

As argued above, intensive research is commonly based on qualitative methods that allow for structural and causal analysis, focusing on individual members of groups who relate to each other and/or the phenomenon of interest (Sayer, 1992).

I did not seek for total immersion into the social settings I studied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) but adopted an interpretivist approach based on interview methods that aim to capture people's individual and collective understandings as well as reasoning (Blaikie, 2010; Mason, 2002). Consequently a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012) with people of Afghan origin was at the core of my empirical research. In line with Rubin & Rubin (2005) I considered in-depth interviews as best suited to capture actors' understanding of reality. Through the interviews I was able to engage the narratives of Afghans in Britain and Germany and capture their way of framing the dynamic relationship between life in the diaspora and social change in Afghanistan (Lawson, 2000). The way informants framed their stories gave me insights into their self-reflexivity and ways to understand and theorise about their social world (Miller & Glassner, 2011).

In total I conducted 55 in-depth interviews, 32 in Germany and 23 in the UK. Most of these interviews were one-to-one encounters with the respective informant. At some occasions I interviewed a small group of two or three informants (which explains the deviating numbers featured in Table 4.3. These were either fellow activists who represented the same organisation or additional family members. Some older informants asked to have one of their (adult) children join the interview

as a translator, because the respective informant anticipated problems answering complex question in English or German. In any of these situations I was grateful for the additional young informant to go beyond their role as a translator and add their perspective to the parent's response to my question.

To address my research questions the interviews had to yield insights into my informants' life stories, particularly their memories of life in Afghanistan, their experiences of conflict and displacement, and their arrival and settlement at their destinations. Biographical accounts were complemented by some more focused questions addressing respondents' interactions with Afghans in Britain, Germany and other destination countries in the near and/or wider diaspora. Further questions focused on informants' relationships with Afghanistan, especially the way they perceive Afghanistan's current developmental and political conditions as well as potentially desired processes of change. My interviews also entailed questions pertaining to informants' aspirations to actively engage with Afghanistan. Whenever they were involved in ongoing activities I asked for more detailed information on the aim and scope of these activities as well as the opportunities and constraints people encountered.

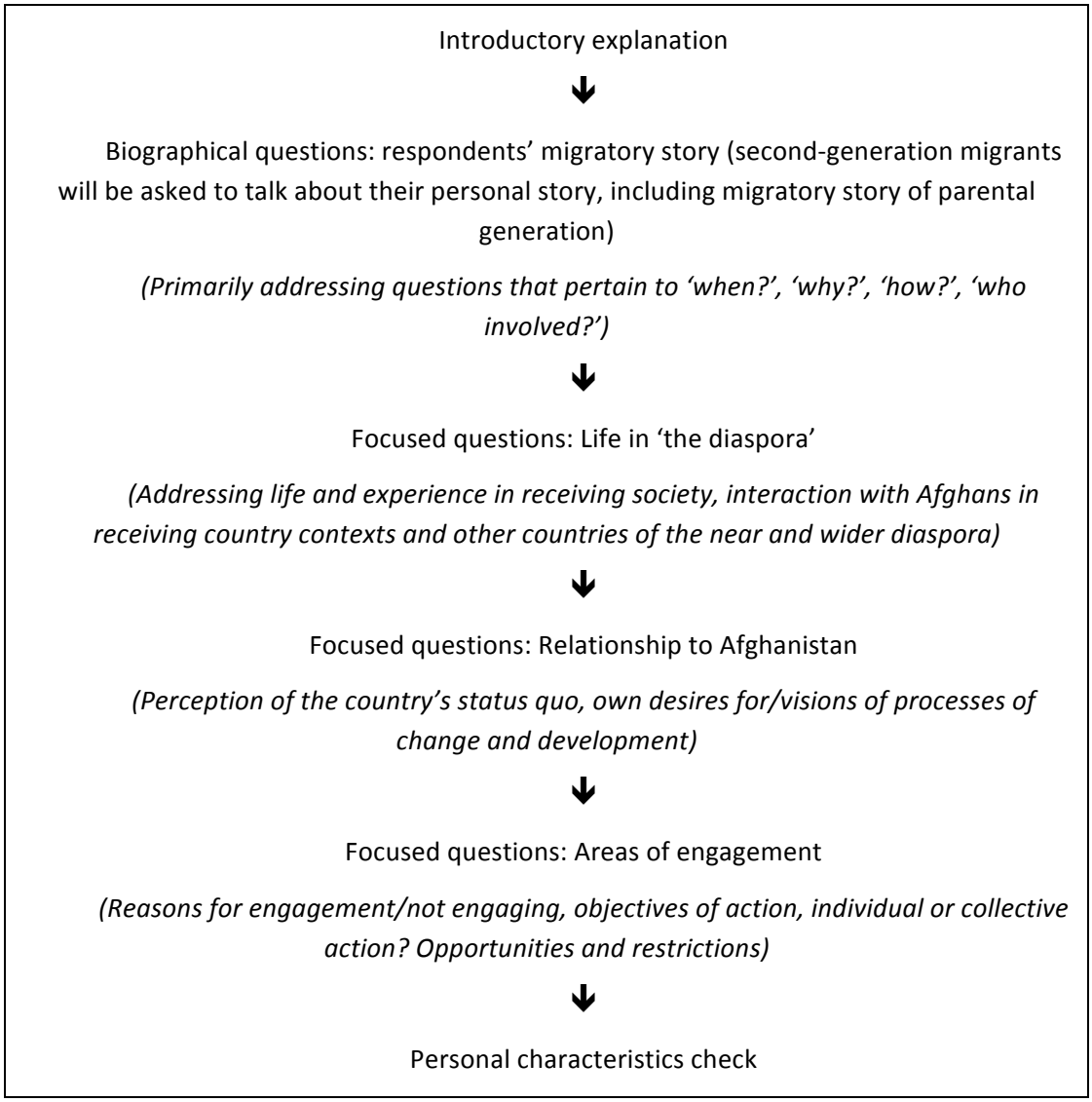
Table 4.3 Overview of informants

Personal information	Male	39
	Female	20
	Age 0-30	15
	Age 30-60	32
	Age 60 and above	12
	Religion: Muslim	54
	Religion: Other	2
	Ethnic group: Hazara	8
	Ethnic group: Pashtun	28
	Ethnic group: Tajik	10
	Ethnic group: Other	13
Migration Information	Time of emigration before 1979	10
	Time of emigration between 1979 and 1989	11
	Time of emigration between 1989 and 2001	25
	Time of emigration after 2001	13
	Country of settlement: Germany	34
	Country of settlement: UK	25
	Citizenship: Afghan	53
Migration Trajectory	Reason for Migration: Refugee	40
	Reason for Migration: Other	21
	Direct migration	31
	Migration via Iran	5
	Migration via Pakistan	12
	Migration via other country	9
	Migration alone	23
	Migration with family	36
Legal & Occupational Status	Citizenship: British	17
	Citizenship: German	31
	Occupation: Student	13
	Occupation: High-skilled	26
	Unemployed	4
	Occupation: Other	11
	Retired	5
Marital Status	Marital status: Married	34
	Marital status: Single	13
	Marital status: In relationship	5
	Marital status: Divorced	3
	Marital status: Widowed	1
	Marital status: Unknown	3
Civic Engagement	Actively involved in Afghan organisation	38
	Not actively involved in Afghan organisation	21
	Actively engaged in Afghanistan-oriented action	26
	Actively engaged in action oriented towards Afghan community in GER/UK	30

The scope of my interviews was rather broad and informants were required to switch between different levels of privacy in their responses. Such variations in the depth of information had to be reflected in the sequence of my questions (Mason, 2002). To allow for swift transitions from one theme to another and to facilitate a gradual build-up of trust and confidence on the part of my interviewees, I began

each interview with a set of biographical and life course questions. Subsequently I moved on to more specific questions addressing informants' contacts with Afghan co-nationals in the diaspora, as well as their relationships and engagements with the country of origin. I kept a loosely structured interview guide to ensure that a certain range of questions was covered in each interview (Bernard, 2002). Core aspects of inquiry are featured in the following overview of my interview structure (Figure 4.4) and Appendix A contains an example of my full interview guide.

Figure 4.4 Overview of rough interview structure. Adapted from Mason (2002)



Kvale and Brinkman (2009) emphasise that there are no unequivocal criteria for assessing the quality of approaches to and conduct of research interviews. Still there are a number of aspects which I considered to enhance the fit between my research objectives and the data generated through interviews. My interview questions are designed to address different levels of empirical analysis which my research questions require me to cover. I am concerned with people as social actors, and narratives of lives yielded accounts of individual trajectories, experiences and the relationships unfolding between people and specific contexts of social and economic organisation over time (Mason, 2002). Places, such as sending and receiving countries, form part of this context. Likewise the extent to which the data collected bear theoretical and analytical potential depends strongly on the issues touched upon in the interviews and the way I actually addressed them (Iosifides, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The emergence of diasporas as social entities and their properties such as agency cannot be directly addressed in an interview, but such processes can be reconstructed with the help of generated data. Such processes unfold over time, which is why my interviews entailed an explicit biographical focus.

In addition to semi-structured in-depth interviews I conducted complementary short and informal interviews throughout the entire duration of my fieldwork. This practice corresponds well to a retroductive research strategy as it not only refined my understanding but also broadened my account of Afghan communities in Britain and Germany.

Most of my interviews were one-off encounters with informants, although I had met many of them beforehand, for example during events I attended or for an informal chat. About half of the interviews took place at people's homes. This always happened upon the initiative of my informants, who invited me to come and

see them. Nearly all invitations to people's homes followed the same trajectory. My informant (and other family members) welcomed me. We then sat down over green tea, often accompanied by dried fruit and nuts, a typical snack in Afghanistan. On numerous occasions the interview would be followed or preceded by a meal, usually consisting of various Afghan dishes. I embraced such invitations. Besides being a welcoming and generous gesture on the part of my informants, meals often brought together the entire family which I found very enjoyable. Such occasions also allowed me fragmented insights into Afghan family life in both Britain and Germany. Besides informants' homes, other frequent places for interviews were cafés, restaurants or informants' workplaces. I always asked informants to suggest a place of their choice to prevent them from potentially inconvenient travelling.

Usually conversations with informants would start casually, which helped to mutually develop a sense of the respective counterpart. Sometimes, however, informants instantly dived into what they perceived to be the central issues of my research and our interview. Instead of cutting them off I gently tried to shift the focus back to some general information, because I was reluctant to start an interview without explaining my research and issues relating to confidentiality and informed consent. In most cases I started the interview by introducing myself, my research topic and the empirical procedure. I then explained my ways to ensure confidentiality and informed consent. In my perception this was a tricky moment, because what had begun as a warm and personal encounter should not be overshadowed by the formality of administrative requirements. I also explained that the interview would be fully recorded unless my interviewee expressed discomfort about this. Subsequently we would start the interview according to the loose structure outlined above.

4.6.2 Complementary participant observation

In addition to the interviews as a core method of data generation I engaged in participant observation at occasions that allowed me to capture additional facets of my informants' social environment (Charmaz, 2006).

Participant observation crucially contributed to my understanding of the (local) communal contexts, their constitutive structures and power relations. More specifically participant observation was useful in three ways: First, it helped me to develop a better idea of 'who is around' and how people of Afghan origin publicly address issues of concern. Second, I gained insights into how 'Afghan culture' is enacted in people's socialising. Third, participant observation supported my efforts to identify informants for in-depth interviews and served as a useful tool to generate trust prior to more emotionally involved in-depth interviews. Contexts of participant observation included a range of different settings. My choice of setting and my perception of people in this setting thus shaped what I was able to see (Mason, 2002).

Thematic events

Most thematic events I attended were organised by Afghan organisations and focused on the situation in Afghanistan. Some events concentrated on current political conditions and potential future developments while others addressed more general issues such as the situation of women or human rights in Afghanistan. Most participants at such events were well educated and articulated a pronounced interest in political affairs. The format of thematic events usually consisted of presentations given by distinguished persons or a panel of speakers. As a participant observer I

found the discussions following the presentations particularly insightful. Depending on the topic, discussions could be quite controversial and thus unveiled a range of political viewpoints and arguments. For me this was useful insofar as I developed a better grasp of different 'political camps' within the wider Afghan population and could approach potential informants more strategically for subsequent interviews.

In the UK I attended numerous one-off thematic events, which lasted no longer than a day. In Germany, however, I joined two seminars that were part of a regular series. One was the *Hamburger Afghanistan Woche* (Hamburg Afghanistan Week) a five-day seminar, which is held at a small recreational centre outside Hamburg. Broadly speaking the seminar focuses on 'Afghanistan and Afghans in Germany' and is open for thematic contributions ranging from the involvement of German troops in Afghanistan to the recognition of professional qualifications of Afghans in Germany. The seminar brought together a group of about 30 people of Afghan origin but also attracted a few native Germans. Most Afghan participants were ethnic Pashtuns, who joined the event as entire families.

The other seminar I attended is known as the *Villigster Afghanistan Tagung* (Villigst Afghanistan Conference), which is organised and sponsored by the Protestant Church in cooperation with the Federal Agency for Political Education. This three-day event predominantly focuses on political events and developments in Afghanistan. It is based on the contributions of experts from academia, policy-making and (development) practice. While most speakers are native Germans, the majority of participants are of Afghan origin. Again, most participants are from the older, well-educated generation, but members of the younger generation are present as well. From a researcher's perspective this event was particularly revealing with regard to participants' assessments of the current situation in Afghanistan as well as

their visions for and concerns regarding the country's future development. Both occasions allowed me to engage with the participants over an extended period of time and have a wealth of informal encounters beyond the official seminar setting.

Cultural events

The cultural events I attended were organised by Afghan organisations. Some only lasted for an afternoon or evening while others took up a whole day. A few of the events I attended were dedicated to the celebration of religious holidays, such as Eid al Fitr. They would be held at public function halls or outdoors on sports fields and involve food, music, dance and sometimes traditional kite-flying for children. In addition I joined events that were organised in honour of Afghan poets or writers. Compared to the previous category, these were more formal and attracted an older audience. On one occasion I attended an Afghan version of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, which was performed in Dari by a theatre group from Kabul. Each of these events gave me insights into dimensions of Afghan culture that were not politically charged and brought together a large and diverse group of people.

Thematic events often incorporated cultural elements, too. Seminars or conferences, for example, would finish with a live music performance, over which participants engaged in more informal conversations and interaction. Often Afghan food would be served after events or during breaks. Such complementary elements of the respective programme showed more joyful sides of togetherness and interaction and conveyed a sense of the elements of Afghan culture, which people in the diaspora value highly.

Private family settings

Conducting participant observation in private settings such as family homes was not something I intentionally planned to engage in. But whenever I was invited to an informant's private home I observed interactions between family members and explored how people arranged and decorated their private spaces. Most family homes I visited featured memorabilia from Afghanistan, like rugs, murals of Afghan social scenes and landscapes, photographs, pieces of pottery and often also a portrait of cherished historical figures or contemporary political leaders. Many houses also had a traditional sitting area with rugs spread out on the floor and embroidered seat cushions arranged in a circle or square. Sometimes the television was on when I arrived, featuring Bollywood scenes or an episode of *Afghan Star*[26]. Visits to informants' homes allowed snapshot-like insights into the organisation of family life. They also showed me how people integrate elements of Afghan culture in terms of artefacts, images and furniture into their otherwise Western-style homes. This indicates that the country of origin can be present in various shapes and forms.

Day-to-day settings

Day-to-day settings include Afghan shops and restaurants in different cities, where I engaged in casual conversations with the people running the place. In such situations I usually asked questions about the business, like how long it had been operating. Departing from such triggers, owners would often continue telling me how long they had been living in Britain or Germany, whether they had left

[26] Afghan Star is a popular reality television show which searches for the most talented singers across Afghanistan. The programme is broadcast on the Tolo TV channel.

Afghanistan with their entire family and how they came to establish themselves in this particular city.

Although the number of occasions I joined as an observer was limited, they still yielded information on situations, interactions and styles of behaviour I could hardly capture by other means than active observance (Gobo, 2006). To avoid conducting random observations I systematically reflected on what a specific setting represents and what information I gained from it. For this purpose I kept a systematic record of the settings which I attended as a participant observer (Emerson, 2011).

4.7 Field access, trust and credibility

The overall period I spent in the field can be divided into three phases, during each of which I conducted interviews in Britain and Germany. During the first, exploratory phase of fieldwork I mainly made contact with Afghan organisations that are 'visibly' dedicated to Afghanistan and often engage in action of various forms. I met and interviewed representatives of these organisations, assuming that their accounts would help to get a better idea of the 'organised' dimension of the Afghan diaspora in both countries. Most of the organisations I identified through web-based research and personal referrals.

The initial interviews I conducted not only helped to establish whom to interview properly. They were also important for asserting my identity as a researcher. Through early encounters with different people I was able to work out how to present myself in different situations and how to articulate what I do and why certain persons are of interest to me (see Feldman et al., 2003). The exploratory

phase also entailed the identification and triangulation of gatekeepers. By interviewing representatives of Afghan organisations I gained information about potentially interesting community events, other organisations and groups of actors, as well as contacts to further interviewees.

To avoid getting 'passed around' in my gatekeepers' close network and adopt a gatekeeper-determined bias, I identified additional ways of accessing the field. I made contact with several organisations at the same time and met further contact persons by attending events, which were either run by Afghan organisations or dedicated to Afghanistan-related themes. In addition I gathered information about local communities and potential respondents through exchanges with scholars, members of refugee support organisations and the Afghan embassies in Britain and Germany. A more random way to establish contacts to people of Afghan origin consisted of spending time in areas of relatively dense Afghan settlement, where I had opportunities to talk to people in Afghan-run shops or restaurants (see also Muller, 2010).

During the second and more systematic data collection phase I conducted in-depth interviews (Mason, 2002) with the informants I had previously identified. After completing a total of 30 interviews I deliberately paused my data collection in order to start a first round of data analysis. Based on a thorough review of my transcripts and an initial round of coding, I identified some areas that needed further scrutiny, including gender, inter-generational relations and patterns of social organisation around ethnicity. With a clearer idea about the scope and depth of my data I entered a third phase of fieldwork, during which I restricted my focus to carefully selected informants, who could specifically address the above-mentioned issue areas.

Like most communicative interactions, the course of an interview is strongly determined by interpersonal dynamics. To some extent interviews are an intrusion into respondents' lives (Maxwell, 2005). Anticipating the 'rules' and 'codes' that provide the most adequate basis for interacting with specific participants is difficult. In her work on the Afghan community in London, Schlenkhoff (2010) emphasises the difficulties of establishing contacts with people who are not only scattered across the city but also suspicious of attention. Schlenkhoff argues that media coverage in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 had a strong impact on the reservations many Afghans articulate when it comes to interviews (see also Omidian, 1996). Despite its heterogeneity, the Afghan diaspora can largely be seen as a refugee population. Individuals are likely to have experienced conflict, escape and often violence (Muller, 2010). Interviews may stir up memories and touch upon aspects that people struggle to cope with and decline to share with a stranger.

To my surprise, however, many informants expressed a vivid interest in the topic of my research, saying that they consider the wider diaspora a neglected facet of contemporary Afghanistan. Most people I approached expressed their appreciation – sometimes even gratitude – with regard to my research interests and were happy to participate. Part of my credibility as a researcher thus came from my research topic and the way I introduced it and myself to my informants. Notwithstanding such articulations of openness, the way I opened my interviews and articulated my interest was a crucial moment in establishing a relationship with my informants. To a large extent the accounts of my interviewees were shaped by their perception of who I am. Social categories of belonging such as age, gender, race and socio-economic background inform such perceptions. Initially I had feared that my lack of membership in the primary group of my informants would be a major

impediment in the field. From the beginning of my fieldwork, however, I found that the opposite was true. Many informants expressed their appreciation of my 'neutral' background, saying that conducting such research would be harder if I was of Afghan origin myself. This, they added, is due to notorious mistrust among Afghans, a subject to which I will return in Chapter 5.

One of the first questions almost all of my informants asked me was how I had come to study the Afghan diaspora. While I found it relatively easy to give a satisfactory answer to this question it was much trickier to respond to inquiries as to whether I had visited Afghanistan. Informants asked this question almost unanimously and my reply that I had not visited the country was greeted with mixed reactions. I did not vigorously defend my lack of first-hand experience of Afghanistan. However, I explained that my research focus is the diaspora and the lives of Afghans in British and German society. To some informants this seemed satisfactory, though many informants emphasised that I would greatly benefit from visiting the country. There were a number of occasions on which I felt that first-hand experience of Afghanistan would have enhanced my credibility. Mostly this was the case when I encountered older first generation immigrants. Younger informants attached less importance to first-hand knowledge of Afghanistan, perhaps because they themselves had lived outside the country for most of their lives.

Research found the heterogeneity and segregation of the Afghan society to be perpetuated in the diaspora. People's affiliations and perceptions of belonging often remain disputed and fuzzy (Naby, 2005). For this reason I was cautious not to straightforwardly address people with reference to assumed backgrounds and senses of belonging. However, often informants deliberately alluded to their ethnic

backgrounds or political views during our interview. In other cases it was possible to read between the lines and draw inferences from comments and statements on certain issues. How informants locate themselves in terms of identity and belonging also influences the way they answer the questions raised during the interviews and needs to be considered when subsequently working with the collected data. Gaining informants' trust before and during the interviews was thus pivotal.

Young informants were often a bit hesitant when I first met them. But after having received more information and informally chatted with me for a while, informants opened up and were happy to answer my questions and have me record our conversation. Besides being transparent about my research interests and objectives, I was very explicit about the way I guaranteed confidentiality to my informants. Knowing how their – often very personal – stories would be dealt with and integrated in my work helped informants to decide how to approach my questions and pitch their answers. In many cases informants straightforwardly pointed out that they had 'nothing to hide' and that they were happy to support my research, which they believe would give a voice to 'Afghanistan' and Afghans worldwide.

4.8 Data analysis

The analysis of my empirical material was an ongoing and iterative process as far as my search for constitutive elements of meaning is concerned. Whenever possible I began to process my data in the immediate aftermath of the interview. First I prepared a postscript (Emerson et al., 1995) in which I captured my reflections on the interview. Here I particularly focused on the dynamics of

interaction and communication between my informant and me, my interviewee's self-presentation and in what manner issues were taken up. I also noted why I chose to ask or not to ask certain questions and reflected on the interview setting and how it might have affected our conversation. Preparing postscripts in this sense marks an intermediary stage between data collection and the analysis of the material generated. As far as time permitted I also began to transcribe the interview promptly. While transcribing I kept memos in which I jotted reflections on core aspects that were brought up in the interview. This was also helpful for refining my interview technique and for continuing a focused search for further informants. I began to develop a preliminary index listing key themes and categories while transcribing. Initially this was a simple Excel file listing a wide range of categories, which were consistent with the various lines of inquiry suggested by my research questions.

Once I had completed and transcribed most interviews I began to substantiate the index of categories by specifying how they would help me interpret and theorise in relation to my data. For this purpose I also considered more general theoretical ideas, which are reflected in a number of coding categories (Bryman, 2012). Ontologically it was important to be clear about the kind of phenomenon that each category represents. Epistemologically I needed to specify how the indexing categories represent instances of these ontological phenomena (Mason, 2002). What kind of evidence do they constitute? Are they literal, interpretive or reflexive readings? Some of my coding categories were theoretically informed and others emerged while reading and re-reading my transcripts. Initial categories were refined, merged or discarded throughout. Once I had finalised a first tentative coding scheme I transferred my categories into NVivo 10 and uploaded my

interview transcripts and other written records (such as memos or reports of participant observation) as sources (Charmaz, 2006).

I coded my material according to a mix of coding principles, which Saldaña (2009) refers to as structural coding and elaborative coding. While structural coding consists of identifying large segments of text on broad topics, elaborative coding stands for the analysis of textual data with the aim of developing theory further. Using different coding principles is part of a retroductive research strategy. While coding the interview transcripts I could bring together theoretically informed interpretations of my material with newly emerging findings. Some of these findings did not fit with the scope of my analytical framework and required me to search for more appropriate explanatory approaches. I conducted a few trial runs, after which I further refined my coding scheme. However, I kept slightly modifying it throughout the process of data analysis, mainly by adding new and merging existing categories. Various cycles of coding allowed me to filter, highlight and focus the salient features of my data and identify patterns. These patterns inform an emerging story, which I present in the following chapters through theoretical interpretation. The information I chose to present appeared repeatedly in multiple sources. There are exceptions, which I clearly introduce as such to illustrate contrasting viewpoints. I selected the material so that I could address the underlying puzzle of my research to the best of my abilities. However, I had to be selective and there remains a wealth of material that I could not include but decided to save for future outputs.

4.9 Ethical reflections

Various ethical issues had to be considered during fieldwork, data analysis, subsequent write-up and in the representation of the research as a whole. Ethical issues apply in particular to the areas of informed consent and disclosure of sensitive information, especially when delving into personal and emotionally charged information. Further ethical considerations pertain to confidentiality and anonymity and, lastly, 'giving back'.

The principle of informed consent (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) is one of my primary ethical guidelines. Informants were required to explicitly agree to being interviewed and researched. But I had to make sure that their decision whether or not to participate was based on comprehensive and accurate information about my research, its objectives and the ways I will use the data obtained from interviews. Each informant participated voluntarily after having been comprehensively informed about my research and the purpose and use of the interviews. I made explicit to everyone that at any time they were free to withdraw, ask for the interview to end or for the information not to be used. I described to my informants how parts of our interview were potentially going to feature in my thesis and how I would make sure that their identity remains protected by using pseudonyms. I also offered to send my informants a copy of the interview transcript for approval. Only a small number of informants were actually interested in reviewing the interview transcript. All these aspects are vital to ensuring informed consent.

Seeking informed consent in situations of participant observation was more difficult. I took most observations at events that were – at least in principle – open to the wider public. Also, as a result of my appearance as a white and fair-haired woman, my presence at events was always obvious because the vast majority of

participants were of Afghan origin. Often people would approach me and ask what brought 'a stranger' to attend the occasion. At most events I was able to introduce myself to the majority of participants at least, so that they were familiar with my background and the reasons behind my attendance. I do not see an ethical dilemma in including information that was obtained from such events and other occasions at which participants said things under the assumption that unfamiliar others were listening. None of the information I gathered at such occasions can be harmful to the persons involved in any way. Aspects relating to informed consent also need to be considered during the phase of data analysis and interpretation. This phase lies beyond my informants' influence, which I kept in mind while interpreting the accounts collected (Miller & Bell, 2002) and in my attempts to find adequate wording for the presentation of my findings.

Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were given to all research participants. However it is necessary to draw a clear distinction between the two. Confidentiality relates to the handling of data, which contain information about the identity of my informants, while anonymity is about not unveiling their identity when presenting my research findings. I have been careful to keep the identity of my informants safe at all times (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Informants were reassured that I would handle information confidentially and not make it accessible to any third person. Whilst keeping a list of personal data and contact information for myself, I assigned encrypted codes to each informant, recording and interview transcript respectively. Prior to each interview I reassured participants that my work would not enable the reader to infer any personal identities from it.

To the majority of my informants, participating in academic research was a novel experience and they showed appreciation for such questions to be considered.

Yet a small number of informants, most of whom were involved in political activities, explicitly asked me not to identify them as participants in my research. I only identify the names of organisations or community initiatives where informants gave me explicit permission to do so. Likewise, for selected organisations to be featured in various case studies (Chapter 7), I sought the authorisation of my informants and asked them to proofread the respective case study before including it in my chapter. Anonymity also includes not revealing informants' exact place of origin and residence. Here, however, I distinguish between places of different size. While not mentioning the names of smaller towns or villages, I do mention if informants originate from Kabul and if they live in large cities such as Hamburg or London. Such places are home to large numbers of Afghans, which makes it impossible to infer to someone's concrete identity. But I am cautious not to mention places of residence in conjunction with detailed descriptions of personal backgrounds or fields of engagement.

Disclosure of sensitive information was an issue in the sense that some of my questions touched upon areas that were highly emotionally charged for my informants. The majority of persons who inform my research come from a country that has a long history of violence and conflict. Having left Afghanistan as refugees, many of them experienced hardship that is painful to share. This includes traumatic experiences of war, displacement and the sometimes perilous journey that people undertook to reach Europe. Many informants had also lost family members to the wars and violence in Afghanistan. Likewise experiences of alienation and sometimes discrimination in Germany or the UK were sensitive topics. To avoid causing unnecessary distress to people living in insecure and unstable conditions, I restricted my group of informants to Afghans who have a residence permit or British or

German citizenship (see also Muller, 2010). Still numerous informants spent extended periods living in limbo while their legal status was unresolved and/or they awaited the outcome of their asylum procedure. This was often exacerbated by the physical separation from loved ones who had remained in Afghanistan or been dispersed to other countries.

Similarly some informants gave highly emotional accounts on their return to a destroyed Afghanistan, which often reinforced a sense of homelessness and loss. A few informants cried during the interview. In such situations I paused the conversation to allow them to recollect themselves. However, I deliberately decided not to turn off the voice recorder – unless they asked me to – because I did not want them to feel that emotional reactions were undesired and disturbing. It should be noted that the experience of sharing emotionally charged information was not necessarily negative. In fact many informants expressed their gratitude for me listening to their story and said that they see my research as a contribution to Afghanistan and the Afghan communities abroad. Some also pointed out that our interview had led them to reflect aspects in a novel light. At several occasions informants contacted me after the interview either to reiterate their gratitude and interest in the progress of my research or to add further pieces of information to the account provided.

Another issue which I identify as essential to research ethics is the need to give something of benefit to my informants in return for their willingness to spend time and share their stories with me. The main element of beneficence I have at hand is the focus of my research as such. With my thesis I give voice to people many of whom remained unheard so far, particularly in the light of the negative attention that has been paid to Afghanistan throughout the last 13 years. Informants almost

unanimously expressed a vivid interest in my research and asked if copies of my thesis would be made available to them. Therefore I will provide electronic copies of the final thesis to all informants. In addition I will compile a summary of my work in English and German. This is to spare informants from too much theoretical and methodological detail and to address the requirements of those who are not comfortable reading complex texts in English.

Ethical considerations are not restricted to the period of data collection. There are numerous ethical issues that need to be considered during the write-up stage, particularly when it comes to representing my informants. Research ethics thus are a continuous process. Finally, to ensure that my research complies with the university's policy concerning the ethical review of research projects involving human participants I completed the required ethical approval process set out by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). As for the relationships with and responsibilities towards my respondents, I draw on the principles of the Statement of Ethical Practice of the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002).

Summary

The nature of the puzzle driving this research required me to find a way of integrating the narratives emerging from my empirical material under consideration with the theoretically guided framework for analysis. To meet this challenge I adopted a retroductive research strategy as part of which I conducted an embedded case study. This combined approach allows me to retrieve the meaning from my informants' accounts in the light of the specific relational settings to which each individual belongs.

Throughout this chapter I provided a detailed account of my approach to doing empirical research. I also presented how the chosen methods of data collection were implemented and how I analysed the material generated. The narratives of people's lives, circumstances, attachments and active engagements which are captured in the interviews are partial and selective. However, getting a clearer idea of the methods I drew on to retrieve these narratives is helpful to situate the data, which I present and interpret in the following chapters. Ultimately a transparent account of my methodology is pivotal to scrutinising the strengths and limitations of the contribution my study makes to the field of diaspora studies and applied sociological theory.

This chapter is the third and last of the first part of this thesis, which sets the background for the presentation and discussion of my empirical findings. In the following chapter I will focus on the relational setup and dynamics of Afghan populations in Germany and the UK.

CHAPTER 5

Exploring Afghan populations in Britain and Germany: Social identities and patterns of social organisation

Introduction

This first of four empirical chapters focuses on the social organisation of Afghan populations in Germany and the UK. In Chapter 2 I discarded the idea of diaspora as a monolithic and clear-cut social entity in favour of a relational concept of diaspora. Understanding the set-up of the structural environment in which informants are situated (Emirbayer, 1997) is instrumental to answering the question of how people of Afghan origin who live in Britain and Germany come to see themselves as part of a wider diaspora. Against this backdrop I examine what is at the heart of self-identification, external categorisation and emerging ties among Afghans in Britain and Germany. I unpack how certain types of interpersonal ties based on categories like family relations, class, ethnicity and politics support the formation of specific subgroups – social configurations – within the wider Afghan population (Elias & Scotson, 1965).

The first two sections of this chapter examine three categories of similarity and difference which feature centrally in the narratives of my informants. These are family backgrounds, ethnicity and political affiliations. It emerges that each of these three categories not only fosters social ties among certain groups of persons but also promotes fractures among Afghan populations in Britain and Germany. At the same time, however, we can observe elements of convergence, deriving from widely shared senses of being Afghan and being part and representative of Afghan culture.

In terms of their effects on mutual perceptions and patterns of social organisation, each of these categories is subject to temporal and local variations. These affect mutual perceptions and ideas of membership and render the Afghan diaspora inherently changeable.

Throughout this and the subsequent chapters I draw on quotes from my interviews to substantiate my findings. These quotes only reflect small fragments of a large amount of very rich interview data. Many informants gave very vivid and thoroughgoing accounts and I use some of it to substantiate my description of transnational engagements.

5.1 Families

Family backgrounds strongly shape self and mutual perceptions among informants in Britain and Germany. In Chapter 3 I highlighted the important role of families in informing people's choice of a destination country and migration trajectories where possible. Families continue to play an important role beyond the migration process[27] as they shape people's livelihoods and social environment in the diaspora to a large extent (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2012; Muller, 2010).

[27] For many informants, family contacts were particularly important upon arrival at the destination country and during early stages of settlement in Britain and Germany. In her memoirs, Shah (2001) describes the role her own and her husband's families played through various stages of flight from Afghanistan and stepwise resettlement in Pakistan and Britain. Following her husband's escape for political reasons, Shah and her children were compelled to flee their hometown Kabul in 1983. On their way to Pakistan they were able to stay with family members who provided accommodation and security. Once the family safely arrived in Peshawar, Pakistan, they were reunited with Shah's husband whose distant relatives provided temporary shelter. Upon arrival in the UK, Shah and her family were welcomed and hosted by her husband's brother until they found a home for themselves. Such family-based support chains were very common for Afghan migration trajectories throughout the decades of war. My findings suggest that families continue to play an important role, particularly when it comes to migration-related decision making and people's choice of destination countries.

Afghan notions of identity are widely described as being formed in relation to family, community, tribe or ethnic group. The social network that individuals are part of develop around the family and then work outwards through more distant kinship ties and other networks. There is a deeply embedded idea of honour in Afghan culture, a system that is largely based on the spoken word. Basic trust thus lies at the epicentre of undertakings, ranging from the administration to more contentious issues like the delivery of aid (Johnson & Leslie, 2004). Afghan families in turn have been referred to as networks of trust (Muller, 2010).

My interview with Nabeela (late 50s[28], full-time director of aid organisation) further illustrates how aspects like trust and mutual obligations are at the heart of Afghan family relations. Nabeela was born into an affluent Pashtun family that lived in the northeast of Afghanistan. She has been living in Germany since the early 1970s and says that family contacts remained key to her social life. *'We love to chat and spend time together. We love our family, we always want to be together and cannot stand to be alone somehow. That's just unbearable for us'.* Therefore, she says, *'we always move to places where we have relatives, where our children live, where we have friends and where our clan is. We need our clan, because we love this security'.* This, according to Nabeela, is not a recent phenomenon but *'[i]t has always been like this and is rooted in history. We were a country which was under constant attack by foreign powers'.* Family ties thus become particularly important in situations of war and conflict. Under conditions of threat and persecution, families function as networks of trust, which delineate scopes of interaction with other Afghans.

[28] All information about informants' age is based on stated or assumed age at the time the interview was carried out.

At the same time Afghan families reveal much about a person's background and position in society. Informants frequently pointed out that everyone knows everyone among Afghans in a certain city or even across the country. Based on names or regions of origin in Afghanistan, people can locate their counterpart in Afghan society, regionally as well as socio-politically. There is widespread anxiety about being the subject to gossip, which leads people to approach each other very cautiously. Shabnam (25), a university student who has been living in mid-west Germany since her early childhood, illustrates how family backgrounds shape the way people approach each other and navigate within social environments. Certain sets of questions, often asked in initial meetings between persons of Afghan origin, are important 'scanning devices', based on which people develop an idea of their counterpart. *'I can tell you what happens if Afghans get to know other Afghans,* Shabnam claims. *'They will say "oh, you are Afghan too… where do your parents come from, which city?" That's how Afghans localise each other. It is like you would ask someone in Afghanistan "where do your parents come from?" It's the same in Germany. You want to have an idea of people's family'.* Families in this sense constitute a basis for self-identification as well as external categorisation. They form networks of trust and solidarity, while at the same time providing an indicator for someone's place within the wider population. The transactions involved in mutual perceptions suggest that people consider multiple layers of context when encountering each other in diasporic settings. In this particular example, traditional structures of Afghan societies play a key role in approaching and shaping the identification of self and other.

Some informants view the primacy of families as social context with ambiguity. They fear that it promotes withdrawal from other parts of the Afghan population and the receiving society. Sadia (20), who came to Germany as a refugee

in the late 1990s and is now studying for her *Abitur*[29], highlights the importance of her extended family as a context of interaction. She also stresses the perceived contrast of her environment to family settings she observes as common in Germany. '*[O]ur entire family lives here. That's already more than 300, 400 persons. We know them. […] We have many relatives here. My seven aunts live here, my great-uncle, my cousins, my mother's cousins… Um [laughs] I do not feel lonely here'*. At the same time, however, Sadia admits, *'I cannot really say much, because I only have family contacts. I have nothing to do with other Afghans […]. We are a large family and that's why we always keep to ourselves'*. Her family context shapes much of her interaction with Afghan populations in Germany. However, Sadia does not consider such patterns of social cohesion and interaction as a unique feature of her family, but typical for Afghan migrant populations. *'I believe it is always like that. Families are really large and therefore keep to themselves [laughs], you understand that?'*. This suggests that extended families not only form self-contained configurations within Afghan populations but also implies that in some cases family contexts increase the distance between Afghan immigrants and the majority population of the receiving country.

Ibrahim (60s), who came to Germany as a student in 1980 after fleeing to Iran in 1978, further elaborates on the implications of families as selective solidarity networks. He observes that many Afghan families take little interest in the situation and problems of people beyond their own social group. But he also indicates that people's awareness of the problems of other Afghan refugees depends on the overall context and the situation in Afghanistan more specifically.

> *You know the problem is that Afghans never lived in a liberal society. They lived in clans, in feudal communities, you understand? That's why they are a bit more narrow-minded. The*

[29] 'Abitur' is the German word for the final exams that pupils take at the end of their secondary education.

> *majority does not care about newly arriving refugees from Afghanistan. Only family members are concerned about their refugee relatives. Otherwise you don't see much action being taken, to be honest.*

Such examples suggest that because of their selectivity families represent an important source of social capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The qualities of social capital in this context are familiarity, trust, solidarity and mutual support, which help people establish themselves in the relatively alien context of the receiving society. Helai, a middle-aged Pashtun woman who has been living in London since 1994 and now works for a social service provider, further elaborates on this. Her local community largely consists of people belonging to the same extended Pashtun clan and thus forms a rather self-contained social context. At the same time, however, Helai asserts *'they are supporting each other, when a family comes here, all the community help each other, financially to bring this family. So this family has to stay with them'*. Family ties thus facilitate social integration while creating socially exclusive contexts at the same time (Jenkins, 1996; Elias & Scotson, 1965). However, informants' controversial perceptions of the impact of family ties on people's integration into the receiving society suggest that it is important to distinguish between potentially positive and negative consequences of social capital (see Portes, 1998).

