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***The (changing) Role of Family among Afghan Communities
in Britain and Germany***

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Abstract

This paper explores how Afghan families shape migration from Afghanistan and processes of settlement and community formation at European destinations. Social relationships based on family and tribal ties are sources of solidarity and make mutual assistance an imperative. How these attributes of Afghan families are maintained or re-shaped through migration and settlement in western countries has not been explicitly addressed. Focusing on the lives of Afghans in Britain and Germany I examine the reconfiguration of families and agency of family members, taking into account structural conditions enforced in the receiving society. I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with people who left Afghanistan at different stages during the last four decades and now live in Britain or Germany. The interview transcripts contain large segments on personal stories and explicitly address experiences of migration and settlement in the two destination countries. Afghan families play important roles at various stages of migration and settlement processes. They are key factors for peoples' decision to migrate and inform choices of destination countries and places of residence. Families also influence social interaction and shape processes of community formation in countries of residence. However, newly emerging patterns of solidarity and community organization among Afghans in Britain and Germany suggest that dynamic reconfigurations occur in conjunction with peoples' lives in receiving societies while core attributes of families are being maintained. Such reconfigurations primarily occur as a result of differences between first and second- generation immigrants. When aiming to unpack how structural environments in Britain and Germany enhance peoples' ability to exercise agency and choice, the challenge is to disentangle how changing scopes of agency affect family ties as a mode of social integration.

Introduction

This paper explores how Afghan family relations, migration from Afghanistan and processes of settlement and community formation at European destinations mutually affect each other. It has been stated that European research on international migration has largely neglected the significance of families (Kofman 2004). At the same time families and family space are referred to as “[t]he centrepiece of obligation and social regulation in immigrant life” (Humphrey 1998, 86). During war and conflict, however, many factors add up to severely distort established forms of family life (Monsutti 2005; Muller 2010).

Mobility and displacement have significantly affected Afghan family life in many ways. Four decades of violent conflict, repressive regimes and persistent instability in Afghanistan had not only devastating effects on the country's society, its economy and infrastructure but lead millions of Afghans to flee abroad or become internally displaced (Turton and Marsden 2002). Experiences of violence, death and destruction have often preceded flight and dispersal. Many Afghans who left their country have settled permanently at destinations in the near or wider diaspora. It is now commonplace that Afghan families live scattered across various countries or continents (Monsutti 2008; Muller 2010; Schetter 2012). Afghans in the diaspora, however, do not form homogenous social entities. They include people from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds who left Afghanistan during different periods of time and under different conditions respectively. Also peoples’ experience of migration and settlement vary widely (Oeppen 2010; Stigter and Monsutti 2005). An exploration of the different and changing roles of families among Afghans in exile can give deeper insights not only into the changing forms and (re)composition of the family but also into the diverse strategies deployed in the course of migration and settlement (Kofman 2004). Families thus offer one angle for exploring how individual migration is connected to the migratory moves of others.

In this study I identify how the lives of Afghans in exile re-shape family settings. More particularly I examine which factors determine the changing roles of families and how changing roles of families affect dynamics of interactions between Afghans in the diaspora. I aim to provide some starting points for understanding how migration-induced changes in family arrangements, changing roles of families and peoples’ agency mutually affect each other. In an analysis of qualitative data collected among Afghan migrants and refugees in Britain and Germany I concentrate on how informants refer to the roles their families played (i) when leaving Afghanistan, (ii) upon arrival in the destination country and (iii) during subsequent settlement in Britain or Germany. My distinction of three analytical steps is not meant to suggest that there is an underlying linear process at work. The proposed analytical categories have been derived from my data and highlight the aspects that stick out of informants’ family-related accounts. In this sense they should be understood as Weberian ideal types that structure the analysis and not serve as a blueprint for the observed phenomenon. I bring together patterns that emerge from my empirical data and conceptual takes on family dynamics in migrant communities. Instead of conclusive statements I seek to establish some key dimensions for further in-depth study Afghan diasporas in Western Europe.

1. Afghan Families in the Light of War and Displacement

The family is widely being referred to as most important institution in the Afghan society, shaping social and community organisation to large extents (Dupree 1997; Muller 2010;

Omidian 1996; Smith 2009; The U.S. Library of Congress 2013). But there are different understandings of family and ways of living within a family within the Afghan society. What has been referred to as traditional family pattern (Dupree 1997) is likely to be subject to complexity and contestation.

