



FROM TROUBLED LANDS

**Listening to Pakistani Americans
and Afghan Americans
in post 9/11 America**

By Arnold R. Isaacs

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I. Introduction

" I remember my mother crying when we first came to America. She was a woman who wasn't used to cooking or taking care of the house, and I remember watching my aunt teach her how to boil water to make pasta so that she could feed her family. It was really a big shock." -- Bilal Askaryar

"It was a new world, a new country. It was a lark, I wasn't expecting it to be a permanent thing." -- Syed Qamer

"The future of my children is 1,000 times better than mine." -- Hanan Zamarial

For most Americans, awareness of Pakistan and Afghanistan dates from a single day: September 11, 2001. So did Americans' awareness of the immigrants from those countries living in the United States. Before that date, it is safe to say, the great majority of Americans knew little about and paid little attention either to those distant countries or to the Afghans and Pakistanis living among them in America. After the 9/11 terror attacks, the Afghan and Pakistani American communities became much more visible in the American public eye and mind. But like their homelands, those communities have been seen for the last decade almost entirely through the prism of post-9/11 terrorism-related issues.

In fact, the story of Pakistanis and Afghans in the United States is a wider, richer, and older tale, one that began several decades before 9/11 and intersects with many other

issues beside America's war on terrorism. In part, that story is a new chapter in a much longer narrative of the immigrant experience in this country. In part, it is also about new challenges to American traditions of pluralism and openness. And in part it is about not just one country but an entire world in which different peoples and cultures are mixing, not always peacefully, as never before in human history.

Significant immigration to the United States from Pakistan began as a direct result of the Immigration & Nationality Act of 1965. The new law ended a decades-old system of quotas based on national origins that had sharply limited immigration from Asia. In place of the old quotas, the 1965 law established a new system of preferred categories, including one giving a high preference for professionals and scientists. With the doors now opened to many more non-Europeans, a growing stream of immigrants began arriving from Asian countries, including Pakistan. Most of the early Pakistani immigrants were in the professional category, some already established in their fields, others in early or late stages of professional training. Though some may have come originally from humble backgrounds, as a general rule by the time they emigrated they had climbed into the upper levels of Pakistani society alongside others born into that class. As a consequence, with few exceptions the immigrants had elite characteristics: well educated, almost always in English; working in or studying for high-status occupations; living in the cosmopolitan society of Karachi or Lahore or other major cities.

Those qualifications, especially the lack of a language barrier, were attractive to U.S. employers, particularly in areas such as medicine and engineering where the demand for skilled professionals was high. And as difficult as it may be to imagine in today's climate, the Pakistan of 40 or 45 years ago had a positive image and good relations with the United States as a long-standing ally in the Cold War. For all those reasons Pakistanis in that early wave of immigrants often found the path to America an unexpectedly easy one. It sounds like a completely unbelievable fantasy in today's atmosphere, but the story in Zahra Billoo's family is that when her mother, a chemist, arrived from Pakistan in the 1970s, she was given her green card when she landed at the airport. "She took it to her host family," Billoo related, and told them "'oh, they gave me this and I don't know what it is,' and they laughed at her."

Syed Qamer's experience may not have been quite that effortless but still sounds today like something that happened on a different planet. As a young engineering student in 1970, Qamer applied for a U.S. visa after seeing ads in magazines and even on roadside signs saying engineers were wanted in America. He sent in a visa application almost as a whim, he remembers, not seriously expecting a response. But he soon received a letter inviting him to the U.S. consulate for an interview. At the time, Qamer was busy on a building project, so he didn't make the appointment. The consulate sent a second letter, then a third. Eventually he went for the interview, still not believing anything would really come of it, but shortly afterward he was notified that the visa was granted. He used it, but out of curiosity and a sense of adventure rather than any decision to settle in America.

"It was a new world, a new country," he recalled 40 years later. "It was a lark, I wasn't expecting it to be a permanent thing." But like several hundred thousand other Pakistanis who arrived in the 1970s and '80s, Qamer ended up embarking on a new life in the United States. He became a citizen; found work as a construction engineer for the

U.S. Navy, supervising building projects on military bases; went back to Pakistan to get married and brought his wife, an artist, back to America, where they raised their two sons. Eventually he left the Navy and formed his own company, which was successful enough to solidly establish the family in a comfortable, upper-middle-class American life. For many others in that first wave of Pakistani arrivals, the trajectory was similar.

In the course of the 1990s and on into the first decade of the new century, the profile of Pakistani immigrants changed. The newer arrivals tended to come from less privileged, less educated backgrounds, and were more likely to land in lower-status occupations in America -- driving taxis, delivering pizzas, working in gas stations, clerking in convenience stores. Many of the newer immigrants were admitted to the United States as relatives of Pakistanis already settled here (of those gaining permanent residence status, four-fifths were in that category); others came with various forms of employment visas. And, as with many other immigrant groups, there were substantial numbers who were undocumented, either having never had legal status or because they had stayed in the country after their visas expired.

Even though navigating U.S. immigration rules and practices had become far more laborious than in earlier decades, and despite a badly deteriorating relationship between Pakistan and the United States, Pakistanis continued to arrive in growing numbers. Between 2000 and 2010, the Pakistani population in America doubled, according to official statistics. That made them the fastest-growing community of Asian Americans, who in turn were the most rapidly increasing racial group in the country.

