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Narratives shaping the perceptions of the second-generation Afghan diaspora: is Afghanistan a militant, occupied and politically disordered country?

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ABSTRACT

The second and third generations of the Afghan diaspora, living abroad, hold diverse views about their homeland. Our findings suggest that these individuals have shaped perceptions influenced by their parents' migration stories, emphasising challenges like political instability and conflict. Growing up with narratives of their family's history, they gain insights into Afghanistan's complex political landscape, including the Soviet occupation, U.S. involvement, and the rise of the Taliban. These stories, often detailing hardships like displacement and human rights abuses, play a crucial role in connecting them to their roots and shaping their identity within the Afghan diaspora. This article uses qualitative narrative analysis to analyse how narratives shape perceptions within the second-generation Afghan diaspora. The article sheds light on the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader socio-political contexts, enriching diaspora research with an understanding of identity formation and transnational belonging.

Introduction

Located at the crossroads between Central and South Asia, Afghanistan has experienced a turbulent history characterised by conflict, migration and complicated geopolitical inter-dependencies. The country, which has earned the nickname 'graveyard of empires' (Bearden 2001), has been a constant challenge for external forces. The ongoing conflicts triggered by the Soviet invasion in 1979 and continuing in subsequent eras, including Taliban rule and subsequent US intervention, have resulted in significant forced migrations and created one of the largest refugee populations in the world (Rubin 2002). These conflicts have severely hampered economic growth and negatively impacted infrastructure and development efforts (Saikal 2004). Although Afghanistan's Islamic heritage permeates daily life, its rich cultural and historical legacy often takes a back seat to narratives of violence and political upheaval (Bose and Ibrahimi 2017).

Nonetheless, Afghanistan demonstrates remarkable resilience and cultural vibrancy amidst persistent security challenges and a global perception largely centred on security

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concerns. Its rich cultural heritage and the resilience of its people defy simplistic narratives associated with conflict-ridden regions. Afghan society remains dynamic, and its diverse cultural traditions and artistic expressions are testament to its enduring spirit. By emphasising this resilience and cultural richness, the representation of Afghanistan goes beyond the mere depiction of conflict and contributes to a nuanced understanding of the country's complex reality in diaspora scholarship and global discourse.

The Afghan diaspora, which has emerged as a vibrant and diverse global community, especially among second-generation people exploring their identity within the framework of their ancestral homeland (Saito 2007), faces the challenge of overcoming negative representations associated with militancy, occupation, and political unrest (Ibrahimi and Maley 2020). This article addresses the narratives that influence perceptions of the second-generation Afghan diaspora and explores the interplay of identity, media representation and lived experiences within this community.

While the mainstream media portrays Afghanistan primarily in the context of conflict, terrorism and political instability, shaping the initial perceptions of many people, particularly in the second-generation diaspora, scholars emphasise the role of the media in shaping public opinion and constructing the identity of the diaspora (Smith 2018). It is important to understand the historical background that shapes international perceptions of Afghanistan, which were primarily influenced by the Soviet invasion in 1979 and subsequent conflicts (Lowenstein 2016). However, the experiences and perspectives of the second-generation Afghan diaspora go beyond the prevailing narratives and emphasise the importance of identity development amidst the challenges of living abroad (Sadat 2008).

Navigating between two identities within the second-generation Afghan diaspora emphasises the importance of external narratives in identity development processes (Ahmed 2020; Osman and Kate 2021). Understanding these influences is crucial to understanding how diasporic groups negotiate their cultural heritage in a foreign environment.

The article seeks to extend the current state of knowledge by analysing the narratives that shape perceptions of the second-generation Afghan diaspora and examining how these stories intersect with the formation of individual identities. By employing an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates media studies, cultural studies and identity theory, we aim to offer a thorough investigation that goes beyond the superficial representations of Afghanistan in mainstream discussions.

To understand diasporic identity and its connection to geopolitical narratives, one must be aware of the narratives that influence perceptions of the second-generation Afghan diaspora. This study seeks to improve the discourse on Afghanistan and its diaspora by carefully analysing the prevalent biases and representations. Its aim is to create a more informed and compassionate awareness of this thriving population, thus promoting a more accurate and comprehensive understanding.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the intricate relationship between narratives, identity formation, and real-life experiences among the second-generation Afghan diaspora. Focusing on a specific methodology, it delves into the narratives shaping the perspectives of this diaspora, exploring their historical context, experiences of conflict, and migration. By examining how external narratives influence perceptions of Afghanistan as a politically troubled nation, we aim to deepen our understanding of the challenges faced by this community in navigating dual cultural identities. It underscores the impact of global media and historical events on the diaspora while highlighting the

second generation's ability to actively reshape narratives. This research contributes significantly to the academic discourse on diasporic experiences and identity development.

