School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography
Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology



COIN-operated anthropology: Cultural knowledge, American counterinsurgency and the rise of the Afghan diaspora

Morwari Zafar

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology

Linacre College, University of Oxford
Michaelmas Term 2016

Word Count: 92, 150

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Acknowledgements

This thesis and the life lessons it has afforded me would not have been possible without the mentorship of my supervisor, Dr. Nicholas Van Hear. Long before I embarked on the DPhil, Dr. Van Hear's research on diasporas had a formative impact on me. I have been grateful and honored to work with him over the last four years. He encouraged me to appreciate the challenges of research and writing that would test my endurance, and pushed me beyond what I thought possible. For his patient guidance and friendship, I remain eternally grateful.

The University of Oxford and the Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society (COMPAS) offered an invaluable space for intellectual engagement. The works of my COMPAS colleagues were often sources of inspiration in rethinking my own project. I am thankful for the DPhil students at COMPAS, who provided the motivation and good humor to carry an onerous task to completion. In addition, I recognize Linacre College for making me feel a part of the community, even while I was away. A travel grant through the college's Frederick Mulder Fund allowed me to participate in a conference on Afghan migration, which had a lasting impact on my research. I am also grateful to Dr. Oliver Bakewell, Dr. Iain Walker, and Dr. Dace Dzenovska. Their critical feedback at various stages strengthened my overall argument. And, of course, to Dr. Ruben Andersen and Dr. Ceri Oeppen, whose skilled assessment of my thesis defense precluded my coronary arrest and produced a conversation I will forever cherish in memory.

I also acknowledge the tremendous support of mentors and participants outside of Oxford. I am indebted to Dr. Stephen Lubkemann, who asked me if I was crazy when I said I wanted to get a doctorate (I believe I have now answered in the affirmative), for his encouragement, support, humor, and unfailing belief in me. I am humbled by the generosity of Dr. Barbara Miller at the George Washington University for welcoming me as a visiting scholar, and providing a collegial space to exchange ideas. I extend my sincere thanks to my colleagues in Washington D.C., who encouraged and supported me in the process. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, Dr. Hugh Gusterson, and Dr. Roberto Gonzalez. They generously offered their time to review chapters or provide input into the theoretical framework. I am grateful for the invaluable contributions of the Afghan-American community and U.S. military personnel. Their trust was not lost on me. They opened up their lives and their homes to me on several occasions, and made sincere efforts to connect me with other potential research participants. I hope that this thesis does justice to the stories and depth of the experiences they shared.

My ineffable gratitude goes to my parents, Drs. Anahita and Chafi Zafar, and my sister, Fereshta. Their unwavering support of my intellectual curiosities, from playing with a kid's chemistry kit that triggered an asthma attack to working in conflict zones as an adult, has allowed me to experience a life of learning and adventure. I hope that this thesis, in some small way, will validate the sacrifices they made. I am humbled and moved by the unrelenting strength and the courage with which they have negotiated life's adversities as immigrants. I am also indebted to my friends for unconditionally championing my dreams – and to Jamie, who sadly passed before I could say thank you. And last but not least, I acknowledge Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Jay Morse, with whom I have shared the pains and gains of this adventure among others, for reminding me that "Who's tougher than you?" is a rhetorical question. I continue to aspire to his inimitable perseverance, grace, and light, and his faith in the human spirit.

To each and everyone I have had the privilege of sharing this experience – thank you.

Abstract

COIN-operated anthropology: Cultural knowledge, American counterinsurgency and the rise of the Afghan diaspora

Morwari Zafar, Linacre College, University of Oxford
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology, Michaelmas 2016

This thesis explores the encounter between the Afghan-American community and the U.S. military-industrial complex in the production of cultural knowledge for counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan. It focuses on the narratives mobilized as 'expertise' by Afghan-American contractors from the major diaspora hubs in California and Virginia, who were employed as role-players, translators, and cultural advisors by the U.S. military and defense contractors. I discuss how such narratives gained currency and shaped the perceptions of Afghanistan in the U.S. foreign and security policy communities. The goal of the thesis is to demonstrate the extent to which COIN-centered cultural knowledge production both defined political strategies toward Afghanistan and also reconstituted the Afghan diaspora in America. The thesis contributes to emergent ethnographic studies on militarism by looking at its effect on American society in general and the Afghan diaspora in particular. The broader application of the thesis findings is to move beyond critiques of the troubled connection between anthropology and the military, and to analyze the relationship between citizens and the state in terms of national and biopolitical security.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, cultural knowledge, knowledge production, diaspora, counterinsurgency, militarism.*

Glossary

Afghaniyat – The core values of Afghan identity or Afghan-ness.

Alhamdullilah – (Arabic) An expression that means to praise God/Allah.

Bacha-e-lochak – A perjorative term applied to young men who are perceived to be vulgar.

Bacha bazi – Pederasty or pedophilia.

Bakhshish – A donation or hand-out.

Baychara – Unfortunate or pitiable.

Bay saowiya – Lacking class, finesse, or refinement. It can be applied to people or objects.

Chapan – A cloak.

Dehat – Rural areas or provinces.

Eid – (Arabic) Festival or holiday. In Islam the term signifies *Eid-al-Fitr*, which celebrates the end of the month of Ramadan, and *Eid-al-Adha*, which marks Prophet Abraham's acceptance of God's will to sacrifice his son.

Farhang – Culture heritage.

Glasnost – (Russian) Literally meaning openness, the term epitomized the changes in the Soviet Union's economy, political, and international affairs under Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985. *See 'Perestroika.'*

Iftar – The breaking of the fast during the holy month of Ramadan in which Muslims fast for a month.

Insha'allah – (Arabic) A religious expression meaning 'By god's will.'

Karakul (hat) – A hat fashioned of the wool of the Karakul breed of sheep.

Kharijee – A foreigner or non-Afghan individual.

Kinarab – A colloquial term for a toilet.

Loonghi – A long piece of fabric wound around the head as a turban.

Mashallah – (Arabic) An expression conveying God/Allah's will.

Masjid – Mosque.

Mehmanawazi – The practice of hosting guests in one's home.

Mehndi – (Hindi) An art form that uses henna to draw intricate patterns on the body.

Mela – A party or a festive gathering of people.

Nazr – A ceremonial ritual of good will in which food (often a starchy confection called *halwa)* is blessed and shared with the community.

Pashtunwali - The unwritten code of customs or way of life for the Pashtun people.

Perestroika – (Russian) Restructuring. Along with glasnost, the term describes the reform programs in the Soviet Union that reconfigured its diplomatic relationship with the U.S. government and ushered the end of the Cold War.

Piran tumban – A tunic (piran) and pants (tumban) considered to be traditional dress for Afghan men.

Saowiya – Class or an elevated status that correlates with education, family name and legacy, social propriety, dignity and etiquette.

Shura – An assembly or meeting of community or political leaders to discuss an issue and reach a decision through consensus.

Taaruf – Customary discourse that dictates diplomatic comportment and etiquette in social interactions.

Tashnab – A more formal term for a toilet or bathroom.

Umma – The community of Muslims around the world.

Watan(ee) – Homeland. The term can also be modified as 'watanee' to describe people from a specific area or those who display values and customs in keeping with accepted traditions.

Zan, zar, zamin – Women, gold/treasure, and land; values thought to underlie tribal life.

Introduction

The change seemed to happen overnight. The horizon just west of Washington D.C. erupted into vertical blocks of concrete and steel. It transformed the otherwise-unremarkable 64-mile expanse of asphalt known as the Capital Beltway into a virtual histogram of America's global power. In the decade after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Global War on Terror (GWoT) launched the development of 263 new government agencies and spawned the establishment and growth of myriad private sector Department of Defense (DoD) contractors (Priest and Arkin 2012). The 'military-industrial complex' that has defined America's political and economic might in the world since the Cold War took on colossal proportions, spurred by the need to securitize America as an international priority. Deviating from President Dwight D. Eisenhower's original initiative to develop America's nuclear capabilities in the 1950s to dissuade Soviet expansion, the current 'national security enterprise [has] a more amorphous mission: defeating transnational violent extremists' (Priest and Arkin 2010). In the wake of the attacks, then-president George W. Bush warned the United States (U.S.) that the imminence of danger was not across oceans and continents, but rather preying upon the safety of Americans from their own neighborhoods. Nothing and no one was safe. Such attitudes towards the possibility of homegrown terrorism fueled a massive array of programs to monitor the communities that could potentially harbor terrorist cells. Not only did spending on products and services grow by 8.4 percent, but '[b]etween 2001 and 2010, dollars obligated by the DoD to contract awards more than doubled, and contract spending far outpaced growth in other DoD outlays' (Ellman et al. 2011: 6). Intelligence collection and analysis became critical components of a new, asymmetrical warfare strategy, and as drones zeroed in on virtual

targets outside, the U.S. military-industrial complex homed in on the communities living on the periphery of America's national security infrastructure. For the Afghan-Americans settled across America, the demands of the U.S. war economy soon presented opportunities for them to engage in imagined and physical returns to Afghanistan by assisting counterinsurgency (COIN) training and operations. This transaction of expertise cast some members of the diaspora as transnational actors in a long, protracted spectacle of war and peace.

Mina is among those who want to return to Afghanistan. Her family is from Kabul, but has lived in Northern Virginia for more than 30 years and while she feels settled, her sense of 'home' remains rooted south of the Hindu Kush: 'Once school is done, I want to return home to Afghanistan,' she tells me in English as she skims off a frothy head of whipped cream from her mocha with a straw. Her final year of community college incidentally coincides with the projected 'Decade of Transformation' – a period marked by the 2014 North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) withdrawal and expected to draw Afghans in a transnational effort to rebuild Afghanistan (World Bank 2012). For Mina, it is not so much a 'return.' She was born and raised in a suburb of Northern Virginia. She speaks a little Dari, but communicates almost exclusively in English. She understands Dari only when it is spoken to her. Her parents speak Dari between themselves and English with her, 'but their English is not very fluent and they have accents,' she tells me, 'Sometimes it's hard to talk to them.' The difference widens the distance in communication between her parents, who moved to Germany then to America as adults, and Mina, whose knowledge of Dari and Afghanistan has been a second-hand recollection of family narratives. The 8,000-mile separation from Afghanistan cinches to a close across an expanse of narratives and

social memories, articulated through generations of diasporic Afghans, which are rooted in both Afghan cultural and Islamic identities.

> I think of myself as Afghan and American, but Muslim first. When 9/11 happened, people [other ethnic groups] kept calling my brother and me "terrorists." Sometimes they were just joking around, but other times they were serious and I wanted to show them that you could be Muslim without being a terrorist…I thought more about my identity and started going to mosque. I didn't feel as lonely among other Muslims, even if they weren't from Afghanistan. At first I wore a headscarf, but my family was really against it, so I stopped. But I still felt accepted, even like this.

She runs a hand over her face, brushing against the fringe of lacquered black lashes and neckline of a fitted blouse. She spies two other Afghan women at a table, chatting in English and codeswitching in Dari. They acknowledge each other with faint smiles. I ask Mina if she knows them. She responds, 'No, but they're Afghan and they know I'm Afghan, so I have to say *salaam*. I see a lot of Afghans here because, you know, it's like a bar without alcohol. It's a space for us to hang out in the community.' Although Mina knows or is familiar with many of her Afghan-American peers, she felt isolated during the turbulent aftermath of the September 11 attacks[1], but not necessarily by other ethnic groups. She identified her own family and the Afghan-American community as the most ostracizing over a longer period of time. Her parents left Afghanistan later than most other families, who migrated in the mass exodus following the Soviet invasion. The family had struggled economically upon arrival, a condition made worse by the palpable class differences in the Afghan diaspora network.

> My aunts had come here (to Virginia) before us, and their husbands had better jobs. They had been taxi drivers, but one of them opened his own company so they had more money. They looked down on us like they were better, like when we lived in an apartment before my parents could buy a house. I think they still look down on us. I don't think the extended family was that helpful to my family. They didn't include us in parties and get-togethers, so my brother and I grew up alone not knowing our cousins much. It's like the family had drawn lines between who was in and who was out.

[1] A note on terminology: The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks are referred to as '9/11' in the text.

Mina's experience as an Afghan-American woman in the American diaspora highlights many themes of this thesis. American-born and without personal memories of Afghanistan, she and her peers (re)turned towards a notional home of Afghanistan. But the initial impetus for this study was inspired 2,300 miles west of the Springfield Starbucks, where I met Mina, in the heart of California's Silicon Valley.

In 2001, the city of Fremont, California – a middle-class suburb in the San Francisco Bay Area – came under an intense national spotlight. After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the diaspora's identity and affiliations became the subject of public scrutiny. While some Afghans visibly embraced both sides of their hyphenated identities, some Afghans, who had immigrated with their families to America/ in the 1970s or were born in America, began to rediscover the roots of their Afghan heritage and Muslim identity. Among them was Mohammad. He had left Afghanistan via Iran in 1980 as an infant. Growing up in the Bay Area, he had struggled to accept his Afghan cultural background when it contradicted his experiences and desires. He recalled the challenge of navigating his own sense of identity and religious meaning:

> It was a hard balance to strike. But when 9/11 happened and this stuff about Islam was constantly getting talked about in the news, it made me stop and think about my own identity, like how important my culture was and what Islam meant to me. My parents are practicing Muslims, but growing up we never really talked about Islam. It was just there in the background.

Mohammad began to regularly attend the local mosque. He went on pilgrimage along with other Afghan-American men who had similarly taken a newfound interest in Islam, some who were affiliated with the Zaytuna Institute[2], an Islamic institution in Hayward – a city

[2] http://www.zaytunacollege.org/about/

adjacent to Fremont. In 2008, the institute expanded to become the first Islamic liberal arts college in America located in Berkeley, California. Sheikh Hamza Yousuf, the co-founder of Zaytuna Institute, rose as a prominent figure among many Afghan-Americans, who had grown up in Afghan households in the Bay Area. In the year after 9/11, Mohammad grew a long black beard and wore a woven white skullcap to symbolize his devotion to Islam. Although his family are practicing Muslims, his parents had reservations about his change in behavior – particularly during a time in which Muslims had gained a level of notoriety and become subject of government surveillance[3]. Mohammad's father, a prominent community member among Afghans, expressed his frustration at the way his son chose to express his Muslim identity: 'I told him, for God's sake, why are you dressing like an Arab Wahabi. I was afraid he would be targeted. There was an Afghan man who was beaten almost to death by white teenage boys because they called him an Arab terrorist […] I believe in God. I'm Muslim too, but I don't need to grow a beard or try to make a point about my piety. Islam is in my heart.' He fingered the curves of the gold Arabic scripture, 'Allah,' hanging on a chain around his neck, before continuing: 'My son made me throw away all of the alcohol in the house! I couldn't even play poker with my friends because he said it was not Islamic, and he'd walk around with his Wahabi beard, shaking his head.' The image he described was a stark contrast to the picture on the mantel, revealing a young man in an Ed Hardy muscle t-shirt and a sideways baseball cap. The picture was taken more than two years ago when Mohammad had decided to tone down the way he

[3] Government surveillance measures were strengthened through the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 – commonly referred to as the USA PATRIOT Act. It allowed the government, specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to monitor the personal communications of American citizens, and detain immigrants in America based on suspicion rather than reasonable cause. As a result, the act was considered by some to be unconstitutional and in direct violation of individual rights. Additional information can be found at the U.S. Department of Justice website: https://www.justice.gov/archive/ll/highlights.htm.

represented his piety because he saw it as a potential constraint to employment. Such disparities in the experiences of Afghans from different socio-economic backgrounds and migration histories kindled my interest in the way Afghanistan and Islam were repositioned and represented after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. In 2009 and thereafter, the community's identity, practices, codes of dress, and behavior shifted again to coincide with the civilian-military surge that accompanied the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. Afghans in America, like Mohammad and Mina, became reflections of the 'human terrain' in Afghanistan. The U.S. government provided an unparalleled opportunity for Afghan-Americans not only to return to Afghanistan, but to integrate economically and socially in implementing U.S. international security strategies in their actual or imagined homeland.

At the start of my doctoral study, I set out to examine the particularities among diasporic Afghans (many who have never been to Afghanistan) in the years following September 11, 2001, and through which Afghan cultural identity, traditions, customs, and religious adherence were reconceptualized. I wanted to understand the motivations for the paradoxical change in cultural practices and social identity choices in a political environment in which the GWoT maligned Afghan cultural and religious beliefs. But by publicly reclaiming their ties to Afghanistan and adopting codes of behavior and ideology that emphasized the centrality of Islam and social conservatism to Afghan identity, they assumed far more culturally- and religiously-conservative principles than were ever fostered by their parents or grandparents. For some, however, the changes themselves were dynamic and directly affected by shifts in the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. What may have first been a counter-culture movement, a form of visible resistance, transformed into

a reconstruction of Afghan-ness or *Afghaniyat*, which Mir Sadat explains as the 'akhlaq-e wejdani (moral values), aqa-id (beliefs), and ananat (customs) shaping the Afghan psyche and way of life' (2008: 330). He argues 'it is within the Diaspora, that Afghans are faced with the choice of preserving, hyphenating or rejecting their *Afghaniyat*.' Although through my study I did not encounter anyone that had outright rejected his or her *Afghaniyat*, most seemed to have vacillated from staunchly preserving their identity to suddenly underscoring the hyphen that distinguished them as Afghan-Americans rather than as Afghans outside of Afghanistan. The shift was perhaps no coincidence.

In 2006, the stalemate in the war in Afghanistan begged for a revised political and military strategy. The U.S. government and military leadership identified significant shortcomings in America's understanding of Afghanistan – not just as a safe-haven for Al-Qaeda and the Taliban but also as a place of immense ethno-linguistic diversity and historical complexity. In response, the advent of counterinsurgency doctrine contained within the Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 redefined the guidelines for a more efficient, effective, and regionally-nuanced engagement in Afghanistan. Drawing upon America's experience during various conflicts, including the Vietnam War, the manual notes the importance of working with local populations as a means of isolating and defeated the enemy. The manual advises on interacting with local populations in ways that facilitates their trust and wins hearts and minds:

> "Hearts" means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. "Minds" means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. [...] Building trusted networks begins with conducting village and neighborhood surveys to identify community needs. Then follow through to meet them, build common interests, and mobilize popular support. This is the true main effort; everything else is secondary. Actions that help build trusted networks support the COIN

> effort. Actions that undermine trust or disrupt these networks—even those that provide a short-term military advantage—help the enemy (Nagl 2007, A-5).

At the core of the COIN campaign, the definitive feature of the U.S.- military strategy after 2006 was to gain the Afghan population's support rather than emphasize conventional warfare. To do so, the U.S. military needed to learn how to interface with Afghans in socio-cultural contexts different from their own. Afghan-Americans became de facto experts on Afghanistan – a critical assumption that coincided with a massive effort to recruit members of the diaspora as proxies and interlocutors. Effectively, the diaspora's social memory, history, norms, values, and religious expertise became a highly sought-after commodity. Afghan-Americans became an indispensible source of knowledge for private-sector defense companies, who acted as suppliers to the U.S. Department of Defense – their foremost customer. While the knowledge supply chain reinforced the military-industrial complex, the context within which such highly-prized cultural information was developed often received less than a secondary consideration. S.M. Hanifi, an Afghan-American historian, argues that:

> Knowledge transfer from the Afghan-American diaspora may be hampered by the replication of social patterns of division and enclaving. Domestic divisions based upon location/region, ethnicity, class, gender, and ideology continue to pervade Afghan communities and structure intra- and intercommunity relations in diaspora settings. (2006: 115-116)

The context of the diaspora's cultural knowledge is therefore significant because it situates their narratives across a spectrum of transnational experiences and social memories, challenging the perception that the diaspora constitutes a culturally and ethnically homogenous group. Afghan identity – or *Afghaniyat* – varies particularly among the cohort of Afghan-Americans who were either born or grew up in America. As that segment began

to redefine 'Afghan' and 'Muslim,' the GWoT struggled to make sense of the very same categories in Afghanistan. An U.S. Army officer, who had undergone two pre-deployment cultural training programs offered by separate defense contractors, noted that some of the material presented by Afghan-American experts varied considerably or was actually contradictory. 'Overall, it was great to get some kind of familiarization. But there wasn't much consistency. Some of the instructors seemed to have a certain bias or maybe even a dislike for certain ethnic groups and tribes [...] The story you got depended on who was talking,' he said.

To elucidate 'Afghanistan,' Afghan-Americans filled roles as cultural advisers, interpreters, translators, and subject matter experts[4]. At Fort Polk, Louisiana, and Fort Irwin, California, Afghan-Americans also served as role-players in training centers composed of replica Afghan villages for a 25-day program to simulate an environment similar to what soldiers could expect in Afghanistan. The role-players helped soldiers negotiate what were called Key Leader Engagements (KLEs) and navigate social and tribal dynamics; interactions the military deemed vital to the implementation of COIN objectives. Fara, a 33-year-old role-player, who moved to America prior to her third birthday, recounted 'It's fun to do the role-playing. I didn't know much about Afghanistan, but I learned a lot from the older Afghans with more experience [...] I learned about the culture as I was teaching it and acting it out.' But the reconstructions were not always helpful to the populations for whom they were designed. In fieldwork interviews with military personnel who took the trainings and deployed to Afghanistan, many referenced the distinct social and class divisions among the Afghans and echoed the inconsistencies

[4] The contractors and military personnel I interviewed made no distinction between the terms 'translator' and 'interpreter,' and used the terms inter-changeably. I employ the same usage in the thesis.

apparent in the presentation of what was supposed to be a culturally authentic experience. An U.S. Navy officer reflected in an interview that the content of the trainings did not necessarily relate to the experience on the ground:

> At [Fort] Polk, there were two guys that were old-timers. They had worked in Afghanistan and they knew what they were doing. I found out later that a couple of the other folks had no clue and they were learning about their own culture on the fly [...] Some of the stuff they told us about, like not using your left hand, I found it confusing when I deployed because the Afghans used both hands [...] It felt like they would tell you what they thought you expected to hear.

Through such iterations, 'Afghanistan' as a concept could be revised and reproduced. For the U.S. military, Afghanistan became something one could know, classify, and experience by performing accordingly. 'Cultural intelligence' as an element of COIN conformed to what soldiers had been told or trained to expect. Some scholars have criticized and cautioned against the reliance on diasporic engagement since 'diasporas opportunistically find common ground with the host country's foreign policy goals' (Kapur 2007: 104). The observation is valid among Afghan-Americans as well, although arguably, at least some of the diaspora engaged beyond a sense of opportunism to facilitate communication with local communities and deepen the military's appreciation of the socio-cultural context in Afghanistan. The fundamental issue seems to lie in the commodification of cultural knowledge, as a product, by the U.S. government. In this regard, expertise must be profitable, differentiated, and meet the demands of the current global security market. Producing expertise for the consumption of America's military-industrial complex allowed Afghan-Americans to not only gain substantial economic benefits, but also to rise to greater social and political significance. In the process, the community itself experienced the

fluctuations of what it means to be Afghan, and reconstituted its identity and position in America.

In sum, this thesis argues that the Afghan-American diaspora as it exists today is a product of the encounter with American militarism. By examining the relationship between the U.S. military's need for cultural knowledge and the representations of Afghanistan presented by Afghan-Americans, I conclude that defense contracting provided unprecedented opportunity for members of the diaspora to reconstitute the community and its relationship with the state. Afghan-Americans mobilized a collective identity, gained greater socio-economic mobility, and redefined the boundaries of community membership both within the diaspora and in American society more widely. To explain the effect of the encounter, I trace the expression of Afghan and Muslim identities as a response to structural integration into the U.S. military-industrial complex. I show that the knowledge produced is a reflection of the social memory, history, class stratification, and migration experiences of Afghan-American households, and not necessarily a reflection of Afghanistan's socio-cultural reality or the collective consciousness of the Afghan population. More specifically, I underline the connection between diasporic expertise and the increasing use of culture and anthropology as instruments of military power. In doing so, I focus on the military's version of 'anthropology' in contrast to its definition as an academic discipline. I contend that the networks and processes that defined cultural knowledge were as much a factor in advancing America's footprint in Afghanistan, as they have been in justifying its diminishing involvement and accountability for the ongoing instability. This is particularly salient as the GWoT faded into the nebulous realm of

'Contingency Operations' following a transition in the U.S. presidency in 2008[5]. Such disparities in knowledge, particularly in the limitations of what can be known, have been at the center of the controversial relationship between anthropology and the military. The thesis seeks to show that, by influencing transnational politics and the dispensation of neo-colonial power, diaspora communities are not only transformed by militarism, but they also shape it. I employ militarism, in this context, to mean a heightened social emphasis on national security interests manifest in the presence of militaries, security groups, surveillance and war-technologies, as well as the circulation of war imagery and discourse in the media (Gusterson 2007: 156). Drawing on Gusterson's perspective, I approach militarism as a culture that has been evolving in America since the Cold War and has advanced further in the post-9/11 period. The prevalence of security concerns, perceptions of risk, and a public preoccupation with defense and danger has become a normative aspect of American life. COIN, therefore, is an extension of militarism that relates to both tactical military strategy and to the percolation of militarism across communities. More generally, the thesis responds to the current appeal in the discipline of anthropology – particularly in the anthropology of militarism, which I explore – to better understand the social and political constructs of militarism. Beyond criticizing the exploitation of culture as a war technology, some anthropologists argue, '[w]hat we need is […] a set of texts that analyze militarism in relation to nationalism, late modern capitalism, media cultures, and the state while mapping the ways in which militarism remakes communities, public cultures, and the consciousness of individual subjects in multiple geographic and social locations' (Gusterson 2007: 175). This thesis aims to serve as one such text, and unfolds as follows.

[5] George W. Bush, whose administration was responsible for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, was succeeded by Barack Obama in 2008.

Chapter outline

Chapter 1 Literature review and analytical framework

The chapter that follows lays out the foundation of the thesis by providing a review of the literature and methodology that contextualizes the argument. It situates the material within three distinct theoretical fields; diasporas and transnationalism, anthropology of militarism, and knowledge production. I position the thesis under the overarching analytical framework of knowledge production because the thesis is an inquiry into the body of Afghan cultural expertise, its representations, and the relationships and processes through which such articulations emerged particularly in the figure of the Afghan-American 'contractor' hired to provide cultural knowledge to the U.S. military.

Chapter 2 Methodology and research challenges

The discussion of the methodology and research challenges draws on Barth's conceptual paradigm to better understand the social organization of Afghan cultural knowledge in the encounter between Afghan-American contractors and the U.S. military (2002). The chapter addresses the methodological approach to participant observations and interviews, focusing on the development of sites and contacts. Given that the research was conducted among contractors and U.S. military personnel who maintained government clearances, I detail the challenges and ethical considerations encountered during fieldwork.

Chapter 3 'Who are we? We are not Arabs, for one': The Afghan-American diaspora and post-9/11 militarism

In Chapter 3, I provide a characterization of the diasporan social groups from which the contractors are drawn, and situate the analysis in the context of the Global War on

Terror and homeland security since 2001. Linking critiques of Brubaker's 'groupism' to diasporic identity and community, I argue that Afghan-American contractors emerged as a 'category' of individuals constituted and empowered through their engagement with the U.S. military-industrial complex (2002). To contextualize their tenuous solidarity, the chapter traces the development and representation of Afghan diasporic identity and its relationship to the Soviet and American occupations of Afghanistan. The chapter picks up on the themes of migration, class, generational dynamics, and gender to discuss the motivations for contracting work as a form of social and economic integration in America, and upward mobility within the diaspora. The next three core empirical chapters explore, in turn, Barth's three 'faces' of knowledge: *corpus*, *medium*, and *social organization* (2002).

Chapter 4 Corpus: *The social memory and imaginings of Afghan-Americans*

Chapter 4 outlines the social memory and imaginings of the diaspora that constitute the *corpus* of knowledge about Afghanistan and Afghan culture. Opening with an ethnographic vignette, the chapter uses literature on diasporas to illustrate the formative effect of migration on assertions of identity, social structure, and history among Afghan-Americans. It explains the centrality of religious and socio-cultural narratives on claims of belonging and authenticity, which have defined Afghanistan and *Afghaniyat* ('Afghan-ness') in the diaspora, and renegotiated the boundaries of inclusion and membership. The chapter argues that, in the wake of 9/11 and counter-terrorism initiatives, Afghan-Americans constructed knowledge to orient their selves in America – an effort that was concentrated among contractors who interacted most closely with the state security apparatus. I position the revised 'traditions' of knowledge as an ongoing process of cultural development that retains relevance through continual performance.

Chapter 5 Medium: Performing "Afghanistan" in the theater of war

Chapter 5 explores the *media* through which the *corpus* on Afghanistan is represented. I apply Goffman's theoretical perspectives on framing and self-presentation to analyze the media through which knowledge produced by Afghan-Americans is communicated to the U.S. military as its consumers (1959; 1971). The chapter draws on ethnographic observations of training exercises and descriptions of material products to show the inter-connectedness of Barth's faces of knowledge in establishing a core set of ideas. The argument deviates from the prevailing perspectives on hegemonic discourse and anthropology by demonstrating that the orientalist renderings associated with Afghanistan were actually reproduced and reinforced by Afghan-Americans. Supporting critiques of such epistemological and reductionist approaches to cultural knowledge in the military, the chapter unpicks the subtle negotiations of power that define the Afghan-American diaspora. The chapter also segues into a discussion on the processes and relationships – the social organization – underpinning the endeavor to orient the U.S. military in a new cultural material reality.

Chapter 6 Social organization: The process of cultural knowledge production

Barth's most compelling element of the three faces is *social organization* – the transmission of knowledge within a network of social relations that produces culture (2002). In this chapter, I draw on both Latour's Actor Network Theory and Callon's Sociology of Translation to uncover the relationships and processes that create and are, in turn, regenerated through knowledge production (Latour 1986; Callon 1998). The content illustrates specific moments of engagement and negotiation between Afghan-Americans, the U.S. military, and the way knowledge forms a part of their transactions. The chapter

argues that by positioning knowledge as a commodity, the contractors have been able to capitalize on the demands of the military-industrial complex. By perpetuating a system through which they act as suppliers of an 'authentic' cultural expertise, the mobilization of Afghan-American contractors is a reflection of their power and agency in a network that enhances their structural integration and socio-economic mobility in America.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

I conclude the thesis by returning to the concept of the encounter and situating it in the processes, institutions, and relationships that govern knowledge production. By synthesizing the *corpus*, *medium*, and *social organization* of the knowledge produced for the military, I seek to uncover 'the ways in which militarism remakes communities, public cultures, and the consciousness of individual subjects in multiple geographic and social locations' (Gusterson 2007a: 175). The emergence of the contractors and narratives they issued underscore the key point of this thesis – that the Afghan diaspora has been significantly shaped by COIN-related knowledge production. Firstly, the encounter with militarism via defense contracting allowed Afghan-Americans to leverage their diasporicity and stake a distinct community identity in America. Secondly, as a loosely tied category, the contractors were able to capitalize on their 'cultural intelligence' to integrate in American society and redefine their positions in the diaspora. These negotiations uncovered the biases of class and social relations that not only affected the groupness of the contractors, but the representations of Afghanistan and *Afghaniyat* more widely. Critiquing the mechanisms for their engagement, I urge for a more sustained integration of diasporic assistance that does not create a temporary market economy for knowledge, through which culture as a product is compromised as a result of competition.

Chapter 1 Literature review and analytical framework

At the outset of the research, the initial concepts of religion and identity took on dramatic transformations. Part of this was due to the fact that many of the people who had taken on more conservative, trans-nationalist identities began to withdraw from the often-anti-American counter-culture elements their behavior had initially endorsed. Buttressed by an analytical framework of knowledge production, the thesis will unpack the encounter between the U.S. military and Afghan-American contractors to account for the processes and relationships that shaped a collective Afghan self-hood in America through representations of Afghanistan. The thesis brings together the literature on diasporas and transnationalism, anthropology of militarism, and knowledge production, which shall be introduced in this chapter. The following discussion thus traces the existing literature within these three domains and identifies the gaps in theory to which the study can potentially contribute.

Diasporas and transnationalism

Under the umbrella of diaspora studies, the Afghan community presents a unique case study of transnationalism that challenges established definitions and theories about diasporas. Not only is the diasporic experience of Afghans in America not homogenous and homeward-oriented, in many cases it reinforces the political economy and military-industrial complex which represent American hegemony overseas. Thus it poses a valid question: is the Afghan diaspora a diaspora at all? This paper will argue that indeed the Afghan diaspora may very well have been a migrant exilic community for more than a decade, but the thrust of global politics and its effect on Afghan household economies

suddenly compelled a reconsideration of the community's identity. The Afghan-American diaspora, as such, was *made*. Yet to explore these ideas in greater detail, the study requires a review of the initial identity choices that rippled across the community after 2001 and contributed to general assertions about Afghan identity. For example, understanding that ethnicity is a dynamic, context-specific entity, as R. Radhakrishnan (2003) theorizes, is fundamentally reflective of the nature of the immigrant experience in the Afghan diaspora. The community's desire to transpose their identities and reclaim tradition in light of new situations, such as the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, demonstrates how the changing realities of the community and its host society directly shape the behaviors this research explores. Identity, in theory and practice, therefore can become particularly subjective and necessitate a more interrogative approach to its study. In the thesis, I advance Rogers Brubaker's and Frederick Cooper's belief that identity has become an over-generalized but not indispensible idea (2000). They note that the 'self-understanding' of individuals, rather than subsumed under a generic category, should be analyzed in relation to more illustrative concepts (2000: 12-13). As will be discussed in the preceding chapters, I draw upon on their notion to explain Afghan self-understanding in relation to concepts such as class and family name or honor. Moreover, the dispersal of Afghans around the world has been the result of several conflicts within the country; first with the Soviet invasion then the civil war, followed by a mass migration during the Taliban regime. In each case, much as the paradigm of global diasporas denotes, distinct moments of crisis warranted an exodus of the population, compelled their resettlement in one or various host countries with a view to returning, and led to some form of social or economic engagement with the homeland (Safran 1991, Clifford 1994, Cohen 1997, 1998). It is the third characteristic of

diaspora formation and identity that the Afghan diaspora problematizes to a certain extent; the idea of a return. In her study of the Afghans in California, Ceri Oeppen notes that there is not a strong sense of a permanent return to Afghanistan particularly among the first generation for whom the memories of Afghanistan are arguably the strongest. Many do return in a capacity that allows them to assist with their homeland's reconstruction, but few feel compelled to stay in Afghanistan (Oeppen 2013). But their mobilization may not necessarily be a reflection of an unyielding 'homeland orientation' (Brubaker 2005). Instead, as Robin Cohen suggests 'diasporas often *mobilize a collective identity*, not only a place of settlement or only in respect of an imagined, putative or real homeland, but also *in solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries [emphasis in the original]*' (2008: 7). There is certainly an element of 'co-responsibility' among the Afghan diaspora, a shared sense of obligation to other Afghans, not necessarily the homeland as a defined place. What is particularly interesting among the Afghan diaspora is that its members feel a shared sense of co-responsibility to their co-ethnics, but also to America as the hostland. As Oeppen points out, for many of them America has also become home and thus their efforts towards Afghanistan are done in solidarity with the virtues of international development (2013).

To better position the fragmented nature of the Afghan diaspora, the thesis considers an alternative framework to account for the contractors. I draw upon Brubaker's differentiation between groups and categories to settle on an apt analytical perspective through which to frame the subjects of this study. Since not all Afghan-Americans from the post-Soviet generation participated in the defense industry programs, 'diaspora' is too broad a term and 'generation' is fitting but applies mostly to the migration trajectory that

distinguishes one segment of the community from another. 'Ethnic group' faces a similar challenge. Brubaker criticizes the notion of 'groupism' as 'the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed' (2002: 164). He argues that everyday experiences are not organized by ethnic identities and 'groupism' (2006). Rather, conceptualizing groups as *categories* that facilitate groupness can 'better account for phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without implicitly treating high levels of groupness as constant, enduring or definitionally present. It allows us to treat groupness as an *event*, as something that 'happens'' (2002: 168). The Afghan-American contractors are indeed not reflective of a 'substantial entity.' Instead, they show how external social and political processes shape their collective solidarity during specific moments, such as mobilizing cultural expertise for counterinsurgency operations. Brubaker suggests that 'From above, we can focus on the ways in which categories are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated […] From below, we can study the 'micropolitics' of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade or transform the categories that are imposed on them' (2002: 170). Brubaker's idea helps us to understand how Afghan-American contractors emerged from within the larger diaspora to create distinct processes and relationships of 'groupness' that are internalized and reproduced in the encounter with the military-industrial complex (Brubaker 2002; 2006). At the core of this is a circulation of power based on narratives that create new norms of 'Afghan-ness,' allowing for different forms of membership within and beyond the diaspora.

I extend the notion of 'groupness' to discuss the implications of the way in which Afghan-Americans are constituted through the encounter with the military-industrial

complex. Similar to subjects shaped by colonial interests in the 19th century, Afghan-Americans act as 'agents involved in commodity production [who] are constituted by their activity' (Coronil1996: 16). Fernando Coronil's work on colonial subjects resonates with the point I intend to make about the mobilization of Afghan-American contractors – that their groupness and the government's interest in their role are fleeting. But while the demand for their 'activity' exists, Afghan-Americans readily assume new forms of power, mobility, and social relations through the encounter (Coronil 1996). I also apply the construct of colonial subjects to understand how Afghan-American contractors perpetuate the encounter to ensure their continued integration and socio-economic mobility – not only do they advance America's colonial interests in Afghanistan, but they reify archetypical conceptions of Afghans in Afghanistan as a population in need of foreign intervention. Afghan-American contractors and others who aspired to such work expressed concerns about their employment opportunities as the COIN campaign waned in Afghanistan. The number of billets and contracts available after the 'civilian surge,' declared part of the U.S. government's strategy in 2009, declined at the approach of the 2014 security transition in Afghanistan which turned over the reins to the Afghan national security forces as part of the Afghan First Initiative. COIN rapidly lost favor as a 'winnable' strategy by that time, and the International Security Assistance Force, which had supported combat operations under America's Operation Enduring Freedom, transformed into NATO's non-combat Resolute Support Mission; a smaller, consolidated effort by the international community to train, advise, and assist the development of Afghanistan's security forces who would now be responsible for leading their own military campaigns. As an 'Afghan First,' Afghan-led approach the need for expatriate contractors diminished. Consequently, the interaction

between the contractors and the military generated new cultural meanings and categories of people and relations, as the knowledge produced has been continuously adapted to the changing needs of COIN and counter-terrorism efforts. This perspective, which I apply in Chapters 2 and 3 to discuss the influence of Afghan diasporic knowledge, elucidates the extent to which Afghan-Americans have pieced together revised narratives of Afghan-ness, culled from their experience with the military, to create a new collective identity in America.

The structure of the Afghan diaspora is grounded in varying layers of migration to America. This study is concerned with the group of Afghans who initially migrated to the U.S. as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. They are distinct from those who migrated during the civil war in Afghanistan in the 1990s and those who fled during the Taliban regime. They are also distinct from Afghans who left after the American invasion in 2001 and arrived in America seeking asylum, or relocated through education opportunities and Special Immigrant Visas. The initial cohort of Afghans, whose memories of the Soviet invasion defined their presence in America, share a common connection. The bond is similar to Mannheim's notion that a shared experience among individuals tends to foster 'a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action' (1997: 291). For the Afghan diaspora in America, the Soviet invasion and the necessity of migration and resettlement has been the backdrop to the community's narratives about its identity. Such experiences '[create] a different social "drama" for each generation' (Berg 2009: 272). As a point of inquiry throughout the research, it is worth contextualizing a discussion of generations in the type of 'diasporicity' Stephen Lubkemann deems a particular form of 'identity discourse' (2004). Much as

nations must be 'imagined' (Anderson 1983), traditions 'invented' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and notions of home 'narrated' (Rapport and Dawson 1998; Lubkemann 2000; 2008), diasporicity can be seen as a particular way of imagining, constructing, and presenting the 'social self' (Goffman 1959). In the construction of the social self, the relationships that develop within a cohort of diasporans can be transformed vis-à-vis the homeland; their attachments transnational, translocal, and sometimes, tenuous - but always fluid. I apply the concept of diasporicity to discuss the variances of experience across various migration trajectories. Among Afghan-Americans who left because of the Soviet invasion, some can only ascribe to a notional sense of Afghanistan, while others can draw upon memories and experiences to color their sentiments and claims to *Afghaniyat*. However, their posture towards Afghanistan is defined by both their presence in America and Afghanistan's absence from their immediate environment. Lubkemann notes that socialization in such similar veins of experiences can define subsets of the diaspora as 'generations' (2004: 35). He echoes Susan Eckstein (2002) and Mette Berg (2009; 2011), whose research provides an innovative approach to looking at a diasporic 'generation' beyond a temporal framework. Their perspective offers a more practical view than Ruben Rumbaut's view of assimilation. He believed that the first generation, over time, would show the least degree of acculturation; a fact that would be countered by a second generation with conflicted loyalties, and followed up with a subsequent generation that would readily assimilate (Rumbaut 1997). Despite the deterministic nature of his assumptions about assimilation and generational dynamics, Rumbaut's concept of 'generational cohorts' is useful – a term he uses to encompass the varying age groups that stem from a single migration event (2007: 350-351). For the Afghan-Americans with which

this study is primarily concerned, leaving Afghanistan was an experience that was felt and processed collectively, but differently by the various cohorts that made the journey together. Their experience is similar to Mette Berg's ethnography of Cubans in Spain, which challenges Rumbaut's conventional approach by noting that,

> biological age at the time of migration was relatively insignificant. Rather, it is the historically situated trajectories, which give rise to the different modes of remembering and relating to home and away. Diasporic generations, then, like Mannheim's political generations, are historically grounded; they are not based on intra-family relationships or age at the time of migration (2009: 272).

Although the generations overlapped temporally, their experiences shaped their identities, choices and agency. Thus, by repositioning the concept, Berg discovered three distinct generations that 'emerge through historically embedded experiences of leaving Cuba and of arriving in Spain rather than through age at the time of migration' (2011: 40). This is relevant to this thesis because the Afghan diaspora and its internal dynamics are similarly structured. The diasporic generation in America is a political one 'historically grounded' in the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Within the diasporic generation reside two groups or cohorts; one cohort of Afghans whose adulthood was shaped by formative experiences in Afghanistan, and another whose coming-of-age primarily occurred in America. The perspective helps understand the complexity of the memories, narratives, and identification with Afghanistan that inform their selfhood. As contractors were selected from the diasporic generation, both cohorts had the opportunity to communicate their understanding of Afghanistan; producing a body of knowledge that was far from homogenous or uniform and reflected the ongoing negotiations of diasporic identity.

The changing dynamics of diaspora communities is a window into their formation and disbanding. In New Diasporas, Nicholas Van Hear departs from the notion of diasporas

as exile communities and discusses integration and the return to the homeland as processes by which diasporas begin to unravel and are 'unmade' (1998). He argues that such changes reaffirm the transnationalism of a particular group. It is an idea that further supports that groupness as the prevailing dynamic by which the diasporan social groups organize. In the context of this study, boundary maintenance seems representative of a desire among the cohorts of the first generation not only as a means of preserving a distinct identity, but also shaping or maintaining the idea of a diaspora. This is particularly important at a time when the U.S. government has sought specialization in expertise and identity, and thus reinforced the need for differentiation – much like market demand for a product that requires innovation and differentiation to remain in demand, relevant, and lucrative. Much of the distinction in identity and identification, as a process, can be viewed through the varied migration experiences. The migration order model developed by Van Hear serves as a critical construct for looking at the relationship between individual and household decision-making strategies, disparities in origin and destination, migrant networks, the migration regime and the macro-political economy (1998: 15-16). If the exodus of Afghans during and shortly after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is perceived as a distinct migration crisis, the layers of both individual and structural effects on migration and resettlement can be examined in light of the encounter with the military-industrial complex. Shifting power relations and preoccupations with status are key factors in reshaping diasporic identity, and the role of the contractors who emerged to define it.

The notion of class and diasporic engagement are intertwined themes in my discussion of fieldwork among the Afghan diaspora. I investigate class-consciousness, among other themes, through the construct of 'spheres of engagement,' an idea developed

by Cohen and Van Hear to distinguish

> the largely private and personal sphere of the household and the extended family; the more public sphere of the 'known community', by which is meant collectivities of people who know one another or know of one another; and the largely public sphere of the 'imagined community', which includes the transnational political field, among other arenas (2016: 2-3).

The typology of three spheres of engagement offers a relevant framework for understanding how encounters across the diaspora community generate ideas about Afghanistan and Afghan identity (2015; Cohen and Van Hear 2016). Transnational interactions occur across the 'household/extended family' sphere, the 'known community,' and the 'imagined community.' In the first sphere, transactions often take place in the form of private remittances among people who are familiar with one another. In the 'known community,' interactions take place among people who know one another or *know of* one another. This form of public engagement relies on networks and associations. The 'imagined community,' which is based across collective identities (i.e. religion, class, politics), is the most public of the three spheres. I apply the construct in Chapters 3 and 4 to characterize the dynamics of the diaspora and explain the relationship of its members to Afghanistan as a physical and notional homeland. The findings of the thesis show that the interactions across the private and known spheres are largely determined by class distinctions. The consideration of class between the spheres directly shapes the engagement with Afghanistan as an imagined community through the encounter with the U.S. military. Although American society's perception of class often gives greater weight to economic capital, historically among Afghans (and Afghan-Americans by extension), class can be traced as a reflection of one's social and 'cultural' or 'informational capital,' and as Bourdieu suggests, it can be converted to other forms of capital at will (1987). This notion

of capital conversion and class are picked up by Van Hear in his discussion of the relativity of choice and constraints on five 'permutations' of movement, which he identifies as:

> Moving out (outward movement, out migration, or emigration); coming in (inward movement or immigration); moving on (onward movement); moving back (going home, return, repatriation); and staying put (encompassing 'mobility,' roots, moorings, stayers, the left behind) (2014: S107).

Within the Afghan-American community, 'moving back' to Afghanistan in some cases was the best means of 'staying put.' When examining the factors that shaped the decision of Afghan-Americans to return to work in Afghanistan, the choices can often be linked to the availability – or the potential – for capital. An example of this is demonstrated in interviews with Afghan-American men, who returned to Afghanistan to translate for and advise Special Forces personnel. The salaries in exchange for their knowledge allowed for the accumulation of material capital that allowed them to return 'home' to America and invest in property or other assets that could afford them greater economic and social mobility. Thus as Van Hear asks, 'how do migration and class play out in broader currents of social change and transformation?' it merits examining the processes of change that are taking place across the Afghan diaspora. It offers a compelling pause to assess a key development – that the increase in economic and social mobility from return migration (albeit short-term) and increased transnationalism have, in some cases, engendered members of the diaspora to relocate to new states and cities where their money can go farther, recreating new diasporas in places such at Utah, Texas, and Nebraska. Moving back to Afghanistan for specialized employment with major private sector contractors or directly with the U.S. military allowed Afghan-Americans to identify with the military-industrial complex that defined American power. In interviews, some Afghan-Americans noted that they felt at a

'safe' distance from the turmoil of Afghanistan by being able to associate with U.S. organizations and having the ultimate advantage of being able to *leave* at any point. In addition, for some Afghan-American contractors, being able to work in positions that required government security clearances was in itself an attainment of status. The higher the clearances were the more they seemed to feel an integral part of the U.S. effort in Afghanistan and by extension, more integrated into American society. Ironically, as shall be discussed, social status and economic integration within American society does not necessarily confer the same implications in the diaspora, whose stringent classist ideologies are entrenched in family legacies and social capital. I draw on Zuzanna Olszewska's study of the Afghan diaspora in contemporary Iran, where class-consciousness and aspirations of social mobility affect the processes of self-presentation, to examine similar forms of identity and social organization among Afghan-Americans (2013). Olszewska's research breaks ground on the analysis of mobility strategies among Afghans and Iranians. Her perspective shows that class conflicts may be subtly articulated, but they underlie diasporic identity. In the context of this study, the reshaping of class and transnational mobility thus depended upon the demand for diasporic engagement – one that was substantiated by the quality and authenticity of claims to Afghan identity, Islam, and cultural heritage.

Considering diasporic studies and engagement as part of the analytical framework helps to explain how some Afghan-American contractors actually reified, rather than contested, Orientalist representations of Afghanistan's culture and people. I use Talal Asad's pioneering work on colonial encounters to explore the relationship between knowledge, power, and the creation of colonial subjects to shift from diaspora studies to a

focus on militarism and anthropology. Romanticized and essentialist anthropological representations of colonial subjects were indispensible to colonial rule in the nineteenth century, and remain relevant in the studies of the post-colonial Western security state. Asad notes that cultural translation, as a means of knowledge transmission, 'is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power [...] Given that is so, the interesting question for enquiry is […] how power enters into the process' (Asad 1986: 163). His perspective helps to demonstrate that Afghan-Americans do not come to the forefront of the U.S. government's war on terror on their own – they are elicited as experts and vested with the authority to define 'Afghanistan' through the encounter with the military. This is an important distinction because it not only shows the close relationship between power and knowledge, but also illustrates how the association constituted the category of Afghan-Americans that emerged through contractual employment in the defense sector. Applying Asad's approach, Afghan-American translators and cultural advisors would be positioned as neo-colonial mechanisms through which the U.S. military articulates its control. Among the Afghan-American subjects, the specific point of entry for power, to which Asad alludes, is cultural knowledge – a subject that sits at the heart of debates on anthropology and militarism.

Anthropology of militarism

From drones to data, the U.S. military expended a costly effort to counter terrorism from 2001 to the present. While America's security and foreign interests remained the principle drivers of overseas interventions, the focus of military strategies shifted from objects to subjects, taking a greater interest in the people who occupied contested spaces. As a result, the move increasingly drew upon the social sciences as a means of both

informing and legitimizing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Such approaches have historical roots to the imperialist, colonial foundations upon which the security of populations emerged as the lynchpin to state control. Indirect rule or 'Native Administration' allowed imperialism to flourish while colonial powers conferred independence on former subjects. As Mark Duffield writes, '[c]entral to the biopolitics of Native administration was developing a better understanding of the people's concerned. The study of their languages, customs, and social organization through, for example, the emerging discipline of anthropology was encouraged' (2005: 149). By understanding such socio-cultural elements, one could productively communicate with and engage local communities in a collective effort of governance and authority. In the ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan, 'the benefits of action-as-propaganda derive not so much from winning as from appearing to win' (Keen 2006: 144). In the theater of war, as this section will illustrate, perception and reality are not always consistent.

Long before the contentious politics of current human-centered war technologies, Franz Boas issued a full condemnation of anthropology as a means of substantiating military power. In War, Technology, Anthropology, Koen Stroeken broadens the discussion of anthropology and the military by examining how culture, as a concept, can be constructed and deployed as yet another weapon of war (2010). Stroeken argues that anthropological contributions to warfare constitute predictive and/or preemptive measures to contain insurgencies, the development of a 'militarized concept of culture,' and lastly, a tacit complicity on issues that should incur ethical and moral objections (2010: 1). Of the three, militarizing 'culture' has become a salient and controversial issue as a result of the counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The observations culled through

this ethnographic study confirmed many of the problems with using 'culture' as a potential skeleton key to winning a war or to post-conflict nation-building endeavors. In the development of regional familiarization programs by the U.S. Department of Defense, the quick-impact, PowerPoint-focused lectures would often essentialize or homogenize aspects of the 'human terrain' – an all-encompassing term that attempted to map the ethnological complexity of Afghanistan. The resulting approach was specifically what Stroeken describes as the return 'to legalistic approaches to culture (e.g., lists of customs and beliefs) that date from colonial times' (2010: 8). In discussing the operational difficulties of working in Afghanistan, some recent authors contend that the country can be read and understood as a historical text, and that

> The moment you dismissed the importance of tribe and ethnicity you began to misread Afghanistan. From the days of King Ahmad Shah, Afghanistan constituted a fragile webwork of tribes and ethnic groups occupying the water-starved wastes between the settled areas of the Russian Empire in Central Asia, the Persian Empire in the Middle East and the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent. The killing of 1.3 million Afghans by the Soviets in the 1980s shattered this fragile ethnic webwork (Kaplan 2005: 195).

Compartmentalization of cultures, customs, and human beings is therefore a way of organizing data to support a specific conclusion – not a hypothesis. Such an approach not only favors, but also enables the engineering of other technologies that craft war into a game, constituents into players, and leaders into hegemons.

The Human Terrain System (HTS) developed in 2005 as a response to growing attacks from Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks on coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Modeled after the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program, a U.S.-led counterinsurgency effort during the Vietnam War, HTS assisted military decision-makers in subduing hostile populations by tapping into cultural intelligence. To

counter the proliferation of such threats, the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) issued a study to examine the causes and potential solutions to IED attacks. In conclusion,

> JIEDDO research indicated that many of the IED attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces were a result of military actions that violated local and national sociocultural values, which resulted in violent retaliation. Sociocultural understanding and knowledge was believed to provide a unique method to help combat commanders consider the effects of military operations among local populations and engage local leadership to build trust, understanding, and cooperation to non-violently engage the enemy and reduce the number of violent attacks against U.S. and Coalition Forces (The Human Terrain System 2006: 3).

While the effort was an attempt to mitigate conflict, it nonetheless precipitated a heated debate among American institutions and anthropologists who questioned the wisdom and validity of socio-cultural studies as an instrument of military strategy. Initially deployed in Iraq then scaled to the villages of Afghanistan, HTS provided the basis for anthropological engagement in military interventions. It blazed a critical, operational need for social scientists within the rank and file of military, development, and security organizations. In Anthropologists in Arms: The Ethics of Military Anthropology, George Lucas notes that it has become 'routine practice for such groups either to include or to seek as consultants academic subject matter experts from their own ranks or from the wider civilian academic community: economists, political scientists, sociologists, and […] anthropologists' (2009: 65). The advent of HTS spawned an expensive effort by private contactors, such as BAE Systems, to recruit social scientists. A position description of the Human Terrain Team (HTT), which includes a team leader, an analyst, research manager, and a general social scientist, noted that 'the key attribute of the HTT team leader is the ability to successfully integrate the HTT into the process of the [Brigade Command Team] BCT in an effective and credible manner' (Lucas 2009: 152). The pursuit of credibility became the guiding principle

of efforts to engage doctrine with scholarship; the latter contested as a merely a specious attempt at grounding controversial practices in theory (Albro 2010; Gonzalez 2008; Price 2010). But for the purposes of defining a cultural context- or 'terrain' – HTS exemplified the U.S. government's flagship knowledge-production project. An inflammatory node at the nexus of anthropology and military, the program appealed to anthropology and social sciences, but it became 'increasingly synonymous with the accelerating work of human, social, culture, and behavior modeling' (Albro 2010: 23). Predicated on a military command's desire for predictive analysis of human behavior, HTS and its variants are a key decision-making tool in military centers, such as the U.S. military's African Command Center (AFRICOM), where ''humanitarian' objectives will be combined with a focus on US strategic interests in the region, including counterterrorism' (Albro 2010: 23). Although the idea was rooted in understanding and reconciling fundamental human differences, HTS straddled an all too familiar and disconcerting line between research and intelligence collection. Perhaps one of the more striking aspects of such research is that it problematizes the concept of who and what is an 'anthropologist' beyond the purview of social sciences. Fluehr-Lobban emphasizes the benefits of having a resident anthropologist in the defense sector (2008). However, through my fieldwork observations, the U.S. government (whether directly through the military or indirectly through private-sector organizations) cast Afghan-Americans, among other contractors, as proxy anthropologists or purveyors of 'expert knowledge.' The distorted versions of 'anthropology' that ensued underlined epistemological concerns, particularly surrounding research aims, already prevalent among the military policy community and academia. COIN-operated anthropology, discussed in this thesis, suffers from treating human societies as 'threats' or

'problem sets' to which a solution must be applied. The focus privileges 'bite-size' information that is quick to reference, easy to generalize, and aimed at preventing casualties among military forces. Many anthropologists would strongly dispute whether such reductive and instrumental renderings of the discipline qualify as anthropology at all. Such observations contest the very notion of military anthropology, but lend support on the other hand to the need for a study of the military and its effect on the knowledge production that helps to shape society.

The rise of HTS and its offshoot programs have further problematized the already-provocative anthropology of the military. The contention stems from a critical ethical and moral difference in the anthropology of the military and military anthropology, in which the former studies the military as an organization and the latter that appropriates anthropology as an instrument. This is not a new debate, but one that has continually transformed in the post-colonial period and remains relevant to this study. The innovations in 21st century warfare, however, are increasingly zeroing in on human populations and the undeniable significance of migration, borders, and transnationalism. This has not only stoked the fires of old debates, but also brought into question myriad new challenges for anthropologists to consider. Although there are now two distinct camps of dissidents and proponents among anthropologists who deal with social science and military policy, the scope of the arguments and underlying issues can be viewed through a historical lens. Originating with a scathing admonition by Franz Boas, the role of anthropologists working with military and security structures was perceived to be tantamount to 'prostitut[ing] science by using it as a cover for their activities' (2005: 27). His reproach was directed at anthropologists who, in World War I, had assisted with intelligence collection on behalf of

the government. His own perception that World War I was yet another 'imperialist war' thus deepened the divide between military anthropology and the purpose it served; a retrenching of imperialist orders aimed at the subjugation of humanity. Although Boas embraced scientific, objective study, he disavowed the credibility of research programs rooted in clandestine operations – challenging, beyond time, the specific premise of HTS, which sought intellectual integrity and legitimacy through its affiliation with social sciences and social scientists. Boas also felt a painstaking contradiction between the role of the military and that of anthropology. His unreserved vituperation condemned the soldier as a morally-dubious character 'whose business is murder as a fine art […] a politician whose very life consists in compromises with his conscience' (Boas 2005: 27). Through the interviews with the military, this study will show that Boas' assessment was mostly an essentialization of an occupation that runs counter to the basis of anthropological study – to do no harm. In 21st century warfare, the military as an organization has evolved to serve often-contradictory roles beyond its mandate to defend a nation. As a result, it has caused anthropologists to wrestle with the moral dilemma of applying anthropology in a setting that challenges the premise of the discipline.