My findings reiterate Muller's observation that families as solidarity networks often extend across borders but retain their functions as solidarity networks (Muller, 2010). As such they may take precedence over the social environment that surrounds people in the receiving society as Razma (26), a young professional from Greater London, illustrates

> *We kind of keep mostly in the family. So I interact mostly with mum, dad, my cousins. I've got family abroad: New York, Canada… We have a close-knit family relationship but we never really get involved with anything outside of that. I guess maybe because my parents like keeping to themselves.*

Families also reflect the social stratification of the Afghan society by providing indicators with regard to people's socio-economic backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1984). There is a frequent coincidence of periods of migration and ties between Afghan people abroad. As we saw in Chapter 3, people forming part of the same cohort tend to come from similar social and socio-economic backgrounds (Van Hear, 2004, 2014). I often found that contacts between families in the diaspora derived from old friendships in Afghanistan. Farzana (38, nurse, Germany), for instance, describes how her parents' social contacts are largely based on friendships and connections from pre-migratory times. She also illustrates how mutual visits, which are common practice among Afghan families, led to a continuation of these ties among the younger generation.

> *[O]ur old acquaintances prevail today. My father's friends and their children. We saw each other during all these visits, which we do among Afghans… And that's how we grew close to each other and developed friendships. For example, my father came to Germany with a friend from university and his daughter and I are now best friends. And there are many such examples.*

While drawing on the example of her own family, Farzana also indicates that such ways of forming social alliances are widespread among Afghans in the diaspora.

Family and social class as structuring elements of Afghan diaspora populations tend to coincide and forge the development of sustained community structures, which sometimes extend over generations. At both field sites I discovered a general tendency for people to stay within their socio-economic environment. Early cohorts of Afghan immigrants, for example, tend to have few connections with Afghans who came to Britain or Germany more recently, unless there are pre-existing ties which are mobilised in the diaspora. This is similar for more recent arrivals, many of whom are onward migrants from destinations in the near diaspora. As many of

them are economic migrants, their social relations in the diaspora develop around different aspects and needs compared to earlier cohorts of political refugees. To this end families forge path dependencies which are reflected in informants' social context and scope of interaction with other persons of Afghan origin. Such path dependencies, however, are not set in stone but may be altered, for example as a result of generational transitions (see section 5.4).

5.2 Ethnicity

The present section examines how ethnicity affects social relations among Afghan populations in Britain and Germany. Although informants refer to ethnicity as a powerful determinant of mutual perceptions, it is also an essentialising framework. I do not draw on ethnic descent as a theoretical explanation. Rather I refer to ethnicity as one aspect that determines how some people of Afghan origin frame co-nationals they encounter in the diaspora. Often such perceptions are biased in the sense that people ascribe certain characteristics to members of specific ethnic groups.

Baseer (45), who left Afghanistan for educational purposes in 1985 but was compelled to apply for asylum in Germany after the outbreak of civil war, elaborates on what he perceives to be significant differences between Pashtuns and Hazaras. *'[T]hey speak differently, they think differently and they set different priorities and adhere to different values. They speak different languages too…'*. Other informants echo such claims, such as Abdul-Samad (60s), a Tajik academic living in Greater London. Abdul-Samad holds that, compared to Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazaras are more closely related *'because we have the same language, but still they [Hazaras] […] are different. Religiously they are Shi'a, so*

they are very isolated'. His reference to 'isolation' suggests that ethnicity is a category that forges instances of social inclusion and exclusion. Informants often invoke metaphors of proximity or distance, which are reinforced as people primarily bond with members of their own ethnic group. Proximity and distance, however, are dialectically related and mutually reinforce each other, which is reflected in emerging residential clusters, as shown in the previous section with reference to Helai and the set-up of her community in London.

Some informants observe a tendency among Afghans to base claims of social supremacy on ethnic descent. Abdul-Kabir (early 40s), who arrived in the UK in 1999 and now works as an interpreter in the British Midlands, found that among Afghans in the UK '*[s]ome say "okay, we are Pashtun, we have to be in lead" or "we have to be listened to". And the Tajiks say "oh, we are Farsi people, we are Tajik, we have to be in control"*' . Such accounts suggest that framings of ethnic descent may imply perceived power relations and a fear of experiencing disadvantage.

References to ethnicity as a marker of difference between people of Afghan origin are not necessarily value-charged. Mukhtar (28, PhD student, UK), when reflecting on the role of ethnic ties among Afghans in Britain, suggests '*Maybe in the beginning only […] what brought them together as Afghan, brought them together as their own ethnicity, maybe because they had a lot of things to share'*. But, he continues, over time such coalescences were perpetuated as '*they disconnected [from] the rest of the community and only stayed with the ones that were of their own tribe, or, you know, from the same province. Ethnicity or religious lines, whatever it was'*. Regardless of the connotations which are attached to attitudes towards Afghans from other ethnic groups, common ethnic descent promotes a sense of familiarity based on which groups of co-ethnics tend to keep to

themselves. Ethnicity, some informants claim, gives people an identity in the absence of an overarching Afghan national identity.

As we saw in the summary of Afghanistan's demographic features in Chapter 3, ethnic and language differences coincide to some extent. On several occasions I found these divisions reproduced at public events hosted by Afghan community organisations. Some events attracted mainly Dari speakers, predominantly people of Tajik or Hazara backgrounds[30], whereas others were more Pashtun-dominated. Language differences additionally amplify perceptions of 'otherness'. Nesarullah (30), who lived in Greater London working as a freelance consultant at the time I interviewed him, expresses his frustration about recurrent resentments between Dari and Pashto speakers. The language divide, he claims, may solidify perceptions of difference. He recalls an argument that revolved around the use of language during an event in London where participants '*started complaining "well, this is all in Pashto and we don't understand anything" […] I told them "look, I am a Pashtun and I speak Dari. I have attended hundreds of such events where is only Dari. But I have learned Dari and I have no complaint that Pashto is not spoken there. Why can't you learn that language?*'" As Nesarullah suggests, such episodes do not only affect interactions between people as they occur. They also have implications for mutual perceptions among Afghans more generally in terms of reinforcing assumed divides between 'us' and 'them'.

Ethnic backgrounds thus not only inform mutual perceptions and categorisation but also determine patterns of social organisation and (sometimes implicit) principles of inclusion and exclusion (Wimmer, 2008; Jenkins, 1994).

[30] It is important to note, however, that many Pashtuns speak Dari/Farsi as their first language. Most of them originate from Kabul and other urban areas, while Pashtuns populating the tribal areas of the southeast predominantly speak Pashto. Many Pashtuns who are better educated are bilingual. However, they rarely live outside of urban environments. Quite a number of my informants are ethnic Pashtuns but only speak Dari.

Abdul-Samad is one of many informants who feel that the existing organisations are not necessarily open and approachable for everyone. '*There are some organisations who have established a community centre, whatever, for certain groups of Afghans. For instance there is one for Pashtuns, one for Hazaras, probably one for Tajiks…'* As a result he frequently encounters people claiming *'oh no, I can't go to that one because I am not of that [particular group]'* or *'I have been to that one [organisation] and I was not welcomed'*. Whether such perceptions are based on real antagonisms or merely the anticipation thereof is difficult to discern. Either way, what seems to matter most is the divisive effect of real or perceived ethnic biases. Over time and through constant reiteration, preconceptions can lead to the formation of social boundaries that delineate self-contained groups.

Social organisation around ethnicity also occurs as a reaction to the perceived problems certain ethnic groups are exposed to in Afghanistan or the adjacent countries. Among Pashtun informants, references to structural disadvantages of co-ethnics in Afghanistan are widespread[31]. A group of Pashtun men from different age groups, who run a small community association in the northeast of England, explain what makes the situation of their co-ethnics in Afghanistan exceptional.

> *People there remain deprived of the development. And almost all of them are the Pashtun settled areas. […] we would like to give a voice to any person who is in trouble in Afghanistan, any particular group. But we realise that Pashtuns are the people who are more acutely affected by the current political establishment in Afghanistan and they are the people to be given a voice, at least for people to understand what their problem is and how to address that.*

[31] It is noteworthy that not only Pashtun informants referred to the disadvantaged position of the 'tribal areas' in Afghanistan. Awareness of this problem is widespread among informants from different ethnic backgrounds.

Conversely, Hazaras often evoke narratives of protracted discrimination and repression. Such narratives inform transnational – albeit particularistic – patterns of solidarity, as Hamid (40s, mature student and minicab driver, UK) illustrates:

> *My concern is about all of the Hazara population in Pakistan and in Afghanistan […] because they are at the frontline of the danger. And I try to raise the awareness of the Hazara people anywhere in the world, in particular in the UK, because they have more facilities to demonstrate, they have more facilities and are financially in a better position to raise their voice.*

While ethnicity is a powerful determinant of mutual perceptions among Afghans in Germany and the UK, far from everyone mobilises ethnicity as a significant marker of difference between people of Afghan origin. Naveed (late 60s), who has been living in Germany since the mid 70s when he came as a university student, refers to ethnic antagonisms as a problem of the elite.

> *Here in Europe you find Afghans who used to be Afghanistan's elite. It is easy to stir discontent among the elite, which then causes divisions. And it is the same in Afghanistan: the elite is caught up in disagreements while the ordinary people have no reservations towards each other. On the contrary they have shared concerns: poverty, unemployment… There is no difference between Hazaras, Tajiks or Uzbeks. They all suffer from the same problems. They live side by side in refugee camps and have to look after one another.*

Naveed's account draws attention to the potential intersection of ethnicity and class. More particularly he indicates that biased perceptions of ethnicity are not a problem among Afghans in general but tend to result from people's entanglements with certain parts of the Afghan society.

5.3 Political orientation

Scholarship on diasporas originating from violent conflict has paid much attention to the way dynamics of conflict are perpetuated across borders (Kapur, 2007). One cross-cutting argument is that traumatic experiences of dispersal turn

the past into a main reference point. As a result people's ties to the homeland retain emotional and symbolic connotations. These are reflected in contested patterns of interaction between those seen as representatives of different political standpoints (Koinova, 2011b). In line with previous findings, I discovered that political affiliations of Afghans in Britain and Germany affect mutual perceptions, which in turn contribute to shaping the structures of Afghan populations in both countries. In addition to social ties deriving from family and ethnic backgrounds, I found some informants' networks to be based on political backgrounds and past or present political activities. I observed divisions between those who had belonged to different political factions that were involved in fights over political leadership in Afghanistan from the late 1970s onwards. Most notably, this includes pro- and anti-communist factions.

Political affiliations are also reflected in Afghan organisations. Atif (early 30s), who has been living in Britain since 2008 and was applying for PhD programmes at the time of our interview, draws attention to the salience of political affiliations when stating that he perceives Afghan communities in the UK as '*strictly divided because of their affiliation with specific political parties'*. As a result, he continues, '*everyone established their own community. For instance people who served in the leftist government in the 1980s and before that, they [do not have close relations with those who] were mujahed, belonged to mujahideen factions'*.

People affiliated with certain political groups tend to share similar experiences of persecution and displacement. Their migration trajectories, routes and experiences upon arrival at the destination often resemble each other. Alongside other factors, networks that are rooted in political backgrounds and activities also impact on people's choice of destination and sometimes place of settlement. For

example, relatively large numbers of Afghans fleeing the Communist regime during the late 1970s and early 1980s went to countries representing the capitalist side of the Cold War.

I found political affiliations to be at the heart of some transnational networks. These form around membership in political parties or the support of current political actors in Afghanistan. Abdul-Samad, for instance, is part of an international alliance that supports Abdullah Abdullah, one of the presidential candidates in the 2014 national elections. He tells me that his alliance is loosely structured and involves people from various age groups who live in Afghanistan and the diaspora. Online social media are important communication channels. Eager to find out more about the set-up of such activist networks I asked Abdul-Samad for more details.

Me:	*when you say 'we', whom do you mean? Because you sometimes say 'we argue for' or 'what we try to promote'… Who is 'we'?*
Abdul-Samad:	*The opposition.*
Me:	*And where is this opposition? Would you know most of them from before leaving Afghanistan?*
Abdul-Samad:	*Yes, we have connections, we have relations. […] We were supporting him [Abdullah]. Why are we supporting him? Not because I like Abdullah, [but] I like what he is saying and promising.*

We have seen that, to a large extent, political affiliations are rooted in informants' past lives and engagements in Afghanistan. For some, they remain at the heart of their everyday lives while others link politics to traumatic experiences and are eager to stay away from anything they consider 'political'. It is not only the nature and content of political contestations that deter people but also the way political affiliations are socially organised and institutionalised.

5.4 Fragmentation and boundaries

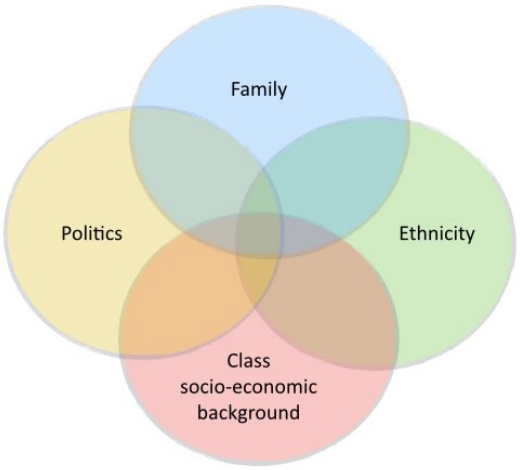
The above sections suggest that family ties, ethnicity and politics are crucial organising principles that structure social relations among Afghan diaspora groups in Germany and the UK. Each category informs transactions between people of Afghan origin, which in turn shape mutual perceptions and determine patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Ultimately repeated transactions forge the emergence of lasting social boundaries between groups (Pachucki et al., 2007) and the fracturing of Afghan populations in both countries.

The concept of boundary is useful to enhance our understanding of 'how social actors construct groups as similar and different and how it shapes their understanding of their responsibilities toward such groups' (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 187). Family ties, ethnicity or political affiliations function as symbolic boundaries, which promote a sense of similarity and group membership. They inform people's attitudes towards each other and foster dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. At the same time each of these types of ties represents a medium through which people acquire social status and resources such as trust and mutual support. This in turn promotes a transformation of symbolic into social boundaries, which Lamont & Molnár (2002, p. 168) describe as 'objectified forms of social difference'.

Social boundaries not only enhance the formation of narrowly defined social configurations (Elias & Scotson, 1965) within the wider Afghan population but also foster protracted gaps between Afghan populations and the receiving society. Differentiating between symbolic and social boundaries helps specifying the quality of social configurations as far as their inclusiveness and exclusiveness are concerned. Different degrees of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in turn have repercussions for the patterns of social organisation of the Afghan diaspora more generally.

The Venn diagram below attempts to illustrate how family-related attributes, ethnicity and political affiliations are different aspects of fragmented identities. These may be reinforced by socio-economic and specific class backgrounds. According to the characteristics of the situation at stake, actors coalesce around one of these aspects. As shown above, there are many situations in which several or all of these layers of identity intersect.

Figure 5.1 Identity categories structuring Afghan diaspora populations



Yet I found that the extent to which these categories inform perceptions of similarity and difference and determine instances of inclusion and exclusion changes over time and varies across different locations.

5.5 Temporal and local variability

The trajectory of political events in Afghanistan and generational transitions reveal the temporal contingencies of the structures and internal dynamics of Afghan populations in Britain and Germany. They represent exogenous and endogenous determinants of incremental change unfolding among Afghan populations in both

countries. Further elements of change are mediated by elements of life in the receiving society and specific places of residence. I refer to the latter as local elements of variability. In the following sections I will show how the identified temporal and local features impact on the salience of perceived similarities and differences.

5.5.1 Repercussions of political transitions in Afghanistan

Informants who came to Germany at an early stage indicate that they maintained good contacts with other Afghans living in Germany. These early generations also felt very well received by the German society. Some had made contacts with German development workers, teachers or tourists in Afghanistan, but even beyond such specific encounters, representatives of early immigrant generations share a general sense of amicable reception. This is linked to the close political and economic relations that existed between the two countries and a widespread fascination with Afghanistan among the wider German society. Farzana recalls,

> *back then my father was a student and he had many social contacts with Germans and Afghans alike. He came here as a student, together with a group of Afghan men who were about his age. Some women were among them too. So he did have contacts and a circle of friends from the beginning. We had good contacts with both Germans and Afghans.*

As shown in Chapter 3, the first cohorts of Afghan migrants and refugees who arrived in Germany not only came from similar social backgrounds but also left Afghanistan during times of peace, as a result of which their narratives of 'being Afghan' were largely uncontested.

While Afghan immigration has been a constant feature in Germany throughout the last four decades, it is a more recent phenomenon in the UK. Prior to the *Saur Revolution* in 1978 Britain hosted a small Afghan population, whose members had largely come for professional purposes. It was not until the mid-1990s that Afghan refugees came to Britain in greater numbers. Abdul-Samad recalls the experience of being part of the first wave of Afghan refugees coming to the UK. He arrived in Britain in the late 1990s. '*At that time there were not many refugees here',* he states. '*There was only a small amount of refugees in 98, it was just a couple of thousands, not more than that. And they knew each other'*. He distinguishes Afghans who came to the UK as expatriate professionals from people who arrived as refugees at a later stage and indicates that life experiences and reasons for migration constitute a crucial backdrop for mutual perceptions among these groups.

With the outbreak of war and conflict in Afghanistan, numbers of Afghan migrants to Western destinations multiplied rapidly and the dynamics of interaction changed in many ways. Against the backdrop of political contestation and violence in Afghanistan, the rapid growth of the Afghan migrant population had significant repercussions on relations between people of Afghan origin. In Germany this was particularly noticeable as the country was an important destination for those fleeing the Communist regime. The Communist coup and subsequent Soviet invasion in Afghanistan led people to adopt politicised positions and frame events and conditions in Afghanistan accordingly. Political views not only shaped perceptions of newly arriving migrants but also affected relationships among Afghans who had come to Germany before the outbreak of war. Informants describe how events in Afghanistan led to rising levels of mistrust and turned solidarity into a matter of particularism.

Sabir, a retired surgeon in his 70s, who arrived in Germany during the 1960s notes *'[t]he years of war have torn people apart. Mistrust has increased a lot and the question of nationality became more important: 'oh, you are this one, you are that one' and so on…'.* Subsequent phases of war in Afghanistan have made it difficult for Afghans abroad to meet each other on neutral grounds. Rising levels of violence and insecurity increased the vulnerability of social relationships. Declining levels of trust changed the meaning of family and ethnic backgrounds as a substance of interpersonal ties and determinant of mutual perceptions. Most informants situate perceptions of ethnicity in a historical context, which indicates that they think of it as a social process rather than a social fact.

A recourse to the recent history of Afghanistan suggests that the run-up to the Communist coup, the breakup of the PDPA and the subsequent emergence of different mujahideen groups contributed to the ethnicisation of politics in Afghanistan (Schetter, 2005)[32]. This was extended to the diaspora where it is being perpetuated. Below, Ibrahim (60s, working for social services, Germany) underlines how in times of war and conflict, ethnicity is used as a political tool which amplifies tensions between Afghans of different backgrounds[33].

> *After […] the dissolution of the Democratic People's Party, we were facing the worst problems. A lot of emotions were stirred at that time. There were tensions between Pashtuns and Tajiks, between Shi'a and Sunnis and between people from different regions. There were internal quarrels among Pashtuns too, depending on whether people came from the south, the*

[32] Prior to the Afghan wars, ethnicity played a limited role as basis for social organisation. This changed over the course of the wars Afghanistan experienced from the late 1970s onwards, when ethnicity turned into a subject of warfare and political rhetoric. Various actors engaged in bitter fights for supremacy of their ethnic group. During the 1990s the claim for Pashtun hegemony was a central element of the fundamentalist Taliban regime. Attempts to establish Pashtun sovereignty were coupled with repression of other ethnic groups among which Hazaras were worst affected (Schetter, 2005).

[33] Accounts like Ibrahim's should be read with caution because they are likely to involve elements of nostalgia which distort images of life in Afghanistan during pre-war times. In Chapter 6 I will provide a more thorough account of the role nostalgia plays in people's images of and perceived relationships with Afghanistan.

north or the west of Afghanistan. There were tensions. And during the time of the Taliban tensions got even worse, because the Pashtuns supported the Taliban, while other ethnic groups were against them. At that time tensions were very high.

Over the last 40 years, changes in Afghanistan's political landscape have strengthened feelings of communality among co-ethnics in opposition to the perceived identities of other groups (Wimmer, 2008; Barth, 1969). This echoes earlier observations that migrant communities change as a result of homeland conflict and the arrival of individuals moving directly from conflict zones. Conflicts may affect the status of certain ethno-national communities within the wider populations. But ethno-national communities themselves also evolve as a result of conflict (Collyer et al., 2011). Events with far-reaching implications for the Afghan society have caused the (re-)drawing of boundaries among Afghans living abroad. This points at an intersection of macro-level events and micro-level processes (Lubkemann, 2008). In the light of political events and upheaval in Afghanistan, people began to perceive each other as representing distinct facets of the conflict. However, ethnic boundaries shift situationally (Brubaker, 2004) and vary in their degree of closure (Jenkins, 1994). This will be further illuminated in section 5.5.

Likewise the emergence of political clusters within Afghan populations has been a gradual process. With each wave of reinforced migration from Afghanistan, newly arriving people were perceived as representatives of distinct political positions. This often prompted disputes among ideologically determined subgroups, which over time caused protracted divisions between people. Informants state that tensions not only arose between newly arriving people and already established residents but also among groups of Afghans who had previously maintained good relations with each other.

However, the impact of homeland conflict and conflict-induced displacement on Afghan populations in the West proved not only divisive. Mutual perceptions are not exclusively informed by politically charged resentments but are also influenced by a spirit of solidarity. As a result of homeland conflict and instances of large-scale displacement, newly arriving groups of people had different experiences and needs from previous migrant generations. Abdul Razaaq (64, full-time director of small humanitarian aid organisation, living in Germany) illustrates how, from the late 1970s onwards, his contacts with people of Afghan origin began to change according to the needs of those who were displaced during political upheavals in Afghanistan. He recalls,

> *after 1978, many refugees came to Germany. I wanted to help these people and I started working as an interpreter and so on. Of course I did this voluntarily and free of charge. That's how my contact got passed around among practically all Afghans. I also did translation in courts and helped Afghans with other things like their asylum application and whatnot. I also helped them find a flat and so on. Yes, it has been like that until now.*

Similar instances of solidarity or a sense of responsibility for Afghan co-nationals are observable in the UK. For example, several informants, all of whom are well-educated, eagerly promote education among Afghans who came to the UK only recently and who are in need of help when tackling administrative hurdles and getting by in day-to-day life.

The above sections underline that mutual perceptions and categorisations among Afghans in Britain and Germany are partially mediated by the nature and sequence of events in Afghanistan. Experiences of uprooting and resettlement in a context that is not necessarily welcoming means that trust-based relationships gain importance, not only as a source of comfort but also in a more instrumental sense. In such an environment various markers of difference, including ethnic descent,

political affiliations and family ties, become salient and lead people to draw or redraw boundaries designating in- and out-groups.

5.5.2 Inter-generational changes

Other temporal elements that impact on mutual perceptions and instances of group formation among Afghan diaspora populations are linked to inter-generational relations and the coming of age of young Afghans in Britain and Germany. I refer to inter-generational changes as endogenous aspects, which are not connected to external events but unfold from within the populations. At both field sites I discovered that perceptions of fellow Afghans and group formation processes among the young generation[34] differ from the patterns prevailing among members of the old or older generation.

Having spent most of their lives in the British or German society, young informants were not exposed to war and conflict in Afghanistan in the same way as their parents. Consequently many have difficulties relating to the events and experiences that shaped their parents' perceptions of life in the diaspora and may feel disconnected from Afghan co-nationals. Poor Afghan language skills often exacerbate such feelings of estrangement. The majority of young informants demonstrate a clear awareness of the perceptions that have played an important role in shaping the older generation's mindset, but they tend to be selective when it comes to adopting those values and perceptions that are widespread among their parents' generation.

[34] When discussing 'young informants' I refer to persons of Afghan origin who are at different stages of their 20s. Although all of them were born in Afghanistan, they have been living in Germany or the UK for most of their lives.

Many of my young informants emphasise that it is important for them to transcend the family environment when establishing contacts with other Afghans. Their accounts suggest that they have different – and more open-minded and inclusive – ideas or visions of an Afghan community. Razma (26, young professional, UK), for example, describes how her interest in Afghanistan differs from what she perceives to be her parents' relationship to the origin country and Afghan co-nationals in the UK.

> *[M]y parents like keeping to themselves. […] But as I have grown up, I realised that I wanted to get involved with the Afghan community. […] I have always just wanted to get to know people from my own community. When [a friend] approached me about the [name of organisation] I thought it's a great thing. Because not only am I doing something that I want to do, like help in a charitable way, but also meet people that are of the same background as me. Um, so it has definitely changed. But prior to this I would say I didn't have any involvement with the Afghan community and now I have. Not quite a lot, but a significant amount more than I did before.*

Like Razma, many young informants expressed a desire to establish more inclusive spaces of interaction that were not tainted by political disagreements or ethnically particularistic. However, entering relationships with other Afghans can be a balancing act because it requires young Afghans to manoeuvre between their family and other social environments that they aspire to be part of. Growing up in the environment of a Western society, many informants feel uneasy about forms of conduct they consider 'typical' for the older generation.

Group formation processes are often based on contacts young people make at school or university[35]. Such relations develop out of curiosity and a desire to discover Afghan culture from a different perspective, which reflects their interests and individual values. Nahid (30), a young professional who lives in the Greater

[35] It should be borne in mind that all of my young informants were university students or graduates. Perceptions and patterns of making contact with other persons of Afghan origin may be different among people who come from less educated backgrounds.

Frankfurt area, made new contacts with other young Afghan-Germans when she moved away from home to start university. The idea of sharing some kind of Afghan cultural descent forms a central element among such newly emerging acquaintances and Nahid and her friends were trying to set up more institutionalised structures around it.

> *Initially we wanted to meet every month but unfortunately this has not quite worked out. So far we have met twice for an 'Afghan night', where we cooked together […] and put on traditional dresses. Um, that was a lot of fun [laughs]. There were no proper instruments in the flat, but we still tried to play some music with the tabla and sing along…*

Other informants discover Afghan culture more from a religious perspective. In particular, young Afghans whose parents had been involved with or supported the Communist regime in the late 1970s and 1980s point out that religion allows them to establish their individual relation to Afghan culture and groups with Afghans in Britain and Germany.

Such examples suggest that young informants' social engagements and meaning-making are informed by different schemas of mutual perception compared to large parts of their parents' generation. It seems that often their identity as Afghans is informed by different aspects. With the aim of distancing themselves from the often conflict-laden dynamics of interaction among the older generation, they consciously position themselves in their social context.

Another factor that amplifies newly emerging contacts and social relations among the young generation of Afghan migrants is their extensive use of online social media. Based on what she calls a *'mundane example'*, Soheila, an Afghan-German university student in her mid-20s, illustrates how virtual networks may open inclusive spaces and transcend ethnic boundaries. *'Let me give you a simple example. There is a music group on Facebook. And there you see Pashtuns posting Hazaragi songs,*

although both ethnic groups were enemies for a long time, but still…'. Similarly, Atif confidently expresses his forward-looking attitude, when stating *'I am [part of a] generation that engages with a new phase of history of my country. Because of that I need to understand what happened in the past, what was the truth behind it'*. He implies that the young generation needs to adopt a well-informed yet critical position vis-à-vis Afghanistan's history and the political forces which have shaped it.

Generational relations and differences reveal crucial (dis)continuities among Afghan populations in both countries. The consequences of occurring discontinuities vary. Some informants, who have spent most of their lives outside of Afghanistan, claim to have grown out of touch with their country of origin. Others, however, are eager to be part of a new era that is marked by a more integrative spirit and greater cohesiveness among Afghans in the diaspora and beyond. While temporal elements play an important role in shaping relationships among Afghan diaspora populations, patterns of interaction and group formation vary not only over time but also according to different localities of settlement.

5.5.3 Localities of residence

Given the overall setup of this research the most obvious aspect that comes to mind regarding local specificities of Afghan community structures are differences between Germany and the UK. However, the structuring factors identified in the previous sections manifest themselves very similarly among Afghan populations in both countries, and in my group of informants more particularly. I attribute this observed congruity to specificities of Afghan populations in Western countries. As detailed in Chapter 4, the majority of my informants come from the well-educated

upper class of Afghanistan and were more actively involved in politics than people coming from rural parts of Afghanistan.

It is possible, however, to discern specificities in relationships and patterns of interaction among people of Afghan origin across different localities in the two countries. While elaborating on the set-up of the Afghan community in Germany, Shabnam (25) mentions that – alongside family relations – places and regions of settlement also forge inter-personal contacts.

> *Well, things are primarily structured by family relationships and regional structures come second. This means I imagine that Afghans who live in the same place know each other. Of course that also depends on how big the city is and how long you have been living there… And besides that people make contact through mosques and religion, that's how you get in touch with other Afghans too*

My informants' accounts suggest that there is an important local element to the patterns of relations among people of Afghan origin in the sense that local conditions, such as prolonged residential concentration or segregation, affect the way Afghans in Britain and Germany coalesce and establish social relations (see Morawska, 2011). The dynamics and scopes of interaction between people of Afghan origin vary significantly across different places and regions of settlement. To some extent this is connected to the overall numbers of Afghan residents and the density of settlement in different localities. Informants express a general preference for moving to larger cities with more diverse populations and infrastructure[36]. Besides being a place of refuge from homeland conflict, major cities of the destination country tend to provide accessible opportunities for mostly casual work, study and career progression. For example, workplaces like restaurants, food delivery services, shops, taxi companies and offices also offer spaces of interaction

[36] It is important to keep in mind that not everyone is free to move wherever they like. Especially for Afghans coming to Britain or Germany as asylum seekers, movement is restricted and they often end up living in relative isolation for extended periods (see Chapter 3).

among Afghans from different backgrounds (Collyer et al., 2011). By attracting large immigrant populations in general and Afghans in particular, such localities display the combined effects of advantageous infrastructure and job opportunities, which are amplified by emerging social networks.

In German cities like Hamburg or Frankfurt or in the UK's Greater London area there are certain neighbourhoods where numerous Afghan-run shops and businesses can be found. Such amenities open a context for casual encounters in everyday settings such as supermarkets. They represent a shared infrastructure that caters for overarching needs, such as certain types of food. Esmat (early 40s), who came to Germany as a child and now works in the IT sector, describes the dynamics of casual interaction in neighbourhoods of his town that feature larger numbers of Afghan inhabitants:

> *…there are certain neighbourhoods where you find many Afghans and then you find smaller pockets of people in suburban areas. […] I can recall a number of families who had the financial means to move out of the city but then realised that they missed the community […]. Seriously, they need this proximity, [even if it is only about] running into each other in the supermarket and exchanging a couple of words there. Many have different political views but they still seek [the company of other Afghans] along the lines of 'we are Afghans'.*

In larger cities with higher numbers of Afghan residents, the backgrounds of people tend to be more diverse. As a result there is a wider range of aspects around which people can assemble. Some informants made this explicit when talking about their experiences of life in London, suggesting that a high degree of diversity among the local Afghan population may reinforce boundaries based on familiarity and like-mindedness. Sekandar, a religious scholar in his 60s who fled Afghanistan after the Communist coup, illustrates this for his town, whose Afghan population largely represents a particular facet of Afghanistan's political landscape. During our

interview I asked, *'how would you describe the development of the Afghan community in [your place of residence] over time? Also looking beyond your organisation?'* He replied,

> *Until 1992 this was a diaspora, which was united in their opposition to the Soviet invasion. […] Yes [place of residence] has a special status when it comes to fighting for the political cause in Afghanistan. That's also because of my efforts, I had much impact on these affairs. But otherwise Afghans in [place of residence] are not different from other communities.*

With Kabul being the epicentre of political contestation at several stages during the wars (Barfield, 2010; Schetter, 2004), the degree of politicisation among 'Kabulis' was higher compared with people from rural areas. This is reflected in the political inclinations of Afghans inhabiting urban centres in the diaspora. Yama (34, freelance journalist, UK) feels uneasy about the political tensions among groups of Afghans in London. He specifies how political alliances among Afghans in the UK are extensions of political divisions in Afghanistan, which represent specific moments in the country's recent history. *'[W]hat happens in London'*, he reasons, is that *'[t]here are some Pashtuns who are in the interest of Soviet Union […]. When Russia invaded Afghanistan, they were with Russians. And they still [maintain] their communist ideologies. And they are Khalqis'*. Opposed to this group there are *'the Persian-speaking, they are interested with Iran, they [claim] that Persian language should be the dominant language, Pashto should be removed from the official system. In London, many of this type of people are there'*. He then continues describing the effect such a divisive atmosphere had on him, concluding that in the end he *'left London, because of this clash between them'*. At his new place of residence, Yama experiences very different dynamics of interaction among people of Afghan origin. This, he assumes, is connected to their personal backgrounds and regions of origin. *'They are from villages, they are not from the cities, not from Kabul. They are from outside Kabul, from provinces. Like from Kunduz, from Paktia, from Pansheer, from these provinces. And they are not interested in these type of [political] issues'*. Yama's account also

illustrates how political affiliations have ethnic underpinnings and vice versa. Moreover he reiterates that ethnic and political antagonism are problems of the urban elite and are not as prevalent among the 'ordinary population'. This suggests that class and socio-economic backgrounds also affect how people encounter one another in diasporic settings.

Other informants, however, frame metropolitan environments in more positive terms. Razma, for instance, holds that not only the socio-historical positioning of the young generation but also their locality of residence contributes to more inclusive attitudes. She suggests that such transitions in mindsets, mutual perceptions and inter-personal relations are mediated by the way people are embedded in space and time.

> *I think what the younger generation are doing, as far as I am aware and the people I have contact with, we are trying to eradicate all kinds of like ethnic backgrounds, language barriers, religious barriers… Well, we are kind of privileged to live in London. Like I think all people in this room [café in the City of London] I could promise we are all from different continents. So I think that kind of taught us a really good lesson.*

Razma's account suggests that people's living conditions give rise to different concerns, which in turn impact on mutual perceptions. Also she implies that people's places of residence represent an important aspect of living conditions in this context.

It seems that spatial proximity and exposure to large and diverse Afghan populations can work both ways: it can foster inclusive interaction but also reinforce tensions between people. Conversely smaller cities may allow for more open-minded contacts and inclusive ties between people from different backgrounds, as Nahid's recollection of living in a small town in the centre of Germany suggests.

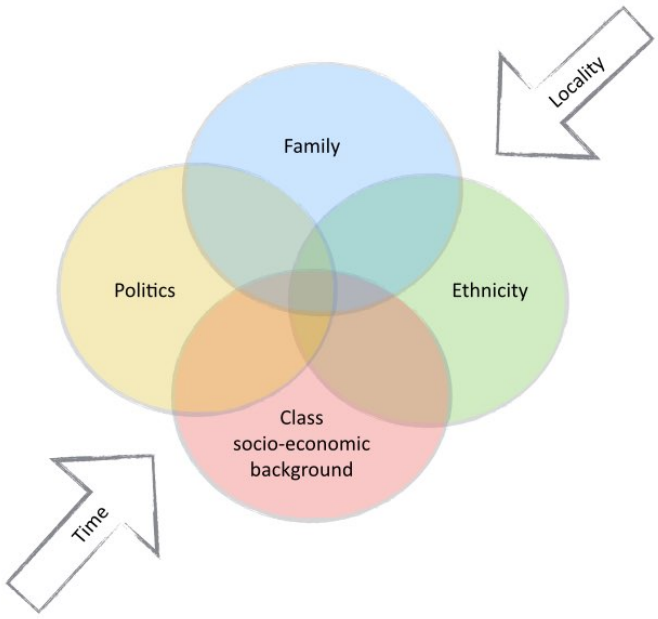
> *I have to say that here in Germany people are dispersed across the entire country. Therefore, if one lives in a village, one gets in touch with any Afghan. That's how one makes contacts.*

And it does not matter whether people are family members or not. Sometimes friends are much closer than family.

Meeting other Afghans in day-to-day situations conveys a sense of being one of many and it may lay the foundation or serve as an entry point to local community structures. It seems useful, however, to differentiate between casual encounters and more sustained relationships enhancing the formation of groups. While people may find some comfort in the mere presence of other Afghans, this does not necessarily lead them to develop more sustained relations.

Based on the findings presented in the section above we can modify the Venn diagram introduced earlier, as shown in Figure 5.2:

Figure 5.2 Temporal and local variability of social identities and social organisation



The amended figure now illustrates how time and locality impact on the way categories of difference play out in encounters among people of Afghan origin. Categories like family, socio-economic and ethnic background, and political affiliation crucially inform mutual perceptions among people. Yet the extent to which such categories are mobilised and determine the structure of Afghan

communities is mediated by temporal and local contingencies. A focus on transactions encourages us to analyse which specific aspects co-determine mutual perceptions and how certain ties bind people in distinct groups under certain circumstances. Such an analytical angle helps explain why trust-based family ties gained importance during times of war and why political issues are less important for many young informants than they are for their parents. Moreover, temporal and local aspects underline the inherent variability of mutual perceptions. Categories of difference in this sense are not a constant factor but are enacted differently according to the specificities of the situations in which people are enmeshed.

5.6 Afghan culture and 'being Afghan'

The previous sections show how categories of difference like ethnicity and politics inform mutual perceptions and provide a basis for shared definitions of 'us' and 'them', as a result of which people group themselves along particularistic lines. This contributes to an overall segregated structure of Afghan diaspora populations in Germany and the UK. However, I discovered that, beyond such categories of differentiation, there is a range of qualities that are widely shared among the majority of informants. These shared features revolve around people's perceived attachment to Afghanistan and their sense of 'being Afghan'. Some of the voices I present here were also featured in the previous sections. This is important to note because this section presents a rather different dimension of mutual perceptions among people of Afghan origin in Britain and Germany.

Perceived bonds with Afghanistan not only extend across generations but are generally widely shared among informants. Yet it has to be acknowledged that

Afghanistan has different meanings and connotations for different people. In Chapter 6 I will further elaborate on informants' memories of life in Afghanistan and their relationships with the country of (ancestral) origin. Regardless of any specific connotations, informants tend to express an attachment to Afghanistan as a whole, without restricting their sense of connectedness to any particular region or group within the society. Similarly they often use vaguely defined expressions such as 'we' and 'ours', which suggest that there is not only an underlying idea of Afghanistan as a wider territorial entity but also an idea of an all-encompassing Afghan people. Certain elements of Afghan culture and 'being Afghan' seem to be collectively shared, which is reflected in phrases such as 'we as Afghans', 'our history' and 'our country'.