The organisation of this article is delineated as follows: Initially, we introduce the overarching topic and delve into the intricate landscape of the Afghan diaspora. Subsequently, we outline our methodological approach for data collection. Moving forward, we provide a comprehensive overview of Afghanistan and the dispersion of Afghan communities worldwide. This leads into an exploration of the second-generation Afghan diaspora, aiming to gain insights into their narratives and experiences residing abroad. We then delve into their complex questions of identity. Ultimately, we conclude the article by synthesising key findings and reflections.

Methodology

The study employs a rigorous qualitative methodology that includes content analysis, critical analysis and discourse analysis. Content analysis is used systematically to examine narratives from various sources such as media articles, literary works and personal accounts, with a particular focus on representations of Afghanistan and its political environment. Critical analysis will be used to recognise and evaluate the implicit assumptions, biases and power dynamics embedded in these narratives with the aim of shedding light on their underlying socio-political frameworks. Furthermore, discourse analysis will be utilised to examine the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed in shaping these narratives, with a particular focus on how language contributes to the dissemination and formation of certain perceptions. Through the application of these robust qualitative methods, the study seeks to unravel the intricate interplay between narratives, perceptions and socio-political realities within the second-generation Afghan diaspora, thereby fostering a nuanced understanding of identity formation and transnational belonging in this context.

Afghanistan

The emergence of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1978, the subsequent Soviet invasion in 1979 and the ongoing conflict following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 have significantly disrupted the demographic composition of the country. The country has experienced nearly four decades of war, brutality and poverty that have made it a 'fragile state' and forced millions of its citizens to seek asylum elsewhere. As a result, it remained the leading country of origin of refugees for over three decades, from the late 1970s to the early 2010s (İçduygu and Karadağ 2018). In the late 1980s, more than 6 million people, who probably made up almost a third of the Afghan population at the time, were displaced as refugees, mainly due to the ongoing conflict. The civil war and the devastation of towns and villages led to large population movements either to the two neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Iran, or resettlement within the country to the safer city of Kabul. Iran and Pakistan were significantly impacted by the influx of Afghan refugees (İçduygu and Karadağ 2018) where Pakistan hosted approximately 3.5 million refugees, while Iran around 2 million.

Furthermore, countries like Turkey were also influenced by the influx of Afghan refugees. Turkey, for instance, took thousands of Afghan refugees since the early 1980s and served as a transit point who were en route to various European nations. A significant number of

Afghan diaspora communities have emerged in both Turkey and Europe over time (İçduygu and Karadağ 2018) and several of them have even obtained citizenship. A significant number of individuals returned home in the 1990s, however, displacement surged again after 2000 due to persistent social and political instability, economic hardships, prolonged and severe drought conditions, ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, and the challenges associated with establishing security following the withdrawal of foreign forces in 2014.

Afghans across the globe

Currently, over 6 million Afghans are living abroad as refugees, while another 3.5 million people have been displaced within the country's 40 million population (Al Jazeera 2023).

Western Asia

Around 780,000 registered Afghan citizens are temporarily residing in Iran under the care and protection of the UNHCR. According to the Afghan Ministry of Refugees, the total number of Afghans in Iran is around 3 million. In 2020, the UNHCR announced that over two million Afghan illegal immigrants were living in different parts of Iran. According to the IOM, more than 1.1 million of them will be deported to Afghanistan in 2021. More than 600,000 returned to Afghanistan in 2022. According to Iranian Ambassador Hassan Kazemi Komi, half of the foreign investors in Iran are Afghans.

A considerable number of Afghans also live in Turkey. Among them are corporate investors, registered refugees, migrant workers, and people trying to travel to Europe (Akcapar 2019). Around 300,000 people live in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), many of whom are investors in Dubai and Abu Dhabi (Vora 2015). Among them could be Iranians and Pakistanis using fake Afghan passports (Al-Muharrami and Al-Farsi 2018). Around 10,000 Afghans live in Israel with Israeli citizenship (Malkinson 2017). Between 3,500 and 4,000 Afghans live in Qatar (Barrie 2019), and the UAE authorities have been accused of holding thousands of Afghan asylum seekers in cramped and miserable conditions for more than 15 months (Human Rights Watch 2020). Between 2,400 and 2,700 Afghans have been arbitrarily detained at the Emirates Humanitarian City in Abu Dhabi (Human Rights Watch 2020). Several Afghans interviewed said that they were not allowed to leave the site at will and were only allowed to visit necessary hospitals under the strict supervision of security forces and camp guards (Human Rights Watch 2020). HRW called on the UAE to release those arbitrarily detained and allow fair and efficient procedures to determine their status and protection needs (Human Rights Watch 2020).