Not least among the foremost anthropologists of the 20th century, Margaret Mead and her work with the government of the British Empire during World War II brought to light the complexities of military anthropology. Working closely with military and intelligence organization in Britain and America, Mead advocated the use of anthropologists not only as sources of knowledge, but also as practitioners that could highlight innovative approaches to solving key social problems. She argued that

> The obligation of the scientist to examine his material dispassionately is combined with the obligation of the citizen to participate responsibly in his society. To the organization

> of social materials to the end that we may know more, had to be added the organization of social materials that we may *do* more – here – now – in America toward fighting in a way that will use with the moral and physical resources to attack the problem of reorganizing the world (1942: 2).

What Mead references is an interesting juncture that underscores the discipline of anthropology and anthropologists. The dilemma of an anthropologist is thus to maintain an objective perspective, but simultaneously engage in a reflexive interrogation of one's position, character, and responsibility as a citizen charged with a duty that requires the exact opposite of what the discipline seeks: a subjective rendering of one's environment that exposes the effects of professional choices – thus, a sense of accountability. While the aim may be to 'do more' with knowledge, Mead demonstrates that part of the dilemma is anchored in an explicit political endeavor. It is, arguably, an endeavor in which she already privileges the narrative of superiority as a member of one nation hoping to use cultural insight to structure the world of the other. Lucas further explains that Mead's appeal to political outcomes represents an attempt at '"just war" reasoning,' a philosophical line of inquiry that 'frequently degenerate[s] into hopeless circularity' (2009: 42-43). Through an inquiry into the material representations of knowledge, I will show how such justifications for the occupation of Afghanistan were rearticulated as cultural knowledge through COIN. Lucas' argument does not eschew careful introspection into the morality of wars and the use of expertise in executing policies, but he does highlight an interesting omission in such arguments early in the 20th century. Lucas observes '[…] we do not see [Mead] asking […] whether in so doing the *core values of the discipline itself* might thereby be compromised' - largely because '[s]uch a summary was, at the time, nonexistent' (2009: 36). The American Anthropological Association (AAA) eventually issued the 'summary' as a Code of Ethics, but

it did not broach – perhaps because it did not anticipate – the challenges that anthropology would encounter as a result of its association with international defense priorities (AAA 2007). At the advent of COIN in Afghanistan, the dilemmas of Mead and Boas echoed with renewed energy when the Association printed an advertisement in several of its journals on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) (Gusterson and Price 2005). The outcry forged sharp divisions among anthropologists worldwide, bringing forth a compelling series of arguments that are shaping the nexus of anthropology and militarism.

By the time the Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with U.S. Military and Intelligence Communities (CEAUSSIC) had convened in 2006, anthropologists had already editorialized their polarized positions. Some alleged,

> what is advocated here amounts to a social science inspired approach to Empire, using 'information warfare', 'ethnographic intelligence' and culturally informed soldiers as a velvet glove around the brute fist of military might that Empire requires. Do anthropologists really want to be part of this sordid, neo-colonialist project? (Gusterson 2007: 23).

It is a pointed assault on the discipline's misappropriation that is echoed by other critics, such as David Price (2009; 2011; 2014), Roberto Gonzalez (2007; 2012), and Brian Ferguson (2013), who issue both practical and philosophical objections. On the other end of the spectrum, anthropologists such as Robert Albro (2014; 2010; 2010a) and Carolyn Fleuhr-Lobban (2008) argue for a cautious, but robust engagement of anthropology in the military, intelligence, and security sector. As the HTS program's most vocal critic, Roberto Gonzalez condemned the entire enterprise of militarizing culture, particularly by anthropologists, such as Dr. David Kilcullen – a former lieutenant colonel in the Australian Army, who served as U.S General David Petraeus' senior counterinsurgency advisor. Gonzalez criticized what he perceived to be a wanton application of socio-cultural

anthropology, stating that:

> The fact that Kilcullen and others are eager to commit social-science knowledge to goals established by the Defense Department and the C.I.A. is indicative of a new anthropology of insurgency. Anthropology under these circumstances appears as just another weapon to be used on the battlefield — not as a tool for building bridges between peoples, much less as a mirror that we might use to reflect upon the nature of our own society (Democracy Now! Interview by Amy Goodman: 2007).

His fear stemmed from a key development in the wake of the War on Terror. In 2004, the torture and humiliation of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib detention facility in Baghdad was linked to specifically what Gonzalez deems 'a new anthropology of insurgency.' Ethnographic data about cultural sensitivities regarding perceptions of masculinity and sexuality were used to extort information from Iraqi detainees during interrogations (Gonzalez 2007). Gonzalez's critique centers upon two issues, which are explicitly related in the Abu Ghraib incident. In an editorial summing up the atrocities, he notes how the application of social science knowledge armed 'U.S. interrogators with culturally specific material that could be used to recruit Iraqi informants — and, with or without official approval, to develop torture techniques tailor made for Iraqi prisoners' (2007). Not only is the application of culturally-specific information in the case of detainee torture at Abu Ghraib problematic, it reaffirms the essentially colonialist uses with which the discipline of anthropology and counterinsurgency have previously been criticized. Iraqis from the local population are co-opted by the military-industrial regime as informants, complicit, either directly or indirectly, in the abuses of war and hegemonic privilege. Echoing similar objections to both the HTS program, David Price argues that the uses of anthropology by the military 'can leverage social structure and hegemonic narratives so that the occupied will internalize their own captivity as freedom' (2009). Exemplifying Coronil's 'colonial

subjects,' Iraqis became a part of Western hegemonic interventions. The example offered by Gonzalez, it is also an acute reflection of the way in which Afghan-Americans were involved in preparing for counterinsurgency operations. This study addresses the facet of diasporic engagement that allowed Afghan-Americans to draw upon particular narratives as a means of not only legitimizing their relevance to U.S. policies in Afghanistan, but at the same time helping shape the international community's (often) Orientalist, colonial impressions and goals for Afghanistan's 'modernization.' Price's contribution to the field of war anthropology resonates beyond the machinations of the military. It looks specifically at other actors that circulate in the discussions of war, culture, and counterinsurgency. He draws upon Patricia Omidian's work in Afghanistan to highlight the increasing lack of distinction and disparity between humanitarian workers and the military under the umbrella of counterinsurgency-led humanitarian aid (Price 2014: 98). Omidian, who spent four years working on humanitarian interventions in Afghanistan, observed that development efforts affiliated with the military compounded the erosion of 'the symbolic boundary that aid workers (and anthropologists) need to stay safe and which allows [them] to be seen by local communities as neutral. That boundary no longer exists in Afghanistan' (Omidian 2009: 7). Aside from theoretical or ethical apprehensions about the practice of anthropology, she and Price expose vulnerability in the systemic application of human-centered initiatives that belie the intent to subvert socio-political structures and retrench the values and principles of the occupying force. Ultimately, such participation compromises the local populations as well as the anthropologists or the aid workers by underscoring their affiliation with the politics of an ongoing war. But most importantly, it renders their work subjective despite the humanitarian gloss. Brian Ferguson, whose

extensive research on human conflict has offered acute observations about the syncretic relationship between war and anthropology, further supports this idea. He argues that proponents of anthropology in the military may feel that their actions do not induce harm, but the belief

> that their actions support only non-lethal actions is belied by consistent statements by military writers, that cultural awareness and ethnographic information is to be fully integrated into all of a commander's options. Information gathered by social scientists may be combined with other information and used in lethal targeting. That is why anthropologists should not participate (2013: 8).

He thus infers that anthropologists working in the context of military engagement are aware of the scope of a commander's options, which include and often initiate the use of force against populations. His point is salient and also notes that the limitations of a commander's options can directly affect the collection, dissemination, and analysis of cultural information. Anthropologists can work as humanitarian intermediaries, but they can also become complicit in lethal military campaigns.

Although some anthropologists have disavowed any engagement with the military, few have developed parameters in which the studies of human societies at war can actually benefit the discipline of anthropology. In fact, as Albro notes, the American Anthropological Association's report against HTS was not in principle ''anti-anti-engagement' with the military,' but rather maintained that 'indiscriminate engagement is inadvisable' (2010: 1088). The domain of public anthropology, even if solely confined to academia still engages with a host of institutions because 'knowledge production is itself an active form of practice' (Albro 2010: 1088). Beneath Albro's valid assertions about public anthropology lies an important factor in the creation and diffusion of knowledge – specifically, its brokers (the groundwork of which will be discussed in the proceeding section). Anthropologists can

be brokers of cultural knowledge, which is why institutions from the government to private sector enterprises often seek such expertise to better understand their constituents and consumers. Conflict or post-conflict settings heighten sensitivities that social scientists, by training, can contextualize and potentially resolve. Fleuhr-Lobban, who too dissuades against indiscriminate applications of cultural knowledge, nonetheless believes that '[a]nthropologists make excellent brokers in such delicate environments, helping interpret and debate the issues with the people being studied' (Fleuhr-Lobban 2008). Both she and Albro contend that anthropological engagement with the military *is* possible, but must be conducted in a way in which the knowledge can be openly discussed and disseminated – thusly disassociating with any possible links to military and/or government intelligence gathering operations (Albro 2010; 2010a; Fluehr-Lobban 2008). Thus, the argument for anthropological knowledge in war and counterinsurgency operations is valid as long as the goals of the brokers and the goals of the consumers of such knowledge are largely similar. Programs such as HTS have tested both the discipline of anthropology and the ethics of its practitioners even if only looking at the application of cultural information. The concept of 'cultural knowledge brokers' and how such material is shaped by the premise of counterinsurgency doctrine is a thematic area that this study specifically addresses in the subsequent chapters.

Knowledge production

The consistent trope throughout the study is knowledge production and its commodification. Consequently, the thesis draws on Frederik Barth's anthropology of knowledge production as its overarching analytical framework. He argues that the difference between culture and knowledge is limited, and that the transmission of

knowledge can reconstitute culture (2002). Barth notes that 'bodies of knowledge' differ because people experience their social and physical environments in different ways, and position knowledge in ways that will help them orient themselves in the world. As knowledge is produced to make sense of various contexts, Barth posits that it takes on three distinct but inter-related 'faces' (2002). *Corpus*, the first dimension, comprises the body of assertions and ideologies about a specific subject. The representations and performances of such assertions make up the second face - *media*. Barth's third component, *social organization*, reflects the network of relations and institutions through which knowledge is produced, translated, and transmitted. Within the framework, Barth emphasizes agency, rather than structure, as formative of the 'salient processes of production, reproduction, and use of knowledge that takes place and shapes the forms of knowledge,' which Barth situates 'in the social organization of authorities, practitioners, and clients, in the instituted modes of recruitment and replacement of personnel, and in the forms of communication by which each corpus of knowledge is taught, learned, applied and marginally changed' (2002: 6). His analysis can be usefully applied to explain the relationships between the Afghan-American contractors and the military from which the substantive knowledge about Afghans and Afghanistan has emerged in the last 15 years. His focus on agency and discursive forms of knowledge production are informative for focusing on 'the knowers and the acts of the knowers – the people who hold, learn, produce, and apply knowledge' (Barth 2002: 3). Below, I use Barth's three faces to discuss the substantive cultural knowledge produced by the contractors, the representations of such knowledge in the military, and the network of relations and institutions through which knowledge is generated, commodified, and reproduced. As a result, the overlaps in

the empirical chapters – Chapters 4, 5, and 6 – are an intended aspect of my approach as they correspond to the interconnectedness Barth theorized when considering the 'three faces of knowledge.'

Corpus: This thesis breaks down the corpus into two related elements – the specific ideologies about Afghanistan, and how such assertions are constituted and validated. The cultural knowledge articulated by Afghan-American contractors resonates with Barth's discussion of the Baktaman in New Guinea, and thus 'falls within [his] concept of knowledge: it provided people with a way to understand major aspects of the world, ways to think and feel about the world, and ways to act on it' (2002: 4). Barth's concept of knowledge is analytically useful because it helps situate the social memory of diasporic households as a way of knowing Afghanistan. It also makes sense of the role of the Afghan migration experience in shaping knowledge. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Afghan-Americans were cast into the public spotlight as projections of Afghanistan, and their articulations of culture, self-hood, and Islam became codified within a set of claims about Afghanistan. In interviews, Afghan-American contractors related notions of rural pastoralism and tribalism to cultivate an understanding of Afghanistan and its 'human terrain' for the U.S. military. They emphasized the significance of *zan, zar,* and *zamin* (women, gold, and land) as the pillars of Afghan culture and tradition, despite the fact that many of contractors had either left Afghanistan at infancy or were raised in cosmopolite households in Kabul, the capital city, prior to migrating. The same claims were echoed in the larger diaspora, as cohorts of the first generation and subsequent generations discussed similar romanticized ideals of Afghan culture based on their family's nostalgia. As an insider in the community, I became interested in how certain assertions were

incorporated and others excluded from the body of knowledge about Afghanistan and *Afghaniyat*. Although they were not necessarily 'invented traditions,' the ideologies could be explained as a form of knowledge production that allowed populations to integrate into specific social contexts (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 8-9). The positioning of particular ideologies can be seen as the community's critique of the post-9/11 order, in which Afghans were homogenized in the same categories as Arab, Pakistani, and Indian immigrants. By selectively asserting aspects of cultural identity and forms of Islamic representation, not only did the diaspora constitute a distinct set of narratives about Afghanistan and Afghan-ness, but it also pushed for the recognition of the community as a population distinct from other Muslim groups in America. In the socio-political context of the GWoT and the post-9/11 security posture, integration based on the public's assumed knowledge about Afghanistan and Islam was challenging given the vilification of Muslims and certain ethnicities. The inclusion of some ideas versus others was a way for Afghan-Americans to contest being typecast, and afforded them greater agency to stake and redefine their role in American society. Thus, their assertions, projected by the category of contractors, served as a platform upon which the politics of diasporic identity could be enacted, broken, and reshaped.

I turn to Mir Sadat's study of Afghan-Americans to explore how ideologies about Afghanistan and *Afghaniyat* were constituted through the diasporicity of Afghan-American households (2008). Sadat's analysis is helpful because it illuminates the development of varied 'traditions' within the substantive corpus of Afghan knowledge (Barth 2002). As Sadat explains, although the 'Afghan Diaspora serves as a cultural proxy for Afghanistan,' the moral values, beliefs, and customs that shape their thinking and actions vary from one

diasporic generation to another (2008: 330). But he emphasizes that the traditions of knowledge articulated among Afghan-American contractors, as well as the post-Soviet diasporic generation, are deeply rooted in the legacy of the Soviet invasion and its resistance, and the pattern of migration that it engendered around the world (Sadat 2008). For the cohort of Afghan-Americans who did not experience the invasion, family memories anchor historical reconstructions upon which their sentiments and interactions with one another are based. They appropriate their family's wounds, experiences, and biases, and reassert their salience in contemporary dialogues on Afghanistan. Van Hear's perspective on 'spheres of engagement' is useful in addressing how such interactions not only reconstitute, but also validate assertions about *Afghaniyat* and Afghanistan (2015). I apply the perspective in two ways. First, I use it to show that the memories and narratives of the Soviet invasion define the social boundaries across which households engage with other households in the 'known community.' Interactions across this sphere, which I describe in Chapters 2 and 3, are formative elements in revising notions of Afghanistan as an 'imagined community.' Afghan-Americans' engagement with other households and within the known community points to their agency in the process of cultural development. This provides a pause in conventional anthropological analyses of discursive power by showing that Afghan-Americans actively shape their social structures. Secondly, the 'spheres' concept helps to analyze the assertions and ideologies as forms of non-discursive practice that establish understanding – and validity - through action or '*doing'* (Budden and Sofaer 2009). Such performances of knowledge reflect Barth's argument 'that each tradition of knowledge will be characterized by distinct and in their own ways stringent criteria of validity – presumably in some kind of systematic relation to the uses to which the

knowledge is put' (2002:10). Among Afghan-Americans, the 'criteria of validity' are established by conveying an understanding of *Afghaniyat* through its sustained performance in interactions across the three spheres. This discussion presages the following section on the representation of knowledge. By relating the literature on migration to emergent accounts of Afghan socio-cultural identity, I emphasize the agency of Afghan-Americans in using knowledge to negotiate the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the diaspora.

Media: In this section, I focus on the various media through which the corpus of knowledge about Afghanistan is communicated to the U.S. military. Barth perceives the medium of communication as a powerful frame. He states that 'the nature of the medium requires that its idioms resonate emotionally and vividly with the audience, so the precision of the message can be relatively low but the importance of its illocutionary force is great' (2002: 5). The medium not only situates the information, but it also shapes the validity of the information presented based on the effect it produces among the audience. I extend Barth's description to the role-playing training exercises on U.S. military bases in which discursive and non-discursive knowledge are both present. As a performance of knowledge, the messages can lack accuracy but their effect is punctuated by the medium of scripted scenarios that define what Afghanistan means through action. In the analysis of the media, the interplay of factors that shape reality and meaning are a window into the social organization of knowledge. The assertions that generate a social reality or institutional knowledge about Afghanistan are reinforced by non-discursive physical representations; creating a distinction between a 'way of speaking' about a culture or people, and the specific ways such ideologies are substantiated in action (Foucault 1972:

193). Here, I draw on Erving Goffman's concepts of framing, performance, and self-presentation to analyze the exercises as a form of representation (1959). On installations reconstructed to resemble archetypal Afghan villages (which, incidentally, are also used to represent Iraq), Afghan-American contractors are employed as actors to lend authenticity to the environment to which the soldiers must adapt. The village constitutes a theater in which a script defines scenarios ranging from tribal engagements to firefights. Actors are given specific roles – the Afghan-Americans are supposed to 'act Afghan' and the soldiers take their cues from how the proxy-Afghans interact with them. The transaction of cross-cultural knowledge by Afghan-American role-players constitutes 'Afghanistan' as a cultural-material reality, both through articulating assertions as well as relying on structures, such as houses, to relate the norms and values associated with Afghan culture. A village house, as a form of 'media,' reflects Bourdieu's idea of the house as an example of a 'structuring structure' in his discussion of the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu cited the Kabylian house in Algeria to illustrate the way cultural life is structured within the home according to binary oppositions, such as 'high:low, […] male:female,' which show a 'tangible classifying system' in the very structure of the house (Bourdieu 1977). The organization of the Kabylian house is therefore a symbolic representation of Algerian cultural realities. Similarly, the houses on the installations are constructed to convey Afghan cultural life, particularly in drawing a distinction between the organization of men's lives in the public sphere and women's lives in the domestic/private domain. In simulated interactions, the 'villages' and the constituent homes that emulate the physical and cultural infrastructure of Afghanistan actually reconstruct a habitus that can organize not only how the Afghan-Americans and U.S. soldiers act and interact, but also a collective set of narratives and

cultural articulations that gain their validity through the role-playing process. I connect the described application of habitus to Goffman's observation about framing - that the sheer presence of the actors and objects within a setting is an affirmation that another world exists outside of that specific frame (1974). The interactions among Afghan-American contractors and with the military involve strategies that are informed by the recognition of the outside world. This is an important point as it highlights how perceptions of class, ethnicity, and gender roles carry over into the theater as factors that shape the production, representation, and performance of culture. Within the reconstructed theater of operations, the relationships among Afghans and with the U.S. military were critical reflections of counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. The expectations of Afghan culture and society drew upon concepts of Afghanistan reconstructed in the diaspora. Moreover, the concepts were pre-emptively scripted in the scenario interactions so that Afghan-American role-players could perform according to the cues provided. During my fieldwork, a female role-player noted that it was not in the 'action' moments, but after the role-playing was over when one could see the lines along which the actors divided themselves in the 'real' world and contested the 'performances' they had encountered, often questioning the validity of other Afghan-Americans presentations and the motivations for their choices to enact Afghan identity in particular ways – a point that is intertwined in the social organization of the knowledge produced, which shall be discussed in the next section.

I extend Goffman's theory on framing to explain the material representations of knowledge about Afghans and Afghanistan. In the study, I apply it to anthropologist Rochelle Davis' discussion of cultural training materials in the U.S. military during the

occupation of Iraq (2010). Prior to deployment, U.S. military servicemen and servicewomen were exposed to a range of media from a 'three-day intensive course on the history and religions of Iraq to manuals and CDs on the country and language' and as well as 'a list of dos and don'ts, which embody behaviors that can be obeyed like orders' (Davis 2010: 301). Culture, through such a process of learning, is stripped to basic prescriptions and proscriptions with the instrumental function of efficiently enabling military occupation. Davis' findings resonate with documents I encountered, such as the Master Narratives of Afghanistan – a series of reports that inform military, intelligence, and foreign policy decision-makers on the collective consciousness of the Afghan population. The representations discussed above reveal 'the constraints that arise from the properties of the medium' (Barth 2002: 3). I unpack these constraints by drawing on critiques in Orientalism. Edward Said, who was highly critical of American society for reducing knowledge to categorical, generalized assertions, contended that '[a]s framed by the media, the choice facing professional interpreters of, or experts on, 'other' peoples is to tell the public whether what is happening is 'good' for America or not--as if what is 'good' could be articulated in fifteen-second soundbites--and then to recommend a policy for action' (1993: 323). Referencing Davis' argument, the representations of knowledge about Iraq, like Afghanistan, are physical manifestations of the 'soundbites' Said mentions. His critique of expertise applies to the essentialist reductionism of concepts, such as Master Narratives. Knowledge, therefore, is taken as fact, as long as it can meet the public's demand for a quick answer to determine a conclusion for which there may be neither question nor hypothesis. Absent too is the grey area between the absolutes of 'good' and 'bad,' and as Said suggests only one of the categories has a place in the public's conception of what America (and

American hegemony, by extension) represents. The same binary cataloguing of information applies to the actual discourse of cultural trainings. In many of my observations and interviews, U.S. military personnel and U.S. government contractors spoke of local populations – or allies and enemies – as 'good guys' and 'bad guys.' The words conveyed an essentialist mode of thinking and compartmentalization of knowledge, which often ended in general lists of things one should and should not do to perform Afghan culture accurately. I reinforce Said's criticism by drawing on Douglas Little's treatise on American Orientalism. Little traces the discursive practices and expert opinions that have historically essentialized Arabs in order to fashion various economic-driven imperialist agendas in the Middle East. Referencing distinctions of the civilized and the barbarian, Little draws upon research conducted on *National Geographic* magazine as a type of scientific and cultural educational product, whose readily accessible and popular issues teemed with 'Arabs, Africans, and Asians [as] backward, exotic, and occasionally dangerous folk who have needed and will continue to need U.S. help and guidance if they are successfully to undergo political and cultural modernization' (2004: 11). Not only did the content of the magazine draw differences between 'us' and 'them,' it also contributed to an essentialist narrative that supported America's foreign policy endeavors in the 1940s and 1950s (Little 2004: 12). The shortcomings of the military's cultural knowledge training programs are not predicated upon the aptitude of its servicemen and servicewomen (quite the contrary), but rather the overall rigidity of the frames and limitations placed on how knowledge is produced, learned and applied – constraints that were effectively channeled as an opportunity by Afghan-Americans to gain authority and relevance in the pursuit of nation-building in Afghanistan.

The media used to represent knowledge on Afghanistan is problematic beyond Orientalist critiques. Marshaling the literature on the metaphoric language and imagery of America's colonization of Native Americans, I show how representations of militarism and colonialism are readily mobilized to frame the experience of the military and the public as subjects of the GWoT - consistent with Asad's critique of such depictions as inherently rooted in a colonial legacy that reflects 'a crisis of representation' (1986). Stephen Silliman poses a critical reflection on the relationship with militarism in his analysis of the metaphorical use of 'Indian country' and imagery of the 'Wild West' used by the U.S. military to reference the territories under occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. The observation relates to characterizations such as 'Sitting Bull,' a prominent Native American chief, whose name was used to refer to an Afghan tribal elder in Major James Gant's book One Tribe At a Time, a proposal on winning the war in Afghanistan. Silliman notes that rhetoric mirroring the conquest of the First Nations recasts the relationship with present day Native Americans in the same light as the past. The use of the terms 'represents the language of colonization in the present. Summoning this kind of metaphor for a military effort in the Middle East conveys that the occupying troops are agents of colonization, imperialism, and the presumed highest orders of civilization' (Silliman 2008: 243). Silliman notes that for Native Americans in the United States and especially those serving in the military, the comparison proves jarring to their sense of self as Americans when it is associated with terrorists and insurgents – collectively, the enemy. He argues that

> even if the rendering of terrorist and infidel zones in the Middle East as "Indian Country" serves more as historical metaphor, and even if soldiers would not consider their Native American neighbors or fellow soldiers today as terrorists, one still cannot escape the problematic renarration of those historical Indian Wars as conflicts with terrorists, despite the obvious common thread of the United States as the invader (2008: 243).

The experience is echoed among Afghan-American contractors, who, like Native American soldiers, work with the military to assist the occupation of their (at times imagined) homeland. Subscribing to the rhetoric of the Wild West and acceptance of the U.S. military as occupiers, the contractors reconstitute their relationship to both America and Afghanistan. America is thus positioned as a progressive occupying force responsible for controlling a backward and savage population. By situating local Afghan populations as inferior to the class of Afghans in the diaspora, some Afghan-American contractors manipulated this representation to effectively ally themselves with the U.S. government. This sort of a neo-colonial reconfiguration relates to the non-discursive performance of knowledge and heritage that inform the overarching discursive practice of domination and control.

Social organization: This section will focus on the institution of social relations that produce and represent cultural knowledge. Barth's concept of social organization helps us understand how knowledge about a culture is transmitted and reproduced (2002). By considering the relationships among organizations, communities, and individuals, we can see how various instances of 'groupness' allow people to act across various traditions of knowledge. Their participation within these networks represents their agency as knowledge producers. Barth's perspective embeds production and diffusion of knowledge within the network of relationships and echoes Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT). Rooted in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), Latour presents an unconventional consideration of knowledge as 'science' – a perspective that parallels Barth's assertion of knowledge as 'culture.' Latour's interest lies in the network of relationships that govern the field of study from where the *facts* upon which science is

based emerges (1986). Like Barth, Latour believes that in the production of knowledge, the parts of the whole – the relations and processes that galvanize its development – are critical for understanding. Set apart from the whole, it becomes easier to identify the structure of the actor-network associations as well as the acts of agency within each action. By applying Latour's idea to the performances of Afghanistan and *Afghaniyat*, each element that falls within the frame of the network can be parsed out and studied individually such that one can examine how Afghan-American contractors organize themselves within the known community, both on set and off set during the role-playing rotations. Looking at such relationships through ANT, we can assess how these interactions might affect the production of Afghanistan as a knowable fact; something that can be learned, communicated, and reinforced through rehearsed iterations. I use ANT to demonstrate the effect of networks (in addition to performance, as noted in preceding section) on the principles of validity that emerge to regulate cultural development and knowledge production. In the role-playing exercises Afghan-American contractors communicate knowledge to the U.S. military, but the transmission of knowledge also takes place within each community – for example, the military shares and reproduces the knowledge to form an understanding of how to think about Afghanistan. Through the experience, Afghan-Americans draw upon their personal experiences and relationships in the community of contractors to reify or reject notions of Afghanistan. These negotiations of knowledge and power map on to the information conveyed to the military as 'expertise.' At the same time that ANT allows us to examine the agency of human constituents, it is also applicable to the agency of material products in producing knowledge and creating versions of Afghan culture. In the thesis, I discuss the role of Smartbooks – guidebooks on the demography,

history, and culture of countries – that are published by the Army. Such materials serve as a quick-reference guide for forces that are deployed overseas and who expect to interact with local populations. The military personnel I interviewed often noted that they followed the books as guidance on building rapport with Afghans and Iraqis. The materials positioned an understanding of cross-cultural communications between Americans and Afghans – an understanding that was brokered and reinforced by the performance of Afghan cultural values by Afghan-American contractors. The irony of the representation was that Afghan-Americans often referenced the Smartbooks to familiarize with knowledge about Afghanistan prior to training the U.S. military in the specific assertions.

Another useful perspective on the social organization of knowledge comes from Michel Callon's pioneering study of scallop fishermen in St. Brieuc Bay. In what he deems a 'sociology of translation,' Callon provides a theoretical framework to study the intersection of knowledge production and power. He defines translation as a continual process in knowledge production, without an end point, 'during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited' (1986: 203). By studying the network of three scientific researchers, scallop fishermen, and scallops as the subject of inquiry, Callon examines how these actors relate with one another and explain their reality. This provides an interesting angle for the study of the Afghan-American contractors and the scope of their interactions with the U.S. military. The exchange of cultural information affected how the members of the diaspora positioned themselves as Afghans vis-à-vis the U.S. government. In the translation of Afghan cultural expertise, the relationships and processes among the actors define the emergent body of knowledge. Callon identifies four processes at work, which I apply in Chapter 6:

> (a) problematisation: the researchers sought to become indispensable to other actors in the drama by defining the nature and the problems of the latter and then suggesting that these would be resolved if the actors negotiated the obligatory passage point of the researchers' programme of investigation; (b) interessement: a series of processes by which the researchers sought to lock the other actors into the roles that had been proposed for them in that programme; (c) enrolment: a set of strategies in which the researchers sought to define and interrelate the various roles they had allocated to others; (d) mobilisation: a set of methods used by the researchers to ensure that supposed spokesmen for various relevant collectivities were properly able to represent those collectivities and not betrayed by the latter (1998: 196).

Applying the four characteristics to the Afghan case, the structure of the relationship between Afghan-Americans and the U.S. government also becomes apparent. The U.S. military defined a problem in Afghanistan, which led to diasporic actors being mobilized to provide specific assistance in implementing counterinsurgency interventions. As a result, Afghan-American contractors performed a set of assigned 'roles' prescribed by the military, and those roles were inextricably linked to other actors, such as private defense contracting firms, who also negotiated the exchange of cultural information. In terms of continued 'mobilization,' the U.S. military's strategies abided by specific narratives, which Afghan-American contractors produced and reproduced to support counterinsurgency efforts. Thus, the Afghan-Americans ensured their own utility and integration in the American war economy and, at the same time, the U.S. government was able to project its power into Afghanistan. These four pivotal moments allow the network of relations between Afghan-Americans and the U.S. military, as well as the diasporic community amongst itself, to be examined within the scope of 'translation.' The case is also compelling when taking into account that the process of 'translation' is predicated on a course that has no actual end point, although the alliances among the various actors involved may be forged with the same outcome in mind. One could argue, given the nature of the

engagement, that the lack of an end point is not a simple facet of the process, but rather a sought-after and deliberately determined outcome in itself. As long as Afghanistan and its related expertise were frequently revised or reinvented, the U.S. government worked with limited influence over the hearts and minds of those whom counterinsurgency was supposed to influence and co-opt, and would continue to rely on Afghan-American contractors for guidance and expertise. For Afghan-Americans, such opportunities to reconstitute Afghan culture exemplified their agency and power to shape the limits of the military's knowledge.

As an extension of framing, the notion of 'overflows' – the effects of a decision on one group of agents made by another group of agents (Callon 1998) – is another useful concept in the overall social organization of knowledge. This process is central to Callon's discussion of how framing provides a way of containing or attempting to contain such overflows by structuring the interaction among agents. Like Barth, he employs the economic term 'externalities' (Barth 2002) to define overflows; the effects of an encounter that spill over into spaces beyond the frame. In the thesis, I employ 'externalities' to discuss the consequences or results of the encounter between the contractors and the military, moving from a more theoretical angle to a discussion of concrete examples of the effect of knowledge production. Given that the interaction between the two entities are structured to anticipate results, I was more interested in understanding the outcomes that were either not anticipated or fell outside of the margins of the encounter – specifically how such results translated to perceptible developments in Afghanistan. Thus, I use the term to characterize the byproducts of the military and policy decisions in Afghanistan that stemmed from the interaction and transaction of knowledge between the contractors and

the U.S. military-industrial complex. Each contract, role-playing exercise, or training session that takes place 'is helping to structure and frame the interaction of which it more or less forms the substance, [and] is simultaneously a potential conduit for overflows' (Callon 1998: 254). In the same way that contracts frame legal roles and expectations, military training exercises that involved Afghan-American role-players drew upon a similar premise to script roles and scenarios – setting the scene for the engagement between the contractors and the military. The critique I issue is that one of the externalities – or outcomes – in the transaction of cultural production was the reconstitution of the cause of the war in Afghanistan. It became something inherently cultural and, therefore, 'fixable' by anthropologists. Particularly during the counterinsurgency period, the war in Afghanistan was cast largely as 'a clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) or a fight with 'accidental guerrillas' who adhered to 'folk-ways of tribal warfare that are mediated by traditional cultural norms, values, and perceptual lenses' (Kilcullen 2009: xiv). Such ideas popularized the Orientalist discourse on tribes and tribal warfare, which constituted all local populations as 'tribal,' drawing upon an imagery all too similar to the 'noble savage.' In cultural trainings and role-playing exercises, the emphasis by the U.S. military on tribes and other traditional powerbrokers subverted the social structure of local Afghan communities, 'reinforcing the power of state-appointed tribal leaders [that led] to greater regionalism and social fragmentation' (Hakimi 2012: 14). The focus on tribes and tribal warfare supported the U.S. military's justification for mobilizing local militias in Afghanistan's provincial districts. They represented parallel structures of authority to the central government and the Afghan national security forces, contesting their political administration and often perpetrating immense human rights violations. The effect

stemming from the network of relations in knowledge production fits subjected local Afghan populations to new forms of power, empire, and nation-building. The process of generating knowledge between the U.S. military and Afghan-American contractors exonerated the U.S. invasion by stipulating cultural and Islamic norms as the causes for and challenges to governance and security. Knowledge production thus minimized the West's role in creating the structures that have contributed to the ongoing instability in Afghanistan, but increased the power of both the U.S. government and the Afghan diaspora to influence the political and economic direction of the country. This leads into a broader discussion of how the assertions, representations, and social organization of knowledge are defined by militarism.

Conclusion

Through the analytical framework of knowledge production, the encounter between Afghan-American contractors and the U.S. military offers a perspective into the effects of militarism. Against the backdrop of the GWoT and the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan, America's national security infrastructure has spread into much of the socio-political landscape and economy in America. The appropriation of anthropological knowledge as a technology of war – particularly in the form of ethnographic intelligence – is a testament to the continued growth of militarism since the days of the Cold War. It is also at the center of heated debates on the discipline's engagement with military interventions. Some anthropologists argue that little in society remains untouched by the militarism (Gusterson 2009). The encounter with the military has had a formative effect on the specific assertions of cultural identity and on the media through which knowledge about Afghanistan and Afghans have been cast. At the start of the chapter, I argued that the

Afghan-American contractors were constituted as a category of actors because of the encounter with the military-industrial complex. I conclude by emphasizing that the ability to secure government clearance and employment with the U.S. government had a powerful effect in not only allowing a category of knowledge producers to emerge, but also enabling them to transcend the margins of America's and their own community's socio-economic divisions. As intermediaries in the War on Terror, Afghan-Americans became distinguished by their 'native' intelligence – a distinction that allowed them the autonomy to contest their marginalization in American society and break from the class-oriented hierarchy of the diaspora community. The narratives of Afghanistan that emerged from the encounter between Afghan-American contractors and the U.S. military-industrial complex were more reflective of the social memory, history, and migration experiences of Afghan-American households than they were of Afghanistan's culture, norms, religion, and people. Nonetheless, the processes of cultural development in the last 15 years has been palpable in the Afghan diaspora, as Afghan-Americans have mobilized a collective identity and redefined the boundaries of their membership both within the community and in American society. Obtaining security clearances, representative of the government's trust, and moving beyond contracting to long-term work with the U.S. government has become a new way of articulating status and belonging in both the diaspora and American society at large.

The thesis is positioned to contribute to salient theoretical engagements with regard to militarism, war, and anthropology. In an environment where the integrity of the discipline and the knowledge it generates are often compromised by hegemonic appropriations of anthropology, 'social scientists have another option: to hold up a mirror for critical self-reflection. Stepping back for a moment from the utilitarian, uncritically

'applied' uses of our discipline, it is worth considering how anthropological insights might lead to a deeper understanding of what is occurring' (Gonzalez 2012: 57). The examples and analysis in this study provide a useful point of departure for considering alternative perspectives on the contributions anthropological knowledge can make in the national security sector. Such a step, then, could elucidate the social and political constructs that shape not only what is occurring in society, but why, how and to whom. By synthesizing the corpus, representation and social organization of the knowledge produced for the military, I position knowledge production as one of 'the ways in which militarism remakes communities, public cultures, and the consciousness of individual subjects in multiple geographic and social locations' (Gusterson 2007a: 175). The thesis presents legitimate concerns as to how militarism and the forms of knowledge production it enables as 'war-technology' is reconstituting anthropology (Stroeken 2012). For example, financing for research imperatives and employment are more readily available in the national security sector than they are in academia (Priest and Arkin 2011). As a result, some critics invite anthropologists to '[…] consider how the very structure and mode of doing anthropology are themselves amenable to militarization […] A discipline that often seems bent on arbitrating, regulating, and monitoring indigenous identities and practices, may be called anthropology, or it may be called by its more obvious name: counterinsurgency' (Forte 2011). Such critiques center on the practice of ethnography where observations about populations can be transformed into cultural intelligence, compromising the legitimacy of anthropological research. The application of anthropology as a counterinsurgency technology was evident in the popular Human Terrain Systems program. Some anthropologists question whether the discipline wants to participate in 'a sordid, neo-

colonialist project,' arguing that 'what is advocated here amounts to a social science inspired approach to Empire, using 'information warfare,' 'ethnographic intelligence' and culturally informed soldiers as a velvet glove around the brute fist of military might that Empire requires' (Gusterson 2007: 23). I hope to validate through the thesis the need for anthropology to understand militarism as a culture cultivated by the state to shape public life, rather than relegate it to a product of the security state. Militarism can be studied in much the same way as a culture: it subscribes to assertions about security and state; it is communicated through various media in society; and it is the product of a network of social relations and processes that reproduce the principles of militarism. Like the culture generated about Afghanistan, militarism will continue to shape local populations and constitute new ways of thinking about the world. But anthropologists do not have to become embroiled in the 'sordid, neo-colonial projects' of empire making. Instead, in the pervasive environment of heightened surveillance and projected threats, anthropologists can contest the roots of increased militarism – an industry of fear perpetuated in the name of national security, public safety, and global power.

Chapter 2 Methodology and research challenges

Before proceeding with the findings of the thesis, I will first address the research methodology and limitations of the study. The project commenced with a fundamentally mistaken assumption on my part: that the Afghan-American diaspora community would be easy to study because I am an Afghan-American and therefore, an insider, as I will show below. As a result, I spent more than a year scaling the walls of the Afghan-American community and its households to gain better insights into the themes of my research, all

the while grappling with my misinformed hubris in assuming that an open door meant access. In the end, I learned as much about the process of ethnography as I did about the questions set out in my research. The following sections will discuss the methodological approach, sites and contacts, and the ethical consideration and challenges.

Methodological approach

My inquiry into the encounter with Afghan-American contractors and U.S. counterinsurgency training and operations was predicated upon two key questions:

- What narratives of Afghanistan emerged within Afghan-American communities after 9/11, and;
- How and to what effect were such narratives incorporated as expertise into U.S. counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan?

The answers were sought from semi-structured, qualitative interviews among 58 Afghan-Americans from the San Francisco Bay Area, California, and the Washington D.C. metro area (primarily northern Virginia); the largest diaspora hubs in America. Interviews were also conducted with 45 U.S. military personnel. In addition to interviews, I made observations of 10 trainings events to understand how knowledge about Afghanistan was applied and performed. Interviews with the military were in English, whereas the interviews with Afghan-Americans were done in a mix of Dari and English. In the quote extracts, I indicate where I paraphrased from Dari into English during the interview transcriptions. My initial perception had been that Afghan-Americans, who had immigrated to America as adults, would have preferred to communicate in one of Afghanistan's native languages during the interviews[6], but discovered that they vacillated back and forth between Dari and English. In

[6] As the interviewer, I was fluent and literate in Dari only. Fortunately, none of the interviewees spoke Pashto only and thus we were able to converse in both English and Dari throughout the interviews.

the paragraphs below, I detail the key considerations and challenges to my assumptions that shaped the overall methodology.

A consideration in developing the methodology was how to constitute the specific subset – or 'category' – of Afghan-Americans in the Afghan diaspora who engaged with the U.S. military. The reason for this is largely based on the criteria for employment stipulated by the U.S. military and the private defense contracting organizations. They hired Afghan-Americans as subject-matter experts and/or interpreters and role-players who could obtain a security clearance, which meant that the participants had to have American citizenship and be able to pass an extensive background check. This rendered some Afghans in the diaspora ineligible to even apply for the positions. The hiring criteria thus isolated the category of Afghans that had migrated to America around the time of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the late 1970s through to the ensuing civil war in the early 1990s. These Afghans were also set apart by the political dimension of their resettlement by the U.S. government. At a time when post-Cold War tensions were at a peak in America, the U.S. government sought to maximize its influence by granting asylum and a path to citizenship to Afghan refugees fleeing Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. In return, Afghans extolled the virtues of American democracy and neo-liberalism while vocally supporting criticism of Russia and communism. Their public denouncements fed into America's political narratives countering Soviet ideologies. Ironically, contrary to the post-9/11 period, the U.S. government maintained an open door policy to Afghan immigrants, ensuring that they would be Americans before Russia could Sovietize the Afghan population. Afghans, who were ushered through the open door, have now been in America long enough to attain citizenship, language proficiency in English (which was a

requirement for contractors, in addition to fluency in Dari or Pashto), and could more easily meet the provisions for government clearance, which discouraged recent residence overseas because it prolonged security and background checks. By comparison, the Afghans that came to America from Afghanistan in the late 1990s as a result of the Taliban occupation, or more recently after 2001, were not yet citizens and did not necessarily speak English well enough to translate for the military. They had also often spent significant amounts of time as refugees or resided overseas, making the process and acquisition of a security clearance more time-consuming and costly. For private defense companies competing over government contracts based on pricing, Afghan-Americans who required less 'processing' were a cheaper and faster option of supplying the military's demand. As a consequence, the group of people explored in this thesis had long been away from Afghanistan. Thus, the nature of contracting – the recruiting and hiring of diasporic expertise within the military-industrial complex – pre-selected the category of Afghan-Americans that constitute the subjects of the study.

My desire to capture people's lives and perspectives around the central issue of Afghanistan and Afghan culture required an acute ethnographic analysis. Gary Fine's concept of 'peopled ethnography,' which encourages the use of vignettes to discuss analytical implications, inspired the fieldwork and evaluation methodologies (2003). To synthesize the research, I selected five to seven key interviews and ethnographic moments (as vignettes) to inform the basis of each chapter. The data fell along three inter-related themes that reflected Barth's three faces of knowledge: the interviews and observations yielded insights into the body of knowledge that was operationalized for counterinsurgency, as well as how the knowledge was represented and performed for the

military and the diaspora community. By learning about the three elements, the processes and relationships configured by the encounter with militarism became more apparent. The selection of the case studies depended on the ethnographic richness they conveyed. I wanted to present moments in time that captured the knowledge produced, its representation, and the network of relationships and individuals from which such assertions or beliefs emerged. Moreover, I also followed eight to ten key informants (across the military and the diaspora) that were central to the development of my research. They were often conduits into the communities. I interacted with them frequently in a variety of settings, and they privileged me with a great degree of candor. These key informants were those with whom I established rapport and continued to interact over the life of the project. Although the majority of the field notes and observations were conducted from 2014 – 2015, I draw upon encounters that occurred beyond 2015 to illustrate shifts in participants' ideologies or behaviors over time. In the text of the thesis, I have indicated when the conversations and observations took place after the official period of fieldwork. During fieldwork events, I took copious notes in Dari and English in a bound notebook. At times, for example, the conversations in Dari outpaced my ability to put them in their exact translated English equivalent. I maintained a set of notes in Dari, which I looked over, translated, and transcribed thereafter. At the end of each interview and observation, I transcribed the hand-written notes into a computer. Despite taking several training courses on research analysis software, I ultimately chose to review and code my field notes by hand. While the limitation in such an approach was its time intensiveness, I did find that the method allowed me to gain greater familiarity and comfort in managing the data. I had expected it to be overwhelming at the outset of the research (and I was not proven entirely

wrong), but I appreciated the methodological integrity of personally coding and analyzing the data rather than entrusting it to software programs – not matter how efficient. The approach was useful in cataloguing, for example, the common themes and tropes that emerged in interviews. In particular, I could identity patterns, for example through the use of code-switching, in the way people presented themselves and/or their expertise. As a result, the data generated an ethnographic picture that reflected not only the overarching reach of militarism, but revealed the delicate social organization of Afghan cultural knowledge that the study investigates.

Sites and contacts

The decision to conduct a dual-sited ethnography was based on the desire to cover populations with the highest concentrations of Afghan-Americans. The approach allowed differences among the communities to emerge in a more meaningful way. It provided a window into the effect of settlement choices in shaping identity and status in the diaspora. It also highlighted the construction of relationships among households, based on perceptions of Afghaniyat. I initially concentrated on conducting fieldwork and cultivating contacts at community events. The timing of events such as Ramadan and Eid offered ample opportunities to attend community gatherings and meet potential informants. Afghan restaurants were hubs for both Afghan diaspora functions, such as ceremonies and wedding receptions, as well as places where Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds gathered for holiday celebrations.

One of the most frequented sites during my fieldwork in Virginia was Dunya, a bustling restaurant and banquet hall in Alexandria. While it doubled as a banquet hall for special occasions, during the month of Ramadan it offered a somber space for prayer and

iftar during the evenings. More than a hundred men and women attended the events. Men sat on the right side and women on the left, maintaining the religious custom of gender segregation but doing so without a *purdah* or divider of some sort to obscure visibility. As I continued with fieldwork (and will discuss in the following chapters), I discovered that sites were often arranged in such a way that they loosely mapped onto social or religious customs and protocols without compromising on function – for example, an Afghan cultural event would incorporate Afghan, Indian, and Arab artifacts in the interior décor of the space. At sites such as Dunya and events like *iftar*, it was often challenging to discern potential Afghan-American contacts from the other ethnicities represented. The method of listening intently to find Dari or Pashto conversations was not always fruitful, as many Afghan-Americans chose to communicate with one another in English. For the most part, my presence as an observer was not particularly out of place. I sat among the attendees and ate with them, using the occasion to introduce the research project and myself. However, from the start of the first night, my unfamiliarity with Islamic prayer rituals marked me as an outsider among the participants who attended the events regularly. The imam, presiding over the *iftar* dinner, asked the group to pray collectively on the rug at the restaurant. As they knelt in prostration, I shuffled hurriedly to the back of the room, sitting against the wall. Most people did not ask why I remained in the back as others prayed. When it was brought up casually by a group of older women, it was not an investigation into my religious beliefs. Instead, their curiosity measured my ability to watch the young children as their parents prayed. I willingly accepted. It allowed me to get to know the families better and establish trust within a short amount of time given my assigned role as the unofficial babysitter. Such associations were helpful in getting referrals to potential

interviewees and learning about new possible field sites for participant observations. It was in the capacity of the toddler-guardian that I met two of my key informants – sisters who hail from a well-connected family in the diaspora. On the night we met, I was asked to watch one of the young boys in their family and sat precisely where the toddler had been moments prior. Feeling the carpet slowly seep into the fabric of my jeans, I realized my mistake. When the prayer had concluded, I whispered to the young woman that I suspected the boy's diaper had leaked and revealed the side of my thigh. Despite the somber tone of the occasion and the hushed conversations, she burst into a fit of laughter and motioned to her mother and aunt. In a few seconds, a number of solicitous faces surrounded me, making apologies in Dari and English. The moment had diffused any tension between them as insiders and me as an outsider. It created an opening for further dialogue among other participants, who found both sympathy and humor in my plight. With the end of Ramadan in sight, my growing familiarity with the community secured personal invitations to Eid holiday parties at people's homes – often with an explicit encouragement to attend so that I could observe household events and conduct interviews, or to meet relatives who worked as defense contractors. Establishing such relationships helped sustain the momentum of snowball sampling, as I was able to secure a steady stream of referrals. As my network of informants expanded, new sites of observation and inquiry emerged. The linkages in the diasporic network, therefore, opened up new opportunities across both locations to observe and interview Afghan-Americans.

In the case of Fremont, my primary field site was the neighborhood of 'Little Kabul,' an area that had gained prominence in the years since 9/11. Little Kabul centers on and spills around the edges of a main city boulevard. Dotted with Afghan-run businesses, it is a

hub of diasporic life. The area is well known, even in Virginia, and has already been the subject of other research and literature (such as Ceri Oeppen's study of transnationalism among Afghan-Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area). Although I based myself in Fremont, where the heart of the diaspora community is, I did not limit my interviews to the confines of the city. As I was interested in interviewing Afghan-Americans with experience as translators and cultural advisors, I frequently interviewed informants who lived in neighboring cities, such as Union City, Hayward, and Concord. It is worth noting, however, that many of them had found employment at government-sponsored job fairs held specifically in Fremont by various private defense contractors. Fremont was a site that had been constructed by the government and media as a long-distance representation of Afghanistan, and so it became a central point of association with Afghans and Afghanistan in the post-9/11 public conscious.

While I often made connections and observed the day-to-day interactions of the diaspora at places, such as local markets, weddings, and public events (to include a new years' concert), the Fremont site was relatively easier to navigate throughout my research because I had already established roots by growing up within the community. Since my approach had been to cast a wide net among the category of contractors, snowball sampling proved useful. I found Afghan-Americans in the Fremont area to be graciously accommodating and willing to refer me to family and friends with few questions asked about the research – choosing to vouch for me based on their relationship to or perception of my family, rather than be burdened with the research information and consent forms. As a result, I did not have to frequent as many sites to develop contacts. I did, however, reach out to Afghan Coalition as the main diaspora organization in the San Francisco Bay Area

headquartered in Fremont. Despite several attempts, I was not able to get a meeting or a response from them. When informed about my futile attempts to contact the Afghan Coalition, the responses of my interviewees indicated a perception that I found to be startlingly common and, for the most part, valid. Afghan-Americans did not organize – the community lacked a strong sense of solidarity and cohesiveness; choosing to come together and disband for specific occasion or events, then dispersing once again. Within the diaspora, there are few diasporic organizations and those that do exist seem to be treated with indifference or disdain by others. I was often told not to bother speaking to a specific association because it was well known that the organization was 'just another 501(C)(3) out there to get the government's money,' as one of my initial interviewees in Fremont warned me. His allusion to a 501(C)(3) refers to the tax code designation for non-profit organizations, which enable them to take advantage of federal tax exemptions in America. Such accusations became commonplace among Afghan-Americans. People's intents were often portrayed as disingenuous displays of altruism aimed at securing U.S. government funding for personal gain (allegations that were largely directed at Afghan-Americans whose sought to improve their socio-economic mobility through America's war economy). The conversations with Afghan-Americans revealed the skepticism and general distrust of such associations. While many challenges persist in an urban ethnography, I had not anticipated the extent to which there would be a lack of diasporic associations at both field sites. Those that did exist contained similar memberships, but in general, Afghan-Americans did not choose to participate in or mobilize as associations. In the absence of such associations, households tended to socialize within tight networks of other known families, eschewing large-scale affiliations for the familiarity of their own friends and

families. The dynamic presented a small but surmountable challenge to fieldwork in Fremont because the sense of community and solidarity was lacking. Instead, the site captured perfectly the 'groupness' of Afghan-Americans as a whole, and its role in constituting the emergence of the contractors.

The research also draws upon observations of 10 training events that were informed by diasporic expertise and narratives. The observations included seven cultural trainings, which consisted of academic-styled lectures, and three role-playing exercises. Prior to commencing the research project, my professional experience in international development and security was a useful conduit to developing contacts and establishing trust. In particular, my work with cross-cultural awareness programs in the defense sector provided sufficient familiarity with the nature of such training courses. I was also relatively familiar with the Afghan-American contractors, who often occupied the role of experts, and the military personnel who participated as audiences in the exercises. In the performances of knowledge, I could draw upon my own past experiences to contextualize observations, leading my gaze beyond the surface of the 'expertise' offered. Other than directly interviewing people with whom I had previously worked or interacted, I primarily used snowball sampling within both the Afghan-American and military communities. Although among the military, snowball sampling was useful, it nonetheless entailed a lengthy process as some interviewees had to get approval from the military chain of command to participate in the research. Given the vast network of Afghan-American contractors, snowball-sampling in California and the Washington D.C. metro area yielded a large group of interviewees. To ensure that the sample was representative of the Afghan diaspora, I reached out to former recruiters at defense contracting companies, such as SOS

International (SOSI) and WorldWide, who knew numerous Afghan-Americans from various backgrounds that had served as cultural advisors, translators and interpreters, and role-players. My contacts issued e-mails appealing to former and current employees to participate in the research and supplied the information sheet and consent form that I had furnished to them. Many people who responded affirmatively did so only upon discovering a link to my family. Most households in the diaspora lived in Kabul and have common affiliations based on schools, places of employment, and social circles. Understanding that I came from an educated, upper-class family underscored the legitimacy of what seemed to some, as I would find out further into the research, an attempt by the U.S. government to collect intelligence on Afghan-American households. But their participation, as I would also discover, came with expectations if not outright conditions.

In studying the military community, the 'field' as an object of investigation was limited in many ways. Given the classified nature of some training exercises, I did not always have access to trainings *in situ*, but could interview the participants and trainers after the events had passed. The sites at which I conducted observations of trainings, translations and/or role-playing were based mostly in Northern Virginia with a few in California. Most of the trainings I observed occurred in office spaces, where the rooms had been staged to resemble Afghan ministerial bureaus or Afghan homes. The contexts would change depending on the training exercise conducted. Certain defense contracting companies allowed me to watch their Afghan-American contractors on the job as they provided linguistic and cultural trainings at offices in Northern Virginia. Their permission was conditional on the basis that nothing the contractors had to share would be considered classified or proprietary information. The specific sites, therefore, were defined by the

organizations. My access was contingent on the responses to the mass request for research assistance I issued early during the fieldwork stage. Naturally, this approach limited the scope of my research to those sites that were permitted for study. Many forms of knowledge production and performance exist outside of what this research was able to cover, but my aim has been to address, as holistically as possible, the significance of the sites and activities to which I was privy.

The focus on the aforementioned networks reflects the sociology of knowledge. As an analytical framework, it was a formative consideration in the methodology of the research project. I wanted to understand how expertise was generated and in what ways it was shaping the various entities engaged in creating it. Moreover, I wanted to contextualize the process against the background of migration and transnationalism. The utility of understanding the parts and processes of knowledge production, in this case, has been established by other scholars, who note that '[s]tudying networks, especially those linked to family and households, allows us to conceptualize migration as a social product – not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actions, not as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction' (Boyd 1989: 642). By conducting interviews with U.S. military personnel and Afghan-American contractors, as well as observing the nature of training exercises, I was able to discern the social organization of knowledge within a specific context. To understand the interconnectedness of the producers and consumers of Afghan cultural knowledge, I had to deconstruct the network – to examine the military-industrial complex in addition to the Afghan diaspora. The interviews and observations in both communities (U.S. military and the contractors) allowed for the distinct faces of knowledge to emerge.

The method uncovered the overlapping dimensions of the interactions that generate information about Afghanistan. More explicitly, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were central to eliciting the personal, ethnographically rich narratives that explained the connections among the diaspora, and the encounter of some Afghan-Americans with the state. The method was especially helpful in bringing out some of the key themes in the research and in understanding the 'spheres of engagement' within the diaspora. Class, for example, emerged as a strong theme in explaining intra-diaspora dynamics based on migration trajectories. Had the research methodologies been conceptualized differently, the pattern of the networks underlying the processes of knowledge production may not have been fully realized. Thus, the methodology reflected the centrality of social organization in Barth's faces of knowledge.

Ethical considerations and research challenges

Moreover, given the nuances of working as an observer within two communities in which I have been an insider, there were myriad ethical considerations to deliberate during the fieldwork. The issue of confidentiality became a critical component between both the Afghan-American contractors and the military but for different reasons. Limited familiarity with anthropology among the Afghan diaspora has generally created a wariness of ethnographic interviews that penetrate beyond social propriety. Thus, my questions were not necessarily perceived as an academic curiosity, but as an occasion to expose diasporic households in ways that would render them vulnerable within the community. Some Afghan-Americans (particularly those who actually declined being interviewed) commented that the community was a fishbowl of sorts, and the great level of connectivity would surely mean that anyone reading the research would deduce their participation. The

question of confidentiality was largely related to the amount of community gossip and judgment that could ensue. Ironically, the consent forms that ensured anonymity and confidentiality actually posed more of a challenge than an assurance. Many of the interviewees were eager to be interviewed, but hesitated in signing the consent form because they did not want their names associated so tangibly with the project. Several noted that the forms were actually barriers between them and me as a researcher. A community leader in Virginia, who later moved back to Afghanistan for a political position, argued that I would have made it much easier on him if I were not 'forcing ink on paper.' The comment provided a pause in how I had calibrated the ethical considerations of the research – something that I had assumed would resonate with the communities I was interviewing. The perception of consent forms as an impediment was a similar consideration among the military interviewees, who did not want to compromise their institutional affiliation with the military. Understanding that I could not forgo their written consent, they were thus encumbered with having to place official requests for approval to their superiors prior to participation. Every participant I interviewed in the research opted to be given a pseudonym in the final written thesis. Although the military personnel and the Afghan-American contractor communities were different in many ways, they were both embedded in their respective tight networks of social relations. Therefore, I treated with utmost gravity the requests to apply pseudonyms for names and places that would otherwise give people away. For U.S. military personnel, I chose to indicate interviewees by their branch of service and their rank so as to preclude any attributions to existing personnel coinciding with the same name and rank (e.g. 'An Army major' versus 'Army Major Bryant'). I began using pseudonyms in the field notes from the start of the research,

but maintained a confidential password-protected document with the names of the interviewees, as a point of reference, on my computer. Some of the interviewees within the Afghan-American community requested to review the pseudonym I had selected to ensure that nothing about it could be potentially reminiscent (e.g. a homophonic pseudonym) of the individual or household.