Jahed (early 30s), a young professional living in the northeast of England, makes this explicit when referring to himself and any other Afghan in the diaspora as a 'representative' of their country:

> *Every Afghan living in Germany or in Britain or anywhere in the world is a representative… is considered to be a representative. Even if I sit in a bus and talk to somebody, you know introduce myself, I got quite a few friends from Germany […] and when [they] talk to me I feel like I am the elected president of Afghanistan.*

Perceptions of being an 'Afghan representative' may be coupled with a sense of responsibility, not only for the country but also for the way 'outsiders' look at Afghanistan and Afghan people. *'[W]e are not people with official responsibilities',* Mukhtar (28), a PhD student from Greater London explains. *'… [M]aybe not officially on paper, but to the country we do'.* This, he says, is because *'no matter where we go, people look at me as an Afghan, you know? They would never accept me as anything else, they would always look at me as an Afghan. So, it is my responsibility towards that country that I belong to, so that I can be proud of it and my children would be proud of it and not ashamed'*. Mukhtar's

account highlights how self-perceptions influenced by the perceptions of others, in this case the receiving society. He exemplifies what Jenkins (1996) refers to as the internal-external dialectic of identity. Identification is a matter of transactions, which in this case unfold between Mukhtar and the British society as generalised other. He assumes that outside perceptions of him as Afghan come with certain connotations and preconceptions. For this reason he is eager to enact what he wants Afghan culture and identity to represent.

Depending on the specificities of the respective situation or setting, persons are framed in different ways with different layers of identity becoming salient as a result. According to Mukhtar 'being Afghan' has different meanings and implications in Afghanistan and the receiving society. Deriving a sense of responsibility from one's self-perception of 'being Afghan' suggests that informants like Mukhtar see themselves as being part of something bigger or overarching. While implying feelings of responsibility, perceptions of membership also convey a subtly comforting sense of familiarity. *'It just feels safe and comfortable around those people and you can share and they understand you',* Mukhtar asserts. *'You don't have to explain things and, you know, try to act differently so that you can adapt to a different culture. I guess that would be the only thing and they can give you honest advice and may be able to help you a bit better'*. Similarly Ferdaws (mid 30s), an economist and PhD student living in Greater London, expresses his affection for Afghanistan and 'being Afghan'. During our interview Ferdaws tried to find words and metaphors that would help me understand his sense of affection. Questions about his feelings towards the home country he says are like being asked *'do you love your finger or do you love your eye or do you love your hair or do you love your nose?'* This is because *'I am part of the Afghans, so I cannot be disconnected, no matter where I live, no*

matter what I think. I am an Afghan and I am proud of that, so I want to be part of them, no matter where or no matter what'.

It is obvious that Mukhtar's and Ferdaws' self-perceptions mark stark contrasts to informants' explicit denial of an overarching Afghan identity, which I emphasised in the previous sections. One explanatory aspect may be that both Mukhtar and Ferdaws were children during the worst times of war and thus not exposed to hostile narratives as much as their parents may have been. This underscores that perceptions of self and other are situationally determined. At the same time, however, both demonstrate that their sense of being Afghan and experiences of being labelled as Afghan are things that they reflexively and consciously act upon, keeping both the origin and receiving country in mind. On the whole, however, it seems that the existence of shared ties to the (ancestral) homeland requires specific relational circumstances in order to be enacted.

Informants frequently referred to or enacted more subtle elements of Afghan culture such as hospitality. On many occasions informants stated that 'we Afghans are hospitable' without adding any differentiation regarding the particular group to which this would apply. I enjoyed the generosity of Afghan hospitality throughout my fieldwork. Hardly any of my informants would allow me to pay for my own drink, let alone theirs, whenever we met at public places such as cafés. *'No, no, you are my guest'* was the standard phrase unanimously expressed by younger and older informants, regardless of their ethnic or socio-economic background. Likewise I was frequently invited to informants' homes, where I was warmly welcomed. Often such invitations would involve a meal, usually consisting of a meticulously prepared selection of dishes, which were presented to me as *'typically Afghan'*. It seems easier for people to collectively identify with Afghan culture or sides of Afghanistan that

did not fall victim to politicisation and antagonistic claims. How people express feelings of membership hence strongly depends upon the issues at stake in a given situation.

There are two qualities that are widely shared among Afghan populations in Britain and Germany. One is a sense of attachment to Afghanistan, while the other consists in a self-perception of being Afghan. Both appear to blur the boundaries that otherwise cause divisions within the community (Alba, 2005). However, informants express their attachment to Afghanistan in different ways and the same applies to meanings and connotations of being Afghan. Although the essences of Afghan identities vary from person to person, the self-perception of being Afghan is widely shared. Hence, underneath the surface of a rather segregated diaspora population there is an imagined Afghan community (Anderson, 1983), which transcends the dividing lines that structure the diaspora in everyday life. It seems, however, as if the imagined Afghan community is not being mobilised in the same way as more particularistic identity markers. This raises the question how such apparently shared identifications with 'being Afghan' and feelings of being connected with Afghanistan are reflected in the social relations and configurations of people in both countries.

A closer look into the role of festive events may yield one answer to this question. Whenever I attended festive occasions I got the impression that they function as bridging events, which bring together people from various backgrounds. Religious holidays such as *Eid al Fitr* (feast of breaking the fast at the end of Ramadan) or *Nowruz* (the Persian New Year) are occasions at which often hundreds of people come together to celebrate. Joyful togetherness is usually complemented with Afghan food, music and dance. Life course events like weddings and funerals

are further types of occasions that bring together Afghans from different backgrounds. Also here it is common that more than a hundred, if not several hundreds of persons, attend such celebrations. People from old and young generations use such occasions to wear traditional Afghan dress, which give the events a very colourful appeal. Informants tend to give enthusiastic accounts of festive occasions and often emphasise that they particularly enjoy the experience of being in a mixed and 'truly Afghan' crowd. At the same time they are not uncritical but underline that joint celebrations of this kind are only possible because no political strings are attached. *'People may have different interests'*, Ashraf (early 60s, living in Hamburg where he runs a family enterprise) points out, *'but there are commonalities as well: language, culture, religion, land and problems. At weddings [and funerals many people come together]: the old ones and new ones alike. For example for Ramadan, everybody comes to the mosque. So in that sense there are commonalities and these commonalities are a reason for people to get together.'* This said, however, he adds that *'a real and true diaspora that would have a centre somewhere, that does not exist. There are different mosques and different organisations'*.

Another reason for the inclusive character of religious events and other festivities may be that they rarely last longer than one day. People gather for the occasion, which usually revolves around a clear purpose, and then disperse again once the event comes to a close. There are neither long-term commitments nor are people required to agree on specific objectives or come up with targeted agendas of any kind. It is all about enjoying and celebrating uncontroversial elements of Afghan culture, but not about reflecting conditions in Afghanistan in any specific way. One could frame such events as instances of momentary solidarity which lead to a temporary emergence of groups that are united in their shared cultural and/or

religious descent. Festive occasions in this sense are temporary enactments of imagined Afghan communities.

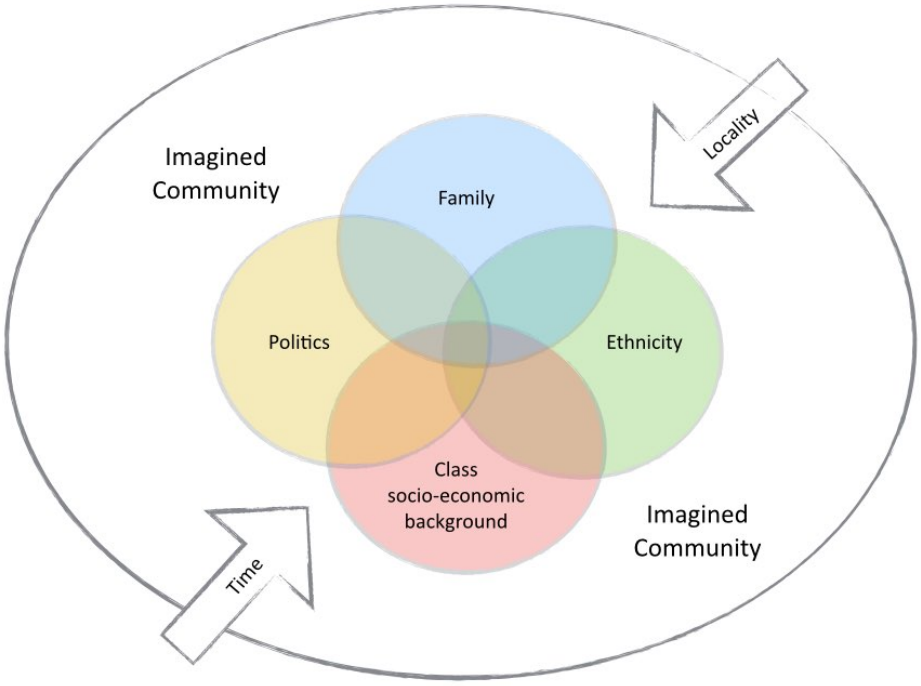
Inclusive structures have also developed around religious centres and organisations, which have been established in different cities of both countries. They bring people together and foster broader interactions. Besides holding religious services, Islamic cultural centres offer a range of additional activities, including the provision of facilities for recreation and the enhancement of social welfare. Examples of concrete activities are Saturday schools where children learn about Afghan and Islamic culture and language classes in English, German, Dari or Pashto. Compared to celebrations of religious holidays, where Afghans from a large variety of migratory, socio-economic and political backgrounds come together, Islamic cultural centres tend to attract more narrowly defined groups of persons. The breadth of the respective target population, however, is contingent on the objectives and approaches of those running the particular centre.

One example is an Afghan cultural centre located in a major German city, which gradually turned into the heart of the local community and now attracts more and less devout poeple. The centre was established on the initiative of Sekandar, an Afghan religious scholar who fled Afghanistan and came to Germany in the early 1980s. Upon arrival he quickly became a much sought-after person because he could, for example, lead religious services surrounding life course events. Eager to promote community structures beyond individual occasions, he made efforts to establish a centre dedicated to various facets of Afghan culture. Sekandar recalls that *'over time more and more Afghans came here and they were looking for a religious person, who could help with weddings, with deaths and so on. Someone who could offer condolences. That's how I gained a reputation and the Afghan organisation has kept me busy throughout'*. Besides hosting

Friday prayers and other regular religious services, the centre runs well-received cultural events, which place Afghan poetry and music[37] at centre stage.

Afghan culture is multi-faceted and full of different meanings, which in turn are of different significance for different people. The above accounts, however, suggest that some elements of Afghan culture foster binding ties that are employed to express communalities rather than drawing boundaries around particular sub-groups. Another amended version of the Venn diagram tries to depict how the fractured configurations emerging from particularistic identity categories and social ties are situated within a wider imagined community.

Figure 5.3 Fractured and imagined Afghan communities



Yet whether or not people see each other as part of the same imagined community varies by situation because relationships are framed differently in

[37] Olszewska (2007, p. 205) acknowledges poetry and composition as 'the most highly prized and widely practiced art form among Afghans of all walks of life, both literate and illiterate'. Yet it should be noted that music and literature, including poetry, are also embraced by the distinct ethnic or political groups, some of which use it as an instrument of political contention.

different social environments. As a result people enact specific layers of their identity according to the transactions unfolding in the respective setting in which they are enmeshed.

Summary

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the discrepancies between idealtypical concepts of diaspora (Cohen, 2008; Brubaker, 2005; Safran, 1991) and the features of diasporic populations as they unfold 'on the ground'. The idea of a triadic relationship between home country, host country and transnational diaspora communities as such tells us little about the dynamics that shape and re-shape Afghan populations in Britain and Germany. While experiences of displacement, dispersal and life away from the country of origin leave profound imprints on people's lives, diasporic identities are shaped by a range of additional aspects.

Throughout this chapter I demonstrated that there are multiple categories that inform mutual perceptions and foster social ties between people of Afghan origin in both countries. People rarely encounter each other as simply 'Afghans' but perceptions are filtered through a range of categories among which family and socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity and political affiliations feature prominently. Consequently the fabric of social relations among Afghans in the diaspora is heterogeneous and the population as a whole is best described as a cluster of configurations of (self-)perceived groups. The significance of ties at the heart of identified configurations can only be understood if analysed in the context of war and displacement in Afghanistan.

It is important to note that categories of difference are categories of similarity at the same time, leading to a dialectic relationship of social inclusion and exclusion. Extended families, for instance, do not only constitute self-contained social units; they are also crucial sources of solidarity and mutual support. But individuals carry many characteristic features: they are part of distinct family structures, members of ethnic groups and representatives of political views at the same time. Which of these features sticks out in terms of determining mutual perceptions depends on the contextual elements that inform the repeated transactions at play in encounters between persons of Afghan origin. Repeated transactions – as we have seen throughout this chapter – promote 'the generation of boundary-making beliefs' (Tilly, 2005, p. 85). Adopting a relational perspective hence allows us better understand dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and the waxing and waning of specific social configurations (Elias & Scotson, 1965) among Afghan diaspora populations.

The boundaries delineating groups of characteristics based on family ties, ethnic origin, political affiliation or socio-economic background, however, are neither universal nor permanent but subject to temporal and local variability. Ethnicity, for example, only gained significance as a category of difference among Afghans in the diaspora after the onset of the 'ethnicisation of politics' (Schetter, 2005) during the civil war. The findings presented in this chapter thus highlight the contingencies of diasporas and reiterate that they are in a constant state of formation and re-formation. Against the backdrop of Afghanistan's turbulent history and its concomitant waves of displacement, the changeability of the Afghan diaspora populations is particularly pronounced. Regardless of its heterogeneity and contextual contingency, I discovered that there is an imagined community, which

finds its expressions in a widely shared concern with Afghanistan and a self-identification as 'being Afghan'. Although elements belonging to this imagined Afghan community are widely shared, they rarely find an expression in people's social networks with other Afghans.

An attempt to compare the Afghan case with Vertovec's three meanings of diaspora (Vertovec, 1997) leads us to the conclusion that the Afghan diaspora may not be a diaspora in the sense of an organised social form. Implicitly, however, there are indicators for the existence of a wider Afghan diaspora as a type of consciousness. This – as we will see in the following chapters – has crucial implications for 'the Afghan diaspora' as an actor. One informant, Nesarullah, stated that Afghans in the diaspora search for something they can hold on to, something that constitutes their identity. However, against the backdrop of the damage decades of conflict have brought to Afghan society, 'being Afghan' cannot offer much in terms of social capital. Conversely family relations as well as shared ethnic and political backgrounds form a basis of trust, which is an essential precondition for solidarity and mutual support. As a result social contexts tend to evolve around more narrowly defined categories, which deter informants from identifying with an Afghan diaspora as an organised social form.

This raises the question of whether the concept of diaspora is of any value for this research given the specificities of the Afghan case. In line with Kalra et al. (2005) I argue that employing the concept of diaspora is justified and insightful for two reasons. First, 'diaspora' allows us to survey different kinds of identity formation and social organisation. Second, the concept of 'diaspora' adds to our understanding of the changing relationships between immigrant groups and receiving societies as well as their countries of origin (see Chapters 6 and 7 for further elaboration).

Taken by itself, the discovery that Afghan diasporic identities are contested is not revolutionary. In fact earlier research has drawn attention to the often contested identities and patterns of social organisation among conflict-induced diasporas (Koinova, 2011a; Horst et al., 2010). Approaching social identities and patterns of social organisation from a relational perspective has allowed me to unpack how certain identity categories are mobilised in different situations. It is in this context that the idea of relational settings (Somers, 1994) becomes analytically meaningful. In this chapter I established how social institutions, including family, ethnicity, politics and Afghan culture, inform the social identities of my informants. Yet the meaning each of these categories has for mutual perceptions and the emergence of social ties and patterns of social organisation respectively, is contingent on the trajectory of events in Afghanistan and informants' experiences of life in the receiving societies. Thinking of the triad of country of origin, receiving country and co-nationals in the diaspora as key dimensions of informants' relational setting enables us to trace how changes in each of these dimensions affect social identities and forms of social organisation in the diaspora. A relational perspective, in other words, allows us to specify to what extent and under which conditions Afghans in Britain and Germany see themselves as part of a wider diaspora. It also enhances our understanding of the social context in which any transnational engagements are carried out.

In the next chapter I will focus on informants' relationships with Afghanistan in greater detail. After examining the different types of ties people maintain with Afghanistan, I shift the focus and turn to ideas and desires of development and change in the country.

CHAPTER 6

Ties, memories, concerns and ideas: Relationships to Afghanistan

Introduction

This chapter focuses on informants' relationships with Afghanistan. I specify perceptions of home and belonging, and unpack how informants relate to the current conditions in their country of (ancestral) origin. I first analyse relationships in terms of personal ties that informants maintain with Afghanistan. This includes contacts with (groups of) persons and institutions. I also examine different means through which contacts are being upheld. Subsequently I shift the focus to informants' memories of life in Afghanistan and then move on to their assessment of the current conditions in the country.

I uncover ambivalent narratives of 'home' which raise questions of membership and belonging. This leads me to scrutinise how people's social embeddedness is reflected in commitments to their origin country and ideas of change and development more specifically. While the previous chapter links fragmented identities and emergent structures of Afghan diaspora populations, narratives of home and concerns about current conditions in Afghanistan are aspects which most informants (implicitly) have in common.

It emerges that perceptions of conditions in Afghanistan, people's livelihoods in the diaspora and their transnational networks of contacts are interdependent. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how life in the diaspora (re-)shapes people's relationships with their home country, sometimes leading to a reinvention

of Afghanistan and what it means to be Afghan. Informants' relationships to Afghanistan in conjunction with diasporic livelihoods and dynamics in local communities play an important role in shaping transnational engagements.

6.1 Maintaining contacts with Afghanistan

The majority of my informants have family members living in Afghanistan. In many cases these are more distant relatives such as aunts, uncles and cousins. Occasionally informants mentioned members of their nuclear family – usually parents or siblings – who either stayed in or returned to Afghanistan. The latter appears to be more prevalent among Afghans in the UK and reflects the patterns that characterise the recent history of Afghan migration to European destinations (Chapter 3). Families rarely live scattered across Afghanistan but often reside in the same town or area. Some live at the actual place of origin[38] but many moved to Kabul or other urban areas during times of war or in search of better opportunities (Koser, 2014; Monsutti & Rodriques, 2013).

Besides maintaining contact with family members, many informants also keep in touch with friends living in Afghanistan. In some cases these are old acquaintances that date back to people's lives in Afghanistan, including friends from school, contacts from professional contexts or fellow members in political groups or movements. In other cases informants made new contacts through work, engagement in civil society projects or (online) social networks.

[38] In Afghanistan it is common that people refer to their ancestral place of origin when asked where they are from. This does not necessarily correspond to a family's current place of residence. Many of my informants stated that they come – for example – from the province of Paktia, but have lived and grown up in Kabul. In fact many informants had never actually lived at what they referred to as their place of origin.

The means of communication between Afghans in the diaspora and in Afghanistan and other countries have changed and expanded significantly over the last two decades. In the early days of Afghan mass migration and displacement, telephone calls were the most widespread communication tool. Informants also recall using 'messengers' to send personal updates, material and financial aid to relatives in Afghanistan. Those fulfilling the role of messengers were usually Afghan relatives or acquaintances from the country of residence who travelled to Afghanistan.

The advent of the so-called 'digital age' (Castells, 2010) revolutionised communication flows between Afghans in the diaspora and their contacts in Afghanistan (Monsutti, 2010). Most of my informants still make telephone calls on a regular basis, but they emphasise the growing importance of online communication tools, among which e-mail, Skype and online social networks feature most prominently. Informants particularly stressed the importance of Facebook as a communication platform upon which old friendships and networks are being maintained while new acquaintances emerge – for example – as people join thematic forums.

I discovered a slight generational difference in the use of online social networks. It is a difference in magnitude as well as in form, because young informants not only seem to be using online social media like Facebook more frequently than their parents' generation but also use it for different purposes. For example, sharing music, videos, etc. is very popular among young Afghans. Meanwhile their parents mainly use platforms like Facebook for keeping in touch with relatives and exchanging personal information.

When I interviewed Abdul-Kabir (early 40s, working as interpreter) at his home in the British Midlands we talked in length about communication flows between Britain and Afghanistan and how things have changed with the expansion of online communication. With regard to the Afghan communities in his hometown Abdul-Kabir observes that

> *they are well-connected to Afghanistan. Myself, I am always connected with friends back home through, nowadays, social media and the internet and e-mails […] [R]ecently it increased. Now everybody uses the internet. It's good now, whatever happens in Afghanistan I just open my Facebook page [and check what is going on there]. So it has been changing my life, especially the smart phones are changing everybody's life, especially mine. You can do anything with it.*

Abdul-Kabir's account of the increased frequency and immediacy of communication and information flows between Afghanistan and the UK led me to ask whether this makes him feel more connected to the country of origin.

> *In a way yes. I can chat to anyone whenever I want, who have access to internet. I can call, I can e-mail, I know anything about … any news, live news now. When I came in 1999 there was no radio channel, only BBC Pashto that could tell us about Afghanistan. There was no TV channel. Now there are 3–4 TV channels directly from Afghanistan, internet and websites: all telling us about Afghanistan.*

Abdul-Kabir illustrates how – in addition to personal communication tools – there are now a variety of media outlets which enable Afghans in the diaspora to maintain contacts with Afghanistan. Informants almost unanimously and across generations said they were continuously following events in Afghanistan. TV and radio news as well as online media constitute the most widely used information channels. Most informants are eager to keep up to date with the political situation, but for many following popular entertainment shows is almost as important. Although Aziza (30, working as freelance journalist and consultant) has spent most of her life in Germany, she emphasises that she is '*very curious to know what is going on.*

We [her husband and herself] update ourselves every minute about Afghanistan, through relatives, friends, Facebook, media, everything, everything…'. But, she suggests, staying up to date on the situation in Afghanistan is not the only thing that matters to her.

> *Our hearts and minds are there […]. When I hear Bollywood music which is very close to the Afghan culture, I think always about me driving my car [in Afghanistan], especially in the evenings […]. [T]oday actually, because I called my mum, she is in Afghanistan now, and I told her 'I miss my life in Microrayon', where these Russian blocks are… And, somehow, I am always curious what's going on and I am slightly frustrated and depressed about Afghanistan, about all the things I told you.*

Aziza illustrates how following Afghan news and entertainment programmes has much deeper connotations as far as informants' feelings of attachment and belonging are concerned. Her account reveals a constant urge to stay on top of events happening but also uncovers deep-seated feelings of nostalgia.

Having the ability to follow events in Afghanistan and maintain contacts with people in the country intensifies informants' degree of connectedness to the country. Enhanced media and communication technologies have amplified the extent to which events and elements of daily life in Afghanistan form part of people's lives in the diaspora. Also different sources of information help informants develop a more complex idea of what is happening 'back home'. However, informants feel connected to different aspects. While some express a vaguely defined connection to the country, others frame their attachment mainly in social terms by referring to family ties as their primary link to Afghanistan. For others it is a political cause and the fate of Afghanistan that form the substance of their ties with the home country. Most informants, however, maintain various types of ties with their origin, which become salient under different conditions.

How and to what extent informants maintain contacts with Afghanistan is strongly mediated by their social and family background. Farzana (38, nurse,

Germany) was born into an upper-class family in Kabul. Together with her family, she came to Germany as a young child in 1983. She illustrates how her relationship to and interest in Afghanistan were strongly mediated by her family's profound and multi-faceted attachment to the country. During our interview I asked her *'How do you think your relationship with Afghanistan developed over time? Was Afghanistan very present throughout?"* Farzana replied:

> *Yes always. That's also because my family had a vivid interest in politics and we were very much oriented towards Afghanistan. This mainly applies to my father and my brothers. We had many friends too and regularly met with other Afghans. Afghanistan was a central topic during these gatherings. And once I finished vocational training I travelled to Pakistan. My grandmother lived there. She felt very attached to me and wanted to see me. That's why I went. But then I really liked being there with the family and friends and I continued to go and visit them every year.*

Farzana also illustrates that visits to Afghanistan or – as in her case – relatives living in one of the adjacent countries are another way for Afghans in the diaspora to stay in contact with their country of origin. However, her family not only sparked her interest in Afghanistan but also had the necessary means to afford regular return visits. It is important to note that return visits to Afghanistan imply a financial challenge to many families in the wider diaspora.

6.2 Visits to Afghanistan

Informants' accounts with regard to return visits to Afghanistan reveal a rather mixed picture as far as the purpose and frequency of visits is concerned. Return visits also vary in length and in terms of emotional effects. However, I discovered some trends which mark the patterns of return visits of particular groups of informants.

Some informants travel to Afghanistan regularly, often for extended periods. This seems particularly common among members of the older generation who have been living in exile for several decades. For them visiting Afghanistan became possible again – or at least much safer – after the fall of the Taliban. Several informants had the opportunity to integrate return visits with professional activities or involvement in aid initiatives. Only a small number of informants reportedly went back to Afghanistan during times of war and the subsequent Taliban regime. In many such cases return visits form part of informants' civic or political engagement.

Many informants representing the older generation recall the shock they felt when returning to Afghanistan for the first time in decades. What they found upon return was a country in ruins that showed little resemblance to the country in which they had grown up and, in some cases, started a professional career. Visits to Afghanistan disrupt nostalgic images which informants may have preserved over the years of life in exile. At the same time they often emphasise the importance of retaining first-hand connections to the country instead of 'just talking about it', which indicates that there is a desire to stay involved beyond emotional attachment.

Visiting Afghanistan not only constitutes a 'reality check' with regard to the situation in the country, but also confronts people with their own background and place in society. Return visits mean that many informants see their country of origin from a different perspective. Comparing elements of life and social conditions in Afghanistan to their equivalents in Western societies led some informants to discover new values in Afghan culture or to see familiar aspects in a new light. Sekandar (60s), a religious scholar who runs an Islamic and cultural centre in southern Germany, recalls the impressions he gained while spending two years working in the

remote Northeast of Afghanistan. *'I went to Afghanistan from 2005 until 2007 to work for a German aid organisation. I spent much time in villages, which could only be reached by foot and required me to march for several days'*. Sekandar explored unfamiliar places and came to know their inhabitants. This, he states, *'made me feel connected with the country, its people and its nature. I encountered much honesty among those ordinary people. They were different from those false intellectuals, who mainly pursue their own interests. These normal, simple farmers have let me into their hearts and did everything to make me feel welcome. They had no expectations. This was a wonderful experience'*. Sekandar's experience highlights the relational nature of encounters with the home country. In his particular case, spending time working with the country's rural population evoked a sense of purity and nostalgia, which mark a stark contrast to ever-present images of corruption and violence. Hence, renewed contacts with Afghanistan and its people can lead informants to re-define their relationship with the country. At the same time experiences of day-to-day life in Europe and the physical distance from Afghanistan are crucial points of reference in informants' relational setting, which affect and at times re-shape perceptions and emotional feelings of home.

While Sekandar emphasises the positive sides of his temporary return to Afghanistan, other informants show more ambiguity when reflecting on their experiences. For many, visits to Afghanistan are overwhelming and exhausting, at least at first. Informants find themselves confronted with a range of restrictions, which derive from the precarious security situation in the country. Further restrictions are linked to implicit and explicit social rules, which are particularly palpable for women. Shabnam (25, university student, Germany) has visited her country of origin three times over the past decade. When reflecting on her return experiences she describes how she gradually managed to accommodate the initial

shock and establish a way of handling the peculiarities of the social context surrounding her.

> *When I was there for the first time I experienced a real culture shock. […] I must have been 17 or 18 years old. So it was about 7 or 8 years ago. The first time it was quite nice but I was really shattered when I came back. I experienced a couple of borderline-situations which I only begin to understand now. Now I know how to cope better.*

Shabnam's account is one of many similar experiences, which suggest that informants readily confront the challenges of coming to terms with 'the reality on the ground' in Afghanistan without casting them as insurmountable. Rather they adopt a straightforward attitude, allowing them to adapt themselves to Afghan environments which are familiar and deeply unsettling at the same time.

Visits to Afghanistan thus not only reveal multiple facets of local everyday reality but also urge informants to reflect on facets of their own personality and identity. Informants representing different generations and immigrant cohorts in Germany and the UK widely share such experiences. During interviews, informants recalled various situations which confronted them with existential questions such as how, where and why they do or do not fit in with life in Afghanistan or in Britain or Germany. Such confrontations with one's social and local embeddedness imply a break with habituated self-perceptions which are linked to coming from one place and society. Experiences of displacement and resettlement thus urge informants to critically evaluate (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) their present living situations and feelings of alienation from both Afghanistan and their country of residence.

Khatima's (mid 20s, university student) parents, for example, who fled to Germany after the onset of the civil war in Afghanistan, first went back to visit their home country after a long period of life in exile. Their experience upon return was

one of alienation from the country and their family, who greeted them with overrated expectations. Khatima recalls:

> *In 2006 or 2005 my parents went back for the first time. Just imagine, that was more than 10 years after they left Afghanistan. Even our own family members greeted them with scepticism. It was as if they were thinking 'here are my son and his wife from the West. They have certainly made a lot of money over there and will shower us with dollars'. My parents then told them the truth about life in Germany, how difficult it is to obtain a residence and working permit, and that things in general are not just rosy. But our relatives would not accept that.*

The examples above illustrate how visits to Afghanistan can alter the established relationships between people and their origin country. They underline the difference of feeling connected to Afghanistan as an imagined place and actual 'real life' encounters. Often the meaning informants attach to both places changes. For informants who have spent extended periods away from Afghanistan, return visits tend to be emotionally charged but also deeply confrontational. This older generation finds a stark contrast between the current situation and childhood memories of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. This is less the case for informants who lived in Afghanistan during times of war and witnessed the destruction of the country as it happened.

Most informants, regardless of age, social background and country of residence, have temporarily returned to Afghanistan at some point or express a desire to do so. However, a small number of informants either did not share this desire or feel unable to return for reasons of personal safety. Threats to personal safety mainly derive from past or ongoing political involvements or their particular family history. For some informants, however, the conditions and events that led them to leave Afghanistan deter them from wanting to return. The accounts above reiterate that visits to Afghanistan and first-hand encounters with the country and its

society have different connotations and implications for different people. Besides return visits and maintaining contacts by means of cross-border communication, I found that contacts with Afghan co-nationals in third countries constitute another important dimension of informants' relationships with their origin country.

6.3 Maintaining contacts with Afghans in third countries

According to ideal-typical definitions, contacts with co-nationals in other destinations constitute a characteristic feature of diasporas. I include the examination of informants' 'lateral connections' (Clifford, 1994) to tease out how contacts with Afghans in other countries of the global diaspora impact on informants' relationships with Afghanistan and their self-perception in terms of being part of a wider social entity. Similar to the contacts upheld with people in Afghanistan itself, we should differentiate between the kinds of ties informants maintain with other Afghans across the world, the purpose of these contacts, the pattern of their geographical distribution as well as the durability of the ties discovered.

Family ties constitute a large proportion of the contacts informants maintain with co-nationals living in third countries. This reflects two aspects I discussed earlier: the conflict-induced disruption of Afghan families (Chapter 3.2.4) and the role families play as a reference point and important structuring element of Afghan communities in Britain and Germany (Chapter 5.1). Most informants have family members living scattered across a number of countries worldwide. This includes countries of the near diaspora, other European countries, and destinations like North America and Australia. The patterns of geographical distribution of family

members vary between different migrant cohorts while being shaped by socio-economic factors at the same time (Van Hear, 2004).

As a general tendency it is quite common for people from early refugee cohorts to have relatives in North America. Afghans who left their country at a later stage, for instance during the civil war (as was the case for many of my UK informants), primarily mentioned having family members in Pakistan and countries across Northern Europe. This reflects the gradual emergence of new destination countries and the changing routes of Afghan migrants. While most informants are aware of the geographical location of their family members, it is not always possible to stay connected. Still, informants, including Krishma (late 20s, young professional, UK) and her family, make great efforts to stay in touch with family members living in other European countries and the United States.

> *I am a very family-orientated person. I want to know who my cousins are, I want to know who my auntie is. So we actually made the effort to go to Afghanistan, go to America, go to Germany, go to Holland to see all my other family members so that we are in touch and we don't lose that connection purely because of the war or what we faced. I don't want it to have an impact on our relationships.*

Although cross-border ties which revolve around family relations are largely restricted to distinct groups of persons, Krishma illustrates that the connection to members of one's extended family is something she sees as integral to Afghan culture and Afghan identity. By maintaining family contacts informants thus implicitly reify their connection to a wider, imagined, Afghan community (Anderson, 1983).

Informants who are actively involved in Afghan organisations often maintain contacts with Afghan organisations in other countries, especially if they engage in similar fields of activities. Farwad (49), for example, leads a UK-based community

organisation which, among a range of other activities, runs a football team and organises regular football tournaments. He says that he frequently receives requests from Afghan football teams in other European countries who are eager to expand the scale of their sporting competitions beyond the national context. I also found informants who are involved in different forms of civic action to engage in cross-border cooperation with like-minded actors in other countries. Rasheed (mid 50s, researcher), one of my informants from Germany, has been organising workshops on 'peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan' in which he seeks to involve a range of actors from the Afghan diaspora alongside German politicians and other stakeholders. He and his team have been proactive in terms of reaching out to potential collaborators in other European countries, including the UK. Rasheed's activities and the network of contacts he strives to set up have political underpinnings. His cross-border cooperation with other diaspora organisations exemplifies a general tendency I observed among informants who have a background as political activists or intellectuals. Often they refer to themselves as members of extended networks of distinguished persons of Afghan origin across the world, including poets, writers or musicians. Such networks that used to be or still are involved in Afghanistan can be a crucial source of social capital, which nurtures peoples' self-image and provides support structures at the same time.

Contacts with Afghans in various countries constitute a valuable source of information, which enhances people's decision-making abilities. To illustrate the importance of having a transnational social network, Ibrahim (60s, working for social services, Germany) emphasises:

> *One needs to have contacts. Otherwise you don't know what is going on and if you don't know what is going on you cannot have a say either. So one needs to know what is happening in order to have a say. It is part of my responsibility to know how people in different places*

are doing. And thank God I have close contacts with Afghans in different places, including England and Northern Europe. Sometimes I receive phone calls from – for example – Sweden, because people seek my advice. I then refer them to one of my [local] contacts who can help them.

Contacts with Afghans in other countries represent an important source of information, not only when it comes to migration-related decision-making (see Muller, 2010). Also, as Ibrahim suggests, networks of contacts may significantly enhance people's opportunities in terms of keeping them informed and enabling them to assess and perhaps improve their lives in the country of residence.

The above examples indicate that transnational contacts among people of Afghan origin are largely based on distinct ties or concrete purposes. Cross-border networks do not simply revolve around shared Afghan descent but emerge out of specific social relations (such as families) or aspects of mutual interest (for example sports or politics) based on which informants connect with co-nationals in other countries. The subjects at the heart of transnational connections also determine to what extent and in which ways the country of origin constitutes a shared reference point. This reiterates the findings discussed in Chapter 5 in the sense that a shared national or ethnic background does not necessarily suffice when it comes to forging ties between Afghans who live in different locations across the world. In addition the composition and geographical distribution of networks not only varies across different migrant and refugee cohorts but also between generations.

Members of early migrant cohorts tend to belong to social networks that are stable in set-up and geographical distribution, because people have firmly settled in their receiving countries, and may well have acquired citizenship. Conversely the networks of contacts I discovered among younger informants seem to be more

versatile and flexible (Granovetter, 1973). One important factor in this context is, again, the widespread use of online social media among young Afghans.

Nesarullah (30, freelance consultant), who is well connected with various groups of young Afghans in the Greater London area, describes the composition and emergence of Afghan transnational networks through social media. He also indicates how maintaining contact with Afghans across the world may bolster a sense of forming part of a wider community evolving around Afghanistan as country of origin.

> *Within [my organisation] we have got around 700 members. There are first students from all over the world. You find Australian Afghans, there are American, Canadian, German, from everywhere, literally. And you would find professionals, you would find former students, current students, you would find people who have never been to school, for instance. You would find people from other organisations. So they just want to be part of that Afghan community, they want to be known in a way as an Afghan, they want to show their attachment, so just to show that they are Afghans and they have these feelings for Afghans and thoughts for Afghans.*

Such trends reiterate the changeability of Afghan diasporic groups and the Afghan diaspora in a wider sense. Over time people from diverse backgrounds left Afghanistan for a growing variety of destination countries (see Chapter 3). This gradual expansion added new nodes to already existing networks and forged the emergence of new ones. Networks not only changed in terms of their geographical set-up but also with regard to the types and strengths of ties between people situated at different nodes.

While family ties and links between people who spent significant periods of their lives together tend to be durable, it is unclear how persistent transnational connections which are primarily based on online social networks can be. This leads us to a related question pertaining to the meaning of transnational networks and the role they play in people's lives. Transnational social networks of Afghans living

across the world may reinforce elements of Afghan identity and an imagined Afghan community (see Chapter 5) as they create platforms upon which meanings of 'being Afghan' and life in the diaspora are being expressed. This underlines the insufficiency of identifying primordial bonds to the home country as an essential common denominator of diasporas (Anthias, 1998). Conversely understanding the specific composition of Afghan diasporic groups can illuminate people's relationships to Afghanistan and the meaning they attach to the home country.

6.4 Meanings of home

So far the focus of this chapter has been on the inter-personal contacts which my informants maintain with their origin country and people in other parts of the global diaspora. However, I discovered that meanings of 'home' often go beyond transnational contacts and are articulated in different contexts. Against this backdrop I now shift the focus and illuminate some of the aspects through which informants express (changing) meanings which they attach to Afghanistan. Disentangling meanings of home is vital for understanding to what extent Afghanistan forms an integral part of informants' lives and how the country becomes a target for social engagement.

6.4.1 Memories of Afghanistan

Memories and images are an important medium through which informants convey a sense of attachment with Afghanistan. Memories testify the presence which Afghanistan has in people's daily lives. However, depending on informants' time of departure and their experiences during different phases of war, memories may have

positive and negative connotations. Also memories of Afghanistan vary by personal background, age, time of outmigration and experiences of life and conflict in Afghanistan, all of which are coinciding factors. Memories give expression to a variety of sentiments, ranging from nostalgia and hope to anger and disillusionment. At the same time the contexts in which memories are mobilised reflect people's position in certain social environments or society in a wider sense. When sharing their memories of (life in) Afghanistan, informants emphasise different aspects accordingly.

Informants who lived in Afghanistan during times of peace and (relative) prosperity refer to these periods as good times in their lives, during which Afghanistan was a place that could provide them with everything needed. Informants not only refer to the quality of past lifestyles but also describe the places and surroundings in which their everyday life unfolded. Informants' memories of pre-war Afghanistan tend to be nostalgic and emotionally charged because they almost necessarily evoke a sense of detachment and loss. For instance Parwana (early 50s, social worker, Germany), who has been living in Hamburg since 1991, states

> *I love my country, Afghanistan, I am always interested to know what is happening there… I have now lived in Germany for 20 years but I retain a close connection to Afghanistan. Unfortunately I have not been able to return for a visit. This really bothers me. But my heart is there nevertheless and I will continue to try and do something there. It is my duty as a human being. My home and my past are there with all the good and bad times. And I have a dream for the future for Afghanistan.*

In Parwana's case memories of Afghanistan form a parallel world, which seems somewhat disconnected from her daily life in Germany, where she is preoccupied with her job as a social worker and her two adolescent children. While she states that a part of her has remained in Afghanistan, Parwana's memories of

home are not purely nostalgic. Rather Parwana's memories of Afghanistan constitute an important building block of her identity as social actor. When thinking of present-day Afghanistan Parwana also contemplates possibilities that could enable her to be actively involved in the country. This indicates that – despite the temporal and geographical distance that separates her from life in Afghanistan – she does not feel alienated from the country and the problems it faces.