South Asia

Approximately 1.3 million registered Afghans are temporarily residing in Pakistan, with 58.1 percent located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 22.8 percent in Balochistan, 11.7 percent in Punjab, 4.6 percent in Sindh, 2.4 percent in Islamabad, and 0.3 percent in Azad and Kashmir, all under the care and protection of UNHCR. About 15,806 Afghans live in India, most of them in the capital Delhi. A few also live in Nepal. Most of them fled Afghanistan as refugees but came to Kathmandu from Delhi in search of a better dream.

In 2022, more than 1 million people were supposed to return to Afghanistan. After the return of the Taliban regime, most Afghans travelled to Islamabad to obtain visas and travel documents for countries around the world. Pakistan issued a directive in October 2023 asking all unauthorised immigrants, including 1.7 million Afghans, to leave Pakistan by 31 October 2023. Failure to comply would result in detention and deportation (PTI 2023). This declaration to send back the illegal Afghans has profound implications for them (Al Jazeera 2023).

North and Central, East and Southeast Asia

There are an estimated 150,000 Afghan refugees in Russia, a third of whom live and work in Moscow. Around 10,000 Afghans are said to be living in Uzbekistan. Around 1,000 people are believed to be in Tashkent. In 2005, the total number of Afghans in Tajikistan was around 2,500 which increased to around 6,775 in 2021. Around 2,500, possibly more than 3,000, are believed to be in Kazakhstan. Hundreds are known to reside elsewhere.

In December 2020, there were 7,629 registered Afghan refugees living in Indonesia under the care and protection of the UNHCR. Japan hosted around 3,509 Afghans and Malaysia around 1,100. There are 'thousands' of Afghans living in China, including traders in the international trading city of Yiwu. A small number of them also live and work in Thailand, South Korea, Hong Kong and the Philippines.

Europe

Afghans are found throughout Europe. Germany has the largest Afghan community in Europe. At the end of 2020, a total of 271,805 Afghans were living in Germany, including refugees and asylum seekers. They first came to Germany in the 1990s due to the Afghan conflict and many chose to live in Hamburg where around 40,000 Afghans are residing. Today, Hamburg is full of Afghan restaurants, shops and cafés. They are the second largest group of foreigners living and working in Hamburg after Turks.

Additionally, there are Afghan communities of varying sizes in the UK, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Switzerland, France, Greece, Italy, Finland and the Republic of Ireland. Some have been nationals of these countries for many years while others are there to apply for asylum. Those who are refused are sent back to Afghanistan. In 2001, there were reportedly around 20,000 Afghans living in Ukraine. Of these, 15,000 were living in Kiev and staying in the Dnieper basin.

Between 1992 and 2002, Germany received the most asylum applications from Afghans in Europe with 57,600. The Netherlands received 36,500 refugees and asylum seekers, the UK 29,400, Austria 25,800, Denmark 7,300 and Sweden 3,100. Every other country in the EU (before 2004) received fewer than 2,000 asylum applications from Afghan nationals. During the recent migration crisis, many people arrived in Germany, Sweden and Austria in particular.

North America and South America

The United States has the largest and oldest population in Afghanistan. In 2022, about 250,000 people live in the country. The first Afghans arrived before the 1930s and

became Americans in their later lives. They live in California, New York, Arizona, Texas, Georgia, Michigan, Idaho, Missouri, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Washington, Maryland, Connecticut, Colorado, Ohio, Utah, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee.

Afghan Canadians make up the second largest Afghan community in North America after Afghan Americans. More than 83,995 Afghans reside in Canada and hold Canadian citizenship. The vast majority of them live in and around the city of Toronto. The rest live in Vancouver, Ottawa, Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Calgary. One month after the Taliban occupied Afghanistan in August 2021, Brazil was one of the few countries to issue humanitarian visas for persecuted Afghans and set up an embassy in Islamabad. Tehran, Moscow, Ankara, Doha and Abu Dhabi are authorised to process visa applications for humanitarian refugees. As of June 2023, 11,576 visas have been issued and around 4,000 Afghans have arrived in the South American country. The refugees are having problems settling in the country. More than 200 of them are waiting to be resettled at São Paulo/Guarulhos International Airport. According to reports, a small number of Afghans are also living and working in Ecuador, Cuba and Chile. Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico, Cayman Islands, Trinidad and Tobago.