As I rotated between California and Virginia, the specific sites where I conducted fieldwork fell along two categories: public spaces, such as coffee shops and parks, and private spaces, such as people's homes or offices, that needed their own sets of unique research considerations. The sites at which I conducted ethnographic observations of the translators, advisors, and role-players were limited to offices. The interviews, however, were offsite at their homes or in a public space. In such arrangements, my gender was often a consideration among the older generation of Afghan-Americans, due to social customs that precluded the interaction of non-kin men and women in private spaces. An interesting dynamic developed. Interviews with Afghan-American men were almost exclusively conducted in public spaces. When I would be invited to meet a male interviewee in his private residence, a female family member would be present (often in another room, but still close by), and the interviews would almost always be followed up with telephone calls by the male interviewee, through which the answers to personal questions I had asked would be divulged in more detail. The obscurity of a telephone line seemed to provide a buffer for such interactions. In part, phone conversation abated some of the tensions of social proprieties. Afghan customs would have dictated incurring personal inconveniences for the sake of hospitality or *mehmanawazi* – the art of hosting a guest. By engaging with contacts at their homes, I was often positioned as a 'guest,' not just as a researcher or an

anthropologist. An excerpt from my field notes from the summer of 2014 illustrates the nuances of balancing the insider-outsider dichotomy as an Afghan-American woman and as a researcher during interviews with Afghan-Americans at their homes:

August 8, 2014 - My arrival is prompt. In fact, it's early by about 40 minutes of '4:30pm' because, in my diligent acknowledgement of my poor spatial awareness, I cannot trust my sense of direction and end up with a sizeable time buffer. I pace through a well-timed farmers' market looking for the requisite first-time-guest flowers. None abound, producing a sense of social anxiety that I will fall short as a guest even though I will be there in the capacity of a researcher. Would a loaf of banana bread suffice? A small basket of organic fruit? Are they traditional Afghans? I settle safely on flowers from the supermarket across the street. At 4:29, I park outside of Haroun's apartment, a dove-grey duplex tucked among five others behind a glass door. I wait until the numbers change on the clock and send a cheery text message: 'Downstairs!' Then I panic. Was a text message appropriate? Surely an exclamation was excessive? Finally, a man emerges in the hallway and smiles.

'Morwari jan, salaam. Please come in. My sister, Alya, is just getting ready – she'll be with us shortly,' Haroun says and motions for me to wait inside. The interior of the apartment is hot with warm air circulating from open French doors. He apologizes for having the doors open when it's humid outside, but he explains, 'Alya has been cooking for us. She invited some other friends to meet you.' I immediately hesitate at the inconvenience, insisting that they should not have gone to the trouble on my account. My appeal comes across as a customary show of taaruf, but I am sincere in my mortification. 'It's no trouble,' he persists, 'We're Afghan. It's a must. It's a pleasure.'[7]

Haroun and the group of friends he had invited became central to my thesis. I have drawn on their accounts across the chapters. Such encounters demonstrated the difficulties of managing expectations within a specific set of cultural norms. Haroun and I shared a mutual acquaintance and, thus, his desire to generously accommodate me was in keeping with the obligation of the shared social network. Moreover, Haroun's overture was a response to my presence as a young Afghan female. I do not diminish the possibility that an equal degree of formality would not have been extended to a young male researcher, but

[7] In my notes, I used *taaruf* to refer to the customary discourse that dictates diplomatic comportment and etiquette in social interactions among Afghans. The same concept is equally prevalent among Iranians.

the demands of my gender and age incurred certain obligations on him and his household. However, after comparing my experience with other scholars who have conducted fieldwork in Afghan communities, such as Ceri Oeppen, Zuzanna Olzewska, and Alessandro Monsutti, I remain unconvinced that the formality of etiquette and hospitality is limited to interactions between Afghans. Many Afghan-Americans, like Haroun, positioned themselves as my 'hosts' – not as informants or interviewees. It illustrated the nature of social relations within the diaspora, but I argue that it is not always linked to a common 'Afghan' identity. Being a good host reflects a certain upbringing and social status – a perception that Afghans, whether in Afghanistan or America, painstakingly cultivate. However, during the fieldwork, a generational disparity became apparent. The first generation, who had moved to America in adulthood, was far more concerned about positioning themselves as 'good Afghans' and minding social cues in interviews that were consistent with host-guest rather than interviewee-interviewer relationships. Afghan-Americans who had grown up in America treated the interactions with a lesser degree of formality. They were content to meet in coffee shops or parks, to engage socially at events, or share a meal at a restaurant rather than invite me to their homes. The interaction with Haroun was a turning point in my consideration of a methodological approach. While I had focused on how Afghan-Americans positioned themselves vis-à-vis my role as a researcher, it was strong reminder to reconceptualize how I positioned myself within different contexts. Thus, each fieldwork encounter became a sort of experiment in self-positioning. I grappled and learned along the way what it meant to navigate across a host of identities.

Beyond the considerations of Afghan-ness or *Afghaniyat*, my self-positioning depended on the community I was interviewing or observing. Among Afghan-Americans

and the U.S. military, I consistently positioned myself as a student. Being a student or a scholar resonated among Afghan-American households because education is deemed a key value. As I will discuss in later chapters, high levels of educational achievement are forms of social capital and perceived as markers of household prestige and status. By being a student, I was perceived to be carrying out an honorable charge – one that reflected my upbringing and family values. In addition, the association with the University of Oxford proved to further validate my positionality. It not only added gravitas to the research project, but it also served as a positive commentary on my family. Many of the Afghan-American interviewees assumed that my family motivated my attempts at scholarship, and were thusly intrigued to inquire about my household. In this regard, they recalibrated their perception of my position from a generic student to a member of a 'good' family. By occupying both roles, I was able to overcome the hurdles of access and trust. Similarly, within the military community, my identification as a student, particularly from Oxford, lent greater credibility to dialogues about my research project. With the military network, my previous work experience in Afghanistan was useful in establishing rapport. Despite working in international development and having no military experience, I had sufficient familiarity with COIN-based programs and the U.S. military culture to be able to communicate 'fluently' with military personnel. We connected based on shared experiences and trials of Afghanistan, of returning to America, and readjusting to new environments. I could also commiserate with their frustrations about the Afghan national security forces and the lack of governance. If my role as a student made me appear little more than a neophyte, my position as a 31-year-old professional with substantive work experience helped me establish legitimacy.

My experience interviewing military servicemen and servicewomen highlighted the tensions between anthropology, anthropologists, and the military. A large part of this tension was mitigated by my experience and familiarity with the structure of the U.S. military and America's national security structure. Understanding that my academic interests intersected with studies on war and militaries became a point of common ground that opened up opportunities to be introduced to new research participants across the U.S. Army, Navy, Marines, and the Air Force. Thus, gaining access to military communities and participants was actually easier than anticipated. Another critical element in establishing their trust in me and the objectives of the research project was that I held a basic security clearance; one that was issued while I worked as a defense contractor and could maintain for five years. The possession of a security clearance meant that the U.S. government had officially deemed me with enough trust and reliability to warrant working with the military. Security clearances seemed to be an indicator of inclusion, and by virtue of having been processed for one successfully, my position as a researcher was validated by my experience as an 'insider' within the national security infrastructure in America. But some challenges persisted. By the time I began conducting research, many military personnel had a point of reference with respect to anthropology. They had known, heard of, or worked with someone that identified as an 'anthropologist' because the Department of Defense had undertaken a sizeable effort to retain social scientists. However, the association was not always beneficial. First, many people I met confused 'anthropologist' with 'archaeologist,' and I had to temper the excitement of individuals who thought I was the female real-life equivalent of an Indiana Jones or Lara Croft fictional character (references to the American movie industry as touchstones for an understanding of anthropological studies were both

common and frequent). Secondly, once I clarified my position and statement of research, it was met with a general uneasiness about my intent. A consistent fear among the military interviewees, particularly among the officer class and ranks of leadership, was that their participation would potentially make them complicit in a criticism against the U.S. military and its role in Afghanistan. For me, it was an occasion to explain that the nature and integrity of social research, where conclusions are not unequivocally determined prior to the investigation. I also began to understand that such interactions represented the interviewees' encounters with anthropology based on their experiences, however tangential, with programs such as the Human Terrain System (HTS) that hired social scientists to conduct 'ethnographic' research in Iraq and Afghanistan. HTS was highly criticized by the American Anthropological Association because of its lack of transparency and links to intelligence operations. Some social scientists and anthropologists decried the fact that they were asked to collect ethnographic data to support a pre-determined conclusion rather than investigate a research question. I had to reiterate my objectivity many times to attenuate concerns that I had already drawn conclusions about the U.S. military and would be producing a treatise on its shortcomings. In my interviews, I experienced first-hand the extent to which such manipulations of ethnographic research had cultivated a misunderstanding of anthropology and anthropologists – a record that made establishing trust more difficult. Despite the challenges such fears induced among the military community, they reflected an apprehensive posture I could understand and with which I could empathize. In doing so openly, and in ensuring that I conducted my research transparently, I was ultimately able to instill a greater sense of confidence and

understanding in not only the research, but in the integrity and objectivity of anthropological research methods.

Ironically, my experience interviewing the Afghan-American community helped me better understand the organization of the military and anticipate research challenges. The military's rank structure and disparities between enlisted and commissioned officers were initially points of consideration with which I was unfamiliar. In some interviews, military servicemen and servicewomen attributed the validity of their experiences and narratives to their specific positions in the military – a process that mirrored the contractors' assertions and the validity of the information presented. An enlisted Army Specialist, who had been deployed to eastern Afghanistan, lamented that the Army officers had little idea about the struggles facing the enlisted ranks on the operating bases in remote parts of Afghanistan. They often talked about the officers as being disengaged from the reality of the war. The criticism bore heaviest on generals, who, despite giving orders, were at times perceived to be disconnected from commonplace occurrences, such as cultural trainings exercises or working with local translators in rural areas. In a similar but contradictory vein, a few officers questioned the narratives presented by enlisted personnel, arguing that the latter's rank would have equipped them with insufficient knowledge to provide any valuable perspective on the military's greater strategy. Rank and status seemed to be a way of differentiating the value of knowledge across the military, as class did within the diaspora. I recognized that these processes, though occurring within two different organizations, demonstrated the relationship between power and knowledge – a connection that I had to gingerly navigate to ensure that my study was representative and not biased by limited representation from any one segment of either population. My exposure to the Afghan-

American community thus helped me identify biases that related to differences in status among the military interviewees. As a result, I made sure to interview military personnel from across the services and ranks, and be cognizant of the dynamics induced by differences in position.

The role of assumed knowledge was a research challenge unique to dealing with members of the Afghan diaspora as an insider. In the vignettes and interview excerpts, I note several exchanges in which variations of the phrase 'you know how it is' or 'you know how they are' were employed to indicate a shared understanding between me, as the researcher, and them, as the interviewees. While I took it as an indication of a stronger level of rapport, I was also conscious of the inherent shortcomings of such assumptions. For example, the informants would often assume that their experience was the same as mine in emigrating from Afghanistan and resettling in America. As the conversations shifted to sensitive topics, such as the hardships and indignities of migration, many of the informants initially dismissed the details with the supposition that I, as an insider, would already know what they would otherwise express. I had to probe with questions that were, in many cases, uncomfortable for the informant to consider let alone issue a response. As a result, I became more mindful of how I approached the interview questions. Prefacing or following up questions simply with 'assuming I know nothing' prompted informants to go beyond the surface in their responses. Whereas initially I might have said 'Tell me about your experience arriving in Fremont,' I rephrased the inquiry to: 'Tell me about your experience arriving in Fremont, assuming I'd have no idea about what that might be like.' It proved to be a more productive and less invasive method of eliciting information. However, assumed knowledge was much harder to challenge subtly when it alluded to a shared bias. It was

most pronounced when Afghan-Americans spoke about the negative stereotypes associated with Afghans in Afghanistan. For instance, some of the informants who knew I had worked in non-urban areas of Afghanistan would presume that I agreed with their assessment of rural Afghans as 'backwards' or 'primitive' (and frequently 'tribal,' which was used pejoratively and outside of its reference to a form of social organization). Rather than expressing my possible disagreement outright, I would invite them to unpack the assertion, asking what encounters and experiences had shaped their perceptions. Attempting to understand such biases was always a delicate operation. But maintaining a conversational tone to the interviews and using open-ended questions helped minimize the potential for any conflict or tension.

Although I had considered and prepared my methodology carefully, I had not fully anticipated the security challenges of fieldwork. During my initial year of study, I took the Field Risk and Safety Methods course at Oxford as a pre-requisite to fieldwork. Upon reflection, my assumption was that the course would not necessarily reflect the safety considerations in my field because my field was limited to urban, developed settings. I was proven wrong on the first day of fieldwork. I visited a popular Muslim community center run by an Afghan imam. The attendant, alarmed by my casual stride towards the main entrance, enquired about my purpose and ushered me to the women's entrance – an ensconced door on the side of the building. The imam, he assured me, would return shortly. Upon entering the small landing, a man in late 20s blocked the stairs leading to the imam's office, widening his stance so that the exit door was also partially obstructed. He was visibly agitated, muttering to himself, and shifting from foot to foot, and I, armed with nothing but my anthropological training, nervously offered him an overview of my project

and intent to meet the imam. He stared blankly. I had been trained to deal with interview subjects, and he represented someone well outside of the parameters of the people I had expected to encounter. I agreed to his request to talk before I spoke to the imam, hearing in my head my supervisor's advice to 'be open to where your fieldwork takes you.' But suddenly it had nothing to do with the fieldwork or the imam, and I became painfully aware of the absence of other attendants. 'I've done something so terrible. I don't know if Allah will forgive me,' he choked out. Wet with bewilderment, his eyes flicked from my face to the door. He edged between the door and me. 'Do you think Allah will forgive me? Oh man, it was so bad. What do you think? I just need a friend.' In such a moment, it was difficult to ascertain how to respond – as an anthropologist, a passing observer; a woman caught alone in stairwell by a man twice her size. The encounter challenged my sense of objectivity, as my reasoning took on the forms of my fears. Amidst his near-constant stream of conscious, I responded that Allah would forgive him despite my own lack of religious adherence. I believed none of what I was saying, especially as his utterances pieced together into a story that sounded like he had murdered his mother and fled Sierra Leone for America to escape prosecution. The only reliable reality I had within my reach was the door, which he was blocking. He continued along the same line, pausing several times to hold back tears and despite my efforts to leave he continued to offer a physical obstacle. And I continued to utter assurances that felt stunningly insincere as an anthropologist, but I had already negotiated my position beyond my role: I was not an anthropologist, but someone who was trapped in a potentially explosive situation. I could not corroborate what he had done. In fact, he never disclosed anything other than a hint of a justification ('I just wanted to find a girl. I wanted to marry.'). When he turned away briefly, I pushed past the door into a full

run towards a coffee shop from which the imam finally emerged. The interaction with the imam was equally challenging, though in a markedly different manner. After guiding me to his office and hearing my account, his frown was not an indication of concern for my safety as a researcher. He squinted above his glasses and said, 'I see, but you shouldn't have talked with another man inside the mosque. It's not proper.' Despite the overt academic purpose of my study, his gaze was focused on my position as a (assumed) Muslim and Afghan-American woman. We conceptualized the space differently from emic and etic perspectives, and it weighed on the interview. It underscored the difficulties of being an insider and outsider in the communities I studied, particularly when being an insider was connected to expectations of behavior and belief.

My role as an Afghan-American woman and as an anthropologist also presented another unanticipated challenge in conducting ethnographic fieldwork within the diaspora. It did not take a great amount of perspicacity to realize that fieldwork constituted as much an opportunity to learn about the community as it did for the participants to learn about me. It was almost never enough to answer that I was a student conducting research. My family background, their education, and stipulated status mattered far more. Satisfactory responses to the latter conditions helped diffuse fears that I was not observing the community, but spying; an understandable fear given the uncomfortable reach of U.S. government surveillance measures in post-9/11 America. The diffusion of such assumptions also created a space in which participants could draw upon our shared social capital to advance – albeit lightly – personal requests. Often, the requests were directed at securing a personal referral to an international development or defense agency for a job. Although the participants continued to be involved when I admitted my limitations in

connecting them to employment opportunities, their sense of disappointment was nonetheless palpable. Other requests were overtly personal and illustrated the limitation of snowball sampling in one's own community. As an unmarried educated woman from a 'good' family, referrals to some interviewees, unbeknownst to me at the time of interview, were in fact done to introduce my 'marriageability' to potential suitors. While it did not pose a constraint in the information I could gather, diffusing the expectations of some sort of reciprocal transaction sometimes meant that I lost the opportunity to re-engage interviewees. Through the progression of fieldwork, such interactions took on a new meaning. They were not necessarily outlying constraints. As Paul Rabinow experienced during his research in Morocco, the negotiations represent willingness 'to enter into any situation as a smiling observer and carefully note down the specifics of the event under consideration […] one simply endured whatever inconveniences and annoyances came along' (Rabinow 1977: 46). Thus, what I initially perceived as 'inconveniences' to the research, I began to view as an element of the process of ethnographic fieldwork. I could no more predict the challenges than I could the findings. I could only be open to both. Through openness and adaptation, the fieldwork yielded insights and themes that would have otherwise eluded my dissertation.

Conclusion

In sum, the methodological approach was, on balance, conducive to investigating the key questions and gathering substantive information. My assumptions about insider access in the Afghan-American community proved to be the biggest impediment, but one from which I gained much insight about the challenges of fieldwork. I had underestimated the effect of post-9/11 militarism on ethnographic research. Building relationships and trust,

in the context of national security concerns, proved difficult in both communities. Surveillance by agencies like the FBI and local police created tensions that I, perhaps naively, had not fully anticipated as a researcher. Thus, I had to patiently establish and reinforce a distinction between my research and perceptions that rendered it parallel to intelligence gathering on local communities by state institutions. In doing so, I also had to defend myself as a researcher. Afghan-Americans voiced concerns that academia and state organizations were tightly bound around the task of identifying homegrown national security threats. As mentioned in this chapter, I was able to surmount such challenges, but they were a striking reminder of the extent to which militarism has changed the public space for anthropological research. In the next chapter, I will examine post-9/11 militarism and its relationship to Afghan communities in America.

Chapter 3 'Who are we? We are not Arabs, for one': The Afghan-American diaspora and post-9/11 militarism

Maiwand Market is an institution in Fremont, California. On a stretch of road known as Little Kabul, the shop sells a variety of Afghan foods and housewares to clientele ranging from Afghan-Americans to Hispanics and the occasional African Muslim. Here one finds cardamom pods and cumin seeds by the bulk; boxes of animal rennet next to an open dish of cream rolls; Afghan dresses and prayers mats; and always a long set of international phone cards suspended against the wall like an exhausted accordion. And just below the phone cards is a relevant reminder about Western Union, a money transfer service to facilitate remittances. One can get just about anything - except alcohol. The Afghan customers often make a beeline for the back of the shop, where bakers skillfully shape dough into the store's legendary Afghan bread. The dough, stretched and elongated, is sprinkled with a handful of black sesame seeds before it cooks in a clay oven. The baked ones are stacked into soft aromatic towers, ready for purchase. They rarely last long enough to get cold.

'Don't take any of these. I have a fresh one coming out of the tandoor you can have,' the baker's voice issued from behind the pillar of bread. I stepped aside and let the line of other customers quickly whittle the stack – some taking four or five at a time. The baker had no sooner relieved one taut tongue of dough before four others were thrown into the oven. He moved with a sense of purpose and urgency, cradling the bread in his embrace.

'Watch your arms,' he said as he gently released it onto a piece of brown parchment and placed it across my outstretched forearms. The jarring awareness of my bare skin was visible, and I kept my face down, buried in the warm fragrance of the freshly-baked

bread. The store was full of Afghans, chatting mellifluously in Dari, and despite the California spring, not a single person other than me was in a tank top and jeans – a point my father went well out of his way to make. He and I continued to shop, picking up a 10-kilo burlap sack of rice along with a bunch of slender green grapes supposedly from a reputed vintage in Afghanistan. My family had frequented the store for more than 15 years, but my father always accompanied my sister and me. It was not necessarily out of fear for our safety. He was more concerned about what other members of the Afghan community in Fremont would perceive about the decorum of our household upon seeing a young unaccompanied woman. He did not want people – especially men - to get what he called 'notions' about our integrity and virtue. So we stood in line together patiently, listening to the white noise of street traffic and the sing-song doorbell that chimed with each new customer. It chimed frequently. The door was a portal. On the outside was Fremont, an indiscriminate working-middle class community of immigrants and Silicon Valley technology professionals. Inside was an incarnation of Afghanistan in all its tastes, sights and sounds. It was the closest one could get to Kabul without leaving America. In this chapter, I will discuss the formation of the Afghan diaspora to contextualize the emergence of Afghan-American contractors and their relationship with American militarism. The chapter will provide a characterization of the key subjects and their interactions upon which the remainder of the thesis is based.

Nestled against the Pacific Ocean, the California coast has historically been a home for new migrants from all over the world, but most notably central and South America. Afghan-American populations are largely concentrated in the San Francisco Bay Area and further south between the valleys of Los Angeles and San Diego. With sporadic populations

spread in the mid-western states, the next largest diaspora communities are in the Northern Virginia area adjacent to Washington D.C., and New York. Studies of the diaspora suggest that

> [m]ost of the Afghans emigrating to the United States in the early 1980s arrived from Pakistan or West Germany. An estimated 300,000 Afghans live in North America, mostly in the United States. Canada is estimated to have at least 40,000 Afghans. The highest population density of Afghans in the United States is located in the East Bay region of Northern California, where about 80,000 Afghans reside (Sadat 2008: 331).

Approximately 45,000 Afghans live in the Washington D.C. area (to include mostly northern Virginia and parts of Maryland). In recent years, with the accumulation of financial capital from high-paying contracting jobs in Afghanistan, Afghan-Americans have created new communities in states where land and the cost of living are relatively cheaper than the cities on the coasts. Most Afghan-American households consist of a set of parents or grandparents who immigrated from Afghanistan, the children who were born or grew up mostly outside Afghanistan and now a third generation. But even for the generations most removed, Afghanistan still shapes their identity. The most fundamental differences within the diaspora are not along ethnic lines. The social stratification results from perceptions of class and status differences, and the migration path and destinations that households followed. Those who left Afghanistan often did so from Kabul, the capital, and Afghanistan's largest urban center. The point of departure implied that the household had at least some financial and social capital to afford them passage out of the country. For the numerous Afghans who had to escape furtively, smugglers stood on hand to navigate their way through treacherous borderlands for hefty sums. Both the fieldwork interviews and the larger body of literature on Afghan migration detail the harrowing accounts of smuggling journeys. America was rarely the first destination upon leaving Afghanistan. Most people

first traveled to Pakistan or India, from where they would be sponsored by a family member already in America, or they would initiate applications for asylum to other countries. From the cadre of refugees in Pakistan and India, many would end up in Germany as another stepping-stone prior to finally settling in America. But why did they settle in Fremont, California, or Springfield, Virginia?

'You know how it is with Afghans. We're tied to our families and friends. One family moves to California or New York, suddenly there is a string of Afghans following them. You want to go where you know people and people know you, especially in a foreign country [...], especially at that time,' said Asad, an Afghan-American man who had lived in New York before relocating to Fairfax, Virginia, in 1984. 'Even if you didn't know people well in Kabul, they were the closest thing you had to family and community in America.'

'So we came': The Post-Soviet Cohort and the Trajectories of migration to America

Asad was in his early thirties when he arrived in New York from London. After a year in New York, he married his sweetheart from Kabul and together they moved with her parents to Fairfax, Virginia. His family hailed from a prominent dynastic line and had an established, middle-upper class life in Kabul. He was a graduate of Kabul Polytechnic University and had started working for the Afghan government when the Soviets invaded. While Asad had always planned to marry and leave for America, he had not envisioned that his departure would be hastened by the arrival of the Soviet army:

> Kabul during the time of the shah [Zahir Shah, the king] was glorious. In rural areas people were always backwards, but in Kabul it was very relaxed. We went out, boys and girls, together for ice-cream or to watch movies. People didn't have a lot of money, but they had good lives. They had food and shelter and security. The culture was very mild. Even Islam, we practiced it, of course, but it wasn't like it is now, crazy and violent. The Russians changed everything. They came and they destroyed Afghan society and culture [...] We

> couldn't stay. It was dangerous. Some relations of ours were imprisoned; some tortured [...] The communists didn't care about anyone. They didn't care about Islam. They just had an agenda and that was it. Afghanistan was on its way to be a modern, prosperous country and then suddenly the war started and everybody left. Who was left in Kabul? The poor, the uneducated. Everybody like us left. I had an uncle who had come to America – New York – and he told us to come, so we came.

Asad, like many Afghans, experienced the social and political upheavals as a result of the Soviet invasion. The changes in Kabul were no longer conducive to the quality of life that many had enjoyed prior to the civil war. Upon arriving in America, Asad worked as a food deliveryman for a pizza restaurant and later as a taxi driver. When I met him, he had given up managing a small fast food franchise to work as a contractor for an international consulting firm. Although Asad had wanted to return to Afghanistan to fight with the Mujahideen, he knew that it could diminish his chances of returning to America. He stayed, creating a new home in the suburbs of Virginia and visited Kabul for two weeks in the summer of 2006. With his earnings from contracting, Asad and his wife planned to retire in Wyoming where their money could go a lot farther.

The post-Soviet cohort that left Afghanistan have often been associated with the 'brain drain' – a term encompassing the effect of migration on the collective technical capacity and institutional knowledge of the country. Education, skill, and some form of capital not only enabled household decisions to migrate, but they also helped define the path out of Afghanistan. Among the various experiences, three distinct trajectories emerge related to their prospects in the host country at the time of migration: educated with employment, educated without employment, and limited education without employment[8]. I explore each journey through the stories of Afghan-Americans who left Afghanistan

[8] I did not encounter anyone in my interviews that had limited education and already secured employment. The absence does not necessarily indicate that such cases did not occur.

around the time of the Soviet occupation. The purpose is to highlight the factors that informed their decision to work on military and defense-related programs. The stories convey the relationship between their experiences in America and the emergence of some diasporic Afghans as cultural brokers behind the front lines of war.

Although they are often a part of the major diaspora hubs today, Afghans who moved to America with employment prospects already in place often landed in states with minimal Afghan or immigrant presence, such as Arizona, Nebraska, Kentucky, and Alabama. Yasamin was less than a year old when her family moved from Kabul to Illinois, where her father worked as an architect. Prior to the Soviet invasion, her father had worked closely with international aid agencies. With the assistance and sponsorship of a contact at the U.S. Embassy, her father was able to secure a job lead and relocate the family to Illinois. The lead turned to full-time employment within months of their arrival. As Yasamin recalled, they 'fortunately didn't experience the major hardships a lot of families went through. [Her] dad was able to get a good job that allowed the family to have a middle-class standard of living, just like any of the American neighbors.' Her experience is similar to Rostam, who grew up in the suburbs of Pennsylvania. Rostam's father was part of the office administration at the United States Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D.) in Kabul. Through his employment, he had become friends with an U.S. embassy official who, like in the previous case, was able to provide sponsorship and secure the family a visa out of Afghanistan. Rostam's family was resettled in a small, quaint town in Pennsylvania without any other Afghans in the area. Although his parents struggled to secure full-time jobs, his father was able to get a government job with the United States Postal Service, which provided economic security and a basis upon which the family could reconstruct

their lives in America. Both Rostam and Yasamin have since moved to Washington D.C., but noted the absence of an immediate Afghan community as part of their early lives. Yasamin's reflection accounted for the lack of social constraints as a result of living apart from the community: 'My parents weren't super strict with my brothers and me. They wanted us to respect our culture, but we got to play sports and hang out with friends in ways that my cousins in California couldn't […] Their parents were just considered what other people [Afghans] would think or say.' Rostam echoed Yasamin, adding that the lack of community pressure not only allowed him and his brother to enjoy similar freedoms to their American or Caucasian counterparts, but it also meant '[his] parents weren't restrained by the other Afghans' judgment and could assimilate more easily like wear shorts, drink alcohol.' Both Yasamin and Rostam are examples of Afghan-Americans whose lives were shaped by the path their families followed out of Afghanistan. Their fathers' opportunities to economically integrate into American society expedited the processes of acculturation and assimilation. The same cannot be said for Afghans who immigrated to America without job prospects.

When Khalida's family arrived in northern California in the summer of 1983, she was just shy of 18 months old. Her mother and father were both educated. Her father had a Master's degree in economics and her mother had completed college with a degree in literature. With a minimal grasp of English, they had followed other family members to the San Francisco Bay Area. In their first five years in America, the family lived in an apartment outside of Richmond, a city teeming with gangs and violent crime. Ultimately, the family moved to Concord, 30 miles northeast of San Francisco and in close proximity to other Afghan households.

'The first few years were rough. My parents had a comfortable life in Kabul and they lost it all by coming here (to America) […] Then it was all about saving face to the extended family and the other Afghans in the community,' Khalida explained. 'My mom was working at a McDonald's and my dad worked at a car assembly plant, which for them was hard to accept because it was beneath their positions in Afghanistan. My brother and I were in school, but seeing them struggle – like workwise and emotionally - was really hard […] it kept us focused as students all through college and we also kind of felt like guilted into being good Afghan children and not creating gossip in the community.' Her parents' adversities, the loss of their status and income, affected Khalida's sense of agency in the community. Unlike Rostam and Yasamin, she had to consciously mind the invisible social boundaries that shaped her role in Afghan and American society. Khalida's experience highlights the impact of her family's circumstances and decision to migrate on the choices she made in America. She described her early life 'as under surveillance by other Afghan families […] especially as a girl, there was a lot of pressure to make sure that [she] didn't become Americanized and lose [her] culture even though [her] parents were pretty open-minded, still they had to be mindful of how other Afghans would see the choices [they] made.' The desire to be perceived well by the community meant that she had to meet expectations consistent with Afghan social norms for her gender – limited interaction with young men, not participating in school sports, maintaining decorum and etiquette, and dressing modestly. Education, a shared value in Afghan and American society, became her ultimate way of negotiating between two cultures. Khalida went to graduate school and now works as a financial analyst for a major investment bank. She positioned her achievements as trappings that allowed her parents to reclaim what had been lost to them

in their journey to America. These considerations were connected to the lack of opportunities her parents had faced (in their particular areas of expertise) and their reliance on the Afghan community.

Although the lack of employment upon arrival presented substantial challenges, integrating into American society was even more complicated for Afghans who arrived in America with both limited education and employment prospects. Kamela was working at a beauty salon in Fremont when I met her. She, her husband, and two children immigrated to America in early 1986 after a few months in Germany. She had completed high school in Afghanistan and had been married off by her family to a relatively prosperous distant cousin, who operated a business as a mechanic. Their savings allowed them to be smuggled across the border to Pakistan and then to India as refugees, where they awaited a visa to Germany. Kamela recounted,

> We didn't know what we were doing when we came to America. My husband was depressed and angry. He didn't want to work here because he wanted to go back to Afghanistan. He was too proud as an Afghan man. I said "you're dreaming, we're staying here if for nothing then for the children to go to school and have a better life than we did." He didn't want me to, but I got a job washing hair at a salon, learned a little English, and then learned how to cut and style so I could get paid more […] We made a life, but it was hard. The children have now graduated from college. My daughter still lives with us, but my son has his own place and is in between jobs […] I hope they will have a better life because of the sacrifices we made.

Kamela's experience resonates with studies of transnational gender dynamics that emphasize women's tendency to embrace assimilation as a socially liberating process (Abdul Rahim 1993; Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001; Pessar 2003; Shandy 2003). With the traditional structures subverted, Afghan women who migrated to America without language and education ended up seeking more opportunities to integrate and acculturate than their husbands. As in Kamela's case, Shalla also became the sole provider

for her family. Just short of a few credits at university, she and her husband had to flee Afghanistan before she could complete her studies. They came to America via India, first staying with family in New York before moving to California. Shalla's husband had been an electrical engineer in Afghanistan and found the transition to America to be both emasculating and hopeless as he waited for a job commensurate with his education and technical skills. None came. Shalla recalled,

> He became more and more involved in politics with other Afghans here, of her husband. 'He was angry at everyone and everything, also America. He didn't want to call America home […] He tried a few jobs that were beneath him but it was too humiliating for him and his sense of honor. He just stopped working while I worked various jobs to learn English and get some skills. […] Our situation got much better when I started to work as a translator with the U.S. Army. We have some savings, which was good because when my mother got sick, I could take care of her […] My husband is still not working and I don't know what to do if I can't get another rotation.

When the necessary pre-conditions for education and employment opportunities did not exist, arrival in the host country proved challenging to household decisions to migrate as a result of the Soviet occupation. For certain households, the inability to transition at an economic and social level consistent with their life in Afghanistan brought not only financial hardship, but also personal and emotional conflicts that tested their cultural values and customs against the backdrop of American culture. The ever-present gaze of the diaspora, for such households, provided an added pressure to maintain a public semblance of pride and honor during a difficult process of migration and resettlement.

A small, but influential group of Afghan men who left Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion have fared better than most others in the diaspora. They are also interestingly the ones tapped by the U.S. government to serve as mediators in the wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Afghans, such as Zalmai Khalilzad, a former U.S. Ambassador to

Afghanistan, and Dr. Ashraf Ghani, who moved to Lebanon and then America for educational opportunities – and stayed, have been able to assert themselves along a critical fault line between the diaspora and the U.S. government's interests. Seen as 'American Viceroys,' Afghanistan's recent leadership is comprised of Afghan-Americans who mostly left Afghanistan prior to the Soviet occupation, worked as technocrats in America, and are now being exported to Afghanistan to implement a new system of democracy and governance on behalf of the U.S. government (Anderson 2005). This form of 'diasporic governance' relies on a malleable construction of identity within the diaspora (Varadarajan 2009). Dr. Ghani, the current president, represents the group of Afghans who voluntarily migrated overseas for educational and professional opportunities. Hanifi classifies them as part of a larger class of Afghans constituting

> members of the political elite (the Muhammadzai clan and their clients/dependents); and a heterogeneous collection of *jihadist* or *mujahideen* militants sponsored by the CIA, informants working for the Drug Enforcement Agency (*sic*), and translators for the Voice of America, as well as employees of other US Government agencies [...] The vast majority appear to be culturally and economically connected to Kabul. This first wave contained educated and/or financially well-off middle-aged and older males, arguably the supra-elite of the previous regime, who were voluntary migrants and brought their immediate families with them (2006: 100-101).

Their already-established social and political capital in both the diaspora and the U.S. government significantly shaped the roles they occupied in American society upon migration. Having worked with organizations such as the C.I.A., U.S.A.I.D., and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), their integration into professional, relatively well-paying jobs was considerably easier. What is particularly noteworthy is that the U.S. government has selected among this category of Afghan-Americans to 'lead' on issues related to Afghanistan: Karzai was appointed as an interim president as part of the Bonn

Conference in 2002 headed by the U.S. government, Khalilzad was an ambassador, and Ghani recently became the president of Afghanistan. Their authority not withstanding, the long ago farewells to Afghanistan and the strong link to the U.S. government did not place the candidates above reproach by Afghans. The candidates were perceived by Afghans to be little more than puppets in a new theater of operation for America. Their proximity to the centers of American power shaped them as subjects of American political and economic liberalism, who could facilitate the transaction of power between America and Afghanistan. It is specifically in the brokering of power relations, in the activity itself, that their identity becomes substantiated and legitimized by the state (Coronil 1996). Defense contracting offered some Afghan-Americans contractors an opportunity to emulate the positions of the elite Afghan-Americans by getting their foot in the door on well-paying national security jobs, and securing government clearances. Their involvement reflects the process of transculturation that occurs as a result of the encounter with the American state (Ortiz 1995). By straddling cultures, they activated different identities and created revised cultural forms to accommodate new relations of power. The desire among Afghan-Americans in the diaspora to seize defense-related employment can be interpreted as an extension of the debates on colonial encounters. Some Afghan-Americans who rose up to meet the demands of the military-industrial complex sought to recapture a past that had eluded them through migration; one in which they had greater status and economic mobility through prestigious positions in the Afghan government. Based on Afghan cultural norms, a person's job was seen to be a direct reflection of his or her status. As a result, government contracting offered a better alternative to more menial jobs. The encounter with the military allowed Afghan-Americans to be defined by what they provided as

interlocutors. They became associated with the 'commodity production' of cultural and regional knowledge; a point that Coronil emphasizes is central to the creation of colonial subjects (1996: 16). The power asymmetries, however, are more palpable in class differences among Afghan-American contractors, the larger diaspora, and Afghans in Afghanistan than they are with the state. The engagement with the U.S. government and military has reshaped power differentials among Afghan-American households – renegotiating community divisions and the politics of belonging.

Sadat and Hanifi, whose academic publications capture the experiences of Afghan-American households, reflect the stories of Yasamin, Rostam, and Khalid and provide a window onto the tensions and interactions within the Afghan diasporic community. Sadat, who left Afghanistan at the age of three, recalls that,

> Many of these refugees or immigrants are highly educated, many former engineers, doctors, and diplomats, educated in these host countries at one time. Instead of finding employment commensurate to their talents and education, most of them join ethnic economies, driving taxicabs, working in convenience stores, surviving as street vendors, or dependent on the welfare system of their host country (2008: 332).

In the diaspora, educated and skilled households began to mix with households that had relatively little education or professional experience – an encounter that reflected and reified the socio-cultural divisions prevalent in Afghan society. Leaving Afghanistan in the pursuit of a better life, for many, had meant maintaining or rising above the lives they had established in Kabul. But in the suburbs of California and Northern Virginia, among others, communities previously unassociated with one another jockeyed for the same blue-collar professions that they might have not deigned to occupy in Afghanistan. In the diaspora communities, the journey one took out of Afghanistan was a marker of social status. In describing other households that arrived in America around the Soviet occupation, some of

the Afghan-Americans I interviewed often addressed them as 'FOBs' – meaning 'Fresh Off the Boat,' a pejorative term related to recently arrived immigrants[9]. The term, which does not have a Dari or Pashto equivalent, is an English phrase that denotes an important characterization. The 'FOB' population is unassimilated and still clinging to the familiarity of its own culture and traditions rather than embracing a more cosmopolitan bi-culturality. Relating a story about her relationship with her cousins, who had come to America in 1998 via India, Yasamin noted that one of her uncles 'had a hard time letting go of some Afghan traditions, so the cousins are still FOB-ish and don't go too far outside of the Afghan community in the Bay Area.' The implied cultural divide is a commentary on the level of assimilation both in the diaspora community and American society at large. Most importantly, as the next section shall discuss, the divisions between "FOBs" and cosmopolites contribute to the class-consciousness that underlie the social structure and identity formation among Afghan-Americans.

'Above all, I am a Muslim': Identity development in the diaspora

In the initial conceptualization of the research, I had proposed to study the identity choices of Afghans in America after the 9/11 attacks. The thread remained a relevant aspect throughout the study and revealed greater insights into the lives of households than I had originally anticipated. Just as religion had been a factor in the migration of Afghans, it was equally important to the creation of diasporic identity and unity. One of the most common assumptions about the Afghan diaspora is that household identity and interactions in the community are based on ethnicity. However, in reality, ethnicity is only a fraction of what constitutes Afghan identity. While identity often serves as a catch-all in

[9] The term 'FOB' is entirely unrelated to the acronym for Forward Operation Base used by the U.S. military.

anthropological studies, in the context of the Afghan diaspora, the concept aligns with Brubaker's and Cooper's theory that 'self-understanding' can move beyond ethnicity, tribal, or religious affiliation, and instead relate to honor and legacy. In the diaspora, household interactions often depend on one's family legacy, family name, and their perceived status in Afghanistan *prior* to migration. Many in the diaspora, even among later generations, maintained similar divisions in their interactions with other Afghan-Americans.

Monir's reputation preceded him. A young entrepreneur with a successful technology solutions company, he exemplified the crop of Afghan-Americans who thrived in the defense contracting business after 2001. We met at an upscale hotel in Rosslyn, Virginia, during the month of Ramadan. In assuming the role of an anthropologist, I realized only too late my mistake of offering him tea or coffee. With a smile, he said 'I'm observing' and without fully understanding his reference and assuming he meant anthropologically, I noted with a laugh that I too was observing. But as he gently reminded me of Ramadan, I felt the common ground slip to a close. Rendering my apologies, we changed the topic to the décor of the trendy lobby. Couches and chairs resembling relics of European aristocracy decorated the lounge area. It seemed as though a piece of Versailles had been transported to Northern Virginia on a summer afternoon. But Monir fit the picture perfectly.

'I like couches like this. Much more comfortable and still classy,' he said surveying the swooping curves of the tufted sofas. Monir draped his arm across the chair and straightened the lapel of his navy blue pinstripe suit. 'Everyone says that I'm a 80-year-old man in the body of a 29 year old,' he explained motioning to his thick mass of black immaculately-coiffed hair, 'I have an appreciation for the finer things in life.' Monir was born in Kabul and lived in Peshawar as a refugee for eight years before moving to America.

In Pakistan, he studied English and computer science and resumed his studies when arrived in Virginia. With a B.A. in business management and then a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Virginia, he started his own technology, logistics, and operations support company. His goal is to use his business as a vehicle for change in Afghanistan – specifically he is interested in engaging the youth in education programs such as public library projects. He hopes to become an intermediary in economic development. He plans to secure funding in America that will encourage private sector investments among youth in Afghanistan. Monir expressed that America's socio-cultural and economic context provided him with unparalleled opportunities to pursue his ambitions and thrive in a competitive environment. For Monir, education is the key to acculturation in America.

'As long as you work hard and know what you want, people want to follow,' he remarked about the support he has received from American (more specifically, Caucasian male) business partners, who have backed his initiatives. His experience in America was not tainted by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. He admitted to 'not encounter[ing] any negative reactions and us[ing] his knowledge to educate people, who were less informed and narrow-minded about differences.' His family was also spared any prejudicial backlash, including his 24-year-old sister who wears a *hijab*, a practice she took up while in exile in Pakistan despite his family's secular objections to the head covering. Monir's economic success in America brought him closer to both sides of his hyphenated identity. His transnational connections afford him the opportunity to bid on and win lucrative defense contracts, while he bases himself out of the Washington D.C. area (or 'home' as he calls it):

'[Afghanistan] is my motherland, but I don't see a difference with it and the U.S. They are both equal in my eyes.'

But within the confines of both homes, Monir places clear boundaries in his relationship to the 'known community' of Afghan-Americans (Van Hear 2015; Van Hear and Cohen 2015). Reflecting upon his experience in migration and integration in new societies, he stated: 'I didn't want to associate with just anybody, like the *bacha-e-lochak*' – a term that refers to young men who behave in a ribald or vulgar manner. What proved interesting in Monir's case was the role of family name and legacy in defining social boundaries. He discriminated in his personal associations because he felt that certain groups or types of people were inferior to the status his family held. When Monir first tells me of his background, he assumes my familiarity with his great-grandfather, a renowned poet and figure in Afghan history. His narration of his grandfather's patriotism is as much a historical account as it is an aspiration for his identity in the diaspora.

'My grandfather inspired me to carry on his legacy. He was a political leader and a writer who changed society with education. He believed in equality through education and exposure. Everyone in my family has an enlightened way of thinking so it's harder to socialize outside of our group. Afghans can be very narrow-minded and uneducated. You can't have elevated conversations with them [...] They don't have good manners or the same upbringing,' he said, adding in Dari 'they're *bay saowiya*.' Monir's observation relates to the perceptions of class in the diaspora. He isolated himself and his family from those who lacked or were 'without class.' His self-understanding drew upon the achievements of his great-grandfather, relying upon the construction and realization of a specific narrative that defined his family's distinction and set him apart as an individual. By underlining the

class element, Monir's self-understanding was aspirational. He cultivated an identity based on his associations in the diaspora, considering himself among more elite Afghans than the masses of *bay saowiya* Afghans because of his lineage. Another striking aspect of Monir's account was that he identified more closely with the American entrepreneurs with whom he associates than with most Afghan-Americans in the diaspora. Throughout the initial discussion, Monir reiterated that 'Americans value hard-workers' and recognize talent whereas 'Afghans just tear each other down.' He related recognizing talent to the perspicacity of his American mentors, who he claimed could deduce the pedigree of his lineage and provide him socio-economic opportunities commensurate with his family's social status in Afghanistan.

Monir's mixed ethnic heritage is not uncommon within the diaspora. His father is a Pashto-speaking Pashtun and his mother, a Farsi-speaking Hazara, but he stressed that there had been little focus on ethnic or linguistic differences within his household. More so than such differences, 'it's really upbringing that matters,' he noted. Upbringing, a common theme in discussions with Afghan-Americans, relates to the inculcation of family values, social norms, and the delicate balance of *Afghaniyat* against the backdrop of cosmopolitanism. Upbringing fosters notions of class, status, and belonging by creating distinctions among those who are brought up 'well' and those who are not and therefore relegated to a lower social status. This form of class-consciousness reproduces and strengthens differences in the community. Homira Nassery, who has written about diasporic engagement, emphasizes that

> Any discussion of the Afghan diaspora cannot be complete without including the component of social class in Afghan society, particularly the complex multiple layers of the former oligarchy, which comprises a large proportion of the Afghans settled in the

United States. Indeed, this author postulates that class is more of a barrier and cause for conflict among Afghans than is ethnicity (Nassery 2003).

Class is a valid consideration because it shapes social organization and interactions in the diaspora. It is also a transnational reflection of the lives households had in Afghanistan vis-à-vis their often-lesser positions and status in the host society. While class in Afghan society derives from family legacy it is usually related to education and occupation. As such, material wealth is not necessarily a marker of high class, though it does confer greater clout to households because resources and power are intertwined. Nassery explains that '[t]he emphasis on social class overrides ethnicity since many of the urbanized upper classes had intermarried among themselves whether they were Tajik, Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkmen, Nooristani, etc., and this diversity is reflected in the composition of the diaspora in the United States' (2003). If social class is characteristic of their identity, how do Afghan-Americans perform their sense of self? The term describes a trait cultivated through an urbane upbringing and cosmopolitanism, factors that are shaped through education or personal associations with aristocratic families and the established intelligentsia. Unlike more conventional links between money and class, Afghan households gain prominence through their achievements in the humanities and the public sector, particularly as technocrats within the echelons of the Afghan government, or as scholars. Most interestingly, the accomplishments (and conversely, the failures) of one individual reflect the value of the entire family. Monir exemplified this because he chose to define himself through his great-grandfather's legacy and its corresponding attributes to the family's prestige. He also discussed the influence of his father's social activism in Afghanistan on his identity, which was deemed an extension of his grandfather's and great-

grandfather's prolific political literature. Their achievements are consistent with the emphasis on poetry and literature as revered and distinguished forms of resistance and social critique, particularly among Afghan refugee populations (Olszewska 2007). For many Afghan-Americans, the refugee experience reinforces notions of social class when all other aspects of an individual's life, such as wealth and a personal sense of dignity, have been exhausted in the process of migration. Interactions among households at community gatherings reveal the implications of identity construction based on the social stratification described.

The second time I saw Monir was a chance meeting after Eid prayer at an Afghan restaurant in Springfield, Virginia. Among the 150-plus people who trickled out into the parking lot to greet one another, Monir stood out. In fact, he actually shone. The sun danced over his traditional mirrored vest and white *piran-tumban*, and caught the silver threads of the cloth that fanned out of his carefully-styled *loonghi*. He introduced me to his parents. We exchanged Eid greetings and I remarked jokingly that unlike Monir, we were commemorating the occasion more conservatively. His mother's face, a striking intensity of features punctuated by a neat black chignon, relaxed into a smile.

'Yes, well, *he's* very traditional. He has to wear his best clothes on Eid like a true Afghan. We just wore whatever we had,' she said gesturing to her black shift dress and pearls, and his father's dark suit. She had a matching cotton gauze scarf draped under the handle of her purse – for prayer, like many other Afghan women at the event. In the ensuing pleasantries, they asked who my father was, a question with which I was wholly familiar. Just as Monir's grandfather and great-father had done, my father also represented my lineage. Once his identity was issued, he would be linked to his position in Afghan

society (by virtue of his occupation in the Foreign Service) and his marriage to my mother, the daughter of two former Afghan government ministers. The proverbial green light, at that point, would then signal the continued interaction.

'Ah yes, of course. Zafar. Related to Mehdi Zafar? The journalist? What school did your father go to?' his father asked.

'Yes, a relation of my father's, I believe. My father went to Lycée Esteqlal and then got a scholarship to do his graduate and doctoral studies in France.'

'He might know some of my cousins then. A very distinguished family. And your grandparents on your mother's side – we know of them well. Monir says you're following in your grandmother's steps towards higher education.' My 'very distinguished family' thus became a conduit to the promise of research assistance as well as social engagements. The point of our commonality rested on a known yet imagined network of associations from similar backgrounds and occupations that defined our place in Afghan society. Who we were perceived to be, in social class and standing, was far more important than the reality of our existence in the diaspora. The perceptions and performance of self-hood thus dictated the 'sphere of engagement' with which a household could or should engage. Beyond the *bacha-e-lochak,* households risked losing their reputation and social capital by being seen to socialize below their assumed station. In this conscious 'presentation of self,' such considerations shape individual agency within households (Goffman 1959). As Nassery observes, 'One of the key elements of Afghan society, one's perception by others, or 'what will people say?' has limited unity and action in the Afghan diaspora in more ways than one' (2003). This pressure is also evident among later generations, who often inherit their sense of class and status from their parents and grandparents, in turn using it as a

discriminator among their peers in the diaspora communities. The pervasiveness of class biases and community judgment act as powerful forces that shape household decision-making. The preoccupation with class is not necessarily unique to Afghans in the West. Zuzanna Olszewska's research among Afghans in Iran revealed similar inclinations towards status aspirations. She was 'struck by the level of intellectual and cultural activity and determination to improve one's lot in the 'downtown' neighborhoods in which Afghans lived alongside Iranian migrants from rural areas […] They themselves cling to a self-perception as higher-status, but others tend to see them in terms of the lower status position they occupy' (2013). This reality often faces Afghan-Americans as well. Despite assimilating, integration challenges often erode, if not outright reject, the status perceptions with which households arrived in the host society. By staying within the boundaries of distinct diasporic groups, belonging and recognition at a higher status level can be revived through shared experiences and narratives of the past.

Haroun, who worked as a translator and analyst in Afghanistan with the Special Forces, is a recent transplant in Annandale, Virginia. After a divorce, he moved from California and lives with his sister. A mutual contact introduced me to Haroun based on the perception that we would be 'of like minds.' Haroun, although older than me by two decades, lived in Europe, is educated, and comes from a respected family in Afghanistan – three qualifications outlined to me by my contact. In America, Haroun and I interact based on a careful negotiation of Afghan social customs against a Western backdrop. We performed them based on a conscious recognition that anything we would say or do would be reflective of not only our individual but also family *saowiya*. Unlike other interviews, I met Haroun at his apartment – his invitation had nonchalantly but explicitly made mention

of his sister's presence. Since our connection had been forged based on my position as an 'Afghan' more than as a 'researcher,' I spent more than 40-minutes wondering whether I should take a loaf of banana bread from a nearby farmers' market or the generic bouquet of flowers as a requisite gift for the host. I settled on flowers solely because it would not signal an ill-conceived perception of his worth on my part or serve, in an unanticipated way, as an insult – key considerations given the nuances of social proprieties among Afghans. But in my negotiation of cross-cultural customs, I was remiss in arriving at 4:29p.m. for a 4:30p.m. meeting. Haroun opened the door and ushered me into the balmy living room, excusing his and his sister's unpreparedness, as they had not yet expected my arrival. Implicit in the exchange was the simple fact that I should have known better, as an Afghan, than to catch them off guard with an on-time arrival rather than be customarily fashionably late. Twenty minutes later, two other Afghan-American guests arrived as unanticipated research participants. While the discussion proved insightful in terms of their roles as translators, role-players, and cultural advisors, their interactions with each other and with me exemplified the various layers of identity construction in the diaspora. More specifically, they were illustrative of the divisions within the community.

'I thought I knew your face from the second I laid eyes on you!' Laili exclaimed, as she clasped her hand on mine, 'I know your mother – we worked together […] No wonder you're working on a doctorate. From a family like yours, we could expect no less.' The establishment of familiarity with my family and what they represented opened up the forum to a more candid dialogue. In fact, in subsequent conversations, Laili offered several invitations to Afghan events with the subtext of getting me to meet 'young Afghan men commensurate in pedigree.' Romantic alliances brokered in such a way were not

uncommon and often expected, so my evasiveness lent itself (as I discovered later) to the assumption that I had considered her and her recommended suitors beneath my perceived status. However, in the discussion that ensued, I was in the 'us' that was the subject of a discussion detailing differences between the company present at Haroun's apartment, and 'them' – those in the 'known community' who were seen to be socially inferior, or provincial and less cosmopolitan. Ghafoor, who worked as a cultural advisor with the U.S. embassy for two years before returning to America, lamented:

> The problem with these programs (author's note: pertaining to programs that hired Afghan-Americans) is that they don't discriminate. You have some guy whose dad sold pickles and who can barely speak Farsi properly let alone English, talking about strategies with the U.S. government. What does he know? They make things up about Afghanistan and they distort Islam. How are the foreigners (author's note: meaning U.S. military and government officials) supposed to know the difference?

When I met Ghafoor, his job in Afghanistan had facilitated a successful transition to a long-term position as a translator in Tampa, Florida, where he worked for a national defense contractor. Laili agreed, contending that the U.S. military and senior U.S. government leaders were often far too trusting of what was conveyed as expertise because they did not understand the underlying social dynamics.

'I was shocked by some of our Afghans. They are so different from people like us – uneducated and rude and they just wanted money but didn't want to work for it. They gave such a bad image of Afghans and Afghanistan […] They were very low. People, like us,' Laili said, motioning with her head towards the men in front of her, 'we care about Afghanistan and America, and we went over there to help both countries. These others, they just went to help themselves.' Laili's personal effort illustrated why some Afghan-Americans participated in the programs; reasons that complemented the U.S. government's

recruitment push during COIN. Most of the recruitment and placement of the contractors relied on private sector defense companies that contracted directly with the U.S. military or DoD, a discussion that will be addressed further in Chapter 5. After gathering resumes, the basic procedure entailed an interview, a background check and government clearance, and for some positions that required travel to Afghanistan, a seven-day personnel readiness course at Fort Benning in Georgia, which included medical and dental check-up, gear issue, and weapons training. The rigorous process had to be completed prior to deployment. For language positions, contractors had to also undergo language tests. In the early years of the hiring surge, many defense companies suffered from inadequate testing measures, which allowed Afghan-Americans to cheat the system by having family members and friends take their exams on the computer or on the phone. In later years, once the issue became apparent, the companies required in-person testing available only with a government-issued identification card.

Laili's sentiments related to the reasons for taking on contracting opportunities, but they were all the more remarkable because they conveyed her belief that the discrepancies in conduct and professionalism stemmed from perceived family legacy deficiencies. One of the most striking elements in discussions about *saowiya* – class and family status - was the description of the attribute as something one was either born into (as part of a prestigious family) or had it cultivated through education and international travel. Such attitudes have drawn distinct lines across households and limited community unity. But the concept of *saowiya* remains an integral criterion for social affinity among diasporic families. The relevance of *saowiya* is most discernible in discussions related to marriage. One participant succinctly explained what several others had addressed in their interviews. As a Pashtun

woman from the powerful Muhammadzai family, who had grown up in Virginia, she noted that 'marrying someone from [her] own background makes it a lot easier because the families know each other and there isn't that awkwardness […] Everyone knows their [*sic*] roles and expectations, and how they should act […] there's always a support network. It's not like everyone's out for themselves, so everyone has to take care of everyone else.' Such considerations underscore not only how agency is conceptualized, but they also display the extent to which personal identity materializes through community members' perceptions and judgments.

Sadat's explanation of *Afghaniyat* also encapsulates class. In leaving Afghanistan for places like America, he writes,

> Afghans brought with them notions of a class structure, built on socio-political and socioeconomic hierarchies (Kabul versus non-Kabul dwellers, urban versus rural divides, royal versus non-royal blood ties). Although some Afghans gained formal education while in the Afghan Diaspora, they were still considered of an inferior class […] because their families were not considered wealthy back in Afghanistan. Some Afghans felt that because they had come from the royal bloodline or were high-ranking at one time, they […] believed that history could be rewound, and they could return as ministers and generals, as the saviors of Afghanistan, to rescue it from its modern-day calamities (Sadat 2008: 335).