Exact numbers are elusive. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that there were 409,000 people of Pakistani origin in the United States in 2010, a figure that is almost universally thought to be too low. Adil Najam, a prominent Pakistani American scholar who analyzed earlier census statistics for a 2006 book, believes the true figure is around 700,000 or perhaps slightly less.¹

Others give estimates of 800,000 or even higher. Irfan Malik, a board member of several local and national Pakistani American organizations who was active in a campaign to promote greater participation by the Pakistani and Muslim communities in the 2010 census, believes the real number is double the official census figure. Malik, an engineer and successful entrepreneur in Maryland, lists several categories that contribute to the undercount. First is the sizable number who are living illegally in the United States and, Malik said, "are afraid to participate in anything." (Even if they do fill out a census form, undocumented Pakistanis are unlikely to call attention to themselves by answering questions about their national origin). Another sizable group is those who are in the country legally but are afraid they might have something in their past -- some misstatement on an immigration form, a minor criminal offense -- that could subject them to deportation. Despite assurances that information on census returns cannot be used for law enforcement or any other purpose, Malik said, many in that group are fearful that "they may come after me, so let me not get into this trouble, I'll stay away from filling this form." Even legal residents who aren't vulnerable for any past irregularity may share that reluctance, fearing -- and not without reason -- that just being identified as Pakistani or Muslim can make someone the target of official investigation or anti-Islamic

¹ Adil Najam, 2006. *Portrait of a Giving Community: Philanthropy by the Pakistani-American Diaspora*, Published by the Global Equity Initiative at Harvard University. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2006

harassment. Added to those, Malik said, is a third group of respondents who were just careless or inattentive in filling out the form.

Moreover, as Adil Najam points out, the formulation of the census question can itself contribute to undercounting. "Pakistani" is not listed among the categories that a respondent can choose by checking a box next to the group name. Instead, it is included (in smaller type) as a possible selection within the "Other Asian" category -- meaning the respondent has to check the "Other Asian" box and then print the more specific answer letter by letter in a separate row of boxes below. Clearly, not everyone filling out the form will do it that painstakingly, especially when they are not using their first language. And beyond all those issues, Najam adds, "identity -- especially of diasporas -- can be a tricky question" for many; for Pakistani Americans with roots in two worlds, there is often no simple answer to the question "who am I?"

The initial influx of immigration from Afghanistan started later than the Pakistani wave, though only by a few years, and for entirely different reasons. The Afghans who began arriving in significant numbers in the 1980s did not leave their country because of liberalized U.S. immigration laws, or even because they chose to seek a better life in a new, more developed country. Instead, they came as refugees from violent upheavals at home that had begun late in the preceding decade -- the start of a catastrophic cascade of events that would ravage the country for more than three decades.

Afghanistan's spiral of devastation began with a leftist coup in April 1978, followed by a brutal campaign of repression against Afghans who were associated with previous governments or were business leaders or members of the social or intellectual elites. Continuing violent unrest led to an invasion by the Soviet Union at the end of 1979, touching off ten years of bloody and destructive conflict between Soviet forces and Afghan resistance fighters, known as mujahideen, or holy warriors. Those events drove millions of Afghans from their homes, in one of the biggest refugee crises in human history. By the late 1980s, the number of refugees outside Afghanistan had reached nearly six million, more than one out of every four Afghans. The majority, three and a half million, were in Pakistan; almost two and a half million were in Iran. Up to two million more Afghans were displaced inside the country.² In the '80s and through the following decades, Afghans were by far the largest refugee population in the world.

From that huge flood of refugees, a small stream began arriving in the United States at the rate of several thousand a year. By 1990, approximately 28,000 Afghans had been resettled in America. These were by no means representative of the refugee population as a whole. For the most part, those reaching the United States came from the most privileged layers of pre-war Afghan society, a small world of well-educated, affluent, high-status families, living mainly in Kabul. Unlike the vast majority of Afghan refugees, this group tended to have the means and international connections that made it possible to seek haven in the West -- and the intellectual horizons that made a new life in Western societies a conceivable choice.

Elite backgrounds in Afghanistan did not guarantee the same status in America, to be sure. Sufia Alnoor, the daughter and granddaughter of senior Afghan army officers,

² U.S. Committee for Refugees, "World Refugee Survey, 1987 in Review," p. 17-21 and 31, and "World Refugee Survey, 1988 in Review," p. 34

remembers that parents' stories about their past life were not always completely convincing to their American children. "It was kind of like an inside joke" among her Afghan American friends, she said with a laugh, "about how all our parents were from these high-class families in Afghanistan. Everyone would say their grandfather was a mayor or a governor or whatever. We thought our parents were kind of heightening what they were, but then as we grew older, we realized they really were."

For most Afghans, no matter how privileged their lives had been in Afghanistan, resettlement in the United States was not an easy process. In a few respects they were in a better position than many other immigrants. Because they were fleeing a Communist system and Soviet occupation, the Afghans were seen in American eyes as being on the right side in the Cold War, giving them a legitimate claim to U.S. help and support. For the most part, they had little difficulty qualifying for refugee status, since people escaping from Communism were almost automatically considered to meet that standard. As refugees, they were entitled to a modest allowance and various other forms of assistance to help them get established in American life. Still, the early years were often a struggle. Many who had been well-to-do in Afghanistan had lost all or nearly all their wealth in escaping, and had to start over with nothing. Many found their educational and professional qualifications were not recognized in the United States. Unlike emigrating Pakistani professionals, many Afghans did not know English well enough to work in their previous occupations, even if they were well qualified in other areas of knowledge and experience. Others had training and skills for which there was no demand in their new country -- teachers, for example, or literary or religious scholars.