Oceania

Afghans have been migrating to Australia since the middle of the nineteenth century. The Ghan passenger train, which connects Adelaide in the south and Darwin in the north, is named after them. There are over 59,797 Afghan Australians. They live in many cities, but mainly in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane. Around 3,414 Afghans live in New Zealand. They are all citizens of these two countries. A small number of indigenous Afghans live and work on the islands of Papua New Guinea, Nauru and Fiji.

Africa

Afghans are also been living and working in Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Chad, Ethiopia and Nigeria. Since August 2021, 2,000 Afghan refugees have been accepted in Uganda and 250 in Rwanda. in Rwanda.

### Afghan second-generation understood

The second-generation Afghan diaspora comprises people who were born or raised in a host country outside Afghanistan and whose parents immigrated from Afghanistan (Abbasi-Shavazi and Glazebrook 2005). This generation, often referred to as the second generation, struggles with the complexities of a dual cultural identity, reconciling the customs of their ancestors with the societal norms of their upbringing (Ullah 2024; Ullah and Kumpoh 2019). Scholars emphasise the importance of acknowledging the diverse experiences of second-generation Afghan immigrants as they grapple with integrating, preserving their culture and self-identity in their new society (Ahmed 2020; Mohammed and Jureidini 2022; Osman and Kate 2021).

The concept of the second generation goes beyond a purely chronological definition and encompasses cultural, social and psychological adaptation in the diaspora. Historical and geopolitical factors, such as forced migration due to the Soviet invasion and subsequent conflicts, have shaped the lives of this generation (Bhutta 2002). They inherit a legacy of displacement and often grapple with the challenges of their country of origin. Understanding their interactions with cultural heritage, identity formation and external perceptions influenced by geopolitical events is crucial (Safi 2023).

The Afghan diaspora has thriving communities worldwide with notable concentrations of the second generation, particularly in areas such as Fremont, California, and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region in the United States (Cordaid 2021). The influx of Afghan migrants to the United States increased after the political turmoil, especially after the Soviet invasion in 1979. These communities contribute culturally and economically while negotiating their second-generation identities in the American context (Zandi-Navgran et al. 2023).

In addition, there is also a considerable Afghan diaspora in other European countries, with Germany being an important hub. Hamburg and Frankfurt have become hotspots for Afghan migrants, many of whom sought asylum in these cities to escape the conflicts of the late twentieth century. The Afghan diaspora in Germany, including the second generation, faces the task of adapting to a new cultural environment while preserving their Afghan history. The study of Afghan diaspora communities in Germany offers insights into the complex process of identity development and the influence of global migration patterns on the socio-cultural dynamics within these communities (Gholshiri 2022; Ghorashi 2021). The significant Afghan diaspora sites serve as crucial spaces to understand the complexity of second-generation identity and the different strategies that Afghan groups employ to negotiate their existence in a globalised society (Majidi 2013).
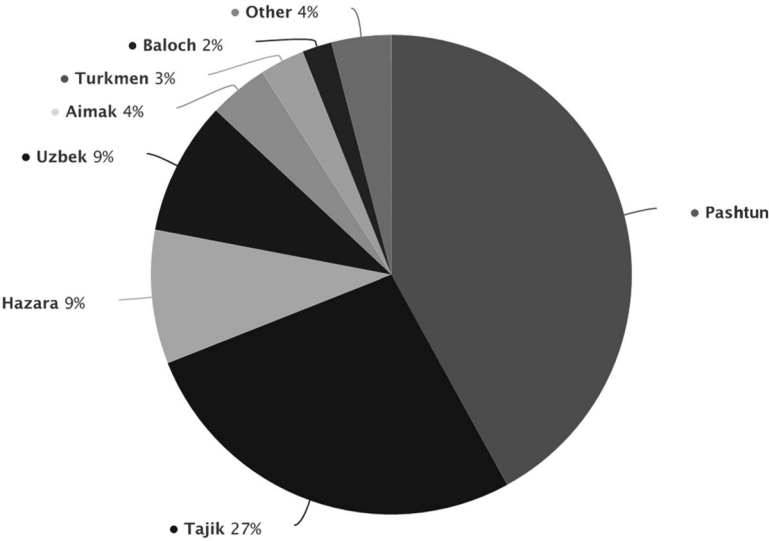
Underlying reasons for exodus

Decades of war, economic hardship, violence, food shortages, poverty, foreign intrusion, political instability and prejudice/persecution based on ethnic, religious, political and social differences have forced many Afghans to leave their homes and homeland and seek refugee status in neighbouring countries and abroad (Kuschminder and Dora 2009). In the 1980s, nearly 5 million Afghans sought refuge in Iran and Pakistan, while several families were resettled in countries such as India, the USA and Europe. In addition, there are an estimated 2–3 million people who have been resettled within their own country (Noor 2006; Rubin 1996; Ruiz 2001).

The occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in the 1980s, followed by US interference, led to significant forced migration and the formation of the Afghan diaspora (Baraulina et al. 2007). The Soviet invasion in 1979 triggered a protracted conflict in which the Afghan mujahideen put up fierce resistance and received international support, particularly from the United States.

In the post-Soviet occupation period, Afghanistan faced extensive displacement, infrastructure damage and political unrest, exacerbating humanitarian crises (IOM 2014). The US intervention after 9/11 aimed to dismantle Taliban rule and combat Al-Qaeda, but Afghanistan continued to face ongoing instability and conflict (CRS 2021; Salt 2018).

The 1990s saw a sharp increase in Afghan migration due to internal unrest, with urban areas such as Kabul facing significant unrest leading to massive displacement to neighbouring countries (Amiry 2010; Marsden 2002; Rubin 2002). Despite initial hopes of return, the ongoing unrest and economic hardship forced many Afghans to seek asylum in Western countries, with the diaspora growing steadily.
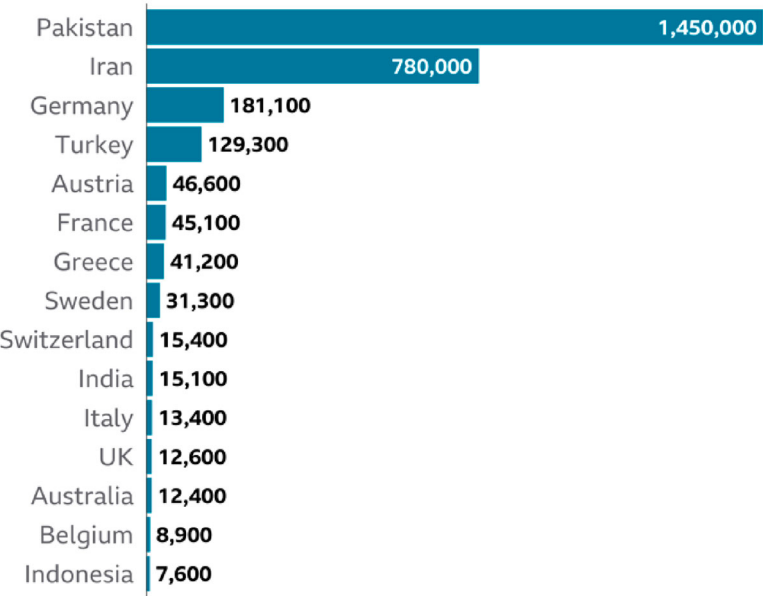
The Afghan diaspora, particularly the second generation, has emerged from these historical events, establishing communities around the world and grappling with a dual cultural identity amidst conflict-induced displacement (Dorronsoro 2009; Saikal 2004). The occupation and subsequent interventions have reshaped Afghanistan geopolitically and led millions of people to seek refuge abroad, shaping the history of diaspora and the challenges of belonging amidst the effects of conflict.

Locating the second generation

Although Afghans are scattered across 72 other countries, the majority of displaced Afghans, 96 per cent, are in Pakistan and Iran (IOM 2020). The majority of people who have remained in Pakistan and Iran have been living in exile for over two decades, with almost fifty per cent of them born in a country other than Afghanistan. Currently, there are over 2.7 million Afghan refugees who are officially registered and living in Pakistan and Iran. Most of these people are descendants of second or even third generation exiles. According to Amayesh (2005), 74 per cent of the Afghan population in Pakistan is under 28 years old, while in Iran 71 per cent of the Afghan

population is 29 years old or younger.

Countries with the most Afghan refugees and asylum seekers

Country	Number
Pakistan	1,450,000
Iran	780,000
Germany	181,100
Turkey	129,300
Austria	46,600
France	45,100
Greece	41,200
Sweden	31,300
Switzerland	15,400
India	15,100
Italy	13,400
UK	12,600
Australia	12,400
Belgium	8,900
Indonesia	7,600

Source: UNHCR data, 2020

Source: UNHCR data, 2020

Narratives and experiences

The second-generation Afghan diaspora faces significant obstacles due to the prevailing perception that Afghanistan is primarily a country plagued by militancy and war (Huma 2011). Members of the Afghan diaspora, who have grown up in host countries that are often characterised by media portrayals and geopolitical discussions, face the challenge of reconciling these external perceptions with the actual conditions in their ancestral homeland (Naseh et al. 2018). Research shows that these stories can strongly influence the second generation's self-perception and contribute to a complicated relationship between cultural heritage and the negative portrayal of Afghanistan in the media (Ahmadi and Lakhani 2016).