As political instability is paradigmatic for Afghanistan, statehood has never been established as the single dominant form of governmentality in Afghanistan. Instead “network structures based on family ties or patronage were a constant feature” (Schetter 2012, 3). Traditionally Afghan family settings are formed of three or even four generations living in the same household (Muller 2010, 36). According to the United States Library of Congress respectful attitudes towards elders alongside eagerness for children, high esteem for motherhood and the contempt of divorce represent core values of Afghan families (The U.S. Library of Congress, 2013). The Afghan society is marked by a strong ideological tendency towards male superiority. Male control over families is commonplace. It not only enables male family members to make key decisions on issues like education, careers and marriage but also grants them control over female behavior (Heath and Zahedi 2011; Rostami-Povey 2007). As a result it is suggested that male prestige and female compliance go hand in hand and independent female action may be regarded as contentious (The U.S. Library of Congress, 2013). In how far this applies to individual families, however, depends on a range of additional factors like levels of education, socio-economic backgrounds and the particular regional- and socio-political context in which people are being socialized. As a result the rigor of male dominance has been found to vary according to peoples’ socio-economic backgrounds. Among mostly urban elite- and upper middle class families women tend to be not only better educated but also more independent as actors in the public sphere (The U.S. Library of Congress 2013). During the last four decades a series of events has lead Afghanistan down a path of constant war, conflict and persistent instability. It rendered Afghan households and families increasingly unstable (Smith 2009).

During the last four decades, conflict not only marked the overall condition of the Afghan society but also prompted (forced) mobility at unprecedented scales (Turton and Marsden 2002). Following a Communist coup d’état in 1978 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. This marks the beginning of a long and destructive war. Succumbing to the mounting pressure of internationally supported anti-Communist Mujaheddin rebels Soviet troupes withdrew in 1989. During the subsequent years Afghanistan was a scene of civil wars and anarchy. It ended in 1996 when Kabul fell to the Taliban, a hardline movement that began to expand its scope of influence in 1994. The Taliban held a firm and repressive grip on Afghanistan until they were toppled in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 by a US-led military intervention. Shortly after the fall of the Taliban the so-called Bonn Conference in 2001 laid out a path for the political reconstruction of Afghanistan. This included the adoption of a new constitution and a presidential election in 2004, and National Assembly elections in 2005 (Barfield 2012). But recent conditions in Afghanistan are far from stable and marked by persistently high levels of fighting and insecurity (Barfield 2008).

Since 1979 some 3.8 million Afghans fled their country. Around 2.3 million of them sought refuge in Pakistan, and 1.5 million went to Iran (Turton and Marsden 2002, 11). During the 1980s and 1990s Afghans represented the largest group of refugees worldwide (Monsutti 2008). Throughout decades of war Iran and Pakistan continued to receive the vast majority of Afghan refugees. Although much smaller in numbers, there were constant movements to overseas as well. North America, Australia, and a number of European countries have come

to host substantial Afghan immigrant populations (Braakman and Schlenkhoff 2007; Gaur Singh 2010; Muller 2010; Oeppen 2010). Most studies on Afghan refugees, however, concentrate on the neighboring countries Iran and Pakistan (Kronenfeld 2008, Turton and Marsden 2002).

To date relatively little is known about the experiences of Afghans who settled at western destinations and historical accounts on Afghan immigration to Germany and Britain remain patchy. Within Europe, Germany and the UK have received the largest numbers of Afghan migrants and refugees. Official estimates of the current size of Afghan immigrant populations are 79,500 for Germany and 61,400 for the UK (The World Bank 2010), which is likely to underestimate actual numbers by far. German immigration statistics for example only considers foreign citizens. However, between 2007 and 2010 alone an annual average of 3100 Afghan nationals were granted German citizenship (destatis 2011). The history of Afghan migration is different for both countries. Germany has been a popular destination for Afghan migrants and refugees since the late 1970's. Intensified migration of Afghans to Britain is a more recent phenomenon. It was not before the 1990s that Afghans started coming to the UK in significant numbers. The incremental changes in Afghanistan's political landscape are reflected in the socio-political and socio-economic profiles of Afghan migrant populations in the two countries.

The history of war and conflict in Afghanistan has been vividly discussed. Most contributions come from the fields of history and international relations (Dupree 1997; Vogelsang 2008; Marsden 2009). Only Muller (2010) explored how the legacy of war and conflict interferes with family lives and traditions of Afghans who settled in the Netherlands. Examining the role of family in migration and settlement among Afghans living in Germany and the UK I aim to add further facets to the study of Afghan migration and the analysis of social actors in migration processes.

2. Data

A series of 50 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with people of Afghan origin living in both countries are my primary data. In the UK the Greater London area has been my main field site. A small number of additional interviews were conducted in other cities like Birmingham, Cambridge or Manchester. My field sites in Germany were more scattered across the country. I interviewed people in Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, the Cologne-Bonn area and in Munich. In addition I am a participating observer at occasions that allow me to capture additional facets of my informants' social environment, including events organized by Afghan community organisations in both countries.

My group of informants includes people from different socio-economic, ethnic and political backgrounds. However most of them come from families who formed part of Afghanistan's educated elite or upper middle class. Still the life trajectories of my interviewees and their experiences of war, migration, dispersal and settlement in Western Europe differ significantly. About two thirds of the people I interviewed are actively engaged in community organisations, religious associations and initiatives that aim to contribute to the development of Afghanistan. Despite these shared characteristics, the research participants certainly do not represent one specific group of Afghans. Rather they give insights to the complexities of an immigrant population that is inherently diverse.