His analysis helps situate the sense of identity and purpose that those like Ghafoor, Laili, and Haroun cultivate in the diaspora. While class shapes associations within the diaspora community, it also informs the relationship with Afghanistan. As other studies have shown, Afghan-Americans who return to Afghanistan rarely intend to do so permanently (Oeppen 2012). The return is an occasion to reclaim one's status in Kabul by working in the upper echelons of the Afghan government or in key positions with international organizations. Those who returned to work with the U.S. military, such as Haroun, emphasized that the responsibility to convey Afghanistan's *farhang* – its culture and heritage – as a means of

developing cross-cultural understanding far outweighed the personal or remunerative incentives to go back. As will be explained in Chapter 4, opportunities to return were often a mixed blessing in terms of redefining class structures and social mobility when the contractors return to the diaspora communities. In discussions about class and occupation, many participants indicated that their family backgrounds had a transformative role in shaping their choice after migration. For Afghan-Americans, like Ghafoor who felt secure in the social capital generated by his family's name and legacy, employment with the U.S. military was discussed as a matter of personal choice that bordered on a moral obligation and not one of circumstantial necessity (especially financial necessity). He, among others, delineated a clear line between Afghans who were educated and 'cultured' and thus genuinely interested in helping the U.S. military, and those who generated fictionalized narratives to meet the client's demands and their own financial needs; a departure from the intellectual responsibility implied in the former position[10]. Dispensing with necessity meant that it was Ghafoor's choice to perform in some way consistent with 'rescuing' Afghanistan. Oeppen discerned another reason through her study – that 'for men, in particular, such employment represented a return to what they perceived as their 'natural' status in life' (Oeppen 2012: 5). Both positions underscore Sadat's assertion that for higher status families in the diaspora, counterinsurgency in Afghanistan marked a historical point for Afghan-Americans to be restored to their perceived social positions through U.S. government-related occupations.

[10] This was largely the perspective held by some Afghan-Americans, but through my research, I found there to be a large overlap between financial necessity and desire to contribute to peace-building in Afghanistan as the reasons they sought employment on such contracts.

Beyond the boundaries of the diaspora, Afghan identity is highly dynamic but fixed to its relationship with Afghanistan and Islam. Ethnic and sectarian identities are not as significant unless a political impetus animates differences into divisions. Carolin Fischer's account of Afghan immigrants in Germany focuses on the lack of a central national identity. She writes that 'ethnic backgrounds are further, and in parts overlapping, reasons for divisions, which seem to get conflated with politics frequently […] There is a tendency for people to coalesce around particularities, like for example, political affiliations, instead of an overarching Afghan identity' (Fischer 2015: 149). National identity – and the fluctuations in its definition – reflects changes in the imagined homeland as well as the host society. The aftermath of 9/11 exemplified the sudden conflation of Afghan national identity, particularly among the later generations who often considered it a duty to act as torchbearers of their families' heritage. As a result, the household-level articulations of social status and family identity mushroomed into a collective, imagined identity.

In the few weeks after 9/11, places like 'Little Kabul' in Fremont were transformed – American flags waved alongside Afghanistan's red, green, and black banners outside shop windows. Afghan-Americans staged demonstrations of solidarity as Americans, decrying the violence and terror wrought in the name of Islam. But slowly, as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan took root in the American political consciousness, and increased surveillance subjectively profiled Afghan-Americans as 'terror suspects,' a counterculture movement evolved within the diaspora. Articulating Afghan-ness, as Sadat explained, became a form of resistance to the government's counter-terrorism policies. Two particular, inter-related shortcomings in the public sphere contributed to erroneous conceptualizations about Afghanistan and the Afghan people. In the early years of the war,

the paucity of ethnographic literature on Afghanistan led policymakers and the likes to pore over antiquated descriptions consistent with the British imperialist agenda of the late 19th century (Hanifi 2012). This further exacerbated the notion that ethnic identities were rigid and highly polarized. But scholars, such as Hanifi, have pointed out that 'ethnicity is not the key variable […] shared experiences as *mujahideen* and locally constructed friendship relationships and kinship ties appear to be the governing variables' at least in the trust-based social network through which remittances are issued (Hanifi 2006: 110). Ethnic identity also became correlated to regionalism (i.e. 'The Pashtun Belt' to signify provinces in southern Afghanistan), which ironically drew greater divisions across the territory and population. Moreover, in conceptualizing the Afghan population, the mass media and U.S. government seemed to operate on an overt, if tacit, assumption that Afghanistan was geographically situated in the Middle East (to which countries like Egypt were also often assigned) and that a shared Muslim heritage and perceived phenotypic homogeneity cast Afghans as Arabs. From such simplistic correlations issued a strong backlash within the Afghan-American diaspora.

In my preliminary fieldwork, Afghan identity was repeatedly described in opposition to Arab identity. At a Ramadan prayer gathering of Afghans in Springfield, Virginia, I met Saleh – an Afghan engineer in his late 50s, who had moved to Germany from Afghanistan when he was 28 years old, prior to settling in America. In the year before we met, Saleh had put together a small, charitable organization to send relief items to Afghanistan. Although Saleh had no inclination to return permanently to Afghanistan (he was entertaining the possibility of working on a contract in Kabul for a major engineering firm), he still wanted to do his part, in some way, to 'help the homeland.' Saleh's attempts to mobilize the

diaspora had increased his awareness of how the community's identity was constantly negotiated in the political and media discourse.

'Who are we?' he exclaimed somewhat rhetorically, leaning over his folded arms on the table between us,

> We are not Arabs, for one. Everyone says the Arabs are responsible for the Twin Towers (author's note: referring to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centers towers in New York City), but then they look at me and think 'well, he's got dark skin and he's a Muslim, so therefore he must be an Arab.' It's a small leap from there to being suspicious that I'm a terrorist. They don't know that we're not all the same. Not that Arabs are terrorists, but as Muslims our belief systems and practices of Islam are different. Our language, our language is different. We don't speak Arabic in Afghanistan. Even on CNN [author's note: CNN refers to the mainstream Central News Network] they said Afghanistan was in the Middle East, as if it was right next to Saudi Arabia.'

His point illustrated a similar attitude I had experienced while working in Afghanistan on an U.S.A.I.D. development project. The newly-arrived communications manager, a native American New Yorker, who had expected Afghans to be like the Iraqis to whom she was accustomed, questioned 'why the fuck do these people [Afghans] not speak Arabic?' She was all the more confused to learn that Afghans were in fact not ethnically Arab. Among many participants who felt a 'calling' towards work as cultural advisors and translators, a major reason for their engagement was the need to define and clarify Afghan national identity in the hopes of preventing precisely the sorts of encounters that haphazardly homogenized populations across three continents. Thus, narratives of a strong national identity gained greater currency in the diaspora as a response to the perceived misrepresentation of Afghanistan in the media and American politics. Redressing the problems of perception related to both Afghan identity and Islam, which shall be discussed below, constituted a key motivation to engage with counterinsurgency programs.

Islam is the prevailing religion in the Afghan diaspora. In the study, all participants identified as Muslims, though their degrees of observation and practice varied. Some of the participants alluded to family that had strayed from Islam, but could not definitively state that they practiced another religion, had converted, or become atheist or agnostic. Deviating from Islam, even if accepted within a household, was not always discussed publicly. Its veiled ambiguity protected such knowledge from becoming an instrument of gossip and reflecting poorly on the families involved. Even a semblance of Islamic observance was sufficient to stave off judgment and its potential backlash within the community. Although some people identified as only nominally Muslim, religious identity ranked first, with 'Afghan-American' and 'Afghan' close seconds. Khalid echoed most of his second-generation peers when he discussed his identity, telling me 'above all else, I am Muslim.' Islam was formative particularly given the reasons for migration and the jihad against the Soviets. The first-generation's articulations of their religious identity made almost no distinction between Afghan and Muslim – Muslim was simply assumed. When many Afghan-Americans initially arrived in America they paid little regard to sectarian differences. For example, generally families were indifferent to sectarian differences when considering marital choices. In recent years, the political discourse generated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have drawn greater attention to splits between Sunni and Shia Muslims, often in the context of explaining radical Islamist groups. In the public consciousness during this period, Islamic ideology became increasingly associated with international terrorism. Thus, stating 'above all, I am Muslim' would lend itself to a wide range of politicized interpretations.

To understand the return to Islam in 2001, it is worth exploring the diaspora community's relationship to Islam upon migration. The line between the practice of Islam and Afghan culture can be fluid and indistinct. As such, Islamic identity blends into Afghan culture or *Afghaniyat*. Sadat traces the decisions households made in preserving or distancing their Muslim identity once they left Afghanistan. He criticizes what he observes as 'a flagrant dismissal of Afghan religio-cultural holidays and customs,' noting:

> Compared to other traditional immigrant groups, first and second generation Afghans have been unsuccessful in preserving their traditional and religious-based cultural behaviors and beliefs. […] [I]t is not uncommon to find certain Afghans eating pork, which is a violation of the Islamic concept of halal (kosher), using and frequent abusing of alcohol known also as shar-ab (mischief water) which is haram (forbidden) in Islam, and failing to observe the fasting month of Ramadan or other religious holidays. However, these Afghans respect and celebrate some Anglo-Christian holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Easter, and Halloween with more passion than their own religio-cultural traditions and events.

Sadat's observation is valid to an extent, but it does not account for the later generations of Afghan-Americans who drew upon strict Islamic ideologies to redefine their Muslim identity after 2001. Khalid, for example, chose to break from the non-traditional, secular observation of Islam his family practiced. In this process of 'self-education,' which Muna Ali has studied among African-Americans, people often find that what they 'had been told were Islamic were in fact part of the cultures of immigrants' (2011: 364). Revived interests in Islamic scholarship pinpointed 'practices as well as gender roles/norms that they now realize are cultural rather than Islamic' (Ali 2011: 364). Equipped with new knowledge, later generations, who have grown up being reproached by their parents for not properly observing customs and tradition, can then turn a critical gaze on their families and subvert the parent-child dynamic. Khalid's journey through religious self-discovery admittedly brought him 'closer to a Salafist' tradition, aligning his practice with the school of Islamic

ideology that adheres to a literal interpretation of the Quran and seeks to restore Islam in the tradition that prevailed prior to the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 A.D. In doing so, Khalid admitted to frequently chastising his own parents for consuming alcohol or gambling, and gaining a sense of purpose as both a Muslim and as an individual. For many in the diaspora, the return to Islam is a recent deviation from the more secularist Muslim identity in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion. For the cohort that immigrated to the U.S. and the generations thereafter, forays in and out of Islamism can be indicative of 'groupism' or sporadic solidarity, similar to other Muslim diasporic populations that struggle to belong and are 'just desperate to be relevant' (Eteraz 2011: 300).

Others attempt to broker a more moderate version of Islam that effaces the inequalities and divisions among Afghan-American households in the diaspora. Dr. Farid Younos, a respected scholar in the diaspora, holds a weekly television show aimed particularly at later generations of Afghan-Americans to promote a dialogue about Muslim identity. In his book, Principles of Islamic Sociology he tackles the issues of radicalism and extremism, countering that Islam, modernization, democracy, and logic do not exist in opposition to one another (2011). By espousing a more philosophical Islamic ideology as a part of diasporic life, he hopes to promote understanding among later generations of Afghan-Americans, who struggle to balance the overarching banner of Islam over their already-hyphenated identities. His perspective specifically addresses identity formation, religion, and the challenges to belonging. Conscious of the figurative walls in the host society as well as the class divisions in the diaspora, Younos reminds Muslims that their community or 'the Ummah […] is a concept without boundaries. So when we talk about a Muslim Ummah, it is a universal concept […] [N]ationalism, which has been defined on the

basis of race, language, or territory, is not approved by Islam. There is one Ummah, and it is universal' (2011: 31-32). Such an idea effectively renders considerations of national and ethnic identity antithetical to religion. What he offers is belonging through Islam, so that as Muslims, Afghan-Americans always have a sense of self and community beyond the potential shortcomings of assimilation and integration. Despite Afghanistan's ongoing turmoil with religious extremism, the form of Islamic identity and ideology Younos and his peers advocate in the diaspora is far more congruous with what being Muslim meant for those who had experienced it in Afghanistan prior to the country becoming an official Islamic republic in 1992.

Whether religious or otherwise, family remains a consistent factor in the way Afghan-Americans define who they are and what they represent in American society. In this sense, inter-generational dynamics and the differences among men and women are grounds upon which the struggles of creating and maintaining *Afghaniyat* occur. The focus on social class, which I have discussed previously, often manifests itself most directly in the relationship between generations of Afghan-Americans. Having lost status in the process of migration, Afghan parents often attempt to recoup or maintain their prestige through the decisions of their children. The dynamic, as evident in Monir's example, affixes later generations of Afghan-Americans with an obligation based on family honor, to preserve an imagined ideal that roots back to Afghanistan. In the discourse of narratives that are passed from generation to generation, migration from Afghanistan is often associated with loss. Although Afghan-Americans do address the gains they have made by leaving Afghanistan, the articulated sense of loss related to status, occupation, home, and identity is pervasive. At various points during fieldwork, conversations at social events centered on the

achievements (and failures) of certain families – the point seemed to be to create associations based on who was upward bound in the diaspora. As mentioned before, marriageability exemplified such preoccupations with *saowiya*. Although most families in the diaspora do not arrange marriages, parents still exercise a level of influence on the choices their children make in their partners. Some families have moved beyond the community perception of status and class, but they are few in number. Many, mostly in the first generation, continue to subscribe to at least subtle prejudices in considering marriage partners for their children. One of the parents at an Afghan youth soccer tournament confided sheepishly, 'my daughter got married to a *kharijee*, but he's a lawyer and is learning Farsi, so that's good. *Shokur khoda* (thank God) he isn't Black.' Her Caucasian son-in-law's occupation was prestigious enough to warrant the family's blessing. But it may not have withstood the same treatment were he a different ethnicity. Mina exemplified the pressure such inter-generational class aspirations exert on the choices available to young Afghan-Americans. Once she and her family had migrated to America, her extended family marginalized them because they were perceived to be lower status. Acutely aware of the dynamic, she noted 'I want to go back home to Afghanistan and then come back and get a really good job here. It would be a slap in the face to my aunts.' When asked about marriage, she responded 'of course, I'm going to get married and have kids. But I want him to be an Afghan guy from a good family with a good name, not just any random guy.' Implicit in much of the inter-generational dynamics (and to an extent, relationships in the diaspora in general) is an overriding insecurity about who they are *not* as opposed to who they *are*. In this negative space lie aspirations for social mobility that are foisted upon each generation. The dynamic is a powerful force, emanating from complex feelings of both

pride and inferiority. They are formative reminders of the past; scar tissue still tender from the sting of migration and loss of status. Thus, for some members of the diaspora, contracting opportunities resonated with the need for upward mobility – particularly in improving circumstances related to personal lives, social standing, and marriageability.

Most scholarship on inter-generational dynamics within diasporic households examines the effects of such constructs on personal identity – and in this sense, the experience of Afghan-American generations are no exception. However, I examine the relationship between the diasporic generation of Afghans who immigrated during the Soviet invasion and the later generations, who were born and raised in America with only notional attachments to Afghanistan. The reconstitution of inter-generational dynamics and gender relations is not just illustrative of dynamics in Afghan diasporic households. It is not about one generation acting out against another in a mundane conflict of perspectives over anachronistic values. Rather, in the case of the Afghan-American community, the dynamic is a direct commentary on the later generations' evolving relationship with America. After 9/11, later generations of Afghan-Americans saw an opportunity to express Afghan identity as distinct – even if it meant going against the grain of their family's secularity and assimilation. It was an occasion for Afghan-Americans to catapult beyond the constraints of generational differences and define their own Afghan identities. Here, the beginnings of their groupism take shape. The encounter with the military-industrial complex represented a moment of solidarity in which some Afghan-Americans could mobilize to represent Afghanistan. Such relationships, however, were tenuous and dissolved when the occasion for collective action passed. For many Afghan-Americans, their relationship to assimilation and acculturation has been problematized by

the post-9/11 political and security posture in America, and is better conceptualized through transculturation (Ortiz 1995). New generations of Afghan-Americans are the products of the diaspora's encounter with militarism, and have used the occasion to create new cultural ideals by selectively mixing elements from the various cultures to which they are exposed. In doing so, such hybrid forms of culture that underpin knowledge about Afghanistan are more representative of responses to American militarism than they are of indigenous Afghan values. When considering the experiences of Afghan-Americans who reconnected with their Afghan heritage, it is important to note that some reverted back to either hyphenated identities or at least distanced themselves from their more staunch embrace of traditional and Islamic values as economic opportunities to integrate in America's foreign policy became more broadly available. I argue that because Afghan identities are largely class-based, inter-generational dynamics are mitigated by the need to maintain a collective rather than an individual identity. This 'plan,' which underlies status aspirations in the diaspora, in the 'everyday sense of self' is a means of 'influenc[ing] the definition of the situation which they come to have' (Goffman 1959: 139). The conflation and deflation of ethnic identity and religion therefore can be short-term strategies to make meaning of the socio-cultural and political realities of American society at any given time. The choice to heighten a performance of *Afghaniyat* outside of the family norms may be reproached, but it is still often deemed more acceptable than enacting a Westernized identity at the other end of the spectrum. A mother I had met among the circle of participants succinctly explained the situation:

> These kids grow up between two cultures, they don't feel part of one or the other, but they're never going back to Afghanistan. They want to feel they can be somebody in America. They want to feel like they belong […] we are try to control them as much as we

> can but it can separate them from America society– and it's very delicate, the balance. They have to always change to fit one category or the other, so that they are acceptable to both.'

Her daughter had initiated an Islam study group in Springfield and began wearing a headscarf in 2003. But by 2006, she had stopped covering and began to move away from more traditional customs after she secured a coveted position with a Washington D.C.-based think tank. The trend was not uncommon among the research participants.

Furthermore, challenging preconceptions of gender roles was also a motivation to participate in contracting opportunities for some Afghan-American women. Many studies have explored the varying effects of migration on men and women with a particular focus on the construction of women's agencies in host societies (Dossa 2008; Levitt 2001; Lutz 2010; Naber 2013; Omidian 1996). The experience of Afghan-American women who worked on counterinsurgency programs is conceptually interesting because it examines the transformation of gender roles in the physical and virtual opportunities to 'return' to Afghanistan – particularly in subverting principles of *Afghaniyat* that are rooted in patriarchal notions of gender roles. It brings to fore attitudes about norms that were perhaps otherwise latent in the semblance of gender equality among assimilated populations. In an interview with an Afghan-American woman from a prominent, high-status family, she expressed the need 'to just do something other than sit at desk in a bank all day long. [She] told [her] husband 'I need to feel like I'm a part of something that's important especially to Afghanistan and the money would be good for our child.' But community perception was still a factor in the decision to return to Afghanistan to work, and look beyond her role as a woman, a mother, and a wife. She noted that

> They (the Afghan community) talk and say 'I can't believe her husband is okay with his wife going to work with a bunch of military men in Afghanistan,' but I don't care. They're

> narrow-minded. My husband was worried about what they would say, but I speak a little Pashto and he doesn't. By going to Afghanistan for two years, I was able to save up and now we can give our daughter a better education here.

Prejudices about women returning to Afghanistan for jobs with the U.S. military are more common among first-generation immigrants and less frequently among Afghan-Americans who grew up in America. When some of the men were asked about female family members working as role-players and translators, they expressed mixed sentiments. One 38-year-old participant explained the constraints on his position: 'It's not that I care. I trust my wife and I want her to develop professionally and have good job opportunities here [in America]. Our families are still stuck in the traditional mentality, so it makes it harder to justify. My family and her family understand, they get it. But they know their friends will think things.' The threat of talk, even without articulation or action, is sufficient to control the choices women in the diaspora feel are available to them. Return migration to Afghanistan for work was a catalyst for traditional gender norms and expectations to be enacted in response to women's participation. But it was also an occasion to challenge *Afghaniyat* in the community, and those who sought to do so emerged as part of the category of contractors.

'Foreigners' in America: Assimilation, segregation, and integration

Both in personal encounters and through field research in the Afghan-American community, I have often been struck by their references to non-Afghans in America, to include Caucasians or 'White' Americans, as 'Foreigners' or *kharijee*, which in Dari literally translates to 'outsider.' It seemed to further complicate the question of belonging in the diaspora. If Afghan-Americans perceived themselves as outsiders and they considered all other ethnic groups outsiders as well, who was actually an insider? By positioning all other

people as outsiders, Afghan-Americans created a boundary around their own communities – a boundary that was not necessarily based on ethnic differences, but rather on perceived disparities in values, customs, and beliefs. 'Inside' the community as a conceptual space often feels tenuous and subjectively constructed. Naween, a 30-year-old graduate student in Washington D.C. observed that there was in fact

> no sense of community among Afghans […] There is a lot of divisions based on who your family is and what they did. People can't let that stuff go […] You look at the Iranians and the Jews, or the Chinese, everyone's helping each other out. They don't seem to give a shit about pretenses. One gets a job at a company and they bring each other on board. Rather than climb the ladder together, Afghans will punch and kick the others down.

Another student, from California, recounted that there is even a palpable tension between the major hubs of Afghan-Americans in America. He explained that

> [t]he California Afghans are pretty laid back and welcoming [...] the Virginia ones are different, like more judgmental and conservative [...] They're suspicious all the time and hold themselves out to be better, maybe because most of them got here sooner than the California ones […] There's no sense of a collective community. Other than major social gatherings, like weddings and stuff, I keep my distance from them.

This sentiment was overwhelmingly echoed among other participants, and reflected infrequent moments of social cohesion. During some interviews, participants often told iterations of the same joke about different ethnic groups in hell. The punch line was that Afghans who encountered other Afghans in hell would rather keep each another down in shared misery rather than facilitate one person's escape, even at the expense of their own salvation. Vertovec offers a salient perspective on the lack of cohesiveness, stating that '[d]iasporas arise from some form of migration, but not all migration involves diasporic consciousness; all transnational communities comprise diasporas, but not all diasporas develop transnationalism' (2000: 12). Just as national identity can vary in degrees, 'diasporic consciousness' is similarly flexible. The consciousness seems to be activated

during moments of crisis or opposition. The political climate after 2001 in America strengthened the concept and unity of 'the Afghan diaspora' as an entity distinct from other ethnic groups. The Afghan diaspora began to materialize in the American consciousness through both the media and politics. But an array of literature also emerged to underline 'Afghan' as both a significant and separate community in America, but also as an experience or expression of specific cultural attributes. Helena Zeweri, an Afghan-American scholar, argues that

> it is important to see these writings as generating new kinds of subjectivities and forms of citizenship within an Afghan collective, which challenge notions of belonging as based on explicit expressions of commitment to Afghanistan as a nation-state or to a one-dimensional idea of its cultural productions, or in a commitment to cultural revitalization. Efforts to collectivize experience, in particular through the medium of writing, can be framed as an implicit strategy to facilitate the circulation of certain ideas about community, even if that is not the openly stated goal of the figures behind such projects (2011: 5).

The writings to which Zeweri alludes capture forms of citizenship and belonging that are not just about hyphenated identities, but rooted in an exploration of the boundaries of the diaspora itself. Other scholars have noted that new forms of identity negotiation and belonging in a globalized political world are beginning to redefine the characteristics that typify a diaspora (Soysal 2000). This is particularly important because it challenges the notion that '[c]lassical diasporas […] were a phenomenon of the *longue durée*. Whether the various instant diasporas being nominated into existence today will have this kind of multigenerational staying power is by no means clear' (Brubaker 2005: 7). The concept of an 'instant diaspora' is interesting to explore in the context of the Afghan-American contractors. Although Afghan-Americans are a distinct community in America, the divisions within their society prevent the sort of unity and cohesion that diasporic consciousness

often generates. The 'instant' an occasion requires solidarity, community members can band together, but the effort is more indicative of a response rather than a natural proclivity towards unity. After 9/11, the Afghan diaspora unified, but at the core of the community, status-based associations and a preoccupation with public perception have often stymied efforts at a large-scale, collective mobilization. As a result, the liminal space between outsiders and insiders that define membership is frequently renegotiated.

The opportunities to work as defense contractors helped attenuate against an increasing social segregation that often isolated and cauterized Afghan-Americans and Muslims as a problematic 'other' in America. By 9/11, many households had largely assimilated into American culture, but the encounter with the military-industrial complex allowed them an unprecedented occasion to integrate economically. But in the space between cultural assimilation and social segregation, the absence of necessary, sustained structural integration was all the more evident. Drawing upon the strategies of acculturation proposed by J.W. Berry, the study of the Afghan diaspora reveals the intersection of integration and separation in terms of how Afghan-American communities remain distinct and separate either by their own choosing or through top-down policies and national institutions (2008). Such processes necessitate adaptation by the both the diaspora and the host society. As a theoretical construct, integration then 'requires non-dominant groups to adopt the basic values of the larger society, while at the same time the dominant group must be prepared to adapt national institutions (e.g., education, health, labor) to better meet the needs of all groups now living together in the plural society (Berry 2008: 705-706). Under the GWoT, new government departments, policies and programs were created to engage the diaspora as a resource in implementing the U.S. government's

interests in Afghanistan. This meant that Afghan-Americans acted as cultural advisors at a time when the diaspora was regenerating a sense of Afghan cultural heritage. The process ironically reinforced the boundaries between the Afghan community and American society, often by emphasizing cultural differences to help U.S. military personnel orient themselves in a new operational environment. The commodification of the demand for expertise, broadly spanning culture, history, and political economy, facilitated the integration of the diaspora as suppliers. This sort of integration, however, reified – and at times invented - class, gender, ethnic and, at times, sectarian divisions within the diaspora community.

For Afghan-Americans who have lived and worked in America for upwards of 25-30 years, many voiced frustration with the lack of opportunities to engage with the U.S. government and society in a way that allows them to 'feel like [they are] doing something for America and for Afghanistan,' as one of the participants stated about her aspirations to work on policy issues within the government. While Afghans are an immigrant population in America, the choice between assimilation and return is not a *fait accompli*. Oeppen argues that '[i]mproved global transport and communication links now allow migrants to travel across geographic space both literally and figuratively,' which facilitates their ability to be a part of the homeland and the host society simultaneously. Ironically, while the discourse and policies of counter-terrorism strategies increasingly divided American communities, the ability to return actually strengthened the sense of citizenship and belonging in America. The forms of economic opportunity and integration afforded through contracting opportunities with military and private sector organizations initiated 'reverse remittances,' which, according to Oeppen,

> are evidence of the multi-directionality of transnational flows. Indeed, although studies of migrant professionals' transnational activities often focus on the impact of the return of

> human capital on the country of origin, this study indicates a number of ways in which Afghans' return activities have had an impact on their integration in the Bay Area. For example, the transnational flow of resources from Afghanistan to the Bay Area can provide resources for investment or for a child's future. [...] In these ways, return to Afghanistan, for this particular group of Afghan professionals is as much about adapting and integrating into their diaspora life as about Afghanistan' (2012: 14).

The increased integration transforms the diaspora into 'home' because, vis-à-vis Afghanistan, it provides security and stability. Similar scholarship on migrants in The Netherlands suggests that a connection between transnationalism and integration. For migrants in the Netherlands, transnational identity, affiliations and activities did not necessarily preclude integration (Snel et al. 2006). In fact, the experience of migrants in The Netherlands spoke to the contrary, demonstrating that among 'migrant groups that also have the weakest labour market positions – […] strong identifications with the country of origin go hand in hand with poor structural and cultural integration' (Snel et al. 2006: 282). Thus, strong labor market positions in the host society could correspond to a greater degree of adaptation, as well as belonging and citizenship in the host country. In the case of the Afghan-Americans, Oeppen recognizes that America, as a 'home,' offers them economic mobility but 'not necessarily career satisfaction for those who previously held high status positions in Afghanistan' (2012: 15). Although she notes it as a tangential comment, the point reinforces the frustrations expressed by Afghan-Americans. Hanifi picks up the argument in his study of material remittances by critiquing the advent of organizations and lucrative contracts that 'are arguably among the largest employers of educated and skilled diaspora Afghans (both directly and through contractors) […] A recent job advertisement indicates that bilingual Afghan-Americans can make $146,000 per year translating […] while Afghan-Americans with advanced technical degrees (e.g., engineering, computer

programming) often enter NGO and Afghan government service at local wage rates and in many cases outside their area of expertise' (Hanifi 2006: 114). The disparity signals two important considerations. The first is a lack of sustainable opportunities available to Afghan-Americans to fully realize their potential in American society. The translation, advisory, and role-playing jobs are contractual and even at time of writing this chapter, the demand for such services has dramatically declined following the demise of COIN, and the security transition from NATO Coalition Forces to the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces in 2014. Afghan-Americans, who had, for example, given up administrative jobs in banks and hotels to work as translators, found themselves unemployed upon return. They were unable to be absorbed into full-time home-office based positions at various government agencies and defense contracting firms involved in security and post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan. Moreover, the lack of opportunities reinforces the social cleavages and perceptions of difference among the diaspora hubs. Oeppen astutely captures the effects of locations as 'environments of actions' (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). She argues that 'Afghans in California feel that too often their views are ignored in favor of those of Afghans living closer to Washington D.C.' (Oeppen 2013: 149). Others have noted similar observations in European contexts and shown the effects of the state apparatus as both an enabling and constraining force on integration for Afghan immigrants (Kuschminder 2013). This is particularly the case where opportunities for economic and sociopolitical integration are concerned, as many of the Afghans in the Bay Area feel that their distance from the American capital inhibits their ability to emerge from their local milieu, engage with state institutions, and contribute meaningfully to the political dialogues on Afghanistan.

The second consideration concerns the implied value of such contributions. Among the Afghan-Americans sought out to broker culture and language for important stabilization and peace-building efforts in Afghanistan, few (especially from the first generation) have been able to integrate further into the government, development, and security industries. For the second cohort and later generations, the professional opportunities to integrate are comparatively greater than for the initial cohort of the first generation. However, young Afghans such as Naween, observe that 'the think tanks in D.C. are full of old white guys working on policy for Afghanistan. Even if you got your foot in, there's a like glass ceiling or something that you can't get above.' As a form of integration, the diaspora's contributions to the labor market in America can be far more extensive than sporadic contracting opportunities. For example,

> beyond mere language skills, some of these diaspora Afghans have advanced training and expertise that might be more usefully applied to development and reconstruction projects. […] [A]n Afghan with a PhD from Michigan State University in Wildlife Management […] now translates for the National Security Agency. This pattern of skill devaluation and language redeployment seems at odds with the international community's goals for the country' (Hanifi 2006: 114).

The 'skill devaluation' is an important critique with far-reaching implications about belonging. During the course of fieldwork, I met many first-generation Afghans (either as participants or their family and associates), who had experience and post-graduate education in key areas of post-conflict reconstruction, such as financial management, medicine, or agriculture. Among them, the profound frustration about their perceived utility (or lack thereof) was often raised[11]. On one hand, the opportunities offered through

[11] Many participants, either during or after the interviews, contacted me about potential opportunities to serve in Afghanistan. No one expressed an interest in returning permanently, but they were eager to contribute their skills and knowledge to American organizations (government and non-governmental) working in Afghanistan.

counterinsurgency programs broke new ground in incorporating Afghan-Americans. On the other hand, however, it cast them in roles that not only essentialized Afghanistan, but also the Afghan-American contractors and the diaspora as well. Just as quickly as they were integrated, Afghan-American contractors have been expelled from the niche labor market in the years after COIN's tactical advantage waned. When the market demand for Afghan expertise shrank, former contractors did not experience opportunities to re-emerge in ways that could facilitate peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. In Laili's words, she wanted 'to feel of use to America. [She] came back to America and went back to the same routine of applying for a hundred jobs at the State Department,' but to no avail. She told me, 'we've assimilated. America is my home. But now what? Am I always more Afghan than American here?' The answer proved elusive. She further noted that she had applied to many humanitarian and development positions commensurate with her education and experience, but 'can't handle the rejection any longer.' The sense of rejection is a valid point of contention and one shared by other Afghan-Americans. Framed another way, the dependency of Afghan-American contractors on such employment shows the impact of the 'contact zone' within the encounter with the military-industrial complex (Pratt 1992) – a space that signifies 'where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination' (Pratt 1992: 4). In interviews, Afghan-Americans did not view their participation on the contracts as indicative of asymmetrical power relations. Instead, they perceived their roles as active agents that reconstituted the communities and cultures in their social environment. The contact zone was also a space of interaction that had not been previously broached, and, as explained in previous sections, Afghan-Americans took the opportunity to re-establish

their sense of self (and community) in America. Their awareness or sense of subordination, however, heightened as the U.S government's interest in their voices began to decline. Thus, the economic integration of Afghan-American contractors as insiders in the U.S. government's most exigent international effort was promising at inception. But the short-lived endeavor effectively replaced a cordon around the community, leaving Afghan-Americans somewhere on the margins of their citizenship.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the encounter with the U.S. military-industrial complex constituted the category of Afghan-Americans that became representative of both the diaspora and Afghanistan. In this chapter, I have described the diasporan social groups to show that the structure of the community, particularly its divisions, fostered the emergence of the subset of Afghan-Americans who wanted redefine their integration in the diaspora as well as in American society. While much of the discourse on Afghans focuses on ethnic and tribal differences, I have argued here that migration trajectories, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and class-consciousness underlie the fragmented nature of the diaspora community and its influence on the body of knowledge produced about Afghanistan. As a result, the characteristic divisiveness actually made it possible for Afghan-Americans to establish a momentary, tenuous cohesiveness to support the U.S. military's COIN campaign. I use the case of the Afghan-American contractors to underline Brubaker's critique of groupism. The category of contractors did not rise out of the diaspora because of a shared ethnic identity. Class and status distinctions, for example, subsumed ethnic, tribal or sectarian differences. Thus, their emergence was a product of groupness – a solidarity that happened through the encounter with the U.S. military (Brubaker 2012). While Afghan-

Americans were creating a sense of Afghan ethnic identity to educate the U.S. military, within their own 'spheres of engagement,' the groupness attested to a dynamic process of identification that fluctuated against the backdrop of the GWoT and the opportunities for integration in America (Cohen and Van Hear 2015: Van Hear 2015). To investigate the characterization of the diaspora's groupness, I examine the effect of the post-Soviet migration on the lives of Afghan-Americans. As a 'diasporic generation,' Afghan-American households attempt to reconstruct a semblance of the social structures and relationships with which they identified in Afghanistan. Through the interviews and observations, I found that many Afghan-Americans still view the diaspora community not as a place of unity, but as a place to reify former social dynamics and gain or maintain status lost during migration. For Afghan-Americans, who were born and/or raised in America, the narratives and social memories of their families continue to shape their perspectives of *Afghaniyat.* Religion and gender are two areas in which such identifications are contested. For example, some Afghan-Americans enacted a more pronounced Islamic identity in the wake of 9/11, but relinquished such claims as opportunities for defense contracting became more widely available. The flexibility of identification created subjective assertions about Afghanistan and Islam that have been co-opted and propagated as 'expertise' by the military-industrial complex. Ultimately, the reliance on such biases secured the contractors' socio-economic mobility in the diaspora and America, and in turn, generated a revised body of knowledge about Afghanistan, which shall be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 *Corpus*: The social memory and imaginings of Afghan-Americans

In early October 2013, Afghan communities around the world convened to commemorate the death of 5,000 men more than 35 years ago. Mobilized through social media, the events occurred in the wake of an investigation by the Dutch government that published a list containing the names of Afghans who had been tortured and killed by the Soviet-backed communist regime in Afghanistan. For the families affected by the tragedy then uprooted and scattered around the world, the list confirmed assumptions about the fate of those who had disappeared. In Northern Virginia, Facebook had been the platform upon which Aryana, a 30-year-old Afghan-American attorney, had organized the *khatemé Quran sharif* – a funerary prayer ceremony held to honor the dead (or the 'martyrs,' as she had specifically noted in her announcement) at the banquet hall of the Afghan Restaurant in Alexandria. Just south of Washington D.C., the hall, which was normally used for weddings, had been transformed into a somber setting honoring those whose absence was marked by the presence of faded portraits. Families gathered with others they knew or at least recognized in their collective effort to assuage the damage of war and remember its victims – figments rooted in the social imaginary of Afghanistan.

The sun did not reach inside the restaurant. A sallow light suspended limply from the exhausted bulbs of six chandeliers, over the bowed heads, round tables and a stage studded with photographs and memorabilia from Afghanistan. The stage area hosted a table draped with an Afghan flag atop which stood a haunting display of black and white and sepia photographs of men, mostly young, who had died or gone missing under the Communist regime. Among them was Aryana's grandfather. He had been imprisoned and killed by the regime before her birth. Six hours later, a bride and groom would mount the

same stage and seat themselves on a loveseat with customary reluctance in front of their guests, a fact not lost on the restaurant owner who paced back and forth, asking Aryana for confirmation that the event would be finished in time for his staff to redecorate[12]. She assured him for the second time before pointing out to a group of women, among them her mother, that the owner had the audacity to rush her after he had charged a room rental fee of $500 for two hours despite the reason for the event – a cost she paid out of her own pocket. Unlike most of the other attendants, her mother was not reading from the Quran. She acknowledged her daughter's frustration and continued to talk in hushed tones with her friends at the table, audible over the hum of prayers and muffled weeping.

'She's a young girl, but so proactive. She's never even been to Afghanistan,' Aryana's mother told me of her daughter's efforts to organize the event. 'You know, she stayed up all night to cook *halwa* and package it into 200 packets for the *nazr*.' The other women commended the effort, adding that many young Afghans were 'stepping up' to represent their Afghan heritage. Aryana's mother mentioned that her son was, in fact, the opposite of his sister. He had little interest in Afghan culture and had married a 'foreigner.' Her Caucasian American daughter-in-law had no knowledge of these things, which she conveyed in a sweep of her arms across the room – a gesture that caught Aryana's attention and she moved quickly to chastise her mother for not minding the customary practice of a *khatem*; to read prayers from the Quran to oneself or to observe in silence. Her mother rolled her eyes and apologized before resuming a line of gossip about the marriageability of certain young Afghans. A woman, who had remained silent other than to ask me what an anthropologist was, suddenly inquired if I was married, a question that concentrated the

[12] Wedding customs among Afghans dictate that the bride and groom temper any visible signs of excitement lest they risk being perceived as immodest by weddings guests.

attention of the women on me and generated an excited cue of questioning about my family legacy. Aryana admonished her mother yet again for the personal interrogation, and her mother, sighing with resignation, finally read a few lines from the Quran before fanning herself with the printout of the list of names.

The start of the event was delayed. Approximately 60 people filled in around the tables, but the anticipation of additional guests was cause enough to wait. Aryana and I arranged the 200 *halwa* packets on a table for the *nazr*, a ritual of goodwill in which the family of the deceased prepares food for the guests. The confection was stuffed in *naan* and wrapped in foil, ready for guests to take upon their departure. Taking advantage of the late start time, I snuck towards the backdoor to move my car and avoid a parking ticket. Aryana stopped me, urging my hasty return for the ceremony: 'Make sure you stay. If you stay, you'll see them cry. You'll see how emotional people will get.' In a moment, her words transformed the space. I stood at the threshold of what was now all a stage upon which a tremendous presentation of memory and history would be performed, and she would direct the performance. History would be invoked and then made, a promise held in the confidence that the audience, whether they knew one another or not, would issue a palpably emotional response based on the collective memory, imagination, and suffering related to the Soviet regime. They may have been Afghan-Americans, but their Afghan-ness was about to be tested and judged by how deeply affected they would become through a series of narratives recalling a time that some people in the room had only experienced through photographs and stories. I risked the parking ticket. At long last, Aryana took her place at the podium and the audience shuffled to a quiet. The memorial service marked a time of remembrance, of common tribulations and pain. It was a gathering of shared

memories and a past that left a gaping void in the lives of many people. It was fitting, therefore, that the opening was about closure.

'Today we remember those that perished because of the murderous, torturous regime of the Khalqis and Parchamis,' Aryana delivered the speech in English, excusing her poor grasp of Dari, but her message was clear. Men and women sobbed audibly. If it closed a chapter, it also pried open a wound that 35 years of time and thousands of miles had not yet managed to suture. They grieved with violent relief; backs arched, chests heaving. Aryana, on the other hand, had aptly appropriated the pain of the generations before her and spoke of an imagined homeland that resonated with the audience:

> We are gathered for the innocent lives that were lost in Afghanistan. Today is about closure, about coming together to mourn the lives of our countrymen and women. But it's not just about closure. It's about a new beginning. We often speak about Afghanistan and so many of us want to make a difference there, and that is beautiful. What is even more beautiful is that most of us who want to contribute to the rebuilding process were born here in America. The only Afghanistan we all know is through newspaper clippings and stories our parents have told us […] When I was an undergrad at American University, it would break my heart to hear other students say they were going home for the summer. Their back home was a safe place […]. Their 'back home' was all the beautiful things I grew up hearing about Afghanistan. What is home in the diaspora? What is it? Now home is here and there. But it's really more here. We must work to build our communities here. I pray that our Afghan-American communities can rely on one another and motivate our youth. We all complain about the lack of unification or *betefaqui* [uncooperativeness] and yet we're getting worse. Afghanistan will never be stable unless we can first bring changes in our own small communities here. We have to pledge our efforts to remove hatred and unnecessary competition. We should be happy for one another. A strong community of Afghan-American brothers and sisters can work together for the rebuilding of a nation we call home, a nation we all love.

Aryana's speech recognized several critical aspects of diaspora formation and engagement. Firstly, she noted the problematized notion of 'home' in which the diaspora community had become the closest representation of Afghanistan. She identified that transnational engagement in the perceived homeland required a social readjustment within the private

and public spheres of the diaspora. Greater unification by rebuilding social networks among Afghan-Americans would thus allow a better effort in rebuilding Afghanistan. Curiously her sentiments would be both contested and reinforced by other representatives of the Afghan-American community, revealing the complex nature of membership forged by migration. Another woman, whose message was peppered in English, urged a more discriminating approach to the sense of diasporic community as she declared:

> I hope that given the significance of this service and the respect we owe to the *shaheedan* [martyrs], that no one from the Khalq and Parcham factions are sitting amongst us because this is not their place. If, *if*, there are those who are Khalqis and Parchamis, then please I ask them to leave because they have violated the honor of the martyrs.

She asterisked Aryana's plea for diasporic unity with a qualifier – that only a specific stratum of Afghans, namely those who rejected and fled the Soviet regime, would be welcome in the community. The remainder of the diaspora fell under some shade of culpability underscored by political or tangential affiliations with political parties. It thus rendered suspect the decisions of households *not* to migrate in protest of Afghanistan's Sovietization – and, as it became inextricably implied, its anti-Islamic secularization. The point was further driven by Imam Sahib, a charismatic 30-something, who was a fixture in the diaspora as the head of a local Islamic community center. Born and raised in Afghanistan, he had witnessed, as a young boy, some of the atrocities after 1978; actions he attributed to 'the godless of one country [giving] the country to the godless Soviets.' He reminded members of the diaspora that 'the community should be fighting godlessness because if it was not for those people fighting the Soviets and their godless puppets, we would not have been able to immigrate here [to America or out of Afghanistan].' Turning his attention to the previous speaker, he conveyed not only his gratitude, but also his

agreement: 'Those who were involved [with the Communist parties] are still in our communities in the West, and we should take every effort to bring out their names and bring them out in the open […] These people should be outcast [sic] from our communities.' The legacy and impact of the Soviet invasion is a defining feature of Afghan diasporic narratives that created the body of knowledge about Afghanistan (Barth 2002). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the production of specific assertions that comprise such knowledge. I trace diasporic perspectives that have emanated from the political history of Afghan migration, the variances in the traditions of Islam, and the perpetuation of Orientalist perspectives on Afghanistan as an imagined community. I focus on the production of master narratives – both as a set of discursive claims about Afghanistan and a representation of knowledge – that emerged through the encounter with the U.S. military, and constitute what Afghanistan and Afghan-ness mean today.

The backdrop to Afghan migration: Afghanistan's convoluted politics

The Soviet invasion's effect has become the primary means of defining social boundaries across which households will engage with other households in the Afghan diaspora, and it has certainly become a formative element in revising the notions about Afghanistan, as an 'imagined community,' to the consumers of such knowledge. For the cohort of Afghan-Americans who did not experience the invasion, family memories anchor historical reconstructions upon which their sentiments and interactions with one another are based. Their agency is similarly situated in the narratives of the Soviet resistance. Nile Green, who has written on the Afghan communities in India, observes that '[i]t was in the diaspora that many features of the Afghans' sense of their historical identity was crystallized, in terms of a sense of the defining limits between self and the world that was

stamped on the present through a heavy imprint of the past' (Green 2008: 172). Thus as Afghan-Americans defined and maintained the boundaries of their identities, the past – both temporal and spatial – became the arena in which their imagined identities converged and through which knowledge was produced. In the proceeding section, I discuss the key historical framework that shaped the evolution and reproduction of distinct narratives and practices that Barth describes as 'traditions of knowledge.'

1919-1933: Afghanistan has a long history of entanglement with foreign occupation. While the Great Game paved the way for Afghanistan's independence, it served as a prescient reminder of ill-fated attempts to occupy the country. In the 19th century, Afghanistan sat in the line of fire between Russia and British India. Britain, aware of Russia's desire to access warm-water ports, feared its southward advance into British territory in India. Similarly, Russia feared that Britain's occupation of Afghanistan would pose a significant threat to its expansion. Afghanistan thus became the stage for proxy wars between the two powers as they vied to instate an Afghan leader sympathetic to their own interests. After the second Anglo-Afghan War, Afghanistan and Britain signed the Treaty of Gandamak, which established a ceasefire and ceded territory in southern Afghanistan to the British crown. It established the basis for the contentious Durand Line, the 2,640-km border between Afghanistan and British India (now Pakistan). Drawn by Sir Arthur Mortimer Durand in 1893, the line carved through tribal lands but provided the strategic depth Britain needed in Afghan territory to protect its colonial interests. Afghan rulers decried the legitimacy of the line and demanded that the lands be restored to Afghanistan. The turning point came in 1919, when Amir Amanullah Khan succeeded his father to the throne and demanded the renegotiation of the Durand line and the withdrawal of British

troops from Afghanistan. The refusal instigated the third and final Anglo-Afghan War. Britain, reeling from World War I, finally granted Afghanistan its independence on August 19, 1919. However, Amanullah Khan's success was short-lived. His progressive socio-economic reforms incurred the wrath of conservative critics. He abdicated the throne in 1929, going into exile in Italy and Switzerland. His cousin, Nadir Shah, assumed authority until 1933. Like many of Afghanistan's rulers, he was assassinated, leaving the throne to Afghanistan's last monarch.

1933 – 1973: Zahir Shah's ascension to the throne in 1933 marked the start of the 'Golden Years,' a formative period of relative stability and prosperity. During this period, amicable relations between Afghanistan and foreign countries ushered in development assistance as well as educational opportunities abroad for promising Afghan students. In 1953, Afghanistan developed close ties with Russia when General Daoud Khan, the President's cousin and Afghanistan's prime minister, requested military and economic support to sustain the momentum of the country's progress. By the mid 1960s, Russia's influence was perceptible in the emergence of communist groups in Afghanistan. Zahir Shah recognized the groups and thus revised the constitution to allow the formation of political parties. Out of the shadows emerged the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (P.D.P.A.), a Marxist organization supported by Khan. In an unexpected blow, Khan mobilized a military coup and forced Zahir Shah into exile. The legacy of this period is the rift between republicans and royalists, which continues to inform diasporic relations.

1973 – 1978: A leftist, Khan abolished the monarchy and declared Afghanistan a republic, sending shockwaves to the West. He was equally provocative among his P.D.P.A. cohort. Upon assuming power, he quickly distanced himself from the more overtly

Communist elements of the P.D.P.A.. The organization had split into two factions. The Parcham, meaning 'banner,' advocated gradual social reform. On the other hand, the Khalq – or 'the people' – supported swift, radical changes in line with communist ideology. Khan's attempt to remain politically independent instigated resentment within the P.D.P.A., particularly as he dispatched many of its key members out of the country on diplomatic assignments. The P.D.P.A.'s perception of Khan's waning loyalty stoked fears that he would delegitimize the political party. Regionally, the recently-established country of Pakistan also worried about reprisal based on Khan's tough stance over the Durand Line. The Soviet Union was wary of its alliance with Khan's government, particularly as Khan had not made any excuses for being open to U.S. government assistance to Afghanistan. Although Khan remained friendly with the Soviets, he issued a staunch warning against then-President Leonid Brezhnev's request for Afghanistan to reconsider its diplomatic relationship with the United States, stating '[We] will never allow you to dictate to us how to run our country and whom to employ in Afghanistan. How and where we employ the foreign experts will remain the exclusive prerogative of the Afghan state. Afghanistan shall remain poor, if necessary, but free in its acts and decisions' (quoted in Fitzgerald and Gould 2009: 135). The Soviets, sensing the distance, lent their support through their main state security agency, the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti – more commonly known as the K.G.B. – to fortify and unify the disparate factions of the P.D.P.A.. It would not be long before the newly-strengthened P.D.P.A. launched the Saur Revolution[13] in April 28, 1978, killing Khan and his family and ushering in a coalition government among the P.D.P.A.'s top leaders, Muhammad Taraki, Hafizullah Amin, and Babrak Karmal. For Afghans, the writing was on

[13] Saur in Dari means April. Thus, Saur Revolution refers to the timing of the revolution.

the wall – many migrated to India, Europe, and America in anticipation of further conflict.

1979 – 1989: With the shadow of the Cold War still looming, the U.S. government grew increasingly alarmed at Afghanistan's relationship with the Soviet Union. The fragile coalition government unraveled under paranoia and suspicion that Taraki and Amin were both betraying each other. The U.S. government's involvement further complicated matters. On February 14, 1979, Adolf Dubs, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, was killed at the Kabul Hotel, escalating tensions and concerns that the Soviets had ordered a hit facilitated by the Afghan government. In response, the U.S. government withdrew its economic assistance and began supporting the Mujahideen, an emergent group of rebel fighters resisting Soviet influence. Tensions between Taraki and Amin heightened resulting in the death of Taraki by Amin's supporters. With Amin in power, the Afghan government began re-engaging Pakistan, Russia, and the U.S. in foreign policy dialogues, sending mixed signals to the countries. Amin also secured the official endorsement of the religious council – a declaration that appeased critics who reproached the P.D.P.A. for its secularism. The upheavals of 1979 culminated in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 24th and the assassination of Amin three days later. Afghans, who immigrated to other nations, began to politically mobilize against the Soviet occupation and its Afghan sympathizers, some returning temporarily to assist the Mujahideen.

The U.S. government, in conjunction with Pakistan, China, and Saudi Arabia, acknowledged that Islamic fundamentalism could be the most effective antidote to secular communism. In the early-mid 1980s, the countries funded and armed the Mujahideen, as an Islamic resistance movement in Afghanistan, to fight the Russian army. Steve Coll captures the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency's (C.I.A.) role as part of 'mistrustful and at

times toxic alliances with the intelligence services of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan [which] stoked the rise of a radical Islam in Afghanistan that exuded violent global ambitions' (2005: 16). The C.I.A. created the Mujahideen, a group of indigenous Afghan rebels supplemented with 'Afghan-Arabs' – fighters from across the Islamic world who arrived in Afghanistan to join the resistance movement against the Soviets. Not only did the rising Islamism offer an opportunity for the U.S. government to reinforce the backlash against Russia and ensure that Afghanistan would not become another Soviet bloc nation, but it also provided the U.S. government an opportunity to secure America's power against Russia for a long time. Zbigniew Brzezinski, U.S. President Jimmy Carter's national security advisor, created a winning strategy for America – one that Tamim Ansary characterizes as 'a quagmire for Russia, draining it of blood and treasure in the same way that Vietnam had sapped the United States' (2014: 212). Brzezinski's prophecy proved correct and the tacit U.S. strategy it implied was relatively successful (although the U.S. government's post-2001 involvement in Afghanistan would bear an uncanny resemblance to the Soviet morass). Upon Amin's death at the hands of the K.G.B., the once-leader of the Parcham faction Babrak Karmal assumed power as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Karmal attempted to soften the image of the P.D.P.A. to the public, but the country was tottering on the edge of social and economic collapse after years of upheaval and conflict, and support for Karmal's reforms rapidly waned. Mikael Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, promptly pulled his support for Karmal and supported Najibullah Ahmadzai's rise in 1986, relying on him to stabilize Afghanistan enough to warrant less investment of Russia's resources and allow the Soviet Army's gradual withdrawal. In the period of *glasnost* and

perestroika in the 1980s, the Soviet Union had begun to restructure its own socio-political economy, and Afghanistan served as a major impediment to efforts to end the Cold War and move Russia beyond it. Thus Gorbachev's explicit direction to his Afghan counterpart was to stop promoting communism and reunite Afghanistan (Ansary 2014: 216). But President Najibullah had inherited a profoundly broken country. As the Soviet tanks filed out of Afghanistan in 1989, Afghans celebrated the end of a tumultuous decade – but this proved a premature celebration as President Najibullah's reconciliation efforts were met with resistance and opposition from the leadership of the Mujahideen.

1990 – 2001: In the wake of the Soviet invasion, the U.S. government's support of Islamic fundamentalism (disastrous in retrospect) had the effect of polarizing the country between Communists and Muslims – labels that traced the lives of those who migrated from Afghanistan during that time, and informed their positions on Afghanistan's political history. The U.S. government's support also paved the way for the formation of theocracies that would ironically undo the very democratic principles that their supporters had hoped would succeed in Afghanistan, and even more ironically had existed prior to and during the Soviet regime. The polarization may not have been based on overt religious ideologies or Islamic adherence, but rather in the way the Soviet forces attempted to implement their vision for Afghanistan. What the Soviets failed to do and what the U.S. government later tried to achieve through counterinsurgency operations and the mobilization of diasporic intermediaries was convincing or winning over the local populations. Ansary recounts that Soviet forces moved into villages in tanks and attempted a heavy-handed approach to standardized reform through education and land redistribution. In rural, conservative areas with cultural prohibitions on women's education, Soviet forces would select females

from households to be enrolled in school. They also rattled landowners by taking ownership of private lands and redistributing it among communities. He notes that 'Afghans use a pithy phrase to sum up why men fight wars: *zar, zan, u zameen* or 'gold, women, and land.' That's exactly what these foreigners [the Soviet forces] seemed to be after, at least to the villagers they were "educating"' (Ansary 2014: 196). In a later section, I will revisit these three terms as a part of the corpus of knowledge that was incorporated in 'hearts and minds' operations. Where the Soviets were brutish and imposing, the U.S. counterinsurgency effort employed Afghan-American contractors to figure out how to develop military personnel into aid workers who could source cultural intelligence from local population engagements that could give the U.S. government an upper hand in enforcing democracy and a free-market economy in Afghanistan. The Afghan public's aversion to the Soviet forces was vulnerable to manipulation. The Mujahideen stood to win hearts and minds if they could convince Afghans that the anti-Islamic Soviet Army would eradicate their system of beliefs and values. It was a hard narrative to challenge by President Najibullah who, as Ansary writes,

> [...] tried everything he could. He changed the name of KhAD to WAD, but everyone knew it was the same dreaded secret police. He renamed the PDPA the "Fatherland Party", but no one started singing patriotic anthems. He had a new constitution written declaring Afghanistan an Islamic republic and guaranteeing the freedom of all citizens, but no one believed him. He started building mosques and religious schools. He called for national reconciliation [...] The Mujahideen cleaned their guns and moved closer to the city" (2014: 216-217).

By 1991, Afghanistan had degenerated into a state of civil war. The C.I.A. had funneled money and weapons to empower the Mujahideen and sitting on a stockpile of resources was little incentive for them to reconcile with the central government. The U.S. government had shaped more than just a resistance to the Soviet regime and the spread of communism.

It financially and socially empowered those who embraced the idea of Jihad against the Soviet forces – and those who would later constitute key leaders in Afghanistan's government – making heroes and politicians out of holy warriors (Coll 2005). It also paved the way for the Taliban regime from 1994 – 2001. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the resistance metastasized into political and security challenges for Afghanistan, as enemies multiplied and old hostilities were resurrected. Moreover, the Mujahideen shape-shifted from ordinary citizens to an insurgent force. As Coll fittingly assessed, '[t]he Soviets could never quite grasp and hold their enemy. It remained that way in Afghanistan long after they had gone. From its first days before the Soviet invasion until its last hours in the late summer of 2001, this was a struggle among ghosts' (Coll 2005: 17). The Russians were fighting against the spectre of the C.I.A.'s clandestine operations and the Mujahideen, who could materialize as fighters and disappear among civilians. Outside of Afghanistan, the emergent diaspora battled its own demons – creating a community that was unified outwardly, while its memories, narratives, and links to the past maintained almost impenetrable boundaries internally.

The following table summarizes periods of emigration from Afghanistan, to include its causes and effects in creating diasporic communities:

Table 1: A timeline of Afghan migration and the diaspora

Time period	**Cause of migration**	**Effect of migration**
1930s - 1970s	Sporadic educational opportunities	Initial waves of migration and return migration commenced as Afghans studied overseas on bursaries mandating civil service in the government. Some students remained in the host country.
Early 1970s	Economic stagnation	Economic migration to border countries and the Persian Gulf. Afghans with social and economic capital migrated to Europe and America.