In the standard American narrative, immigrants come "for a better life, a better standard of living, to seek economic opportunity," said Bilal Askaryar, who arrived in the United States in 1990 at the age of six when his father, a professional diplomat, defected from the Communist regime. But, he went on, "for a lot of Afghans, particularly my family, it was the opposite. Coming to America meant a significant decrease in the standard of our lives." In Afghanistan the family had lived well. "We were a part of the elite, and they were comfortable, they were happy." In America, they were poor, isolated because they didn't know much English, and coping with work and living conditions at far lower levels than anything they had known before. For years, Askaryar's father worked at low-wage, low-status jobs -- the first job Askaryar remembers him having was delivering pizzas -- while his mother had to learn all the domestic tasks she had never had to do for herself in Afghanistan. "It was very difficult. I remember my mother crying when we first came to America. She was a woman who wasn't used to cooking or taking care of the house, and I remember watching my aunt teach her how to boil water to make pasta so that she could feed her family. It was really a big shock."

It took more than a decade, but over time the Askaryars managed to climb back up the occupational and social status ladder. Both parents have learned English; Askaryar's father now works for a pharmaceutical company as a chemist, his first field of study before joining the diplomatic service; they have sent both their sons to college, and the family is now solidly rooted in American middle class life.

In the three decades since Afghan refugees began arriving in significant numbers, many, like the Askaryars, have gained or regained modest affluence and middle class status and comforts. But there are also many who have remained in far less prestigious and satisfying jobs than those they left behind. Among the Afghan Americans

interviewed for this report, one is an author and historian who taught for many years at universities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia; now in California, he is a driver for an airport car service. Another was a well-known actor, film director, and radio and television personality who since coming to the United States has cooked hamburgers in a Wendy's fast-food restaurant, worked in a factory, and now monitors security cameras in a Virginia clothing store. The husband of another interview subject, who used to be a high school math teacher in Kabul, is now the custodian at a nursing home in Rochester, New York. Those men and many others like them may be managing to support their families, but that does not make up for the respect they received in their earlier lives, or the feeling that in leaving their country they had not just lost their home, but a significant part of themselves as well.

Whatever the course of their own lives in America, most refugees see a future for their children that they believe is more promising than any life they could imagine in Afghanistan. That might not take away the sadness or regret at losing their own former lives, but it gives a compelling reason for their hardships. "The future of my children," said Hanan Zamarial, the former actor and film maker, "is 1,000 times better than mine." For him and many others, that is enough to make all they have gone through worthwhile.

After Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the Communist-led government they had propped up for the previous decade lasted for another three years before falling to resistance forces. But instead of bringing peace, the resistance victory led to further violence, as rival mujahideen factions fought savage battles for control. The post-Communist conflict brought a new wave of destruction and terror that lasted until 1996, when a new force known as the Taliban defeated the mujahideen factions and established still another new regime in Kabul. The name came from "talib," an Arabic word also used in Pashto, the language of Afghanistan's largest ethnic group. It means student or seeker and usually applies to students in religious institutions -- in this case, madrassas that were established in Afghan refugee camps with support from Saudi Arabia and conservative religious leaders mainly from Pashtun regions in Pakistan and southern Afghanistan.³

(In a bizarre twist of history that most of the Americans involved might prefer to forget, along with Saudis and Pashtuns, the United States also underwrote education that carried a violent jihadi message to Afghan refugee children. As part of its support for the anti-Soviet resistance, the U.S. government funded the University of Nebraska-Omaha and its Center for Afghanistan Studies to produce hundreds of thousands of textbooks in Pashto and Dari (Farsi), Afghanistan's two principal languages, for use in refugee camp classrooms. The texts were full of language and warlike images glorifying the mujahideen as heroic soldiers for Islam. One Dari text, for example, contained this definition of jihad: "the kind of war that Muslims fight in the name of God to free

³ Hiram A Ruiz, "Afghanistan: conflict and displacement 1978 to 2001," *Forced Migration Review*, issue 13, Refugee Studies Centre of the Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford. June 2002, p 9.

Muslims and Muslim lands from the enemies of Islam. If infidels invade, jihad is the obligation of every Muslim."⁴)

The Taliban succeeded in restoring peace in most of the country, but true to the teachings of the madrassas, they enforced an oppressive, ultra-conservative version of Islamic rules while also making Afghanistan a haven for extremists from the Middle East. Weeks after Osama bin Laden and his followers planned and coordinated the 9/11 attacks from their Afghan sanctuary, a U.S. invasion ousted the Taliban government. In the following years, however, an insurgent Taliban movement regained strength in wide areas of the country, waging a new war that by mid-2013 had taken more than 2,100 American and many many times that number of Afghan lives.

All those events -- the civil war in the early and mid-'90s, the harsh reign of the Taliban, and the new conflict between the U.S.-backed government and Taliban insurgents -- continued to turn great numbers of Afghans into refugees. Those reaching the United States in the '90s and '00s had a different profile from those who had arrived earlier, however. While some still were members of elite groups, a greater number of the new refugees came from rural areas, many with little or no education. This reflected in part a policy change giving preference to war widows and families with a family member who was disabled by wounds or had some other disability. Since most war casualties occurred in the villages, refugees in those categories were more likely to have rural, less privileged backgrounds.

As was true in the earlier wave, the refugees resettled more recently in the United States were still a tiny fraction of the worldwide Afghan refugee population. But together

⁴ Ajmal Stanigzai, who was born the same year as the Soviet invasion and spent most of his childhood and teens as a refugee in Pakistan, remembers a math problem in a text used in his high school in Peshawar: "If 50 Russians were attacked, 25 were killed, and 10 ran away, how many were captured?"

Another math problem, cited by mideast scholar Craig Davis in an article for *World Policy Journal*, read: "The speed of a Kalashnikov bullet is 800 meters per second. If a Russian is at a distance of 3,200 meters from a mujahid, and that mujahid aims at the Russian's head, calculate how many seconds it will take for the bullet to strike the Russian in the forehead." The article also reproduced this excerpt from a lesson on the Persian alphabet:

Alif [is for] Allah. Allah is one.