3. Findings

3.1. *Experiences of Leaving and Arrival*

From 1979 until 2001 millions of Afghans were confronted with a combination of personal and general threats, which led them to leave their homes and become refugees. General threats primarily resulted from chaos and fighting, while personal threats were often rooted in assumed links to former regimes or participation in forms of political action that local power holders disapproved of (see also Muller 2010, 63–67). Often people felt forced to flee from one day to another. Many did not cross international borders right away and were internally displaced before moving on.

Families are important determinants of the risk-management strategies people adopt while fleeing. In the light of difficult and chaotic conditions people focused on the safety of their nuclear family (wives, children and in some cases parents) first. As a result extended families were dispersed, often across different countries or continents. Stepwise migration is another way for families to manage the risks of their overall living conditions. Some informants lacked the financial means required for moving collectively. But also severe security constraints or the socio-political roles of families in their communities of origin can imply stepwise family migration. One informant recalls his experiences of fleeing with his mother and siblings after his father had left for Germany on his own. With the help of family reunification programmes they were able to follow his father to Germany relatively soon.

But then the situation got worse and worse and security conditions were particularly bad. [My father] happened to come to Germany as part of a delegation [...]. He came to Germany and decided not to return. And we had to flee in the dead of night. Three days and three nights across the mountains to Pakistan. [...] But my father was granted asylum very soon and through family reunification [...] we could come to Europe and to Germany by legal means. (*Male, 40s, Germany*) IDI13_GER

In many other cases, however, close kin lived apart for several years before finding a way to be reunited.

Families are decisive (although not solely) for whether migration is temporary or a more long-term project. Moving with the entire family requires people to mobilise substantial amounts of resources. Also people develop different ties to the respective destination if they move with their family compared to migrating on their own. Despite all differences and individual specificities, the testimonies of my informants suggest that the socio-economic and socio-political situation of families in Afghanistan has crucial implications for migration-related decision-making and peoples' experiences en route. For most Afghan refugees the nature and trajectory of migration was not a matter of choice and instead a reflection of the opportunities available to them. The majority of informants, who came to Western Europe in the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's, had been part of Afghanistan's educated (urban) elite or upper middle class. Although they were often forced to leave Afghanistan from one day to another, they had the means necessary to move to a western destination and to bring the core family. I mainly encountered people with such backgrounds in Germany. Among informants in the UK, incremental migration patterns seem to be more common. Many male informants had come alone throughout the 1990s. Once they found themselves in

economically and legally stable conditions efforts were made to bring their wife and children from Afghanistan. Within the extended family, however, experiences of dispersal were common. Informants state that having family contacts at specific destination countries facilitates subsequent migration of other – perhaps more distant – family members. But often they found a way to maintain exchange and support among extended kin across borders. Those making the initial move to a country often subsequently lend their support to more distant family members, who were either in Afghanistan or had moved to Iran or Pakistan.

One of the good things was that my father is the oldest of his clan, he has about 9 or 10 siblings and my mum the same, she is the oldest. And what he did was, because after 11 years he got a good job as a doctor, he had a little money. And [over time people began to trust him] and it's a small village. And he got [good relations with] the guy from the refugee council and we tried to gradually get all my uncles and aunts out [of Afghanistan]. Because all of a sudden everybody fled the country and we knew that half of them died, half of them survived... So what we did, we brought everyone to [town of residence]. Everyone first came to Ostfriesland to our house, we hosted them there and then they got their Aufenthaltsberechtigung [residence permit]. (*Female, 30, GER*) IDI10_GER

Migration trends from Afghanistan to European destination countries have not been influenced by political events in Afghanistan alone. Educational and professional opportunities, family reunification as well as receiving countries' policies towards refugees and migrants served as additional driving forces (see also Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2012). In recent years numbers of young male Afghans, who leave Afghanistan on their own have surged (Boland 2010; Mougne 2010; University of Oxford 2012). For them the act of migration itself is an individual experience, but families tend to be heavily involved in migration-related decision-making. They also provide the resources necessary for their son to leave the country.

And [families in Afghanistan are spending a lot of money for their children's journey] some people sell their lands, homes, everything. And they borrow money from people. So it is really, really a huge problem, people who come here. I wish I could do something and raise awareness [among parents in Afghanistan, telling them not to send anybody]. Because I know how hard it is to come, plus to earn a living here, or how hard it is to get a documentation. [...] So this is a big problem for Afghans. Sometimes you can't blame them because the situation in Afghanistan is really bad. (*Male, 40s, UK*) IDI7_UK

Families are important determinants of peoples' opportunities for migration and the strategies they adopt respectively. The data at hand suggest that peoples' socio-economic and socio-political backgrounds have an impact on whether to migrate individually or collectively. Similar aspects apply to peoples' choice of destination, though many aspects coincide. Periods of emigration, for example, coincide with specific political and socio-economic conditions on the sending side and changing emigration and asylum legislation at the receiving end. For a thorough analysis of the roles of families during the initial phase of migration from Afghanistan, such contextual elements need to be considered in depth.