Memories of Afghanistan are an integral element of family life in the diaspora. As such, however, they bear varying implications. While memories of Afghanistan provide shared reference points (see Farzana's account in section 6.1) and thereby reinforce bonds between people, they may also be a source of – mainly inter-generational – contestation. For Aziza (30, freelance journalist and consultant, Germany) her parents' memories of Afghanistan were subject to ambiguity. She recalls how her parents drew on episodes of their lives in Afghanistan to foster their children's appreciation of life and opportunities in Germany. *'We could never complain because they came with the toughest stories, how they walked ten kilometres a day to school without water, while it only takes me five minutes… How they went to university while bombs dropped down while I can go to university [under normal circumstances]'.* Memories of Afghanistan thus not only shape people's attachment to the origin country but also affect their perceptions of life in the receiving society. Hence, memories can be seen as results of transactions as they reflect different elements of the social context in which people are enmeshed (see Tilly, 2005). According to the situation at stake and their respective counterpart, they may mobilise memories strategically, as Aziza's father did when trying to enhance his children's commitment to education.

For many young informants, early memories of the origin country are dominated by war-induced fear and hardship. Krishma (late 20s, young

professional, UK) therefore cherishes her parents' memories of life in pre-war Afghanistan, which can complement her own rather bleak image of the country. *'[T]he stories [our parents] used to tell us during our childhood, it's just amazing. You know they have seen a lot and unfortunately, as an Afghan, I haven't. All I heard is about the war, killing, bombing, rape, kidnapping, fighting…'*. Krishma illustrates how home can be a locus of nostalgia for some, while it evokes nightmares for others (Stock, 2010).

The above examples underline that memories are important determinants of the meanings which informants ascribe to Afghanistan. Yet it is crucial to bear in mind that memories are contextual and informed by people's experiences and social positions in the society of origin. Displacement and life as a refugee thus constitute an important backdrop for the way memories of Afghanistan are being kept alive (Malkki, 1995). But memories and the narratives through which meanings of home are expressed may change over time, for instance as a result of changes in Afghanistan or people's lives in the diaspora. As a general tendency nostalgic narratives predominate among informants who belong to early emigrant and refugee cohorts. Conversely memories of people who left Afghanistan as part of a later refugee cohort are more preoccupied by experiences of war-inflicted hardship and the difficulties that marked intermittent periods in Iran or Pakistani refugee camps. For most informants who stayed in Afghanistan throughout subsequent periods of war, memories are a source of distress. This suggests that memories not only reveal elements of people's pasts but also give expression to the characteristics of their current living conditions.

6.4.2 Meanings of home as a reflection of current living conditions

Changing political conditions in Afghanistan shape the meaning which informants ascribe to the country. For informants who had left Afghanistan before the wars, relationships with people in the home country changed significantly with the outbreak of conflict and the onset of mass displacement. Political developments in Afghanistan and the wellbeing of family members and friends turned into subjects of great concern. At the same time it became difficult, if not impossible, for people to return to Afghanistan. Due to concerns and unrest about the local situation alongside the experience of an unforeseeable separation from Afghanistan, narratives and meanings of home became more emotionally charged.

The outbreak of war not only changed the connotations of 'being Afghan' for informants themselves but also affected the way they felt perceived by the receiving society. Afghans who had left their country for educational or professional reasons were no longer students, entrepreneurs or bankers alone but also protagonists or victims of the conditions in their country of origin. At the same time informants emphasise how they became increasingly aware of the vast discrepancies between living conditions in Afghanistan and their own livelihoods in Germany or the UK. Perceived obligations and feelings of indebtedness which form part of their home country attachments indicate how informants navigate between the comfort of Western Europe and what they perceive to be much tougher living conditions in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, narratives of Afghanistan in the wake of war and displacement also reflect the dialectic relationship between people's ties with the country of origin and the degree they feel part of the receiving society.

Many Afghans who fled Afghanistan as adults found it difficult to fully adapt themselves to life in Britain and Germany. Mirwais (32, IT professional, Germany),

whose family came to Germany in the early 1980s, points out that language proficiency plays an important role in this context.

> *Many Afghans came here at an advanced stage of their lives. They are adults who experienced a lot and then had to flee. It is understandable that they retain close ties with their home country. I mean all the people who were around 40 and above when leaving Afghanistan… One has to understand that life in Europe, in a strange country, is difficult for them. They have a hard time learning the language and trying to integrate.*

Other informants corroborate this, pointing to additional aspects such as the lack of professional opportunities for Afghans who used to be part of Afghanistan's well-educated professional elite. For them the meaning of their home country is strongly connected to their own purposeful place in society.

I observed similar connections between perceived attachments to Afghanistan and a sense of belonging to the receiving society among many of my young informants. Their situation differs from that of their parents insofar as most of them do not have vivid memories of life in Afghanistan. Also – at least formally – they tend to be more fully integrated into the British or German society (Bolognani, 2014; see also Binaisa, 2013). At a more personal level, however, many young informants do not see themselves as belonging fully to their receiving society but instead relate to Afghanistan as 'home'. Krishma (late 20s, young professional, UK) has been living in Greater London since 1992 where she went to school, attended university and started a professional career. Regardless of her successful structural integration into the British society she states that

> *sometimes you do feel… In different parts of the UK, when I do go I feel as if I don't belong here. But in [my borough], cause I've been raised there, I feel home. I know the people. Because it is within the Asian community, you feel safe. But, like I said, there are some places in the UK where I don't feel comfortable at all. And that's where awww, you just get that feeling... But in Afghanistan you don't, because wherever you go, you are an Afghan at the end of the day. And that's the main difference between the two I would say.*

Krishma's account indicates that their experiences of daily life in the receiving society may reinforce and shape meanings of home which young informants attach to Afghanistan despite the temporal and geographical distance which separates them from the country.

In a similar vein distance emerges as an important element that affects home country relationships in various ways. Informants felt that alienation from the receiving society was tied to an implicitly shared myth about the country of origin. Rabia (33, barrister, Germany), for instance, feels that distance – in a temporal and spatial sense – has amplified her attachment to Afghanistan.

> *My connection with Afghanistan is getting stronger year after year. Well it does not diminish. I have always felt a deep connection with Afghanistan and it will always stay like this. There is something that draws me to it, some kind of tie. It's like the relation between mother and child, there is something. And that's how it is between me and Afghanistan: there is this tie. And it will never dissolve. Whenever I see something that relates to Afghanistan, or when I hear a song, it feels really good.*

Such examples suggest that life in the diaspora often entails a high degree of reflexivity, which leads people to recontextualise themselves at the intersection between their lives in Germany or Britain and Afghanistan as their country of origin.

6.4.3 'Home' as an expression of inter-generational change

Meanings of home change over people's life courses and time transforms people's interest in and perceived attachments to Afghanistan. While it is impossible to discern one clear trend among the young Afghans interviewed, I found their home country relationships to vary more widely than those of their parents. For many young informants the discovery of an interest in Afghanistan and Afghan or

Islamic culture coincides with their 'coming of age' and the beginning of a new phase in life after graduating from high school or when entering university. Such transitions tend to enhance a greater degree of independence in their day-to-day life and also affect their way of relating to Afghanistan. A number of young informants state that they felt an urge to establish their own relationship with Afghanistan. Often this involved a search for more information about the country and its history alongside the formation of new networks of contacts with people of Afghan origin, which are independent of previously existing family contacts (see Chapter 5.5.2).

Nahid (30, young professional, Germany), for instance, left Afghanistan as a small child and hardly retains any memories of life in the country. Coming of age in Germany, however, gradually led her to discover her own facets of an Afghan identity. She recalls,

> *When I was at school, I was never interested in my country, in Afghanistan and I did not do anything. I did not even seek information. Um, and when I started university, as a student you are more of a searcher and you start questioning everything, and wonder how things are. That's when I started focusing more on the region and on the country itself […]. Well personally I have never felt at home here and there was a void inside of me. […] I also realised that I feel a bit closer to my country and to my roots when I am together with other Afghans.*

Some of my young informants made efforts to integrate their newly emerging interest in the country of origin with their study programmes or career prospects. Examples include university assignments or final dissertations in which informants focus on Afghanistan-related topics. Others went to Afghanistan itself for internships or work experiences (see section 6.2). Zulhaja (46, civil engineer, Germany), whose family left Afghanistan for Germany after the Communist coup, has dedicated large parts of her professional life to working in Afghanistan as a civil engineer. This,

however, is the result of a lengthy process, which was set into motion at the time she started university.

> *In the beginning I was not particularly interested in Afghanistan. It actually bothered me to always hear about it. Also when the Afghans came to our house, when the entire house was full of Afghans who are whining and reciting poems about Afghanistan… I thought 'what's going on?' But once I went to university and started studying I began to develop my own interest in Afghanistan. […] And then, all of a sudden, there was a kind of thirst for adventure. It's not that it was love. It rather felt like an adventure, like a challenge. A country which looks like fallow ground. And I thought 'alright, something needs to be done'.*

For informants like Nahid and Zulhaja, Afghanistan acquired new meanings in terms of self-discovery and context of social engagement. Other young informants state that online media and social networks had strong impacts on newly enhanced attachments with the country. Online interaction with young Afghans from across the world is often cited as an important source of inspiration, which impacts on how they (re)define their relationships to the country of origin. Such examples suggest that Afghanistan as place of (ancestral) origin may acquire new meanings which manifest themselves in personal identities and social engagements. This said, however, it is also necessary to shed some light on instances of detachment and a perception of continuously growing distances from Afghanistan.

Ashraf (early 60s, logistics entrepreneur, Germany) holds that the older generation who left Afghanistan as adults cannot simply shake off certain traditions, values and behavioural patterns. Sometimes this makes it hard for them to adapt to new living environments in the diaspora and reinforces the presence Afghanistan has in their daily lives. Conversely, for those coming to Germany or the UK at a young age it has been easier to find their place in society. As a result,

> *the children show less interest in the history and politics of the country… Well the majority think 'I live here, I study here, my place is here, these are my new friends and my new country' and so on. That is children find it difficult to figure out how to act and how to*

> *manoeuvre between the old and the new culture, between old and new values. The old values from Afghanistan are Islam, religion, mores and traditions. And the new freedom, the new life so to say, I don't know, culturally it is about disco, friends, alcohol, and so on…*

Some of my young informants reiterate such observed trends stating that Afghanistan plays a rather marginal role in their daily lifes. Esmatullah (mid 20s), a young professional from southern England holds that *'my day doesn't start with any sort of a relationship or thinking about back in Afghanistan'*. Such narratives suggest that the meanings which informants attribute to Afghanistan can be an expression of both preservation and emancipation.

The above accounts highlight tensions between preservation and change which mark informants' relationships with Afghanistan and the meaning they ascribe to the country of (ancestral) origin. However, meanings of home are not given and stable. They vary according to how transactions unfold between persons in the diaspora and their countries of origin and settlement as generalised others. Adopting a relational perspective allows us to uncover how narratives relating to Afghanistan change over time and as a result of people's social and local embeddedness. Developing a clearer idea of the different meanings which Afghanistan has for my informants is important to situate their perceptions of and responses to the current situation in the country. It also sets part of the backdrop to my examination of transnational engagements, which I will present in Chapter 7.

6.5 Imagining change in Afghanistan: 'Building a foundation'

Having explored the origins and changeability of meanings which informants attach to Afghanistan, I now analyse their perceptions of the current situation in the country. I was curious to identify what informants are concerned about and how

they respond to their concerns in terms of articulating ideas of change and development. I uncovered a set of overarching themes, which emerge from informants' perceptions of current conditions in Afghanistan. In the following sections I will discuss each of these themes individually and highlight identified links. Change in Afghanistan is understood as a slow and gradual process, which has to account for the legacy of decade-long wars. The consequences of continuous deterioration cannot be transformed within short periods of time. Farzana (38, nurse, Germany) illustrates this when expressing her general attitude towards change in Afghanistan.

> *We have seen that things are complicated and that one has to take it slow. There is a need to educate people. I think that's very important, also in terms of providing the ground for further changes, for example women's rights. One cannot forcibly impose such things. If people have had certain mindsets for centuries you cannot change that from one day to another.*

Change, as most informants understand it, is multifaceted in the sense that it requires many parallel areas to be addressed at the same time as they are all interrelated. *'Building a foundation'* emerges as a powerful metaphor in this context. Several informants literally used this metaphor. This led me to use it as a category under which I coded narratives expressing very basic requirements of change in Afghanistan. Establishing foundations that enable people in Afghanistan to live normal lives is seen as an important outcome of change. This means that any form of change and development should yield outcomes that are tangible for *'the ordinary people of Afghanistan'*. The idea of a 'foundation' is brought up by informants of different backgrounds. It transgresses the boundaries that structure Afghan populations in the two contexts studied (see Chapter 5). In the following sections I will examine the elements that informants referred to most consistently as constitutive for a foundation of change in Afghanistan.

6.5.1 Governance and security

When asked about his ideas of change and development, Mukhtar (28, PhD student, UK) replied *'[I]t's a social change that we need. If we can get ourselves to be socially involved and to be socially changed, you know [open] to changes...'*. Social change, however, does imply a change in the modes of governance in the sense that freedom and opportunities need to be in place for people to get socially involved as Mukhtar envisages. There is a widely shared – though implicit – agreement that good governance must follow the logic of Afghan society and culture. Esmatullah (mid 20s, young professional, UK) underlines this when stating that *'democracy does not mean anything in that society'*. Similarly Nesarullah (30, freelance consultant, UK) holds *'…democracy that works in America does not necessarily work in Pakistan or Afghanistan as well. And that's very true. And even if it does, you have to leave it to the people. Educate them, civil organisations, things like that'*. Most informants hence reject the usefulness of trying to impose Western ideas and concepts on the Afghan society. *'[T]he word democracy'*, Jaweed (mid 30s, PhD student, UK) elaborates, *'in Afghanistan always means… is associated with Western culture. And [according to certain understandings it means to become Western], to become non-Muslim even, to become basically secular'*. This is not to imply that change cannot be democratic, but it should not be derived from Western textbooks.

Corruption and the lack of effective law and enforceable justice are often cited as problems. Informants link these problems to the persistent presence of old political forces – warlords from the civil war period – who firmly hold on to their positions and prevent new actors from advancing and acting upon their agendas. Involvement in drug trade and controlling large volumes of illicit revenues are assumed to financially solidify such power structures. Afghanistan's drug economy is referred to as a mafia-like apparatus, which exerts a high degree of illicit control

over formal political structures. In the eyes of informants this has led to the protracted detachment of the political leadership from 'ordinary people' as Naveed (late 60s, retired development worker and consultant, Germany) bitterly summarises: *'The constitution and individual laws which the Afghan parliament has passed only apply to people who are not in power. Meanwhile the power holders disregard the laws. They do whatever they want'.* Such observations lead Naveed to conclude that *'[b]eyond corruption and drug trade there is not much happening in the country. The people representing the government are known for their past. But they are still around nevertheless'.*

In addition, Zmaray (32, freelance analyst and consultant, Germany), who used to work as a civil servant in Afghanistan but resigned in frustration around 2010, draws attention to the lack of political accountability. While Naveed mainly criticises the structures and mechanisms of bad governance, Zmaray also alludes to the effects this has for the wider Afghan population. He uses the metaphor of a *'huge gap'* to describe the consequences of insufficient accountability of political power holders towards the majority of the Afghan people. Aspects of bad governance such as corruption and a lack of governmental accountability not only manifest themselves in the political sphere but also occur across other areas of society. Informants stress that jobs and positions are often allocated according to people's networks and social capital rather than their professional qualifications. At both the political and the societal level, corruption and nepotism are seen as effectively perpetuating existing inequalities. The absence of legal security and rule of law further exacerbate current power structures and patterns of political accountability.

Informants also emphasise the need to differentiate between problems rooted in Afghanistan itself and conditions forged by external interventions. The so-called 'reconstruction' of Afghanistan is subject to much criticism. Acknowledging that vast

amounts of money were poured into the country, informants find that few achievements were made in terms of tackling Afghanistan's most pressing problems. The latter in turn are seen to be deeply rooted in the country's history. Rather than attempting to achieve rapid and sweeping change in Afghanistan, informants believe there is a need for patience and learning from history. Therefore gradual but continuous steps are seen as a more sustainable approach to change. Besides criticising the International Coalition for its deficient attempt to enhance a profound and lasting transformation of Afghanistan, informants also refer to the interference of neighbouring countries as an additional impediment to improved governance. On the whole Afghanistan is framed as being caught in the firm grip of 'higher forces' and – internal as well as external – agent networks, which are far-removed from the influence and concerns of the 'ordinary population'.

Insecurity is another theme that emerges from informants' perceptions of the current situation in Afghanistan. Yet distinctions should be drawn between different contexts in which references to insecurity appear. *'Afghanistan is not safe'* is an expression many informants used when describing their perception of conditions in the country. However, 'not safe' means many different things. On the one hand informants refer to a lack of security in a very direct sense when talking about the persistently high levels of violence and armed combat in Afghanistan.

On the other hand informants refer to insecurity in terms of not knowing what the future holds for Afghanistan and the Afghan people, including themselves. One common assumption is that the lack of viable future prospects is one reason why certain groups within the Afghan population support hard-line factions which are seen as the driving force behind persistent levels of violence. Such perceptions mainly pertain to the most deprived areas of Afghanistan like the tribal regions in

the south and southeast of the country (Petersmann, 2014). Yama (34, freelance journalist, UK) argues that many people in these parts of Afghanistan *'support the Taliban. They don't have other options'*. He draws on his own experiences to substantiate his claim

> *Like myself, I came to this country, otherwise [I might have been one of them], because the government and others don't allow me to talk. There is no access for justice, you can't criticise inside Afghanistan. They are talking about democracy, freedom of speech… There is no freedom of speech. […] In Afghanistan there is joblessness, many people are unemployed, so this is the main reason people are fighting for the government. And a few warlords are in the power and they use the government, their positions against the people.*

Accounts like Yama's, who lived in Afghanistan throughout subsequent phases of war, illustrate how different aspects add up to increase the overall level of insecurity in the country. 'Insecurity' is thus used as a reference to both conditions on the ground and – more metaphorically – to the future of Afghanistan in a wider sense.

Consequently many informants consider good governance as mainly contingent on enforceable rule of law based on which (war) criminals can be brought to justice. Beyond rule of law, informants also emphasise the need for honesty and integrity on the part of Afghanistan's leadership and a sincere commitment to the Afghan people. Change in this sense means creating structures which support more equality and better opportunities for Afghan citizens regardless of their place in society. Quais (34, volunteer at refugee support organisation, UK), for example, points out that

> *people simply want a life in security and respect. That's the first thing that people want. Later on it is about school, it's about work, it's about gender rights, it's about reconstruction and economic development and stuff like that. That's the kind of later part of their life. But if the government cannot provide security to them, or the government is itself part of a problem, then of course people will not support a better administration as we see now.*

Ultimately, informants hold, working in the best interest of the Afghan people will benefit the fight against corruption and the overall security situation in the country.

'More inclusive politics' is put forward as another element of good governance, which is integral to change in a wider sense. In this context informants primarily refer to the necessity of overcoming ethnic divides and working towards *'national unity'*. *'National unity'*, as Zarghona (49, runs a mobile nursing service, Germany) underlines, requires the public commitment of political representatives and civil society actors. The notion of *'inclusive change'* thus stands for a process that incorporates various constitutive elements and brings together diverse groups from within the wider Afghan society.

Ideas like 'national unity' may not necessarily mean the same to different people. This not only underpins the complexity of the overall situation but also shows that informants sometimes associate the same headlines with different stories. However, there is a general tendency that visions for change in Afghanistan place good governance, justice and inclusiveness at centre stage. Yet aspects of 'good governance' are only one dimension of what informants perceive to be elements of desirable change.

6.5.3 Basic needs and education

In addition to concerns relating to governance and security, informants also express critical thoughts about the country's infrastructural and humanitarian conditions. Problems caused by significant shortcomings of Afghanistan's public infrastructure and educational system are given particular emphasis. Connections

are drawn between deficiencies in – for example – the area of education and the country's humanitarian situation, which is marked by endemic poverty and social injustice. One often cited example pertains to employment conditions in the educational sector. Naveed (late 60s, retired development worker and consultant, Germany) states,

> *Good teachers are not willing to work for little money. Anyone who speaks a bit of English works for some NGO, where they earn ten times as much. In Khost, all teachers who know English have left. They now work as drivers for the Americans and earn $500 a month instead of $60, which is the salary for teachers. […] So why should they continue working as teachers?*

Informants moreover refer to structural and regional inequalities in Afghanistan, particularly the drastic discrepancies between the northern and southern halves of the country. In the same vein, much scepticisim is expressed about new urban elites in Afghanistan. According to my informants, many returnees from the diaspora form part of elitist urban groups, which have emerged and grown throughout the last decade. Rabia (33, barrister, Germany) illuminates how cities may be blatant manifestations of the gaps separating the rich and the poor of Afghanistan and form a breeding ground for rising discontent, which ultimately

> *… leads to rising levels of aggression among the poor. They have nothing to eat and their children die of hunger while others have enough money to build skyscrapers at the same time. This imbalance aggravates people's discontent and their resentment vis-à-vis the government or foreigners, I mean the international community.*

Such problems are seen as further exacerbated by an ailing and unproductive economy, which reinforces Afghanistan's heavy reliance on imports from neighbouring countries and perpetuates notoriously high levels of unemployment. Apart from educational shortcomings and a lack of qualified professionals, infrastructural deficiencies further limit Afghanistan's prospects of economic productivity and growth. With regard to the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan

informants tend to conclude that the country needs *'everything'*. As we will see in Chapter 7, such perceptions constitute the basis for the forms and targets of envisaged change and practical engagements.

Education is one of the predominant themes informants bring up when thinking of potential alleviations to perceived shortcomings. The overarching idea is that of a better-educated, *'enlightened'* Afghan population, which has the means to be more independent, critical and proactive than it is perceived to be at present. It is important not to equate enlightenment the way my informants use it with the Enlightenment of 17th century Europe (Cassirer, 1951). In essence, however, there are parallels as enlightenment is referred to in an emancipatory sense as a process that ultimately gives voice to the Afghan people. It seems to imply an expectation that people not only become more aware of the factors determining their lives but are also able to act upon them. Education is seen to be essential in this context. When asked about his opinion regarding the preconditions for change in Afghanistan, Mirwais (32, IT professional, Germany) emphasises *'… once the Afghan society is educated they can no longer be cheated and misled. People will be able to better understand what is going on and take action. They will no longer be misled'*. This suggests that ideas of enlightenment are linked to a wish for greater independence and people's ability to question the order of things constituting their social and political environment.

Ideas of education encompass various dimensions such as literacy, numeracy, general knowledge and more practical day-to-day knowledge and skills. When asked about perceived requirements for change in Afghanistan, Farid (early 30s, university student, UK) straightforwardly replies *'educate people. Education, education and again education'*. This includes skills *'like making a restaurant or just painting a house'*. All these aspects contribute to *'[b]ringing economic opportunities to the youth especially. To give them*

ideas how to cooperate and not go to Pakistan, those tribal regions, to study there and get brainwashed'. Education in this sense is framed as a stepping stone for gradual change. In this context Farhang (mid 50s, director of community organisation, UK) points out, *'We must change people [and enable them to stand on their own feet]. Don't give people fish, we must teach them how to fish'*. Seen from this perspective, education also forms an integral part of a generational transition. Informants cite the example of parents who – although illiterate themselves – send their children to school in order to enhance their future opportunities. Related to pleas for education informants state that there is a need to *'professionalise'* Afghanistan. Professional skills and qualifications are considered important building blocks of a foundation that allows people to contribute to and participate in society. Some informants particularly emphasise the need to provide better education for girls to help improve their structurally disadvantaged position in society.

Narratives of change also encompass ideas of economic and infrastructural development. When referring to economic development, informants particularly emphasise the need to enhance productivity as a way for Afghanistan to become more self-sufficient. Despite large volumes of international aid, informants hold that Afghanistan has missed out on infrastructural development, which is an additional impediment to economic progress. Change hence necessarily involves the creation of employment opportunities, which, as some informants argue, would also lower the attractiveness of joining insurgent groups in search of income. Informants agree that infrastructural investments are part and parcel of economic development. Ahmad (63, civil servant), who has lived in Germany since the late 1960s, visits Afghanistan regularly and has become a proponent of infrastructural development.

He identifies direct links between an improved infrastructure and economic prospects.

> *We have no running water and no sewage system. […] And it won't take long until Afghanistan faces a major waste problem, because there is no proper waste management. There is a need to build up the country systematically. […] This would also help create thousands of jobs and people will be satisfied to have running water and proper sewage…*

Other informants draw direct links between economic and infrastructural development and aspects of governance. It is argued that economic development and domestic production of agricultural crops can help counteract the cultivation of drugs. At the same time, however, informants are well aware that cultivation of wheat and corn cannot yield the same revenues that farmers gain from growing poppies. This implies that economic development is additionally weakened by what informants refer to as the *'drug mafia'*. Economic and infrastructural development in this sense are framed as a direct outcome of improved governance structures. This exemplifies how the means and ends of change are intertwined.

6.5.4 Progress and achievements

The previous sections primarily highlight the problems informants identify with regard to current conditions in Afghanistan. However, it is important to note that perceptions of Afghanistan are multifaceted and it would be inadequate to conclude that informants frame the situation in their country of origin in bleak terms alone. Informants acknowledge that – alongside all prevailing problems – the post-Taliban period and so-called reconstruction of Afghanistan have yielded some positive developments. Some invoke the metaphor of 'awakening' to describe the gradual rise of a new generation, which may be able to support or spearhead processes of transformation in Afghanistan.

Besides emphasising the crucial role of Afghanistan's young generation, informants also identify much potential in the increasing availability of communication technologies to diverse groups within the Afghan population, including people from remote areas. During a recent visit to Afghanistan, Abdul-Samad (60s, engineer and political activist, UK) gained first-hand impressions of the changes information technology has brought to his remote area of origin.

> *I could see the changes over there. Because Badakhshan is a very remote area and now there are satellites over there in each village. People are using generators for satellites, they have mobiles and especially these foreign NGOs which are working there, they have internet. So they have brought them all this stuff.*

His account is echoed by others who acknowledge the potential implications of a better connectivity within Afghanistan as well as between Afghanistan and the outside world.

Ferdaws (mid 30s, PhD student, UK) puts recent developments into a broader perspective, stating that *'history will go on and now that the globalisation has developed and technology has developed, you cannot get isolated, you have no way. If you go to Afghanistan today and compare it with Afghanistan like ten years ago, it is totally different'.* In particular he appreciates the observed impacts of such changes on his own and other people's lives. *'You will see the excitement of people learning the technology, you will see the young generation… Although I am away from Afghanistan, I am very tied and very close, because technology has developed and been able to link me up. Not only me, everybody!'.* Ferdaws is particularly hopeful that better connectivity can enhance access to a wide range of information and thus improve people's opportunities to educate themselves. Perceptions of gradual yet progressive change constitute an important facet of the image informants have of their origin country. Shared by informants from various backgrounds, acknowledgements of progress suggest that people are reluctant to

deny progress in Afghanistan altogether. Cautious expressions of optimism are also significant in terms of encouraging practical engagements.

6.6 Ideas of change and the Afghan diaspora

Narratives and identified preconditions of change frequently incorporate references to contributions from the Afghan diaspora. Informants see great potential in the sets of skills and knowledge that are concentrated in the diaspora, which can be brought to good use in the country of origin. Again the idea of 'enlightenment' is central in this context. Nasreen (early 40s), a mature student and community activist living in Greater London, illustrates this.

> *I would love to go back and work at Kabul University and teach what I have learned here, support students not just to learn business but to learn the ethical and moral side of doing business in their country as well. I hear many stories about corruption and how people try to get away with things. I would love to be able to teach people, to help them understand what it is like to put your heart and mind not just into your workplace, but into your country, so that it develops and stands on its feet.*

The idea of 'giving back' features centrally in Nasreen's account. It reflects how she consciously positions herself amidst the opportunities and assets of life in the UK and the needs she identifies in relation to current conditions in Afghanistan.

Informants emphasise that Afghans in the diaspora have a sensitive understanding of the Afghan society and the needs of Afghan people after several decades of war. This, informants note, places Afghans in the diaspora in the position of a mediator between, for example, the reconstruction efforts of the international community and the wider population 'on the ground' in Afghanistan. Farid (early 30s, university student, UK) holds that *'the communities, Afghan community especially, should be a bridge between the European communities and Afghan inside communities. This is their*

responsibility. […] I think as an Afghan […] they should be a bridge'. Yet, rather than endorsing such potential, informants frame the Afghan diaspora as a missed opportunity in the context of change and development in Afghanistan.

Whether or not people are able to act upon such perceived responsibilities also depends on structures and decision-makers in their receiving society and the functioning of the 'international development machine' (Sinatti & Horst, 2014). In principle, however, there is a belief that precisely because of their specific embeddedness, Afghan diaspora communities in the West are in a good position to contribute to change in their country of origin (Jazayery, 2002). While many informants firmly believe that Afghans in the diaspora may be in a good position to support the home country, Afsana (mid 20s, university student, UK) elaborates on what she perceives to be the implications of the position she finds herself in:

> *I think the Afghans who work here, they should consider what Afghans back home expect from them. Because, at the end of the day, we live here but we are Afghans. We got other Afghans who expect things from us and then we have to carry our heritage, our culture beyond this point. Because we can't just come here to London and forget that millions of Afghans that live in Afghanistan are the people that are trying to carry the culture and they are still living in those restrictions.*

She touches upon a range of aspects I examined in the beginning of this chapter. Afsana's account illustrates how people's awareness of conditions in Afghanistan, their attachment to the country as well as elements of life in Western societies inform their self-perception as potential agents of change in Afghanistan.

It is worth noting that not all informants share such positive views of the diaspora as a capable agent of change. In fact, some criticised returnees from the diaspora for prioritising own career advancements over sincere commitments to Afghanistan. Further criticism derives from observed 'ignorance of local needs' and conspicuous consumption among people returning to Afghanistan after extended

periods of life in the diaspora. At the same time adherents of more optimistic assessments of collective diasporic engagement rarely specify concrete actors, but appear to see themselves as part of an imagined community of actors with certain characteristics who can meaningfully contribute to change in Afghanistan. Such ideas of collective potential mark a stark contrast to the fractured set-up of Afghan populations which I described in the previous chapter. Paradoxically some informants perceive the Afghan diaspora as fractured while emphasising its potentially constructive role in Afghanistan at the same time.

Summary

In this chapter I focused on different ways that informants maintain relationships with Afghanistan. I drew a distinction between relationships in terms of personal contacts and return visits and relationships in terms of meanings attributed to the origin country. Afghanistan forms part of informants' lives in various ways. It is a place with which they maintain personal and sometimes professional connections but it is also a part of people's social consciousness, their identity and sense of belonging. Afghanistan also constitutes a subject of concern towards which informants direct some of their capacity for engagement.

Memories of and attachments to Afghanistan are relational as they reflect informants' lives in the country, especially the social positions and livelihoods they lost as a result of conflict and displacement. For representatives of early migrant and refugee generations, memories of Afghanistan retain a strong sense of nostalgia. Conversely, younger informants, who have spent most of their lives outside Afghanistan, see the country more from an explorer's perspective. Some

substantiate their vaguely defined ties through return visits while for others Afghanistan remains a distant – perhaps mythical – place of origin. Perceived attachment to the country of origin also reflects informants' social embeddedness and their livelihoods in the receiving country. Cutting across different generations, I discovered a sense of alienation from the receiving society which shapes and reinforces the meaning informants ascribe to Afghanistan. As a result there is a tendency for people to differentiate between a 'real' or 'actual' home in Afghanistan and their place of residence in the diaspora. To some extent such perceptions of self and environment may explain informants' concern with the current situation in Afghanistan and their desire for change.

Against this backdrop I explored informants' understandings of change and development. With regard to the underlying requirements and preconditions of change, informants emphasise the need for a foundation upon which future prospects for Afghanistan can be built. The idea of a foundation is a powerful metaphor, which illustrates the complexity of the current state of the country as well as the variety and entanglements of the multiple building blocks of change. A shared vision for the future of Afghanistan is seen as an essential element in this context. Informants often refer to change in a way that applies to Afghanistan as a whole. Ideas of change in this sense represent an imagined scenario, an ideal version of Afghanistan as a place and society.

While references to change reflect informants' affectionate attachment to Afghanistan, it also suggests that they are attached to an imagined place. This is likely to be reinforced by the temporal and geographical distance which separates informants from the situation on the ground in their country of origin. Ideas of change are thus contingent on people's relational embeddedness and positioning.

This becomes clear when focusing on ideas of change and development and the way informants position themselves in their relational context, most notably between their country of origin and the receiving society. The strong emphasis on patience, which is implicit to the idea of using education for progress, differs starkly from the proactive narratives of diaspora involvement that dominate the literature (Sinatti & Horst, 2014; Raghuram, 2009).

The findings presented in this chapter substantiate the relational nature of both home country ties and ideas of change and development in Afghanistan. Understanding informants' sense of attachment to Afghanistan requires us to shed light on how they are embedded in personal life trajectories, social networks and places of origin, and reception. The elements at the heart of people's home country attachment in turn set the backdrop for their ideas and identified preconditions of change and development.

It is noteworthy that ideas and identified requirements for change in Afghanistan feature strong similarities. This leads me to argue that narratives of change and identified preconditions of change implicitly unify members of various groups within the Afghan diaspora. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that the segregation and particularities which mark Afghan diaspora populations in Britain and Germany do not have a strong bearing on informants' relationships to the origin country. On the contrary, attachments to Afghanistan and a profound concern about the country's current situation and future developments are widely shared among informants. However, although attachments to Afghanistan and ideas of desirable development and change are cross-cutting, they are enacted in many different ways. In fact, as I will show in the next chapter, forms and targets of transnational engagement do not only reflect home country attachments and ideas

of change but are also shaped by the relational set-up of Afghan populations in both countries.

CHAPTER 7

Who is acting for what change? Spheres of engagement in Afghanistan

Introduction

This chapter examines informants' transnational engagements in Afghanistan. I explore different forms of action through which informants seek to ameliorate conditions of conflict and deprivation in their country of origin. The chapter builds on informants' relationships with Afghanistan in terms of personal contacts, memories and desires for the future of the country, which were presented in Chapter 6. However, I now shift the focus to practical engagements that involve concrete flows, including remittances, material goods of different kinds, knowledge and ideas. While the substance of the observed flows varies, they are all based on people's aims to achieve some form of positive (from their perspective) impact or change in Afghanistan.

Previous research has emphasised the ambiguous aims and effects of transnational engagements undertaken by conflict-induced diasporas. It is argued that often transnational intervention of actors located in the diaspora amplifies rather than ameliorates conditions of homeland conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Kapur, 2007). In the case of Afghanistan, diasporic groups played an important role on the eve of the civil war (Centlivres, 2010; Schetter, 2004). Similarly, it is widely argued that the fundamentalist Taliban regime has its roots in Pakistani refugee camps. The engagements of my informants, however, do not corroborate accounts of 'the Janus face of diasporas' (Kapur, 2007). They are all dedicated to the

improvement of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan in a wider sense, as I will specify throughout this chapter. While I claim that such forms and targets of engagement represent a general trend among the wider Afghan diaspora, I am aware that the overall landscape of transnational engagements may be more complex and also feature adverse activities and impacts (see Hanifi, 2006).

In a recent paper Van Hear (2013) draws attention to the controversial role of diasporas in homeland conflict and post-conflict settings. He suggests that one way to analytically refine the debate is to disaggregate diaspora engagement and the public and private spaces in which it may occur. For this purpose Van Hear identifies three *spheres of engagement*, which feature different combinations of the private and public. First, the *sphere of the household and the extended family* is restricted to members of the nuclear and extended family and is therefore largely private and personal. Second, the *'known community' sphere* is more public as it delineates groups of people that know each other or know of each other. Most engagement in the 'known community' sphere is directed towards spaces where one has a personal connection. However, it addresses wider groups than households and extended families. The known community sphere is the realm of associational life, including community-based and civil society organisations. Last, there is the largely public *sphere of the 'imagined community'*, which refers to the nation with which one has an affinity without necessarily knowing its members personally (Anderson, 1983). The imagined community may include ethnic, national and other allegiances.

Conceptually, spheres of engagement delineate the social and local contexts towards which different forms of action are directed. However, I discovered that actual engagements in the home country benefit from further differentiation. We also need to consider the social, local and institutional contexts in which people

carry out their activities (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Alexander, 1988). In Chapter 2 I argued that actors do not exist outside of relational complexes which may be more or less constricting or enabling. Hence people's experiences as actors are inextricably intertwined with the relevant range of social forces that configure together to shape livelihoods and social action (Somers, 1994). For Afghan diaspora populations this matrix of social forces largely consists of public institutions such as state structures, nationality or the *de facto* legal system (Crawford & Ostrom, 1995). It also includes social institutions such as ethnicity, religion and membership in other social networks at the destination and beyond, as well as prevailing connections to the origin country. Such elements constitute the relational settings in which actors are enmeshed and which shape identity formation and social engagements (see Somers, 1994, pp. 625–626). Relational settings determine the social context in which I situate observed forms of engagement. They revolve around relationships between persons (for example actors in the diaspora and Afghanistan), institutions (for example families or civic organisations), public narratives (for example the desire to promote change in Afghanistan) and social practices (concrete activities like school building or remittance sending). Examining how forms of action are situated in relational settings helps understand why diasporic groups direct their activities towards specific spheres of engagement in Afghanistan.

A shared element that underlies engagements in all three spheres consists of a feeling of attachment to Afghanistan that is linked to a sense of obligation and responsibility for the well-being of Afghans who continue to live under dire conditions. Statements such as *'I have always felt obliged to contribute something towards where I come from'* were expressed in almost every interview (see Chapter 6). Another commonality that I observed across all three spheres of engagement is that people

who engage in transnational action rarely do so as individuals on their own. In most cases informants form part of a group of actors who are linked by clearly defined ties. How and to what extent the envisaged improvements of conditions in Afghanistan reflect ideas of development will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

For the purpose of clarity I should specify that I am not examining transnational practices themselves but focus on informants' narrative representations of practices and their underlying rationale. Through the narratives of engagement, people situate themselves and their respective practices in a given social context. At this stage I give a purely descriptive overview of *what* people say they do. This will be followed up by an explanatory account in Chapter 8, in which I situate the observed forms of engagement in the specific times and places in which people live (Morawska, 2009, 2011; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). This allows me to uncover how Afghans in Britain and Germany are able to mobilise particular resources amidst the specificities of their relational embeddedness. In addition I include a number of case studies featuring a selected set of actors which exemplify forms and structures of transnational engagements in each of the three identified spheres.

7.1 Engagements in the (extended) family sphere

This first of the three identified spheres of engagement includes action geared towards informants' families in Afghanistan. Individual and family-level support is very common among Afghans in both Germany and the UK. So far financial remittances Afghans in the diaspora transfer to their kin in Afghanistan, Iran or

Pakistan have remained largely exempt from the vast amount of research conducted on this subject (see for example Orozco, 2013). There are a few exceptions, each of which emphasises that the overall volume of remittances transferred to Afghanistan is subject to rough estimates (Oeppen, 2010; Hanifi, 2006; Jazayery, 2002). The focus of these studies is on remittance practices, while the authors agree that overall volumes of financial transfers remain subject to rough estimates. My findings echo earlier research insofar as they suggest that financial support of family members in Afghanistan or the adjacent countries is widespread among informants in Germany and the UK alike. In fact, some informants claim that Afghans in the diaspora help their families *'without exception'*. Most transnational support is oriented towards members of the (extended) family (see Chapter 5), but some informants also said they were supporting parents or siblings who live in Afghanistan. This is more prevalent in the UK than in Germany because the UK received a greater number of Afghans who migrated on their own. In the following I will not only describe the forms of action taken in support of family members in Afghanistan but also highlight some of the strategies informants apply in the course of their engagement.