Bi [is for] Father (baba). Father goes to the mosque...

Pi [is for] Five (panj). Islam has five pillars...

Ti [is for] Rifle (tufang). Javad obtains rifles for the Mujahidin...

Jim [is for] Jihad. Jihad is an obligation. My mom went to the jihad. Our brother gave water to the Mujahidin...

Dal [is for] Religion (din). Our religion is Islam. The Russians are the enemies of the religion of Islam...

Zhi [is for] Good news (muzhdih). The Mujahidin missiles rain down like dew on the Russians. My brother gave me good news that the Russians in our country taste defeat...

Shin [is for] Shakir. Shakir conducts jihad with the sword. God becomes happy with the defeat of the Russians...

Zal [is for] Oppression (zulm). Oppression is forbidden. The Russians are oppressors. We perform jihad against the oppressors...

Vav [is for] Nation (vatn). Our nation is Afghanistan.... The Mujahidin made our country famous.... Our Muslim people are defeating the communists. The Mujahidin are making our dear country free.

(Craig Davis, "A" Is for Allah, "J" Is for Jihad, *World Policy Journal*, Spring 2002, pp. 90, 92-93; see also Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad: Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2002)

with Afghans admitted under various family reunification procedures, they brought the total of Afghans resettled in America to slightly over 54,000 by 2010, according to Census Bureau estimates. American-born children of Afghan immigrants were estimated to number nearly 29,000, bringing the official figure for the total Afghan American population to just under 83,000.⁵ For various reasons (a lower rate of illegals, for one), the undercount of Afghans is thought to be less than for Pakistani Americans. Still, the true figure is almost certainly somewhat higher than the census estimate, probably reaching 100,000 or more. That would put the Afghan and Pakistani American communities together at more than three-quarters of a million, by conservative estimates, and possibly closer to a million -- still well behind the larger Asian immigrant groups, but still a significant new population on the American landscape.

* * *

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, *Selected Population Profile in the United States, 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates*; at http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_3YR_S0201&prodType=table

II. The 9/11 Aftermath



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"If you say somebody is Muslim, the second word is terrorist. Everybody uses this terminology." -- Shahid Malik

"I had nothing to do with it, there was nothing I could have ever done to stop it, or prevent it, or protect people from it, but it's still part of how people think of me and think of my family." -- Sabrina Shairzay

"Where do I go now?"

That's the feeling Nahid Aziz remembers from the weeks and months following September 11, 2001. With Afghanistan incessantly portrayed in media reports as a nest of terrorists and their religion linked in the public mind to violent extremism, Afghan Americans -- who had come to the United States seeking refuge from America's chief enemy -- suddenly were faced with being seen in American eyes as enemies themselves. So were Pakistani Americans and other Muslim American communities, now the objects of widespread public hostility and suspicion and at times violent attack. Like Japanese Americans during World War II, Muslim Americans after 9/11 "have to prove our loyalty on a daily basis," said Irfan Malik, who heads one leading Pakistani American national organization and is active in a number of other national and local groups. The sense of a daily loyalty test applies not just to himself as an immigrant from Pakistan, he added. "My kids who were born here, they are asked to do the same."

Shabbir Anwar, who came to the United States from Pakistan in the 1990s, has the same feeling. Even after spending more than a decade on active service as a U.S. Air Force reservist, including three tours of duty in Iraq, he still lives with a sense that Americans and even some of his military colleagues may not fully trust his loyalty. In general, he said, despite sporadic needling remarks from other airmen that he chooses to take as harmless ribbing, he doesn't feel that being a Muslim in the American military has been difficult. But at times, he went on, "I wonder if I'm being accepted as equal... not because somebody did or said something, just in the back of my mind." After being "bombarded every day" with negative news about Muslims, Anwar feels, Americans "tend to have those negative opinions, negative thoughts, as soon as they hear a Muslim name" -- even if the man with the name has spent years serving in his adopted country's wars.

In Iraq, where he served with a military police unit, Anwar became a kind of unofficial adviser for his colleagues on Islamic subjects, explaining things such as religious rituals or holidays or the differences between various sects. Being the only person in his unit who knew such things made him feel useful, but also different. "I always knew I was helping a good cause," he said, "but it kind of made you wonder if you were being accepted as equal as part of military.... it made me feel how important the mission I was doing was, but on other hand, it was always a feeling of OK, is this going

to be enough to prove my loyalty? That was always the case, thinking that someone's going to question my loyalty."

Wajahat Ali, a Pakistani American writer, lawyer and community activist, calls the 9/11 attack "a permanent fork in the timeline," in his own life and for other Muslims. On the one hand, as an act of religiously inspired terror, 9/11 "was a rude awakening for many Muslims that this poisonous element did indeed exist within the realm of Islam," Ali said. On the other hand, it made Muslims, willingly or not, into ambassadors representing their religion, their cultures, and their nationalities in front of the larger society. (One might assume, he added, that in the 11 years since 9/11 "all the awareness and discussion of Islam would make people less ignorant," but that's not what he's seen happening. Instead, he believes the post-9/11 period with its continuing waves of anti-Islamic rhetoric has generated more public ignorance, not less.)