A significant number of second-generation Afghans are actively involved in challenging and changing the current portrayal of Afghanistan. They endeavour to showcase the great historical significance, diverse customs and unwavering strength of their homeland through community efforts, social media platforms and cultural events (Alsalloum 2023). Their aim is to challenge the simplistic portrayal of Afghanistan as a place of conflict and instead emphasise the country's multifaceted nature. Studies show that these efforts allow second-generation people to paint a more positive and authentic picture of Afghanistan.

This portrayal fosters a sense of cultural pride while challenging the prevalent misconceptions in mainstream discussions (Osman and Kate 2021).

Despite these efforts, the second-generation Afghan diaspora still faces a significant obstacle in establishing their identity due to prevailing myths that can marginalise or stigmatise their cultural background. A fairer representation of Afghanistan in the public sphere is essential to promote a deeper understanding of the diaspora's encounters and cultivate a more accurate global image of the nation.

The second-generation Afghan diaspora must confront the difficult challenge of dealing with narratives that portray Afghanistan as a nation that has historically been under foreign occupation, first by the Soviet Union in the 1980s and then by the United States after the events of 9/11 (Baden 2017). The historical context influences how these people understand and manage their Afghan identity in the diaspora. Research emphasises the lingering effects of the Soviet invasion on Afghan communities, and the subsequent presence of the US military has also shaped perceptions of Afghanistan as the site of a foreign occupation (Chris 2017; Sarah 2016). Second-generation Afghans often face difficulties resulting from the outcomes of these historical events and struggle to understand and express their ongoing impact, despite prevailing narratives that portray their country as a site of geopolitical contestation and external interference.

The diaspora's reaction to the narratives of foreign domination is diverse and complex. Some people are actively engaged in educational projects and community discussions to shed light on the complicated historical dynamics of Afghanistan's association with foreign powers. The agency and resilience of the Afghan people is emphasised, while at the same time it is stressed that the history of occupation should not eclipse the nation's rich cultural heritage and contributions. Furthermore, scholars argue that it is important to recognise the diversity of experiences within the Afghan diaspora, as each person has a different perspective on the impact of foreign involvement and occupation on their sense of self (Antonio 2015). The second-generation Afghan diaspora plays an important role in challenging and changing the dominant narratives related to foreign occupation by actively engaging in conversations about the history of their homeland. This engagement contributes to a deeper understanding of Afghanistan's complicated past (Marsden 2009).

The portrayal of Afghanistan as a politically turbulent country is a major obstacle for the second-generation Afghan diaspora as they grapple with issues of identification and a sense of belonging. The ongoing political instability and governance problems in Afghanistan have led to a prevailing perception that the country is a hotbed of chaos (Astri 2011). The prevailing perception, often reinforced by extensive international media coverage, influences second-generation descendants in the diaspora and shapes their relationship with and understanding of their ancestral homeland. Research shows that these stories in the diaspora can lead to feelings of resentment, isolation and a sense of obligation to actively engage in promoting positive change (Ullah 2017).

Members of the second-generation Afghan diaspora actively participate in many efforts to refute stereotypes and promote understanding of the Afghan political environment in the face of the prevailing narrative of political unrest. Their activities include advocacy, community mobilisation and cultural events to demonstrate Afghanistan's resilience and capacity for constructive change. Through this approach, they aim to challenge the notion of prolonged chaos and emphasise the ability of the Afghan people to

shape their political destiny. The efforts of the second-generation diaspora not only contribute to the restructuring of external narratives, but also foster a more optimistic and resilient sense of identity among people moving in different cultural spheres.

The rise of the Taliban and their governance has deeply influenced the perspectives of the second generation of the Afghan diaspora, shaping their identity and perceptions. The Taliban's seizure of power in the 1990s marked a turbulent chapter in Afghan history, characterised by strict adherence to Islamic law, particularly in social regulations and the suppression of women's rights and cultural expression. This period not only impacted the development of Afghanistan but also left a lasting imprint on how the diaspora views their homeland.

The Taliban's rule elicited an unfavourable portrayal of Afghanistan in the international media, further embedding negative perceptions among the diaspora, especially regarding education and gender roles. These narratives hold significant cultural significance for the second-generation Afghan diaspora, influencing their perspective on their heritage (Kakar 1997; Suhrke 2011; Zafar 2016).