3.2. Settlement

3.2.1. Families as source of support

Following their arrival at the destination country, migrants and refugees face a new and often unfamiliar physical, social and political environment. In many cases the experiences of being socially uprooted and unable to exert effective control over the day-to-day life are exacerbated by being subjected to the British or German asylum legislations and placed in a legally precarious situation.

Well, it was actually a hotel in the middle of nowhere. They only provided food and we than had to survive ourselves so to say. People were very angry, because we did not have any contact with the outside world. [...] These are the asylum-seekers' hostels that one is not allowed to leave without permission. And every time you leave, you have to deposit an ID... That's where we were. You have to be there until this interview takes place after which you know whether or not you are entitled to asylum. We were lucky, we had our interview after 17 days and our status was acknowledged after 27 days. (*Female, 30, GER*)
IDI134_GER

Usually families determine peoples' choice of a destination country. Upon arrival, however, the institutions of the receiving country – and the legal provisions more particularly – limit peoples' capacities for family-based decision-making. As a result of asylum legislations, people are required to settle in designated areas until their legal status has been decided. Initially many informants have not had the opportunity to live close to their kin who had come to Britain or Germany at an earlier stage. Often, however, efforts were made to move closer to other family members if this was within the range of possibilities available. Overall, the initial moves of pioneering family members affect the considerations and efforts of kin migrating at a later stage. This way families are an important determinant of spatial clustering and emerging areas of condensed Afghan settlement.

Language deficiencies and problems to find satisfactory employment added further dimensions to the challenges people face at their arrival in Germany and the UK. A number of informants recall their arrival as an experience of loneliness and social isolation. They emphasised that before leaving Afghanistan their families had been the most important building block of social life. Many informants pointed out that having parts of their family living close by gives them a sense of familiarity and comfort.

Sometimes I wonder [what my life would have been like] if I would have lived in Afghanistan, being in one country [with the entire family]. How would life have been then? I cannot even imagine. [...] My family, we were very lonely, [unlike my uncles] who were in America, they don't feel lonely because it's four of them together. But in my family, it was only my mum, my dad and us in Holland and the rest of the family were more relatives than family. We were kind of very lonely. In the UK it's fine, at least we have some cousins, but in Holland we were very lonely. (*Female, 20s, UK*) IDI18_UK

When you are not with your family, it becomes really difficult, especially if you don't know the language as well, it becomes really, really difficult. (*Male, 30s, UK*) IDI37_UK

Experiences of isolation are often exacerbated by socio-economic deprivation. Many well-educated and highly skilled migrants struggled to get their qualifications recognised in the receiving country. In such situations families can help people to cope with the frustration they experience when stepping down on the professional and socio-economic ladder.

No, my parents... It's really difficult. Both my parents are quite old now, they are 60 years plus. So they came here when they were in their 40s and to live your life in a certain way for 40 years and then change was a big step. [...] Uhm, the plus side is that we have got family in the west, which has helped them - not integrate - but has helped them accept where we are. But I guess in terms of being easy for them... I don't think it is, which is understandable. (*Female, 20s, UK*) IDI40_UK

Despite having experienced fragmentation and being physically separated, family members found ways of keeping in touch to support each other. Relations to family members in Afghanistan are maintained in the receiving country across borders. Many informants who came to Britain or Germany on their own refer to far away family members as an important aspect of their daily lives. Material obligations often complement emotional ties. In this sense people not only feel responsible for their own wellbeing but also consider the conditions of their kin living in Afghanistan, Iran or Pakistan. For some informants family members who had settled and built social networks in other countries could help them establish their own network of contacts in Germany and the UK. Transnational family relations can thus significantly shape peoples' social networks and family relations in exile. The following informant describes how his emerging family life in Germany is rooted in the social relations his family maintained in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

I was here and my mother, my brother and the rest of the family were in Pakistan. They had to flee from Afghanistan to Pakistan and my wife's family was in Pakistan too. We had known that family for a long time and my mother said "well, I have a beautiful wife for you if you want". And I replied "yes, we know her family and it is a nice family". So we got engaged. I then gathered all necessary documents and brought my wife to Germany. We got married in Pakistan and then I brought her here. (*Male, 50s, GER*) IDI20_GER

The experiences of my informants suggest that initial phases of arrival and settlement in Britain or Germany are strongly shaped by the institutions of the receiving country. Especially the functioning of the asylum system is a major factor (Koser 2000). Once people get a chance to organise their daily lives, their families come in as key determinants of social environments and facilitators of adjustment to a new context.

3.2.2. *Families as social environment*

Migration of Afghan families not only shapes migration-related decision-making but also affects the way informants situate themselves as Afghans within the British or German

society. At the same time, families as social environments bring out different aspects integral to Afghan culture and lifestyles of the receiving society. Families are widely perceived as a source of familiarity and comfort and as a way of preserving valued elements of Afghan culture. Festive events such as religious holidays or weddings are jointly celebrated and people get together for funerals. But there are noticeable differences between the family settings of informants. In many cases only parts of the nuclear family live in Germany or the UK. Others are part of extended family settings consisting of several hundred individuals who came to live in the same city or region.