Many Pakistani and Afghan Americans, like other Muslims, remember name-calling and racial slurs as part of their post-9/11 experience. For some, it was a fairly common occurrence. Abdul Khan, who was nine years old when he and his mother came from Pakistan to join his father in Maryland, recalls being tormented for months during his first year in high school by fellow students who taunted him for being a terrorist. What sunk in, he says, is that when he hears anyone use the word terrorist, "Muslim comes to your head. Terrorist, Muslim, terrorist, Muslim. They're interchangeable." Shahid Malik, a Pakistani immigrant who owns an event management business in Virginia, made the same point in almost the same words. "Right now that's the connotation of Islam. If you say somebody is Muslim, the second word is terrorist. Everybody uses this terminology." The deranged white supremacist in Norway who killed 77 people in a bomb and mass shooting attack in July 2011, wasn't called "a Christian terrorist, he is a mentally disturbed person," Malik went on. "If the same person were Muslim he would have been a Muslim terrorist."

Masood Haque, a Pakistani American and an emergency room doctor in New York's Westchester County, has also heard the word "terrorist" many times from disturbed or strung-out patients. "When a patient gets really mad at me," he said, "the first thing they say to me usually is, 'you fucking terrorist,' 'you fucking go back to your country,' 'who do you think you are!' They often confuse me with Indians, with Arabs, they kind of go back and forth with these racial epithets."

For Haque, another consequence of 9/11 was "a very very strong sense that you had to mind what you say; the opinions you expressed, they had to not offend anybody." That meant, among other things, not trying to explain things he knows about the political and historical context of Muslim extremism. He is not a religious believer himself and emphatically opposes violent terrorism, but as an immigrant who has lived in both cultures, Haque believes he has a sense of "where these people are coming from, why they have such a strong feeling." But, he said, for years "you couldn't have that conversation with anybody. You could not say it, you had to watch what you say." Nor did Haque feel free to say things in everyday situations that might draw attention -- grumbling about long waits in the Motor Vehicles office, for example. "It's less so now, but for the first five or six years you could not draw any kind of attention, you just wanted blend in and not get yourself in trouble."

The 9/11 backlash came to Afghan Americans and Pakistani Americans in many ways. Some created national news, in cases involving hate killings or major terrorist

prosecutions. Many more did not make the headlines. But virtually no one in the Pakistani or Afghan communities was unaffected. Here are some things that happened:

"I didn't want to be a coward": With her two small children and wearing her headscarf, as usual, Rohina Malik, a Pakistani American actress and playwright, was on her way to a Pakistani friend's wedding in Chicago. On the sidewalk outside the wedding hall, she noticed an American couple, apparently guests at another wedding taking place inside. The man was smoking a cigarette. As Malik walked past, the man suddenly began shouting:

"Take that fucking shit off your head!"

"I froze. I couldn't move. My brain was trying to process what just happened," Malik wrote in recreating the scene for her one-woman play, "Unveiled."⁶ In the play, Maryam, the character who narrates the story, is fictionalized, but her account of the exchange on the sidewalk presents it just as Malik remembers it happening in real life.

"I kept asking myself, 'Did he just say that to me?'" Maryam says in the play. "I turned around and he was glaring at me, with this look that said, 'Yeah, I just said that to you.'

"I could have walked away and just ignored him," Maryam goes on, "but I didn't want to be a coward in front of my children.... So I looked that man straight in the eye and said, 'Sir, you need to get an education, because you're ignorant.'"

The dialogue continues (in performance, Malik speaks both parts):

MAN: Fuck you! You're in America, take that shit off your head.

MARYAM: That's right I'm in America, where I have my constitutional right to practice my religion and dress how I like.

MAN: You A-rabs are terrorists, go back to Afghanistan.

MARYAM: Sir, let me educate you, Afghans are not Arabs. I'm not an Arab, or an Afghan, or a terrorist. I'm an American, a Pakistani American.

MAN: If you're American, then dress like one!

MARYAM: I am dressed like one, veiled or unveiled. I am an American! And I'm not going to waste another second of my time talking to an ignorant loser like you.

MAN: Don't call me a loser, you bitch!

MARYAM: At this point, the guy charges towards me with his fist getting closer and closer to my face. All of a sudden, his lady friend pulls him back.

LADY: JOHN, NO! JOHN, NO! Don't do it John! She's not worth it. She's just a fucking A-rab.

MARYAM: I spent most of my best friend's wedding at the police station.... This man, John, thought it was okay to swear at me in front of my children. He thought it was okay to physically attack me in front of my children. That's because in his eyes I was not a mother, a wife, a daughter. I was just a "Mozlem," a "Terrorist." I was not human. Do you know what it feels like to be treated like you and your children are not human?

(Pause) I do.

⁶ © 2009, Rohina Malik. Brief excerpts from the play can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7ATqM-IQ18>

After recounting the story, Maryam adds this reflection, which one can guess is Malik's as well:

"Before 9/11, I always felt like I was a part of the great melting pot that America is. (Pause) But, after that day, that horrible day in September, I found myself wondering if this American experience included me. You see, on September 10th, 2001, I was a normal American, life was normal, we were normal Americans living our lives. The next day, everything changed. The backlash was so ugly. Women in veils got the worst of it. Do you know, years have gone by, but still every September 11th, my husband will not let me leave the house. He worries about my safety...."

"As for John, he was arrested for assault. Truth is, I don't think John's arrest will really teach him anything, maybe to hate Muslims more. So what's the solution? I don't know, getting to know me might help. Maybe, maybe I should have invited him to the wedding...."

"We're sorry that we're going to war": For weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Sufia Alnoor's father, a former Afghan army officer, did not want her or her sister to leave their house. Both girls wore headscarves, and he "was really worried," Alnoor remembers, about what might happen to them if they went out in identifiable Muslim dress. The family was living in Springfield, Virginia, and the girls were attending a local Islamic girls school. One day around the time of the first U.S. air attacks on Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, Sufia related, "I remember my dad was moving things, I think from the garage," and her sister started to come out of the house to help. When their father saw her, he began to shout, "'get back in, get back in!' He was that worried that he didn't want us to step out of the house." But, she went on, instead of the hostility they feared, a group of their American neighbors came to the house with flowers and candles. As she spoke, her eyes filled with tears. "Our neighbors brought us flowers and candles," she said a second time, and started crying again. "They were like, 'We're sorry that we're going to war.'"