Remittances that help family members cope in everyday life are the most frequently mentioned form of support. Often remittances are framed as an essential lifeline that enables relatives in Afghanistan to meet their basic needs. This includes buying food, getting medical treatment if needed, or enabling children to attend school or university. According to my informants, remitting money to the family has been common practice throughout different phases of conflict in Afghanistan. Remittances are not only directed to Afghanistan itself but also sent to family living

in Pakistan or Iran[39]. In both countries the living conditions and socio-economic prospects of Afghan refugees tend be dire compared to those of the majority society (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2012; Turton & Marsden, 2002). Informants differentiate between regular flows of support and more spontaneous aid provisions and urgent purposes such as support towards travel expenses so family members can leave Afghanistan in times of crisis.

The support of family members in Afghanistan and the adjacent countries may involve significant logistical challenges. Nowadays it is possible to make payments through ordinary bank transfers or other transfer agencies. In the past, however, people relied on personal couriers. An informant described how she used to carry substantial amounts of money whenever travelling to Afghanistan. She served as a courier for friends and relatives who sought to support their families in Afghanistan. Most informants referred to couriers as relatives or friends and none explicitly said they were using the *Hawala* system[40], which has elsewhere been described as central to money transfers in the Afghan context (Oeppen, 2010; Hanifi, 2006; Monsutti, 2005). Over the last decade, visits to Afghanistan have become more common practice (see Chapter 6). This also has the effect that people rely less on couriers or money transfer agencies

Providing support for kin in Afghanistan is common among diasporans from different income brackets. An informant stated that *if* people earn some money, they

[39] Most informants who help family members outside Afghanistan talked about Pakistan, while Iran was hardly ever mentioned. At this stage it is unclear if this reflects a general tendency or if my data are biased. A closer look at differences between families who support relatives in Iran or Pakistan may reveal interesting insights into the general nature of transnational ties in the Afghan context. This, however, would require further in-depth analysis of my data and focused follow-up interviews with additional informants.

[40] The notion of *Hawala* stands for an informal value transfer system. It is based on the performance and honour of a large network of money brokers who are primarily located in the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. *Hawala* operates outside of, or parallel to, traditional banking, financial channels and remittance systems.

always send something to Afghanistan. For some this involves significant sacrifices in terms of long working hours and limited savings. Family obligations may hence be far-reaching and significantly affect the livelihoods and financial situation of Afghans in the diaspora. Nabeela (late 50s, full-time director of aid organisation, Germany) illustrates this when stating that

> *there are people who work hard at McDonald's, really hard. And they send all the money to their family. Well, this sense of responsibility for the family is very strong among Afghans, it still is. Thank God, I always appreciate this. And sometimes – I mean now we have bank transfers – some years ago I had to carry 10,000, 15,000 Deutschmarks for all the families who live here and supported their relatives over there.*

Other informants in both countries corroborated Nabeela's observation by giving similar accounts of the efforts Afghans in the wider diaspora make to support family members 'back home'.

With a few exceptions my informants had come to Germany and Britain as refugees but are now relatively well situated[41]. In the interviews, however, they mentioned other Afghans who had left Afghanistan more recently and for primarily economic reasons, and who now work very hard in order to send a share of their earnings to family members 'back home'. Sustaining their family was the rationale behind their decision to leave Afghanistan and migrate to Europe. Instances of people supporting members of their nuclear family thus seem to be currently increasing. This is more prevalent in the UK which – compared to Germany – has been a more popular destination for Afghans who came during the last decade and for mainly economic or educational purposes (Chapter 3). Akhtar (early 30s,

[41] This statement is based on the fact that most of my informants who are of working age have jobs that allow them to secure a regular income for their families. Living arrangements – as far as I can tell from the houses I visited – are relatively spacious and well-furnished. On average my German informants seem slightly better off. This, however, may also reflect the high living costs in the Greater London area, which is home to the majority of my informants in the UK.

engineer, UK), who lived in Greater London at the time of the interview, has been observing the arrival and settlement trajectories of this group from a close distance:

> *When they came, especially early like in 2000, 2001, those times, the majority of them were young [and they were responsible for their families]. […] When they came to Europe there was an opportunity for example to work, they start working and they didn't have any, any directions. So if someone starts working as a minicab driver, he would just go there seven days a week because he didn't have any other things to do. And if someone went [to work in a pizza shop or something like that, it will be the same], he will work seven days a week, maybe thirteen, fourteen hours a day. Number one because they didn't have any specific goals. They just came for work, they just worked. And then they feed themselves and their families and earn their own pensions.*

Conversely, most of my informants in Germany referred to members of their extended and not their nuclear families as recipients of transnational support.

Although necessary, many informants state that helping their family only leads to small-scale temporary improvements and is not particularly sustainable or a way to ameliorate general shortcomings in Afghanistan. Restricted scales of impact are framed differently. Some informants adopt an optimistic attitude, stating that even small contributions bring about changes. Others appear more pessimistic when framing their supportive action as no more than *'a drop in the ocean'*. However, not all informants would frame family-oriented engagement as a contribution to change in Afghanistan. In fact, in some interviews a clear distinction was drawn between engagements oriented towards Afghanistan in a wider sense and the transnational support of family members. This suggests that the family constitutes a self-contained unit that is somewhat disconnected from the wider Afghan population or Afghanistan as an imagined nation or territorial entity. When stating that Afghans support their families *'without exception'* informants are unlikely to speak for the entire diaspora. The same goes for claims that people work hard in order to earn money 'all' of which is sent to Afghanistan. Such statements entail two messages: one

describing what people do and another one emphasising the importance of Afghan families as networks of support. To this end my informants echo earlier accounts stating that a sense of obligation for one's family is deeply engrained in Afghan culture (Muller, 2010).

Engagements to support family members in Afghanistan may be transnational in a dual sense. At times family members living in different countries join hands to help their kin. Modern means of communication are used to coordinate such joint efforts. Connections between those giving and those receiving support may not necessarily be close. However, instances of permanent or acute need among family members in Afghanistan may forge joint transnational practices through which otherwise dormant family contacts are activated. Similar to the findings presented in Chapter 5, such diasporic structures are selective and purpose-oriented. In this case, for example, the shared reference point and anchor of solidarity consists of family ties rather than a shared commitment to Afghanistan in a wider sense, as Rabia's (33, barrister, Germany) experience exemplifies.

> *Well, my husband's family lives in Pakistan and we often talk to his parents on Skype. […] But we do not maintain contacts more actively now than we did in the past. In my case it is not like that. My older siblings [who live in other countries] ask me, for example, if I want to donate money. Well, they sometimes send money when someone is ill and needs surgery. In that case I say 'okay, I'll take part and contribute something as well'. That's how it is. And otherwise I just call briefly to hear how they are. I don't have more thoroughgoing exchange.*

Informants rarely refer to the support of family members as a form of action they would be taking as individuals. Usually they would state that 'we', meaning family members in the diaspora, are doing something to support their relatives in Afghanistan. Overall my data suggest that family support is framed as a collective obligation among Afghans. This underlines the important role of families in determining patterns of solidarity in the Afghan context. As a form of transnational

activity, engagements in the household and extended family sphere are common among informants from all ethnic groups and political or socio-economic backgrounds. While common practice, they cannot be conceived as joint action. This is because the settings in which particular activities are carried out are delineated clearly and restricted to those considered part of the respective household or family unit. While safeguarding their respective household and family boundaries, informants situate their activities in a wider context marked by what they see as specific for 'Afghan culture'.

7.2 Engagements in the known community sphere

According to Van Hear (2015) the known community delineates the realm of associational life[42]. Most concrete actions are planned and carried out in contexts of publicly registered organisations or associations. Usually those involved in known community engagements have a personal connection to the local community, region or context towards which their activities are directed.

Before examining types of activities undertaken in the known community sphere, I will provide some more details about the organisations I studied at both field sites. All of the organisations surveyed for this work are formally registered and organised according to the statutory principles that apply to official civic actors in Britain and Germany respectively. As a result the organisations feature clear governance structures and distribution of responsibilities. In terms of size, the organisations vary widely. Some register fewer than 50 members while others count

[42] According to Van Hear, religious groups may provide a context for known community engagements too. This, however, did not apply to the Afghan organisations I studied in both field sites. Although most individual members are practising Muslims, the organisations did not have the shape of religious bodies.

several hundreds. However, it is important to distinguish between active and supporting members. Usually the group of persons who are actively involved is rather small but there can be substantial numbers of supporting members who provide passive yet vital financial support. Most of the organisations featured have both male and female members but I also studied a few women-only initiatives.

The range of activities covered by Afghan organisations in both countries is broad and relates to change and development in different ways. Most of the activities carried out are small in scale and aim to achieve focused impact in specific localities in Afghanistan. Many organisations cover more than one area of activities. A shared feature of all engagements in the known community sphere lies in their dedication to public or collective purposes that exceed more narrowly defined social contexts such as families. The activities analysed strive to yield long-term improvements at local levels, which go beyond immediate economic and material effects. In some cases private donations are the only available source of funding. Other organisations have been able to secure funding from government and – to a lesser extent – corporate sources. Engagements in the known community sphere are often carried out in cooperation with local partners in Afghanistan. In most cases these are members of local communities who provide situated knowledge and technical support. Connections to local partners often date back to informants' lives in Afghanistan and have been maintained over time.

Each of the organisations studied has an overarching mission statement but the binding ties between individual members often go beyond a shared aim for action. Such connections can, for example, be rooted in family ties, places of origin or people's contacts from school, university or work in Afghanistan. Past political engagements in Afghanistan may be another source of lasting contacts. In addition,

people can easily infer each other's backgrounds by their family names, or place of origin in Afghanistan. For someone considering whether or not to join an already existing group, it is hence relatively easy to discern if this group is based on pre-defined familiarities. In principle most organisations are open for Afghans from various backgrounds and some also encourage native Britons or Germans or members of other minority groups to join. The openness many organisations adopt towards members from the receiving society may appear contradictory considering the often more narrowly defined ties between Afghan members. It seems that people of Afghan origin choose the social context of transnational engagements according to different criteria compared to German members of Afghan organisations. In fact, often pre-existing groups of Afghans initiate certain forms of engagement which are subsequently joined by members of the wider public who are eager to contribute to development-oriented projects in Afghanistan.

Most practical engagements in the known community sphere are carried out by first generation migrants. Younger informants seem to take part in known community engagements to a lesser extent, perhaps because they often lack social ties that would link them to the localities where activities are carried out.

In the following sections I will examine three areas of activity that emerged as particularly popular among the organisations studied: education, women's affairs and humanitarian engagement.

7.2.1 Education

In the previous chapter I highlighted the importance informants attribute to education as a stepping stone to change and development in Afghanistan. It seems a

logical consequence that much of informants' transnational engagement is aimed at improving educational opportunities in Afghanistan. Projects dedicated to promoting education are mainly based on the idea of strengthening a new generation that will create the foundation of a future Afghanistan. After decades of war and chaos followed by harsh restrictions during the Taliban regime, Afghanistan's education system was ruined. Yet the Afghan society has a low average age (The CIA World Factbook, 2014) and many informants consider the improvement of educational opportunities as a straightforward path to future development and a better functioning, more democratic Afghan society (see Chapter 6). However, informants do not only frame their efforts to promote education in teleological terms. They also assign intrinsic values to education and the idea of an educated society.

I uncovered a plethora of transnational activities that aim to promote education in Afghanistan. Projects dedicated to establishing new schools or improving already existing schools are particularly popular. School building projects are run in different parts and provinces of Afghanistan and most organisations initiating such projects focus on one specific region. However, some organisations support or run several schools, which may be located in different provinces. Often there is a connection between the initiator(s) of a project and the region of engagement. Informants emphasise that maintaining connections with the local population constitutes a vital element of their initiatives. Efforts to promote education – and girls' education in particular – may spark contention and controversy among communities at the recipient end. During the Taliban time, education was restricted to religious subjects and girls were banned from schools altogether (Rostami-Povey, 2007b). Although the overall situation has changed

markedly in the aftermath of 2001, informants stated that there are remaining concerns within communities that schools may spark a fundamentalist backlash. It is therefore important to establish trust-based relations with community representatives and the local population. Trusted networks forge the emergence of reliable structures in terms of schemas and resources (Sewell, 1992), which empower engagements directed to certain localities in Afghanistan. Some of the initiatives studied actively engage members of local communities in the implementation of their projects. This helps to enhance the acceptance and appreciation of school projects.

The organisation featured in Case Study 7.1 illustrates the identified characteristics of engagement in the known community sphere. It was initiated by a group of people of Afghan and German origin who share a desire to enhance the educational prospects of people living in the Andkhoy region in northwestern Afghanistan. This particular region was chosen because of the local contacts of those who first launched the organisation.

Case Study 7.1 Union of Assistance for Schools in Afghanistan – 'Afghanistan Schools'

Established in the early 1980s, the organisation Afghanistan Schools (AS) has made continuous efforts to provide educational opportunities for children in Afghanistan. Early activities were carried out in refugee camps in Pakistan and since 1988 the organisation has been active in Afghanistan. The regional focus is on the arid Faryab province in the northwest of the country, close to the Turkmen border region where the Soviet invasion, the subsequent years of civil war and the Taliban regime left most provincial schools destroyed. For many years children, especially girls, were deprived of any educational opportunities.

In recent years AS was able to establish 39 new schools and expand or renovate a number of existing school buildings. Besides the general curriculum for children, these schools also offer some adult classes, covering subjects like English language, IT and sewing. The organisation also maintains a training centre in Andkhoy which runs preparatory courses for students who aim to take the university entrance exam. To help cope with the persistent water scarcity, several schoolyards have been equipped with water reservoirs.

AS is run jointly by volunteers based in Germany and permanent staff based in Afghanistan. The organisation was founded in Germany and it cooperated with local colleagues in Afghanistan from the start. All projects are initiated and administered by communities in Afghanistan based on local needs assessments. However, the funding required for the implementation of projects stems from German sources such as the Ministry for Development Cooperation, the Foreign Office, the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation) and Miserior (Catholic development agency). Private donations collected in Germany provide important complementary funding. (Afghan-) German members of the organisation hold regular fundraising activities including public lectures and exhibitions. They also initiate partnerships between German schools and the schools supported in Afghanistan. Together with their partners in Afghanistan, members of AS identify affordable ways to implement proposed projects. For this purpose, and to assess the overall progress of the work, (Afghan-)German members of the organisation regularly travel to Afghanistan.

The organisation recently expanded its activities to the area of Masar-e-Sharif in the north of Afghanistan.

When asked how important German members of AS consider the cooperation with Afghan partners, my informant states:

> *Very important. We have an office in Kabul and five members of staff work there on*
>
> *a permanent basis […]. They coordinate everything and maintain contacts with the local authorities and take care of the accounting. And then we also have a small office in Masar-e-Sharif. […] Another office is located in Andkhoy. It is staffed with three people who mainly coordinate the training centre and new building projects. We have known all these people since 1988 and we can trust them. […] That's the most important thing for us, we could not work without them. If we weren't able to count on their reliability, and on their critical advice…*

AS provides an illustrative example of the work and set-up of known community organisations. The organisation's success depends on its members and initiators in Germany, its staff and supporters in Afghanistan as well as its German funding bodies to equal extents. They all form indispensable parts of the effort to re-establish and expand the core elements of an educational infrastructure that was damaged during decades of war and repression.

While elementary education is the main focus of people's transnational engagement, there are other initiatives that are geared toward higher education. Khaled (50s), a lecturer at a technical university in Germany, convenes a masters programme which has been designed particularly for visiting students from

Afghanistan. Every year a selected group of Afghan graduate students receive a scholarship for the two-year IT studies programme. The convenor cooperates with eight universities in Afghanistan. Students participating in the programme are required to return to their sending universities in Afghanistan for at least two years after graduating. The aim of the project is to create a coherent curriculum for IT training in Afghanistan and to train scholars to run it. Within the next decade Khaled aims to expand the pool of experts and to establish a PhD programme that is primarily practice-oriented. Also he works to disseminate knowledge by carrying out conferences at different universities. To him it is important to *'educate, educate, educate'*. Knowledge, he believes, is what Afghanistan needs most. The German Academic Exchange Service funds the project alongside smaller initiatives in higher education. One example of a smaller initiative is that of another informant, to translate German medical textbooks into Dari and Pashto. These textbooks were distributed among staff and students of several Afghan universities. German funding and networks of academic contacts in Afghanistan are indispensible to such projects. Networks of collaborative contacts in the countries of origin and reception constitute a known community in an extended sense, which functions as supporter and recipient of the actions taken at the same time. Such examples suggest that known communities, based on inter-personal ties, familiarity and shared commitment, are not necessarily linked to specific localities. Rather they derive from multi-local collaborative networks of people knowing (of) each other.

Known community engagements that are dedicated to promoting education are more widespread in Germany than in the UK. Most organisations that run school projects in Afghanistan were initiated by Afghans who left their country at an early stage of the wars. At that time Germany was the most popular European

destination for Afghan refugees. People who had already been connected in Afghanistan maintained ties in exile and founded organisations to access German funding. In the UK I did not encounter any Afghan organisations running known community engagements at scales comparable to the German cases described. However, some informants regularly make small contributions in support of better education in Afghanistan. This includes material donations consisting of books, stationery and other learning materials. Usually the people involved in such initiatives have personal connections to the respective beneficiaries. Rather than establishing long-term structures for engagement in Afghanistan, UK-based organisations seem to carry out more ad-hoc initiatives like seasonal calls for donations in connection with Islamic holidays (see section 7.2.3 on humanitarian engagement).

7.2.2 Women's affairs

In both Germany and the UK women's empowerment marks another prominent domain to which Afghan organisations dedicate their work. While in some parts of Afghan society the role of women has traditionally been restricted, the fundamentalist Taliban regime brought dramatic changes at a general level. Women were deprived of their personal freedom in many ways. In rural areas women were able to retain their contributions to the local economy. However, in the cities women had no access to work or education whatsoever and perceived improper conduct was subject to brutal punishment (Centlivres-Demont, 2010; Rostami-Povey, 2007b). The aftermath of 2001 opened opportunities for multiple forms of diaspora engagement.

Strengthening the role and position of women and advocating women's rights in Afghanistan constitute the overarching objectives of the work done by the organisations I encountered. Fundraising and awareness-raising campaigns in Britain, Germany and online are often carried out as complementary activities. Young women mark a prominent focus of activities and many projects are dedicated to promoting girls' education.

Female informants who left Afghanistan at an early stage of war and conflict find it unsettling to compare their memories of life in Afghanistan with the restrictions women experienced at later stages, particularly during the time of the Taliban. Contrasting their personal freedom with the (perceived) situation of women in Afghanistan sparks a desire to take action aimed at creating or restoring conditions of gender equality. Parwana (early 50s, social worker), who has been living in Germany since 1991, recalls the conditions under which she grew up, studied and began to work in Afghanistan. Given her own experiences she finds it hard to silently accept what she perceives to be the destiny of many women in Afghanistan.

> *I grew up in Kabul, yes. And I had the chance to get to know a lot. We went travelling abroad too. I have seen many other women and gained further impressions from reading books. And as a human being I have a heart too, which makes me say 'no, it does not work like that: I have a good life, I can go to school without wearing a burqa, without a head scarf. Others accept me, I can exercise a profession and discuss politics and my rights with men. Why don't other women have such opportunities too?' And one simply cannot say 'I am doing well and don't care what happens to others'.*

Parwana and many other informants greatly appreciate their lives in Britain and Germany for the freedom it gives them to initiate activities which might be more difficult to launch in Afghanistan itself. Informants' social networks in Germany and the UK are a crucial source of material and non-material support. At

the same time existing contacts in Afghanistan determine the concrete sphere of engagement as well as specific locations at which projects are carried out.

Similar to the example given in Case Study 7.1, the work of Afghan women's organisations is often supported by local partners and/or permanent members of staff in Afghanistan. In many parts of Afghanistan, especially in areas under insurgent control, women's empowerment remains subject to contention and may be forcefully opposed (Amnesty International, 2011). Organisations 'working on the ground' thus need to build on local support, which often derives from personal contacts. These aspects are further illuminated in Case Study 7.2, which explores the activities of an Afghan-German association which seeks to promote women's empowerment at various levels.

Case Study 7.2 The Afghan Women's Association

The work of AWA is dedicated to the support of women and children in the following areas:

Medical care
AWA supports two clinics. One is located in a refugee camp near Peshawar and the other has been established in a remote mountain region near Kabul. Treatment is free of charge at both clinics. AWA pays the salaries of the doctors and provides medical supplies.

Drinking water supply
Constructing wells in remote areas of northern Afghanistan and around Kabul forms another pillar of AWA's engagement. Funds are raised in Germany but AWA commissions local enterprises with the construction and maintenance of the well.

Primary and secondary schools
AWA runs five schools in different rural areas of Afghanistan and one school in a Pakistani refugee camp. Three of these schools offer primary and secondary education for girls only. Student numbers range from just over 100 to 1000. Attendance is free of charge and AWA has been initiating partnerships between Afghan and German schools. Such partnerships are a vital source of funding for these schools and also open platforms for exchange between Afghan and German students.

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Vocational training centres
AWA operates two vocational training centres. One is located in a Pakistani refugee camp and the other in the southeast of Afghanistan. Local women can enrol for a one-year training course in tailoring and embroidery. In addition to manual skills the women also receive basic literacy and numeracy training.

Partnerships and emergency aid
To support poor families with many children AWA initiates partnerships with German families who transfer a monthly amount of €25. The money is used to pay for food, clothing, schooling, etc.

With regard of the fruits of her longstanding engagement, my informant notes

> *We take small steps at a time but we are making progress […] despite the difficult situation, because we have the support and protection of the local population. […] In total we have carried out more than 90 projects and we can proudly look back at what we have been able to achieve so far.*

The example of AWA reiterates that engagements in known community settings are not necessarily tied to one specific locality. Rather the known community aspect of such actors and engagements derives from the networks and supporting structures available at certain places.

7.2.3 Humanitarian engagement

The forms of engagement that I subsume under a 'humanitarian' heading essentially aim to support people in meeting their basic needs or provide relief in emergency situations. In both Germany and the UK Afghan organisations carry out a range of different humanitarian activities. Examples include medical aid and

assistance to groups with specific needs – for example orphans, disabled children or widows. Further activities encompass the provision of food, drinking water and, in some cases, energy.

Medical support forms a subsection of humanitarian engagement in which a particularly large number of activities are carried out. These include training doctors and equipping surgeries and clinics. In some cases money is raised to establish clinics in places where medical services are scarce. Likewise medicine and medical equipment are bought in Germany or the UK, shipped to Afghanistan and distributed among already existing health centres. In both countries I discovered organisations that were established by Afghan doctors and are exclusively dedicated to providing medical support. Other organisations feature a broader portfolio of activities with medical support being one form of engagement among several others. In Germany, many initiatives that provide medical support to Afghanistan are run together with German professionals and institutions such as hospitals. In the area of medical support, cooperative relations with German institutions often revolve around the provision of treatments that are technically demanding and based on the mobilisation of resources that are not available in Afghanistan.

One of my Afghan-German informants is a retired heart surgeon. In cooperation with former colleagues from the hospital he used to work for, he initiated a project called *'heart bridge' [Herzbrücke]*. The key idea behind his initiative is to bring Afghan children suffering from heart disease to Germany to receive treatment. These children stay with host families in Germany and return to Afghanistan upon recovery. Private donations from the (Afghan) German public create the basis for this project. Such examples illustrate that the social settings in which transnational humanitarian action is initiated are not necessarily restricted to

persons of Afghan origin but may also involve committed members of the receiving society. I found 'joint ventures' of this kind to be less common in Britain. UK-based professional associations of Afghan doctors are exclusively Afghan-run but also aim to establish cooperative relations with medical schools and centres in the UK. Providing medical assistance to Afghanistan marks the overarching objective of these organisations but I did not uncover examples of established collaborations with UK health centres and professionals.

While the above informant spent all of his professional life working in Germany there are numerous examples of Afghan doctors who came to the country as refugees and struggled or failed to get their qualifications recognised. As a result most of them were unable to continue working in their profession. Ahmad (63, civil servant, Germany) has lived in Germany since 1969. As part of an organisation which was set up during times of war, he made efforts to provide medical aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistani camps. *'And we involved some fellow Afghans too. They joined us and helped us',* Ahmad states. He continues, *'I know that across Germany there are 3700 male and female doctors from Afghanistan, many of whom are unemployed'*. To acknowledge their skills and extend the provision of support, Ahmad and his colleagues made the involvement of Afghan doctors an integral part of their project.

Providing help and assistance for people with special and pressing needs that would otherwise remain unsatisfied is also at the heart of some diaspora initiatives I encountered in the UK. Case Study 7.3 sheds light on the cooperation between two organisations which join hands in support of orphanages in Afghanistan.

Case Study 7.3 The Afghan Professionals Network and The Enabled Children Initiative

The Afghan Professionals network (APn) is a UK-based organisation of young professionals of Afghan origin. APn was created in early 2012 with the aim of positively contributing to the livelihoods of Afghan communities in the UK and beyond. To this end APn strives to enhance the career development of Afghan professionals and channel the knowledge, experience and expertise of its members towards the wider Afghan community. My informant, a young professional from Greater London, joined APn at an early stage. With regard to the setup of the organisation he tells me '*at the moment we are 89 people, I mean these are [all] the members […]. And at the same time we have around I would say nine board members and then we have around eight [people on the] board of trustees'*. Most of APn's members were born in Afghanistan but have lived in the UK for most of their lives and graduated from British universities.

To facilitate the career advancement of Afghan professionals APn coordinates a range of activities designed to support knowledge-sharing and networking. In addition members of APn engage in practical community service activities in the areas of education, social welfare and social development. Examples of such activities include networking sessions on professional development for graduates, fundraising for community service projects in Afghanistan, publications on relevant topics in various professional fields as well as guidance and mentoring to young professionals in Afghanistan.

While the primary focus of APn's engagement is on Afghan communities outside Afghanistan, the organisation also supports humanitarian initiatives in the country. From its early days APn has been joining hands with the Enabled Children Initiative (ECI), a charity dedicated to improve the lives of orphan children with special needs in Afghanistan.

Severely disabled children face a difficult situation in Afghanistan because the country provides very few facilities and services for assistance and treatment. Little public awareness of the causes and nature of disabilities further exacerbates such shortcomings.

Against this backdrop ECI seeks to satisfy the basic needs of children with disabilities. To this end ECI works with local partners to provide training and support to caregivers. Through fundraising activities and outreach in the UK, Afghanistan and online the charity aims at raising awareness of the needs of children at risk in Afghanistan. Local partners in Afghanistan are vital to implementing and monitoring ECI's activities. In addition, it liaises closely with other organisations working on the ground in Afghanistan to ensure that its activities are in line with strategic developments in the country.

ECI currently supports 14 children with mental and physical disabilities, some of whom live at a private care home while others found shelter at a government-run orphanage in Kabul. In cooperation with APn, ECI provides basic food, health care, clothing and equipment as well as educational materials and training to the children and their caretakers. Fundraising activities include film screenings, an annual charity run and food sales or raffles at Afghan community events.

Other forms of humanitarian support include impromptu relief in the event of natural disasters. An Afghan-German informant's organisation supplied communities affected by floods or draughts with food, makeshift shelter, medication and livestock feed. Such activities form part of the known community sphere because there is often a connection between those launching the initiatives in the diaspora and the affected regions in Afghanistan. In this particular case the natural events had occurred in the Kunduz province where my informant was born and raised.

Overall Afghan organisations in Germany make more efforts to get support from the German public while UK-based organisations mobilise primarily within the Afghan community. Generally in Germany there is a greater variety of funding bodies compared to the UK. These comprise governmental bodies (including ministries, lotteries, etc.), churches, foundations and private sources (including schools, associations and businesses of different sizes). Another and more subtle difference derives from a general public interest in Afghanistan-related matters, which seems much stronger in Germany than in the UK. In part this observed discrepancy might be rooted in long-standing relationships between Afghanistan and Germany, which are not restricted to an inter-governmental level but include a strong civil society element as well (Chapter 3).

Informants who travel to Afghanistan regularly state that such visits allow them to monitor the outcome of earlier initiatives and conduct needs assessments for future activities. Naveed (late 60s, retired development worker and consultant, Germany), who has been involved in various projects that aim to promote the improvement of education in Afghanistan, addressed his current aspirations during our interview. *'I hope that this year I will manage to go to Afghanistan again before October'.*

This, he says, is because *'[m]eeting our partners or friends who now work there in Kabul always motivates me. It is better to discuss the political situation on the spot, because in Germany we talk too much anyway'*. Cohesion and the experience of working towards shared aims across borders is an often-cited feature of known community engagement. Concrete activities, however, may involve substantial difficulties. Informants point out that working in areas scarred by endemic insecurity, infrastructural shortcomings and poverty is challenging. At the same time, however, they appreciate the small and focused contributions made through, for example, the establishment of schools or clinics. During the interviews informants expressed much gratitude for the support and appreciation their projects are met with by local populations. Ultimately local engagements in Afghanistan involve a high degree of resilience on the part of people who initiate projects in Germany and the UK but also among those who support their efforts in Afghanistan.

Unlike most household- and family-related engagements, action taken in the known community sphere is often framed as a contribution to development and change in a wider sense. Yet achieving large-scale improvements in the overall situation in Afghanistan is beyond the scope of engagements in the known community sphere. Still, empowering people in Afghanistan and enhancing their chances to live a decent life are important drivers of informants' transnational activities. At the same time, however, informants are aware of the complexity of requirements that need to be met in order to achieve significant change on the ground in Afghanistan.

7.3 Engagements in the imagined community sphere

Engagement in the imagined community sphere includes involvement in political parties and movements and support for insurgent or oppositional groups. Lobbying politicians or other influential people in the host country or in Afghanistan and engagement in political, social or cultural debates, some of which happen online, are further activities informants carry out in this sphere of engagement (Van Hear, 2015). With such forms of action predominating, the imagined community sphere is – conceptually – the most publicly oriented sphere of engagement. My data suggest that this applies to the objectives and targets of observed engagements. The context in which people take action however, are restricted, similar to those for other spheres of engagement.

Most informants who engage in the imagined community sphere take action as part of a coalition of activists most of which are in clearly circumscribed social contexts. They are delineated by boundaries based on ideological, political or ethnic grounds. Some of the ties binding coalitions of activists are rooted in pre-migratory involvements in Afghanistan while others have developed in the diaspora. Hence the social settings of engagement in the imagined community sphere reflect the structuring elements of Afghan diaspora populations which I presented in Chapter 5. However, I also observed people taking action as individuals, independent of organisations or specific social networks. This particularly pertains to persons who are active as writers, bloggers or journalists, and who address a wider public and promote their ideas and opinions. While informants tend to specify the kind of target group they aim to address, these target groups are not necessarily based on personal contacts but framed in more imaginary terms such as 'the Afghan people' or 'the opposition'.

Before moving on to the presentation of concrete engagements, it is important to note that the concept of imagined community does not always capture the forms and objectives of activities carried out by my informants. An imagined community, in the sense that Anderson (1983) develops the concept, refers to the nation with which individuals have an affinity. Conversely, many activities I found informants to engage in do not address a wider Afghan nation but seem to be about the future imagining of a different Afghan state and society. To some extent – as we will see throughout the following sections – informants' attempts to shape a future Afghanistan derive from assessments of current conditions from which inferences for necessary changes are drawn. In the following sections I will therefore distinguish between engagements directed towards an imagined Afghan community and an imaginary future Afghanistan.

Most engagements for an imaginary Afghanistan aim to promote a political and perhaps ideological sea change in the country. Some of the actions taken are perceived as potentially contested and prone to leave activists in a vulnerable position. This brings issues of trust back into the picture. For Afghan activists in the diaspora, Babak (42, volunteer at refugee support organisation, UK) explains, it is particularly important to be linked by strong, trust-based ties. He underscores his point with a description of the set-up of his own context of engagement. The latter features the characteristics of known community settings. But the aims behind and the target group of Babak's activities are best described as an imaginary Afghanistan and an imagined community of like-minded co-nationals respectively.

Babak:	*We are thinking that at some point maybe we can bring change to Afghanistan really. Not just me, we are a group friends thinking about that, talking about that. […]*
Me:	*Do you see them, do you meet them?*

Babak: *Yeah, yeah, definitely. I have contact with them, I know them personally. […] It is very important that we are thinking the same, we are thinking about Afghanistan, we are thinking to [bring an end to corruption], we are thinking to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. We are thinking to improve Afghanistan's development and rule of law. There are some men, some good women who are supporting our idea. And, maybe in the future, it would be a good team for Afghanistan.*

Similar to what has been observed for engagements in the known community sphere, social and institutional settings in the diaspora are important for shaping and enabling the activities undertaken.

7.3.1 Journalistic activities and working with media

Different forms of print and online media serve as important tools and platforms for engagements directed towards an imagined community. Several informants, for example, run websites on which they publish articles and essays relating to the situation in and their visions for Afghanistan. Most of them are written in Farsi or Pashto, which made it difficult for me to regularly follow up on content and direction of their activities. However, much of the material produced discusses current political affairs or assesses the situation in Afghanistan from an individual perspective. In most cases informants concentrate on problems that they identify as particularly pressing. Often it was stated that writing on identified key issues, such as corruption, would be impossible if one was based in Afghanistan (see Brinkerhoff, 2011).

Yama (34, freelance journalist, UK) used to work in Afghanistan as a journalist. He felt compelled to leave the country after receiving threats from opponents of the allegedly blunt messages and positions he put forward in his

articles. Yama claims to be mentioning specific individuals in articles he publishes on a personal website. *'I reported the corruption [and the government's links to warlordism and war crime] and the government did not want me to tell the truth, you know'*. By exposing such perceived misconduct he aims to publicly spread information among an imagined audience of actors and strengthen political forces that are more democratically minded and work towards a new political establishment in Afghanistan.

> *There is no access for justice, you can't criticise inside Afghanistan. They are talking about democracy, freedom of speech… There is no freedom of speech. If you read the reports of the International Crisis Group, they say [that the Afghan army and the Afghan police will be unable to protect the government once the international forces have left the country]. This is what I told people in Afghanistan through my articles.*

Yama's articles appear online and he claims to occasionally place a piece in local newspapers in Afghanistan. Informants who engage with a wider Afghan audience through articles or other online platforms state that they receive supportive feedback from the audience addressed. In the above case Yama aims to address and enhance awareness among what he frames as the silent majority of the Afghan population, an imagined community among which he seeks to distribute knowledge. He thus addresses an imagined community with the aim of promoting his version of an imaginary Afghanistan.

Written contributions form the bulk of media work which informants carry out in this sphere of engagement. Most of them appear online, either on websites of official media outlets or on personal blogs or websites. Some informants, however, use other forms of media. Nahid (30, young professional), for instance, runs a weekly radio show hosted by a local radio station in Germany. In order to signal an inclusive attitude and attract a wide audience, the show is broadcast in three languages: Farsi, Pashto and German. In terms of content, Nahid aims to address a wide range of Afghanistan-related issues which she tries to present in a complex and

non-biased way. With her radio show Nahid thus strives to represent and at the same time reach out to an imagined Afghan community.

7.3.2 Lobbying activities

Engagements for an imaginary Afghanistan also include membership of or involvement in political parties and movements, and support for opposition groups. Such allegiances are articulated and contested through lobbying politicians or other influential people in the host country (Van Hear, 2015). I found some of my informants to directly support certain political groups and actors in Afghanistan. Some engagements are remnants of earlier times and tied to informants' membership in certain political parties or groups. Zarghona (49), who has lived in Germany since the early 1980s, used to engage in attempts to support mujahideen groups in their resistance against the Soviet invasion throughout the 1980s. These attempts of promoting the cause of political actors in Afghanistan marked the beginning of her home country-oriented engagements. *'Back then there were the freedom fighters, the mujahideen as they were called. We promoted their cause among Afghans in Europe and spread information. We tried to enhance sympathy and organise support for the resistance movement. […] That's how we got engaged'.* Over time and with changing political conditions, however, the aims and focus of her activities have shifted and become more development-oriented. Zarghona is now actively engaged in an organisation which promotes education and provides medical support to certain localities in Afghanistan. Such examples uncover some relational features of engagements in the imagined community sphere as they vary according to the situation in Afghanistan as well as the resources actors in the diaspora are able to mobilise.

Informants not only try to support actors in Afghanistan itself. Some also maintain active contacts with policy makers of the receiving country who seek advice in Afghanistan-related matters. In the UK, informants mentioned contacts to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) with whom they engage with regard to Britain's involvement in Afghanistan. Some expressed their discontent about the UK's perceivedly ill-informed Afghanistan policy, as Nesarullah (30, freelance consultant, UK) illustrates. Together with colleagues of Afghan origin Nesarullah is eager to draw attention to

> *lack of grounded realities within their policies and within their strategies [and] send for instance feedback and inputs to FCO and DFID: 'This is how it is done right now and these are the grounded realities and this is how we as Afghans, Afghan diaspora, based on the information that we get from the local communities within Afghanistan, [think interventions] must be'.*

Besides aiming to influence the Afghanistan-related policies and action of political actors in Germany and the UK, informants also try to lobby politicians or representatives of the host country administration in pursuit of their own agendas (Shain, 1999).

In Germany Afghans from different cities have joined forces with the aim of promoting peace in Afghanistan. The 'Afghanistan Committee for Peace, Reconciliation and Culture' [Afghanistan-Komitee für Frieden, Wiederaufbau und Kultur] runs events involving parliamentarians and representatives of German NGOs working in Afghanistan. Besides involving Afghans from various places in Germany, the initiative also reaches out to Afghan organisations in other European countries. The committee aims to foster dialogue between different factions in Afghanistan including the international forces currently deployed in the country. Based on the idea of acting on behalf of a wider Afghan nation, the organisation

therefore advocates that the withdrawal of international troops has to be accompanied by a stability plan for Afghanistan, entailing mechanisms for stability and peace in the country. Rasheed (mid 50s, researcher, Germany), who chairs the committee, emphasises the need to contain the recurrent danger of civil war that would throw Afghanistan back into a state of even greater disorder. He stresses that Afghans living in exile have an ample grasp of *'what Afghans actually want'*. Therefore *'[i]t is important for Afghans to voice their opinions because they are the better experts'*. Shared perceptions and collective positioning, however, may not be the only binding tie as most members of the Afghanistan Committee for Peace, Reconciliation and Culture are intellectuals whose connections date back to life in Afghanistan. As for the social setting of action, this particular example reveals strong parallels to what has been observed for engagements in the known community sphere. However, their initiatives are not linked to specific localities or networks of persons in Afghanistan. The imagined community element of such engagements mainly exists in the idea of acting on behalf of a wider Afghan nation that is united in its striving for a 'better Afghanistan', which the activities of the Afghanistan Committee for Peace, Reconciliation and Culture are geared towards.