Yes, our entire family, the entire family lives here. All in all we know around 300, 400 people and we are all somehow related to each other. It's like "I'm your great-uncle", although I have never met that person before. Somehow we are related. So yes, we have many relatives here. Only my seven aunts live here, my great-uncle, I don't know, my cousins, my mum's cousins... Uhm, [laughs] I do not feel lonely here. (*Female, 20, GER*)
IDI30_GER

Accounts like these suggest that people feel lonely without their family or without (enough) family. But the emphasis many informants placed on the importance of family interaction raises the question to what extent families represent a harbour of trust and comfort, which cannot be found elsewhere. At the same time the sense of social familiarity found in families reflects how informants were being socialised and how Afghan families are being reinvented in exile.

Some references to interaction among family members, however, were more ambiguous. Informants for example state that family-based interaction in the receiving country may lead to withdrawal and small-scale interaction with the other parts of society.

The thing with Afghans is, Afghans are people who have always lived in closed family units. In Germany they have the same problem. For example [some] moved to Germany with their entire clan. You can find families here who have about 120 – 200 members. For them, family is everything, they hardly have contacts with other communities. Afghans are place-bound and family-bound [people]. They find it difficult to be for themselves, so they stay within the family. There are only few Afghans who came to Germany on their own like I did. Most came with their family and they stay within their family too. That's why we are not like the Turks or another nation here, but form our own separate community. (*Male, 60s, GER*)
IDI4_GER

Such accounts imply that in some cases family contexts increase the distance between Afghan immigrants and "the rest of society". The informant below alludes to the perceived consequences of withdrawing to family life in greater detail. She is particularly concerned about certain habitual dimensions of family life. By reproducing traditional family models and gendered role divisions she fears that Afghans miss out on crucial opportunities the receiving societies make available.

I don't think men or women would get together with the intention of abusing each other or having this horrible married life that they have. I don't think they would want that to happen. But it happens. Why? Because of not having enough knowledge of this commitment. That "yes, we have started this life, what is it about? What are our duties? What are our obligations? How can we develop this?" And I don't think that we can just get it from the air and I don't think [that we can live the same way as previous generations] because times are different. There are more challenges now, things have changed. Mindsets of people have changed: we are in a different environment, in a different society. Even in Afghanistan things have changed. So instead of us adapting to that change, we keep sticking to the past and try our best to live like our grandparents did. (*Female, 40s, UK*) IDI47_UK

It is noticeable that informants tend to talk about Afghan families in communal terms and often use phrases such as “we as Afghans” or “we are...”. This suggests that families are thought of as an element of Afghan culture whose significance is widely recognised. This is particularly interesting with regard to the often-mentioned absence of an Afghan national identity. While meanings of “being Afghan” tend to be contested, the idea of the “Afghan family” represents a building block of Afghan culture that people collectively identify with.

I guess it's something that's installed in all of us. I don't know why that is though. I guess we are family-orientated people. [...] It's got its negative and its positive [sides]. Positives would be you've got a good backup [system] of support, you never kind of feel like you missed out on any kind of love from your parents because [they prioritized] their career over you. But on a negative side you are very, very sheltered. Like for example I am 26 now and I have never lived away from home. Therefore I probably am missing out on a lot of things and there are probably a lot of skills that I just never learned because I've always been with my family. (*Female, 20s, UK*) IDI40_UK

However we should distinguish between family as an overarching metaphor and family life in more practical terms. A social bond between people seems to be the imagination of an Afghan family rather than the family as a concrete social entity. The following informant reiterates the idea of family-orientation as something genuinely Afghan. According to her

...it is the worst thing to be somewhere on your own and without family. Imagine a house with 20 rooms and 20 Afghans. I can guarantee that you will find all 20 of them sitting in one room, talking and talking. We love to talk and be together. We love our family, we always want to be together and we can't bear it to be alone somehow. (*Female, 50, GER*) IDI44_GER

She then contextualises Afghan family-orientation, linking it to the history of Afghan warfare. Elsewhere it has been stated that under conditions of permanent threat and a notoriously weak Afghan state, families were the only reliable source of trust and support (Muller 2010, 117; Schetter 2012). Families in this sense are more important as a driver of social integration than ideologies or state institutions. Seeing Afghan families in the light of war and conflict thus

helps explain why they function as anchors of trust and why there is a tendency for some families to keep for themselves.

Overall the context in which people were socialised has strong impacts on how they relate to family life and themselves as members of families. Similar contingencies apply to how migration affects – and perhaps unsettles – family life. The dynamics of interaction within families and between families and the wider Afghan community thus reflect broader changes of livelihoods.