The man on the radio: "I had been 'hiding' the fact I was Afghan," Sabrina Shairzay remembers about the days after 9/11. She was in New York City at the time, in her senior year at the Fashion Institute of Technology. "[I] took off the Allah necklace I used to wear (I wore it because it was a gift from my mom to keep me safe, not because I was religious), didn't correct anyone when they thought I was Hispanic (to this day I still struggle with admitting my true heritage -- it depends on the situation), but our community as a whole was scared of any retaliation. I was devastated, ashamed to admit who I was and guilt ridden for not standing up for the innocent ones."

Then she heard a man on the radio telling an interviewer he hoped Americans would "kill all those people in Afghanistan."

Before 9/11, she thought, "most people didn't even know where Afghanistan was or had even heard of it. Now everyone wanted the whole country and the people blown up. It was heartbreaking on so many levels, and finally I couldn't stay silent anymore." She poured out her feelings in a five-page essay that she wrote in one anguished stream of consciousness, without stopping to use capital letters or correct small spelling mistakes. Her first sentence was: "hasn't anyone heard the saying two wrongs don't make a right?" The rest of the essay is full of sorrow and passion -- notably, not for the things

that were happening to her in New York, but for Afghans facing American destructive power in a country she had never seen. (She has since left New York and now lives in Minneapolis.) Here is some of what she wrote:

....if you want to stop the threats of terrorism, if you want to sleep better at night knowing there is no threat to america, death to afghanistan and all its people is not what is going to make you feel better. the terrorists are not true afghans, they are not true muslims. the taliban care nothing for the afghans, they do not feel for the country in their hearts as americans do for the united states. all the taliban wants is to force their fanatical ways upon the poor and the weak. the taliban was not an elected form of government in afghanistan. the taliban forced their way into power through violence....

i believe in bringing those responsible to justice and prosecuted to the full extent of god's law and the government, but the idea of my people sitting in ruins in afghanistan and looking up to see missiles being dropped on top of them again, not scared because they have seen it countless times before, not screaming because they have been expecting their end forever, not crying because they will be reunited in afterlife with their families, i do not believe this is proper retribution for what has torn new york and america. if you feel it is, then there is no more i can say. maybe it will be better if america blew up afghanistan. in that case, if that is the direction of revenge, if that is the idea of retribution, i ask please, blow up the whole country, leave nothing behind, and send me there so i can die with them....

my family has been living in fear... my family is terrified for my brother and i being in new york, they desperately want us to come home so we can hide together. is this anyway to live? for me and my family to hide from america, where i was born and raised, because of what a group of violent animals who i hate with every bone in my body for what they are doing to afghans, did to my new york city, to my country.... imagine there was a country bigger and stronger than america that had vowed to destroy the entire country in retaliation for an act a small group committed, a group not even supported by the population. imagine the fear facing through the population as people everywhere fled for their lives before the destruction began...

i am afghan, i am muslim. i am not taliban, i am not a terrorist. i am american, i am a new yorker, i am suffering, i am in hiding, i am sorry... i have felt helpless, living in such freedom and opportunity in america while afghans have suffered, knowing there was nothing i could do to help them, to help the girls my age, that the lives these children have lived, growing up in war, numb to the sounds of missiles and bombs, could not understand the life i have led in america, that i graduated high school, that i attend college, that i have had a job, that i drive a car, that i use the internet, that i watch t.v., that i buy cd's, because these children my age have never done any of this. and now if america turns against them, i wish to lay down and die as well because i cannot live if the american part of me has killed the afghan part of me.

Nearly twelve years later, Shairzay's feelings are still complicated and painful. She has never put her mother's Allah necklace back on, and remains hesitant to disclose her Afghan identity to people she doesn't know. She struggled a bit to explain that reluctance. "Sometimes it was just a lot of questions I didn't want to answer, assumptions that I'm a terrorist or my family is terrorist," she said. "It's like in a way I had a secret,

and I didn't want people to know the secret," she said, so not mentioning her Afghan identity was a way to avoid difficult questions.

When she was growing up, Shairzay recalled, being Afghan was part of her life but not the central one, either in her family or in the "pretty much upper middle class white" Connecticut town where they lived. "We never really noticed that we were that different, because most people had never heard of Afghanistan. My parents weren't strict, my mom didn't cover or anything. If anything, most people just thought we were exotic.... My parents didn't force Islam, being middle eastern, being Afghan, on us when we were growing up. We always kind of lived in this in-between place, where we weren't 100 percent American and we weren't 100 percent Afghan, we were a mix of something. And all of a sudden this insane international catastrophe happens on 9/11 and now... a part of me that has always kind of been a mystery is now out in the open, and it's ugly. It's this horrible part that had been unleashed onto the world and caused all of this horror and damage" and, she added, completely changed perceptions of Afghanistan among the people around her. The connection with terrorism and violence became "the only thing that people knew, whereas before it was just kind of mysterious and exotic.... It's weird. I had nothing to do with it, there was nothing I could have ever done to stop it, or prevent it, or protect people from it, but it's still part of how people think of me and think of my family."