Besides lobbying receiving country politicians and organisations that work in Afghanistan, informants have also been directly involved with ministries and policy makers in Afghanistan. Such engagements are largely based on old contacts who have called upon friends and colleagues to seek their advice in certain matters. A number of informants aim to actively support the cause of certain political actors, some of whom are based in Afghanistan while others are fellow diasporans living in different countries. Jaweed (mid 30s, PhD student, UK), for example, supports the position and campaigns of an Afghan member of parliament, whom he would like to

see at the forefront of political decision making. Having expressed his discontent about governance standards in Afghanistan, Jaweed concedes

> *But you have some people who really want to embrace democracy, who want to really, who really want to take seriously what democracy and liberalism can offer. Um, in the context of Afghanistan. And you can find them, you can speak to them, you can write to them and they are responding […] and they can exchange views with you. And I have been trying to speak to someone called [name of politician]. He is very open to suggestions, he immediately responds to what you say, but also he is a very effective person in the sense that he is able to put forward his views to society openly, to an extent let's say.*

Paradoxically, while aims of engagement may be dedicated to a future Afghanistan, the diaspora is the primary site of action and engagement. Such discrepancies between far-reaching aims of engagement and a restricted outreach of the activities undertaken was observed for several organisations whose work is dedicated to fostering peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Rather than cooperating with actors 'on the ground' in Afghanistan, such organisations were found to concentrate on organising events involving British or German policy makers and fellow diasporans. Often those who are keen to promote certain causes in Afghanistan actually live outside the country, with their networks spanning diasporic nodes. Consequently there are mismatches between informants' aspirations and their actual abilities to act match these with concrete engagements. This suggests that distinguishing between desired and *de facto* levels of engagement is useful.

7.3.3 Long-distance nationalism

Long-distance nationalism has been identified as a characteristic feature of many conflict-induced diasporas (Turner, 2010), which – depending on the specific case – may yield constructive (McGregor, 2009) or destructive (Collier & Hoeffler,

2004; Kapur, 2007) effects. As indicated in Chapter 5, nationalism in the Afghan case is a delicate issue and the question of what constitutes an Afghan nation has been subject to fierce contestation. For some of my informants, however, the idea of strengthening the basis of an Afghan nation constitutes the driving force of transnational engagement.

For example, calls for humanitarian engagement may be directed at a wider Afghan audience, an imagined community within the diaspora. I encountered several cases in which certain events led several organisations to join hands. In late 2012, the British Afghan Women Society initiated a call for donations of money and clothes in order to provide winter relief in Afghanistan. This initiative was widely supported among Afghan organisations in the Greater London area. This suggests that occasionally the scope of known community engagements is being expanded. Upon my enquiry into the nature of such occasions, informants stated that wider cooperation is possible whenever the underlying purpose is purely humanitarian and not geared to the advantage of a certain ethnic or political group or segment of Afghan society.

Diaspora relief efforts transcended the boundaries of known communities again in the aftermath of the deadly landslide that buried villages in the remote Badakhshan Province in spring 2014. In response to the event, Afghan diaspora groups in the UK circulated a call for impromptu support:

> *Dear friends,*
>
> *I am writing with regards to the Badakhshan landslide. It is a moment of great grief for us. Nonetheless, the way Afghans from all provinces inside Afghanistan and the diaspora community has responded to it, is an excellent representation of how we as a nation support one another in such difficult times.*
>
> *In the similar spirit, representatives of various Afghan communities in the UK are getting together to discuss support.*

Time: xxx

Venue: xxx

Apologies that it's a very short notice. But it is an emergency that needs our urgent attention.

We look forward to meet as many as you as possible.

This particular example demonstrates how emergency situations not only lead to a reshuffling of the boundaries delineating the social context in which activities are initiated but also extend the scope of engagements beyond a known community at the receiving end.

Long-distance nationalism, however, also revolves around more particularistic concerns. In the Afghan case especially, mobilisation on the basis of ethnic claims can be observed. Some organisations have been established to mobilise for the support and concerns of the Hazara ethnic minority. Several of my informants reject the idea of an 'Afghan' state and promote the idea of 'Khorasan'[43] instead. Such engagements are directed to an imagined community as they address ethno-national collectives with which informants have a general affinity that is detached from personal contacts with individuals (Anderson, 1983).

During my interview with Abdul-Samad (60s, engineer and political activist, UK), he was very eager to make sure that I was familiar with *'[s]ome basic terms'*, which are essential to understand the way he frames Afghanistan and the Afghan population. *'[T]he term "Afghan" and "Afghanistani", you know the difference?'* he asked. He then explained that *'we have four major ethnicities in Afghanistan, these are Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbek and Afghans are Pashtuns. So the name of the country belongs to the name of one of the*

[43] Greater Khorasan was a historic region most of which lies in modern day Afghanistan, extending to minor parts of Iran and Turkmenistan. Khorasan has been mentioned in various sources in the past. The region has had a troubled history as a result of which it is peopled by a great variety of ethnic groups. Today the languages spoken in area are Persian, Kurdish and Turkish (Encyclopædia Britannica 2015).

ethnicities. "Afghanistan" means the land of Afghans, which we don't accept. […] For example I am a Tajik. If you call me 'Afghan' it means [the same thing as if you called an English person a Scot]'. Abdul-Samad also addresses an imagined community with the aim of promoting an imaginary Afghanistan. Yet his idea of an imagined community is restrictive. Unlike other informants he does not envisage an integrated Afghan nation but promotes the perceived cause of specific groups within the wider Afghan population[44]. Mobilisation on the basis of ethnic claims may involve contact with politicians and/or organised structures in Afghanistan or members of the global Afghan diaspora who live in other countries.

Engagements that are based on particularistic concerns rarely go undisputed. They are subject to controversy and often a source of discontent. However, Mukhtar (28, PhD student, UK) is convinced that pursuing ethno-national interests may also help in advocating more inclusive concepts of an Afghan national identity, as long as the underlying idea of what qualifies as 'Afghan' is sufficiently inclusive.

> *What they don't understand is that this hatred does no-one any good. […] They don't understand that even if we did split up, we'll be neighbours. […] [In Afghanistan] you cannot just draw a straight line, because there are people living all over, it's very mingled. And this hatred does them no good. That's what brought me more and more close and I thought 'okay, we need to rescue people from this kind of mentality and bring them to a level where they work in a positive energy'.*

The imagined community not only constitutes a sphere of engagement but also seems to be a reason for engagement. Many informants state that they feel intrinsically connected to Afghanistan and that this connection is largely constitutive of their identity and self-perception as an acting person (Chapter 6). When expressing such connections to Afghanistan, informants add little detail but seem to

[44] Despite Abdul-Samad's explanation I decided to continue using the term 'Afghan' to refer to persons from Afghanistan, as it is a better-known term than 'Afghanistani'.

identify with an imagined Afghan community. Ideas of change and development are often based on overarching scenarios that are difficult to achieve through small-scale interventions on the ground but require the mobilisation of a wider – imagined – community.

Summary

I found that Afghans in Britain and Germany engage in a plethora of transnational activities. Engagements vary according to the extent they are oriented towards the public or the private and thus match Van Hear's categorisation of different spheres of engagement (Van Hear, 2015). Forms of engagement clearly differ according to the sphere they are directed towards. At the same time, the engagements I observed in each of the three spheres are undertaken by clearly delineated groups of people.

There seems to be a correlation between types of group membership and the extent to which concrete actions are oriented towards the private or a more public sphere. Engagements undertaken in a family context tend to be geared towards the support of family members in Afghanistan. By contrast, engagements undertaken by more encompassing coalitions of actors in the diaspora tend to reach out to a target group that is defined in broader terms, which has been referred to as known community throughout the chapter. The imagined community sphere is the only realm of transnational engagement in which people were found to take action as individuals. However, most informants who take action oriented towards an imagined Afghan community or an imaginary future Afghanistan are part of a coalition or group of people.

The findings presented in this chapter reinstate some of the arguments I made earlier. Afghanistan-oriented engagements in all three spheres may be transnational in a dual sense: they are directed from Germany or the UK towards Afghanistan while also often involving transnational groups of actors. These can consist of family members who live scattered across different countries or transnational coalitions of actors whose binding ties are defined by other factors. To some extent Afghan diasporic connections reflect the selectivity of conflict-induced migration as a result of which the elite get to leave a country first (Van Hear, 2009). In fact most informants represent remnants of Afghanistan's former elite, which was internally well-connected (Schetter, 2012). This becomes particularly obvious in Germany where many of the well-established Afghan organisations are run by members or descendants of the Afghan elite who left the country at an early stage of the war. Ethnic origin or political affiliation may further support emerging coalitions of actors.

The patterns of coalescence described in this chapter contradict the idea of an overarching diaspora. Instead, the relational settings in which informants initiate their activities reflect the effects which the fractured set-up of Afghan diaspora populations (Chapter 5) has on transnational engagements. How informants are embedded in certain diasporic configurations also determines which resources and social ties they are able to mobilise. At the same time, and as demonstrated in Chapter 6, ideas of change in Afghanistan and identified avenues through which change can be achieved are widely – though implicitly – shared among my informants. Considering the confined contexts of action we can assume that attachments to the home country are important but far from the sole basis upon which informants engage in transnational activities.

The activities carried out in different spheres of engagement allude to meanings of development and change in different ways. All forms of engagement that were observed in the three spheres aim to achieve some kind of positive change. None of my informants, however, explicitly claimed to be involved in development or seemed to be guided primarily by rational economic considerations. Instead the objectives of the engagements undertaken are framed in much narrower terms tailored to specific and localised needs as well as informants' abilities to mobilise resources to address these needs.

When attempting to frame the observed forms of Afghanistan-oriented action in developmental terms it emerges that different meanings and conceptions of development have to be employed. In the household and extended family sphere the well-being, perhaps even the survival of individual persons, is at stake. It is about changing lives and enabling people to 'develop' themselves beyond the level of mere survival. Engagements in the known community sphere aim at development at a larger scale. Many of the projects carried out aim to contribute to localised infrastructural development through providing, for instance, schools, medical centres or wells.

Ideas of development and change that underlie much of the engagement in the imagined community sphere tend to be ambitiously large-scale. The desire to change the way Afghanistan is governed and/or to overcome the remnants of the war are strong driving forces behind engagements in the imagined community sphere. Likewise the desire to create a 'new Afghanistan' may also be informed by ethno-nationalist ambitions that prioritise the interests of one particular group of Afghans over the society as a whole.

Overall by taking action in different spheres of engagement, people contribute to change and development in Afghanistan in various ways and at multiple levels. Development thus comes in many shapes and forms and it is difficult to make a general statement as to how 'developmentally-minded' (Bakewell, 2009) the Afghan diaspora is. The observed spheres of engagement suggest that people in the Afghan diaspora in Germany and UK are developmentally-minded in many different ways. So, while Afghans living in the diaspora do take home country-oriented action, they do not act as a coherent diaspora. Whether and how people choose to engage in Afghanistan-oriented action is highly contingent on their overall living conditions, their social environment and the resources they are able to mobilise.

In the introduction to this chapter I stated that drawing a distinction between different spheres of engagement helps to unpack the complexity of home country engagements. At the same time this distinction is a first step towards identifying 'the enabling and constraining structural opportunities […] or dynamic limits of the possible and the impossible within which the people conduct their activities' (Morawska, 2009, p. 3). A closer look at the reasons informants state for taking certain forms of action offers insights into what Morawska (2009) refers to as 'agentic considerations'. Agentic considerations are informed by sets of resources available in time- and place-specific environments in which people live. Hence they allow us to shed light on elements informants frame as enabling or constraining with regard to their engagements. How people act upon the opportunities and restrictions encountered and what this tells us about interactions between structure and agency will be substantiated in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 8

Structure and agency in transnational engagements

Introduction

Building on the analysis of transnational activities and different spheres of engagement, in this chapter I investigate why Afghans in the wider diaspora take action in certain ways. I aim to explain how informants come to direct their activities towards certain spheres of engagement and how these engagements in turn relate to ideas of change. This way I reflect on the implications my findings have for the idea of diasporas as *agents of change*. Situating the observed forms of action requires me to specify the structuring effects of the relational setting in which informants are embedded. Throughout this chapter I will identify enabling and constraining structures and explore how informants exercise agency and creatively use available resources by taking action in one or several spheres of engagement. All sub-sections of this chapter feature short snippets from interviews which capture some specific details to illustrate how I integrate and consolidate empirical findings with theoretical explanation. In this chapter I treat the empirical material differently from the previous chapters. Many empirical examples are based on cross-references to the material presented earlier. In addition I include some new evidence, which appears in the shape of vignettes that support theoretical points through verbal illustration (Stake, 2010). The more comprehensive accounts featured in the previous chapters will enable readers to situate short snippets of particularly meaningful data through which I aim to bring to life specific issues (see Miles et al., 2013).

8.1 Locating action and agency in relational settings

Based on the findings presented in Chapters 6 and 7, I argue that transnational engagements are largely driven and shaped by informants' relationships with Afghanistan in terms of personal contacts, feelings of attachment and ideas of change and structural opportunities and restrictions that derive from the specific setup of informants' social context. Both relationships to the home country and structural opportunities and restrictions are integral to the relational settings which constitute informants' life worlds. The fact that members of diaspora populations share a commitment to their country of origin but confront constraints when it comes to transnational engagement is not a revolutionary discovery. It concurs with previous work on diaspora engagement in countries of origin, or – as Mohan calls it – development by the diaspora (Mohan, 2002). However, we enter new ground if we shift the focus to the way informants exercise agency by navigating between perceived attachments to Afghanistan, desires for change in the country and the structural features of the social contexts in which informants are situated and towards which their engagements are directed. In the previous chapter I outlined different forms and spheres of engagement and linked them to the specificities of the relational settings in which informants are embedded. For example, I demonstrated that known community engagements tend to rely on established social networks whose members know and trust each other. However, more clarity is needed as to how the structures which constitute relational settings enhance or impede concrete action. This chapter thus strives to make social action intelligible by highlighting how different elements of informants' relational settings shape their agency while engaging with local Afghan populations and in transnational activities that are oriented towards the home country.

I am not examining transnational practices themselves but focus on informants' narrative representations of practices and their underlying rationales. Through the narratives of engagement, people situate themselves and their respective practices in social contexts. Also it is through narratives that different dimensions of agency are being expressed. But actors do not exist outside of relational complexes, which may be more or less constricting or enabling. The analysis of embedded narratives of engagement helps us to develop models of social being that move away from 'falsely imputed universalities' (Somers, 1994, p. 610; see also Ahearn, 2001) such as the assumption that people mainly act as a result of primordial attachments to their country of origin.

Relational settings are the realm in which social structures take shape and manifest themselves (see Chapter 7). As discussed in Chapter 2, I am drawing on Sewell's definition of structure as 'sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action' (Sewell, 1992, p. 19)[45]. Resources, according to Sewell, are the results of structured relationships, which in the case of Afghan diaspora populations may be based on family ties, ethnicity or political affiliations. Schemas, on the other hand, are recipes for action that inform thought, perceptions and behaviour. Structures – composed of schemas and resources – are 'hardened' into societal institutions as they are repeatedly enacted in people's everyday practices. Chapters 5 and 7 demonstrate how family ties or ethnic backgrounds inform not only social relations among Afghan diaspora populations but also shape the forms and settings of transnational engagement. Likewise a degree of structural integration (Snel et al.,

[45] Unlike, for example, Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) – which conceptualises structural and contexts agentic orientations as deeply intertwined – Sewell's definition allows for an analytical distinction between aspects of structure and practice (Archer, 2010; Sewell, 1992).

2006) into the British or German society enables informants to set up organisations through which they can effectively channel their engagements. The emergence and effects of structures composed of schemas and resources becomes clearer if we consider the wider relational setting in which people are enmeshed. Depending on someone's relational embeddedness, certain structures may be more or less salient. This explains why informants refer to aspects such as family background, ethnicity or their legal status in the receiving society in different ways, also with respect to their practical engagements.

Different structures of social life are created and recreated as actors assess the practical situations of the moment and adjust their habitual reactions and future-oriented projects accordingly (Sewell, 1992, p. 13). To provide a more detailed account of how informants engage with the structural environments, I draw on Emirbayer and Mische's tripartite conception of agency. Thinking of agency as an 'interactive response to the problems posed by changing situations' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970), the authors imply that approaches to and outcomes of structural assessments are contingent on the relational position of social actors. The capacities of social actors are shaped by sets of particular resources available in time- and place-specific environments in which people live and by specific configurations of habitual, projective and practical evaluative considerations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971, see Chapter 1.4.1). Agency thus arises from the actors' knowledge of cultural rules, some control of resources and their ability to apply these to new situations. This implies that different people act differently despite facing similar situations.

To identify how informants navigate amidst structural opportunities and constraints, I examine how they refer to their contexts of engagement, what they

experience as enabling or restrictive, and how they adjust forms of action accordingly. The discussion of my findings in this chapter is organised according to the three dimensions that Emirbayer & Mische (1998) define as constitutive of agency: habit, imagination and judgement. The analytical distinctions I draw between different observed forms of agency are based on the dimension of agency I identify as dominant in a given context. It is important to note, however, that all constitutive dimensions of agency are inherent to any empirical instance of action, albeit to varying degrees. Or, as Ahearn (2001) puts it, multiple types of agency are exercised in any given situation. I will draw attention to inter-relationships between different aspects of agency throughout the subsections of this chapter.

How and to what extent informants' engagements are shaped by certain structuring elements of their relational setting varies. Further differences pertain to the way people evaluate the structuring elements of their respective situation and exercise agency accordingly. Emirbayer & Mische's tripartite concept of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) allows me to examine structural circumstances from an actor's perspective. My focus on informants' narratives of action thus reveals how they reflexively act upon specific circumstances by interpreting the schemas in place and evaluating their resources accordingly (O'Reilly, 2012). This is reflected in their approaches to transnational engagement and concrete forms of action. Ultimately I am proposing a new way of analysing diasporic agency which explicitly considers the relational context in which informants are embedded. I do not attempt to measure the agency of diasporic actors in terms of impact through engagements but by focusing on the contextual narratives of the actors themselves.

8.2 Habit and social norms

According to Emirbayer & Mische (1998), the past is the most important informant of the iterational dimension of agency. The adjective 'iterational' is used to describe the way past patterns of thought and action are reactivated and incorporated in practical activity. Others have referred to such modes of action as 'habitual' or 'habituated' (see for example Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; or Dewey, 1922), and I will use all three terms interchangeably throughout this section. Iterational agency is expressed through the application of tacit, taken-for-granted schemas to present actions. But we should not misunderstand this dimension of agency as solely deterministic. Dewey (1922), for instance, emphasises that habit is inherently plastic and educable rather than merely a question of stimulus and response. The empirical puzzle, however, is under what conditions people act upon habituated schemas. Below I will examine how iterational agency is expressed through informants' narratives of engagement with the relational settings constituting their diasporic livelihoods and engagements with their country of origin. It is important not to ignore that habituated practices are also necessarily situated in dynamic social contexts. In the following sections I will show that some identified instances of iterational agency are closely linked to perceived social norms (Crawford & Ostrom, 1995) to which informants implicitly or explicitly refer when talking about their engagements.

I discovered that informants' narratives of attachment to Afghanistan are a fundamental part of their diasporic identities. Despite the physical and often temporal distance, Afghanistan is constantly present in the lives of most informants. In Chapter 6 I showed how for many informants both personal ties to and memories of Afghanistan forge a sense of attachment to the country. This has a stabilising

influence on people's social identities and the meanings they ascribe to the homeland and their diasporic livelihoods. Referring back to Sewell (1992) we could speak of schematised experiences of self in relation to place and culture. This is why I consider narratives of home country attachments as an expression of habitual agency.

In many cases feelings of attachment are coupled with a sense of solidarity and a commitment to the future destiny of Afghanistan and its people. Considering the needs of Afghanistan and the Afghan population, many informants are determined to 'give something back' to their country of origin and improve local living conditions to the best of their abilities. The stark contrasts between the livelihoods of most of Afghanistan's population and their own livelihoods in a Western country additionally amplify informants' perceived obligations to share some of their relatively good fortune. The way informants link their feelings of attachment to the requirement to give back shows that expressions of iterational agency and perceived social norms can be closely intertwined. Here we can draw connections to early concepts of social habit. In the work of Thomas Aquinas (1981), for instance, habit is associated with moral virtue and people's striving to act well.

At the same time we need to acknowledge that such routine engagements with the situation in Afghanistan also entail elements of practical evaluative agency. I often found that informants' habitual attachment to their home country is coupled with an acute awareness of their own position and perceived responsibility towards the country. The engagements featured in Chapter 7 show that – beyond feeling attached to Afghanistan – informants' living conditions allow them to mobilise material resources and social networks which they direct towards the improvement of conditions in Afghanistan.

Yet feelings of attachment and solidarity are not unconditional but are strongly mediated by events in Afghanistan, which can transform habituated relationships between people and their place of origin. Hence the way people draw upon the past as a reference point can vary as a result of changes in their wider relational setting. Political transformations in Afghanistan are one example of such changes, which affect expressions of solidarity and support for relatives living in the country. In Chapter 6 I showed how decades of war and conflict have led many informants to lose trust in Afghan politicians and what they perceive to be 'governing elites'. Informants express their frustration about a system that they perceive to be based on corruption and bribery. In some cases corruption has directly interfered with attempts to implement projects in Afghanistan. Such experiences lead to the emergence of new narratives through which informants express their perception of conditions in Afghanistan and their relationship with co-nationals in the diaspora. In Chapters 5 and 7 I underlined the importance of trust, which informants emphasised when discussing their diasporic networks and contexts of transnational engagement. In times of homeland conflict trust emerges as a crucial guideline for social engagement. As a general tendency it seems that contextual changes prompt people to critically evaluate and amend routinised practices. Amended practices, however, can develop into new habits over time as we can discern from recurrent narratives that emphasise the importance of trust in the light of given conditions in Afghanistan (see Box 8.6 in section 8.4 for a concrete example).

Expressions of mistrust appear to be equally characteristic for home country relations as feelings of solidarity. Such perceptions are continuously reactivated and perpetuated as new forms of schematised experience (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

These in turn affect relations and patterns of organisation among people in the diaspora, as well as the concrete social settings in which informants engage in transnational activities. As an element of narrative, trust becomes salient whenever informants evaluate opportunities for engagement in the light of the situation in Afghanistan. The need for trust is reflected in the social spheres towards which informants direct transnational activities.

Known community engagements, which are based on networks of people who know (of) each other without necessarily sharing kinship ties, feature several elements of iterational agency. Informants simultaneously act upon attachments to Afghanistan and habituated feelings of trust and mistrust. The known community constitutes a trusted network, which enables informants to act upon their attachment to Afghanistan and related concerns about the situation in the country. Trusted networks, as Case Studies 7.1 and 7.2 in the previous chapter illustrate, are based on personal contacts and established modes of cooperation which all actors involved value highly. This suggests that habituated structures are a necessary prerequisite of future-oriented action. It is important to note, however, that known community engagements are not purely habitual but also feature elements of practical evaluative agency, as informants' careful assessments of conditions in Afghanistan exemplify. Hence engagements in the known community sphere can also be read as a transactional reaction to war-induced changes of the social climate in Afghanistan.

Engagements in the family sphere are another example of practices that are driven by iterational agency. Family-oriented engagements revolve not only around acute needs but are also based on deep-seated solidarity patterns. Informants thus provide transnational support and simultaneously sustain crucial elements of their

identity and habituated patterns of social organisation. In Chapter 5.1 I cited Nabeela (late 50s, full-time director of aid organisation, Germany) who refers to Afghan families as a source of social security and the historically rooted epicentre of social life. However, transnational activities which aim to support family members in Afghanistan are more than routinised and pre-structured forms of action. They also represent practical evaluative reactions to changes in informants' relational settings, as I will specify in section 8.3.

I uncovered further instances of iterational agency when studying the cooperation between actors and institutions in Afghanistan and receiving countries. Public support for Afghanistan-oriented projects and longstanding cooperative arrangements seem more prevalent in Germany. This reflects the degree to which parts of the Afghan population are socially integrated with parts of German society. As presented in Chapter 7 there are numerous initiatives that derive from amicable Afghan-German relations. Habituated narratives of friendship and mutual feelings of solidarity[46] have promoted Afghan-German joint ventures at a civil society level.

Yet it is important to note that such structures are highly selective. They involve persons who can mobilise certain forms of past experience. Interest in Afghanistan-related projects is particularly high among Germans who were students during the 1960s and 1970s, who often travelled along the 'hippie trail' to Afghanistan. Likewise – on the Afghan side – joint activities mainly involve members of the first two immigrant cohorts. They are equipped with the forms of social and cultural capital that are typical for the country's former upper and upper-middle classes. The habitual element of joint activities thus consists of shared past

[46] Here I draw on Durkheim's definition and refer to solidarity in a 'mechanical' sense of the term (Durkheim, 1969). This means that solidarity derives from the homogeneity of individuals in terms of their values, beliefs and teleologies but also their educational and socio-economic backgrounds.

experiences which are a condition for present action (see Mead, 1980 [1932]). Such time- and class-specific connections have fostered structures that enable informants and their collaborators to mobilise resources which they direct towards the improvement of conditions in Afghanistan. Established forms of cooperation, in other words, allow for projective aims and ideas to be enacted. We can see this in the case of Afghan-German initiatives or other forms of known community engagement.

So far I have focused on iterational aspects of agency as an enabling factor of transnational engagements. However, when shifting the focus to the effects of structures and dynamics among Afghan populations in Germany and the UK, we uncover some impediments which derive from habitual schemas. Mutual perceptions of people in the light of their political or ethnic backgrounds are routinely incorporated in practical activity (Wimmer, 2004; Jenkins, 1994). People engage with pre-existing patterns or schemas of perception. As a result they remain within confined groups and adopt sceptical attitudes towards perceived others. This not only shapes patterns of social organisation but also scopes for potential collaboration, as Box 8.1 below further illustrates.

With respect to the effects of ethnic and political boundaries, many informants in both countries emphasised that cooperation among Afghans is difficult. *'Afghans find it hard to accept other Afghans'*. Besides apparent difficulties in accepting other people's viewpoints, there seems to be little acceptance of principles such as partnership and joint work. Boundaries, as shown in Chapter 5, are deeply engrained in Afghan populations. They create schemas that are difficult to dissolve and limit the resources that people are able to mobilise (Pachucki et al., 2007; Tilly, 2005). Boundaries also impede the identification of shared goals that would facilitate

broader cooperation. As a result, informants hold that not every organisation is approachable for everyone and that particularities often weigh heavier than solidarity. In order for social boundaries between groups of Afghans to persist, people need to exercise iterational agency through which they act upon and thereby reproduce tacit and taken-for-granted schemas. This can be illustrated with an empirical example. Box 8.1 shows how habitual patterns of conduct and thought are linked to different particularistic political interests. These pose an impediment to the initiative which my informant attempted to launch.

Box 8.1 Biased perceptions as obstacle to joint initiatives

As part of his engagement with Afghan communities in Greater London and beyond, Nesarullah (early 30s) aimed at establishing a pool of experts from different backgrounds who could advise British agencies on Afghanistan-related matters. He was keen to form an advocacy group around inclusive Afghan national interests, but motivating people to unite their efforts and work towards a shared goal turned out to be difficult. *'I wanted it an inclusive group, inclusive in a way that you include all the ethnicities in Afghanistan. Because that's how the divisions basically are in Afghanistan. So I just wanted it to be inclusive.'* Yet Nesarullah admits that *'it has been a hard task for me to hold people together. One, these divisions, political divisions and then personal divisions, problems that individuals have with each other or get with each other… So, it's really hard. It's really hard to, to… Well, working with Afghans is really hard. It's the hardest thing'*. Nesarullah repeatedly emphasised the desirability of a more integrative national identity, which would enhance a sense of coherence and shared teleologies. However, the relational setting in which he sought to launch his initiative was strongly marked by boundaries and segregation among the groups of people with whom he tried to work. Therefore Nesarullah failed to create momentum based on a shared idea of promoting inclusive Afghan interests.

It seems that patterns of mutual perception which sustain people's (political) identity are routinely incorporated in practical activity (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Boundaries between different subgroups of Afghan diaspora populations constitute an important dimension of relational settings. They derive from habituated patterns of social consciousness and social organisation.

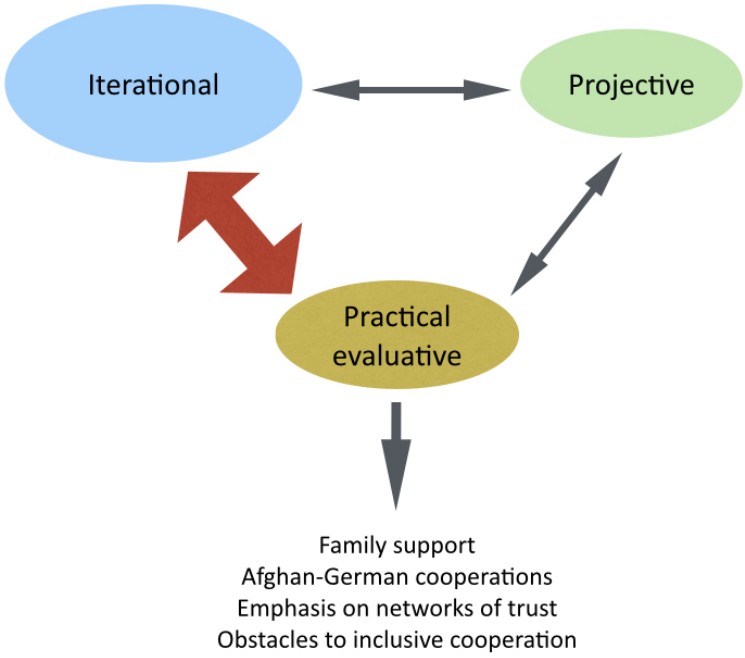
Besides aspects like ethnicity and politics, age represents another boundary marker that impedes on broader cooperative arrangements and hence limits the scope of Afghanistan-oriented action. Informants repeatedly referred to the cooperation between different age groups as a challenge. Young informants in particular often expressed their discontent about what they perceive to be age-related social hierarchies among Afghans. In inter-generational settings they tend to feel sidelined, claiming that representatives of the older generation neglect their opinions, ideas and values. This suggests that social norms such as respect for age, which are at the heart of Afghan culture (Vogelsang, 2008), are upheld and reproduced in the diaspora. Aspects like age-related social hierarchies form an integral part of informants' relational setting. Such prevailing structures explain why many young Afghans seek to establish new settings for engagement and explore new platforms of social organisation such as online social networks. Acting amidst institutionalised structures can also unleash projective agency. Young informants, for instance, proactively and creatively work to establish platforms which allow them to engage with valued elements of Afghan culture without compromising other forms of social integration into the receiving society (Nagel & Staeheli, 2008; Snel et al., 2006).

Further patterns of habituated social organisation among Afghan populations are linked to class and people's socio-economic backgrounds. In Chapter 5.1 we have seen how informants refer to certain groups within Afghan populations as withdrawn and 'keeping to themselves'. Such perceptions draw attention to various underlying issues. On the one hand they highlight the effects of socio-economic constraints and material pressures; on the other hand they illuminate the effects of boundaries deriving from class and people's socio-economic backgrounds.

Responding to the need to make a living in the receiving country may prevent many people of Afghan origin from sparing time for additional engagements. Likewise accounts of informants suggest that there are large numbers of people who routinely support family members in Afghanistan without labelling their activities as development contributions in a wider sense. Hence different forms of social experience shape cognitive schemas and practical competencies of acting in particular social worlds (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Even though people may be interested in civic engagements in the local community and beyond, not everyone gets a chance to act upon these interests. Such findings reiterate Swidler's argument that although people may share common aspirations, their culture and social environment organises their actual behaviour in profoundly different ways. Action, she holds, is not a matter of values alone but also one of cultural competencies (Swidler, 1986). The socio-economic backgrounds of Afghans in Britain and Germany in combination with social environments and the challenges of everyday life not only promote the emergence and consolidation of habituated patterns of engagement with the home country and local communities, but to some extent they also inform the way people situate and frame their practices (see also Bourdieu, 1984).

Figure 8.1 below clarifies the workings of iterational agency and its relations to imagination and practical evaluation. The bold arrow indicates that habitual agency is almost inevitably mediated by practical evaluation. Conversely, the projective dimension of agency does not feature prominently in empirical action, which is strongly driven by iterational agency.

Figure 8.1 The workings of iterational agency



In Chapters 6 and 7 I draw attention to tacit schemas of being part of a wider Afghan nation which are at the heart of (temporarily enacted) imagined communities. A sense of familiarity and shared commitment to Afghanistan can spark people's desire 'bring some change' and be a driver of social engagement. This is further exemplified in Box 8.2 below. Habituated dimensions of people's social identity can form a basis upon which they exercise projective agency. Yet I mainly observed such integrative patterns of social organisation among members of the young generation for whom habituated feelings of scepticism are less relevant than they are for their parents. This suggests that habituated forms of social consciousness which derive from informants' perceptions of being Afghan or part of Afghan culture can be differently enacted.

Box 8.2 Enacting new imagined communities

Mukhtar (28) illuminates how engagement in joint activities can unleash a positive spirit of togetherness, coupled with a shared motivation to work towards a common goal. Describing the dynamics among a group of people participating in his organisation's activities Mukhtar states that

> *they wanted to do something for the country […]. At the same time they wanted to meet other people, like-minded people and get out of the usual, you know, cynical mindset. [They wanted to come] somewhere where they celebrated and had fun. So we had a lot of events that were to do with fun. We had music and food and dancing, just to [keep people] entertained, yes we did. […] We had to keep them going, because that's what kept people attracted. If there was a concert-type of event, we had so many people that we could not even [fit them all into the venue].*

This account indicates that joint engagements in (transnational) activities rely on the identification of cross-cutting issues of concern and interest. In addition to sharing substantive aims and concerns relating to Afghanistan it is important that joint activities provide a space for shared emotional experiences.

At certain phases of their lives individuals may be involved in creating new strategies of action (see Swidler, 1986). Such opportunities, however, are subject to specific historical and local circumstances and are thus relational. This leads us to the next section in which I will focus more closely on agency in terms of imagination and future orientation.

8.3 Imagination

The projective dimension of agency builds on the idea that human agents do not only repeat past routines but also invent new possibilities of thought and action. To explore this creative dimension of agency in the context of diaspora engagement we need to shift our attention to informants' engagements with the future. This allows us to uncover how they distance themselves from schemas and habits and how they respond to desires and purposes that are oriented towards the future.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) refer to the projective dimension of agency as an embedded process in the sense that actors attempt to reconfigure received schemas by generating alternative possible responses.

Informants' ideas of change and development as well as concrete forms of engagement always entail elements of projective agency. They are carried out with the intention to contribute to improving current conditions in Afghanistan regardless of the concrete sphere towards which they are directed. Both ideas of change and different forms of engagement revolve around the improvement of future conditions in the country. Depending on the sphere of engagement that is targeted, concrete activities vary in terms of their connection to broader ideas of development. I identified two central metaphors which express informants' desired outcomes of change in Afghanistan. These are the ideas of 'building a foundation' and 'enlightenment'. Both notions are projective in themselves because they express a move towards emancipation, greater freedoms and new beginnings. In the Afghan context this would, for example, include a move away from 'bad governance' and towards more participation.

Besides aiming to enhance lasting changes of mind among groups of people in Afghanistan, ideas of change and concrete engagements can also relate to the future in more practical ways. An example would be activities that aim to enhance the infrastructural conditions in certain localities. The underlying aims of observed engagements are transactional because they reflect how the situation in Afghanistan, in conjunction with their social position in the diaspora, affect teleologies among groups of Afghans in Germany and the UK. Imagination or projective agency can thus be considered as a prerequisite of any form of concrete engagement through which informants strive to contribute their share to envisaged processes of change.

However, imagination as expression of projective agency is almost automatically coupled with practical evaluative agency as informants consider different elements of their relational settings when thinking of concrete transnational engagements.

Informants exercise projective agency when referring to their aims of strengthening Afghanistan's young generation. Strengthening future generations of 'leaders' is seen as key to overcoming Afghanistan's legacy of conflict and prevailing conditions of 'bad governance' and faltering economic development. Thus many of the observed activities aim to promote education and enhance the prospects of young people who will ultimately be shaping Afghanistan's future. Instead of succumbing to perceived impediments that derive from current conditions, informants try to find a way to respond to the identified need for change. However, while their emphasis on the need for a new generation of leaders clearly entails a projective element, the idea of top-down leadership itself is rather traditional and linked to established modes of government.

As shown in Chapter 7, most engagements that seek to strengthen Afghanistan's young generation are carried out in the known community sphere. Examples are initiatives to promote education and vocational skills as they were presented in Case Studies 7.1 and 7.2. This indicates that although people act upon projective aims, they seek to situate their activities in a trusted environment. Informants carefully consider how to best engage with Afghanistan and with whom to cooperate, and known communities represent environments of familiarity and trust. Structures emerging from habituated interpretations and networks of trust are crucial enabling factors of engagement driven by projective considerations. Known community structures moreover allow informants to monitor the outcomes of their efforts by tracking the development of initiatives on the ground. This way

informants retain confidence in their ability to make small but meaningful contributions to valued elements of change in Afghanistan. Such findings reveal a consequential discrepancy between tacit imagined communities and practically enacted known communities. Projective aims for engagement, as we have seen in Chapter 6, are widely shared. Actual practices, however, do not only reflect informants' projective teleologies, but also the social environments in which they are initiated. In Chapter 7 I distinguished transnational engagements according to whether they are directed to private or public spheres. This led me to also shed light on the opportunities and constraints of the wider relational contexts in which my informants are situated.

To illustrate how projective orientations and established structures are interlinked and mutually dependent, Box 8.3 returns to the example of an informant from Germany whom I first introduced in Chapter 7.

Box 8.3 Habituated networks as enabling context for projective action

Khaled is a senior academic who has been living in Germany since 1979. For the past ten years he has been convening a masters programme in IT in cooperation with universities in Afghanistan. He compares the establishment of IT infrastructure in Afghanistan with a construction site. 'At the moment', he says, 'we are working on the basement, the foundation'. Khaled (50s) is convinced that the young generation is the source of hope and (sustainable) strategies for Afghanistan. But the existing 'structures of institutional responsibility' (Struktur für Verantwortung in Afghanistan), such as ministries and universities, pose significant challenges. Despite these hurdles Khaled remains optimistic and states that 'Afghanistan is on its way'. The young generation is already changing and social media contribute their share. He uses the metaphor of a knife: 'you can use it to kill someone but you can also use it for cutting your bread'. Afghanistan does not need 'enlightenment' according to Western standards, but tailored knowledge transfer that is able to satisfy the specific needs of the country.

Whether or not conditions in Afghanistan pose an impediment to people's engagement strongly depends on the kinds of resources they can mobilise. Khaled greatly benefits from his network of contacts with Afghan universities, which constitute his known community and contribute to the success of his engagement. His academic network and contacts with funding bodies in Germany are further pillars of his engagement and important sources of social as well as cultural capital. The cooperation with partners in Afghanistan and Germany involves practical evaluative considerations but also enables him to act upon his projective ideas of enhancing Afghanistan's IT infrastructure.

While trusted environments and networks of collaborators in Afghanistan are a crucial prerequisite for transnational engagements, other established structures, like the legal frameworks of informants' receiving society, constitute additional enabling factors. For example, several informants emphasised that the laws and regulations of the receiving society enable people to engage in activities they could not carry out if they were based in Afghanistan. This pertains particularly to engagements in areas related to women's empowerment and women's rights. Moreover, informants whose engagements are politically motivated sometimes refer to their objectives and activities as contentious.