Moreover, the gradual withdrawal of NATO and coalition forces from Afghanistan since 2014 has fuelled apprehension among Afghans, both at home and abroad. Concerns about the capacity of the Afghan National Army to maintain security post-withdrawal have contributed to a pervasive sense of uncertainty labelled as the '2014 syndrome' (Abraham and Busbridge 2014, 244).

The 2014 syndrome has also afflicted the global Afghan diaspora (Abraham and Busbridge 2014). The syndrome led to inherent tensions and fears within the diaspora. The diaspora is not only characterised by the collective experience of forced displacement, nor is it an exact reflection of the indigenous culture. According to Avtar Brah, diasporas are complex communities that emerge through the development of new forms of political identity and imagination, and through the pursuit of a new beginning (Brah cited in Abraham and Busbridge 2014).

The second-generation Afghan diaspora is faced with the task of reconciling its cultural heritage with the often unfavourable and uniform representation of Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. The imposition of a rigid interpretation of Islamic law, along with the erasure of cultural heritage, has led to Afghanistan being seen as a nation plagued by cultural decline and social stagnation. Scholars argue that these narratives not only shape the external perception of Afghanistan, but also influence the diaspora's sense of identity, as individuals must navigate the complexities of defending and acknowledging their cultural roots in the face of external stigmatisation (Ullah 2013; Yousafzai 2013).

In addition, reports on the Taliban have greatly influenced the way diasporic communities view political and social issues in Afghanistan. The Taliban's association with extremism and terrorism has led to heightened sensitivity among second-generation Afghans, who often face challenges to their identity and sense of belonging as part of global counter-terrorism efforts. The misconceptions propagated by these stories contribute to the marginalisation of the diaspora and exacerbate the difficulties they face in representing their homeland (Roy 2012).

Efforts by the second-generation Afghan diaspora to address and reform these narratives are evident in community initiatives, activism and cultural events. They aim to counter prejudice and create a more equitable image of Afghanistan by emphasising

the country's diversity, resilience and cultural richness beyond the limited focus on the Taliban era. The research emphasises the importance of these alternative narratives in enabling the second generation to paint a more optimistic and authentic picture of Afghanistan. These narratives recognise the intricacies of history while demonstrating the vibrancy of cultural heritage (Ibrahimi 2015; Karzai 2021).

The accounts of the Taliban's rise to power and subsequent governance have had a profound impact on how the second-generation Afghan diaspora is perceived. These people face the challenge of coming to terms with their dual identities and cultural affiliations. In doing so, they have to deal with and change narratives that often portray their home country in a negative light. The second-generation diaspora plays an important role in creating a broader and more accurate understanding of Afghanistan by actively challenging stereotypes and offering an alternative view that goes beyond the limited narratives of the Taliban era.

Questions of Afghan identity in diaspora

The many forms of tension primarily revolve around questions of self-image and belonging. The term 'Afghan' is often contested, making it an identity category that social scientists describe as 'fuzzy'. This means that there are different degrees of belonging, which change depending on the situation, and that the boundaries of belonging are not uniform. The challenge associated with the name arises from its 'dual ethnic and political implications' (Abraham and Busbridge 2014). Although the term 'Afghan' is generally used today to refer to all people from Afghanistan, regardless of their ethnicity, in the past it was used specifically as a synonym for the Pashtun ethnic group. The Pashtuns were the politically dominant group in Afghanistan in the mid-eighteenth century and remained the largest ethnic group in the country.

However, Afghanistan is characterised by the mosaic of ethnic groups that include Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkmen and others, forming a complex web that shapes Afghan identity in intricate ways and influences perceptions in the Afghan diaspora (Rashid 2002). Each ethnic group brings its unique cultural heritage, language and historical experiences to the collective Afghan identity, contributing to the nation's rich diversity (Rubin 1995). The Tajiks, who live mainly in the northern and western regions, have played a significant role in Afghan politics and culture in the past, while the Uzbeks, who live mainly in the northern provinces, maintain distinct cultural traditions and social structures (Kakar 1997). The Hazaras, predominantly Shiite Muslims, have been discriminated against in the past, but have also played a decisive role in shaping Afghanistan's cultural landscape. The Turkmen, who live mainly in the northern regions on the border with Turkmenistan, have a unique mixture of Turkic and Afghan cultural elements. These different ethnicities overlap and interact with each other, influencing the perception and identity of the Afghan diaspora, both internally and externally (Noelle 2002). Understanding the nuances of these ethnic dynamics is crucial to understanding the complexity of Afghan identity and the narratives prevalent in diaspora communities.