1973 - 1989	A coup by the Communist Party abolished the monarchy. Internal power struggles paved the way for the Soviet invasion. A fierce battle ensued between the Russian Army and Mujahideen rebel fighters.	Mass migration out of Afghanistan led to the rapid formation of diasporas across the world. In exile, some Afghans mobilized to provide political and financial support to Mujahideen groups. A "brain drain" depleted the Afghan economy and civil society of the human resources they needed to function.
1989 - 1994	After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the Soviet-backed regime under Najibullah Ahmadzai collapsed. Civil war broke out between once-allied Mujahideen forces.	The period between the Soviet invasion and the civil war created more than six million Afghan refugees (in addition to those internally displaced). Most Afghans sought asylum in Pakistan, Iran, and India, often as transit points to destinations in Europe, America, and Australia. Approximately 900,000 Afghans repatriated when the interim Islamic Republic was formed in 1992 (Ruiz 2002: 9).
1994 - 2001	The Taliban rose to power and established a theocratic state by 1996.	Many Afghans fled to Pakistan and Iran. Most of Afghanistan's Hazara populations left for Iran due to rampant persecution and sectarian violence by the Taliban. More than three million Afghans remained refugees, with 700,000 internally displaced (Ruiz 2002: 8).
2001	Under Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. and Coalition Forces ousted the Taliban and reinstated the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.	The promise of governance and stability ushered 5.8 million Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan. But escalating violence from terrorist organizations and insurgencies continue to fuel migration, while transnational economic opportunities enable short-term return migration from the global diaspora.

Table is based upon input from Sadat 2008: 334.

Producing resistance: Reconstructing Jihad and the Mujahideen in the body of knowledge

As the conflict deepened and Afghans moved out of Afghanistan and settled overseas, anger towards the Soviets among the diaspora sometimes materialized into praise for the holy war – Jihad – and for the Mujahideen, its warriors. Sentiments such as those conveyed by the speaker in the preceding vignette were often commonplace in the diaspora – the Soviets and the Soviet-backed regime were viewed as worse than the Taliban. During

fieldwork and personal experiences growing up within the diaspora, many Afghans (although all male) recounted that they had either waged Jihad in Afghanistan prior to emigrating or returned to do so. Some Afghan households that settled in America, primarily in the Northern Virginia area, had worked closely with the U.S. government in dismantling the Soviet-backed regime. Such households transitioned to America with greater ease and economic privileges, creating an upper echelon of diasporic households who had integrated into the American system long before they had set foot in America. Unlike the ragtag army of Mujahids in Afghanistan who exchanged bullets, the exiled Mujahideen in the diaspora offered support and justification for the dismemberment of the Soviet empire. This was also the view of many non-Afghans, who lionized the Afghan Muhajids, like the North Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, for their service in the Jihad. However, as is now known in hindsight, fanning the flames of the Jihad and giving rise to the Mujahideen may have fixed one problem (eviscerating the Soviets), but it ushered in a period of ethnic and religious violence at unprecedented levels in Afghanistan. Marsden's account of Afghanistan presents the challenges that wrought themselves in people's memories of the country as they left en masse for Pakistan, Iran, Europe, America and Australasia (2001). Within the communities that formed, the rhetoric of ethnic differences, of oppression and injustice, formed the nucleus of the impressions that were passed on within households. As a result, the second cohort of the first generation whose formative years were spent as immigrants seem to have internalized and adopted these notions and perpetuate them as they re-engage with Afghanistan through various contracting opportunities in international development and defense. U.S. government policies and programs in Afghanistan have been charted from politically- and personally-nuanced interpretations of the culture and

religion. Ironically, Afghanistan's secular past seems eclipsed by the historiography of recent conflicts that have emphasized the role of radical Islam. The reality of the forces that shape the country lie somewhere in between and, as Marsden concludes,

> the West therefore needs to think carefully about how it engages with the Islamic world […] it needs to play its part in extracting Afghanistan from a crisis that has become overwhelming and which has been of its making. It is likely that the military action taken by the USA and its allies will have made it very much more difficult to achieve a political solution to the Afghan conflict, if only because it will have further polarized positions and brought on board many more external actors […] (2001: 33).

This perspective is valid as it illustrates the role that the diaspora has – and will likely have – on shaping the outcomes in Afghanistan through encounters with the state: the impact of the diaspora as an external actor can be seen as potentially more polarizing than constructive. Moreover, it is constitutive of a definitive representation of Afghanistan. The ideas perpetuated within the households create sharp cleavages in identity and political persuasion in the known community and the wider imagined community, and inform the premise and scope of transnational engagement in Afghanistan. Participating in the Jihad against the Soviet Army, whether directly or tangentially, has become one way some Afghan-American contractors establish the criteria of validity in the knowledge produced about Afghanistan. In keeping with Barth's ideas, the social and physical environments to which Afghans were exposed during the Soviet occupation and their subsequent emigration has generated different narratives based on personal biases. The *corpus* generated by Afghan-American contractors, therefore, is a reflection of the disparities in social relations and power within the diaspora community. The anti-Soviet element that informs the knowledge on Afghanistan's political history in particular resonates with America's post-Cold War posture towards Russia. The resonance with the U.S.

government's outlook allowed Afghan-American subjectivities to be incorporated and validated as conclusive knowledge about Afghanistan. Whereas bringing the diaspora into the fold could be a positive step towards a political solution, in the case of Afghan-Americans it has also re-introduced – if not outright underscored – the ideologies and practices that have evolved along a more radical trajectory than Afghan norms. The polarizing character of such concepts becomes clearer when looking at the specific religious and socio-cultural narratives that some members of the diaspora use while working with the U.S. government and military.

Insha'allah: Religious representation and the return to Islam in the diaspora

Religion has become one of the most prominent mechanisms for diasporic engagement across the three 'spheres of engagement' (Van Hear 2014; Van Hear and Cohen 2015). Imam Sahib's condemnation of secular Afghans as 'Godless people' in juxtaposition to the Mujahideen as the holy defenders was no coincidence. To be Afghan and Muslim are often discussed as part and parcel of both identities, a symbiotic relationship in which one cannot exist without the other. An individual's actions are therefore measured against his or her compliance within the framework of being a 'good Afghan,' which automatically lends itself as a commentary on the person's level of religious observation. To be compliant, however, requires a level of understanding and knowledge – as such, the rise in Islamic centers for Afghan-Americans was a way of establishing new traditions of Islamic knowledge and relating them to Afghan diasporic identity. Barth's view of Bakhtaman religious and cosmological traditions of knowledge is useful in examining how and why Islamic knowledge became such a central feature of diasporic identity after 2001. Islamic centers, like Bakhtaman traditions, offered 'content' that 'provided people with a way to

understand major aspects of the world, ways to think and feel about the world, and ways to act on it' (Barth 2002: 4). The centers helped orientate Afghan-Americans towards a coherent (if not always consistent) narrative on negotiating their Muslim identity in an environment in which Islamic values had become synonymous with terrorism, repression, and structural violence.

In the early years of the Afghan migration, an Afghan imam established the Masjid Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq in Fremont, California, as both a mosque and a refugee resource center for Muslim immigrants of various ethnicities. It became a local community hub for Muslims in the San Francisco Bay Area, particularly first generation immigrants for whom the *masjid* was often the sole point of familiarity in a foreign land. By 1985, the Bay Area had three mosques. By 2010, the figure had risen 16-fold to 48 mosques (Naber 2012: 4). In addition, organizations such as the Taleef Collective in the Bay Area and MakeSpace in Virginia emerged as both physical and spiritual spaces in which Islamic identity could be embraced, explored, and understood[14]. The Taleef Collective opened its doors in 2005 to respond to the renewed interest in Islam. The group offers classes on Islam as well as 'convert care' services that assist new Muslims with the transition to Islam. Moreover, it provides religious counsel to Muslims on matters that require confidence and discretion. In a time of internal tribulations within the Afghan and Muslim diaspora, Taleef provides acceptance through belonging, a principle contained in their mantra: 'Come as you are, to Islam as it is' (www.taleefcollective.org). In fact, both Taleef and Makespace spell out in clear terms on their website that the communities they foster are inherently 'nonjudgmental' – a word that makes frequent appearances in the literature of their websites. Makespace is premised

[14] Taleef Collective: http://www.taleefcollective.org/. Makespace: www.imakespace.com.

on a similar concept to Taleef. During Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, Makespace hosted several prayer events and *Iftar* [15] dinners at an Afghan restaurant in Springfield, Virginia, that I attended. The crowd included Afghans, other ethnic groups, men and women together in one area – although men sat on one side of the room and women on the other side. The message of each sermon was almost invariably about inclusivity – a message that resonated given the diversity of its numerous attendants.

As a result of these developments, initial impressions of religious knowledge in the diaspora after 2001 were consistent with what seemed to be an Islamic revivalism among Afghan-Americans as a means of engaging across the Muslim diaspora. The second generation and the cohort of the first-generation immigrants that had grown up outside of Afghanistan began to embrace Islam along more conservative lines of observation and practice. Whether such terms as 'revivalism' were valid in discussing the evolving role of Muslim identity among the diaspora later seemed questionable. Was the behavior truly indicative of a resurgence of fundamentalist Islam or was it, as some anthropologists have observed among Arab Muslim communities, a performance of Islam that demonstrated the diaspora's tactical agency in the face of constraints they perceived imposed upon their role in their local communities and in the imagined Muslim world community, the *Umma*? (Moallem 2008; Bernal 1994). However, arguably 'revivalism' should not be sidelined altogether. The solidarity sought in negotiating Muslim identity required a reaffirmation of certain values, traditions, and beliefs within the diaspora, and its moral and spiritual underpinnings shape the process by which Islamic faith has not only become important in the lives of Muslim diasporans, but has defined the hyphen that links their identities. Thus,

[15] *Iftar* is the breaking of a fast during the month of Ramadan.

it was little surprise that in field interviews, Afghan-American interviewees who were asked to prioritize their Muslim, Afghan, and American identities almost exclusively selected Muslim first and then Afghan or Afghan-American second. In the rare cases in which an alternate identity was selected, the interviewees prioritized the categories on equal footing.

On the surface, the return to Islam and religious representation in the diaspora took form in the visible changes to the codes of dress among the diaspora. But more importantly, the changes showed the interconnectedness of the assertions about Afghanistan and the physical articulation of what it means to be Muslim. Discrepancies in the interconnectedness compromised the authenticity with which Afghan-Americans treated the understanding of Islam. Barth's analysis positions such forms of change as knowledge that has been 'cast […] in non-verbal codes of images and acts' (2002: 4). The most prominent display of religious representation among Afghan-American women was in donning the hijab and for men, it was similarly conveyed in wearing a prayer cap and the traditional *piran tumban* (tunic and loose-fitted trousers). In an area of Fremont designated as 'Little Kabul,' the changes were more evident among the secondary cohorts of first generation immigrants. The primary cohort, in fact, remained largely secular and, at times, critical of the overt representation of Muslim identity, which made them attractive candidates as U.S. military contractors. They espoused a different understanding of Muslim identity, both in thought and practice that countered the fundamentalist Wahabi or Deobandi traditions of Islam that had were associated with the Taliban. In discussions with a family who had two teenage sons with an active interest in Islamic fundamentalism, the parents expressed concerns about the assumptions of such ideas – notions that they argued

had been appropriated in protest of the U.S. military's occupation of Afghanistan and vilification of Islam. Their mother, much like Aryana's mother, could not fathom the sons' renewed faith and interest in being an Afghan Muslim: 'At first, I was happy that they wanted to go to mosque and learn more about their heritage, but then all this other stuff [referring to the clothing and rigor of Islamic practice – author's clarification], this is just crazy Wahabi stuff. We never practiced Islam like this in Afghanistan [paraphrased from Dari],' she noted. The ideological shift among the secondary cohort of the diasporic generation disrupted the continuity of knowledge about Afghanistan and Islam, but the community consciously reclaimed it as contracting opportunities emerged. They often eschewed conservative representations of knowledge when given the opportunity to work on defense programs. The divergence indicated a split with fundamentalist Wahabi and Deobandi traditions, and strengthened the relationship between the contractors and the U.S. military. The encounter thus gave rise to different 'versions' of Islamic knowledge in the Afghan-American community. The contractors and other members of the diaspora simultaneously generated different assertions about Islam – an act that precipitated debates on authenticity and spurred an ongoing debate on a standardized definition of Islamic practice within the diaspora. Zubaida, an Afghan-American woman who grew up in Virginia from the age of five, explained the tension between discursive and non-discursive iterations of Islam, criticizing the absence of authenticity in what she described as a disparity in belief and practice:

> After 9/11, I was going through a divorce and learning about myself. I questioned what I meant when I said I was Muslim […] I first read the Quran in English and then I learned to read it in Arabic. I traveled to the Middle East and experienced what it meant to be a true Muslim […] Growing up, I was told what I think a lot of young Afghans who didn't grow up in Afghanistan are told – 'being a good Muslim is just

> about being a good person,' but that's just one part of it and it's kind of a cop out because you have to actually live your life in accordance with the true teachings of Islam.

For her, the practice involved the strict observance of the five pillars of Islam (she emphasized the difficulty of praying five times a day at work) and wearing the hijab. She noted, 'My mom thinks I'm backwards. She says our family never wore headscarves in Kabul and she doesn't understand why I do it. She doesn't do it. But for me it's important to convey to people that you can be Muslim in America and you can be totally cool.' The negative portrayal of Islam in the public media and political discourse, particularly during the George W. Bush administration, seemed to have had a profound impact on the motivation of Afghan Muslims to defend Islam against slander and, in some cases, against itself. Another young woman I met at an Eid festival in Virginia said that she had decided to cover her hair both in observance of Islam, but also as a public testament that 'you could be Muslim and not be a terrorist.' In the shadow of U.S. government policies in the Muslim world after 2001, Afghan-Americans created a new narrative of Muslim identity to inform the public what Islam stood for and for what it specifically did *not*.

The developments in religious representation were also manifest in the social spaces and rhetoric of the diaspora. The mosque regained its significance as a social and religious hub for Afghan-Americans to engage with one another and among the Muslim community. Going to *masjid* became an often-articulated priority among Afghan-Americans. Among the San Francisco Afghans, local travel agencies in the Bay Area catered specifically to *hajj* trips given an increased demand in the diaspora to complete the fifth pillar of Islam, the holy pilgrimage. For Afghan-Americans who attended university after 2001, the Muslim Student Associations on-campus often provided a comfortable, easy

access to a familiar social grouping of like-minded individuals. Moreover, returning to Islam afforded Afghan-Americans a sense of community and belonging among Muslims at a time when the terms 'Muslim' and 'Afghan' were a part of a contentious public and political discourse. Haidar, an University of California Berkeley graduate, found his experience at university to initially be isolating until he discovered the Muslim Student Association (MSA):

> From 5th to 8th grade, my mom took me to mosque, but then after 9/11 that stopped. For four years, I was really distant from Islam. If I really wanted to, I would have made my mom take me but I hadn't really grown up with it. I wasn't really involved with the Afghans in high school. When I was there, we had pretty much become *sia* [Black]. There was no sense of Afghanhood. When I went to Berkeley, there wasn't [*sic*] other Afghans, just me and this dude from SoCal [Southern California – author's clarification]. When more Afghans came in my third and fourth year, the first group they went to was the MSA. I started going to the lectures and meeting others. That was the case with some of the other Afghans too. Ninety-nine percent of my friends are those I met through the MSA and the mosque.

Islam thus became the touchstone for Afghan-American unity, although Islamic identity did not necessarily have to be monolithic. Haidar explained that he was originally more Salafist, but in recent years and after further scholarship had toned down his ideological stance to what he identified as 'Afghan traditionalist' – a belief and practice of Islam more consistently aligned with Sufism. The MSA offered a specific avenue for Afghan-Americans to unite – and part of that collective belonging meant a shared understanding of constraints and obligations. Like Haidar, Khalid experienced a great degree of social isolation in college because of the limits his family placed on him as an Afghan-American. Immersed in American college culture, Khalid went to parties, drank alcohol and fell in love with a non-Afghan woman, which incurred his parents' intense dissatisfaction. 'My mom would call me all the time. 'What if another [Afghan] family finds out that you're running around with girls and partying? How's that going to make us look?' It was a lot of pressure. I was

paranoid in public with my girlfriend. In the end, we broke up. I was a wreck. It took a long time to get out of feeling depressed,' he remarked. To alleviate the pressure of his circumstances, Khalid turned to Islam and attended mosque regularly as a means of distracting himself from his personal agony. Since romantic relationships, particularly of a sexual nature, are social taboos among Afghan communities, his parents were not open to discussing his pain publicly, and he was reluctant to engage his peers lest the gossip should reach the Afghan-American community and muddy his family's name. In the nebulous configuration of Afghan-American culture and in communities where accountability to one's heritage and customs is tacitly enforced by the power of gossip, Islam serves as an anchor; a clear set of guidelines that, if observed, could position someone above reproach. For those who feel lost in the liminal area between cultures, religion and religious-based groups can provide a reconciliatory space in the known community.

Another facet of religious representation after 2001 related to changes in language. Denoted by the prevalence of code-switching in the rhetoric of Afghan-Americans, the ideology and praxis of Islam in the diaspora community was strengthened. Conversations became peppered with Arabic invocations of god's name to signal the renewed spiritual direction of members of the diaspora. The trend is elucidated in the Children of Dust by Ali Eteraz, a Pakistani-American Muslim who recounts his personal voyage through various iterations of his faith. Eteraz's return to Islam shared a similar trajectory to that of Haidar and Khalid, as the son of immigrants from Pakistan who rediscovered his connection to Islam whilst coming of age in America. But his demonstration of his faith, in both action and word, far exceeded the moderation of ideology and praxis common among his grandparents. He writes,

> I grew facial hair so that everyone would know up front that I cared about Islam. I began folding up my pants above my ankles so that everyone could see I practiced Islamic humility. I began inserting an *alhamdulillah* and *subhanullah* in almost every sentence. I spoke English with a slight Arab accent that I cultivated, believing that Arabs were the best of Muslims (2011: 164).

For Eteraz, and for many of his peers within the Afghan diaspora, religious representation was just as much about as Islam as it was about the purpose of rendering it manifest as a framework to which 'true' or 'good' Muslims could belong and engage. Thus, rhetoric mattered. At the conclusion of one of the MakeSpace Ramadan prayers, I recall a specific incident in which I cheerily quipped 'Bless you!' as a young Afghan woman with whom I had been chatting, sneezed into her cupped hand. Her cousin locked eyes with mine and furrowed her brow under the arc of a black hijab. 'Al*ham*dullilah,' she issued, and I feeling a prickly heat of mortification in my cheeks, sensed the edge in her voice and followed suit. More specifically, both as an insider in the Afghan-American community and as an interviewer, I noticed a distinct shift from words that were usually used for certain expressions to their authentic Arabic, religious equivalents. The most distinct example was during a public Eid holiday celebration at the same Afghan restaurant where Makespace held its meetings. The celebration was a women's-only event and I sat at a table with five other women who knew one another. As the women caught up on news about mutual friends, they exclaimed 'Mashallah' to convey their appreciation for the subject of the conversation. One women's daughter had just had her fourth birthday to which the response was both a hearty *Mashallah* and a collective knocking on the wood table, a hint at the superstitious and mystical traditions that were still common among even devout Muslims in the diaspora. In the most dogmatic Islamic interpretations, Muslims are required to disavow any syncretism or beliefs in magical thinking. Yet at the same event, I

was privy to at least two conversations about consulting mystic practitioners (one regarding fertility issues and the second to corroborate whether a hex had been placed on a friend) among women, whose speech and attire reflected a proclivity towards a stricter observance of Islam. These dichotomies acutely situated the challenges of religious knowledge and the revitalization of Islamic identity within a dynamic cultural and religious context in American society. Much of the representation seemed to be about presenting a version of Islam that could counter prevailing narratives, which associated the religion with terrorist organizations and violence on a global scale. Repositioning Islam was meant to help bridge the divide in understanding between Afghan-American contractors and the U.S. military. But the extent that the performance of Muslim identity reflects actual ideological changes is difficult to gauge. The beliefs and practice of Islam among members of the diaspora seem to be fluid and dynamic, evolving as the environment and people around them change. I have discussed religious knowledge production in this section to underscore the interconnectedness of Barth's face of knowledge. New iterations and practices of Islam have evolved in the diaspora since 9/11, creating a collection of perspectives that are contested within the community when the representations of Islam are perceived to fall short of the accepted assertions (and vice versa). In much the same way that groupness is activated and deactivated, knowledge about Islam is continuously renegotiated. Ultimately, when Afghan-Americans did retreat from more conservative values, such evolutions of thought and practice often coincided with job opportunities to integrate in America.

Zan, zar, zamin: Transnational tribalism, rural romanticism or plain Orientalism?

I first came across the terms *zan, zar,* and *zamin* during my tenure as a consultant for

the U.S. government on a program designed to promote awareness of Afghanistan's socio-cultural context. Emblazoned in a robust font across a PowerPoint slide, the words accompanied the picture of a dark-complected man with a strong beard and an oversized *loonghi* (turban) bound intricately around his head. For a supposed Pashtun like him, the words *zan, zar,* and *zamin* stood for everything for which *he* stood: women, gold, and land, the Pashtun trifecta of masculine honor, and the ultimate checklist of counterinsurgency efforts to appease such tribal men and their tribal ways. I would subsequently find such assertions as the core basis of a series of country-familiarization documents titled 'Master Narratives'[16]. The papers claim to contain 'historically grounded stories that reflect a community's identity and experiences [and] help groups understand who they are and where they come from, and how to make sense of unfolding developments around them' (Open Source Center 2013: 4). The Master Narratives series and the ideas it supported not only helped contextualize Afghanistan for the intelligence and military communities, they also helped orient Afghans who were often less familiar with Afghanistan's recent landscape than many American soldiers and Marines. Another Afghan-American contractor, who had lived in Germany and in America for more than 30 years, explained that the terms related to the values of Afghanistan's forefathers and could explain the challenges facing the coalition forces in rural, conservative parts of Afghanistan as men fought to protect what they considered to be their property. Although the terms were etched across U.S. military training materials and Smartbooks, during my fieldwork interviews none of the Afghan-Americans appeared to have internalized the values

[16] Master Narratives is a document authored by the Open Source Center under the Office of Director of National Intelligence, an independent government agency established by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 .

themselves. Instead, the interviewees consistently noted that *zan, zar*, and *zamin* were concepts with which they had been vaguely familiar as reflective of rural politics in Afghanistan, but reiterated their centrality only because of the dominant narratives of Afghanistan developed by the U.S. military – reinforcing what had already been brandished in training materials rather than what they had personally experienced or practiced as Afghans. Thus, within the extended family and known communities the concepts were relegated to archaic aphorisms, but more widely they were treated as compass points to help the U.S. government navigate across the imagined community of Afghanistan's human terrain. One of the most enlightening conversations that prompted my initial foray into the research topic was with a role-player, who occasionally dressed as a tribal Pashtun elder and titillated U.S. military personnel with tales of his heritage and boyhood antics in the defense of *Pashtunwali*, the Pashtun honor code. Among others I would encounter, he ironically drew upon a distinct patriarchal rhetoric to relate 'tribal' culture to soldiers. Therefore, it was not only that Afghanistan was essentialized, but also the interaction between the U.S. military and the Afghan diaspora conversely stereotyped the military. Just as some military personnel assumed *zan, zar, zamin* to be quintessential elements of cultural knowledge that would resonate with every Pashtun inside and outside of Afghanistan, their Afghan-American experts thought their cross-cultural communication would be better conveyed and understood if it were steeped in machismo and unspoken solidarity about masculine values. What had originated as an antiquated tribal maxim thus rooted itself as the definitive characteristic of the Pashtun tribal consciousness. Moreover, the concepts reaffirmed the belief that the honor-bound system of tribal politics would elude the strongest attempts at engaging local communities in support of the coalition

forces, particularly if precious resources were at stake.

Beyond the ethnic and tribal dimension, *zan, zar,* and *zamin* also alluded to the appropriation of identities and cultural values related to a rural versus urban dichotomy. As an outsider, one has only to look at present dynamics in Kabul alone – a city that grew exponentially from 400,000 to four million people within ten years – to understand how the rural and the urban collided during and after the civil war. In the war's aftermath, the distinction assigned values to people as urban 'Kabulites' or rural 'authentic' Afghans; those who were less exposed to or contaminated by Western influences or non-traditional ways of life, and could serve as authorities on the knowledge produced. These distinctions related to the diaspora in two ways. Firstly, the rural-urban divide actually translated to class differences in discriminating between those from the capital and the 'provincial' others, who hailed from the peripheral provinces. Prior to their migration, most Afghan-Americans of the Soviet generation lived in Kabul, had at least a secondary or high school level of education, and came from either relatively modest working to middle class backgrounds, or from a more educated, upper class of Afghans. They were socially distinct from the Afghans who remained in Afghanistan or were only able to escape as far enough as refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. Most of the Afghan-American diaspora initially came from Kabul (via other transit points) and thus represented a more 'cosmopolitan' stratum of Afghan society. Although the local divisions within the diaspora were in fact based transnationally in family histories, legacy, and social status in Afghanistan (prior to migration), the internal differences across households within the community constituted a significant challenge for the implementation of counterinsurgency, which specifically sought out and targeted the 'non-cosmopolitans' of Afghanistan. The second aspect of the

rural-urban or capital-periphery split has been the revision of such identities within the diaspora to coincide with a systematic rural romanticism widespread in the discourse of U.S. counterinsurgency planning in Afghanistan. In part, the rural romanticism stems from the myriad historical accounts of Afghanistan that saturated the literary market after 2001; narratives of pastoral warrior-ideologues with a fierce sense of independence whose unrelenting defense of land and honor earned Afghanistan the moniker 'Graveyard of the Empires' (Barfield 2010; Stewart 2004; Tanner 2009; Tomsen 2011). The image can also be traced to the origins of the Mujahideen resistance, a force that did not mobilize from the capital but from a snowball of insurgencies that gained momentum in the provinces. Just as political leaders hailing from the diaspora reassumed the centrality of their heritage, so did many Afghan-American advisers who risked being labeled elites and considered to lack local or rural authenticity. This sort of 'tactical cosmopolitanism' (Landau 2010) affirms that, 'in the struggles over belonging, the actions of migrants and minorities are major examples of dialogic imaginative ways of life and everyday cosmopolitanism' (Beck 2002: 21). Thus to be an expert, Afghan-Americans had to speak for the cross-section of Afghans whose hearts and minds the U.S. government imagined to be invaluable to its mission in Afghanistan, but a population that may have been equally invisible to both the military and the contractors for different reasons. But as long as COIN laid as groundwork the expectation of Afghan authenticity, Afghan-Americans, as the most credible and convincing representatives, rose to the occasion.

Indicative of a general trend towards sense-making, the Master Narratives series introduced topics such as 'Afghanistan's Government Elites' and 'Afghanistan's Business Elites' in an attempt to distinguish how each segment of Afghan society perceive and

process their environments. Divided into six sections, each Key Influencer Report identified six 'audience segments' and their voices: urban democrats (central government supporters), violent Islamists (Taliban), and ethnic nationalists, which were disaggregated into four groups – Pashtun, Tajik, Turkic, and Hazara Nationalists. The documents are designed to offer analysts (particularly in the intelligence sector) and those engaged in Information Operations (formerly Psychological Operations) an unparalleled opportunity to 'immerse themselves in the mindset of the foreign audience' (2013: 4). The Narratives are of interest for at least two reasons. The first, and perhaps the most obvious reason, is that their content proclaims to be 'subject matter expertise' – a product in which knowledge is methodically constructed and tied to specific variables. The series applies an almost mathematical approach to socio-cultural information. Theoretically, based on the premise of the Master Narratives, the sum of certain inputs, such as ethnic identity, history, and social status, should equal an output or an equivalent conclusion that can be cross-checked with the accounts provided. Not only do the Master Narratives frame expectations, but they also run the risk of applying such categorical formulations to how Afghans make sense of their worlds such that they conceal from view the nuances of Afghanistan's socio-cultural landscape. Moreover, they maintain a level of generalization and affectation regarding Afghan values such as 'bravery, pride and independence' that risks overly-exoticizing what may otherwise constitute rather mundane observations in Afghanistan. While the content runs counter to objective observations, the narratives nonetheless constitute a set of assertions that provide a way for U.S. military and defense personnel to make sense of their environments and act accordingly. Said long argued about articulations of cultural knowledge and ethnic identity that are formed from the broad strokes of

sweeping generalizations. More to his point, the development and appropriation of values pertaining to tribal 'mentalities' and the romanticized rural peasantry can encourage a dependence on an essentialist discourse by highlighting themes that effectively typecast a culture and people. Remaking the cornerstones of Afghan cultural knowledge thus 'gives rise to semi-official narratives that authorize or provoke certain sequences of cause and effect, while at the same time preventing counter-narratives from emerging' (Said 1993: 324). The absence of counter-narratives is significant because it indicates the uneven power relationship among the actors. Ultimately (and ironically), the most disadvantaged group is the people for whom the Master Narratives speak. The U.S. government, as the client of such accounts, and the subject matter experts, who produce them, both exercise greater agency in crafting the interpretations of Afghan mindsets. Thus, such Afghans either conform to the characterizations or chance being treated as outliers in a formulaic construction of Afghan-ness.

The other, perhaps less obvious, point of significance of the 'Master Narratives' is the extent to which the papers are actually more representative of the *approach* to knowledge rather than the information or data contained therein. Throughout the discourse of the materials, the voices represented by each audience segment are backed up by a single claim in the methodology section of the report that serves to substantiate the reports' ultimate credibility: the information, assumptions, and conclusions were drawn from Afghan analysts and subject matter experts. As the Master Narratives series demonstrate, the voices of the population segments have power when they can be linked to authentic sources. But the question remains: how well can engaging a subject matter expert in Virginia or even Kabul attest to the experiences, attitudes, and collective conscience of the

Taliban, or of Afghan women in general? Can a Caucasian male born in New York with a master's in Near Eastern Studies reflect the voice of a Tajik Nationalist? Would an Afghan-born American be any more qualified to do so? These questions situate epistemological pursuits of socio-cultural knowledge as a facet of diasporic engagement within the constraints of the global political economy. As invaluable sources of credible, legitimate information, subject matter experts such as those found within the diaspora constitute powerful agents who stand to shape the strategies and attitudes affecting another country and a multitude of lives under the umbrella of foreign policy. As will be outlined in the following section, the challenge is to identify authenticity against an ever-changing cultural background. If culture is not static, then cultural changes should determine how and what narratives are actually produced. In the Afghan case, because narratives are mobilized to meet the demand for information on an ad hoc basis, they effectively cast the diaspora as the barometer against which authenticity can be determined and all else discarded.

Becoming Watanee: Perceptions of Afghan authenticity

The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan accentuated the complex character of Afghan-American identity. It was not necessarily that the hyphenated articulations were suddenly infused with a crushing polarity, but rather that the concept of Afghan-ness became an evolving construction subject to both the demands of U.S. policies and to the inner dynamics of the diaspora (such as class, mobility, and status). The U.S. government's incentivized integration of Afghan-Americans for military counterinsurgency bears an uncanny resemblance to post-revolutionary Iran. Zuzanna Olszewska, who acutely captures the conflicting matters of 'class mobility and status aspirations in contemporary Iran,' notes that '[a]fter the revolution, the Islamist regime offered economic and other

incentives to those who readily embraced its ideology, notably less-privileged rural and urban residents, […] and [those] who had not benefitted from Pahlavi economic policies. […] Yet such inducements had the paradoxical effect of empowering certain constituencies' (2013). Although perhaps an odd comparison, the statement would hold true were it edited to comment on the U.S. government's strategy in Afghanistan. Through the use of private sector contractors and lucrative contracts, the U.S. government (the defense sector, more specifically) offered six-figure salaries, as inducements, that could transform the economic and social mobility of Afghan-Americans almost overnight. But they did so in exchange for particular dialogues. These narratives – be they critiques of the technocratic Soviet regime or the inherent social repression of women – served to not only assist military operations, but to justify the U.S. military's intervention and prolonged presence in the country. The justifications thus became self-fulfilling prophecies of a corrupt, socially-repressive state precariously teetering on the edge of a violent theocracy and ethnic conflict. But such opportunities for transnational engagement allowed Afghan-Americans, like Rostam, to return to Afghanistan and come face to face with imagined ideals of *Afghaniyat*. Being able to compare such imagined notions against Afghanistan's reality underscored one's claim to cultural authenticity.

Rostam grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania where until recently his household had been the sole Afghan family in the area. His family immigrated to America as a result of the Soviet invasion, and the move was facilitated through his father's employment at the United States Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D.) and a professional connection with an U.S. embassy official. But it meant settling in a predominantly Caucasian suburb in between the two large Afghan hubs in New York and the Northern Virginia areas.

The first other Afghan person he met was almost a decade after his family arrived. As such, Rostam was raised as a 'Half-ghan' - a term with semi-pejorative connotations applied to Afghans whose identities are considered to be ideologically divided[17]. He recalled his experience returning to Afghanistan as a translator and cultural advisor embedded with U.S. Special Forces groups in Kandahar:

> Afghanistan was a transformative experience for me. My parents were really apprehensive because they knew I wasn't all that Afghan. So when I went back, people [the local Afghan communities] would say 'Ok, American boy, where are you from?' So I asked my dad and he said: 'One, you're Kandahari; two, you're Shia but don't even say you're Shia because the Sunnis don't take kindly to that.' So imagine, I'm 27 and I have to ask my dad for the first time who we are.

The experience of meeting Afghans from places he had only heard about growing up brought his identity to sharp relief. Rostam, who had used a diminutive Anglicized form of his name, began to embrace his full name as the first step towards actualizing his new-found Afghan-ness. He added:

> I started to realize that if you couldn't pronounce my name, that's your problem. Before that was my problem. That's the *sharm* [shame or embarrassment] I'm talking about. When there's an Afghan event, now I'm like "let's go" and I'm more in touch with being Afghan. Like eating food with my hands, I love it; or sitting on the floor whenever I can, whatever – no problem. It's [sic] things I started to do – not through my parents. They were surprised. They'd say 'Bachem watanee shoda!'

The remark from his father translates roughly to *my son is now of the homeland*, with *watan* meaning 'homeland' and the suffix 'ee,' denoting belonging to it. It was one thing to be a Half-ghan and entirely another to be a salt-of-the-earth *watanee*. For Rostam, the sense of belonging to the country thus became suffused with an obligation to perform what was considered to be authentic and essential to being Afghan. Moreover, his practice of Afghan identity departs from the norms set by his parents. One of the more interesting distinctions

[17] Another term used to pejoratively address Afghan-Americans whose identities seem disproportionately American is 'Oreo' – a reference to the classic American biscuit that has a white cream filling sandwiched between two chocolate biscuits; thus white on the inside and brown on the outside.

that plays out in the newly-appropriated traditions of returnees like Rostam is the implied class connotations between being *watanee* and being nominally Afghan. The *watan* often conjures up the rural heartland of Afghanistan that is untainted by the cosmopolitanism of the cities or by foreign influence. It also places the 'real' Afghanistan at a distance from the urban centers that can be perceived as the lackeys of the West. In this sense, the 'real' Afghanistan is again difficult to access, enigmatic, and romanticized if not outright exoticized.

Rostam's embrace of the *watan* is just as much an indicator of his changing identity as it is a critique of the urbane class-bound attitudes that underlie diasporic Afghan identity. And the critique is not only manifest in his performance or practice of real Afghan culture, but also in his discourse: 'I say *kinarab* now. I'm like "hey, I have to go to the *kinarab*." That's another thing I picked up when I was in Afghanistan. I don't say *tashnab*,' he said referring to the word for bathroom. Although the words convey the same meaning, the application of the terms signifies certain associations for the speaker. *Kinarab* is an outhouse and literally refers to a hole in the ground used as a toilet primarily in rural areas in Afghanistan or among poorer families lacking indoor plumbing. *Tashnab* is considered the less-crude signifier. It is a term that shows an elevated socio-cultural status largely indicating that the person who uses the term either never deigned to use a *kinarab* or whose circumstances have significantly evolved (and improved) that he or she now has a proper toilet. In the diaspora, *kinarab* conjures up the images of uncivilized, 'country-folk' whose lack of adaptation to modern facilities is a reflection of their limited sophistication. Rostam's use of the term is, therefore, important because it privileges the people on the peripheries of Afghanistan's urban centers and casts a critical gaze at his own immediate

surroundings as inauthentic or a sterilized rendering of more organic customs in the *watan*. In returning to work with the Special Forces in southern Afghanistan, Rostam sensed his connections to his perceived homeland more palpably and redefined himself and his ideas about Afghanistan based on his experiences.

Although Rostam committed to a physical return, many of his peers in the diaspora experienced a 'metaphorical' return through their families (Baubock and Faist 2010; Hall 1990; Luyat 2001; Safran 2005). Capitalizing on advances in the 21st century, return migration for Afghan-Americans has become a hybrid confluence of physical and sentimental journeys to Afghanistan through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Youtube, and through poetry, music, and art. This hybridity occupies the 'conceptual and affective space in which community, identity, and political and cultural membership intersect' (Hammond 2004: 10). The return, in a sense, does not necessarily have to be physically transnational. It can be translocal in experience and transnational in thought. Similar to the 'inherited nostalgia' of the Iranian diaspora in Southern California, the second cohort of the first generation immigrants often draw upon their parents and grandparents' formative experiences as the ground truth that situates the understanding of their Afghan heritage (Maghbouleh 2010). Their assessment of authenticity is a socially constructed endeavor that links the validity and legitimacy of practices to specific 'collective memories' (Halbwachs 1992). During the weekend of Eid-al-Fitr in 2013, a popular Afghan banquet hall held an Eid *mela* – a party or gathering – for Afghan women only. Most of the attendees were in their 20s, in traditional embroidered dresses, and they almost exclusively spoke in English, at times code-switching in Dari. A group of older women, grandmothers to some of the girls there, sat together and seemed to act as cultural

advisors – or rather as human reference books on Afghanistan. The Eid *mela* consisted of a fashion show of 'authentic Afghan designs,' an Afghan trivia contest that claimed to 'figure out who the experts [were] in the room,' and a *mehndi* station with an Indian artist who applied henna in intricate patterns, as Indians do and Afghans do not, on the participants' hands. The smell of it was reminiscent of Afghan weddings, where the pungent substance, similar in texture and hue to overcooked spinach, would customarily be ladled into the palms of guests and bound with a cloth until it left a ruddy stain. The young women rushed to the artist to be creatively temporarily tattooed, but one woman, in her early 20s, first sought the counsel of her grandmother on the design she wanted to project.

'How should I have the henna applied on my hand? How do people do it in Afghanistan?' she asked in Dari. Her grandmother shrugged, issuing a prosaic suggestion to 'just smear it on [her] palm.' She adjusted her grey headscarf and continued her conversation with a friend, but her granddaughter persisted in slight exasperation. She waved her hand in front of her grandmother and dismissed the suggestion, 'No, I want it in the style of how people do it in Afghanistan. Like *asl* [genuine].' The grandmother stood by her original advice. From an ethnographic perspective, the interaction resonated with me for a few reasons. Not only did it demonstrate the disparity in perceptions of Afghan traditions and customs in post-exilic communities, but also it reinforced my observation that an *ideal* existed in the diaspora about the trappings of Afghan identity – about the material and conceptual aspects that informed Afghan heritage. It was evident in the decorative appurtenances that furnished the hall – artifacts courtesy of an Afghan-American event planner, who had bought them at a local Middle-Eastern grocer to imbue the place with a bucolic sense of home. The artifacts included a samovar and a hookah.

Marc Scully's critique of similar overtures to 'traditional' practices by the Irish diaspora offers an interesting parallel. He notes that the celebrations of St. Patrick's Day have evolved a degree of flamboyance that is far removed from the origins of the holiday itself (2015). Whilst glossing over the origin and perhaps significance of certain traditions, Irish descendants – or 'Plastic Paddys' – engage in cultural innovations that become substantiated through the repetition of 'bandwagon' identity politics (Scully 2015). The myth of a practice is, therefore, more salient in some respects than the actuality of its origins. The young woman's rejection of her grandmother's statement represented her dissatisfaction with anything contradictory to her imagination of henna application as an intricate art illustrative of Afghanistan's rich, complex cultural heritage. The truth, however, rendered it the aesthetic and sentimental equivalent of an orange blob. For many of the women in the room, who had either been born outside of Afghanistan or arrived in America as toddlers, the relics and people perceived to be *originally from* Afghanistan served as symbolic umbilical connections between them and their imagined homelands. It was also evocative of Barth's reflections on the role of ancestral knowledge in Bakhtaman traditions of knowledge. In much the same way that the coherence and validity of the corpus was established through an appeal to ancestors during religious and cultural rituals, Afghan-Americans from generations that have a second-hand knowledge of Afghanistan rely on the memories and articulations of the generations prior to account for authenticity. However, in the case of Afghan-Americans, the body of knowledge is contested if it does not map onto the expected realities of what Afghanistan means in the Afghan diaspora.

Deriving from such translocal conceptions of Islam, culture, and identity, the diaspora's narratives constituted the forms of expertise that the Afghan-American

contractors substantiated as a definitive body of knowledge on Afghanistan. Scenario-based trainings, which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, became a preferred way of not only producing knowledge, but performing it so that the assertions gained validity and permanence through repetition. Role-playing scenarios familiarized U.S. military personnel with Afghanistan – except 'Afghanistan' was an imagined theater of operations often in a desert in Arizona or California. On U.S. military bases that housed artificial villages, Afghan-American role players taught Afghan culture to U.S. military personnel by acting in scripted situations. It was a practical exercise to ensure that the lessons taught about Afghanistan could be understood and applied by the military audience to the point that the trainings could be re-enacted and re-articulated by the U.S. military personnel when they deployed. As one interviewee recounted, 'we pretend that we are Afghan villagers [...] we act like Afghans would act if Americans came to their villages and homes.' While for some the economic advantages were significant motivators, another interviewee explained that working with U.S. military was actually a 'chance to do something valuable for Afghanistan, like teach people about the culture and heritage. An Afghan-American man, who had experience as a role-player and a translator for a major defense contracting company, captured a significant discrepancy that was echoed by the frustrations of many others: 'The Americans didn't know better when Afghans said things that weren't true. They [Afghan-Americans] told them things about the culture and history that was biased.' The diaspora's internal dynamics – its personal prejudices and class relations – provided a variety of often conflicting narratives about Afghanistan to serve the U.S. military strategy. The role of the diaspora as proxy 'local Afghans' and cultural brokers, who could best conceptualize and convey Afghanistan, nonetheless underpinned critical training efforts to

prepare and mobilize U.S. military servicemen and servicewomen. As an Army colonel noted, 'Some of these guys (U.S. military personnel) have limited experience outside of the U.S. […] it was helpful just to get them familiar with some sense of Afghanistan.' The more counterinsurgency efforts required cultural intelligence, the more the diaspora produced innovative material that could sustain the military's need and, in turn, their own economic integration. At a micro-level, beneath the umbrella of global politics and counter-terrorism, the Afghan diaspora community began to internalize its own subjectivities and transform accordingly. In general interactions with Afghan-Americans, I was often struck by how often material from the Master Narratives series or various cultural trainings would be brought up in conversations to underscore some aspect of Afghan identity – even among those who had not worked on contracting opportunities. Supporting public assertions about Afghanistan allowed Afghan-Americans to capitalize on a new distinct identity. By producing knowledge that articulated differences between Afghans and Americans, Afghan-Americans embraced the economic and social mobility offered through short-term transnational engagements. The process allowed them greater agency as Afghans in the diaspora and as Americans in American society, and shielded many of them from the severity of the U.S. economic recession during the early years of the COIN campaign.

While the economic gains through working with the U.S. military translated to a higher economic class in American society, it did not necessarily leverage their social capital or status within the diaspora itself. In fact, in some instances it had the opposite effect of relegating people to a lower status – a factor that had a tremendous effect on the decisions of Afghan-Americans to accept such contracts in the first place, considering its perception by the community. Nasrine, an Afghan-American woman who left Afghanistan

with her children in 1983, worked for more than five years on various defense contracts as a translator and cultural advisor. A former United Nations employee prior to leaving Kabul, she 'wanted to help Afghanistan and a chance to go back,' but was conscious of other members of the community seeing it as 'work that was beneath [her] because [she was] working with the military.' She also discovered that other Afghan-Americans with whom she worked 'would constantly stereotype and generalize each other. They invent their own histories. Everyone was somebody and lived in Wazir Akbar Khan.' What she candidly conveyed was the specific attempts at reconceptualizing Afghanistan as a means of revising their status within the diaspora and among the U.S. military personnel, who were otherwise oblivious to class structures that shaped social capital in Afghan-American communities. In many respects, Afghanistan's utter destruction had cleared the slate for some Afghan-Americans to claim more elevated identities situated metaphorically and physically in Wazir Akbar Khan, an affluent neighborhood in Kabul. Although such reconstructions added authority and gravitas to the narratives provided to the U.S. military in such engagements, they often lacked resonance in the known community. By travelling back and forth as cultural interlocutors between America and the homeland, Afghan-Americans could enact a greater degree of *Afghaniyat* to substantiate the authenticity of their belonging in the diaspora community. Yet because the authenticity was predicated upon interactions with rural, often-conservative Afghans or via U.S. defense sector contracts, their identity became suffused with values that some community members perceived to be lower-class or provincial, subverting social relations within the diaspora upon their return.

Diasporic identity and cultural knowledge are not always reinforced by return

migration. The experience of return at times reconciled the disparities of memory and perception that gave rise to the articulations about Afghanistan. Among the interviewees, the memory and perceptions of Afghanistan underlined their desires to engage in transnational development programs in support of Afghanistan's reconstruction (Brinkerhoff 2004; Hanifi 2006; Oeppen 2010; 2013). The question of responsibility, as presented by Oeppen, is critical in examining such transnational linkages in the diaspora. Responsibility, as a sentiment, highlighted the duality of their identities and their continued sense of obligation to Afghanistan. But the return sometimes constituted a reality check that contested the perceptions upon which the responsibility was staked. In her ethnography of the Afghan diaspora in Fremont, California, Oeppen notes that some Afghan-Americans feel like 'stranger[s] at home' in Afghanistan (2013). My findings were consistent with Oeppen's research, confirming her view that,

> [d]espite the 'myth' of eventual return […] often evoked as a cohesive force holding together diasporic or ethnic communities (Cohen 1997; Dahya 1973), […] not all interviewees felt that they wanted to return permanently, or held normative ideals that Bay Area Afghans should return one day (2013: 3).

In discussions with Afghan-Americans in both the Northern Virginia and California communities, the reality of Afghanistan was often discussed using terms such as 'sad,' 'unfamiliar,' and 'unrecognizable.' Those sentiments were consistent mostly among the first cohort of the Soviet generation, but for the second cohort whose experiences in Afghanistan were limited at best; the descriptions often referenced the surprising 'backwardness' of 'crazy tribals' and 'savages.' Both groups seemed to agree on the absence of culture and *saowiya* – the form of cultured refinement akin to class, though not necessarily related to economic status. The term *bay saowiya*, in Dari, can refer to people

who lack social grace, etiquette and education, and its absence fundamentally changes attitudes about Afghanistan as home. During fieldwork, an Afghan woman, who had moved from Afghanistan at three years of age to New York then to California, recounted her experience returning almost thirty years later to work on a development program in Kabul:

> I had always wanted to go back because I felt like that's where I was from and that's where my roots were, like that's where my family's roots were. I'm glad I did. But I remember thinking 'who the fuck are these people?' Like I couldn't relate to any of it […] Especially the attitudes towards women […] By the end of my trip, I was ready to go back to the States and close the chapter on that one […] No, I wouldn't go back.

These experiences challenged the romanticized assertions about Afghanistan by exposing the differences between the diaspora's memory and the socio-political evolution of the country. More importantly, they questioned the authenticity of collective memories and perceptions and in doing so, posed a simple question – if Afghanistan was no longer identifiable, what did it mean to be Afghan-American? I argue that these mixed sentiments about return actually encouraged the integration of the Afghan-Americans in America. From a purely auto-ethnographic stance, my own return to Afghanistan in 2007 felt like looking into someone else's mirror; nothing about Afghanistan reflected what I felt was contained in my hyphenated identity. It became apparent, then, that diasporic identities were more translocal than transnational – particularly when taking into account that composition of the diaspora as the mostly-educated, urban Afghans who, in many instances, met Afghans from the provincial areas or *dehat* for the first time upon their return. They came face to face not only with vastly different realities to their expectations, but also with the populations that were unable to leave Afghanistan and now represent the country. The *Afghaniyat* that had evolved in the diaspora was then not necessarily a reflection of Afghanistan, but a construction of the communities that had found themselves

together in America or perhaps, as evident in the experiences of some of my interviewees, the absence of certain values in Afghanistan was indicative of the socio-cultural, political, and economic erosion that had taken place during the civil war. Thus the diaspora contained the vestiges of *Afghaniyat* and each generation of Afghan-Americans would serve as its sentinels through a self-perpetuating process of memory and performance.

Conclusion

By looking at the relationship between knowledge produced, contested and reproduced, I emphasize the interconnectedness of the face of knowledge by showing that the assertions gain legitimacy and acceptance through practice – a point I further develop in the next chapter. In this chapter, however, I have traced the body of Afghan cultural knowledge in relation to the political history of the diaspora's migration to America, the iterations of an Islamic identity, and a set of master narratives that define Afghanistan as an imagined community. In post-9/11 America, it became possible to 'return' to Afghanistan either by physically traveling back or by engaging with the country locally in the diaspora. As such, the integration of Afghan-Americans in transnational security issues reinforced certain subjectivities of Afghan identity. What is particularly salient to the analysis of such subjectivities is to understand that the diaspora community evolved within two key historical transition periods – the Soviet occupation and the American invasion. These events privileged different groups of people, voices, and notions of nationalism. Situated within the historical contexts described in this paper, the diaspora drew upon variegated notions of Afghanistan and *Afghaniyat*. From these notions stemmed binary categorizations of identity that on one hand informed the 'Master Narratives' guiding U.S. policy, but on the other hand created or exposed the fault lines of status, class and social mobility.

The emergence of master narratives as a set of accepted beliefs about Afghanistan and Afghan Muslim identity exemplify Barth's notion of a *corpus*. The production of such assertions, I conclude, relate to three key points. First, the interpretation of Afghan-ness that the military applied to Afghanistan was produced in the diaspora to contest the community's own social margins. In particular, I outlined the post-migration social dynamics that shape claims of belonging and Afghan-ness among diasporic Afghans and the category of contractors. The extrapolation of such dialogues as ground-truths has been problematic at best because they rarely speak to the collective consciousness of Afghans and Muslims in Afghanistan. Secondly, the body of knowledge evolved from Orientalist narratives related to Afghanistan and Islam. Some Afghan-Americans, particularly those who had limited experience living in Afghanistan, drew upon the nostalgia of the post-Soviet diasporic generation to give their expertise more weight. In doing so, they appropriated the voices, memories, and, most importantly, biases of others as facts about a country to which they may have never been and a people to whose way of life they had never been exposed. Barth's theoretical currency is evident here, as the articulations of Afghanistan and Afghan identity reflect a way of making sense of the world among Afghan-Americans, but are linked to the use and representations of such knowledge beyond the diaspora. The process of appropriation and validation relate to the third and final point – that the U.S. military designated the diaspora as an authority on Afghanistan. The voices resonated with America's post-Cold War posture in Central and South Asia because it provided the context and justification for U.S. military and foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan. The role of the military and defense contracting organizations in validating the diasporic assertions, particularly by empowering and leveraging the contractors'

knowledge over indigenous voices, underscores the larger theme of the thesis. It demonstrates the Afghan-Americans, as a community in America, have been greatly shaped by the encounter with the military-industrial complex.

Chapter 5 *Medium*: Performing 'Afghanistan' in the theater of war

'You would get attacked in the middle of the woods. You would get attacked in your village […] Usually they would come around 4 a.m. or 6 a.m. to pick you up and you'd go with them. They technically couldn't keep you longer than 14 hours, but that wasn't the case, sometimes it would be 17-18 hours depending on what they needed,' Farah said, leaning back. 'It was really fun!'

Like some Afghan-Americans, Farah works part-time with a defense contractor as a role-player at U.S. military installations in Louisiana, Georgia, and Kentucky. She acts out training scenarios created by the U.S. military to help soldiers gain practical field experience prior to deployment; those trained included the Rangers, the Army's most highly-trained and specialized soldiers, and those conducting some of the most important missions. The drama unfolds across a vast setting that emulates Afghanistan's terrain and life on a Forward Operating Base (FOBs)[18]. Dappled with mud huts, the set is meant to resemble an archetypal Afghan village (though on occasion it also accommodates representations of rural Iraq) replete with shops and wandering livestock. Soldiers are cast against this backdrop on three-week training exercises to help them anticipate and work through the cross-cultural impediments that could hinder their mission. It is a crucial effort

[18] Note that the acronym, FOB, is the same as the one used pejoratively to describe recent immigrants. As an extension of larger main operating bases, the FOBs conduct tactical operations in local areas (i.e. FOB Salerno in Khost province in Afghanistan).

to adapt to a new environment, to feel the pulse of the populations whose hearts and minds will determine the success of counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan. Alongside the U.S. military personnel are Afghan-Americans contracted to create a visual and sensory environment akin to living among Afghans. They are hired as actors to lend authenticity to the simulated setting and interactions that define the Afghan experience.

Redefining Afghanistan and Afghan-ness, as a place and as an identity, is a production. It requires not only the reconstruction of cultural and historical narratives, but also their repetition and performance. The process is not unique to the Afghan-American diaspora. In the United States, the descendents of Irish-Americans, at times many generations removed, root themselves in Ireland through shared experiences in America that often draw upon imagined or recreated customs. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) explained the phenomenon as 'the invention of tradition' – customs deemed ancestral that are in fact recent innovations loosely based on erstwhile practices. Among others they pointed as an example to the inculcation of Indian heritage among Indian soldiers in British Colonial India. In this as in other cases, the forms of dress and attire underscored more superficially prevalent, underlying narratives. After the archaeological survey of 1860, the preservation of Indian heritage became a chief preoccupation of the colonial government:

> Before 1860, for example, Indian soldiers and the British both wore Western-style uniforms. But in the eyes of the British, Indians had to look like Indians. The dress uniforms were modified to include turbans, sashes and tunics regarded as 'authentic'. Some of the traditions they invented, or half invented, continue on in the country today, although of course others were later rejected (Giddens 2002: 37-38).

The concept of 'looking Indian' meant playing a part defined by those who created the idea of Indian-ness and defined the body of knowledge on Indian customs. Clothed as Indians under the vaster cloak of Britain, the soldiers served as puppets of a foreign government

with a clear agenda of retaining India. It reflected an acceptance of non-verbal codes of knowledge that attempted to establish a standard sense of Indian identity and culture. Although the British government assumed and acted upon a presumed historical reality, the irony of authenticity, as a claim of such endeavors, has echoed across similar imperial advances well into the 21st century. As I explain below, similar processes of knowledge production and performance occurred among Afghan-Americans from the diaspora, who were chosen to represent Afghanistan.

In 2014, Afghanistan's presidential elections captured similar overtures by its leading contenders whose sartorial choices demonstrated deliberate attempts at legitimizing their political candidacies and their re-engagement with Afghanistan. Both candidates hailed from the diaspora. Dr. Ashraf Ghani, the leading contender, and his rival, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah were lauded for their conversion from suits and ties to traditional tunics and pants (*piran tumban*). As Dr. Ghani drew in votes, the media discussed the wardrobe change as a means to soften his image and increase his local appeal; figuratively photoshopping him as an ethnic Pashtun Afghan rather than a World Bank technocrat, who had lived in Lebanon then America for more than 30 years. Dr. Ghani's public image improvements paralleled those of former president Hamid Karzai's years in office when he stepped out in dazzling hues and textures to represent Afghanistan's ethnic diversity despite having lived in exile for years. The Uzbek cloak – the *chapan* – and the lambskin *karakul* hat became synonymous with his image. The patchwork accoutrements were intended to mollify ethnic tensions from the Mujahideen era, and to convey that he was a man of the people. To the communities in Afghanistan and abroad, the image could be perceived as far less indigenous. It reflected, instead, the artificial designs of the West

(associated with the C.I.A.'s machinations) to downplay Karzai's international associations and use his ethnic and family heritage to curry favor among all Afghans. The trendy overtures to 'tradition' were not only visibly inconsistent with Afghan customs, but also with Afghanistan's political history. Prior to the civil war, Afghanistan's leaders had not worn traditional dress to office. Afghanistan's national leaders wore suits or military uniforms as a function of holding government positions or an office; their *piran tumban* reserved, like many Afghans, for home and holidays. But, in the wake of such changes, a *Radio Free Europe* article observed that Dr. Ghani 'now appear[ed] to have embraced Afghanistan's traditional ethnicity-based political system, built on patronage networks and tribal loyalty' (Bezhan 2014). The statement echoed the legacy of the post-Soviet era and shaped the image of the new government as an institution whose credibility would be judged by how closely it mirrored the representation of a 'traditionally' Afghan political structure. Yet the credibility was predicated on elements that could also be viewed as superficial and essentializing – in itself a critique of the long-distance nationalism developed in the diaspora towards Afghanistan. The basis of nationalism, like many interventions in Afghanistan, has been knowledge produced outside of Afghanistan and reified through physical representations and performances transnationally.