Allegedly all of the political engagements I studied are undertaken with the aim of promoting political inclusiveness and social justice in Afghanistan. When it comes to concrete activities, however, informants often argue against certain powerholders who are deemed responsible for prevailing conditions of bad governance. Therefore they perceive the legal institutions of their receiving society as a protective and enabling aspect of their social environment, which allows them to articulate their positions and call for action in Afghanistan. In Chapters 5 and 6 informants' perception of living *'in between'* two societies was presented as a rather unsettling element of informants' diasporic identities. However, the above examples suggest that such positions may also bring empowering effects. The example in Box

8.3 underlines the contingency of projective agency as it cannot be detached from other – often habituated – structures which derive from the interlocking schemas and resources associated with the relational settings in which informants are situated.

Self-perceptions as living *'in between'* are particularly widespread among younger informants. This means that they developed a sense of belonging to Afghanistan as their country of origin and to Britain or Germany as their living environment at the same time. Many young informants feel attached to Afghanistan without referring to the country as their actual home. Having left Afghanistan at a very young age, most grew up in a Western society, which has shaped their socialisation to a large extent (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, ties to Afghanistan are being maintained. As illustrated in Chapter 6, however, most young informants retain little lived experience of Afghanistan and their social networks tend to involve fellow Afghans in the diaspora rather than Afghanistan itself.

Self-perceptions as not fully belonging to either of the two countries also affect young Afghans' reasoning with regard to potential home country engagements. Many projectively envisage potential ways of 'doing something for their country'. On several occasions young informants emphasised that they perceive their life *'in between'* as an asset. Having been educated in Germany or the UK, they are convinced that they can offer valuable sets of knowledge and skills to the development of Afghanistan. Education in this sense promotes habituated forms of self-assessment vis-à-vis conditions in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, young informants critically evaluate their overall living situation, which leads many of them to acknowledge that there is a gap separating ideas of engagement from

actual opportunities to get involved. Projective agency thus not only derives from an imagined future but is also tied to critical assessments of the present.

Projective, future-oriented considerations can also be directed to life in Germany or the UK and lead people to minimise their involvement with the country of origin (Bakewell et al. 2011). Several informants stated that securing a livelihood in their destination country takes precedence over engagement in Afghanistan. Box 8.4 illustrates how people's projective consideration can revolve around the establishment of routinised structures.

Box 8.4 Links between projective agency and current livelihoods

In reaction to persistent uncertainties in Afghanistan, people focus on establishing themselves in the receiving country, reorganise their lives and set the framework for their future. *'[I]f people don't see their future secure here, they won't think about the future'*, Abdul-Kabir (early 40s) explains. *'For example'*, he continues,

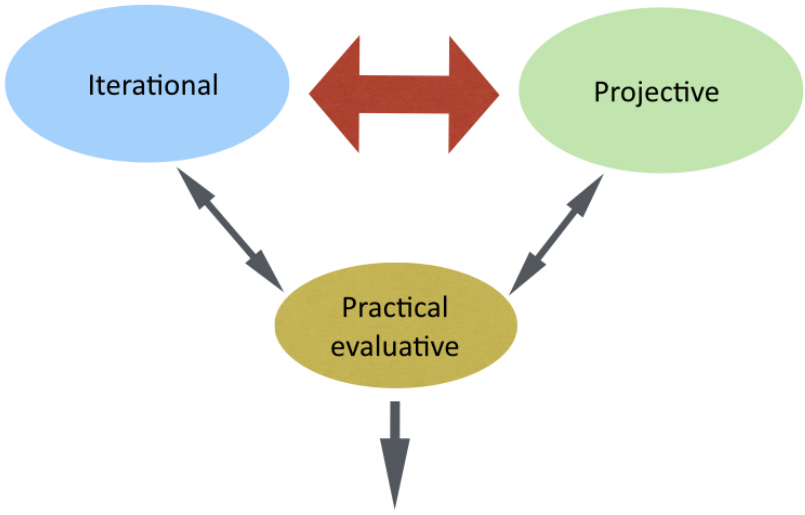
> *'if I don't have a legal status here, I can't think of doing anything for the future. They don't have a plan for the future. They want first [to] settle here. Once they have settled, they can think about the future. People who have settled with their family, they think about their future. They want to do something for their kids, for their family, so they can benefit from it'*

Establishing new livelihoods in Europe entails opportunities and difficulties at the same time. Especially upon arrival, people confront numerous challenges such as integration into the labour market, mastering a foreign language and coping with a socio-cultural and socio-political environment that may not always be welcoming. Tackling these challenges requires people to make significant efforts, as a result of which their projective agency is oriented towards life in the receiving society rather than focused on conditions in Afghanistan. Projective instances of agency as a result of which informants focus on their future livelihoods in Britain or Germany also

entail practical evaluative elements as people respond to the requirements that are part of their receiving context.

Figure 8.2 builds on my earlier illustration of iterational agency. It seeks to clarify the links between projective, iterational and practical evaluative agency. In this case, however, the bold arrow suggests that in order for projective agency to be exercised actors tend to rely on habituated structures. The connection between imagination and habit is likely to be particularly strong in the present case study and may be less pronounced otherwise.

Figure 8.2 The workings of projective agency



On a few occasions I identified projective considerations which revolve around informants' perception of local Afghan communities. While not denying the challenges that are connected to the segregated nature of Afghan populations, it is important to note that informants do not frame the heterogeneity of the Afghan diaspora in negative terms alone. They also emphasise positive contributions of diversity. This suggests that ideas of an imagined Afghan community are not only

manifestations of habituated cultural identities but can also be expressions of projective agency. This was made explicit when informants contrasted the perceived fractured structures of Afghan populations with the hypothetical idea of a more integrated Afghan nation. Here we see another instance of habituated structures providing fertile ground for projective agency which people mobilise to articulate or work towards their ideas of a *'better'* Afghan community. To some extent this corresponds to what Mohan (2002, p. 104) thinks of as 'development in the diaspora', which describes a process that leads to the formation of intra-ethnic networks of cooperation and trust. Ultimately this 'can lead to the formation of civil, political and social associations which protect and support the diasporic community within the host society' (p. 107).

Depending on people's social position, classificatory boundaries may be more or less palpable or – in Alba's words – 'bright' (Alba, 2005). In Chapter 5 we have seen how intersections of certain categories of difference harden the boundaries between people to an extent that cooperation and joint engagement becomes impossible (Dahinden et al., 2014). Yet differences can also be accommodated or framed as a challenge which sparks the dynamics of joint initiatives, as Mukhtar's example in Box 8.2 suggests. Whether or not informants appreciate the Afghan diaspora for its complexity or conceive of persistent segregation as problematic also depends on the way they position themselves to elements of their relational setting. For example, in Chapter 5 we saw that the meanings which informants attribute to political affiliations of ethnic backgrounds vary by generation. This indicates that people draw on different reference points when encountering co-nationals in a diasporic context. Categories of difference are not equally relevant for everyone. Rather they have different connotations and may reflect practical evaluative as well

as projective considerations. Both may help transcend the problems emerging from established categories of difference shaping mutual perceptions and cooperative arrangements between Afghans in Britain and Germany.

8.4 Judgement

Judgement or practical evaluation constitutes the dimension of agency through which actors respond to the demands and contingencies of the present. It accounts for real-world circumstances and thus expresses people's responses to different dimensions of relational settings and their implications. Through practical evaluation actors contextualise their experiences and desires. Practical evaluation therefore expresses the transactional character of agency most clearly (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Most of the observed engagements involve practical evaluative judgements. In this section I will elucidate how informants respond to various elements of their relational setting by exercising practical evaluative agency.

In Chapter 6 I showed how the notoriously volatile security situation in Afghanistan affects how people relate to Afghanistan. It also affects forms and aims of engagement. In many cases personal well-being and safety are contrasted with the assumed risks informants associate with journeys to Afghanistan or engagements that require extended stays in the country. Krishma's (late 20s, young professional, UK) experiences, which are featured in Box 8.5, exemplify how informants use practical evaluation to accommodate habitual feelings of attachment to Afghanistan and the perceived impediments which derive from the country's endemic security problems.

Box 8.5 Reconciling security concerns with desires to act

During a recent visit to Afghanistan, Krishma (late 20s) felt strongly confronted with the fragile security situation. Simultaneously she stresses her general affection for the country. *'I loved it there, I absolutely loved it there. I mean yes, of course, the country is not in a very stable position. But, you know, your country is your country'*. Yet, when offered an opportunity to stay and work in Afghanistan, she felt reluctant to compromise her secure livelihood in the UK.

> *And my uncle, did offer 'by all means if you wanted to work here, I could get you a job'. Because he works for the government and he has his contacts. 'If you wanted to work here, by all means, I could get you a job and then you could serve for your own Afghan people…' I would love to do that, but it's just, once again, just the security… You just don't know. It's just that I am quite reluctant. But otherwise I would love to.*

Krishma declined her uncle's offer of work in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, she stepped up her engagement with Afghan communities in Greater London. She became an active member of an organisation for young Afghan professionals which – among other activities – runs a charity project for orphans in Kabul.

While unwilling to break with their habitual livelihood in the diaspora, informants seek ways that allow them to act upon affectionate relationships with Afghanistan despite the ambiguities arising from the volatile security conditions in the country. Hence through practical evaluation informants respond to several elements of their relational setting. In Krishma's case these include her livelihood and future prospects in the UK, the fragile situation in Afghanistan and the opportunity to get involved in local community initiatives. Practical evaluation can help people solve the dilemma of wanting to act upon their emotional attachment to a place, a perceived part of their identity and their projective ideas of change while considering real-life impediments.

Notorious scepticism not only shapes informants' views of Afghanistan's security situation but also affects perceptions of the international involvement in the country. Considering the amount of official development aid (ODA) flowing into Afghanistan, some informants call into question the use of individual contributions

to 'the development of Afghanistan at large'. Depending on how widely they are shared among people, sceptical views are likely to mutually inform and reinforce each other. People critically evaluate past patterns of action and engagement in the light of the changing situation and retreat to more specific and localised forms of action. In Box 8.6 I bring in another example from the field. It shows how people break habits through practical evaluation as they critically assess established forms of transnational engagement in the light of international aid flows to Afghanistan.

Box 8.6 Revisiting and sustaining routinised practices

Prior to 2001, Naveed (late 60s) remembers selling Afghan food at street parties. The proceeds were sent to Afghan refugee camps in Peshawar, Pakistan. Nowadays, however, people are less willing to make joint fundraising efforts because they see substantial amounts of aid flowing to Afghanistan anyway. *'Throughout the 90s and during the early 2000s Afghans were much more active'*, Naveed recalls.

> *But now they get many negative impressions. Everyone says 'so much money is flowing to Afghanistan, so what is the use of me making my contributions? It is not actually needed. What difference does it make if I send a couple of thousand euro to Afghanistan every year?' So they think 'I'd rather help my family or support my school than spending money on other projects'.*

However, although sceptical attitudes lead people to critically assess forms and contexts of engagement, they do not necessarily mean the engagements are discontinued. Rather informants seem to be redirecting and perhaps re-scaling their support based on practical evaluative assessment of how needs in Afghanistan are being addressed and who is there to address them. Despite the substantial flows of ODA, obligations towards the family or specific known communities prevail. In the above case practical evaluation leads people to redirect their activities to a different sphere of engagement and act upon different habitual elements of their daily lives.

Another or additional reason behind the re-scaling of transnational support may be people's spatial and temporal detachments from the country of origin as a

result of which transnational engagements shift from more publicly to more privately oriented activities. This should not be misinterpreted as a manifestation of informants' powerlessness but instead indicates that informants adopt a conscious position vis-à-vis conditions in Afghanistan, considering how to best deploy their resources. Assessments are largely informed by critical evaluations of the current situation in the country but over time habituated patterns of action may emerge, as we see in the case of engagements in the family and known community sphere.

Practical evaluative considerations are also connected to attempts and direct experiences of living and working in Afghanistan. In several cases informants' efforts to reintegrate into the country of origin have been a source of difficulties and ultimately disillusionment. Disappointment can strongly affect people's willingness to make any further efforts to actively engage with the situation in Afghanistan. Some withdrew from Afghanistan-oriented engagements altogether, while others changed their strategy of engagement, as was the case for Aziza whose experiences are featured in Box 8.7.

Box 8.7 Shifting spheres of engagement through practical evaluation

Aziza (30) left Afghanistan as a small child and grew up in Germany. After graduating from university she returned to Afghanistan where she found employment in the private sector and also met her future husband. However, life and work in the country of origin turned out to be more difficult than expected. In particular Aziza struggled with the materialistic attitudes of her social environment in Kabul. *'[T]his Afghan behaviour killed my mind really. I got very sad. And I saw many Afghans quickly wearing Armani clothes and having jewellery and showing off… And I thought "whom do you want to impress? These poor people?"'* Ultimately she decided to return to Germany with her husband. Aziza was still trying to come to terms with this trajectory of events at the time we met for an interview.

It's for me like, since I was torn out of Afghanistan, I am not rooted anywhere any more. And for me just getting out of Afghanistan, we were very down. You have to imagine us, one year ago you could not talk to us: we were depressed, my illusions were broken. Seeing all these people being corrupt, friends of ours being corrupt. And then again you have the pressure to behave like them, I did not want to behave like them.

Aziza decided to withdraw from her work in the Afghan private sector and began working as a freelance journalist instead. She is now based in Germany and reports on Afghanistan-related matters from her perspective.

Experiences of rejection and dislocation can stimulate practical evaluative as well as projective considerations. People reposition themselves in their relational setting and seek new (plat)forms of engagement without abandoning their commitment to Afghanistan. As a result of practical evaluative judgements, engagements are reconfigured. At the same time people hold on to their hopes and ideas for the future of Afghanistan as well as their personal future. Instead of continuing to expose themselves to the perceived frustrating reality in Afghanistan, informants prefer to redirect their resources to other spheres of engagement. It is important to add, however, that informants like Aziza also benefit from their structural integration into the receiving society. Their decisions clearly reflect the opportunities that come along with holding a German or British passport, which significantly enhances mobility and choice. Although attempts to structurally reintegrate into the Afghan society may fail, informants are still able to move between the two worlds and establish new platforms for engagement which allow them to act upon their beliefs and values.

The decision to withdraw from engagements 'on the ground' may not correspond to what is usually framed as the agentic potential of people living in the diaspora (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Mohan, 2002). However, when deciding to

retreat from one form of engagement and adopt a different – perhaps more distant – role vis-à-vis the country of origin, informants exercise practical evaluative as well as projective forms of agency. Often this allows them to make good use of their capacities amidst the given opportunities and restrictions and to position themselves better in relation to their country of origin.

Practical evaluative considerations not only derive from informants' assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. How informants position themselves or are positioned vis-à-vis the structures of the receiving country also affects commitments to Afghanistan as well as engagements in transnational action. Informants identified concerns relating to people's legal status as a widespread deterrent to Afghanistan-oriented action, especially among Afghans who had arrived in Germany or the UK more recently. Many apply for asylum and endure transitory legal situations for extended periods of time (Chapter 3). Material constraints resulting from low household incomes further exacerbate the psychological uncertainties of such living conditions. A general sense of insecurity coupled with physical immobility make it difficult for people to engage with situations beyond their day-to-day lives. Structural elements like legal status and livelihoods form part of the situational context to which informants respond with considerations and decision-making. Consequently aspects shaping 'here and now' can prompt a salience of practical evaluative rather than projective considerations that revolve around potential contributions to Afghanistan.

Likewise among informants who hold temporary residence permits, there appear to be widespread fears that transnational engagements may bear unwanted consequences in terms of threatening their secure status and thus their overall future

prospects in the receiving country[47]. There seems to be some degree of uncertainty as to what is acceptable and welcomed and what is feared to cast a dubious shadow on one's activities. More particularly people seem concerned that public debates around mobilisation among Islamist groups could enhance scepticism with regard to the activities of Afghan community organisations. Across Western Europe, public debates around so-called 'home-grown' Islamist activists have intensified. Classificatory schemas and negative image-making resulting from such debates have triggered much concern among Muslim communities in Germany and the UK alike. Such developments affect people's awareness of their national and ethnic origin and may lead them to adjust their practices and ways of engaging with the public.

Hence informants practically evaluate perceived social norms. This may lead people to take Afghanistan-oriented action which is limited in scope or to remain inactive. Limited action, for example, consists of family support or occasional contributions to charity events. On the other hand, however, perceptions of one's position in the receiving society may involve strong framings which, over time, translate into habits of thought. This may be reinforced by public discourse where Afghanistan is often linked to subjects like terrorism, insurgency and unlawfulness. Such perceptions of 'self' and 'other' reflect the consequences of boundary work, which reiterates symbolic differences between Afghan immigrant populations and the receiving societies (Dahinden et al., 2014; Pachucki et al., 2007). Consequently, alongside practical evaluation, iterational elements of agency may feature strongly when people position themselves in the receiving society and towards their country

[47] I did not gather first-hand evidence on such concerns, because they did not seem to be a personal issue for informants with a temporary residence status. However, many other informants touched upon such dimensions of insecurity and the cautious attitudes people adopt respectively. I therefore decided to include this aspect in my findings.

of origin. While my findings do not suggest that transnational activities pose an impediment to integration (Oeppen, 2013; Snel et al., 2006) it seems more reasonable to assume that integration or the lack thereof may impede transnational engagements.

It is important to distinguish between people's ability and their willingness to participate in transnational civic action, partly because these aspects are different expressions of people exercising agency. Many Afghans who live in Britain or Germany with their families and young children are reluctant to dedicate substantial parts of their lives to Afghanistan-related engagement. Especially for later emigrant generations, life in Europe implies not only safety but also socio-economic improvement. They left Afghanistan when the country's economic infrastructure was weak; consequently they are grateful for their children to grow up in a safe environment that provides a wealth of future opportunities. But, as shown in Chapter 6, sustained attachments to Afghanistan may be a contentious subject of debate within families. In some families I found that one of the parents, most often the male head of the family, worked part time in Afghanistan. Such transnational commitments often imply delicate balancing acts between the desire and opportunity to work in and for Afghanistan and a concern about the well-being of their family. This suggests that different elements of relational settings may have antagonistic effects on informants' teleologies. Family obligations may conflict with people's desire to dedicate parts of their life to working in Afghanistan. As a result people are required to accept trade-offs as they acknowledge that their relationship with Afghanistan and aspiration to contribute to their country cannot be easily accommodated.

Likewise we need to bear in mind that informants may consciously decide not to participate in organisations and to stick with certain segments of Afghan communities. Not participating thus is as much an expression of agency as active (transnational) engagements. Informants are aware of the choices and opportunities at hand. As a result they use their freedom to act on what seems best for them, which Esmatullah's account in Box 8.8 exemplifies. We should consider, however, that practical evaluation not only leads people to decide what they aspire to – it may also lead them to decide against their actual aspirations. This implies that practical evaluation has both positive and negative connotations for those making decisions.

Box 8.8 Non-engagement as an expression of agency

Esmatullah (mid 20s), who has been living in the south of England since 2002, recalls how he wrestled with the decision of whether or not to get engaged in Afghanistan.

> *[W]hen I finished university I thought I want to kind of go back to Afghanistan and work for the government. And I had those big ideas to just make changes and you know… Sometimes I say 'okay I should go back and do something. I was born in that country…' But then I say 'oh no, too much, I just carry on my life'. If I am happy with what I am and I carry on my daily life then, yeah, it's not my problem, it's the people who are there… Um, yeah…*

Some informants used the metaphor 'silent spectators' with reference to the less actively engaged parts of the Afghan diaspora population, who allegedly are difficult to motivate. Being a 'silent spectator', however, does not necessarily mean that people are passive. In many cases it is a reflection of the way people practically evaluate and act upon the situation in which they are enmeshed. Such findings suggest that diasporas are agents but not necessarily agents of change according to the modernist understanding of change and development, which revolves around improvement of economic welfare in home countries. Focusing on practical evaluative aspects of agency helps us understand which aspects of diasporic

livelihoods are considered when people engage or refrain from engaging in transnational practices. Emirbayer and Mische's tripartite concept of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) allows us to see how the drivers of engagement are negotiated amidst local, social and institutional specificities of informants' relational setting.

Summary

Throughout this chapter I demonstrated how informants exercise agency when engaging in transnational activities amidst the opportunities and constraints that emerge from the relational settings in which they are embedded. My analysis of narratives of engagement and social embeddedness allows me to disentangle the connections between people's social context and their forms and spheres of social engagement, some of which seek to contribute to 'a foundation for change' in Afghanistan.

I demonstrated how different elements of informants' relational setting have constraining or enabling effects on social and/or transnational engagement. More importantly I explained how informants respond to the opportunities and restrictions they encounter by exercising different forms of agency. This shows that there are multiple ways in which the building blocks of diasporic livelihoods affect transnational engagements. It emerges that both endogenous structures and dynamics of Afghan populations and people's embeddedness in different receiving societies have a strong bearing on transnational engagements. These factors – often in conjunction – influence aims of engagement and the resources people are able to mobilise.

Contrasting the aims of engagement outlined in Chapter 6 with the actual activities described in Chapter 7 reveals that there are mismatches between informants' aims for engagement, available resources and actual activities. This suggests that informants are not necessarily able to act upon identified drivers of change in Afghanistan. But this does not mean that they have no agency. Rather informants' narratives of engagement reveal how they exercise agency while navigating amidst the opportunities and constraints deriving from the way they are embedded in the relational setting (see Ahearn, 2001). However, if relational settings change, they may practically evaluate their circumstances and might act closer to their aims.

The findings which emerge from my analysis allow me to specify widely held beliefs pertaining to diasporas as actors. There are several questions we should ask before adopting certain images of diasporas as actors. In fact there is a need to critically revisit our understanding of action itself. According to which criteria do we acknowledge social practices as 'action'? And what kind of values are implicitly or explicitly linked to our assessments? Much research on diaspora engagement implicitly or explicitly draws on rational actor models. Diasporas are cast as actors whenever the assumed targets of engagement correspond to widely shared understandings of valuable impact. This includes development (Sinatti & Horst, 2014; Mohan, 2002), post-conflict reconstruction (Horst et al., 2010; Koinova, 2011a; Van Hear, 2015) and political advocacy (Gamlen, 2008b; Shain, 1999).

Such framings of diasporas as actors, however, imply a narrow understanding of the way actual forms of action and agency are interlinked. Ideas of diasporic agency are derived from assumed characteristics of diasporas as social entities and carriers of fixed identities. Based on my close examination of agentic narratives I

contend that we cannot assess the agency of diasporic groups by focusing exclusively on the transnational practices which they direct towards the respective origin country. Rather the primacy of outcomes which dominates studies of diaspora engagement (Brinkerhoff, 2011a) turns a blind eye to the instances in which agency is exercised. How and under which conditions people exercise agency only becomes intelligible if we broaden our understanding of the multi-layered conditions under which members of diasporic groups act upon their specific relationships with their countries of origin and reception, their embeddedness in social networks and ideas of change and development.

Considering the potential effects of transnational activities, diasporic groups may be agents of change. As such, however, they do not solely act upon their attachment to the origin country. There are various reasons why people choose to engage in specific activities. Actual practices become more intelligible if we approach them from a relational perspective which considers people's social position in relation to their countries of origin and reception as well as to fellow (groups of) Afghan diasporans. Making the effort to disentangle the effects and variabilities of multi-layered structures helps us gain a more precise understanding of *why* people engage with their home countries in certain ways and what forms of agency are involved *if* people choose to take action.

Emirbayer and Mische's tripartite concept of agency helps us specify how informants respond to the situation they live in. It also allows us to account for the contextuality of agency and action without slipping into relativism. Distinguishing between different elements of agency is useful to discover new facets in narratives of action that might otherwise be misread as motivated by linear, rational considerations. It also prevents us from reducing the idea of agency to specific forms

of behaviour or outcomes of action. Considering iterational, projective and practical evaluative engagements with social contexts recognises different aspects of the acting person and thus provides valuable complementary insights to impact-centred accounts of diaspora activities.

In section 8.2 I focused on iterational agency, showing how crucial dimensions of informants' social identities are permeated by past experiences, which is also reflected in their practices. Habit and repetition are implicated in informants' relational settings. As such they enable or restrict people from acting upon projective aspects of agency that are oriented towards future possibilities and which I examined in section 8.3. Hence both habitual and projective dimensions of agency are integral to informants' transnational engagements or their decision to focus on their future lives in Germany or the UK in the first place. Actual engagements – as I showed in section 8.4 – are mediated by practical evaluative considerations. Through practical evaluative agency, informants adjust habitual dispositions and projective imagination to the specificities of the given situation. Practical evaluation therefore makes the transactional nature of agency most explicit. This is particularly important in immigration contexts where agents rarely get to articulate aspirations, engagements and related opportunities and restrictions in their own terms. Rather people are seen and framed according to dominant systems of meaning-making which are determined by actors like states or international organisations.

With a primary focus on individual narratives, I am able to capture how people situate themselves in the light of their migratory experiences, their relationships to the places of origin and reception and to their co-nationals living in the receiving country and beyond. Perceptions and narratives of contextual embeddedness also make it possible to discern which relations mark particular

diasporic experiences. They elucidate how people create meaning by interpreting and evaluating their life-world (Hall & Lamont, 2013). Such an agent-centred perspective differs decisively from studies of diasporas that adopt an etic approach to examine the formation of diasporas in the light of transformations, without acknowledging aspects that forge variabilities within emerging diaspora populations. However, I have not been able to exhaustively specify how the lives of Afghans in Britain and Germany and the ties they maintain with Afghanistan shape engagements in transnational action. There is no general explanatory formula because people interact differently with the particular elements of their relational setting. Systematic analysis of several cases, however, may allow us to establish patterns and regularities, which shape contexts, objectives and forms of diaspora engagement in origin countries.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

The central puzzle of this thesis revolves around the lives and engagements of Afghans in the wider diaspora. While there is a substantial body of work on the livelihoods and mobility of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan (Schetter, 2012b; for example Monsutti, 2005; Stigter & Monsutti, 2005), Afghan populations in Western countries have attracted little interest.

I studied Afghan populations in Germany and the UK against the backdrop of ideal-typical definitions of diaspora. I chose Germany and the UK as two specific research sites which I assumed could provide insights into distinct facets of the wider Afghan diaspora. Both countries are important European destinations for Afghan migrants and refugees, yet they feature interesting specificities as far as historical patterns of Afghan immigration and the history of bilateral relations with Afghanistan are concerned. 'Diaspora' seemed to be a useful concept to specify processes of displacement and dispersal, and their implications for regrouping and social engagement away from 'home'. To contrast empirical cases with idealtypical definitions of diaspora (Cohen, 2008; Brubaker, 2005) we need to examine the links between the causes of migration, the incorporation of diasporic groups in countries of settlement and the cross-border experiences of the homeland (see Faist, 2010).

From an outside perspective Afghan populations fulfil many of the criteria that define diasporas according to idealtypical understandings. Four decades of war and turmoil in Afghanistan were accompanied by large-scale displacement and the dispersal of Afghan refugees across neighbouring countries and various destinations further afield. Persistent conditions of conflict also left Afghanistan's infrastructure

and economy ailing and contributed to the fact that the majority of refugees settled permanently at their destinations or moved on to third countries. Following the logic of the diaspora and development literature (see for example Newland & Patrick, 2004; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002), Afghans living outside their country seem predisposed to engage in transnational activities for change in Afghanistan.

However, a closer examination of my informants' diasporic narratives reveals a deviation from both the literature on diasporas as social forms and studies on diasporas as social actors. We come to realise that Afghan populations are fractured and tend to coalesce in distinct subgroups, which may be based on extended family ties, ethnicity or class. Transnational engagements reveal a similar trend. They are carried out by small groups of actors rather than resulting from large-scale mobilisations, which have been suggested for other conflict-induced diasporas in Western countries (Mohamoud, 2005). Such facts imply a stark contrast to the literature on diasporas and diaspora engagement. While studies of diaspora engagement tend to make bold assumptions about contributions to development, they rarely adopt an actor-centred perspective that tries to unpack the teleologies of actors themselves and the meanings they attach to their engagements.

The lives and engagements of Afghans in the wider diaspora constitute a puzzle insofar as they emphasise the need to better understand the inner workings of diasporas and why and how people engage with their countries of origin. To this end this thesis has sought to establish to what extent people of Afghan origin who live in Britain and Germany see themselves as part of a wider diaspora. Assuming that relationships to the home country are central to diasporic identities, I explored informants' perceptions of current conditions in Afghanistan and potentially related ideas of change and development. I hoped that examining the diasporic livelihoods,

emerging identities and patterns of social organisation among Afghans in Britain and Germany would yield insights as to why people engage in specific forms of transnational action. Inherent to this puzzle is the request for theorisation of the dynamics deriving from patterns of social organisation, social integration, teleologies and agency. Drawing on relational sociology to develop the analytical framework, this thesis has also aspired to make a substantive theoretical contribution. As I revisit my empirical findings I will evaluate the explanatory capacity of the applied theories.

I began my research by employing a retroductive, qualitative approach in different research sites in Britain and Germany. My case study consists of 55 interviews, most of which I conducted during a total period of 12 months. I obtained additional data from shorter and more informal interviews and participant observation, carried out at thematic events. By applying these methods I was able to gather very rich data on individual life and migration trajectories and – more specifically – forms and contexts of transnational engagements in Afghanistan. In the following sections I will present the three main conclusions I draw from my work, and then highlight their implications.

9.1 What I found

While my study does not delve deeply into different dimensions of people's livelihoods in the destination countries, it yields profound insights into the elements which shape diasporic identities and the development of (fractured) community structures. However, I found that Afghanistan has remained a centrepiece in the lives of most informants. In my sample home country attachments are often tied to a desire for change and development in that country. The apparent discrepancy

between multi-layered social identities, fractured social organisation and (implicitly) shared commitments to the origin country led me to apply a relational approach to the analysis of transnational engagements. I suggested that a relational perspective would help to better understand how transnational engagements are linked to both people's enduring attachment to their country of origin and the elements which shape their lives in the diaspora.

9.1.1 Perceptions of membership and belonging are relational

I began the presentation of my empirical findings by focusing on the set-up of Afghan populations in the two countries. In Chapter 5 I aimed to examine the substance of social ties and dynamics of communitisation under consideration of the social, local and institutional contexts in which informants are situated. I discovered that mutual perceptions among persons of Afghan origin are strongly shaped by certain categories among which family background, ethnicity, political affiliation and class feature prominently. These categories not only affect the way Afghans frame and approach each other but also constitute the fabric of social ties. Rather than coalescing under the umbrella of an overarching Afghan identity, I found informants in both countries to form alliances along more narrowly defined lines. This leads Afghan diaspora populations, as informants point out, to be divided. Drawing on the concept of boundaries (Wimmer, 2008; Lamont & Molnár, 2002) I argued that such categories of difference not only shape mutual perceptions but also affect patterns of social organisation. Yet it is important to note that social ties are selective for different reasons. To some extent particularistic patterns of communitisation are an inherent feature of (traditional) Afghan society (Vogelsang, 2008; Schetter, 2003; Glatzer, 2001, 2002). While acknowledging the importance of

family and – in some cases – tribal ties, informants also link contested dynamics of social organisation to episodes of homeland conflict. Hence, while fractures of Afghan populations are widely seen social facts, their underlying reasons are subject to different interpretation. This raises more general questions about the way we construct social reality (Searle, 1995) and on what basis we make claims and interpret social life around us.

The salience of identified categories of similarity and difference varies according to time, place and the issues at stake in certain situations. I have shown that changing phases of conflict and displacement led to waves of migration and the gradual politicisation of Afghan diaspora populations and aspects like ethnic backgrounds. A gradually emerging second generation of Afghan immigrants in both countries represents another facet of temporal variabilities. As such the discovery that members of the second or young generation adopt, interpret and do things differently than their parents is not new (see for example Alinia & Eliassi, 2014; Bolognani, 2014; Rytter, 2010). However, in the Afghan case generational differences may be particularly consequential. Among young Afghans in both countries I discovered not only a desire to transcend the divisions deriving from mainly ethnic and political antagonisms but also concrete attempts to promote more inclusive forms of social organisation. Likewise, I established that degrees of inclusiveness and exclusiveness vary at different places of settlement.

Referring back to the links between diasporas and social change which I drew in Chapter 2, I found that conflict-induced transformations in Afghanistan have affected an emerging Afghan diaspora in two ways. First, homeland conflict has been the reason for Afghan displacement and dispersal and, second, political changes in Afghanistan strongly shaped the dynamics of social organisation among

dispersed populations. The Afghan case underlines that diasporas are best conceived as continuously evolving and inherently changeable social entities. The findings presented in Chapter 5 moreover suggest that people have multiple identity categories. They are at the same time members of families, representatives of a certain generation and adherents of certain political views (to name only a few). These identity categories, however, are selectively enacted.

Whether perceptions of self and others are shaped by more particularistic or inclusive identities depends on what is at stake in a specific situation and which layers of people's identities are being addressed. This may not be a very satisfactory answer to the puzzle as to how people come to see themselves as part of an Afghan diaspora. However, the above findings urge us to study the making and unmaking of social groups as part of wider social, political and historical settings whose effects need to be specified for each individual case. It is insufficient to premise our understanding of people and social groups on single categories such as 'diaspora' (see Somers, 1994). Instead we need to acknowledge that social identities emerge and are re-worked as a result of continuous iteration with the building blocks of social context in which people are embedded. In Chapter 5 I cited the example of Razma (26, young professional, UK), who hardly knew Afghans beyond her family network while growing up in London. This changed drastically once Razma started university and joined an Afghan student association. Her new network of contacts not only changed Razma's self-perception as 'Afghan in the UK' but also opened new fields of social engagement. People define who they are in relation to others who are part of their social context and in relation to specific identity categories which may be more or less inclusive. These identity categories also inform

perceptions of membership and belonging to certain social groups or wider social entities.

9.1.2 The Afghan diaspora: A tacit imagined community

There are some identity markers that cut across identified categories of difference as well as generations. Such cross-cutting communalities are linked to widely shared perceptions of informants as being part of the Afghan people and Afghan culture. I argued that, beyond the particularities which structure Afghan communities, there is an imagined Afghan community that also shapes informants' social consciousness.

Building on my analysis of mutual perceptions and dynamics and patterns of social organisation which I presented in Chapter 5, I shifted my focus to (transnational) relationships with Afghanistan in the subsequent chapter. I differentiated between connections based on personal contacts and return visits, and connections deriving from imaginary ties which are reflected in ascribed meanings of home. Both forms of home country connections are widespread among my informants. Implicitly they transgress social boundaries, generations and class and unite informants in an overarching, yet unacknowledged, imagined Afghan community. The findings presented in Chapter 6 further substantiate the pitfalls of conflating diasporas as social forms and diasporas as social consciousness (Vertovec, 1997). Rather we should differentiate diasporic ways of being, meaning actual social relations and practices, from diasporic ways of belonging, which are expressed in identity categories that are ascribed to or chosen by individuals or groups (Levitt, 2005).

I also showed that home country attachments vary in terms of their emotional connotations. These variations derive from life experiences, emigration trajectories, the purpose and frequency of return visits and personal networks. Each of these aspects plays a crucial role in shaping the transactions between informants and their country of origin as a generalised other. Afghanistan thus does not have the same significance as a country of (ancestral) origin for everyone. Different connotations of home are particularly pronounced between generations. I primarily attributed observed differences to first-hand experiences of life in Afghanistan among the older generation and higher degrees of structural integration into the receiving societies among younger informants. At the same time, however, improved communication infrastructure and the emergence of online social networks contributed to a new sense of proximity which is especially widespread among the young generation.

Chapter 6 specifies tensions of preservation and change in the case of the Afghan diaspora. It also highlights that perceptions of home and belonging not only affect informants' relationship with Afghanistan as country of (ancestral) origin but also their social integration into the receiving society. To a large extent my findings reiterate earlier accounts that emphasise that meanings of home are contingent on contextual specificities (Binaisa, 2013; Stock, 2010; Mallett, 2004). Yet a relational approach – as shown in Chapter 6 – helps us to determine how meanings of home interact with other aspects. These include political transitions in Afghanistan, modes of incorporation into the British or German society and expanding media and communication channels, which have supported a sense of greater proximity between diaspora and country of origin. In this way, my case study of Afghan diaspora populations allows me to make a clear case against the naturalisation of belonging (Anthias, 1998) because it presents belonging as fundamentally relational.

For most informants perceived attachments with Afghanistan are coupled with concerns about current conditions in the country and prospects for future development. In this context informants highlighted a set of criteria which they consider as integral elements of change. I identified the idea of 'building a foundation' as a crucial metaphor in this context. Informants stressed their desire for Afghanistan to be a 'normal country' and the necessity of enabling people in Afghanistan to live normal lives. The idea of 'building a foundation' is linked to different identified requirements for concrete action. The identified building blocks of a foundation for Afghanistan largely concur with common understandings of development in conflict-ridden settings (Brinkerhoff, 2011b; Smith & Stares, 2007). For instance, informants particularly emphasised the need for 'good governance', 'security', 'infrastructural improvement' and 'education'. It is important to note, however, that informants rarely used terms such as 'development' and 'change' but instead derived their ideas for intervention from the situation in Afghanistan. When thinking about elements of change in Afghanistan, ideas of development seem generally relevant. However, concrete meanings of development are closely linked to the specific requirements which informants derive from the situation in their home country.

Here it is important to reiterate that my findings reflect the mindsets and engagements of a specific group within the wider Afghan diaspora. Most of my informants take part in the debates of their receiving country. This suggests that ideas of development are relational for two main reasons. First, meanings of development are relational as they are linked to the history and current situation of one specific place. Second, ideas of change and development seem inseparable from informants' social backgrounds. Here my findings agree with previous research

making a case for the connection of social and structural integration and transnational engagement (Oeppen, 2013; Nagel & Staeheli, 2008; Snel et al., 2006). For example, all observed engagements in lobbying activities (Chapter 7.3) involve people who come from educated upper (middle) class backgrounds. These are reflected in their social networks with Afghan co-nationals and members of the receiving society. Such findings suggest that informants' concerns relating to change and development in Afghanistan not only derive from feelings of attachment and belonging to 'home'. They also reflect how people are positioned in their receiving societies and among fellow diasporans.

Others have identified diasporic consciousness as forming the essence of imagined communities which take shape as more or less organised social forms (Vertovec, 1997; Anderson, 1983). Imagined communities are widely assumed to constitute the basis for diasporic social engagements (Sökefeld, 2006). In the Afghan case, however, the imagined community is at best selectively enacted. It largely remains underneath the surface while more particularistic identity categories shape actual patterns of social organisation. This leads me to the conclusion that not all identified layers of people's identities are necessarily reflected in inter-personal ties, which drive dynamics of communitisation. Perceptions of belonging – locally as well as socially – in turn affect people's teleologies as well as forms of concrete social engagement. Overall desires and ideas for change form an important part of many informants' home country relationships. As such they nurture concrete engagements. Yet, while informants' reasons for action are similar, forms of engagement vary significantly. Both reasons for action and forms of engagement can be explained by shedding light on people's embeddedness in relational settings.

9.1.3 Transnational engagements and local embeddedness

Having explored different reasons for transnational engagement in Chapter 6, I shifted my focus to concrete forms of action in Chapter 7. Drawing on Van Hear (2015) I identified three spheres towards which informants direct their activities: extended families, known communities and the imagined community or an imaginary Afghanistan. As a concept, spheres of engagement works well to specify the social entities towards which transnational engagements are directed. However, we require supplementary clarification as to why people direct their engagement to different spheres.