The question of whether someone is considered a 'true Afghan' who seeks refuge abroad from the chaos in Afghanistan is often raised. Existing tensions over identity are exacerbated by rivalry over the limited humanitarian resources that would allow

family members to relocate elsewhere. Debates over the validity of identification and asylum claims, which are linked to historical conflicts over Afghan identity and sense of belonging, are exacerbated by existing tensions.

Scholars such as Hall (1991) and Gilroy (1993; 1997) use the concept of diaspora to challenge the essentialist, fixed, ahistorical notions of identity. Gilroy (1993; 1997) argued that the concept of diaspora opens up new ways of thinking about identity that are not anchored in notions of space, place or nationality. The concept of diaspora, as articulated by these two scholars, has implications for redefining immigrant identity and challenges us to define identity as a creation of cultural discourses, history and power. Hall explained that cultural identity is not an essence, but a 'positioning' (1990, 226). The concept of positioning implies that identity is situated in politics and does not evolve from an authentic, universal origin (Bhatia and Ram 2001).

Current identity theory provides a basic structure for understanding how individuals shape and navigate their sense of self in relation to various societal influences. Academics such as Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966) have presented models of identity development that include stages of search, engagement and crisis resolution. These theories emphasise the ever-changing and complex nature of identity, which is influenced by interactions within the social, cultural and historical context.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development across the lifespan places particular emphasis on a primary developmental task of adolescence and young adulthood, namely answering the question 'Who am I?' Erikson viewed the transition from childhood to adolescence as a phase in which adolescents begin to take control of their lives by choosing commitments that are consistent with how they conceptualise their present and past selves (Erikson 1959; McLean and Pasupathi 2012).

Erikson (1968) argued that advanced cognitive abilities and increased awareness of one's surroundings can lead to changes in beliefs and perspectives that may create a sense of vulnerability. These changes challenge identity on a philosophical level and can transform the individual into a distinctly different person (McLean and Pasupathi 2012). Erikson (1959) also suggested that such changes associated with vulnerability pave the way for the exploration of identity. Consequently, the application of identity theory is crucial for understanding diasporic populations who are caught between preserving their cultural heritage and adapting to their adopted homeland (Archer 1989).

The identity development of the second and third generation of the Afghan diaspora is influenced by factors such as family narratives, cultural traditions and the challenges of migration and displacement. Qualitative research, including interviews with second-generation Afghans worldwide, emphasises the profound influence of parental narratives on their understanding of family history (Berzonsky and Kinney 2008). Growing up amidst turmoil in Afghanistan fosters a unique diasporic identity that intertwines the complexities of ancestors with the realities of the present.

Despite Afghanistan's turbulent history, the period following the establishment of the republican government (2002–2014) sparked optimism among many Afghans and diaspora members (Barfield 2010). This optimism prompted diaspora returnees to become involved in various fields, including government, non-governmental organisations and entrepreneurship (Goodson 2002). In Kabul during this period, there were vibrant entrepreneurial ventures, media initiatives and academic endeavours led by diaspora members (Giustozzi 2007). Maintaining relationships with families living in the

West or seeking refuge in other countries have continued to shape the perception and influence of the diaspora (Rubin 2014).

To incorporate the identity of the Afghan diaspora into existing theory, the intricate interplay between individual experiences, social environment and cultural heritage must be recognised. This negotiation mirrors the stages of exploration and engagement in established identity theories (Erikson 1968; Marcia, 1966). Furthermore, the socio-historical context of Afghanistan fits the broader concept of identity crisis and resolution. By integrating established theories with the nuances of the Afghan diaspora, a comprehensive framework emerges that illuminates how individuals navigate their cultural roots amidst the socio-cultural dynamics of their adopted societies.

Conclusions

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the intricate relationship between external narratives and identity formation among second-generation Afghan diaspora and addresses a significant gap in existing literature by focusing on how narratives shape perceptions within this demographic group, particularly regarding Afghanistan's portrayal in media and geopolitical discussions. By exploring these dynamics, the study offers valuable theoretical insights, contributing to media studies, cultural studies, and identity theory.

Moreover, the research delves into the lived experiences of second-generation diaspora, shedding light on their struggles and agency in navigating their relationship with Afghanistan amidst prevailing narratives of militancy and political unrest. This analysis not only enhances scholarly understanding but also has practical implications for promoting informed global perspectives on Afghanistan and its diaspora.

By examining the multi-layered dimensions of Afghan identity formation and transnational belonging, the study enriches diaspora studies and offers opportunities for further research into the complex interplay between external narratives and diasporic identities in diverse geopolitical contexts. Overall, this study significantly advances academic discourse by providing nuanced insights into the formation of diasporic identities and perceptions within the second-generation Afghan diaspora.

Disclosure statement

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