As Shairzay spoke, it became clear that beneath those feelings lay a deeper, more complicated layer of emotion, having to do not only with other people's views of her family's homeland and religious heritage, but her own perceptions as well. In that underlying layer there is an illogical but unshakable feeling that some part of her identity *is* connected to the terrorists, that she somehow shared the responsibility for the attacks just because of who she is and that her family came from the place where the attacks were planned. Shairzay knows that none of the 9/11 attackers was Afghan, and that the terrorists' version of Islamic teachings has no resemblance to the religious traditions and values she learned in her family. Even so, seeing acquaintances in New York who lost friends or relatives on 9/11, or hearing the names of victims read out in anniversary commemorations in the years following the attacks, left her with a sense that "I feel like I owe something for it." She felt guilty, Shairzay said, for "not being able to explain why this was happening, why did they do it... it's not that it was my family or my people that did it, but there was just something about the connection to it, that makes me -- it makes me angry, it makes me sad."

At the border: It's not her real name, but the woman who told this story asked to be called Maryam (not to be confused with Maryam in Rohina Malik's play). After arriving from Afghanistan, she and her family settled in Ithaca, New York. From there they regularly made the three-hour drive across the Canadian border to Kingston, Ontario, to visit close relatives who had settled there. For years those trips were uneventful, but when Maryam, her brother and her mother drove back from another visit a few months after 9/11, an immigration officer at the U.S. border checkpoint ordered her brother out of the car and roughly handcuffed him, kicking him in the process.

Maryam's mother, watching the scene from the back seat, was so upset that she fainted. At that, another immigration agent offered to call an ambulance. "She doesn't need an ambulance, she needs her son," Maryam told him, but the ambulance came

anyway and took her to a hospital in Buffalo, leaving her son in handcuffs at the checkpoint. After two hours, Maryam said, the officers released her brother and told him he could leave. But he refused to go until they explained what had happened. After some argument, they finally told him that they had thought he might be someone else they were looking for -- though the suspect's last name and date of birth were different, and the only match with Maryam's brother was the first name.

"For two weeks my brother couldn't go to work" because he was so shaken by what happened, Maryam told me, and her mother refuses to go to Canada again. Maryam is sure their religion was the only reason for the incident. "It's because we are Muslims."

A fateful photograph: Exactly four weeks after 9/11, a boyish-looking 24-year-old pizza deliveryman named Ansar Mahmood drove up a steep hill to the end of Rossman Avenue on the southern outskirts of Hudson, New York. A customer had told him there was a nice view from that spot, and Mahmood had gone there with a borrowed camera hoping to get some photographs to send to his family in Pakistan, so they could see what a beautiful place he was living in. Standing at the end of the road was a high chain-link fence with a small building behind it and beyond, a mile or so to the west, the scenic view he had hoped for, showing a stretch of the Hudson River with the Catskill mountains rising beyond the far bank.

After parking outside the fence, Mahmood walked through the unlocked gate and approached a couple of men who were working on the other side. "I ask one of them, can you take my picture over there?" Mahmood recalled later. "He said why not, sure." Mahmood returned to his car to get the camera, then walked back through the gate and handed the camera to the man. "He say move here and here, he gave directions. He take like three or four pictures... he was nice to me. I thanked him, we exchanged a few words, and then I left."⁷

Mahmood was delighted with the photographs, but when he got back to the pizza store, two policemen intercepted him before he could get to the door and hustled him to the police station. Although Mahmood didn't know it, the area behind the chain-link fence was on the grounds of Hudson's reservoir and water treatment facility. A security guard had grown suspicious and had called to report that a Muslim-looking young man had turned up there with a camera. Investigators quickly decided that Mahmood -- a legal immigrant with a green card -- was not a terrorist. But they found evidence on a completely unrelated issue: that he had co-signed an apartment lease and registered a car for two friends, a Pakistani couple who were in the United States on expired visas. Mahmood denied knowing about his friends' illegal status, but when his questioners promised he would be freed if he signed a statement saying he did know, he agreed to sign. Instead of being released, though, Mahmood was rearrested on a criminal charge of

⁷ Recorded interview in the documentary film "Stranger in Paradise," Masood Haque, writer/producer/director/editor, © 2007, Eksaki Films LLC. The film can be viewed at http://eksaki.com/Stranger_in_Paradise.html. Footage of the interview in the Federal Detention Facility in Batavia, New York, was shot for an earlier unreleased documentary by filmmaker Jim Sofranko. Additionally, a long account of the case including a detailed interview with Mahmood appears in Irum Shiekh, *Detained Without Cause*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 59-91. Also see *Worlds Apart: How Deporting Immigrants After 9/11 Tore Families Apart and Shattered Communities*, New York: American Civil Liberties Union, December 2004, p. 4-5

harboring illegal aliens -- an "aggravated felony" under immigration statutes, though that is a status that exists nowhere else in U.S. criminal law.

Stuck with his signed admission and on the advice of his public defender, Mahmood pleaded guilty to the harboring charge -- not realizing, he contends, that a criminal conviction would automatically subject him to deportation, and that the aggravated felony category meant he could be banned from the United States for life. The judge in the harboring case did not give him additional prison time, sentencing him to time served and five years probation. But again, instead of being freed, Mahmood was immediately returned to prison while the deportation proceeding unfolded. After spending two and a half more years behind bars while he and his supporters tried unsuccessfully to appeal the order, he was flown back to Pakistan. In its final notice denying his appeal, the Department of Homeland Security acknowledged that Mahmood had committed no terrorist acts and had no terrorist connections. Nevertheless, and despite the relative harmlessness of his offense, it concluded that kicking him permanently out of the country was "in the best interest of national security."