Informants do not necessarily frame their transnational engagements as contributions to 'development'. In the literature remittances directed to the (extended) family sphere, for instance, are considered as crucial contributions to economic and social development (see for example de Haas et al., 2009). This, however, does not mean that informants necessarily think of wider development processes when sending remittances to family members in Afghanistan. Such divergent framings of transnational engagements imply different understandings of the agency of diasporic actors. As I analyse the relational embeddedness of informants' engagements I unpack how they exercise agency by targeting certain spheres of engagement through specific types of activities.

Here an actor-centred perspective takes me into new ground. If we broaden our understanding of diasporas as social actors, we come to acknowledge that social engagements may take different shapes and forms. These in turn are connected to different understandings and interpretations of what is going on as actors accommodate different aspects of their social identity and their social environment when taking action. Defining agency mainly in terms of outcomes turns a blind eye

to the meanings which actors themselves ascribe to their engagements. Impact-oriented perspectives moreover ignore how people exercise agency by navigating amidst the opportunities and constraints of their relational settings.

Although contexts of engagement are rather narrowly defined, informants often frame their activities as contributions to 'Afghanistan' in a wider sense. I discovered that there is a general tendency among informants to act in the name of an imagined community or an imaginary Afghanistan. Likewise informants tend to express similar ideas of change and development and take action with the aim of reaching similar ends. Conversely, the concrete settings in which activities are initiated are based on more narrowly defined social ties, which largely derive from the particularistic identity categories I discussed. Thus, although people may take action in the name of an imagined Afghan community or an imaginary Afghanistan, this imagined community does not provide a basis for social mobilisation. Afghans in the diaspora engage with Afghanistan but they are not acting as a cohesive diaspora.

Concrete engagements do not only derive from the ties informants maintain with Afghanistan and their ideas and desires for change. They are also a response to the specificities of informants' social environments. This led me to focus more closely on perceived opportunities and restrictions relating to identified needs for change and concrete forms of action. More particularly I tried to establish how opportunities and restrictions of transnational engagements are linked to informants' embeddedness in relational settings and how informants exercise agency when taking action in their countries of origin. The activities informants carry out in different spheres of engagement are an expression of constraints and agency at the same time. They exemplify how life in the diaspora implies constant navigating

amidst the elements and institutions constituting informants' relational settings. Studying the activities directed to different spheres of engagement in conjunction with the diasporic settings in which actors are situated makes this explicit. Case Studies 7.1 and 7.2 feature activities through which informants contribute to the improvement of education and rural infrastructures at specific localities in Afghanistan. I argued that such engagements are only possible because of informants' secure livelihoods in Germany, the (financial) support they receive from German civil society and their close partnerships with local communities and colleagues in Afghanistan.

Such examples show that we do not learn much about the agency of diasporans if we solely focus on the outcomes of engagement. When trying to explain agency it is necessary to better understand the 'inner workings' of Afghan diaspora populations. My examination of spheres of engagement suggests that agency is best conceived as an interactive response of actors to their structural environment, which is part of the relational setting introduced above. How and under which conditions people exercise agency only becomes intelligible if we broaden our understanding of the multi-layered conditions under which members of Afghan groups act upon their specific relationships with the origin country and the conceptions of change and development emerging from these relationships.

The analysis of different dimensions of agency, which are mobilised as part of informants' transnational engagements, makes a case against models of rational actors. I am contrasting the rational actor (see for example Elster, 1989) with a pragmatist actor model (Dewey & Bentley, 1960). The latter is reflected in aims of engagement which emerge during the course of action. My analyses in Chapter 8 show how informants constantly re-frame and adjust their practices to the

conditions in place, which do not allow people to act on purely rational grounds. Responding to the last of my research questions I suggest that people exercise agency but agency is not necessarily expressed in the way accounts on diaspora and development often assume (see for example Agunias & Newland, 2012; Newland & Patrick, 2004). My analysis of relationally embedded engagements makes explicit that actors see the world differently from outside spectators. Social action is driven by different dimensions of people's social identity and shaped in interaction with various elements of the relational setting in which they are embedded.

By disentangling different spheres of engagement I show that there are many possible ways in which life in the diaspora and people's local and transnational ties shape the activities they engage in. Developing an overarching typology that exhaustively captures how transnational livelihoods and engagements are connected seems compelling but is beyond the scope of this work. To reach more far-reaching conclusions as far as the links between transnational livelihoods and forms of engagement are concerned it would be necessary to extend my sample and also include those groups of Afghans whom informants referred to as 'invisible'.

9.2 Evaluations

9.2.1 Evaluation of concepts

Diaspora

Throughout the thesis I use diaspora as a way of 'looking at the world' (Kalra et al., 2005, p. 28). It is a concept that allows us to survey different kinds of identity formation, social organisation and engagement. My empirical case study of Afghan populations in Germany and the UK highlights the social processes behind such

abstract wording. These, however, require me to make some concessions in terms of the fit between the idealtypical notion of diaspora and the specific Afghan case. As we have seen throughout the empirical chapters, the Afghan case does not correspond to a diaspora in the idealtypical sense of the term. As a result one might wonder whether the diaspora concept and terminology is of any use and value to this work. Throughout my empirical chapters the analytical and explanatory purchase of 'diaspora' unravels, partly as a result of my relational approach to agency and identity, and partly because of the specificities of the Afghan case. It becomes apparent that the notion of diaspora glosses over most of the identity contestations and social dynamics that shape Afghan immigrant populations in Britain and Germany. Conceptually, however, 'diaspora' was a useful starting point for framing my case at the start of the analysis.

Generic sociological concepts help to develop more nuanced explanations of 'what is going on' than rubberstamping anything that vaguely alludes to diaspora as diasporic. I conclude that the concept of diaspora only facilitates the explanation of home, host country and internal relationships if used in conjunction with other – more general – elements of sociological theory, particularly relations and transactions (Emirbayer, 1997; Somers, 1994), boundaries (Jenkins, 1996; Lamont & Molnár, 2002) and structure and agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Sewell, 1992). In the following paragraphs I will briefly recapitulate how these concepts have been of analytical and explanatory value for the empirical chapters of this work. Ultimately concepts such as diaspora and development seem to tell us more about dominant schemes of interpretation and sense-making in academic and policy discourses than they reveal about the identities, patterns of social organisation,

actions and teleologies of Afghans in Britain and Germany, which are the focus of this study.

Relations and transactions; boundaries; structure and agency

In Chapter 5 I argued that thinking in terms of transactions highlights the dynamic nature of diasporas and prevents us from misunderstanding them as clear-cut social entities. I showed that relations between Afghan co-nationals in the two countries do not revolve around a fixed set of criteria such as nationality or shared perceptions of belonging. Rather people coalesce around different identity categories, which become salient in specific situations. A focus on transactions encourages us to analyse which specific aspects co-determine mutual perceptions and how certain ties bind people in distinct groups under certain circumstances. Transactions, however, unfold in specific social, temporal, local and institutional contexts. Drawing on Somers (1994) I have referred to these contexts as relational settings. The study of narratives of social identification and social organisation in the light of dynamic relational settings helps to explain why trust-based family ties gained importance during times of war and why political issues are less important for many young informants than they are for their parents.

To further specify the links between social identity categories, mutual perceptions and patterns of inclusion and exclusion, I have drawn on the concept of boundaries. I explained how informants link up with like-minded co-nationals by drawing on a particular category of their social identity, such as political ideology. Such selective alliances lead to the emergence of more or less tightly bound spaces (see Alba, 2005; Levitt, 2005). As a subset of relational analysis, the concept of

boundaries has added useful insights to the mechanisms of fractured patterns of social organisation among Afghans in Britain and Germany.

Thinking in terms of transactions also explains the emergence and temporary enactment of an imagined Afghan community as a result of which Afghans in the diaspora join hands and transcend otherwise palpable antagonisms. Here I am thinking of the example given in Chapter 5 where a devastating landslide in Badakhshan province was echoed by a call for support that was directed to 'all Afghans' rather than a specific and circumscribed group of persons. Similar to the emergence of divisions, this example demonstrates how dynamics within diaspora groups are co-determined by events in Afghanistan and other aspects that shape diasporic lives. A relational perspective hence unpacks how events occurring at one site of people's social context (Afghanistan) affect the characteristics of other contextual elements, such as issue-driven alliances (see Tilly, 2005).

Transactional thinking also helps us understand why Afghanistan has different meanings for different people. In Chapter 6 I showed that there is no universally shared connection between my informants and their country of origin. For example, informants' memories of Afghanistan have different connotations, ranging from nostalgia to scepticism and fear. I argued that we can understand such differences by focusing on the aspects which co-determine the way informants relate to Afghanistan. Such mediating elements include informants' life experiences in Afghanistan, their livelihoods and social incorporation into the receiving society, and their belonging to certain migrant cohorts or generations. Relationships between informants and their country of origin have also been affected by events in Afghanistan and changes in transport, information and communication facilities which have fostered a sense of greater proximity between everyday life in

Afghanistan and in the diaspora. A transactional perspective places such mediating aspects at centre stage rather than conceiving of 'home' as a place to which people maintain stable relationships that are linked to a sense of belonging and commitment. How informants relate to Afghanistan has important implications for their desire to establish themselves in receiving countries and their eagerness to engage in transnational activities.

In Chapter 7 I employed a relational perspective to unpack the links between informants' social identities, patterns of social organisation and forms of social engagement. I showed that people do not exclusively act upon their attachment to Afghanistan or their desire to contribute to 'change' and 'development' but also upon the elements that structure the relational setting in which they are embedded. Such links between structures and action become explicit if we disaggregate transnational engagements according to the social spheres towards which they are directed. Understanding how informants come to extend their activities to different social spheres in turn requires us to consider the social settings in which they are situated as actors. I argued that informants may well be acting to enhance change – yet they do not act as a cohesive diaspora. Hence forms and rationales of transnational engagement are only intelligible if we link them to a detailed analysis of the relational setting in which they are carried out.

In Chapter 8 my analysis of structure-agency dynamics in transnational engagements yielded further insights as to why informants engage in certain forms of action. Differentiating between iterational, projective and practical evaluative dimensions of agency enabled me to specify which aspects of their relational setting shape informants' transnational practices. I showed that although concrete activities are directed to different social spheres in Afghanistan, we learn little about diasporic

agency if we only examine transnational practices and their results. A relational approach to agency in transnational engagements gives us access to the backstage area of concrete activities. Here we are able to identify how specific elements of informants' relational setting converge to social structures in relation to which different forms of agency are being mobilised.

The educational and socio-economic profiles of my informants appear to affect how they define the underlying purpose of transnational engagements. A relational perspective allows us deeper insights into processes of meaning-making with respect to the home country. It also enables us to specify different understandings of change and development and explain why they are contextual. More importantly, however, we understand why ideas of change and development are widely shared but selectively enacted.

Though relational sociology has been of great analytical and explanatory value to this work, the approach is not devoid of flaws and shortcomings. While analysing my empirical material I noticed that there is a danger of over-interpreting the relational features of the problems at hand. With respect to the idea of relational settings, for instance, it is not always clear how to limit the aspects that are relevant to the questions under consideration. Though theoretically refined, the literature on relational approaches entails little methodological guidance for those who are not conducting fully fledged network analyses (Mische, 2011; see for example Emirbayer, 1997; Somers, 1994). However, while a relational approach does not save us from misunderstandings, it certainly enhances our awareness that social phenomena hardly make sense in isolation from the spatio-temporal connection of their components.

9.3.2 Evaluation of methodology and methods of data collection

Retroduction

This work has come a long way conceptually. It was through retroduction that I identified relational sociology as a framework for analysis. Once I began to immerse myself in the literature on diaspora mobilisation and diaspora engagement for home country development, I realised that the social organisation of diasporas as actors remains largely unaccounted for. This led me to raise more fundamental questions about social organisation and social positions of diasporas as actors. I was curious to trace the process of 'becoming' a diaspora and identify through which mechanisms Afghans in the diaspora acquire agency relating to the country of origin. In search for a refined explanatory framework I turned to critical realist contributions to social theory.

I particularly drew on ideas of emergence (Sawyer, 2004) and causal mechanisms (Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010; Tilly, 2001; Bunge, 1997). I assumed that they would enable a theoretically rich analysis of the emergent processes at play in the formation of an Afghan diaspora and evolving relationships between diasporic groups and their country of origin. This way I hoped to establish mechanisms by which people exercise agency in engaging in transnational activities. According to critical realist reasoning emergent properties like agency would come out of the diaspora as a whole and not be explicable by focusing on the level of aggregate individuals (Elder-Vass, 2010; Sawyer, 2004). Essentially 'emergence' describes the relationship between individual and collective (Sawyer, 2004). According to emergentist logic (Elder-Vass, 2010; Sawyer, 2003) we would think of diaspora as a collective which emerges from recurrent interactions between its constitutive parts. With regard to diaspora engagement, this means that although people take action as

individuals they do so because they are part of a wider social entity, which in this case would be the diaspora.

These concepts set the backdrop against which I developed my strategies of empirical enquiry and my interview guidelines. However, while conducting fieldwork and during early stages of data analysis, I became increasingly sceptical about the explanatory value and the general applicability of critical realism. The idea of agency as an emergent property of diasporas as social entities seemed too far-fetched and unable to capture what my empirical data began to uncover. While the critical realist plea of moving beyond methodologically individualist explanations continued to be a guiding principle I found it unhelpful to frame the observed phenomena in terms of 'parts', 'mechanisms', 'entities' and 'properties' (Elder-Vass, 2010). Instead the fractured but highly dynamic setup of Afghan populations in Britain and Germany drew my focus to the relationships between people and their social and temporal context.

A relational approach enables me to show how different aspects in conjunction facilitate the emergence of diasporic identities and social formations respectively. Agency has been key to my research interests throughout. Both, critical realism and relational sociology place agency at the centre stage. What makes relational sociology specific is that it enables an integrated conception of agency. Agency cannot be conceived as a 'property of diasporas'. Instead we have to acknowledge that diasporas are relational, which implies that agency in the context of diaspora is relational too. A major issue with critical realism is that it struggles to capture particular social entities and link emergent properties to them.

Accommodating contentious views

From my previous research among Afghan civic actors in Germany, I was aware that large parts of the wider diaspora are highly politicised. This corroborates the observations emerging from previous work on conflict-induced diasporas, which researchers often find to be ridden by internal conflicts, biases and inequalities (Horst et al., 2010).

During many of my interviews I encountered strong views which informants held with regard to historical events, current conditions and specific actors in Afghanistan. Strong opinions also affect informants' perception of certain groups within local Afghan populations. Being confronted with divisive opinions was challenging for two reasons. First, in the situation of the interview itself, I was required to react to my counterpart's positioning without compromising my impartiality as a researcher. Second, during subsequent data evaluation it was not easy to determine to what extent informants' views and claims represent widely shared interpretations.

More clarity could have been achieved through more detailed examinations of informants' life histories. These would have allowed me to draw clearer links between people's past experiences and involvements in Afghanistan and their present attitudes and claims. Hence more attention should be paid to relations between assertions, people's life trajectories and their current social embeddedness. Establishing such links was largely beyond the scope of the present work and would require explicitly biographical interviews.

9.4 Implications

9.4.1 Specificities of the Afghan case

The turbulent history of Afghanistan and the fractured nature of Afghan society help explain many of the categories that play important roles in shaping the social identities of Afghans in the wider diaspora. As shown in Chapter 5, there is much disagreement among Afghan diaspora populations that derives from issues that are rooted in the recent history of Afghanistan and hence are specific to this particular case. Since it began to expand in the early 1980s, the wider Afghan diaspora has been deeply fractured. In many ways it is riven with the same – largely political – divisions that have polarised political leaders and parts of the wider population in Afghanistan throughout the last four decades. These include the rising levels of divergence among adherents of different political factions and the politicisation of ethnic backgrounds which intensified during the civil war. Traditional patterns of social organisation among Afghan populations in confined social units based on family or tribal ties extend the progressive segregation of the wider Afghan diaspora. Rather than just describing identified divisions as a matter of fact, I used relational analysis to specify their origins and – more importantly – their effects. I extended emerging insights to my analysis of transnational engagements and the social contexts in which these are carried out. Internal divisions are not unique to the Afghan case. Hence the approach I adopted may yield useful insights into the relations between internal dynamics and social engagements of other conflict-induced diasporas.

In addition, as specified in Chapter 3, Afghan displacement did not result from one historic break event. Rather it occurred in separate waves. Over time Afghan migrant populations became more heterogeneous not only in terms of

political affiliations, but also socio-economically. Hence Afghan diaspora populations in Britain and Germany may be even more complex than I depicted them in my empirical chapters. This implies that there may be more variations with regard to patterns of social organisation, people's ties with the home country and their transnational engagements than I covered in this thesis. With regard to the findings I presented, this means that they only pertain to a small group in a much broader population. At the same time, however, my findings can also apply at larger scale, for instance to other transnational populations whose attributes are similar to those of the Afghan diaspora.

Generally, Afghan migrants and refugees who managed to obtain a secure legal status in Western Europe can be considered relatively privileged compared to their counterparts in the near diaspora. Still the majority of my informants represent a relatively small group within wider – and largely anonymous – populations of Afghan origin that have settled in Western countries. Future research should delve more deeply into the livelihoods and patterns of social organisation of those who some of my informants referred to as 'the silent majority'. This way we could gain further insights into the set-up of the Afghan diaspora in a wider sense and to correlations between socio-economic backgrounds and forms of social organisation in particular.

Scrutinising gendered aspects of social organisation would be particularly insightful in this context. My findings do not reveal much about gendered dynamics of interaction among Afghans in Britain and Germany. I conclude that this is largely connected to informants' socio-economic backgrounds. However, numerous informants – particularly women based in the UK – mentioned instances and effects of gender inequality among local Afghan communities. They also drew links

between gender inequalities and social class. Also, as mentioned in Chapter 3, statistical data on Afghan populations in Western Europe is very limited. Therefore further qualitative inquiry into Afghan diasporic livelihoods would greatly benefit from additionally compiled survey data.

Afghan diaspora populations may constitute an outlier as far as socio-political and socio-economic cleavages are concerned. As such, however, they reiterate the necessity of not taking for granted certain identity categories and patterns of social organisation that are commonly associated with diasporas. Meaning-making and social engagement not only depend on multiple factors, but they are also inherently changeable (see Levitt, 2005). In my empirical chapters I identified events in the home country, livelihoods in receiving countries and generational transitions as crucial drivers of change. They are important factors to consider for the study of conflict-induced diasporas more generally. Every conflict is specific, which is also reflected in instances of displacement, the dynamics of regrouping among co-nationals at certain destinations and the ties they maintain with their home country. Relational analysis proved to be a useful tool for bringing together specific historical events, local structures and social dynamics. Adopting such a line of inquiry in other cases of conflict-induced diasporas could help to achieve greater clarity as far as the effects of homeland conflict on diasporic identities and (selective) processes of communitisation are concerned.

Further specificities derive from Britain and Germany as the receiving contexts of my informants. Although immigration regimes in both countries have become increasingly restrictive, most people who are granted permission to settle are able to establish relatively secure livelihoods. In many cases these are a precondition for transnational engagements. People's abilities to act upon conditions

in Afghanistan are likely to differ starkly if they live in more constraining environments, as is the case for the majority of Afghans living in countries like Iran or Pakistan.

9.4.2 What does the multi-sited case study add to my discoveries?

My study of Afghan populations in Britain and Germany revealed similar dynamics of interaction in both countries. This is because many aspects which shape mutual perceptions and patterns of social organisation derive from characteristic features of the Afghan society as well as the recent history of Afghanistan. In both countries informants refer to the Afghan diaspora population as fractured, which I found to be reflected in the set-up and engagement of civic organisations. Although broader patterns of social organisation are similar in the two countries it is important to bear in mind that Germany and the UK received different cohorts of Afghan refugees. As a result the socio-economic profile of the populations in the two countries differs quite significantly. Yet these variations are slight when compared with the livelihoods and socio-economic profiles of the majority of Afghans living in countries of the near diaspora (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007; Stigter & Monsutti, 2005; Turton & Marsden, 2002). Even so, different socio-economic backgrounds seem to bear important implications for the aims and forms of civic engagements, as I will further illustrate below.

More remarkable differences between Afghan populations in Germany and the UK become salient once we shift the focus to aspects of social integration and forms of local and transnational engagement. Most of the activities I classified as known community engagements are carried out by Afghan organisations that are based in Germany. These organisations in turn tend to benefit from specific modes

of social integration, part of which derive from habituated patterns of collaboration and old friendships between Afghan and German civic actors. Such forms of known community engagement involve specific forms of social capital, which is restricted to a certain group of Afghan diasporans, namely the former elite who were among the first to leave their country after the outbreak of war. Also – though not exclusively – because of such cooperative arrangements, civic engagements carried out by Afghans in Germany feature a stronger homeland orientation than I found to be the case among Afghans in the UK.

The extent to which Afghan civic action is inward or outward oriented varies between Germany and the UK although there was not enough data to cover this fully in my empirical chapters. To a large extent these different orientations are related to the socio-economic backgrounds of those forming the majority of the Afghan populations in the two countries. While I did encounter some civic engagements directed towards Afghanistan among my UK informants, these activities do not match the magnitude of their German counterparts. By contrast, in the UK I identified that meeting the needs of local communities forms a sphere of engagement in its own right. My findings also draw attention to links between transnational engagements and social class. This reiterates the importance of considering the interplay of class, social incorporation and forms of action when studying diaspora engagements (see also Van Hear, 2014). Such links, however, need to be further unpacked and merit more systematic inquiry.

Connections between transnational engagement and class do not only shape forms of action. They are also reflected in the underlying rationales of engagements as well as the sphere towards which they are directed. For instance, people may take action to support family members in Afghanistan without purposively acting

towards change and development in a wider sense. Looking at the bigger picture, such engagements can still drive change, for example by enabling families to send their children to school.

Over the years Germany has become home to Afghanistan's former elite who have reached high levels of social integration, which is at the same time cause and effect of social capital. Conversely, large parts of the UK's population of Afghan origin have different migrant backgrounds, socio-economic profiles and needs. Afghan communities in the UK are often referred to as being 'more traditional', which is reflected in communal activities such as Saturday schools, where children receive language training in Dari or Pashto alongside cultural and religious education. Overall, for Britain's Afghan population, maintaining elements of Afghan and Islamic culture seems more important than changing conditions in Afghanistan. This implies that forms and targets of engagement can differ among diaspora groups in different countries due to the immigration patterns and not because of differences in the receiving countries as such.

9.4.3 Implications for scholarship and beyond

Though limited in scope, this thesis sheds light on the lives and engagements of Afghans living in two specific destinations of the wider diaspora. I contribute a timely case study to the literature of migrant populations in western Europe. Also I highlight historical specificities that mark the processes of immigration and settlement of Afghans in Germany and the UK. I show how historical trajectories are reflected in both the socio-economic profiles of Afghan populations in the two countries and the relationships unfolding between distinct groups of Afghans and equally distinct groups of the receiving societies.

While I was conducting my fieldwork, many informants were curious to learn about the differences I observed between Afghan communities in Germany and the UK. Despite being restricted in scope, my findings entail numerous elements of potential interest to my informants. My accounts of the dynamics among Afghan populations in the two countries and my examination of different settings and spheres of engagement will allow informants to situate their own perceptions and activities. It may be revealing for them to see how an 'outsider' tried to make sense of communitisation and social engagement.

Scholarship on diasporas will particularly benefit from my relational approach to the Afghan case. Implicitly idealtypical definitions of diaspora already allude to their relational nature. However, empirical studies – especially when it comes to diaspora engagement – treat diasporas as fixed social entities rather than a concept of relationship. Through its explicit focus on narratives, my relational approach moreover adopts an actor-centred perspective, which is largely missing from empirical accounts on civic engagements of diaspora actors. While many of my findings are specific to the Afghan case, the analytical perspective I adopt in this work may be useful to uncover hidden trends and dynamics among other diasporic populations which have so far remained unaccounted for. One particular example, which emerges from this work, is the relationship between class, social integration and social engagement. Speaking in general terms, sociological perspectives can make valuable contributions to the epistemological underpinnings of diaspora studies.

Likewise my case study contributes to applied social theory. So far relational perspectives have primarily been applied to wider social processes such as historical accounts of social inequality (Tilly, 2005; Lamont, 2000b). My relational analysis of

Afghan diaspora groups shows that elements of relational sociology lend themselves to studying 'meanings', 'perceptions' and 'agency', which are embedded in complex relational settings that bring together different levels of analysis.

Lastly this thesis bears several points of importance for society in a wider sense. I am particularly thinking of the value of this work for discussions revolving around questions of who is part of 'our' society. Although the presence of migrant 'others' is ubiquitous in public and political debate, we know relatively little about the ways in which people coming from certain backgrounds are embedded in our societies. Their own narratives of livelihoods, aspirations and engagements spark little interest compared to 'our' perceptions thereof. Since I embarked on the journey of this work, public attitudes towards immigrants have hardened across Western Europe. Often Muslim immigrant populations are identified as being particularly problematic and therefore subjected to generalised suspicion, often coupled with overt hostility. Thereby discourses warning of the looming Islamisation of Europe are conflated with images of 'welfare tourists' and 'economic refugees'. This not only leads to emerging ideas of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' immigrants, but also to mounting fears that livelihoods in western Europe are threatened as far as their cultural and material basis is concerned.

Against the backdrop of such trends it is important to provide more detailed insights into the lives and livelihoods of migrant groups in our societies. This work can make a small and focused contribution to dismantling images of immigrants as a threat by showing how Afghans in Britain and Germany navigate through the different elements of their diasporic lives with the aim of being an integral part of the receiving society while upholding ties with the origin country at the same time.

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APPENDIX I

Timeline of events in Afghanistan, Germany and the UK

1747	Ahmad Shah Durrani declares the establishment of an independent State of Afghanistan after unifying Pashtun tribes
19th Century	Afghanistan serves as a buffer between the British and Russian Empires during so-called 'Great Game'
1838-1842	First Anglo – Afghan War
1879	Second Anglo – Afghan War
April – August 1919	Third Anglo – Afghan War
8 August 1919	Afghanistan gains independence from British control
1919	Establishment of official diplomatic ties between Afghanistan and Germany
1922	Establishment of official diplomatic ties between Afghanistan and Great Britain
1926	Germany and Afghanistan sign official friendship treaty. Subsequently Germany and German private enterprises provide financial support for infrastructural development
1929-1978	Rule of the Pashtun Musahiban dynasty, which became known for gradual moves towards modernisation and the implementation of a democratic legislature
1929 – 1933	Rule of Nader Shah
1933 – 1973	Rule of Zahir Shah
1963 – 1973	Constitutional monarchy under Zahir Shah
1965	British Government introduces Race Relations Act to outlaw discrimination based on race, colour of skin or ethnic or national origin
1971	British Immigration Act is introduced
1973	Mohammad Daud Khan stages a military coup against his cousin Zahir Shah and proclaims the 'Republic of Afghanistan'

27 April 1978	'Saur Revolution': PDPA topples Mohammad Daud, Nur Mohammad Taraki acts as president of the Revolutionary Council
1978 – 1979	Continuous quarrels amidst the leadership of Afghanistan's self-proclaimed government
1978 – 1984	Political developments prompt standstill of Afghan – German cooperation
September 1979	Taraki is assassinated and replaced by Hafizullah Amin
24 – 27 December 1979	Soviet Union intervenes in Afghanistan, Amin is killed and replaced with pro-Soviet Babrak Karmal. A decade-long war begins
1981 – 2001	Diplomatic ties between Afghanistan and Great Britain are on hold
1986	Najibullah replaces Babrak Karmal as head of Afghanistan's Communist Party
14 April 1988	Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the USA and the Soviet Union sign peace treaty ('Geneva Accord')
1989	Withdrawal of Soviet troops
9 November 1989	Fall of Berlin Wall
3 October 1990	German reunification
1992	Mujaheddin topple Afghan head of government Najibullah. In the so-called 'Peshawar Accord' various factions of anti-Communist resistance form interim government. 'Islamic Republic of Afghanistan' is proclaimed
1992 – 1996	Continuous fighting between different mujaheddin factions leads to a complete destruction of Kabul
1993	Germany restricts constitutional right to asylum and reorganises border controls
1993	Britain introduces 'Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act'
Summer 1994	First Taliban interventions in southeast Afghanistan
September 1996	Taliban capture Kabul. All other parties of the conflict form 'Northern Alliance'

1996	Britain introduces 'Asylum and Immigration Act' to supplement the 1971 'Immigration Act' and the 1993 'Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act'
Since 1999	EU member states work on 'Common European Asylum System'
11 September 2001	Coordinated terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, New York and the Pentagon, Washington DC
7 October 2001	Beginning of US-led military intervention in Afghanistan
27 November – 5 December 2001	UN-sponsored conference takes place in Bonn with the aim to establish a process for political reconstruction, including the adoption of a new constitution
5 December 2001	International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) is created. Its mandate is to help the new administration maintain security
8 December 2001	Taliban loose Kandahar as their last stronghold
22 December 2001	Interim government, led by Hamid Karzai assumes office
December 2001	German diplomatic mission in Kabul resumes office
June 2002	A *loya jirga* (traditional tribal assembly) confirms Hamid Karzai's presidency
2003	EU Commission lays down 'Dublin Regulation' to establish mechanisms for determining responsibilities for examination of asylum applications submitted by third-country nationals to EU member states
December 2004	Presidential elections; Hamid Karzai becomes first democratically elected president of Afghanistan
2005	Germany introduces 'Law for Managing and Containing Immigration and for the Regulation of the Residence and Integration of EU Citizens and Foreigners'
2006	Germany introduces 'National Integration Plan' and launches 'German Islam Conference'
2006	Great Britain introduces 'Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act'
December 2009	Hamid Karzai is re-elected for a second term

2009 – 2014	Process of building a stable central government is hampered by resurgent Taliban assaults and continuing provincial instability. This particularly affects the south and the east of Afghanistan
2013	Recast 'Dublin Regulation' enters into force, aiming to enhance standards of protection for asylum seekers and featuring procedural safeguards, including right to information and personal interview
2014	Presidential election results in runoff between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. Both agree to form a Government of National Unity in September. Ghani acts as president and Abdullah claims newly-created position of chief executive officer
September 2014	Ghani administration signs the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement and NATO Status of Forces Agreement, which provide the legal basis for the post-2014 international military presence in Afghanistan
2014	End of ISAF mandate, gradual withdrawal of international troops

Sources: (Auswärtiges Amt, 2015; CIA, 2011; Monsutti, 2005; Schetter, 2004; 2012; 2011; ECRE, 2014; Schuster, 2003; Cyrus & Vogel, 2007; Düvell, 2007; Embassy of Afghanistan, 2014)

APPENDIX II

Loose structure of interviews[48]

1) Introductory explanation

2) Biographical questions

- When did you leave Afghanistan and why?
- How did you come to the UK / Germany?
- Who came with you?
- Why did you decide to come to this country?
- What information did you have and what was the source of your information?
- What role did Afghans living here before you came play?

3) Focussed questions: Life in "the diaspora"

- How are your contacts with other Afghans living outside Afghanistan / in the UK or Germany?
- How do you maintain contacts (through private contacts, membership in organisations, joint activities, religious services, sports etc.) and which means of communication do you use?
- Why is it important for you to maintain contacts to other Afghans?
- How would you describe your relationship to other Afghans in the UK / Germany?
- Did they develop or change over time?
- How would you describe the Afghan community in your area / in this country
- How did they change over time?
- How would you see yourself as part of an Afghan diaspora?

4) Focussed questions: Relationship to Afghanistan

- How would you describe your relationship to Afghanistan?
- Is Afghanistan an important issue in your day-to-day life? How so?
- What are you particularly concerned about?

[48]This is a tentative overview of questions that have guided my interviews and participant observations. Questions were refined and adjusted according to the specificities of each encounter or event observed.

- How did it change since you left the country?
- What were the reasons for those changes?
- How do you follow current events in Afghanistan?
- What role does Afghanistan / the current situation in Afghanistan play for the Afghan community?
- How do people talk about Afghanistan? Are there differences in perceptions? What do you think is the reason for differences?
- Does the Afghan community in UK / Germany or the Afghan "diaspora" more generally influence the way you relate to Afghanistan? How?
- How would you like to see Afghanistan change? What is your idea of a future Afghanistan?
- What do you think should be done?
- Who do you think should act? Why?
- What contribution do you think Afghans outside Afghanistan can make?

5) Focused questions: Areas of engagement

- You mentioned that {…} is of particular concern for you. Why is that?
- How do you act upon {…}?
- How have your areas of concern changed over time?
- (How) did you first come to engage in Afghanistan-related action?
- Who is part of such action? Who takes the initiative?
- What is the aim of your activities, what do you hope to achieve?
- How have the aims of your activities changed over time? Why?
- How important is the Afghan community in this context?
- What makes it important?
- How do the people around you relate to Afghanistan-oriented action?
- Would you describe your activities as part of the Afghan community?
- What problems do you confront?
- What is helping you when pursuing your activities?
- How do you prefer to take action?
- What prevents you from doing it?

Guideline for initial and informal interviews

Purpose of initial interviews

- Situate me as a researcher for accessing the field
- Provide information about Afghan communities in the UK and Germany
- Provide information about norms, values and adequate conduct
- Identification of gatekeepers and informants

Introductory explanations

- Explanation of research: my interests and objectives, my fieldwork, requirements for informants

Exploratory questions

- When did you leave Afghanistan and why?
- How did you come to the UK / Germany?
- How would you describe your relationship to other Afghans in the UK / Germany?
- How did they develop or change over time?
- How would you describe the Afghan community in your area / in this country?
- How did they change over time?
- What would you say are the primary areas of concern peoples' lives?
- What role does Afghanistan / the current situation in Afghanistan play for the Afghan community / certain groups within the community?

Referrals

- Could you point me to people who you think might be interesting to interview considering the aims of my research and who would be willing to spare some time for an interview?
- Could you recommend people or places from whom / where I could obtain further information pertaining to…?
- Are there any events that I could join as a participant observer?
- What general recommendations would you give me for my field research?
- Do you have any specific recommendations regarding…?

Guidelines for participant observation

- What is the purpose of the event I attend as a participant observer?
- What is the setting like? What does it represent?
- Who is present?
- How do people refer to the purpose and meaning of the event?

What does the event under observation tell me about:

- Relations among the people present?
- Relations of people in place to other people of Afghan origin in the receiving society or in other places outside Afghanistan?
- Practices and content of interactions
- Structures and self-perception of the Afghan community in the UK / Germany?
- Identities and practices that produce and maintain an Afghan diaspora?
- Relationships among Afghan migrants who came to the UK / Germany at different points in time and under different conditions?
- Relationships among people of Afghan origin who come from different ethnic and / or socio-economic backgrounds?
- What 'divides' and what 'unites'?
- The ways people relate to Afghanistan?
- Meanings and relevance of change in Afghanistan for the people present at the event?
- Motivations for Afghanistan-related action and the determinants of such motivations?
- Reasons for taking specific forms of action?
- Reasons for not engaging / aspiring to engage with Afghanistan?
- Peoples' relationship with the receiving society?

APPENDIX III

List of interviews and participant observations

In-depth interviews

When?	Where?	Who?
12th March 2012	Colindale, London, UK	Male interview
16th March 2012	Uxbridge, Greater London, UK	Male interview
17th March 2012	Harrow, London, UK	Male interview
27th March 2012	Mainz, GER	Male interview
29th March 2012	Mönchengladbach, GER	Interview with male and female informant
3rd April 2012	Oxford, UK	Male interview
4th April 2012	Walsall, UK	Male interview
11th May 2012	Berlin, GER	Male interview
12th May 2012	Berlin, GER	Female interview
13th May 2012	Berlin, GER	Interview with male and female informant
20th May 2012	Cologne-Bonn area, GER	Male interview
22nd May 2012	Bonn, GER	Male interview
22nd May 2012	Bonn, GER	Male interview
23rd May 2012	Bochum, GER	Female interview
24th May 2012	Bonn, GER	Female interview
11th June 2012	London, UK	Male interview
26th June 2012	London, UK	Male interview
26th June 2012	London, UK	Female interview
27th June 2012	Oxford, UK	Male interview

10th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Male interview
11th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Male interview
12th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Male interview
13th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Female interview
14th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Female interview
18th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Male interview
18th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Male interview
19th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Female interview
19th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Interview with male and female informant
20th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Male interview
20th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Female interview
Break during Ramadan period		
30th August 2012	Uxbridge, Greater London, UK	Male interview
2nd September 2012	Berlin, GER	Interview with three male informants
11th September 2012	Munich, GER	Male interview
12th September 2012	Frankfurt am Main, GER	Female interview
13th September 2012	Wiesbaden, GER	Male interview
16th September 2012	Manchester, UK	Interview with three male informants
12th October 2012	London, UK	Male interview
13th October 2012	Leicester, UK	Male interview
19th October 2012	Cambridge, UK	Male interview
24th October 2012	London, UK	Female interview
1st November 2012	Ealing, Greater London, UK	Male interview
29th November 2012	Oxford, UK	Male interview

11th December 2012	Bonn, GER	Female interview
14th December 2012	Schwerte, GER	Female interview
2nd January 2013	Berlin, GER	Male interview
21st January 2013	Ealing, Greater London	Female interview
08th February 2013	London, UK	Female interview
11th July 2013	Frankfurt am Main, GER	Female interview
28th July 2013	Alzey, GER	Male interview (via Skype)
22nd January 2014	London, UK	Interview with male and female informant
27th January 2014	London, UK	Female interview
28th January 2014	Liverpool, UK	Male interview
30th January 2014	Nottingham, UK	Male interview

Informal interviews

When?	Where?	Who?
14th January 2012	Harrow, London, UK	Male interview
2nd February 2012	Colindale, London, UK	Male interview
24th February 2012	Uxbridge, Greater London, UK	Male interview
27th February 2012	Acton, Greater London, UK	Male interview
8th March 2012	Oxford, UK	Male interview
16th March 2012	London, UK	Male interview
20th March 2012	Bonn, GER	Female interview
22nd March 2012	Bonn, GER	Male interview

29th April 2012	London, UK	Male interview
8th June 2012	Harrow, London, UK	Female interview
2nd September 2012	Berlin, GER	Informal interview with five male informants
4th September 2012	Berlin, GER	Male interview
4th September 2012	Berlin, GER	Female interview
16th September 2012	Manchester, UK	Female interview
9th October 2012	London, UK	Female interview
7th June 2013	London, UK	Female interview
13th July 2013	Zeilsheim, Frankfurt am Main, GER	Female interview
1st May 2014	Oxford, UK	Informal interview with two male informants

Participant observations

When?	Where?	Type of event
24th February 2012	London, UK	Cultural event
15th March 2012	London, UK	Thematic event (women's day)
20th March 2012	London, UK	Thematic event (political)
6th June 2012	Oxford, UK	Cultural event
8th June 2012	London, UK	Cultural event
9th – 14th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	'Hamburger Afghanistan Woche' (Hamburg Afghanistan Week)
17th July 2012	Hamburg, GER	Encounter with social workers and group of unaccompanied minors

25th August 2012	London, UK	Cultural event
14th September 2012	Darmstadt, GER	Thematic event (economic cooperation)
12th – 14th December 2012	Schwerte, GER	'Villigster Afghanistan Tagung' (Villigst Afghanistan Conference)
10th March 2013	London, UK	Thematic event (cultural and political)
13th November 2013	London, UK	Thematic event (political)
13th – 15th December 2013	Schwerte, GER	Villigster Afghanistan Tagung' (Villigst Afghanistan Conference)
25th January 2014	London, UK	Thematic event (political)