This chapter explores the various media through which the body of knowledge on Afghanistan is articulated. I apply Goffman's theoretical perspectives on framing and self-representation to analyze how knowledge produced by Afghan-Americans is communicated to the U.S. military as the consumers of such information. The discussion draws from ethnographic observations of training events and role-playing exercises, as well as descriptions of the material products (cross-cultural handbooks, rapport building

guidelines, and country reference guides). These representations channel an understanding of Afghanistan that, although produced with diasporic expertise, often equate to Orientalist renderings that reinforce and are reinforced by the prevailing narratives about Afghanistan – a criticism that substantiates similar findings in other studies of the U.S. military encounter with Afghan-Americans. I will draw on some of the critiques of the use of anthropology by the military to argue against the appropriation of 'culture' as a virtual weapon of warfare used to redistribute power over subjects (Boas 2005; Foucault 1978; Ferguson 2013; Gonzalez 2007; Price 2009). Beyond a critique of the epistemological and reductionist approaches to cultural knowledge in the military, this chapter uses Goffman's theater metaphor (1959) to capture scenario-based role-playing exercises as performances of knowledge designed not only to simulate the Afghan environment, but also to help the military orient itself in a new cultural material reality. These new cultural worlds were thus an opportunity for Afghan-Americans to define and enact new 'traditions of knowledge' that could meet the 'criteria of validity' upon which their self-hood in the diaspora and their expertise among the military is based (Barth 2001). As my argument concerns the relationships and processes that propagate knowledge production and cultural development, I also use Bourdieu's concept of 'structuring structures' to unpack how Afghan-Americans negotiate their interactions with one another and with the U.S. military in a unique medium – reconstructed Afghan villages in the deserts of California and Arizona (1990). The infrastructure serves as a stage for performances of Afghan identity and expertise, allowing Afghan-Americans the role of protagonists in shaping the world in which the U.S. military must interact to defeat threats to America in Afghanistan. I conclude by looking at the effect of the media and various representations on the ways Afghan-

Americans organize themselves on and off the staged 'sets.' The discussion will also take into account the cadre of 'conscientious objectors' – diasporans who did not engage in such efforts to operationalize culture as a concept, noting that their objections often relate to the medium through which 'Afghanistan' is constituted and conveyed in the trainings. This discussion sets the stage for an analysis of the social organization of knowledge in the next chapter.

What I aim to show in this chapter is the relationship between the choice of medium for knowledge transmission and the epistemological reductionism propagated by the U.S. government's institutional approach to learning about human societies. Consequently, the media also had an impact on the type and depth of information conveyed by the diaspora. I focus in particular on Village Stability Operations (VSOs) as a major part of COIN, and posit that the U.S. military's insistence on Key Leader Engagements and tribalism conflated the scripts upon which the diaspora's performance was based. Juxtaposing their narratives with the motivations for such employment, I critique the ad hoc approach to diasporic engagement within the U.S. security and foreign policy apparatus for two reasons. The first is that the discipline of anthropology has suffered from operationalizing 'culture' in such a way. The second is a criticism of contracting mechanisms as a medium for knowledge production and not simply knowledge transmission.

In the years since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Afghan-American contractors have been engaged across a spectrum of occupations. Some were role-players on military bases, while others role-played Afghans on various training programs at defense contracting companies in the Washington D.C. area. Most of the role-playing, scenario-based interactions and the language instruction programs are based in America. Prior to

the drawdown of international security forces in Afghanistan in 2014, organizations such as the Defense Language Institute and the Monterey School of International Studies hired Afghan-Americans to work as Dari and Pashto language instructors for U.S. military personnel. Most of the demand for translators, interpreters, and cultural advisors, however, is often transnational. Some Afghan-American contractors work for defense contracting companies in the continental U.S., but can be deployed to Afghanistan as well. In other cases, the contractors are sent directly to Afghanistan to fill a variety of roles supporting the U.S. government's efforts. At the height of counterinsurgency, the U.S. security sector awarded lucrative contracts to private-sector defense contractors, such as Mission Essential Personnel and Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), to employ droves of Afghan-Americans that could apply linguistic, cultural, and regional expertise in training, advisory and analysis programs across the portfolio of COIN and counterterrorism operations. The surge of opportunities on COIN-related contracts affected diasporic households engaged in such work in three ways. First, the positions related to knowledge transmission created new class distinctions based on the type of work undertaken and the associations that were developed as a result of working with the U.S. military or NATO coalition forces. A disparity in the values attributed to certain activities further contextualized social divisions in the diaspora. I argued that the medium of role-playing conferred the least value on contractors because it did not require an education other than knowledge about Afghanistan. Role players were often relegated to a lower status in conversations among the diaspora in general and the Afghan-American contractors, who had not participated on role-playing rotations. Secondly, contracting work bestowed access to classified information through various levels of security clearances,

allowing Afghan-Americans to integrate into the American economy in unprecedented ways. The third factor relates to the wages earned through the employment that further supported the integration of Afghan-Americans by affording them relatively greater financial independence to participate in the economy as consumers and also socially broadening their presence beyond the ethnic enclaves in which they lived. Since the advent of such opportunities that allowed Afghan-Americans to remit money back to their households in America, Afghan-Americans have moved out of diaspora communities, such as Fremont and Springfield, in search of places where a lower cost of living would make better use of their recently-earned money. Thus, while some people were able to access greater social mobility in terms of class through their associations and employment in the security sector, others experienced the reverse; their motivations for employment questioned and their households subject to a more critical eye among other diasporic families. My exploration of the transmission of knowledge will be grouped into three particular channels that provided representations of Afghanistan: role-players and cultural advisors, translators and interpreters, and the material literature on the subject.

Role players and cultural advisors

As mentioned previously, for many of the Afghan-American role-players, Afghanistan is a distant memory and one often appropriated through family relations and articulated nostalgia. In her mid-30s, Farah has lived in the Northern Virginia suburbs since she was a toddler. Her family moved to America in 1981 after the Afghan government began persecution of families like hers, who were related to the deposed king or were considered to be royalists. While Farah identifies as 'Americanized,' she feels rooted enough in her Afghan identity to consider herself an authority on the values and norms

associated with Afghanistan's socio-cultural context. But such work has been as much a learning experience for Farah as it has been for the U.S. military personnel with whom she interacts. She explained:

> Had I known that this program had started in 2006 or 2005, I would have done it from the start because it's so much fun. I was sick of my job and I said 'I'm gonna quit and go to school,' but that never happened. One of my cousins knew one of the team leaders for the company I work for. He said 'hey, why don't you do this? You can be a cultural role-player and wear traditional clothes, be in villages, and act Afghan,' and I thought ok, I can do that […] When I got there, at first I was an interpreter with the U.S. Army in Army clothes, then I did some role-playing […] My Dari is better when I go back to back (to the rotations), but it's worse when I'm away longer […] Fort Polk is huge. They have these little villages that they built a couple of years ago during the Iraq war. Like mud huts, fake gas stations, those doors. Some of the writing is in Arabic, they took down and made signs in Dari or Pashto. They'll bring out goats and stuff like that. It's like a movie set. The role-players go and they get their roles like clan leader's wife or mullah's wife or the mullah. […] I conveyed some of the traditions like how to talk to leaders, not to put…what is it?...your right or left hand out, or the sole of your shoe, or if you're at someone's house offer to take your shoes off, things like that. When I worked with the FETs [Female Engagement Teams – author's clarification], I'd tell the women 'don't try to shake hands with the men because they won't' or to have a headscarf on out of respect. Since I didn't grow up in Afghanistan, I had to brush up [on Afghanistan] from family and other Afghans – so they'd tell me, and I probably forgot, 'don't shake hands with your left hand and stuff like that.' […] I'd give them [the U.S. Army soldiers] a background of why there are so much ethnic issues in Afghanistan, how Afghanistan works, let them know about the different ethnic tribes - just to give them an idea of why there is so much turmoil because they have no clue.

Rotations, as they were called, were 21-day training exercises through which U.S. military personnel and Afghans, like Farah, would stage a scripted performance. The objective of the training was to equip the U.S. military with enough skills and knowledge to win hearts and minds in Afghanistan. Similar to previous examples, the irony of the drama was heightened by the fact that some of the Afghan-American contractors had no first-hand experience in Afghanistan. The contractors were preparing for roles they had not previously assumed. Yet they were charged with a presentation of Afghan-ness that had to be socially and culturally authentic. Within the reconstructed theater of operations, the

relationships among Afghans and with the U.S. military were critical reflections of counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. The expectations of Afghan culture and society among the military drew upon concepts of Afghanistan reconstructed in the diaspora. Moreover, the concepts were pre-emptively scripted in the scenario interactions so that Afghan-American role-players could perform according to the cues provided. While some studies have criticized the failings of the military, my research looks at the complexities of the diaspora's role. The military may have been operating under generalized notions, but I seek to analyze how Afghan-Americans adapted their assumed expertise to the medium of role-playing scenarios. The media used to transmit such knowledge was implicit in constituting Afghan culture and the Afghan people.

Role-playing often has two overlapping dimensions. In one sense, it is supposed to help the U.S. military personnel anticipate and respond to different operational environments and the populations within them. But beyond that it is also supposed to help inculcate cultural relativism and sensitivity under the umbrella of 'cross-cultural competence' or '3C.' These efforts derive from a need to redefine military personnel or 'warfighters' into 'warrior-diplomats' or 'cross-cultural experts' who can understand and appreciate the disparities between America and the rest of the world (Rasmussen and Sieck 2012: 71). This endeavor requires the mitigation of bias. As 'cultural researchers,' U.S. military personnel are expected 'to frame such differences objectively' despite their mandate to fight certain populations (Rasmussen and Sieck 2012: 72). The role-playing scenarios create the opportunities to frame – and reconcile – the disparities between Afghan and American culture. But the medium through which such cultural interactions are explained and analyzed creates a subjective experience. The channel of expression

encourages producing knowledge that can be readily labeled, categorized, and re-articulated. Role-playing, viewed through Goffman's idea of performance (1959), is non-discursive, performed knowledge. In each role-playing performance, the participants enacted a series of roles simultaneously. The medium of role-playing imposed different frames on Afghan-Americans that brought the range of their social identities into being. U.S. military personnel became students, diplomats, and aspiring anthropologists who were meant to observe and learn. Afghan-American contractors were cast as both the experts and the subjects. Most importantly, the contractors had the ability to not only generate information but control the meaning. They had the power to shape a picture of reality about Afghanistan and direct an understanding of it. In some interviews, U.S. military personnel assumed that their knowledge of Afghanistan, despite several deployments, had little to no value compared to the presumed expertise of Afghan-Americans such as Farah. This relationship substantiated the position of Afghan-American contractors as both outsiders and insiders of Afghan culture, and ushered them into the fold of American militarism. As insiders, they could demystify Afghanistan and speak about it in a way the military could understand. However, the validity of knowledge produced and transmitted depended on the role of the contractors as outsiders. The outsider role the contractors played was reminiscent of the 'ancestors' in Barth's description of Bakhtaman ritual knowledge and the validity of its *corpus*. The contractors were certainly not ancestors of the military personnel they were training. But the military did look to them as the bearers of the wisdom that could solve the problems facing military operations in Afghanistan. A term I heard often in training exercises was 'skeleton key' – an allusion to an illusory piece of information that would finally provide the U.S. military with a solution to Afghanistan.

Thus, the dialectical relationship between performing non-discursive knowledge, producing discursive knowledge, and shaping identity can be expressed in two ways. First, the representations of knowledge constituted Afghan-Americans as a category of insiders in America, and secondly it constituted them as experts by predicating their expertise on a presumed belonging *outside* of American culture. Inside the frame of a reconstructed village, Afghan-Americans could position themselves as outsiders and take ownership of the scripts to advise on how authentically they aligned with the perceptions and memories of Afghanistan – despite the fact that the audience of U.S. military service members had more recent experiences in Afghanistan. Assigning the term 'expert' to the Afghan-American contractors carried significant weight to the assumption of the validity and authenticity of the knowledge performed on set. The U.S. military-industrial complex's reliance on authentic knowledge signaled the importance of diasporic expertise and engagement in COIN efforts. As a result, whether constituted as insiders or outsiders, Afghan-American contractors maintained their relevance and status as key components of the U.S. political and military strategy in Afghanistan.

To address role-playing exercises as a medium, I will discuss two of their most prominent features – the village as a stage and the emphasis on Key Leader Engagements, which also demonstrate the interconnectedness of the faces of knowledge. Goffman's perspective on the actors, performances, and the stages upon which everyday presentations of self occur is helpful in understanding how the medium influenced the knowledge that was produced (1959). More specifically, it helps demonstrate how 'we may be able to lay bare some of the determinants of the forms of *coherence* or systematicity achieved in various traditions of knowledge' (Barth 2002: 3). Here, the element of agency

among Afghan-American contractors becomes a critical factor in shaping Afghan cultural knowledge. Farah and other interviewees, who had served as role-players on the village settings, described the village as a theater. Military officers in charge of creating the setting and directing the play consulted with the actors – the role-players – to assess the accuracy of the material world that was created to develop an understanding of Afghanistan. Although most Afghan-Americans who had experience in such settings and with whom I spoke related that they found the artifacts consistent and familiar, those in the second cohort of first generation immigrants (or their second generation peers) often discussed the same artifacts as 'costumes' and 'props' and relegated them to 'playing' (i.e. 'play fighting' when acting out a Special Operations raid on an Afghan household). Suleiman, a former role-player who had moved to America in 1974, described his experience:

> I got to wear a turban and act the part of a tribal elder. I'm Tajik, and that's a more Pashtun thing – the tribal stuff I mean. But it was fun to dress the part of a powerful Afghan *khan*, and show the Americans how to negotiate with an Afghan [...] I got to wear a cloak like Karzai does. The Americans loved it [...] I'd make it tough on them, like if they had raided my house, I would show anger and pound the table or something.

Similarly, a woman to whom he referred me echoed some of his reflections:

> Once I was assigned the role of a village housewife, so I put on a burka and stayed inside the house the whole time. That was boring. The houses were bare and small, and there were, like, farm animals roaming around everywhere. It was freaky. I can't even imagine how Afghans live like that [...] Another time, they did a play night raid and we had to run around inside the house. I was just in regular Afghan costume, like the pants and dress on top, because the point was that the SOF [Special Operation Forces] guys had to try to engage us without offending our honor because I didn't have a headscarf or burka on.

As mentioned above, these interviews suggested that some Afghan-Americans experienced parts of Afghan culture and society in a way that was unprecedented to them. It was part of a world with which they were personally unfamiliar. But they capitalized on such experiences by regenerating assertions about Afghanistan that had been colored by their

contracting work. This proved to be yet another example of the role of migration. Many of the Afghan-American contractors had come to America from the capital city or the more urban areas in Afghanistan. They had lived modern lives with access to education, health, and technology similar to other parts of the world. The equivalent would have been to position a native New Yorker from Manhattan as an expert on life in a remote town in the U.S. state of Wyoming – the experiences would be different enough to question the validity of the representation. Similarly, urbanized Afghans had virtually no experience and/or knowledge of the rural hinterlands in Afghanistan, where the U.S. military based its areas of operation. The theatrical dimension that Goffman emphasized in this sense was both metaphorical, but also quite literal. The setting allowed Afghan-Americans, as 'social actors,' to redraw the boundaries of their identities by using the material instruments of the stage to define their performance (1959). The reliance on the village and the physical world it invoked created an opportunity for the contractors to develop a collective narrative about Afghanistan, and though the articulations could be contested, it still afforded Afghan-Americans a voice in shaping what the military came to understand as Afghan culture and Afghan people. The reconstructed villages constituted a physical way of demarcating boundaries and delineating the space about which knowledge would be produced and communicated. The village sets signified the rural over the urban, and the periphery over the center. They produced a 'structuring structure' – the *habitus* that represented what Afghanistan is by the presence of artifacts that signified it (1977). Much like the Kabylian house Bourdieu references, the Afghan villages became a medium that classified and conveyed knowledge about Afghanistan by structuring the life and relationships that fell within the construct. The frame of such interactions and the

availability of the cultural materials that could be used to represent ideas associated with Afghanistan allowed Afghan-Americans, as social actors, to fulfill what both Barth and Goffman envisioned: a coherence of knowledge and identity.

While the next chapter will focus on how Afghan-Americans organize themselves 'off' set, it is worth noting that inter-cultural and social norms that exist outside the context of the village reconstructions continue to permeate the self-presentation of the individual actors, and the narratives that are generated by them. Suleiman confided that, off the stage, Afghan-Americans often questioned the validity of the information presented by individual contractors, but given the purpose of the village-based reconstructions, they stuck to the scripts; their own and those used by the U.S. military. It is worth noting that the scripts the military used were, in fact, often produced by contracting companies hired for the specific task of scenario production. The distinction is important because it clarifies the source of the information – an external actor paid to write narrative reconstructions of a presupposed reality. Suleiman stated:

> everybody came with their own ideas and told the Americans whatever they wanted […] I got into some arguments with the other men because I said 'brother, why are you saying all these things that aren't true.' The Americans would believe it. They probably thought we were like backward savages […] But we didn't criticize each other in front of the Americans. We just said whatever was general, so that they [the military] could have a basic idea about the country and the culture […] it was all for show, anyway. We were playing a part in a big drama.

When asked why he and other contractors did not criticize the coherence of the narratives upon which the scripts were based, Suleiman pointed to the social customs that would have rendered such dissent 'impolite and confrontational.' His reflection revealed the extent to which Afghan-Americans could contest and shape the military's perspectives, but felt their agency was constrained by the social perceptions and proprieties that dictated their

relationships. Interviews with other contractors attested to similar strategies in navigating the dissonance. Soraya, an Afghan-American woman who had served as both a translator and role-player noted:

> A lot of the other role-players were older than me, and they would say totally off-the-wall things about Afghan culture sometimes, but I'm not going to rock the boat, you know? Especially when they are older and I'm supposed to show respect for them. People talk [...] I'd just go along with whatever they said. Besides, we're all in this together for a short amount of time anyway, there's no use. I would rather keep my job.

Soraya's observation highlighted the way Afghan-American contractors managed the differing traditions of knowledge. Even when misinformation defined the interactions between the U.S. military and the contractors, Afghan-Americans chose not to compromise their positions as experts. Their groupness seemed to have a direct bearing on the constitution and communication of knowledge. Brubaker's characterization of groupness as something that 'happens' could be extended to the role-players – there was limited consistency in the effort to convey empirical knowledge versus producing 'expertise' on the spot according to the context in which it was being represented (2007). This sense of belonging and shared purpose was 'productive not only for groupness, but for the production of shared stories [...]' (Puskas 2009: 43). Thus, the representations of knowledge were more reflective of self-presentations among the contractors than a collective effort to rectify distortions of Afghanistan.

Another component of the scenario-based trainings was the focus on key leader engagements – or KLEs, as they became known more familiarly. At a time when anthropology was increasingly referenced in relation to COIN operations, 'rapport building' was widely perceived as the conduit to winning hearts and minds. In both the reconstructed villages and in offices and classrooms where such trainings were held, KLEs

provided an opportunity for mock interactions between U.S. military service members and Afghan 'influencers,' who could encompass a broad range of roles, such as tribal leaders, village elders, warlords, government ministers, and three-star generals. An Army colonel, who directed training exercises noted that 'practicing cultural do's and don'ts helps soldiers understand how to interact with Afghan leaders […] It helps them build rapport and it helps them avoid the cultural traps that, say someone without that knowledge, might fall into.' An example of a common role-playing scenario was to enact a situation in which an American military service member would engage an Afghan-American contractor playing the role of an Afghan National Army officer. The scene and script would focus on the provision of training and technical assistance to Afghan security forces by the U.S. military[19]. U.S. military personnel were drilled with a set of key points about Afghan culture that was supposed to guide their conduct as trainers or mentors to their Afghan counterparts. As Farah's account noted earlier, some of the recommendations were based on perceptions – not first-hand experiences – of Afghan social customs. In other cases, they reified the impressions and assumptions that U.S. military personnel gathered from their deployments to Iraq. The medium of scripting and role-playing circumscribed the knowledge produced because it placed the performance of each actor within a specific frame that was duplicated, without accounting for differences in human behavior and context, in every iteration of the exercise. As the role-players physically performed cultural knowledge, they strengthened and validated ideas by cultivating a particular understanding of Afghanistan and Afghans based on routine interactions. In the KLE trainings observed, role-playing exercises were not solely cross-cultural. They were

[19] Such trainings gained even greater traction when counterinsurgency became obsolete, and the NATO mission transformed to a train, advise, and assist effort.

directly aimed at diffusing the power differential between the U.S. government and the Afghan population, who were subject to the military occupation. Thus, the concept of 'rapport-building' perpetuated as an anthropological skill within the military and defense sector may have resembled practices similar to building trust and relationships during ethnographic fieldwork, but is wholly different because of the intent. Trust is cultivated to gather cultural intelligence among local populations (especially from key leaders). Once an understanding is established, it is used to convince Afghans of the U.S. government's top-down governance and security measures. For Afghan-American contractors, this was neither lost on them nor necessarily problematic. The medium of role-playing was more about power than knowledge, as it allowed Afghan-Americans to negotiate how – and what – to represent as cultural expertise or intelligence. Suleiman explained:

> Many of the soldiers we work with have just come back from Iraq. They think Afghanistan is like Iraq, and we tell them 'no, it's not,' but sometimes the ideas are inside their heads and we play along because even though it's not the same, it's still similar. They believe that tribes are the answer to winning the war, and we play the tribal leaders so that they can know how to win over the tribal leaders when they get to Afghanistan. I tell them what to say and how to act like an Afghan [...] so that Afghans aren't offended and feel like they can trust the Americans. Trust is a big problem.

At the reconstructed village sites, some KLEs centered on *shuras* and *jirgas*; assemblies of local decision-makers to develop consensus around important issues to the community. Often, they positioned a high-ranking military officer in a role-playing scenario where he or she would learn to negotiate with a tribal leader or village elder acting in the role of 'key leader.' Within this frame, the contractors consistently articulated and performed select elements of Afghan culture that resonated with hyper-Orientalized perceptions of Afghans. Based on his experience training U.S. military personnel, Suleiman further recounted:

> We advise them to drink tea with Afghans, not shake hands with their left hand. I don't know if that's really an Afghan thing. I thought only Arabs did that, but that's what I hear from other people, so I say the same thing to not confuse them [...] So when I wear the *loonghi* and I act like a tribal leader, I make sure the soldiers drink lots of green tea to build a rapport with me - and I also point out that they have to talk to me about my family and land and animals, you know, not business-related stuff in the first few meetings.

His narrative, like Farah's, demonstrated the uncertainty of the experts in formulating expertise. However, it also demonstrated how the medium facilitated the contractors' choice to shape the ways in which U.S. military servicemen and servicewomen would ultimately present themselves in Afghanistan. More importantly, scripting and staging such interactions also meant that Afghan-Americans could define the socio-cultural values of significance to local Afghan populations. By reinforcing notions such as drinking tea to 'building rapport' the contractors emphasized superficial elements that would win over the Afghan population in the long-term. Such ideas have also been influential in reframing the issue of 'green-on-blue' attacks, a term that signifies violence by Afghan military and police forces against NATO coalition forces. Many of the trainings emphasized that such incidents could be mitigated with better rapport building to establish trust. In interviews and observations, a sharp contrast emerged in the responses to such an idea among the ranks. Those with higher ranks, who were further removed from directly training Afghan soldiers or police spoke of the virtues of 'bonding' over a common mission. But U.S. military personnel, who worked side by side with Afghans on a day-to-day basis, were wary of the overly-simplistic reliance on rapport building as a solution – for good reason. It helped advance the notion that the war in Afghanistan was a cultural one, with the solution imminent in increased cross-cultural understanding rather than an accountability of post-Cold War politics that had entrenched divisions and instability in Afghan society and the national economy. The conflation of ideas, such as breaking bread and drinking tea,

oversimplified the grievances of local Afghan populations as well. In the case of green-on-blue attacks, the reliance on rapport building characterized the reason for the attacks to be in part socio-cultural, shifting liability from policy-related security issues to a perception that inherent cultural differences contributed to the frequency of such assaults. As a result, the U.S. military mobilized 'warrior-diplomats' in haste, through the aforementioned training exercises, to roll out COIN efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The rationale was that U.S. military personnel could be trained in warfare as well as in the social sciences that would allow them to assume a nation-building role as cultural ambassadors – a monumental task that was substantiated by the message conveyed through the role-playing exercises: that the war in Afghanistan was inherently a tribal or ethnic conflict exacerbated by cross-border tensions with Pakistan. The exercises and village scenarios lent credibility to the belief that the war stemmed from a natural proclivity for conflict among Afghans, a myth that has been at the root of creating an 'other' upon which the shortcomings of the U.S. strategy could be traced.

Contemporary processes of mythmaking in American society are in fact rooted in historical depictions of other cultures that shape perceptions of 'otherness.' Village reconstructions became a popular fixture of World's Fairs in America in the 1800s, and resonate with current efforts to use and substitute American citizens of different ethnicities as long-distance representatives of their imagined communities. When expositions such as the World's Fair gained traction in the 19th century (Welch 2011), villages were staged and populated with actors representing various ethnic groups. However, the role-players in these reconstructions were often employed locally from communities that could be stereotyped based on phenotypic similarity. For example, Mexicans would be hired to pose

as Arabs at Orientalized Arabian villages. As a result, Americans did not necessarily encounter other cultures as much as they did the essentialized 'writing' of cultures distant from their own (Clifford and Marcus 1986). The shallow ethnographic sketches lent themselves to generic exoticized narratives of foreign countries that were disguised as knowledge based on the symbols, words, and actions associated with them. They were representations responsible for perpetuating a set of beliefs – using costumes, props, and acting in a way that signified a specific narrative about their social identities. Thus, the medium made natural that which could be exaggerated, exoticized, or Orientalized. The practice of creating and transmitting knowledge as such is 'mythological,' in a sense. But, it does not necessarily mean that information is omitted or ignored. Roland Barthes argued that '[m]yth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact' (Barthes 1993: 112). Objectified as curiosities and framed within a supposed indigenous or 'natural' setting, the point of performances, such as the World's Fair or the contemporary training villages, is to emphasize the distinctions between 'us' and 'them,' and shape a way of thinking and acting in response to the perceived differences. In the theater of war, Joseph Masco describes this as '[t]he circulation of affect, the ability to be coordinated as subjects through felt intensities rather than reason at a mass level' - and an inalienable 'core aspect of modern life' (2014: 20). The militarism that shapes much of American society today thrives on the sense of affect. The village-based role-playing exercises are an example of how knowledge can be marshaled to help U.S. military personnel familiarize with the 'other,' and anticipate uncertainties that give them an advantage in combat (Masco 2014).

Masco acknowledges that security policies have fostered an 'American identity [that] is continually reconstituted through national trauma, generating desires for counterterror expertise, as well as for heroism, sacrifice, and revenge' (2014: 210). His perspective prompts a critical examination of the connection between security and citizen-state relations. In examining Afghan-American contractors as providers of counter-terror expertise, the relationship between their role and the perpetuation of the military-industrial complex becomes apparent. By being collectively constituted as subjects and experts in role-playing exercises, the contractors were mobilized within the diaspora as much as a commodity, as they were a symbolic representation of Afghanistan and a war whose intensity could be 'gamed,' tested, and experienced in reconstructions of reality on military bases across America. Moreover, the narratives that emerged based on needs that could justify the war and specific interventions in Afghanistan shaped not only how the public perceived 'Afghan-Americans' as a community, but they also affected – mostly by revising – the community's perception of its own boundaries.

Translators and interpreters

Beyond cultural expertise, language naturally became a critical medium for the transmission of knowledge especially among the military's elite forces. As Robert Kaplan observed in *Imperial Grunts*, '[l]inguistics had to become an occupational Special Forces skill the same as weaponry, communications, medicine, and intelligence gathering […] More emphasis had to be given to cultural training' (2005: 264). This 'weaponizing' of culture is precisely what Gusterson (2009; 2007; 2007a), Price (2014; 2011; 2009) and Gonzalez (2008) argued against during the advent of the Human Terrain System. Kaplan's observation is based on a series of ethnographic accounts of his time conducting research

within military units, primarily Special Forces operators who, by the nature of their mission, were responsible for stealth community infiltration. But as Kaplan notes, the U.S. military's strategy to win hearts and minds – and by association, the war – had little instrumental legitimacy as a tool in places like Afghanistan. During a botched interaction between a U.S. soldier and a villager in Afghanistan's Gardez province, he laments 'here was where the American Empire, such as it was, was weakest […] it was woefully incompetent in linguistic skills, especially in places and in situations where it counted the most' (2006: 235). Conquering a people thus meant understanding them – in some cases only in so far as to communicate power and make manifest the structures of the empire. Linking Kaplan's observation to Ansonge's and Barkawi's research on utile forms of knowledge in colonial India, it is easier to grasp why linguistic knowledge matters in the fashioning of an empire. It is not just about winning over the local population; it is about mentoring the creation of a parallel military structure reflective of the occupying force and its associated values. They note that:

> In order for knowledge of languages to be used in the education of civil and military officials, it had to be put into teachable forms, into grammar texts, dictionaries, readers, teaching aids, and language exams. What made knowledge of language available for the making of empire was the form into which it was put (Ansonge and Barakawi 2014: 13).

These bureaucratic forms or media underscored the ability of the British empire to 'teach' their Indian counterparts. Diffusing knowledge of the English language required incorporating it into the structure of normative education. It meant going beyond military engagement exercises with the indigenous army. It was a process of re-educating them and cementing the new knowledge into material forms that would remain a standing legacy long after the departure of the occupying force. Similarly, the U.S. military's experience in

Afghanistan is a testament to the critical role language played in facilitating advise-and-assist missions geared towards building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces. As Kaplan pointed out, the strength of the empire therefore depends on the ability to communicate and co-opt. This was a consistent theme during my fieldwork in which the scope of 'Information Operations' (the predecessor to 'Psychological Operations') often took into account not only how information could be gathered, but also how it would be communicated – a role that depended on 'subject matter expertise' from the Afghan-American contractors. In fact, the cloud of Orientalist critique did not dissipate entirely from the subtleties of counterinsurgency. Arguably, in both language and rhetoric, the military shied away from overt references to the subversion of systems inherent in the COIN doctrine. For example, disclosing the basis of interactions with local communities as part of intelligence collection efforts would have compromised the basis of the hearts and minds mission. As a result, intelligence became synonymous with generic references to knowledge and information. The concept of 'intelligence collection' was transformed to the rather innocuous-sounding activity of 'information gathering,' an ambiguous effort that belied the true nature of operations to co-opt local populations. The distinction between intelligence and knowledge minimized the space between activities that constituted 'information gathering' and ethnographic data collection. The reconstitution of intelligence within the defense sector and the military blurred the line between the production and translation of knowledge for the legitimatization of policies and operations, and the types of data that had been the purview of academic study. Thus, the concentration on 'cultural intelligence' indicated a shift to looking at knowledge as a concise, targeted package of data

points to assist the U.S. military personnel in understanding the communities that populated their operational environments.

During counterinsurgency's apex, *Lost in Translation* became a widely referenced documentary that highlighted the significance of language as a gateway to military victory. It also illuminated the extent to which translators and interpreters had become powerbrokers in the war. The video follows an U.S. Army Airborne Company Sergeant negotiating his way in Mangratay, a remote village nestled in the mountains straddling Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the eight-minute clip, the Sergeant and his translator are trudging along a dusty road looking for the village elder so that they can ascertain the area from where the Taliban has been firing on the U.S. base. Mangratay is a ghost town until an older man appears. Satisfied that he has stumbled upon the village elder, the Sergeant tells the camera 'that's him. Fat guy, red beard' and instructs his translator to stop him for a talk. The sergeant goes through the customary motions of greeting him and offering him a seat on a log before launching into a quickly-issued inquiry about the security of the area:

> *Sergeant [to interpreter]:* Tell him, how has things been here?
> *Village Elder:* I can only speak Pashto.
> *Translator:* That's ok. How is the security here?
> *Village Elder:* There is no security.
> *Translator:* No, what I mean is how's the security situation here?
> *Village Elder:* I just told you! There is no security here. We've yet to see any security around here.
> *Translator [to the Sergeant]:* We are fine. They have no problems here.
> *Documentary voiceover:* Is it any wonder that the Americans feel embattled in these situations and the ordinary Afghans feel ignored?

As the drama unfolds, it becomes apparent that the translator is a Dari speaker in a predominantly Pashto-speaking area. He struggles to comprehend what is relayed by the elder, and as a medium for that information, he redefines the content in his translation. In

his capacity as a translator, he is able to exercise agency and power in crafting the messages communicated between the U.S. military and the subjects of its occupation. One of the most pivotal moments of the exchange is when the village elder delicately addresses the question about the Taliban's prevalence in the area by relating a story in which the answer lies between the lines:

> *Village elder:* I agree with you on the cooperation. The Taliban are over there, not far away. I would like to tell them a story. In our country, we grow wheat and we have ants. There is no way we can stop the little ants from stealing the wheat. There are so many little ants it is almost impossible to stop them. I've told this story to help the Americans understand the situation in Afghanistan. Yes, the Americans built this road and they would do more to help us if we cooperate with them. Of course we know that! And we would like to cooperate with them. It's just that we can't.
> *Translator [to Sergeant]:* Okay. He's giving many examples. The main point is that, he said, if you want to get every ACMs [anti-coalition militias], they are behind this road - pardon me, sir, behind this mountain.

At no point does the translator communicate that he does not understand the elder. He feigns proficiency. Unable to grasp the message articulated by the elder, he washes over the narrative by reducing it to a bunch of 'examples.' But the villager's story was full of meaning. Through the visual of ants overwhelming the wheat and the farmers responsible for them, the villager was in fact describing the constraint the Taliban's prevalence posed for the village. It alluded to the prevalence of the Taliban as the key factor that circumscribed the villagers' ability to cooperate with the Coalition Forces. Instead, he chooses to state an answer consistent with the Sergeant's mission rather than admit that he cannot serve as a conduit for communication. Ultimately, it is the voice of the villager as well as the sergeant that gets compromised – or lost – in the exchange and translation. By failing to convey the information accurately, the exchange led to increased frustration and hostility, with the Sergeant shouting at the villager that the problem of the Taliban's

shadow governance could be resolved if the people, like the elder, decided to 'shoot him [a Talib – author's clarification] in the fucking face' – a statement conveyed so physically and emphatically that it rendered a verbal translation obsolete.

The documentary is a window into translations as a form of media through which the traditions of knowledge about Afghanistan are constituted. The impetus for hiring contractors to serve as translators and interpreters reflected the need to make Afghans and their 'mindsets,' which became a popular allusion to their collective psychology, intelligible. It also showed that the military was aware of its intelligence-gathering limitations. The challenge, articulated by both the U.S. military personnel and Afghan-American contractors, was the emphasis on quantity over quality. Although many U.S. military colonels and generals were staffed with competent translators, those who engaged on the frontlines of the war were sometimes issued translators, who could not speak the languages or dialects of the regions in which they operated. This was not necessarily a reflection of the lack of linguistic proficiency among the Afghan-American contractors. Rather, it was representative of Afghanistan's cultural and linguistic homogenization by the West. I do argue, however, that as the war drew on, the distinctions among populations and the complexity of the culture became more publically known and addressed. But in the initial surge of contracting opportunities for Afghan-American translators, the ease with which employment could be secured (based on qualifications not additional contingencies such as government clearance) was widely known in the diaspora. Asma, a former doctor in Afghanistan, who worked as a Pashto and Dari translator for five years, recounted her experience with other Afghan-American translators:

> There were so many who did not speak Dari even to a basic standard. They didn't know Pashto, just English. They couldn't read or write, and they didn't translate correctly because,

> if they couldn't find a word, they would just say something – like close to it, but not exactly the translation […] You couldn't say 'why do you say this? It's not right,' but they didn't care […] They knew they would get a big paycheck for doing nothing, for pretending.

Others noted that those who spoke Dari and Pashto to a professional or native level tended to lack similar fluency in English, which also limited the quality of the translation. Asma contended that 'the biggest problem with some translators was that they would rather translate something than say that they don't know the meaning.' Translators represented not only the media through which the U.S. military power was negotiated; they also revealed the extent to which subjects could have a voice in the process of nation-building. As intermediaries, the contractors controlled the channel of communication in interactions between the Afghans and the U.S. military personnel, inserting a neo-colonial dimension to the relationship with the local populations. By managing the content of the messaging, the translators positioned themselves as authorities on the knowledge transmitted between the U.S. military and Afghan citizens. Although the information gleaned from translations ultimately shaped military and nation-building strategies in Afghanistan, they were heavily influenced by the subjectivities of the translators.

The relationship between translation, power, and identity is apparent in the encounter between the Afghan-American translators and the U.S. military-industrial complex. The experience has brought a plethora of questions to the forefront of anthropology as a discipline. Drawing upon studies in translation theory, I examine the performance of translation as a political act. Afghan-American contractors consistently echoed that the U.S. military with whom they engaged were mostly oblivious to the negotiations of language and power that occurred within the diasporic milieu. Translation thus became a medium for reasserting *Afghaniyat* and producing or reifying (at times

contradicting) the authenticity of knowledge among the contractors. This observation is explained by Emily Apter's work in translation theory. She views translation as 'a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history' (2006: 6). For Afghan-American contractors who worked as translators, the role provided an unprecedented relevance in American society and politics. When I met Sameera, she had returned from her third rotation in Afghanistan, where she worked as a translator in Kandahar, Kabul, and Herat. A Dari speaker, her first rotation was as a Pashto linguist with a major U.S. defense contractor. She confided, '[w]hen it was time to take the test online, my cousin's wife took the test for me. Now it's different because they changed it so that you have to go in and show your ID and everything. When I did it, it was pretty easy to have other people take the test. But the questioned remained: how did she translate from Dari and English into Pashto? She didn't. As Sameera explained,

> the companies pay a lot more if you speak Pashto, but when you go to Afghanistan, it is harder and more expensive for them to send you back […] usually they find some other work for you […] I didn't have much work for the first two months, but then I got to do some translating, like for government documents, in English and Dari. I even helped the Germans in Afghanistan because I speak German – because my family moved to Germany first before America […] It was good work for three years and we [meaning she and her husband] saved up a lot […] The point is no matter what I translated, it wasn't going to end the war. But it was a good opportunity for me and, you know, other Afghans to get their foot in the door for more important jobs and to make some money […] We were able to save for the first time. Just working for even a few years has made us feel more stable, especially having a young daughter and childcare expenses […]. We were finally able to do things in America that we couldn't do before – you know like buy things, houses, vacations. I'm starting a business with another woman who was also a translator.

In considering Sameera's experience, translations are a conduit for knowledge transmission in as much as they are 'a significant medium for subject re-formation and political change' (Apter 2006: 6). Through the contracting opportunities in translation, Afghan-American contractors, such as Sameera, reconstituted their position in the

diasporic community as well as in the American economy. Moreover, they openly recognized the shortcomings, if not outright futility, of their role as intermediaries in the war; recognizing that the best they could do would be to look out for their own long-term interests as Afghans in America. The relationship between a sense of integration in America, and the appeal of consumerism struck me in Sameera's and other interviews. The ability to 'buy' things reflected a reconstruction of individual identity and agency. Similarly, 'getting a foot in the door' alluded to the lack of opportunities available to Afghan-Americans to gain social and economic mobility if they, like Sameera's family, had come to America with limited socio-political or economic capital.

In addition to shaping identities and opportunities in the diasporic community, translation also enabled Afghan-American contractors to reshape Afghans in Afghanistan as political subjects. In particular, in situations such as the documentary scenario, simultaneous translations or interpretations that occurred in interpersonal communications (versus translating written sources) reinforced the separation between 'us' and 'them' and positioned the contractors in a liminal state between two competing associations – the U.S. military and Afghans. Although for some the distinction was not difficult to reconcile, for others, such as Rostam, the medium of translation challenged his sense of belonging to America as well as his perceived loyalty to Afghanistan and Afghans. He noted

> at times, I would break out of character when working with the Special Forces because although a lot of those guys were talented and gave a shit, some of them were disrespectful and crude – especially with the older Afghan villagers. I would get the gist of what they were saying and then put it in better terms for the Afghans [...] and when I knew the Afghans were just going round and round in circles, I would filter out the most important information and pass that on.

This treatment of the message is similar to Barthes' analysis of textual signifiers through the 'cultural' code (1970). The U.S. military's response further strengthened the perception of the translation 'as a message, not a medium, and one not wholly in the control of its author' (Hawkes 1984: 119). The military received select messages distilled through the sensibilities of translators, who determined not only what was important, but also what was worth communicating. By assigning value to the messages, translators shaped the voices at the both ends of the dialogue in Afghanistan.

While some Afghan-Americans sought contracting opportunities as an occasion to generate a new understanding of Afghanistan and Afghan culture, many others in the diaspora actively opposed participating on cultural advisory or language contracts. As 'conscientious objectors,' they contested not only the production of knowledge, but also the representation of Afghanistan. The prevalence of 'white-collar' professions was a consistent pattern among the objectors. The relationship between their jobs and their opposition to defense contracting jobs as cultural advisors, role-players, and translators, had been elucidated in the early days of my fieldwork. In conversations with two cousins at an Afghan soccer match, I had inquired why one of the cousins, who was fluent in Pashto, had not worked as a translator. The other cousin responded with 'because he has the luxury of not worrying about work like that. He already has a government job.' The implication was that a government job – or something equally stable and well-paid – was the sort of economic and social mobility Afghan-Americans sought through the contracting channel. Malalai, an Afghan-American woman in her late 20s, who worked as a project manager for an international relief organization, argued that she 'objected to these defense contracts because they don't paint a real picture of Afghanistan […] It makes my hair stand

up. A lot of the info is subjective and makes Afghans sound like something from 1,001 Arabian Nights or Rambo [...] it's really off base. I think it creates misperceptions rather than an actual understanding.' Others in the diaspora conveyed similar attitudes. Adam[20], a former IT consultant, who had started his own computer services company, had been approached by BAE Systems to serve as a socio-cultural analyst. He questioned the basis of the recruitment, arguing:

> I'm Afghan by birth and heritage. But I grew up in California, worked in Silicon Valley, and could tell you the best surf spots in the state. I know more about the coast of California than I ever could about Afghanistan, but it was hard to believe, for me, that the government would be willing to pay me a ton of money to act like I knew what I was talking about [...] don't get me wrong, it was hard not to be tempted by the money – I was – but at the end of the day, I was like I'm being asked to portray a caricature of Afghanistan and I don't want to do that.

Adam's perspective, similar to Malalai's, compared the representation of Afghanistan to a caricature of reality and alluded to some cultural interlocutors as performers. They were paid to act as experts; perpetuating scripts about Afghanistan that did not align with real life. Their objections also resonated with developments, at that time, in the discipline of anthropology. The concerns of some Afghan-Americans and anthropologists centered on the extent to which cultural knowledge – and Afghan culture – was compromised by the military's approach to knowledge production. Among their objections, association was another primary reason for the decision not to engage with the U.S. military. Some opposed the U.S. military's occupation of Afghanistan and chose to disassociate from American hegemony. Some objectors vehemently criticized contractors for having "sold out" by supporting the occupation. The interaction between the contractors and the objectors

[20] He had an Afghan name, but chose to go by an Americanized version of his Afghan namesake instead to facilitate pronunciation. Therefore, I employed an Anglo pseudonym to indicate his name.

showed the tensions in diasporic identity. Contradictory to the criticism of 'selling out,' many contractors I interviewed saw it as incumbent upon their sense of American citizenship to assist the U.S. government by assuming the role of cultural interlocutors.

As a result, new class distinctions emerged both among Afghan-Americans who were working on programs, and between them and the 'conscientious objectors' within the diaspora. Role players were often discussed as the least esteemed type of engagement because it defied the general conservatism with which the Afghan-American community viewed interactions within and outside of the community. In explaining why she hadn't pursued short-term contractual work as a role-player, Laili underscored a common perception among some Afghan-Americans that 'it's one thing to be translating and helping Afghans and Americans understand each other, it's completely another thing to be rolling around in the dirt and acting in a way that can be perceived to be very demeaning.' This perspective was mostly due to the fact that the role players did not necessarily require a formal degree or any sort of higher education. It was also the least selective type of engagement and therefore the easiest to secure[21]. Afghans from all walks of life could apply, and if hired, work and live in close proximity – cinching a social distance that may have otherwise remained a chasm. For some Afghan-Americans, the role-playing positions were an opening to capitalize on higher-level positions with greater status and economic benefits. The spectrum of work related to translation and cultural advisory conferred relatively more prestige upon an individual because it often required an education or degree and some professional experience[22]. In addition, the jobs limited the power distance

[21] Provided that an applicant could gain a security clearance.

[22] Some of this distinction was displaced in later years as counterinsurgency training that focused on key leader engagement and role playing exercises often recruited former Afghan government officials within the diaspora.

between an advisor (or an interpreter) and key decision-makers in the U.S. government. Although the Afghan-Americans who served on the programs often cited a strong desire to help Afghanistan's reconstruction, many were reluctant to return to Afghanistan or to accept positions that involved extensive interaction with the local Afghan populations or were removed from the familiarity of American power. As Laili explained 'being in Kabul was shocking. The people are not like they used to be. They had no respect – not for women, not for elders, nothing.' Laili's decision to work in Afghanistan was contingent upon not only being placed at a secure facility, but specifically at the U.S. Embassy 'where [she] could associate with people who are of similar understanding and *saowiya*.' The consistency of class-based discussions reverberated throughout my fieldwork among Afghan-Americans. For example, some Afghan-Americans had the opportunity to work with renowned generals in advisory capacities, thus directly contributing knowledge and opinions to impact Afghanistan's security and political economy. Similarly, Afghan-Americans with language capabilities, particularly native-level fluency and literacy in English, Dari, and Pashto, were actively sought out to work at key intelligence and media analysis centers. Although the attribution of status was inconsistent among the community of translators and advisors, the prevalent perception was that Afghan-Americans who participated as role-players often suffered a status loss, despite their background and social class. Gender was also a component in assigning status based on occupation. Married women, who worked as role-players, were often stigmatized as hailing from homes in which the men were failing as the heads of their households. This was less so if couples volunteered as role-players together, but in the case of married women and mothers venturing into such employment in the company of U.S. military men (without their

husbands), their work was perceived as overt and unfavorable commentary on their *saowiya*. Thus, class dynamics within the diaspora had a bearing on the type of work the contractors sought, and defined new standards against which to judge community belonging. The implications about class and status projected by work with the U.S. military created new markers of distinction and identity within the diaspora. Afghan-Americans echoed a distinct sense of 'us' and 'them' between themselves and Afghans – or those outside 'the wire,' as local populations were often addressed. Notably, in discussing the nature of their work, Afghan-Americans used 'we' to identify with the U.S. and NATO military personnel with whom they worked and employed 'they' to talk about Afghans in Afghanistan. The way of thinking seemed to reflect the contractors' alignment with the coalition forces as protagonists in the production of war, casting local Afghans as extras in a the theater of operations. The next section examines how such attitudes reproduced messages through material products that reinforced the exoticization and marginalization of Afghans in Afghanistan.

Material representations of cultural knowledge

The goal of cultural knowledge production during the GWoT closely resembles an attempt at 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus 1986). But this concept, as applied by the military, differs significantly from its application in anthropology. Anthropologists do not necessarily seek definitive quantifiable answers or solutions, and thus 'writing culture' becomes an exercise in understanding and exploration through ethnographic representation. In the military, however, the deployment of 'anthropology' is far more formulaic and algorithmic. The task is dependent upon distinguishing absolutes – what facts can be drawn from quick observations to make inferences about the success or failure

of interventions. Whereas concepts such as objectivity and reflexivity figure prominently among an anthropologist's concerns in ethnographic writing, for the military, they can often hamper rapid action and endanger the lives of personnel. During COIN, the military's version of 'writing culture' became a significant method of predicting human behavior (often quantitatively) to anticipate threats. It also represented the instrumentalized, 'accessible' type of anthropology used by the military that usually eschewed qualitative observations. Although there may be positive results to such approaches, the main shortcoming is that it breaks up human behavior into static, uniform variables. The trend is most evident in technological developments such as socio-cultural simulation and forecasting programs. Gonzalez identifies 27 programs managed by private contractors that create projections of human behavior or enable comprehensive war-gaming (2015: 10). He notes that at a macro-level, '[s]ome scientists view prediction and forecasting programmes as a way of avoiding war. They argue that if military leaders can predict the next global hotspot, then steps can be taken to mitigate future conflict' (Gonzalez 2015: 14). Nominally known as cultural 'sensemaking' in military and intelligence communities, it reflects a process by which 'to effectively and accurately make sense of activity patterns and worldviews that may be foreign to them,' with the stipulation that 'understanding and predicting the activities and specific behaviors of cultural others requires knowledge about cultures' (Rasmussen et al. 2013: 28). The definition corresponds to Barth's faces of knowledge that work together to create way of theorizing the world. In the realm of national defense, Rasmussen attempts to quantify the specifically qualitative theoretical model Barth proposes. Rasmussen advocates the profusion of 'mental models' – modes of thinking and behavior that are conducive to mapping and analysis in the same way

scientific or mathematical models are studied. But such applications reinforce criticisms issued by anthropologists, such as Gonzalez, Price, and Gusterson – namely that the process of 'writing culture' is scripted as a formula and is based on a system of inputs and outputs. The presiding assumption is that certain inputs, such as a particular tribe or ethnicity, will yield certain outputs, such as 'insurgent' or 'elite.' This sort of classification denies the complexities inherent in the cultural composition of populations or in the dynamic nature of human behavior. Transcribing culture in such a way also detracts from its meaning, leaving a translation of customs and behaviors that is not necessarily representative of the culture at all. In the context of the war on terror, 'writing culture' became the task of soldiers and civilians as anthropologists and linguists. The problem with this approach is explained by Asad, who notes that at least

>]o]ne difference between the anthropologist and the linguist in the matter of translation is perhaps this: that whereas the latter is immediately faced with a specific piece of discourse produced within the society studied, a discourse that is then textualized, the former must construct the discourse as a cultural text in terms of meanings implicit in a range of practices (1986: 160).

The process of 'cultural translation,' which he discusses, is a product of inputs. Cultural trainings in the military and defense sector often relegate cross-cultural 'sense-making' to anyone who may have a vague familiarity not just with a culture, but also with a language. Translators, for example, are critical intermediaries communicating across language barriers. However, their role within the military also requires them to elucidate certain ethnographic moments or discourses to interpret their significance. They produce and negotiate meaning. Many interviewees among the military highlighted their reliance on 'terps' – or interpreters – as their primary resource for cultural knowledge. More interestingly perhaps, in the shift towards recruiting interpreters from local areas in

Afghanistan, Afghan-American contractors who worked as cultural advisors became obsolete as local interpreters took the lead in translating both the language and the culture. As Asad observes, within this system,

> the process of "cultural translation" is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power – professional, national, international. And among these conditions is the authority of ethnographers to uncover the implicit meanings of subordinate societies. Given that that is so, the interesting question for enquiry is […] how power enters into the process of "cultural translation," seen both as a discursive and as a non-discursive practice' (Asad 1986: 163).

The 'conditions of power' are explicitly defined in the relationship between the U.S. military and their cultural and linguistic advisors. Underneath the umbrella of America's political power and international interests, such micro-level interactions were indicative of how power disparities may have compromised the objectivity of cultural observations. In the simplest sense, the transaction between the military and the diaspora was both socially and economically consequential. As advisors and translators, the authority of Afghan-Americans to interpret Afghan culture and Islam was checked by the expectations of both the U.S. military and the multi-million dollar defense contracting companies for whom they worked. The idea is further illustrated by looking at what Asad discusses as a 'crisis of representation' and also by re-engaging the concept of framing (1986). While Asad's analysis focuses on representation as a colonial legacy, the observation is nonetheless relevant to the cultural narratives at the core of this thesis. Colonial systems often generated romanticized, biased, or distorted ethnographies of specific populations, passing off such accounts as something akin to fact. In reality, however, such discourse was often (whether consciously or inadvertently) the product of power inequalities between colonial administrations and their subjects. Similarly, producing cultural knowledge about Afghanistan and using 'culture' as a medium to communicate hegemonic interests has been

fraught with the exigencies of COIN operations. In part, it is an understandable constraint. For example, infantrymen do not enter military service and train for many years to be become anthropologists or social scientists. They prepare for war, not for nation-building. In the following section, I will concentrate on Smartbooks and Master Narratives as prevalent media that provide a characterization of Afghanistan to U.S. military audiences. There, pre-deployment hand-outs display the interconnectedness of the assertions about Afghanistan as the corpus, and their representation in physical written documents.

The most widely-available literature on other cultures comes in the form of Smartbooks published by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), which often run the risk of either essentializing or codifying ethnographic information into a particular matrix of values because they are meant to be used as quick-reference handbooks. While each branch of the military has its own similar country reference book, the Army's version seemed to be the most circulated and referenced during my fieldwork. In the effort to make the documents understandable and relatable within a short amount of time in the field, the data often draws conclusions upfront or becomes a step-by-step guide to building relationships. The ideas gain traction as they are captured in ink and paper, and reproduced en masse. The point, however, is precisely what Asad warns about – that though steeped in cultural relativism, the representation of cultures is done to further substantiate America's military and political power beyond its own shores. Moreover, the representation and dissemination of knowledge takes place as a series of 'disarticulated culture factoids,' which lack the coherence of a cultural framework in the hopes of providing a generalized context (Price 2010: 245). During the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the U.S. military similarly marshaled expertise on defining Arab and Islamic cultural

norms that could enhance local engagements; devolving them to a series of guidelines for interpersonal interactions (Davis 2010). Davis' research on U.S. Marines in Iraq notes the prevalence of 'three-day intensive course on the history and religions of Iraq to manuals and CDs on the country and language' and the 'list of dos and don'ts, which embody behaviors that can be obeyed like orders' (Davis 2010: 301). The body of knowledge about Afghanistan is therefore adapted to a medium that can better serve the war's mission. For example, TRADOC's Afghanistan Smartbook 2011 cites religion and traditional values, such as family and honor, as critical aspects of the 'Afghan Psyche and Behavior' (74). Although they may be valid assertions, they assume a homogenous inclination among Afghans towards the values. Moreover, they suggest that Afghans will respond to certain stimuli in a particular way, which is linked to culture and ethnicity and undermines the effects of class and social status. The exposition of the Afghan psyche includes a discussion on the formative role of Islam and the 'insha'allah attitude' that underpins fatalism as 'a way to cope with a lack of food, clean water, security, and healthcare.' Such claims are rolled into Geert Hofstede's *Six Dimensions of Culture* and Edward T. Hall's work on cultural contexts (Hall 1966; 1976; Hofstede 2005). In my experience, Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist, was often discussed as an anthropologist given his research on the impact of national cultures on organizational behavior. Cross-cultural training events drew heavily from his characterization of national cultures to account for differences between American and non-Western traditions. Hall, on the other hand, was an American anthropologist who provided a similar structure for understanding disparities in behavior and decision-making across the world. He was primarily concerned with how culture affects communication, concluding that countries like Japan and Afghanistan that have 'collectivist' forms of social

organization tend to be 'high-context' – or greatly nuanced by the focus on community and cultivating relationships (1976). In contrast, America is considered 'low context' because it tends towards 'individualism' and concentrates on tasks and results over relationships. In a commonly referenced diagram, Afghanistan is classified as a 'traditional' society as opposed to America, a 'modern' society. The emphasis is on the thinking and cognitive processes prevalent among Afghans. Drawing upon factors such as 'Individualism,' 'Long-Term Orientation,' and 'Power Distance,' Hofstede's model was designed to explain the variances in business or workplace values across cultures. Cross-cultural competence training within the military adapts the model to reflect the differences between American values and the norms U.S. military personnel could expect to encounter in the theater of operations. Smartbooks contain several pages explaining Hofstede's dimensions of culture and relating them to demonstrative ethnographic examples in Afghanistan. At the tail end of COIN, military personnel were increasingly put into roles as advisors to the Afghan National Security Forces as well as to the Ministries of Defense and Interior[23]. To reason with cultural differences in a new operational environment, they were taught to contextualize Afghans and Afghanistan through Hofstede's model. An Air Force major discussed 'the need to find out how Afghans worked,' recalling: 'Once we had the trainings, we started to understand that Afghans are usually late to meetings and don't stick to the agenda because they have a high-context, collectivist culture.' His reference points echoed Farid's lessons in Afghan culture. They also captured the most prevalent, essentializing assumptions about the Afghans' way of life, which have developed as a result of the

[23] After the drawdown of U.S. and international troops in Afghanistan, NATO's International Security Assistance Force transitioned to Resolute Support Mission – a non-combat, train-advise-and-assist role. The primary goals were to supervise the development of the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces, as well as the Ministries of Interior and Defense.

narratives produced through the training programs. In Chapter 6, I will elaborate further on how such representations have reinforced corruption and sexual abuse as intrinsically 'cultural' practices in Afghanistan. An Army colonel, who had led cross-cultural curriculum development and published training materials, explained the constraints of products such as Smartbooks: 'It's obviously not comprehensive. But when our guys are down range and don't have a whole lot of time to try to make sense of their environment, these [the books] do the thinking for them.' From the observation, it was difficult to conclude that such efforts intentionally trivialized the complexity of human culture. I argue that the representation of the information mirrored the ways knowledge and intelligence are compartmentalized in the military. Hofstede's and Hall's theories have evolved to not only encompass Afghan culture, but also become a reference point for Afghan-American cultural advisors as they attempt to explain the differences between American and Afghan values. Similar to Farah's assertions about what she had learned to convey about Afghan culture, Farid too stated that he had 'learned about all the anthropology and cultural stuff on the job and told Americans [meaning U.S. military personnel – author's clarification] that Afghans were always going to be late because they come from a high context culture.' The relationship between the material representations and the re-production of their ideas by Afghan-American contractors indicated the complexity of knowledge production and transmission. It also indicated that the contractors' expertise was perhaps more reflective of the diasporic experience than a comprehensive knowledge of Afghanistan.