3.2.4. Families as platforms of incremental change

Informants' accounts on family life in exile suggest that it is helpful to distinguish between references to “ideal” and imagined families and family realities “on the ground”. In many ways families are referred to as a source of familiarity and support in exile. But it is necessary to acknowledge that family life in exile involves controversy and contestation as well. Among the young generation – people who either left Afghanistan at a very young age or who were born in exile – perceptions of Afghan culture, traditions and family tend to be more complex. Having been brought up and educated in a western society, members of the second generation draw on different sources for identification.

Yes, it's the parents who are telling their family or their children who is who. And sometimes, not most of them, but some of them, still have the same opinions or same thinking about their family or their parents. But most people who were educated here, they don't listen to their parents now. They just see [themselves as] one Afghans or just want to get rid of these problems in Afghanistan, just want peace and just want to be called Afghan only. But yeah, the young generation are a bit different than the older. They are changing because of the environment they live in, the democracy, the experience here in this country. So their opinion is a bit different from people who lived in Afghanistan or grew up in Afghanistan. (*Male, 40s, UK*) IDI7_UK

Most young informants state that their family forms the epicentre of social interaction but not everyone would see it as positive. Parents are frequently criticized for being too traditional or caught up in memories of the past. Life in Germany and the UK entails different opportunities available to first and second-generation immigrants. Compared to their parents, second-generation immigrants have more channels through which they can adapt to the host society. Second generation Afghans have a better linguistic proficiency, which in turn boosts their social and cultural capital. As a result members of the second-generation display bicultural practices and orientations. Although they may have a preference for their host-country language, they have at least some familiarity with their parents' native language (Morawska 2009). Being part of the British or German education system, young Afghans have the opportunity or are being forced to interact more with other parts of the host society and expand their social networks beyond the Afghan community. Many young informants stated that they have at least as many non-Afghan friends as friends of Afghan origin.

Well, I always had friends from everywhere. At university my best friend came from Portugal. But I also had German and Afghan friends and also a friend from Iran. (*Female, 30s, GER*) IDI23_GER

This was echoed by a number of parents when referring to their children and their children's peers. Their multiple interfaces with the receiving society alongside their access to the English or German language leads many young informants to identify themselves as Afghan, British or German at the same time. Those who were born outside Afghanistan sometimes had no Afghan language skills at all and stated to feel disconnected from their parents' culture.

As for the children [...] culturally they are Europeans and entirely German. But the eldest is now studying and begins to regret that he does not know his mother tongue. He now started to learn the alphabet and to read some literature about the language. (*Male, 60, GER*) IDI22_GER

For their parents this is not always easy to accept and to handle, especially when it comes to aspects that mark profound differences between "Afghan" and "western" cultures. In many cases intra-family tensions evolve around issues of obedience, gender roles, sexual relations, etc. The scope of children's independence is often at heart of occurring confrontations.

There are also problems among the young generation. The old generation has problems too, but the problems of the young are different. They want to live their lives exactly like the Germans. They want to have freedom, they want to have friends, they want to go on holidays on their own and many other things. But in Afghan circles, in our culture, it is very difficult to accept such aspirations. (*Female, 40s, GER*) IDI27_GER

At the same time, however, children often function as brokers or translators in parents' encounters with receiving country institutions. Also aspirational attitudes of parents vis-à-vis their children are widespread (see also Rytter 2011).

We came to the United Kingdom [and] we've been here since 1992. We lived with my family, our focus was to study and get somewhere in life. My family's main priority was "education comes first and then work and then money". I have three other siblings, one brother and two sisters. We have all finished university, I'm a qualified pharmacist, I've been working for the last two and a half years as a qualified pharmacist. (*Female, 20s, UK*) IDI46_UK

Different ways of adapting to receiving country environments may call the integrity of families into question. One informant, for example, describes how resentments between her parents and uncles evolved around different educational pathways and achievements of their children.

But having these very strict uncles around and my male cousins dominating [the scene] all of a sudden and my dad was the only one who said "listen, I allow my daughters [to adjust to the new environment]", so it was a big clash [within the family and even beyond the family]. I did not have older brothers and never came to know the unfairness which

really exists between male and female public roles, especially for Afghans. For me it was new and I was really, really angry about it. (*Female, 30s, GER*) IDI10_GER

Young female informants draw attention to gendered inter-generational relations. Many subjects of inter-generational discontent affect young women of Afghan origin more severely than their male counterparts. Male domination is very prevalent in the Afghan society and it remains a dominant structuring factor among Afghans in exile as well. Male family members claiming dominant roles emerge as major subject of inter-generational contention. Most of my young female informants, however, reject to adopt perceivedly subordinate roles. Instead they embrace their host society's liberal values and are reluctant to have male family members making crucial decisions on their behalf. Overall second-generation young men and women display more egalitarian attitudes and practices regarding gender roles and expectations. But tensions and disagreements seem to occur most frequently between daughters and their parents. Whether or not such tensions occur and what implications they yield strongly depends on the background of a family.

The thing is, because I am the eldest, I was supposed to get married first. But I rejected and my parents still blame me for this. They say I am a bad example. Yes, it remains a bone of contention. Because they stick to their imagination of Afghan culture, they of course want the subsequent generation to perpetuate it. And when they see that the subsequent generation refuses to do this, it also means a disruption of the image they have of themselves or of their own culture. It means that they have to rework their self-image and that is of course painful. (*Female, 25, GER*) IDI43_GER

Dissatisfaction arising over gender relations and the role of women in particular are, however, not restricted to the young generation. Changing perceptions and expectations relating to gender roles can be found among first generation Afghans or "the old generation" as well. Besides gendered task-divisions when it comes to domestic work, male heads of family may also determine to what extent members of the family interact with people outside the family and whether or not their house is open to people from "outside". Such accounts, however, only apply to specific cases and can hardly be generalised.

But one notices that there is this gender division anyway. For example, if there is a celebratory event and [many] guests are invited, the women disappear in the kitchen and prepare the food. After the meal, the men would sit there, wait for their tea and resume their discussions. Meanwhile the women are back in the kitchen and busy tidying up. That is what makes me think "okay yes, it is still there...". But else social settings are mixed. Up until now I have not met a family that is very strict about gender division. (*Female, 30, GER*) IDI34_GER

The liberal environment of the receiving societies limits the consequences women have to fear whenever they are not playing according to the rules their families set out for them. Although references to areas of inter-generational contention were common, many informants indicated their willingness to mutually acknowledge differences in attitudes and lifestyles

between the old and the young generation. Some parents for example try to trigger their children's interest in Afghan culture but do not impose rigid behavioural regimes.

The young generation should find their own way. I cannot dictate them what to do. The idea of having children learn [our] languages [and] passing on some Afghan culture... These are issues for most Afghan families. Sometimes attitudes are strict and cause conflicts between the young and the older generation. I did not want that to happen in my own family. I carefully brought my son to learn the language and I carefully brought him to somehow respect Afghan values and morals. But, on the other hand, he has his freedom too. I never prevented him from doing this or that. [...] But in many Afghan families orders are very strict: "don't do this!". This only leads to conflicts but will never help to spark the young generation's interest in Afghanistan. (*Male, 60s, Germany*) IDI11_GER

At the same time many of my young informants who adapted well to life in GER and UK and who were successful in terms of educational and professional achievements expressed strong family attachments, also because their family offers the most straightforward way of maintaining ties to Afghan culture. Without denying the difficulties of living in exile, such statements indicate that people are also open to embrace life in Britain or Germany as a source of opportunities. My data echo earlier accounts suggesting that the parents' backgrounds and attitudes significantly determine inter-generational relations and the way their children accommodate cultural elements from sending and receiving contexts (Foner 1997; Haller et al. 2011). It emerges that parents who were part of the educated class in Afghanistan tend to adopt a more liberal attitude towards their children's lifestyles and encourage them to actively take part in the British or German society.

4. Observed Specificities in Germany and the UK

Afghan communities in Germany represent a broader variety of family backgrounds. Since the late 1970s Germany received several distinct waves of immigrants from Afghanistan whereas in Britain, reinforced migration from Afghanistan is a fairly recent phenomenon. Consequently the majority of Afghans came to Britain within the same decade – that is from the late 1990s onwards. But Afghan communities in both countries have much in common with regard to the role of families. I identified commonalities especially when it comes to maintaining core attributes of Afghan families such as solidarity, a sense of mutual obligation and the tendency of respect for age, which was also observed for Afghan communities in California by Omidian (1996). My data reveal further parallels in inter-generational dynamics among Afghans in both countries¹.

Differences arise primarily from the socio-economic and socio-political composition of Afghan communities in both countries. While Germany received many people who used to represent Afghanistan's educated and political elite, many Afghans in the UK came as economic migrants. To some extent this may be reflected in patterns of interaction within families as well as in the way families interact with the receiving society. A number of

¹ However at this stage most British-born people of Afghan origin are in their early teen ages. All young people I interviewed in the UK had been born in Afghanistan and left the country at a very young age.

informants in the UK described Afghan families as “invisible” and “withdrawn”, which was not the case among their Afghan-German counterparts.

But why is it then that we are not known? What is it that we are so behind? So what happens here is that our children go to school and then some of them end up in university. A lot of them don't. The mothers are invisible because they are at home cooking and cleaning and all that. I don't see them outside learning and developing. And the fathers, because they provide, and many of them have to support their families back in Afghanistan... So it is very convenient for them to work as a taxi driver, or for a pizza shop to provide for their family and in order to be able to support their families back in Afghanistan. So, again, they are invisible, they are not [interacting much with] the society and they don't know what is happening there. (*Female, 40s, UK*) IDI47_UK

It will be interesting to explore how the dynamics within Afghan communities as well as the interaction between Afghans and the British society develop when the younger generation comes of age.