Before retiring, Majid worked as a cultural advisor for a major defense and management consulting company in Northern Virginia. The year prior to our meeting, he attended several role-playing rotations until a recruiter contacted him for a military

training program based in his home state of Virginia. Majid had not returned to Afghanistan for 31 years, and considered both America and Afghanistan home. His expertise on Afghanistan had been cultivated through discussions with U.S. military personnel and his immediate work supervisors, who had served at least one tour of duty as soldiers in Afghanistan and/or Iraq after 2001. He recalled that 'the soldiers know more about Afghanistan than a lot of Afghans. Some of the presentations are so detailed I don't think many Afghans know the information […] The high-context, low-context stuff was new to me […] I learned to explain Afghan culture and the way Afghans are in the way that they talked about it.' Majid's discussion of his work and expertise resonated with other interviews. Talking through Hall's theory of cultures, Majid referenced the 'backwards nature of Afghans because they are in traditional societies. But respect is very important to them because they are also high-context people.' He further alluded to Hofstede by drawing up a set of informational brochures that outlined classifications of Afghan socio-cultural values according to Hofstede's 'dimensions of culture.' He peered over the charts, pausing to deliberate the meaning of each fundamental dimension. Handwritten on the back of the chart were notes from another presentation titled *Building Rapport with Afghans*. I asked Majid what building rapport with Afghans entailed. He responded, 'you have to be ready to drink a lot of tea, and listen because they don't speak like…they talk for a long time about something different than getting to the point. They are always focused on their families and religion so you have to talk to them about families and religion, you know Islam.' I asked Majid how he had come to know the information and if it had been helpful in his case. He looked quizzically at me, noting: 'Oh, I've never worked with Afghans *in* Afghanistan [emphasis in the original]. I just went to Kabul for a visit – it was terrible – nothing like

what it was like in Zahir Shah or Daoud Khan's time. Now I work here – in Alexandria – and fortunately I don't have to go back there [Afghanistan].' Reviewing the charts, Majid's explanation was revelatory. Rather than applying the model to Afghan culture, Majid adapted Afghan customs to fit the descriptions noted on the chart – a pattern consistent among several interviewees who had been exposed to similar ideas without grounding them in anthropological theories. Like many Afghan-Americans in the same line of work, he singled out 'high-power distance' – a point of reference about people's relationship to power in any given culture, originally theorized by Hofstede (1966). The idea supports the view that in cultures where the populations have limited access to central authorities, local communities will develop and rely on their own indigenous power structures. Majid applied Hofstede's theory to explain that 'you cannot do anything in Afghanistan without the tribal elders. Tribes everywhere are very important […] politics in Kabul can't be Westernized because Afghans have their own way of doing things.' Others, with more recent experiences in Afghanistan, positioned the same indicator of power relationships differently. They noted that a greater distance was evident in the structure of the previous political order – during the monarchy, the king dictated and the constituents obeyed. They argued it was not a matter of tribalism. Interviewees, such as Asma, vehemently rejected such explanations as socially constructed: 'this tribal idea is used for everything but it wasn't that big of a deal in Afghanistan. The tribes were still supporting the king. Maybe not because they wanted to, but because they knew they had to. But now we just hear "oh this is tribal and that is tribal," and everybody forgets history,' she said. Knowledge production in the discussed context challenges epistemological integrity. The operationalization of culture in material representations of expertise demonstrates not only the reductionism

with which the discipline of anthropology has been treated, but also how Afghans have been positioned as subjects in the public understanding of Afghanistan.

An Army captain, who had worked on information operations, explained how he mitigated his own assumptions about the Afghan people by referencing 'what is known about Afghan culture in the training guides.' He cited as 'fact' the 'inherent differences between the West and the Afghan people,' noting that

> 'they [the Afghans] are not ready for sweeping democratic changes. If you look at all of these Narratives together – and basically, I had to do that all of the time because of my role – you can see how everything is related to the tribes and the power play between [sic] them. These are the real deal. They are supposed to help us understand the Afghans, so that we can find the best ways of influencing them. But the more you read about how they think and why they think that way, you realize that we're fighting a never-ending war. They don't care if it's us or the Russians in Afghanistan – they want all foreigners to leave […] or read Barfield's book and you understand why we are failing. It's not called the Graveyard of the Empires for nothing.'

The literature, however, lacks the explanatory power to provide a solution for COIN operations – especially when such interventions did not fare as well as intended by the Coalition Forces. The more visibility the materials had, the more credibility they gleaned from the military community. Barfield's book on Afghanistan is an apt example. During interviews with the military, I often inquired what books they had read in preparation for deployment – Barfield's Afghanistan was a consistent response. The representation of Afghanistan set in the book became a point of reference for both the U.S. military and the cadre of development, government, and NGO professionals engaged in the reconstruction effort. While I do not wish to minimize the validity of every material object about Afghanistan after 2001, I do argue that the authority vested in them have contributed to entrenching essentialist and Orientalized ideas. Such conceptions challenge the notion of culture as a system of meaning that is fundamentally dynamic. Against this backdrop, even

fiction books, such as The Kite Runner, serve as authoritative texts on Afghanistan and Afghan culture. The renowned book, centered on the rape of a young Hazara boy, blurred fiction and reality because of its prevalence as one of the first few Afghanistan-related books at a time when the market was far less saturated with such literature. It has rendered 'real' the ethnic dynamics portrayed by the protagonists, such that their roles have become superimposed on other interactions or observations about social relations in Afghanistan. For example, with regard to the practice of *bacha bazi*, pedophilia or sexual abuse of young boys, observations and interviews among the military consistently showed that they perceived the acts to be a part of Afghan culture (and by relation, assumed it to be condoned by Islamic teachings) because of its depiction in The Kite Runner. Reminiscing about his two-year tenure as a cultural advisor, Ghafoor confided that he was not 'impressed' with Barfield (admitting he had not read the book in its entirety) or any similar compendium of knowledge about Afghanistan. It was a reaction that was similar to many other interviewees in the contractor community. While Ghafoor recalled his experience with a sense of scathing reproach at the ideas represented, his main issue lay in the credibility with which such expertise is treated – and its transformative role on the evolution of Afghan culture. At the interview, he had taken out the sunglasses in his shirt. Holding it in front of me, he asked what I saw.

'Sunglasses, black aviators,' I responded. He shook his head.

'Maybe, to you. But if Barfield or one of those guys says 'this is a symbol of Afghan oppression,' guess what? It's a symbol of Afghan oppression,' Ghafoor said, tucked the sunglasses back in his pocket. 'If you contradict it, your information and your intelligence is

[sic] questioned. These lies have gone for more than ten years and made a lot of people a lot of money. So there's a story and you go with it, and get the job done.'

The 'story' to which Ghafoor alludes has been woven through the development of a grand narrative. In literal terms, the Master Narratives document series is influential in cultivating a compartmentalized understanding of Afghan culture and Afghans. The narratives have become a point of reference for contextualizing the observations military personnel or intelligence may make in Afghanistan. The medium acts much like a filter through which observations are processed to yield answers. Information about people and cultures are sorted into categories, creating a model that assumes homogeneity. For example, the series divides Afghanistan into six audience segments that are meant to account for the myriad groups within the population. It is divided as thus: Central Government Supporters, the Taliban, Pashtun Nationalists, Tajik Nationalists, Turkic Nationalists, and Hazara Nationalists. The key point was for COIN professionals who prepared messaging and counter-messaging to assess how their strategic communications would resonate with the local population. To bridge the communications gap the 'condensed narrative description simulates the voice of someone who believes in the narrative itself, helping communicators and analysts immerse themselves in the mindset of the foreign audience' (Open Source Center 2011: 6). The allusion to the 'mindset' of the Afghan people in the Master Narratives presumes that such psychologies only vary along six distinct paths. It undermines both the ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity of Afghanistan, and limits the scope of COIN messaging. The pre-determination of a mindset harkens to Said's critique of orientalist knowledge production. In the case of the Master Narratives, the knowledge is authenticated in the 'sources' section as derived from 'Afghan

experts' in the diaspora and think-tank communities (Open Source Center 2011: 40-42). I draw on Said to make an important distinction between the expert, the expertise, and the media, which also demonstrates the interconnectedness of the faces of knowledge. What I want to convey here is the involvement of diasporic Afghans in contributing to the Orientalism that has become (particularly in anthropological studies of militarism) associated with the military's take on culture, and is evident in the Master Narratives. Said noted that the

> method by which Orientalism delivered the Orient to the West was the result of an important convergence. For decades, the Orientalists had spoken about the Orient, they had translated texts, they had explained civilizations, religions, dynasties, cultures, mentalities [...] The Orientalist was an expert [...], whose job in society was to interpret the Orient for his compatriots. The relation between Orientalist and Orient was essentially hermeneutical: standing before a distant, barely intelligible civilization or cultural monument, the Orientalist scholar reduced the obscurity by translating, sympathetically portraying, inwardly grasping the hard-to-reach object (1978: 222).

Far removed from Afghanistan, some Afghan-American experts were the functional equivalent of modern-day Orientalists. The U.S. military's and government's assumption that Afghan-Americans could speak for the collective consciousness of Afghans enabled an Orientalist discourse to emerge. The romanticized tropes of warrior tribes fending off outsiders created a portrait of a benign savage that could be changed with sufficient investment from the international community in Afghanistan's social and political development. But it is worth noting that for many U.S. military personnel, the purpose of learning cultural knowledge was relatively far removed from the military operations they had been trained to undertake. In the counterinsurgency period, such personnel were increasingly placed in positions that compelled them to take on the role of foreign policy professionals – an extension of the U.S. Embassy's control in volatile areas to which

embassy employees could not travel due to safety restrictions. Thus, in addition to fighting a war, the burden of development and governance also fell on U.S. military personnel. To accomplish tasks in nation-building, which includes training, advising, and assisting Afghanistan's National Security Forces, the U.S. military relied on cultural intelligence to help establish relationships and influence. The convergence between knowledge and the administration of power over subjects is implicit in the forms of media that created a grand or master narrative about Afghanistan (Foucault 1980; 2000). This particular brand of 'American Orientalism' has become a professionalized medium in foreign policy in relation to world cultures and populations (Little 2004). The properties of the media through which such knowledge was disseminated thus trivialized it. The media leveraged categories and classifications that could de-mystify the war and give clear-cut answers, leaving limited space for comprehending the actual complexity of the cultures and populations enmeshed in conflict. The approach is not only contentious, but defies the premise upon which broad social analysis must take place.

The prime example of essentialization and reductionism in texts that relate country-specific information is the representation of Afghanistan as 'Indian Country.' As a referent, 'Indian country' has an explicitly political and hegemonic dimension (Kaplan 2006; Siliman 2008). It recalls the contentious history of the colonial subjugation of the First Nations and Native American populations in America, and should warrant a reflexive repudiation of media that exploits such imagery. But textual representations of ethnographic knowledge in the military are replete with such examples. In trainings and discussions, allusions to cowboys and Indians and Hollywood renditions of the famed battles were constantly

reinforced as points of reference to convey and explain current events in Afghanistan[24]. Majid, during each of the four times I observed him briefing U.S. military personnel at training exercises, described Afghanistan as the 'Wild West.' He portrayed Americans as cowboys, and represented Afghans as 'Indians.' On one occasion, an Air Force major contested the use of the term, commenting that 'Native American' was the politically correct term. Majid refrained from employing the term for the remainder of the exercise, but persisted in the characterization of Afghans, particularly those in the south and southeast, as tribal and lawless – an assertion that was based on his perception rather than experience (he had not been to any of the southern provinces). In some training exercises, Afghan-American contractors used clips from old Western films to reinforce the cowboy and Indians trope. In at least three of ten observed exercises, they produced excerpts from popular literature that similarly reconfigured the war in Afghanistan as the Wild West because the contractors believed they would resonate with the military audiences. I argue that this sort of an approach is a reflection of an anti-intellectualism that reflects the culture of militarism that has evolved in America since the Cold War. It has legitimized voices that perpetuate colonialist representations as fact and rebuke empiricism in favor of assumptions and stereotypes. Kaplan's analysis of Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan reveals the semiotics of the discourse on the 'Old West' or the 'Wild West' in relation to areas of the country that were deemed ungovernable. 'Injun Country,'[25] he notes, signified the south and the southeast (2006: 203). The term connotes an area that lacks governance, and thus constitutes the populations in the south and southeast as the 'new Indians' –

[24] I focus on its use in Afghanistan, but allusions to the Wild West were also common regarding Iraq and Pakistan's Federally-Administred Tribal Areas (FATA).

[25] *Injun country,* meaning Indian Country, is a trope used to describes areas of limited central governance. In the military, it has been used in places such as Iraq and Colombia.

insurgents that should be conquered and made subjects of the U.S.-backed central government. The nomenclature of operations or the codenames of key leaders/high value targets is evidence. Many are named after battles or Native American chiefs. Consider the U.S. military's codename for Bin Laden as Geronimo – an Apache tribal leader who fought against the Americans and died as a prisoner of war in 1909. In Gant's book, he chooses to name the Afghan tribal leader, Sitting Bull after the Lakota holy man and leader who had resisted the U.S. government and its effort to occupy territory belonging to the tribe. Given the historical roots of such imagery, the use of the 'Indian Country' trope in texts signals values associated with the natives in those areas. In the case described by Kaplan, the Pashtuns who occupy most of South and Southeastern Afghanistan are, therefore, the 'bad guys.' This similar construction of 'cowboys and Indians' is at the core of Silliman's critique of the military's use of the 'Old West' metaphor in its operations in the Middle East. He writes,

> even if the rendering of terrorist and infidel zones in the Middle East as "Indian Country" serves more as historical metaphor, and even if soldiers would not consider their Native American neighbors or fellow soldiers today as terrorists, one still cannot escape the problematic renarration of those historical Indian Wars as conflicts with terrorists, despite the obvious common thread of the United States as the invader (2008: 243).

To draw on Barthes, irrespective of how 'innocent' the medium may be, the notion of 'Indian Country' effaces the problematic exclusion and opposition inherent in such a way of thinking about human populations (1993). Implicit in the application of the trope is the perception that Native Americans are not truly integrated in American society, when they can so readily be cast as terrorists and insurgents. It serves as a criticism of the precariousness of belonging and membership in America. For some Afghan-American

contractors, like some Native American soldiers, the representations of cultural knowledge that use such essentializing tropes are articulations of power that reconstitute their relationship with the state. As a result, they perpetuate and internalize their own complicity in America's militarism. For others, the performances and representation of Afghan identity have generated a new and perhaps fleeting diasporic consciousness.

Conclusion

In sum, Chapter 5 looked at the prevalent media through which knowledge about Afghanistan was communicated during the COIN campaign. Glossed in shades of Orientalism, the representation of such knowledge has essentialized Afghan culture and its people into binary categories, with the explicit purpose of stipulating cultural differences as a reason for COIN's challenges in Afghanistan. Barth's observation that the idiom of the medium can lack precision as long as it strikes a chord with the audience guides the discussion in the chapter (2002). I first applied his theory to an examination of role-playing, translation, and material representations that accounted for the resonance of such media among the military and the diaspora. I then looked at how diasporic dynamics affected the contractors and their performance of Afghan expertise. The assertions that generate a social reality about Afghanistan are reinforced by non-discursive performances; creating a distinction between a 'way of speaking' about a culture or people, and the specific ways the ideologies are validated in action (Foucault 1972: 193). Additionally, pedagogic resources, such as the Master Narratives, offer only a superficial examination of human and cultural complexity, but they have defined a formative narrative that substantiates the corpus on Afghanistan. Their prevalence during COIN became synonymous with ethnographic studies that belied the actual human and cultural

complexity. As a result, Afghanistan and anthropology were reduced to sketches of a reality shaped by power – from both America's hegemonic interests and the diaspora's social hierarchy.

By looking at the articulation and performance of knowledge, I conclude that the properties of such media facilitated its commodification, with Afghan-Americans at the center of the effort. As a product, cultural knowledge helped establish Afghan-Americans as critical suppliers, and the U.S. military as their consumers. This relationship ensured that Afghan-Americans could shape 'expertise,' so that it always remained relevant among their audiences despite overt Orientalism and essentialization. From role-playing exercises to Master Narratives, the contractors used the various media to validate assertions that were ascribed to them as experts. As I have shown, the contractors were, at times, mostly unfamiliar with Afghanistan and drew upon simplified statements to communicate an understanding of the country. Since their claims often drew from Smartbooks or the Master Narratives, Afghan-Americans and the U.S. military effectively recycled the same information, using the contractors as a means of assessing the legitimacy of the underlying claims. The constitution of Afghan 'expertise' also reflected the flexible groupness of the contractors; cultural knowledge about Afghanistan existed in varying traditions as long as the contractors could deliver insights to the U.S. military. And similarly, as long as they could provide a coherent narrative on Afghanistan, they could maintain cohesion as a category of experts in the diaspora. Thus, the contractors had to carefully negotiate how to ensure the presence and demand for Afghan cultural knowledge. Not only did the demand shape the diaspora's identity politics, but it also allowed Afghan-Americans to corner the market for cultural intelligence on COIN programs. Such dynamics therefore became

apparent through an analysis of the media. The interplay of these factors that shape reality and meaning offer a window into the social organization of knowledge. The symbiotic relationship between the ideas and their representation as part of the social organization of knowledge production will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 *Social organization*: The process of cultural knowledge production

Knowledge production in the post-9/11 political and security environment in America has become an enterprise. It is dependent on several entities to bid, buy, supply, and market the types of knowledge that can meet the demands of the security state. Thus far in this thesis, I have looked at the assertions – or corpus – that constitute the product, namely Afghan cultural knowledge. I have also examined how such assertions are given validity and represented through various media. In this last empirical chapter, I will examine the web of relationships across several actors that produced Afghan cultural knowledge for COIN programs and helped constitute the diaspora. The chapter returns to Barth's most compelling element of the three faces of knowledge production – social organization, which he defines as the network of social relations that produces culture (2002). Barth's perspective draws out the role and agency of individuals across processes, rather than relying on structural-functionalist interpretations of power. Although at first glance, Barth's work on ethnic groups and boundaries seems to be on a different trajectory to his anthropology of knowledge, the application of his theories in this chapter show where the ideas intersect: how categories of individuals are constituted reflects the emergence of varying traditions of knowledge. The relationship between individual actors working in concert and the development of knowledge is the key point of this chapter.

My aim is to deconstruct key elements of the networks that produce and disseminate knowledge. By doing so, I first address the distribution of power among actors and then explain the effects or byproducts of rendering knowledge as 'cultural intelligence.' The latter takes direction from Barth's encouragement for a more public anthropology that engages with real-world polemics. Therefore, to explain the social organization, I first

examine the encounter between the contractors and the U.S. military through Callon's 'sociology of translation' and Latour's Actor-Network Theory as the nucleus of the study. I then draw three strands from the encounter to explain the processes that abet the commodification and use of cultural knowledge, and in turn reconstitute the diaspora. The first strand focuses on Barth's notion of coherence and consistency that substantiates knowledge as a product and the contractors as its suppliers. The second strand centers on Callon's approach to contracts and contracting mechanisms that drive the supply and demand of cultural knowledge, and the final strand addresses Callon's concept of overflows and externalities – that is byproducts that ensue in operationalizing culture. I trace the effects in two examples of COIN-operated anthropology: the institutionalization of corruption and sexual violence in Afghan society.

The social relations of the encounter

To analyze the social organization of Afghan cultural knowledge, I will first examine how knowledge is 'distributed, communicated, employed, and transmitted within a series of instituted social relations' (Barth 2002: 3). Complementing Barth's framework, Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Callon's sociology of translation provide useful perspectives through which to analyze the relationships and processes underpinning the development of specific ideas. These theoretical perspectives help capture the interactions among actors to account for the way knowledge is transmitted and culture produced. As indicated in Chapter 1, Callon's description of the four processes involved in the development and exchange of cultural information aptly captures specific moments of engagement and negotiation between Afghan-Americans and the U.S. military. He identifies *problematisation*, *interessement*, *enrolment*, and *mobilization* as distinct phases in the set of

social relations that give rise to the narratives and their representation that have been discussed in the preceding chapters (1998: 196). While he examines the role of researchers, fishermen, and scallops in identifying an answer to an ecological issue, his perspective in describing their negotiations and self-presentation is an insightful framework for the study of COIN-operated anthropology set forth in this thesis. By situating the encounter in Callon's sociology of translation, I argue that the U.S. military defined a problem in Afghanistan (*problematisation*) through which diasporic subjects were mobilized to provide support to COIN programs (*interessement*). As a result, Afghan-American contractors performed a set of assigned 'roles,' which were inextricably linked to other actors, such as private defense contracting firms, who also brokered the exchange of cultural information (*enrolment*). In terms of continued *mobilization*, the COIN demand for specific narratives produced by Afghan-American contractors constituted a version of Afghan culture. This interaction ensured the utility and integration of Afghan-Americans, helping them rise socially and economically in America. Although the practice of contracting can be studied from a variety of perspectives, Callon's sociology of translation helps deconstruct it into stages that highlight the inter-connectedness of the faces of knowledge. Callon theorizes translation to be a continual process, without an end-point, which can be viewed through the four distinct phases, 'during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of maneuver are negotiated and delimited' (Callon 1986: 203). In the proceeding section, I will examine each of the four dimensions to show the relationships and negotiations that guided the encounter between the contractors and the military.

The encounter was premised on resolving a specific problem identified by the U.S. government and military: how could 'cultural intelligence' be used to influence the Afghan population to adopt a system of democratic governance, security, and liberal economy compatible with America's national security interests? The *problematisation* of the war influenced the associations, patterns, and traditions that developed in the production of knowledge. By defining the problem as a matter of unknown insights, Afghan-Americans were automatically positioned as insiders with access to valuable information. The contractors that emerged to work on the problem were seen as insiders by the military-industrial complex – a perspective that confirmed their membership in the diaspora, despite the politics of inclusion within the community. The framing of the problem created the conditions under which Afghan-Americans could integrate into the network. I argue against the more conventional analyses of top-down power by situating the source of influence among Afghan-American contractors and the Afghan diaspora at large rather than the military. Framed another way, the problematisation component centered on diminishing local resistance to the U.S.-backed government in Kabul and countering threats from terrorism and violent extremism among the Afghan population. This calibration of the war generated the demand for socio-cultural knowledge, which shaped the mode of engagement with the Afghan-American community. In turn, it informed the roles the contractors played. Observing the relationship between the military-industrial complex and the contractors substantiates the theoretical strength of an agent-centered focus in discourses on knowledge and power. In the study, Afghan-American contractors were instrumental in the creation of power, action, and belief (Barnes 1986: 16). They may not have been entirely in control of the various media through which their knowledge was

communicated, but they capitalized on their ability to be a part of a network of actors involved in the production and transmission of knowledge. By internalizing and articulating the ongoing war in Afghanistan as cultural, the contractors' narratives (particularly their endorsement of an Orientalist discourse) helped absolve the West's role in igniting a political conflict. They also subsequently shifted accountability for COIN's shortcomings by perpetuating the characterization of the country and its people as incorrigible. General conversations with some Afghan-Americans and interviewees, such as Laili, Haroun, and Monir, referred to Afghans in Afghanistan as 'backward,' 'savage,' and in need of 'becoming civilized.' I was particularly struck by the use of the term 'baychara' – meaning poor or pitiable – by the contractors to describe U.S. military and the Coalition Forces, who had to work with the so-called savages. By employing the term, they empathized with the military's challenges. In the study, the engagement of the military, the experts or contractors, and the defense contracting companies in concert diffused power across the network. As the military-industrial complex became reliant on Afghan-American expertise, the contractors often reinvented themselves, their beliefs, and ideologies to answer the questions posed by the military strategy. This initial phase of the engagement is also interesting because it shows the effect of the post-Soviet narrative on both the development of the problem and the emergence of the category of experts. In the transaction of knowledge, the U.S. government's history with the Soviet invasion and the Mujahideen impacted the *problematisation*. As I have mentioned previously, for both the U.S. government and the Afghan diaspora the post-Soviet era was a formative period against which *Afghaniyat* and Muslim identity have been refashioned. America's support of the Mujahideen extended to their preference to work with former Mujahideen supporters,

who were vested with trust and credibility more readily than those who were seen to be royalists or, worse still, Soviet sympathizers. In several interviews with U.S. military personnel, for example, the interviewees discussed the legitimacy of their translators or cultural advisors by referring to them having been former 'Muj.' – an abbreviated moniker that attested to the time Afghan-Americans spent fighting the Soviets or rallying against them in the diaspora. A Navy captain, on two separate interviews, noted that she had not had issues with her interpreters because 'both of them were former *Mujahideen,* who now live in the U.S.' The premise for the question that engendered the encounter was also based on the belief that Mujahideen commanders could enact the sort of native administration needed to secure the West's influence in Afghanistan – a sentiment readily echoed by some members of the diaspora, who sided with neo-colonial interpretations of 'Americanizing' Afghanistan. Thus, *problematisation* helps explain how the U.S. military's objective in Afghanistan collided with a population of Afghan-Americans seeking a channel to surface out of obscurity.

Conversations with contractors, such as Rostam and Farah, were a window into the interactions that demonstrated the shift from *problematisation* to *enrolment* and *interessement* in operationalizing cultural knowledge. In regard to his work with the Special Operations Forces in Kandahar Province, Rostam noted: 'These guys [Special Forces] need us [Afghan-Americans] to understand the cultural differences […] They could not go far without a translator or a cultural advisor. Some of them are from the sticks and have never been abroad, and they show up in a place like Afghanistan and are like 'what the fuck.' This is why terps, like me, were also basically like anthropologists because we had to answer their questions about Afghan culture and people.' Rostam's observation about interpreters

captures both why and how the interaction persists. As actors, the contractors could place themselves between the U.S. military and the military's goal in Afghanistan. They became relevant and indispensable to the task of understanding and winning hearts and minds. The process of *enrolment*, therefore, was responsible for allowing the contractors to act as ethnographers and anthropologists; disassociating with Afghanistan at moments to render an 'objective' account of its culture. It is particularly interesting to note that during *enrolment*, some cultural advisors, for example, heightened their association with the U.S. military audience and distanced from Afghanistan by taking on an almost apologist role in explaining patterns of behavior among Afghans in Afghanistan (as seen in interview excerpts with Asad and Monir in Chapter 3, and Majid, Haroun, Farah and Laili in Chapter 5). Thus, by embracing one set of roles as experts and pseudo-anthropologists, they strengthened their ties to the network. Here, Callon's use of the term 'allies,' those who work in concert with one another, helps describe the nature of the relationships that form in such processes of knowledge production and dissemination. In the *enrolment* of Afghan-American contractors, the U.S. military's post-Cold War attitude affected the selection of 'allies' who could work in support of COIN. Drawing from the diaspora, the U.S. military privileged the narratives of those who had actively worked with the Mujahideen or those who condemned the Soviet-backed regime. The reason was simple: they reflected the interest and perspective of America's ever-present vigilance about threats to its political and economic dominance. For some Afghan-Americans who took on the roles, the opportunities allowed them to draw similar lines in the sand within the diaspora – not necessarily in terms who could be cast as experts, but who could be included in the community based on a shared past that had facilitated their migration. As seen in Aryana's

speech in Chapter 3, historical animosities that cast out community members based on perceived allegiances to the Soviet-backed communist party became a way of gauging the legitimacy of the actors. This revitalization of identity and emotive appeals to belonging occurred as a result of the cultural turn in the military.

The *enrolment* phase overlaps with the *interessement* stage, which is perhaps the most influential on the development and commodification of the narratives provided by the contractors. In Callon's study of scallop conservation among researchers, fishermen, and the scallops in question, he identifies 'the triangle of *interessement*' among the actors as the 'elementary relationship, which begins to shape and consolidate the social link' (1986: 208). He ascribes an element of competition within the relationship, as one actor interests or engages another by through a process of association and disassociation – effectively disrupting links between other possible connections. In the context of COIN-related knowledge production, *interessement* was evident as Afghan-American contractors and the private companies through which they were often hired had to maintain the U.S. military's interest in continuing the association. The market for cultural expertise, like any market, therefore depended upon the contractors, as suppliers, being able to effectively innovate and sell their product. Seen another way, *interessement* is about relevance. It is about forming an association and keeping relevant as a part of an effort. With the translators, advisors, and role-players, whose cultural insights were actively employed in COIN programs, maintaining the salience of culture, the human terrain, and Afghanistan was critical. In the relationship with the U.S. military, they were given a role that they accepted and performed in exchange for being integrated into the society and economy in a way that had not previously been available to them. But the main role was to be an 'expert,' to

provide what others could not by capitalizing on the transnational connection to Afghanistan. It also affected the knowledge produced. For example, during fieldwork, U.S. military servicemen and women conveyed a predilection for strands of knowledge that supported the ideological beliefs of the military-industrial apparatus. A colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps, who had deployed to Afghanistan in 2005, noted that 'What we really needed to understand down range was the way Afghan society functions, you know, what makes the Afghans tick […] some of the Afghans from America were the elites in Afghanistan and they didn't get the Afghans that had lived there through the war […] we wanted advisors who could explain the tribes and how they interacted with the government […] we had some advisors who worked with the Muj. [meaning the Mujahideen – author's clarification] and they were the ones we relied on to talk to the local powerbrokers.' The reliance on the contractors' narrative fundamentally shaped the interactions between the U.S. military and local Afghan communities. For Afghan-American contractors, such demands created the opportunity to act. In their performance of the knowledge, the 'moments of action' are reminiscent of Barth's call to observe the human relations rather than simply focusing on the configuration of information (1966). Rather than systemically recording patterns or customs, Barth focused on the moments of action that displayed the behavior of actors. In the study, these moments define the points at which narratives about Afghanistan are generated, contested, and reproduced among the contractors. The production of knowledge is, therefore, connected to the self-presentation of Afghan-American contractors (Goffman 1959). The contractors activate various parts of their identity to fit the demands of Afghan experts. They enact a great degree of agency to create the scripts – and the environments – that ensure the centrality of their roles, as well as their continued relevance. As a result,

their presentation of Afghan cultural expertise within the chain of knowledge production and transmission is valuable only as long as they can continue to shape the demand.

Callon's fourth and final phase encompasses the *mobilization* of the 'allies' – the actors collaborating on a joint endeavor. The *mobilization* stage features the intersection between the corpus and the 'groupness' of the contractors (Brubaker 2002). In the sociology of knowledge, *mobilization* appears as 'a set of methods used by the researchers to ensure that supposed spokesmen for various relevant collectivities were properly able to represent those collectivities and not betrayed by the latter' (Callon 1998: 196). In the case of COIN-operated anthropology, it appears as Afghan-Americans taking on the role of transnational spokespersons or intermediaries of Afghans in Afghanistan. By appropriating the voices of such Afghans, their expertise in the network embodies the interconnectedness of the faces of knowledge – the corpus finds representation and validation through the voices projected in the diaspora. As an example, take Monir, the young entrepreneur whom U.S. defense companies contracted, who explained to me the need for diasporic Afghans 'to be the voice of Afghans in Afghanistan.' Like some other Afghan-Americans, he believed that Afghan-Americans like him were uniquely positioned to speak for Afghans – not because Afghans in Afghanistan were so far removed from America, but in part because he deemed them insufficiently capable of identifying what the country needed. Thus, he could reconstruct a notion of Afghanistan that fitted into the model of operations the U.S. military deemed necessary to implement its objectives; a set of goals for Afghanistan that many contractors began to echo as their interaction with COIN programs continued. At several training events, I observed U.S. military leaders asking Afghan-American advisors to determine the legitimacy of certain assertions about Afghanistan. In one instance, at a

training event for a group of military servicemen and women deploying to serve as advisors to Afghan government ministries, an Army major concluded that the war effort was a lost cause because 'they [Afghans] are all corrupt and would fight each other anyway, even if the coalition forces left altogether.' The statement was seconded by the Afghan-American cultural advisor, who explained: 'It's part of their culture to be like that [corrupt]. They are used to giving bribes and hiring people they know. It's not something that we can change […] you have to understand that they have been doing it this way for hundreds of years, and don't know better.' At the same event, I noted a particular interaction between two advisors that informed the presentation and coherence of the information communicated about Afghanistan. As one of them sought to fill the place of the other for a presentation on Afghanistan's history, the departing advisor stated: 'Don't stray from what I mentioned previously. It will just confuse them [the military audience]. Talk up the points about the Mujahideen and how they were heroes. Don't go into too much details about all the stuff before the Soviet Invasion, but emphasize Amanullah Khan's time […] I didn't talk about the P.D.P.A. [People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan] that much, so don't bother mentioning it […] Just focus on how the Soviets and the regime back then destroyed everything.' It was a moment in which the contracted advisors came together to consciously manage the representation of knowledge about Afghanistan. The contractors were influential in directing a flawed trajectory of the body of knowledge. They monopolized the voices that could speak about Afghanistan with authority – an effort supported by the U.S. military and the nature of contracting. Ironically, the Afghans for whom they spoke were the least influential in informing the basis of knowledge and policies that affected their lives. Given that the voices emerging from the diaspora acted as

proxy representations of the Afghan population in Afghanistan, Callon's inquiry into 'who speaks in the name of whom?' and 'who represents whom?' helps distinguish the development of diasporic identity and the notion of Afghanistan constituted by Afghan-American contractors.

In the *mobilization* stage, groupness was more pronounced, ironically, as COIN and the emphasis on cultural intelligence waned. As noted previously, in the COIN push towards cultural expertise, the category of contractors that emerged from the diaspora did so to meet a specific demand. But, in later years, their unity diminished to reflect the military's drawdown and the gradual disintegration of COIN doctrine. The occasion to mobilize passed. Brubaker and Barth both suggest that such collective organizations of groupness can be seen as an 'event'. While Brubaker more explicitly defines 'event' as a moment of action, Barth places it within the three faces of knowledge. He asserts that 'the three faces of knowledge appear together precisely in the particulars of action in every event of application of knowledge, in every transaction in knowledge, and in every performance' (2002: 3). As Brubaker noted, groupness *happens*. Similarly, it ceases to happen when the need for collective action and representation stops. These temporary solidarities shaped the performances and articulations of cultural knowledge produced by the contractors. Their military counterparts, as other actors involved in the network, were less aware of the politics of representation that dictated the momentary solidarity of Afghan-Americans. This is particularly important in considering that the trajectories of the corpus about Afghanistan focused on illuminating differences – not just between Afghans and Americans, but also among Afghan communities. Since the military wanted to understand the human terrain and its relationship with Afghanistan's turbulent history, the

focus on tribal, ethnic, and regional differences created, and in some cases renewed, age-old hostilities. Moreover, it engendered the production of a definitive account of Afghanistan that was carefully curated to support the hearts and minds mission. In the transaction of knowledge that ensued, the groupness of Afghan-American contractors was a perspective on the identity of the diaspora; both fluctuating to maintain consistency with the public narratives on Afghanistan. In the next section, I discuss how such consistency and coherence of the corpus are maintained.

First strand: The consistency and coherence of knowledge

Through the fieldwork, I discovered that the criteria for assessing the legitimacy of information was specifically related to the justifications for America's current occupation of Afghanistan and the post-Soviet narrative. In my observations, Afghan-American contractors were perceived to be the ultimate authority on Afghanistan because they possessed 'knowledge about knowledge,' which Barth considers to establish validity (2002). But the form of expertise it privileged created a power dynamic among Afghan-Americans that translated into the diaspora. Majid explained the dynamic by describing his relationships with other Afghan-Americans cultural advisors and role players:

> The challenge was that some of the ones [the Afghan-American contractors] that worked with me were not necessarily educated. Maybe they were nobody in Afghanistan or they didn't come from good backgrounds. They were not people I would associate with if we were back in Afghanistan, maybe say 'salam' but I wouldn't visit with them […] In the jobs, we were all thrown together in the same place. Sometimes it was just an office, other times we lived together. Like on Fort Polk – everybody was with each other. There was a lot of bad behavior, swearing – and swearing in Farsi. The young people did that and it was very disrespectful because the older generation expects that young Afghans will still respect the culture and the elders […] But with these jobs, you have to put up with the people you wouldn't normally associate with. It's part of the process. You can't choose.

Majid's observations resonated with Laili's perspective on the role of contracting opportunities in redefining relationships within the diaspora, which were discussed in Chapter 3. Afghan-Americans enacted groupness within the context of COIN program, but outside of it, they returned to the divisions that existed prior to their engagement. Both cases, among others, highlighted the salience of social relations on the development and transmission of cultural knowledge. The correlation between education, background, and class was reflected in the confirmation or invalidation of concepts that defined the corpus. An Air Force major, who had worked with two Afghan-American translators in Afghanistan, related that she had perceived 'a lot of animosity between the Afghan contractors. You could sense the tension. They wouldn't outright argue with each other, but some of them would occasionally express their disapproval about the credibility of the other contractors […] The sense I got working with them was that they did not like the people that they thought had been part of the government the Soviets had supported [...] It wasn't like they were rolling their eyes at each other, but it was clear that they would check what people said based on, sort of, personal issues rather than the facts.' In interviews and observations, the validity of the corpus centered on the relationships of households to the Soviet invasion and their migration experiences thereafter. The divisions explained in Chapter 2 and 3 thus fed into the notions about the coherence of the knowledge represented across various media. Perhaps an even more important consideration is why such a criteria of validity resonated with the U.S. military. As Barth notes in his discussions, there are overlaps in the relationships between the various actors - in this case, among the diaspora, the category of contractors, and the U.S. military – from which the criteria of validity emerges to establish the corpus of knowledge. It is worth remembering that the U.S. government (including the

military) instituted the basis for an armed intervention in Afghanistan by espousing freedom and the eradication of terrorism. The justification for the war was thus predicated on a specific narrative that connected the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan, and globally, to the legacy of the Soviet invasion. In the first decade of the conflict in Afghanistan, the U.S. government's explicit ties to the Mujahideen and its role in fomenting a religious rebellion against Russia were glossed over, as public information and the media increasingly focused on Islamic extremism, as though it had erupted in a vacuum. The Afghan diaspora's dynamics and the regeneration of diasporic identity helped to provide the basis of justifications for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. During the initial years of the war, the diaspora's internal politics shaped a public discourse about Afghanistan that situated the invasion as necessary for the good of the Afghan people. It discounted the U.S. government's political and economic interests in Central and South Asia. Using the rise of the Taliban and the lack of governance in Afghanistan as the legacy of the Soviet occupation, Afghan-Americans expressed grievances that echoed those of the U.S. government's long-standing political and security posture towards Russia. The vilification of the Soviet's involvement in Afghanistan became a part of the corpus of cultural and historical knowledge – the same body of knowledge that serves to legitimize America's current occupation – and it served to demarcate new processes of inclusion and exclusion in the diaspora. Situating the relationships in the wider field of the sociology of translation reminds us of Callon's assertion that 'translation is the mechanism by which the social and natural worlds progressively take form. The result is a situation in which certain entities control others' (Callon 1986: 213). In the encounter between Afghan-Americans and the U.S. military, the result was a tri-lateral struggle with Afghan powerbrokers in Afghanistan

for various forms of power over indigenous Afghan populations. For Afghan-Americans, defining membership within the diaspora became a mechanism for power and social mobility. For the U.S. military, the contentions within the diaspora were considered to be a projection of reality in Afghanistan. A Navy officer, who had served on a Female Engagement Team, related a story about a cultural advisor and a translator with whom she worked in southern Afghanistan. She remarked

> once I found out that was one Pashtun and the other a Tajik, I thought 'well, no wonder they don't get along.' […] The trainings my unit received helped me understand the historical rivalries between the tribes [author's note: *tribe* was inaccurately used for *ethnicities* in the interview]. It helped to get the training from Afghans in America because they were really the experts, and could explain why groups of Afghans fight each other […] It's just part of their culture.

Such remarks were often uttered as ways of making sense of the resistance against the Coalition Forces. Rendering the war a 'part of Afghan culture' was a way to create and reproduce social meaning, which could be acted upon accordingly.

Barth's model of social organization had anticipated the instrumentalism of culture and knowledge in war (1966). In the social worlds Afghan-Americans and the military-industrial complex have created since 2001, knowledge construction shaped the day-to-day negotiations of a protracted engagement with Afghanistan. Within the dynamics of the encounter, agency and social reproduction are interlinked. The choices Afghan-American contractors made to determine an understanding of Afghanistan can be seen as 'action on the world' – an act of agency that reproduces knowledge (Barth 1966; 2007). In his review of anthropological theory over 60 years, Barth makes a case for generative models of analysis that are applicable to studying the social organization of knowledge production for counterinsurgency operations. He writes:

> My basic point was that anthropologists need to study processes, not merely patterns, and construct generative models that can explain how social forms come about, rather than simply summarize and characterize such forms. The structural-functional model seeks to generalize the overt form of a society and show its coherence with people's own cultural representations. A generative model tries to identify sets of regular events, processes, that lead toward the emergence of such an observed form in a local or regional social system (2007: 8).

The configuration of the relationships and processes that inspired knowledge production emphasize the importance of generative modeling. It is a useful method for examining the development of a coherent form in the assertion and representation of ideas. Generative modeling underscores the reciprocal effect of the actors, as agents, on the structure of a network. It allows for a more nuanced look at how power is produced and mediated by both the contractors and the U.S. military. Through the research, I identified the military's turn to culture and anthropology in COIN as a key part of the process that constituted new forms of knowledge; traditions that were invented or revised to keep up with the changing demands of militarism. As Barth discussed in his analysis of Ok and Bakhtaman traditions, knowledge about a culture – or rites, in his case – were not simply related from one generation to the next. In the transmission of such knowledge, elders were vested with the authority to revise the traditions so that they remained salient and compelling. Similarly, among the contractors, the regularity of the performances of Afghan culture and their incorporation in ink and papers across a variety of print media have helped the emergence of a consistent narrative on Afghanistan. The consistency is a revision of Afghanistan's socio-cultural and historical background that aligns with the U.S. government's justification of military occupation. Such revised articulations have now established the standard corpus about Afghanistan. But the coherence that is generated is also contested and re-

imagined in the negotiations of knowledge production and diasporic identity. In the course of my interviews, I met an Afghan-American journalist, Omaid, who worked for a major news outlet. He explained the effect of the changing narratives on the community. He also captured the pressure he felt to reconstitute his identity as an Afghan and as a Muslim, especially as an immigrant to Virginia after 2001. His first observation related to the diaspora's social boundaries. He recalled,

> I remember thinking, when I first arrived, 'why are they so suspicious?' Everybody kept to their [sic] own families and circles. They were nice and polite, always very polite, but at the same time they kept a distance and weren't very warm […] I don't really associate with the Afghans here at all, just at community events or *Eid* or *Nowruz* […] The biggest problem I had with the diaspora here was at work. The other Afghans I worked with, they always challenged what I said or did […] Yes, I think it was a little bit of competition, but the biggest part was that they had been saying things about Afghanistan, like about the culture and the history and stuff, that I did not see from their perspective. And I said that. I told them 'this is really not how it is in Afghanistan.' One of the things was to be very supportive of the Mujahideen and point to ethnic groups and say 'this group is the problem' or 'that group is the problem,' and so when I came to work there, at first I listened, but then after a little while, I just said to them 'look, Afghanistan is not such a divided nation that you are painting' – nobody liked that […] I felt like I made enemies at work because I contradicted their perceptions. But the thing is, they had not been back to Afghanistan since they left when the Russians came, or if they had gone back, it was for a short time and they didn't get to experience what it is like to be there, to live there […] Some of the Afghans here just make up what they think Americans want to hear, and they push back against other Afghans who argue a different point […] The Afghans I worked with tried to get me fired because I was challenging their credibility. It was a big deal. The backstabbing was out of control. Luckily, I had a boss – he was a great guy – he supported me and understood the situation […] I don't think they would have made it hard for me, if I hadn't spoken out against their knowledge of Afghanistan.

In Omaid's experience, the Afghan-American community's adherence, at least among some of its members, to a specific set of narratives about Afghanistan's culture, history, politics, and society defined the social boundaries within the diaspora. One was either a part of the production and reproduction of the knowledge, or positioned on the periphery as an outsider. People, like Omaid, who contested the representations and coherence of Afghan

cultural knowledge that had become institutionalized within the U.S. media and government, often found themselves socially marginalized or pejoratively cast as 'halfghans.' By reconstructing their social reality, Afghan-Americans in the diaspora and those who served as contractors echoed one another in the process of redefining themselves and Afghanistan. Authenticity and experience have been transformed into forms of social currency. Similar to Barth's observations about the Bakhtaman and Ok traditions, Afghan-Americans – particularly among the second cohort and the second generation – look to the first generation as the sentinels of Afghan heritage; using their memories to inform their own nostalgia and sense of long-distance nationalism. The coherence and institutionalization of knowledge solidifies in the articulation and performance of the ideas transmitted from one generation to another. It shows the agency of various actors in defining the shape of their world. Barth explains the transmission as a process of reconstructing reality to reshape the meaning of the social world. He notes,

> They understand the world they themselves have made. All this changes in the process of transmission to the new generation. The objectivity of the institutional world "thickens" and "hardens," not only for the children, but (by mirror effect) for the parents as well. The "There we go again" now becomes "This is how these things are done." A world so regarded attains a firmness in consciousness; it becomes real in an ever more massive way and it can no longer be changed so readily' (1967: 59).

For Afghan-American contractors the forms of social organization reviewed in this chapter have allowed for a redefinition of Afghan-American identity in America. This dynamic is relevant to the current discourse on countering violent extremism, which touched on the nexus between migration and security. The commercialized narratives as part of an industry of knowledge production were central to the integration of Afghan-American contractors and the diaspora as a whole in America; an integration that was predicated on

the need for cultural expertise. While I have explored the topic through various angles in the preceding chapters, I highlight an interesting observation that stemmed specifically from the encounter with the military-industrial complex and the knowledge production effort. Among the second generation and the second cohort of the first generation, the aftermath of 9/11 had a transformative effect on how they articulated their sense of belonging (or not belonging) in America. Some contractors I interviewed discussed the extent to which the invasion of Afghanistan had influenced their new or renewed sense of 'long-distance nationalism' toward Afghanistan (Anderson 1991). Others echoed similar reactions and added that they had felt closer to their religious upbringing and Islamic faith. But the advent of contracting opportunities based on the military-industrial complex's *problematisation* of the war once again changed how some of the diasporic Afghans viewed themselves and their roles in America. Beyond the consideration of marginalization and membership, the economic integration of some Afghan diasporic members, particularly in the second cohort and the second generation, seemed to dampen the zeal with which they had previously embraced Islam and Afghan culture. Khalid exemplified this during the time of our contact. A self-professed Salafist after September 2001, he had adhered to a strict observation of Islam, and rejected Western innovations that he felt implied immorality and were inconsistent with his cultural and religious ideologies. However, when I spoke with Khalid in 2014 after our initial meeting, he had donned jeans and a button-up shirt instead of Afghan traditional dress. In response to my observation of the change, Khalid's explanation resonated with many other Afghan-Americans I met subsequently. Running his hand down his face, which was cleanly shaved, he remarked:

> I'm trying to get a good job with these companies that are hiring Afghans now. I'd like to work for the government eventually and have a stable job. It kind of made me rethink

> what I was putting out there, you know. I'm still devout, and I'm glad I did *umrah*. But I think I just realized, it wasn't going anywhere and I wasn't really going anywhere. So now I'm starting grad school and hoping to go help out on one of these projects in Afghanistan.

Like Khalid, other interviewees, who had expressed similar experiences of transformation after 2001, began to embrace the American side of their hyphenated identities. These changes were linked to the ability to secure jobs requiring an active government clearance. As economic opportunities on COIN-related program increased, the more some Afghan-Americans began to recalibrate their self-presentation to embrace the full scope of their hyphenated identities. And as COIN waned in reflection of the U.S. government's interest in Afghanistan, the regeneration of *Afghaniyat* and expertise followed a similar trajectory.

Second strand: Contracts and defense contracting

The most prominent aspect of the social organization of knowledge, in this study, is the fact that it is predicated on a commercial transaction. As I have argued previously, the commercialization of expertise has meant that knowledge related to human societies and cultures has been packaged as a product. Like most commercial products, it is made marketable within the military-industrial complex by its claims to offer a solution to a lingering problem. Throughout the thesis, I have discussed the military-industrial complex because it sits at the juncture of capitalism and national security. Since 2001, the implementation of U.S. foreign policy – both in the security and international development sectors – has been entrusted to private enterprises. The privatization of knowledge production reflects the reliance of America's foreign policy on private-sector partnerships. As a result, businesses issue bids on contracts that are aimed at providing 'government

solutions' or 'technological solutions' to problems identified by the government and/or the military. Such 'solutions' can be as broad as technical assistance for computer systems to predictive human behavioral analysis. Contracting as a mechanism of production engages various actors in developing a solution. As described above, it is an applicable case study in ANT and the sociology of translation for the set of relations and processes it engenders in creating knowledge. The associations that are constituted by a collective goal have to assure the government of their relevance and indispensability to be able to receive a monetary award. This structure and set of relational processes, I argue, have been problematic in the COIN push towards cross-cultural understanding. Looking for solutions has often meant a strict categorization and compartmentalization of information within a specific context of defining cultural knowledge as cultural intelligence. I return to Callon's framework to explore the role of contracting as part of the institutionalized social relations that privileged diasporic expertise and allowed Afghan-Americans to emerge from the shadows into prominence.

In particular, contracting demonstrates the four processes at work in the development and exchange of cultural information. Callon's theoretical analysis relates to Barth, who argues that such transactional relations ultimately produce cultural integration – an observation that supports the central argument of this study. The research shows that the transaction of knowledge facilitates the set of processes and relationships that ensure the cultural integration of Afghan-Americans, despite the fact that only a category of the diaspora emerged to fulfill the stipulated roles. Contracts frame the roles of the actors within the network, rendering each entity necessary and valuable to the process. But even prior to its application in the *interessment* and *enrolment* stages, the nature of competitive

contracting in the private sector decidedly transformed knowledge into a product. This is because the contracts framed each of the interactions, but at the same time reinforced the interdependencies in the process and relations of knowledge production. For the category of Afghan-American contractors, the at-will contracts empowered them to move beyond their limited role in American society and to redefine the boundaries of the diaspora. The contracts constituted Afghan-Americans groupness, allowing a channel for participation in the language and cultural advisory programs as contractors. The demand for such services thus allowed Afghan-Americans to momentarily mobilize in a joint effort and then disengage when COIN lost its foothold in the U.S. military's strategy in Afghanistan. In his discussion on framing, Callon references the power of contracts to influence the roles and interactions of actors within a specific set of transactions. He writes that,

> Any two agents can undertake in an agreement that depends solely on the exercise of their wills to interact in a negotiation and then return to anonymity once the transaction is complete. This effectively postulates the actual possibility that a market could exist as a system of relationships between agents (consumers and producers) who reach an equilibrium or harmonious accord (1998: 251).

Callon's framing of the institutionalized social relations as a 'market' explicitly links the roles of the producers and consumers of knowledge. Its application is useful in studies of the military-industrial complex in America because national security and militarism have become intertwined with economic liberalism. The interactions within a network mimic the market. The contracts delineated the relationships, and in fact conferred greater agency among the contractors by stipulating their will to enter and leave the relationship as desired. Any actor can terminate at-will contracts, at any time. Among the Afghan-American contractors, the contracts presented both the opportunity to take part in the programs, as well as the ability to terminate their participation if the parameters of the

agreement changed or if any part of the experience was deemed unsatisfactory. Several female contractors cited the contracts as sources of integration and economic and social empowerment. Especially for contractors who had children in America and were assigned to work in Afghanistan, the ability to sever the agreement with little or no penalty afforded them an opportunity to gain experience and greater financial independence in ways that may have otherwise not been available. Thus, they were able to fulfill their roles as individuals and professionals without straying too far from the norms of Afghan households (where absent mothers could potentially be stigmatized).

In addition to empowering the actors, the contracts were also essential to attributions of expertise and belonging. Given the nature of employment within the national security framework, the contracts often required at least a minimum level of government clearance – even when the work may have dealt with unclassified materials. The contracts pre-selected for a certain type of contractor: those who had U.S. citizenship, could pass a security and background investigation, and obtain government clearance. The contracts had the effect of constituting the category of diasporic Afghans that emerged to meet the demands of the military's turn toward culture. It rendered them 'experts,' endowing each recipient with the recognition of an asset that had become invaluable in the COIN campaign. As a result, the contracting mechanisms engendered competition for the best possible contributions of knowledge. In matters of memberships, the contracts enacted social roles and organized relationships, which defined new ways of belonging in the diasporic community and in American society. Receiving a contract meant that the U.S. government placed credibility and trust in the individual to act on its behalf. Accusations of lying on security forms and inventing knowledge were rampant among the diaspora and

the community of contractors with whom I interacted. The main reason many cited was not necessarily because of an ethical dilemma. They were concerned about the effect it would have on the availability of contracts and the potential erosion of the government's interest and trust in the contractors, leading to diminished opportunities for further engagement. The contracts epitomized social and economic capital. Within the set of social relations framed by the contracts, Afghan-Americans in communities, such as Fremont, encountered the state and the military in more direct ways. Their social networks and political capital expanded to include the likes of high-ranking American generals and diplomats, who relied on the expertise of Afghan-Americans to shed light on the nuances of the war. When contractors returned to the U.S. from stints in Afghanistan, they often drew upon their expanded social networks to access jobs in functional areas, such as the intelligence community, that had previously not been available to them. The clearances enabled further economic and social mobility for those that had been 'cleared' and were, therefore, American citizens – a rite of passage into the military-industrial complex that might have been hard won prior to the COIN surge for cultural expertise. Those who were initiated could then negotiate greater access to other networks and opportunities. Therefore, the contracts maintained the continuity of the contractors' relevance in government and military programs, and vested Afghan-Americans with the authority to assert themselves in American society.

Latour's perspective on power explains how Afghan-American contractors and the Afghan diasporic community have been constituted in the encounter with the military-industrial complex. He notes that power and society 'arise out of the modifications that are made to the developing definition of what society is about' (1986: 271). In that context, the

desire for Afghan-American contractors to perpetuate the production of knowledge through the availability of contracting work can be better understood. Unlike the transmission of knowledge, translation allowed Afghan-Americans to fashion interpretations based on their own experiences and memories. Put another way, they created the world in which they could live. The process was mirrored in the military's pursuit of cultural knowledge – the translation of information in such a way was discussed as 'cultural sense-making.' It was a task for which contractors were enrolled to demystify Afghanistan and the Afghan people, and facilitate the transition and adaptation of military personnel to a new operational environment. Thus, the contractors' power was situated specifically in the ability to render Afghanistan and Afghans intelligible to Western organizations. Callon's observation about translation is also a commentary on the development of a voice – or rather of a coherent corpus – as an effect of the association. He notes

> to translate is also to express in one's own language what others say and want, why they act in the way they do and how they associate with each other: it is to establish oneself as a spokesman. At the end of the process, if it is successful only voices speaking in unison will be heard (Callon 1986: 266).

For the contractors, Callon's projection was a *fait accompli* – even if they contested the narratives individually, they often maintained a singularity of thought and action that was consistent with the military's demand for answers. I reiterate the example of role-players who would criticize each other's depictions of Afghanistan outside of the frame of the scenarios, but would readily submit to the versions that had been espoused by the scripts. They understood that contesting the validity of knowledge about Afghanistan could jeopardize the association; recognizing that as long as they could be a part of the

contracting network, they could exercise power through belonging. It is a facet of integration that is central to the development and representation of narratives about Afghanistan. While the military-industrial complex provides the questions underlying the problematization of Afghanistan, Latour would argue that 'the sources of power are in the hands of those are able to shift around the answers' (1986: 271). The expertise in the translation process is therefore subjective and dependent upon the association. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the answers can be intentionally elusive. For example, the centrality of Islam and tribalism took root in the representations of Afghanistan in part because they perpetuated a certain Orientalized mystique. By revising answers to questions or problems issued by the U.S. military, some contractors enabled a cycle of knowledge production that prolonged the association and a sustained demand for diasporic expertise. In other words, the need for answers ensured a space of belonging for the contractors. In the eventual decline of the counterinsurgency campaign, the question of culture faded from the military's priorities and consequently, so did the opportunities for Afghan-Americans to express their voices. While power was one effect of the association, there were other outcomes that relate to the social organization of cultural knowledge production. In the next section, I revisit Callon's concept of 'externalities' to examine the consequences that emanated from the engagement between Afghan-Americans and the military-industrial complex. The primary interest of the section is to elucidate the real, political effects of the theoretical arguments in the study, based on the observations and findings of the research. I consolidate the perspectives in a discussion on the operationalization of culture as an instrument of militarism. The overarching question that guides the concluding discussion is an inquiry into the process of knowledge production -

specifically its effect on the population for whom a category of the diaspora has spoken for more than fifteen years.