5. Discussion

Afghan families play important roles at various stages of conflict-induced migration and settlement. Most importantly, family factors influence peoples' decision to migrate and inform choices of destination countries and places of residence. Exploring family dynamics helps us understand how immigrant populations interact with the receiving society and establish themselves over time. Abbasi-Shavazi et al. (2012) state that the way people interact with the ‘mainstream society’ has significant repercussions on how they participate economically and socially.

Families and their networks also influence social interaction and shape processes of community formation in countries of residence. While core attributes of Afghan families such as solidarity, a sense of mutual obligation and the tendency of respect for age (Omidian 1996) are being maintained, there are noticeable changes in the role of families during migration from Afghanistan and settlement in western destination countries. Each informant has his or her individual story and it would be misleading to refer to “the Afghan migration experience” in all too general terms. Nonetheless family-related issues were most frequently brought up when informants talked about their experiences of leaving Afghanistan and establishing themselves in the British or German society. During the initial phase of leaving Afghanistan the family context seems to significantly shape peoples' opportunities for migration and the migration strategies they adopt respectively. Many of my informants opted for stepwise family migration. While in most cases this was not a matter of voluntary choice it shows how families determine risk management strategies in contexts of conflict-induced migration.

In her study of Afghan refugee families in the Netherlands Muller (2010, 58) observed that peoples' flight from Afghanistan and their arrival in the Netherlands was marked by the experience of a “gradual shift from internal to external control [...] regarding their family life”. Conflict-induced migration limits peoples' decision-making capacities and may rule out family-based decision-making to some extent. Muller describes “individualization and nuclearization” (Muller 2010, 58) of the family as primary outcome of changing control

patterns. These have important implications for how Afghans organise their lives in exile, both in the receiving country and across borders. This framing the experiences of Afghan refugees upon their arrival at European destinations also seems to apply to most of my informants, who were forced to flee Afghanistan. Upon arrival in the destination country families are referred to as a crucial source of support and familiarity. Support structures often stretch across borders. Examples are remittances or migration assistance provided to relatives in Afghanistan. This reflects earlier findings, which underline the importance of families as a source of different forms of support (Omidian 1996). Informants described instances of practical help when trying to make contacts and social support in terms of familiar environments and forms of interaction, which also include efforts to uphold elements of Afghan culture and tradition through joint celebrations of religious holidays and family events. However, different meanings of the family as a source of support could be specified. It is not always clear to what end families are supportive, or when they are supporting and when they are not supporting. Further clarifications on different expectations of people towards their family could be helpful here. Another question is why people rely so much on the support of their kin. Potential reasons may derive from the institutional environment of the receiving society but also from the (perceived) characteristics of the wider Afghan community. Exploring how different facets of receiving country institutions interfere with family life will be helpful to understand to what extent the roles families change in the daily lives of Afghans in exile.

Experiences of settlement and adaptation through families tend to form an essential basis for peoples' social environment. But the emphasis on family-based interaction is subject to mixed assessments. While some informants seem to embrace their interaction within a close network of people, others perceive primarily family-based contacts as constraining. Especially first-generation immigrants, who find it difficult to interact with the receiving society, are found to primarily stick to family environments. Afghan family networks thus bear opportunities and restrictions at the same time. When informants talk about their families as social environment, distinguishing between imagined and practical dimensions of family life is not necessarily straightforward.

Studying "the immigrant family" Foner (1997, 963) points out that "the cultures from which immigrants come are themselves the products of change so that it is misleading to assume a timeless past for family traditions there". The lives of Afghans in exile, on the other hand, are sites of cultural transformation themselves. The interaction between the first and second generation is one of the most important dimensions of ongoing transformation among and within Afghan families in Europe. Modes of adaptation by which people adjust themselves to the host society, for example, seem to vary by generation. The structural and agentic circumstances second-generation Afghans differ from those of their parents (Morawska 2009, 184-198). This leads to newly emerging areas of contestation within Afghan families in exile. My informants referred to inter-generational relations primarily as a trigger of frictions and discontent. Foner and Dreby (2011), however, point out that studies of inter-generational relations among migrants tend to over-emphasise occurring clashes between tradition-bound parents and their progressive children. This leads the authors to call for a more nuanced approach that acknowledges complexities and temporalities of inter-generational relations. More strikingly, however, parental attitudes seem to be a crucial precursor of children's openness and interest in Afghan culture and developments in Afghanistan.

Based on research among Pakistani immigrant families in Denmark Rytter (2011) observes that, over time, issues of contestation may not only occur within but also between families. He draws attention to families as sites of competition, much of which occurs over economic and educational achievements. Issues of competition, however, vary across generations. This suggests that the dynamics of interaction within families and the wider community change in conjunction with overarching changes of livelihoods. To this end it would be interesting to see how life in Britain and Germany affects inter-family relationships in Afghan communities.

The lives of Afghans in Britain and Germany incur dynamic reconfigurations of interactions while core attributes of family networks are being maintained. But there is a range of issues that need to be unpacked in order to analyse the (changing) roles of family in greater depth. My next research steps will concentrate on how changing scopes of agency affect family ties as a mode of social integration.

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