Third strand: The byproducts of operationalizing culture in COIN

In An Essay on Framing and Overflowing, Callon introduces the concept of 'overflows' to describe the effects of a decision on one group of agents made by another group of agents (Callon 1998). The idea relates to the concept of framing as a mechanism that anticipates the outcomes of an interaction – for example, the scripts in the role-playing scenarios or the contracts in the procurement of expertise. The overflows occur outside of the frame – they are consequences of the interactions. The framework of analysis is compelling because it approaches knowledge production from an economic or market-driven perspective, which captures the processes that underlie the transaction of expertise. Callon and Barth both use the term 'externalities' to further define the type of overflows that occur within a market (Callon 1998; Barth 2002). Callon offers the following definition of 'externality' as an analytical concept that can be applied to transactions:

> Let A, B, C etc. be agents involved in a commercial transaction, or more generally in the negotiation of a contract. In the course of the transaction or contract negotiation, these agents express their preferences or interests and then evaluate the various possible decisions arising from them. The decision they finally take has positive or negative effects, here referred to as externalities, on another set of agents X, Y and Z (as distinct from A, B, and C); the latter are not involved in this transaction or negotiation, either because they have no way of intervening or because they have no wish to do so (1998: 247).

Despite being carried over from the discipline of economics, the concept of 'externalities' effectively encompasses the effects of the decisions that result from the interaction between Afghan-American contractors and the U.S. military-industrial complex. I situate

the concept differently in this chapter by discussing it as a 'byproduct' of interactions. Externalities – or byproducts - specifically address the outcomes of the production of Afghan culture as it was translated into policies and interventions in Afghanistan. In the example above, parts of Callon's argument can be extrapolated and applied to the study. Assuming figures A and B to be the contractors and the military, respectively, using the concept of externalities helps situate the effect of their decisions and relationship on X, Y, Z – or the various segments of the Afghan population. Below, I will analyze two externalities – corruption and *bacha bazi* - that resulted from the encounter between the Afghan-American contractors and the U.S. military-industrial complex – focusing specifically on how diasporic Afghan cultural knowledge has been marshaled and mobilized in COIN-related governance and stability operations. In previous chapters, I discussed the prevalence of certain tropes in the narratives of Afghanistan among the diaspora, and situated them in the context of the relationships and processes from which they emerged. In this section, I examine the particularities of the effect. Afghan-American contractors and the U.S. military helped institutionalize knowledge about Afghanistan, but what was the end product? How did their interactions, their knowledge, and the media used to communicate their ideas translate into reconstructing the social reality in Afghanistan? I argue that the cultural explanations that stemmed from the encounter furthered Afghanistan's socio-political challenges, and strengthened the West's footprint in Afghanistan. Two major issues – corruption and *bacha bazi* – are at the heart of this discussion.

Albeit limited, the material representations of knowledge situate Afghans in Afghanistan as victims of their own cultural practices. The messaging is subtle but

penetrating. Drawing upon extant social binaries and divisions between genders and ethnicities, the literature offers a commentary on a future the international community can expect if Afghanistan were left to its own devices; a land of lawlessness, violence, and depravity. In doing so, it invigorates the *problematisation* stage that anticipates the engagement between the contractors and the military. Forays into human sexual behavior are not uncommon in anthropological discussions on sex and power, particularly from the point of view of Orientalized fetishisms that have constituted the basis for hegemonic interventions in the past (Naber 2012, Nader 1989, Said 1978; 2003). Even though the interactions among the actors within the network of knowledge production offer a window into gender and sexuality, the literature on Afghanistan (both fiction and non-fiction) serve as objective ground-truths in reconceptualizing social norms. From my observations, the subjectivity of the assertions was disregarded. Various cross-cultural competence training exercises instructed intelligence analysts, for example, to mitigate their personal biases. However, the same perspective on the effect of bias was infrequently extended to the material products with which they worked. In an interview in 2014, an Army Military Intelligence Officer, who had deployed to southern Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012, recalled his ability to surmount the cultural challenges he faced in Kandahar province:

> I had heard about *Bachi Bazi* before I deployed, but the extent that sexuality – and homosexuality - is taboo in the culture, I was surprised that people were so open about it. Like the guys joked about stuff – they would call it 'Man-Love Thursdays' - but seeing physical contact to that extent…that's not something I expected. We knew a few of the ANA guys [referring to Afghan National Army] were fooling around with each other and with some young guys who worked on the base […] We tried to get them to focus on the mission and divert them away from those kinds of practices, but there is no explicit guidance or policies that says what U.S. military personnel are supposed to do when faced with that situation. The difference is that in the Army if you see a soldier having sexual relations with a teenage boy or something, that's against the law. Period. The action gets investigated and prosecuted because it violated the law and Uniform Code of Military Justice. But what do

> you do in a place like Afghanistan when it is not against the law? […] Reading the HTS report on Pashtun sexuality really opened my eyes to the cultural context. *Bacha bazi* has been going on around here for centuries. I think we were told it was tied to the way they think about women's roles or women's honor…like 'women are for procreation, and boys are for pleasure.' So they have sex with women to have children, but seek out young men for everything else […] I can fault the Afghan soldiers all I want for their sexual behavior, but they are doing something that is ingrained in their culture […] I may not like it, Americans may not like it, but Afghans don't see it the same way that we do.

The Human Terrain article referenced is a controversial report issued by a Human Terrain Team on the supposed preponderance of *bacha bazi*. Authored by Anna Maria Cardinalli, a HTS social scientist (with a doctorate in theology) and a self-professed military investigator, the report connects the practice of pedophilia in Kunduz province with 'a long-standing cultural tradition in which boys are appreciated for physical beauty and apprenticed to older men for their sexual initiation,' and suggests that Western responses consider 'whether this can rightly be termed abusive when seen through a lens from within the culture' (Cardinalli 2009: 1-2). I will explain the positioning of culture as an explanation for errant sexual behavior among the Afghan military ranks in the subsequent section. I focus here on how such representations shape the interactions and processes that propagate the relational processes of cultural knowledge production. The response among Afghan-American contractors was interestingly varied. For some in the first cohort of the first generation, the report generated an outcry (among those who learned of it). For the others and generally those in the second cohort, the report and documents that ethnicized Afghan violence were treated as confirmation of ethnic differences and their effect on Afghanistan's instability. I found many Afghan-American contractors, who had grown up in America, sheepishly dismissed *bachi bazi* not as a cultural phenomenon, but as a hardwired inclination among certain ethnic groups. By internalizing and reproducing the information

presented in materials, such as the HTS reports which often lack substantial anthropological or ethnographic data, some Afghan-Americans reified the stereotypes associated with the sexual mystique of the Orient and the need to understand their perceived way of life. In doing so, they perpetuated the U.S. government's and military's occupation of Afghanistan by redefining the cultural context of the operations.

Where corruption or *bacha bazi*, although dissimilar in nature, are attributed to behaviors that are part of cultural norms, I noticed a disparity in the representation of such behaviors among the contractors. For example, Farah – who had grown up in America – told me she had 'not witness[ed] anything like that, but imagine it is related to normal practices among some of the ethnic groups or the tribes.' Similarly, Monir attributed the practices to socio-cultural differences among the population, noting that 'things like that are common among the uneducated, lower classes […] because those people unfortunately are in high positions in the government now, you see corruption more visibly now.' While Farah looked at ethnic and tribal differences, Monir focused on class disparities. Both explanations seemed to be influenced by their backgrounds, family histories, and the status of their households prior to migration. Within the first generation, the responses were relatively varied, but they consistently echoed that corruption and *bacha bazi* were recent phenomena ushered in by rampant warlordism and the increasing social power of patronage networks. And while some interviewees denied a causal link between ethnicities, they nonetheless fueled the myth during trainings with the U.S. military. At a pre-deployment briefing with a group of U.S. Marine Corps intelligence officers, Farid, a first generation Afghan who immigrated prior to the Soviet Invasion to Virginia (via London and New York), explained the behavioral motivation for *bacha bazi* through a joke.

The punch-line intimated that homosexuality and *bacha bazi* were so pervasive among Pashtun men that non-Pashtun men should consider protecting themselves if traveling to provinces like Kandahar. However, when asked about his assertion, Farid hedged: 'I don't really think that. Where it's Kandahar or Mazar, or west or east, some Afghan men will do very sick things to other young men and children [...] but these guys [referencing the military audience – author's clarification] they were already told in another training that it's a Pashtun thing. It doesn't matter what I tell them. Somebody else will tell them it's true. If they see one Pashtun Army officer abusing a young boy, they think all Pashtun men are like that.' Farid's comment captured the process of knowledge translation among the various actors. He acknowledged that his assertions would be challenged and reconstituted by another set of actors. His role was thus to perform knowledge of Afghan culture according to his expectation and understanding of the process.

The U.S. military personnel with whom I spoke conveyed a similar understanding of the justifications issued by some of the Afghan-American contractors. But many cited the HTT report as the basis of their understanding. In the previous section, I detailed the problematic framing of *bacha bazi*. I discuss it here as an externality that resulted from another encounter with the U.S.-military industrial complex – that of the Mujahideen and the U.S. government during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In the set of relations that ensued between the U.S. military and the Afghan-American contractors, the root causes of *bacha bazi* as an act of power and violence is relegated to a 'subculture.' Doing so evokes enduring themes of orientalism and sexual exoticism. These representations are where the contributions from the diasporic actors become problematic. Articulated as something 'they' – Afghans in Afghanistan – do, some contractors perpetuated a divide between their

identity as Afghan-Americans and their counterparts in Afghanistan. The implied difference was the exposure to Western values. The translation and transaction of knowledge became instrumental to America's and the West's civilizing mission. The association between pedophilia and pederasty with socio-cultural norms became institutionalized in shaping the U.S. military's response to the issues. Several U.S. military personnel have been disciplined by their branches for refusing orders to turn a blind eye to cases of sexual abuse by their Afghan military or police counterparts[26]. Attempts to intervene were strongly discouraged based on principles of cultural relativism that pedophilia and pederasty were culturally ingrained. From the perspective of anthropology, Gonzalez and Price critique the negligent assignment of cultural relativism based on misattribution of anthropological information. They argue that 'the "anthropological" information provided to the military by HTS frequently stressed such exoticism, while ignoring centuries of contact with the West, legacies of European colonialism, and the inequities of power relations that most anthropological analyses would address' (2015: 5). The argument extended by Gonzalez and Price captures the problems with the production of knowledge through HTS. The program, by design, had limited capabilities in conducting research and maintaining the methodological integrity of fieldwork – particularly in an environment where the threat of an attack was always present. As a result, the information supplied by HTS relied on a patchwork of data, as well as reconstructed historiographies that conveniently, albeit not necessarily accurately, explained the military's questions about Afghanistan. As a result, HTS studies made anthropology vulnerable to criticism because they sensationalized the

[26] The story of Special Forces Captain Dan Quinn received international news coverage in 2015. He was disciplined by the Army for hitting an Afghan militia commander who kept a young boy chained to his bed as a sex slave.

reality of the environment. With regard to *bacha bazi*, the Cardinalli report effaced the historical actualities that had given rise to rampant sexual violence, to include the appropriation of young boys as lovers by older men of influence. A media article in 2015 accounted for the history of the practices, tracing it to the time of the Soviet invasion and the legacy of the U.S.-supported Mujahideen warriors. According to the account,

> Afghanistan's Mujahideen warlords, who fought off the Soviet invasion and instigated a civil war in the 1980s, regularly engaged in acts of pedophilia. Keeping one or more "chai boys," as these male conscripts are called, for personal servitude and sexual pleasure became a symbol of power and social status [...] When the former mujahideen commanders ascended to power in 2001 after the Taliban's ouster, they brought with them a rekindled culture of bacha bazi. Today, many of these empowered warlords serve in important positions, as governors, line ministers, police chiefs, and military commanders' (Mondloch, 2013).

Cloaked in cultural relativism, the U.S. military's deliberate decision to not take action on matters related to *bacha bazi* reinforced the legitimacy of the abuse. Moreover, it is worth noting that the U.S. government had empowered the Mujahideen; setting the conditions that enabled their representation as part of Afghanistan's central government. Criticizing the Mujahideen and linking them to acts that were decried as 'un-Islamic' (particularly by the Taliban) invited further push-back and instability. The effect of the association with the U.S. government was that the Mujahideen had been constituted as subjects and heroes of a proxy war, and vested with power over the Afghan population. As Gonzalez and Price argue, cultural relativism does not supersede moral relativism, and as such, looking the other way while Afghan civilians, particularly children, were subject to sexual atrocities can be condemned as a willful act of ignorance and inaction. Furthermore, appeals to cultural relativism were consistent with the assumption that opposing the Mujahideen or any Afghan government officials engaged in exploitative sexual gratification would be 'culturally insensitive' and perpetuate the state of conflict. Gonzalez and Price discuss such

erroneous causalities by noting that '[t]here has been a surprising lack of inquiry into how American military officials who were obsessed with "cultural awareness" came to accept practices in which unwilling children were taken by Afghan police and militia leaders for sexual gratification' (2015). It is specifically this line of inquiry that I have attempted to cover in this section. By discussing the effect of the relationships and processes in cultural knowledge production, the tacit tolerance of *bacha bazi* can be seen as a byproduct of the U.S. military's and government's foreign policy oversights in Afghanistan.

Corruption, as a concept and practice, has been met with a similar fate to perceptions of sexual abuse in the last fifteen years of war in Afghanistan. While corruption is endemic to any system in which there are sustained inequalities, the challenges it poses to good governance and stability in Afghanistan are linked to its treatment as a cultural practice. Military interviewees, who had worked on VSOs or directly in training and advisory roles with the Afghan national security forces, cited corruption as a means of 'doing business' in Afghanistan. An Army Civil Affairs officer recalled her experience working with Afghan civilians as well as government and military officials. She observed:

> Everybody was corrupt. They all wanted *bakhshish* [donation or hand-out]. Like we would try to set up a *shura* for the villagers and they would demand a *bakhshish*. They were basically charging us a fee for giving *them* money and assistance. At first, when I got there, I was like 'how the fuck does that work, if we are supposed to be helping them?' It was just plain stupid. And then I got to understand that it is part of their culture and they don't see it like we see corruption in America.

Other military personnel as well as many of the Afghan-American contractors I interviewed or observed in the training workshops consistently reinforced the validity of her position. One 36-year-old Afghan-American contractor, who had grown up in America since she was two years old, expressed her frustrations with Afghan culture to a group of Special

Operations Forces soldiers: 'Corruption is the worst part of Afghan culture [...] we have some nepotism in America, but in Afghanistan, it's *the* way things are done [emphasis in the original]. Family comes first, so Afghans will always promote who they know. Everything is based around patronage networks. You have to keep the tribe and the clan happy.' By drawing a sharp distinction between 'us' and 'them,' she positioned Afghan values in direct opposition to American values of transparency and order. In reality, one could question the validity of such values against the backdrop of political lobbying that is pervasive in American politics. Lobbying allows organizations to pay or be paid sums of money – akin to legalized bribery – to influence policies and personalities in the government. The explicit underlining of the distinction between America and Afghanistan, however, helps serve as an empirical argument for American interventions in Afghanistan. Corruption, as a practice, is also traced to the vast amounts of money that flooded Afghanistan from international organizations to fund security and development programs. Asma explained that prior to the civil war by the Mujahideen, 'corruption was still an issue but not that much. People investigated corruption and those were responsible got punished. Now with all the money that goes, and without any monitoring of how it is spent and by who, now corruption is a big problem.' Asma's remarks are supported by the vast literature on aid inefficiencies and their relationship to corruption (not limited to Afghanistan). I argue that the same complex of contracting and privatization that buttressed knowledge production, also contributed to creating a culture of corruption in Afghanistan; exacerbating an issue that was the legacy of the civil war's lawlessness and criminality. But considering corruption as *a part* of the culture helps solidify an understanding that, like *bacha bazi*, corruption did not evolve from hegemonic military and nation-building interventions. Instead, they are hardwired into

socio-cultural norms that govern daily negotiations. In several training exercises, this understanding was brokered by many contractors and decontextualized from the imperialist interventions that gave rise to corruption. In the set of relations governing knowledge production, power and the ability to affect change are largely consolidated in the interactions between Afghan-American contractors and the military. And while government programs, such as HTS, were designed to provide expert answers for effective military engagements, they left a question mark over the role of diasporic actors in validating the misgivings. The system of knowledge production, therefore, empowered Afghan-American contractors to *speak for* rather than to *speak as* Afghans in Afghanistan. Lost in the midst of the encounter were the voices of Afghan civilians for whom war was an everyday reality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the relationships and processes that underpin knowledge production. Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives provided by ANT and a sociology of translation, I have argued that the set of social relations within the network reinforced culture as a product of the symbiotic link among the three faces of knowledge. The coherence of knowledge and its criteria of validity emerge through the social organization, and are defined by both diasporic relationships and the experience of post-Soviet migration. As I hope I have shown, the role of Afghan-American contractors and their negotiations with the U.S. military-industrial complex have had a formative effect on the security and development of Afghanistan. Although I examined each of the four stages of translation in relation to the production of Afghan cultural knowledge, I emphasize here that the power of mobilization – of rendering the Afghan-American community as expert

spokespersons – privileged a notion of knowledge associated with birthright and an imagined connection to the collective consciousness of Afghans in Afghanistan. My point is not to detract from the important work carried out by many Afghan-Americans contractors in bridging cultural and linguistic divides. However, as this chapter has shown, knowledge as an instrument in the mediation of power deserves a more critical gaze. The lasting effect of the associations among the U.S. military-industrial complex, diasporic contractors, and Afghan civilians embroiled in war has often rendered the latter the least heard and the most disenfranchised.

In this process of knowledge production, the associations discussed above converge on the key dimension of power. By looking at the specific example of cultural knowledge in COIN operations, the study draws on Latour's idea that the focus on society as a monolithic entity is less helpful in understanding how it is constituted (1986). I have attempted to capture the 'power of association' by examining how actors or agents translate and shape knowledge rather than simply transmit it (Latour 1986: 264). Latour makes a distinction between having power – *in potentia* – and exerting power – *in actu*. The difference between them, he argues, is the action of others (Latour 1986: 265). Although Latour is cautious about the conventional notion of power, the reconceptualization he proposes is useful in analyzing the expression of power across the set of relations and processes that generate knowledge for COIN interventions. Latour's problematisation of power situates it as 'a consequence instead of a cause of collective action,' which is why he critiques the idea of 'holding' power – a concept that he argues is actually empty of any control until it is put into practice. The relationship between the contractors and the U.S. military confers power on Afghan-American contractors as a consequence of the engagement. The processes of

enrolment and *interessment* reinforce the ability of Afghan-Americans to exercise authority in a novel way. In the Afghan diaspora where class-consciousness rarely overrides community divisions, the distribution of power through the encounter serves as 'the glue' that enables the groupness of the Afghan-American contractors (Latour 1986). As collective assertions about Afghanistan are created, performed, and reproduced, the actors involved hold power vis-à-vis the military, but project it *in actu* within the diaspora. Contracts, the clearances, and above all, highly-prized expertise are instruments of influence that reconstitute the boundaries of the diaspora. Thus, what they seek through the contracting opportunities is the effect of such associations – namely, the power ensured to those who can define the new realities in which it can be exercised.

The final effect of the social organization of knowledge production I want to address is the operationalization of culture and the anthropological discipline against the backdrop of militarism. The structure of the associations that governed cultural knowledge focused on 'weaponizing culture' as a means of control (Price 2009; 2011). In the same way that power and knowledge are tied together, war and intelligence have an almost-inseparable relationship. Pedagogic materials, such as country reference guides and handouts on rapport building, were designed to facilitate cross-culture competence. When available to U.S. military personnel, the Department of Defense provided cultural awareness courses that, in many cases, used diasporic subject matter expertise to broker the information in the training books. The parts of the system of knowledge production – the audience, the defense contracting companies, the contractors – all function both independently and together when needed towards one objective: substantiating America's footprint in Afghanistan. To shape the distribution of power across the Afghan population, the concept

of culture has become operationalized as both the cause of war and its solution. The predominance of human and behavioral analysis programs that have sprung up to meet the military-industrial complex's demands further reinforce the primacy of culture as an operational tool in war and nation-building (Gonzalez 2015b). A review of the Master Narratives or the various training materials that espouse some form of ethnographic or anthropological insight show that they are wholly lacking in the depth of information that would render them a sufficient contextualization of any people or society. Predicated on reductionism (and largely by virtue of the fact that military personnel do not have the time or the training to be anthropologists on the front lines), the concept and content of culture depicted through the trainings is unconvincing. I take up further the relationship between cultural knowledge and militarism in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

> There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know.
>
> *-Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of Defense, 2001- 2006.*

As the embers of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to smolder, the last fifteen years offer a stark reflection on people, power, and knowledge. The significance of the latter in the Bush administration's Global War on Terror is exemplified in Secretary Rumsfeld's confounding admission, and underlines how the production of knowledge was both sought after and manipulated to support military occupations. The fabricated narrative about weapons of mass destruction by an Iraqi immigrant, who traded information, or intelligence, for American citizenship, and established a specious justification for the U.S. military's invasion of Iraq, reveals the instrumentality of knowledge production. The process of uncovering and understanding 'unknown unknowns' became a critical preoccupation of policy planning and military interventions, and has changed the relationship between the state and its citizens in America. The shortcomings of the U.S. policy in Afghanistan became readily apparent as the military strategy shifted to pacifying insurgencies and recognized that the military knew little about the populations it was attempting to subdue. The response to such realizations galvanized a renewed interest in the Afghan diaspora as a primary resource of knowledge. The distinction between Afghanistan and the Middle East, despite both being used erroneously interchangeably, emerged prominently during the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan, and ushered the Afghan-American community along with the U.S. military

toward the social sciences field. Representations of Afghanistan began to take a clearer shape from the generalizations of the Middle East and Islam as voices from academia and the diaspora began to explain the socio-cultural differences. But such characterizations were nonetheless usually Orientalist and essentialized because many 'experts' in the diaspora did not have the level of exposure to the parts of Afghanistan with which the U.S. military engaged. The contracts, however, required the delivery of knowledge for lucrative wages, and thus demands for an exposition on tribal structures, for example, could be an exercise in creativity.

In addressing the twists and turns of the Afghan diaspora's relationship with the U.S. military, this thesis has examined the development of Afghan cultural knowledge by drawing on Barth's anthropology of knowledge production. While Chapter 1 and 2 provided a literature review and the theoretical framework, and set out the research methodology, Chapter 3 focused on the specific subjects at the heart of the investigation. Situating the chapter in the literature on encounters and the constitution of subjects, I explain how a category of Afghan-Americans emerged from the demand for cultural knowledge created by the U.S. military-industrial complex. The discussion also accounts for the political and historical dimensions of their migration – factors that have informed the development of narratives and assertions that make up the body of knowledge detailed in Chapter 4. In particular, I focus on the relationship to the Soviet invasion and the Mujahideen as criteria of validity – a term borrowed from Barth to explain how knowledge is authenticated. Articulated by the contractors, the cultural narratives that emerged within the diaspora after 2001 are often tinged with the politics of status, history, and memory. Chapter 5 covered the second element of Barth's second face of knowledge production - the

various media used to transmit knowledge. Using examples from role-playing scenarios, as well as translations and material representations of cultural knowledge, the discussion centered on the 'properties of the medium' that influenced the transmission of cultural knowledge. I argued that the various forms of representation constituted the contractors as 'experts,' investing them with a sense of authority and relevance in one of America's most sensitive foreign policy priorities. Chapter 6 looked at the third 'face' of Barth's anthropology of knowledge – the social organization of knowledge production to deconstruct the relationships and processes that underlie the COIN effort. In seizing contracting opportunities, Afghan-Americans facilitated their economic integration through the transaction of expertise. The social organization dimension lays bare a critical aspect of the network, which will be explored in the remainder of this chapter: militarism and specifically its role in shaping communities (Gusterson 2007). Below I examine the effect of militarism as a transformative force within the social organization of knowledge. I first touch on the interplay between militarism and the diaspora outside Afghanistan and between militarism and nation-building within the country, before turning to its relationship with anthropology more broadly. In the course of this, I highlight some of the key findings of the thesis.

Militarism and the Afghan diaspora

Against the background of the growing anthropological literature on militarism, this thesis looks at its role in shaping communities. The key point of the thesis is to demonstrate that the encounter with the U.S. military constituted both the identity of the contractor community and the Afghan-American diaspora more widely. By examining the encounter between the U.S. military and Afghan-American contractors in the War on

Terror, the study has shown that the reach of militarism through defense contracting opportunities re-constituted the Afghan diaspora in two prominent ways. First, it established Afghan-Americans as a distinct community in America, highlighting their diasporicity as the most formative aspect of their identity and expertise. Secondly, it facilitated the economic and social integration of the contractors in American society, while simultaneously redefining the boundaries of their membership and inclusion in the Afghan diaspora.

I situate this argument in the context of post-9/11 developments in Afghan-American communities, where two processes served as the precursor to the encounter. The first was the internal diasporic politics that emerged in the wake of the Soviet invasion and the mass migration of Afghan households to places such as America. My findings support those of other scholars' in diaspora studies, who have argued that the migration and resettlement process in America is fraught with class and socio-economic divisions across households (Hanifi 2006; Nassery 2003; Oeppen 2010, 2013; Sadat 2008). These biases and class-consciousness materialize in articulations of *Afghaniyat* and Afghan cultural knowledge, allowing new forms of belonging and exclusion to emerge and redefine the boundaries of the diaspora. The second process resulted from the U.S. government's Global War on Terror from 2001, during which Muslim, Middle Eastern, Arab, and South Asian diaspora communities came under scrutiny. Many Afghan-Americans maintained that they had hardly thought about ethnic identity or standards of *Afghan-ness* prior to 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan. The military's cultural turn and the 'hearts and minds' campaign were the channels through which explorations into individual and collective Afghan identity began to take shape in America. This reinvigoration of identity and mobilization

coincided with the surge of contracting opportunities to work on COIN-related programs through military bases in America. The premium placed on cultural expertise by the demands of the War of Terror created a strand of competition within the Afghan-American community. This was particularly noticeable among Afghan-American contractors, where the criteria for authenticity were constantly reproduced to support the bodies and representations of knowledge about Afghanistan (Barth 2002). The goal to understand and reflect Afghan 'hearts and minds' engendered a race to define and maintain *Afghaniyat* as a standard of authentic Afghan identity in the diaspora, which recast divisions in the community along ethnic, social, and sectarian lines. For many Afghan-Americans, ethnic and sectarian differences had hardly been an issue during the course of migration and resettlement. But many contractors emphasized the differences in order to explain cultural disparities in Afghanistan for which they could not pinpoint another answer. Among the cohort of first-generation and second-generation Afghan-Americans, who have limited or no experience in Afghanistan, COIN-centered cultural knowledge production has prompted their foray into local and transnational identity politics. This process has, in some cases as described in the ethnographic vignettes, undermined the social cohesiveness of the community. The narratives through which Afghanistan has been positioned to facilitate America's occupation have been explicitly focused on the social memories of Afghan-Americans who left Afghanistan as a result of the Soviet invasion and the subsequent Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Thus, when and how Afghan-Americans migrated have become formative ways of distinguishing among households and reconstituting membership within the community. Ultimately, as Afghan-Americans sought to define their own worlds and a new social reality for the U.S. military, they drew up and communicated

assertions about Afghanistan that did not necessarily reflect their actual knowledge or experience. The interconnectedness of saying what Afghanistan represents and actually performing it within a set network shows that in every moment of knowledge transmission, all the faces of knowledge are present (Barth 2002). I conclude that the counterinsurgency demand for knowledge and mobilization of Afghan-American contractors strengthened 'boundary maintenance' (Barth 1969) across the spheres of engagement (Van Hear and Cohen 2015). Boundary maintenance helped Afghan-Americans redefine their selfhood in America against the association (and vilification) with terrorism, the Arab world, and radical Islam. Statements such as 'Who are we? We are not Arabs,' discussed in Chapter 3, underscore a strong current in the diaspora – the need to define who Afghan-Americans are in opposition to who and what they are *not*. As much as the policies of post-9/11 America had an impact on creating diasporic identity, so did the mobilization of some Afghan-Americans as experts.

Viewed from an anthropological perspective, the developments in the diaspora along the lines described are manifestations of Brubaker's notion of 'groupness.' The temporary solidarity reflects the moments of action in which members of a group can band together in accordance to mutual interests rather than any affinity or ethnic and linguistic similarities. As an action, groupness advances a compelling explanation of the forms Afghan knowledge takes. Groupness is an idea I trace throughout the thesis, showing its connection to the social organization of knowledge in Chapter 6. At the height of COIN, the mobilization of the category of contractors represented a strategic cohesion that characterizes the knowledge produced. In previous chapters, I noted that the military's interest in culture and COIN coincided with changes in diasporic identity. Neither the contractors'

associations nor the assertions about Afghanistan were 'definitionally present' (Barth 2002). They were both malleable according to the needs of the contracts. The impetus was not to generate a body of knowledge that could serve as a definitive representation. The need, for many contractors, was to ensure their *enrolment* and *interessement* as actors in a world shaped by American militarism (Callon 1998). The emergence of a particular segment of the diaspora as experts related to their American citizenship, bi- or trilingual fluency in Dari, Pashto, and English, and ability to secure government clearance. In my experience, the clearances in particular have been key in opening up opportunities for economic and social mobility that may otherwise have eluded them. As a result, some Afghan-American contractors expressed concern about the drawdown of international forces in Afghanistan, which would deprive them of future employment. Beyond the economic aspect, the opportunities also helped substantiate their relevance in America. Afghan-Americans were able to have a voice in a critical, public forum in an unprecedented manner allowing them to contest some of the misinformation on Afghanistan. This included the U.S. government's policy to subsume Afghanistan and Pakistan under the 'AFPAK region' banner – a term that assumes homogeneity of people, values, and beliefs across the two countries. Such perspectives within the U.S. government have galvanized a systematic reinforcement of Afghanistan's cultural and historical distinctiveness by the diaspora in hopes of thwarting the forced connection with Pakistan, a country and government that many Afghans view with hostility and deem responsible for years of economic colonialism and insecurity in Afghanistan, and yet one of strategic political significance to America. Thus, on one hand, the War on Terror and the media attention on Afghanistan were helpful in promoting a greater awareness of Afghan-Americans, Afghan culture, and the Afghan

people beyond their associations with fundamentalist Islam or Pakistan and the Middle East. But on the other hand, the approach to cultural knowledge heightened the differences among the various spheres of engagement within the diaspora (Van Hear and Cohen 2015). Across the 'known community' mentioned in Chapter 3, new articulations of *Afghaniyat* revived and at times strengthened past differences. Appeals to class, status, and political affiliation created new boundaries within the diaspora. Contractors were not always able to transcend such rigid walls despite their capital accumulation, but they were able to gain greater mobility outside of the diaspora. The greatest divergence, however, was within the imagined community. Despite being seen as long-distance projections of Afghans in Afghanistan, many of the contractors saw themselves more aligned with their American military counterparts than 'them' – the Afghans for whom they had been hired to speak.

Furthermore, the U.S. military's approach to 'cultural intelligence' has also had a profound impact on the narratives and ideas that have come to underpin knowledge of Afghanistan in the diaspora. I conclude that the *corpus* generated through the process of knowledge production was specifically designed to meet the needs of the U.S. military and foreign policy communities (Barth 2002). The military's positioning of such information as 'cultural intelligence' created a bias toward the range and type of knowledge conveyed by Afghan-American contractors, when they were placed in advisory positions. Cultural knowledge is a useful way of understanding, but it can produce more questions – as research and inquiry often do. But intelligence has to be actionable. It has to present a solution or a way forward to secure the objectives of the U.S. government, and it has to demystify the 'unknowns.' This has resulted in greater social discord among Afghan-Americans because the validity of the information is often contested. Materials presented in

this study point to the lack of consensus – and consistency – about ideas and traditions related to Afghanistan. Organizations like Taleef Collective in Fremont, California, have emerged to attempt to streamline Islamic narratives. Revised articulations of Afghan identity are usually scrutinized within the diaspora, and at times, denigrated as merely imaginative responses by Afghan-Americans, who have sought to benefit socially or economically from the U.S. government's curiosity about Afghanistan. Novel ideas about Afghan heritage have also heightened the tension between the first and second cohorts of first-generation immigrants. As described in previous chapters, the defense sector often hires among the second cohort because of their bilingual fluency, but most importantly because of their ability to speak and write English with better proficiency than some members of the first cohort who have had direct personal experiences of Afghanistan. As a result, they have been given a greater voice in explaining Afghanistan (culturally and linguistically) to their U.S. military counterparts. However, their explanations are by and large the products of their parents' and/or grandparents' nostalgia, memories, and experiences. The appropriation and reproduction of information, in this manner, have reified and perpetuated biases in the body of knowledge produced about Afghanistan and the Afghan people. Although palpable in the diaspora as dissenting voices and contested narratives, the effect of procuring cultural intelligence has also shaped the challenges to nation-building, which informs the next section.

Militarism and nation building in Afghanistan

The sustained effort by the U.S. government and military to occupy, stabilize, and govern Afghanistan by trying to understand and reconcile differences between it and the West led to increased friction in Afghanistan. The U.S. military's 'light footprint' approach

minimized the presence of U.S. forces through the Afghanistan First Initiative, mentioned in Chapter 1, but the strings of power were still tied to America's heavy hand in Afghanistan's nation-building process. The role of Afghan-American contractors in counterinsurgency and nation-building efforts provides a perspective into the entanglement of diasporic communities in inciting or perpetuating instability. This thesis has argued that the narratives developed by Afghan-American contractors and adopted by many in the diaspora as reflections of Afghanistan, contributed to justifications and rationalizations for military and reconstruction interventions that did not necessarily resonate with Afghan society, culture, political economy, or history. This came about in two overlapping ways. First, the body of knowledge that was developed in support of the attitudes and strategies to stability and governance incorporated biases from the post-Soviet era in Kabul. Secondly, the performance and representations of cultural knowledge reified orientalist notions of Afghan culture and the Afghan people that were out of tune with the changing dynamic of the country. Such observations during the research recalled a distinct parallel between COIN interventions in Afghanistan and the forms of indirect rule established during colonial regimes. To argue that the U.S. invasion and its ensuing policies lack explicit imperialist motivations would be to deny the aggregate international political decisions that have contributed to the ongoing lack of governance and security for local populations. The biopolitics of this form of 'native administration' required an understanding of local populations, but only in so far as such knowledge could further America's authority in Afghanistan via the U.S. military, the coalition-trained Afghan National Security Forces, and the U.S.-backed (and brokered) political leadership (Duffield 2005; Keen 2006). This meant that the U.S. and coalition forces maintained destructive power vis-à-vis terrorists and

insurgents, but attempted to share constructive power with Afghans – an overture that publicized the transition from NATO capabilities to reliance instead on the Afghan security forces as step forward in the Afghan First Initiative. The shift meant that movements such as night raids would be carried out by the Afghan military with NATO providing only training and assistance. The same process was echoed politically in elections which were presented as 'Afghan-led,' but summarily resolved by the West when the outcomes were contested or nullified. It is significant to note that at the time of writing, Afghanistan's current National Unity Government (NUG) was brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to thwart potential conflict in Afghanistan when the recent 'democratic' elections collapsed with accusations of fraud and corruption by the two leading candidates – both Afghans from diasporic communities in America and Europe. At present, the attempt at 'native administration' has backfired, with the NUG precariously tilting toward civil unrest.

Unresolved hostilities between households that emigrated as a result of the Soviet-backed regime and those who remained in Afghanistan to work for the Afghan government informed the ideas conveyed to U.S. military personnel and policymakers. Such accounts have had a powerful effect on shaping perceptions of Afghanistan's past, a point of reference upon which nation-building initiatives are predicated and legitimized. The U.S. government, for example, has focused on the Soviet-era destruction, violence, and social disruption to justify what it has had to 'fix' in Afghanistan – an account readily supported by Afghan-American voices especially from era of the Soviet occupation. Yet these voices have diminished the impact of ethno-nationalisms that evolved from the Mujahideen's civil war as the basis for the current lack of national unity and political cooperation. Despite the fact that conflicts in Afghanistan have been rooted in post-Cold War international politics,

the U.S. government and the international community still operate under the impression that essentialized notions of individual and community identity (primarily tribal) are responsible for instability and can be redressed through democracy and modernity. These notions are substantiated in media, such as the Master Narratives, that uphold such assertions. They validate the subjectivities and biases of personal experience as 'expertise.' The relationship between the assertions and the media is powerful because it perpetuates the social organization of the knowledge (a factor that allows Afghan-Americans a voice outside of the diaspora). The ironic reality of Afghanistan as a functioning secular, socially and economically modernizing technocratic state since the 1920s is relegated to Soviet-style autocracy and communism, which reflects the experiences of exiled and immigrant Afghans. Promises of liberty and democracy as the hallmarks of America's military footprint in Afghanistan undermine the fact that Afghanistan had been a democratic republic, at least in name, before 1992 when it transitioned to an Islamic republic under the leadership of Mujahideen commanders. Such realities have been effaced in the production of knowledge that has served to legitimize U.S. government policies and military actions. As the fieldwork interviews revealed, members of the Afghan diaspora have been instrumental in shaping perceptions that Afghans needed liberation, democratic governance, and free-market capitalism. Moreover, the grievances against the Soviet occupation often translate to vocal support and often lionization of the Mujahideen forces, many of whom serve in the current political administration and constitute obstacles to transparency, good governance, and security (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 2016: 18). As a result, the endeavors to bring democratic reform to Afghanistan have met with mixed results, at best, in the years since the U.S. occupation.

The nation-building process has suffered from both the neo-colonial interests of transnational diasporic engagement and the efforts of COIN-operated anthropology. The encounter has had side-effects or byproducts. In an environment in which cultural expertise and cultural intelligence informed military planning, references to 'culture' thus became militarized and politicized. Understanding cultural differences, at times, constituted considerable hurdles to Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction because it perpetuated a 'clash of civilizations' mentality that absolved the U.S. and the international community of responsibility for Afghanistan's continued instability and COIN's failure. Under the framework of the sociology of translation, such iterations can often be traced to Afghan-American contractors, and explained through the focus on networks, actors, and processes. As I related in Chapter 6, the issue with operationalizing culture began with the *problematisation* set forth by the military and the Afghan-American contractors. Cultural intelligence became the key issue, a mutually-accepted problem for which the contractors would provide their expertise.

Corruption exemplifies a by-product that resulted from an ineffective surfeit of aid, and the use of culture as an explanation for inefficacies. By using culture as a crutch, the U.S. military and government have effectively distanced themselves from accountability in supporting policies that rewarded corrupt behavior and decentralized power structures. The interviews within the military community during fieldwork are echoed by the myriad accusations of corruption that consistently surface across the Afghan government, military, and civil society organizations. In response, corruption and bribery are offered as expedient explanations for why U.S. policies and funding continue to fall short of meeting their targets. Interviewees articulated that bribery was simply a way of doing business in

Afghanistan – a concept that was often articulated and conflated as a legitimate practice by Afghans who benefitted from the general lack of familiarity with Afghan customs[27]. This perception emerged because of the 'cultural turn' in the U.S. military strategy, which excused flagrant abuses of power as part of Afghan culture. Afghans, from local powerbrokers to upper echelons of the government, did not readily disabuse their American counterparts of the notion because it would not have been in their interest. Most Afghans will admit that corruption is not a part of the culture. It was investigated and prosecuted by Afghan leaders prior to the civil war in much the same way at it would be handled in the West. But the application of culture as a diagnostic tool was not only a parochial angle from which to view a burgeoning political and economic crisis, but it also overshadowed pragmatic solutions to assisting the local population of Afghans who had to contend with a corrupt, Western-backed bureaucracy. Some Afghan-American advisors and translators discussed attempting, in vain, to explain that corruption and bribery were not norms. However, they usually articulated their positions by appealing to class and status, noting that bribery was not only outside of cultural and social norms, it was also associated with uneducated, lower status Afghans. Such explanations, because of the references to class, often failed to resonate with U.S. military personnel who reflected on the caveats as 'elitist' and 'out of touch.' And they were partially right in the assumption – Afghans from the diaspora were out of touch with the dynamics and social organization of Afghanistan's new power structures. But I have argued that this was a result of COIN strategies that appeased hearts and minds in order to win them, and subverted former hierarchies,

[27] A common reference to bribery that had become an accepted part of transactions between the U.S. government and its Afghan counterparts was 'facilitation fee,' which was added to the budget line items of development projects to legitimize extraneous spending on bribes.

relationships, and values. When such strategies failed, it was easier to reference ideas such as collectivism, patronage networks, and internecine tribal warfare as explanations for Afghanistan's inability to be governed.

A further aspect of militarism's effect on nation-building is evident in the performance and representations of cultural knowledge through Key Leader Engagement exercises. Role-playing scenarios exemplify how exercises in cross-cultural relationship or rapport building have come to uphold orientalist notions of Afghan culture and the Afghan people. For many military servicemen and women, who deployed to Afghanistan in the wake of COIN doctrine, Afghan-American role-players were often their introduction to the theater of operations. The ideas exchanged in the transaction of cultural knowledge framed the experiences and expectations of military decision-makers. As this thesis has tried to show, the material representation of knowledge worked together with the simulated activities to reinforce tribalism, social and religious conservatism, honor, and an irreconcilable rural-urban divide as distinct features of a perceived culturally homogenous country. The exercises categorized and presented information in a way that could be understandable, easily accessible, and, most importantly, performed correctly when servicemen and women engaged local people in Afghan villages during village stability operations. Again, this underscored the belief that the war in Afghanistan is inherently a cultural issue – a clash of modern, progressive ideas with rural tribalism. Focused on shame and honor as central values of Afghan society, U.S. military personnel rehearsed interactions with Afghan-American contractors to understand the cultural nuances of 'rapport building' that could facilitate the negotiation of American power in Afghanistan. These observations led me to conclude that the role-playing exercises and the facets of

cultural representation undertaken by Afghan-American contractors perpetuated the belief that Afghans – and Afghanistan – could be mastered as long as sufficient expertise could be provided. The reliance on performing Afghan culture, however, had a major drawback. While some U.S. service members and military leadership could adapt to environments that were not scripted, others recount struggling when encounters with Afghan leaders veered off the scripted interactions of the role-playing exercises. Literally and figuratively, the theater of operations staged and scripted such encounters to shape how service members conceptualized Afghanistan. But, in practice, it confounded the issues with nation-building because service members were charged with the role of diplomats and statesmen. I focused on Key Leader Engagements – or KLEs – in the preceding chapters to illustrate how counterinsurgency operations and increased militarism in U.S. foreign policy pushed U.S. service men and women beyond their capabilities as military personnel. The effect it generated is visible in the rise of local powerbrokers and strongmen, who currently present formidable challenges to Afghanistan's security and governance. Similar to the belief that corruption is cultural, role-playing exercises and KLEs erroneously emphasize tribal structures and codes of conduct as central to foreign policy implementation. In Chapter 5, I discussed how Afghan-American contractors reified these notions often by role-playing Afghan village or tribal leaders – capacities in which they had limited to no experience. But this conformed to the ideology that winning the war would mean influencing key leaders to support U.S. military operations against the Taliban, and pledging allegiance to the U.S.-backed central government in Kabul. This has underpinned the mobilization of local militias, such as the Afghan Local Police, that are often criticized by Afghans as barbaric, who are subject to their control. While the coalition forces relied on

such militias to assist in countering insurgent forces, the association with U.S. military power and money given them greater political legitimacy and subverted the power structures already in place. The legacy of militarized approaches to nation-building in Afghanistan can be seen in the fragmentation of power and politics. By drawing upon the explanatory power of culture, the disintegration has been dismissed as an indigenous process of ethnic and tribal rivalries rather than the protracted consequence of proxy wars in the post-Cold War period. Such perceptions have left Afghan society broken and divided.

Militarism and anthropology

By focusing on knowledge production, the study provides a basis for future discussions in anthropology on the transformative power of militarism on communities and cultures. I conclude that representations of militarism in a wide spectrum of media have normalized it as an overarching culture in America – not just a product of counter-terrorism initiatives. Many anthropologists have already signaled the effects of the military's connection with anthropology in post-9/11 America as an emergent research area in the discipline (Albro 2010: 2010a; Gonzalez 2012, Gusterson 2007: 2007a). I have attempted to capture an instance of it by demonstrating the relationship between militarism and knowledge production for counterinsurgency operations, and by discussing its effect on the Afghan-American community, who supplied some of the expertise underpinning U.S. military and foreign policy decisions. The byproducts of such decisions in the Global War of Terror serve as a commentary on anthropology – and anthropologists, by extension – at the intersection of international affairs, political economy, and security.

The encounter between anthropology and the security state has changed the discipline. Some anthropologists argue that 'in deciding that anthropology might be to the

'war on terror' what physics was to the Cold War, the national security apparatus took a cultural turn' in recent years (Gusterson 2007). In particular, the focus on war-technology anthropology by the national security apparatus reconstituted anthropology by weaponizing it (Stroeken 2012; Price 2011). Critics, such as Maximilien Forte, who invite anthropologists to '[…] consider how the very structure and mode of doing anthropology are themselves amenable to militarization' see little distinction between the discipline and the tactic of counterinsurgency (2011). The security state has been able to exploit the internal pressure in the discipline. Financing for research imperatives and employment, for example, are more readily available in the national security sector than they are in academia in America (Priest and Arkin 2011). But, ironically, the research has also been useful in shedding light on the human dimension of war, exposing the indignities of night raids by U.S. Special Operations Forces, for example, or the 'collateral damage' of civilian casualties from drone strikes. In some ways, the discipline's encounter with the military-industrial complex has propelled constructive public critiques in the media, government, and academia to limit harm. Moreover, despite the abandonment of counterinsurgency doctrine, shifts in conventional warfare to population-centered interventions continue to spawn new cultural knowledge efforts that draw upon anthropologists and social scientists. At the time of writing, the Human Terrain System has been resurrected as the Global Cultural Knowledge Network. As a result, organizations such as the American Anthropological Association (AAA) are adapting new rules of anthropological engagement. What this change translates to within the discipline is difficult to gauge at this time. Such new developments, however, attest to Barth's call to address the social organization of knowledge production in militarized societies. Whether it is the Global Cultural Knowledge

Network or other Smartbooks, the use of such materials is increasingly shaping the justifications for war and hegemony. Produced to resonate with a certain audience and create an effect, these media often fall short of reality. Perhaps more than ever, anthropology is needed in the study of people and places at war because the advent of modern technologies, such as surveillance and weaponized drones, increasingly virtualize human targets and the experience of war. This impacts both how wars are fought and the civilians that are caught in the crosshairs. And it is these lives at war that anthropologists can ensure are not forgotten.

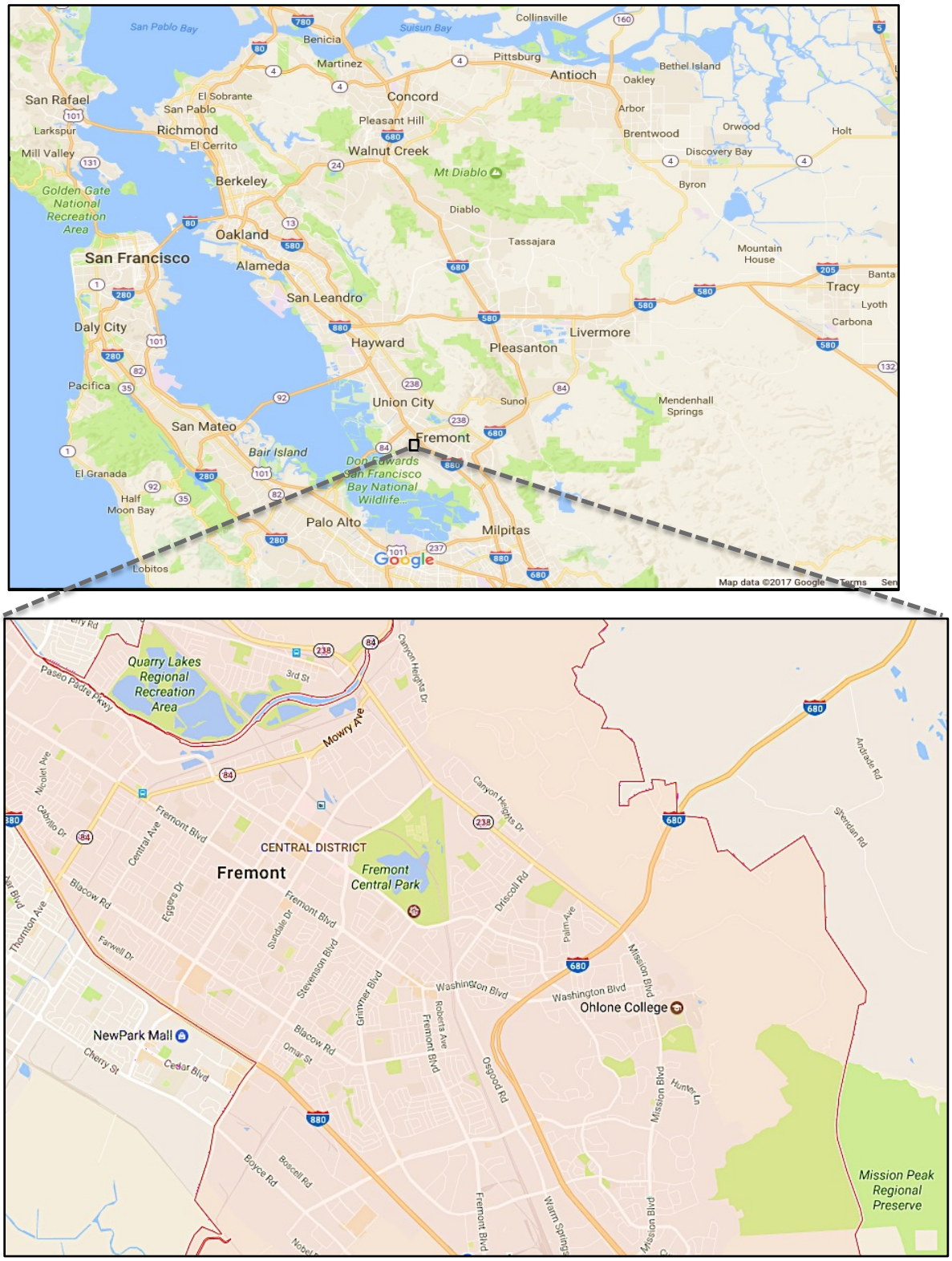
This study is a part of an emergent, but still limited research on militarism in the 21st century. Future anthropological inquiries should contribute to distilling the meaning and implications of militarism, particularly by looking at it as a medium within a broader social organization of knowledge. I suggest three perspectives that could be pursued. The first consideration is to reassess militarism as a culture and as a medium through which active subjects are shaped. Militarism defines the way people think, and affects national and household decision-making. In post-9/11 America, the security state has leveraged fear through the perception of pervasive existential threats to effectively create a market for war and a tolerance for government measures that controversially infringe on civil liberties. When viewed as a culture, militarism can be parsed into a set of values that relate to a deeply inculcated need for control based on risk-avoidance and predictability. This need was set in motion during the Cold War when knowledge production, role-playing exercises, village reconstructions, and simulated nuclear detonations indoctrinated Americans about exigent threats from the Soviet Union and legitimized spending on technologies to help American households anticipate attacks, even at the cost of limiting

civil liberties (Masco 2014). The attacks of 9/11 re-galvanized the Cold War mentality, this time toward containing violent extremism across Muslim-majority countries and communities in America. The need for risk-avoidance and predictability to maximize control is as evident in defense programs that attempt to anticipate and correlate human behavior with violence as it is on televised programs, which perpetuate the belief that society is always under threat but generally complacent or ignorant of it ('Killer Bees' or 'World's Most Dangerous Airports' are apt examples of media that instill terror in the seemingly mundane). In such a culture, self-preservation shapes individual consciousness and affects the cohesion of communities, as questions of threat and risk become the criteria for belonging and membership. Thus, anthropology needs to understand militarism not as a product of the national security infrastructure, but as a culture cultivated by the state to shape public life.

The second consideration by anthropologists should be to divorce the concept of militarism from the military itself. Far from being a monolithic institution, the military has become increasingly tied to the private sector, as much of its non-combat logistics and operations are outsourced to private security companies and civilian contractors (Lucas 2009). The threads within the military-industrial complex and society at large are extensive, and would in themselves constitute an entire subject of study. I would argue that the military is only a subset of the culture of militarism, and that anthropologists would do well to investigate the extent and reach of militarism beyond security organizations. Doing so would facilitate the integrity of anthropological research by ensuring that human societies remain the focus of the processes and relationships that affect them. The constellation of theories I have channeled in the course of this thesis would offer a suitable

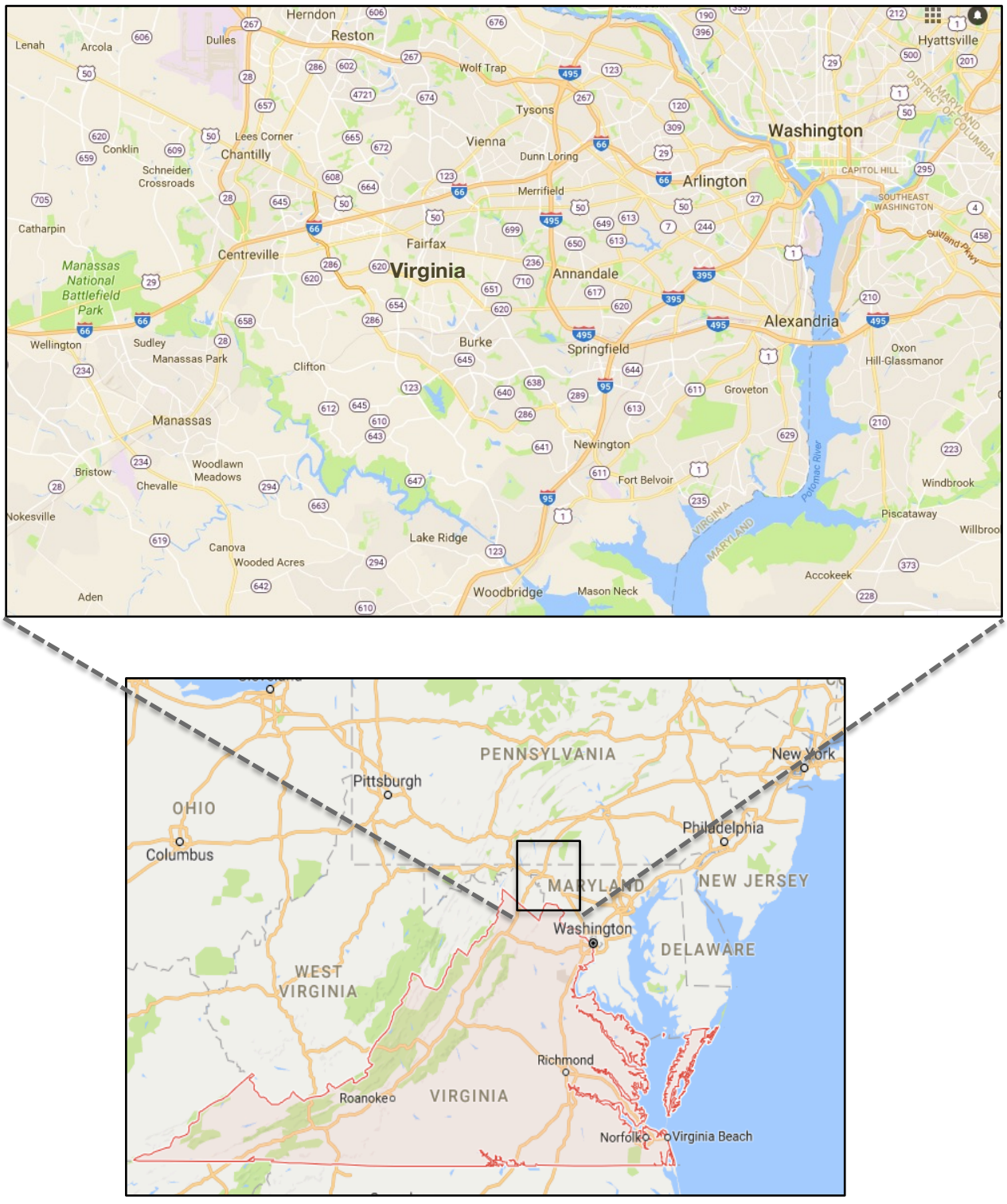
starting point for further inquiries. Barth, Callon and Latour, saw the world as one of 'micropolitics' – of small negotiations across a variety of actors that allow people to make sense of their social environments. Barth's fascination with social organization is apt, particularly as he sought to make anthropology *act* in the public world, and to have it engage with contemporary political challenges. To divorce militarism from the military, therefore, is an opportunity to investigate its articulations across various mediums; to understand how it shapes the people and communities it encounters. Human societies are not external to the social organization of knowledge as power – rather, they constitute and are constituted by it. The human element at the core of anthropology as a discipline supports a third consideration, one that runs the risk of being dismissed and forgotten as counter-terrorism, increased surveillance, and virtual war technologies gain greater momentum in the security state. As this study has shown, the politics of memory is a valuable currency in the transaction of knowledge and power. Anthropology serves as a reminder that people are behind the most sophisticated machineries of war, and it is populations who are subject to them. While this study concluded with Afghan Americans attaining a brief period of integration and even prominence in America, it would be myopic to assume that the reach of American militarism ends where new diasporas begin. Rather, it is worth considering the extent to which militarism is reshaping relationships with local societies and the perceived homeland. For many Afghan-American contractors, the encounter with the military-industrial complex has strengthened their connection with the state and American society. For others, the encounter indicates access to new places and greater mobility to circumvent diasporic politics. For Mina, fresh out of college with a job in the defense sector, it means she is home.

Appendix A: Map of Fremont within the San Francisco Bay Area, California



Maps created by Google Maps www.maps.google.com

Appendix B: Map of Virginia and the Northern Virginia area



Maps created by Google Maps www.maps.google.com

Appendix C: Map of Afghanistan



Map created by Google Maps www.maps.google.com

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