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Indisputably, some real terrorists emerged from the Pakistani and Afghan American communities -- Faisal Shahzad, for example, a Pakistan-born U.S. citizen who early on the evening of May 1, 2010, parked a sport utility vehicle packed with explosive materials in New York City's Times Square. Before walking away, Shahzad activated a timed detonator mechanism, which however failed to ignite the explosives. Arrested two days later after being taken off a plane that was about to fly to the Middle East, Shahzad remained unrepentant. "I consider myself a mujahid, a Muslim soldier," he declared in a court appearance where he pleaded guilty to ten terrorism-related offenses, including attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction and an attempted act of terrorism. Explaining his plea, Shahzad delivered a defiant speech to the presiding judge:

"I want to plead guilty and I'm going to plead guilty 100 times forward because until the hour the U.S. pulls its forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and stops the drone strikes in Somalia and Yemen and in Pakistan, and stops the occupation of Muslim lands, and stops killing the Muslims and stops reporting the Muslims to its government, we will be attacking U.S., and I plead guilty to that."⁸

Najibullah Zazi, who grew up in an Afghan immigrant family in Queens, also found his way into the holy war against America. A one-time street vender who sold coffee and pastries from a cart for several years not far from Ground Zero in New York's financial district, Zazi was incongruously remembered by customers for his smiling, sunny personality.⁹ Twice, in 2006 and 2007, he temporarily left his vending job to go to

⁸ Lorraine Adams with Ayesha Nasir, "Inside the mind of the Times Square bomber," *The Observer*, Sept. 18, 2010

⁹ Michael Wilson, "From Smiling Coffee Vendor to Terror Suspect," *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 2009; Samantha Gross, David Caruso and Michael Rubinkam, "Radical influences all around NYC terror suspect," Associated Press, Sept. 25, 2009

Pakistan, where he had lived as a boy for some years after his family left Afghanistan. He returned from those trips with stricter attitudes about religious belief and practices, or so it seemed to some of his acquaintances. In late summer of 2008, with two classmates from Flushing High School, Zazi left for a third trip to Pakistan. This time he traveled to an al-Qaeda training camp where, according to the U.S. Justice Department, he and his companions were trained in the use of various weapons and explosives. They originally planned to go to Afghanistan to fight against U.S. troops there, but at the urging of their al-Qaeda instructors, agreed instead to return home and carry out suicide bomb attacks against American targets.

After four and a half months in Pakistan, Zazi returned to the United States and moved from New York to Aurora, Colorado, where he found work as an airport shuttle driver. Over the summer of 2009, he and several co-plotters made the rounds of beauty supply shops in the Denver area, buying large quantities of beauty products containing chemicals that can be used to make explosives. On two occasions, he rented a hotel room that he used to mix the chemicals into two pounds of explosive, intended to be used in three bombs. In early September he packed all the bomb-making materials into a rented car and drove to New York City where, he later told investigators, he intended to use the explosives for suicide attacks in the New York subway system. By then, the FBI was already aware of the possible terrorist plot, and had Zazi under surveillance while he drove across the country. (U.S. intelligence officials have suggested that identifying Zazi was a successful result of the massive National Security Agency surveillance program that touched off a heated public controversy after its existence was revealed in June 2013. According to another account, however, the alert came from British intelligence authorities who had intercepted an e-mail to Zazi from a senior al-Qaeda member in Pakistan.¹⁰)

Shortly after he reached New York, Zazi learned from an acquaintance who had been contacted by police that he was being monitored. He abandoned his plans and flew back to Colorado, where he was arrested a few days later. In February 2010 he pleaded guilty to three terrorism-related crimes, two of them carrying a possible life sentence. Instead of public defiance, though, Zazi chose to cooperate with investigators -- apparently, among possible other reasons, to get more lenient treatment for family members and others who also face prosecution. His cooperation may explain why at this writing, three and a half years after his guilty plea, he has still not been sentenced.

There is no question that Faisal Shahzad and Najibullah Zazi wanted to commit mass murder, had the means to carry out their plans, and if they had been successful, would have killed scores or hundreds of innocent people. But many other post-9/11 terrorism cases were less convincing, even where prosecutors won convictions. An

¹⁰ "NSA director says surveillance programs thwarted 'dozens' of attacks," *Washington Post*, June 12, 2013; "British spies help prevent al Qaeda-inspired attack on New York subway," *Daily Telegraph* (London), Nov. 9, 2009. Also see Brian M. Jenkins and Joseph Trella, *Carnage Interrupted: an analysis of fifteen terrorist plots against public surface transportation*, San Jose, California: Mineta Transportation Institute, April 2012, p. 55-57; and "Al Qaeda Operative Convicted by Jury in One of the Most Serious Terrorist Plots Against America since 9/11," press release, Office of Public Affairs, U.S Department of Justice, May 1, 2012

example is the case involving Shahawar Matin Siraj, a Pakistani immigrant who was convicted and given a 30-year prison sentence for a terrorist plot also aimed at the New York subways -- in Siraj's case, a plan to blow up the Herald Square station, the third busiest station in the entire New York subway system. The severe sentence was imposed even though no act of terror was attempted or committed, and despite the fact that Siraj and his mentally ill co-defendant had no ties with any terrorist organizations and never acquired or tried to acquire any explosives. Prosecutors pictured him as a violent fanatic, but many others described Siraj as a confused, slow-witted, naive young man who had none of the skills and knowledge needed to carry out a terrorist act and would never even have thought about planning one if not for what was in effect a sting operation by the intelligence division of the New York Police Department.

The acts that were the basis for Siraj's conviction were a preparatory scouting trip to the Herald Square station, his possession of crude diagrams of the station layout, and conversations, recorded by a police informant, in which he spoke about bombing that and other targets. But those acts were committed only after the informant spent many months inflaming Siraj's anger at the United States by plying him with photographs and stories of American atrocities in Iraq and against Muslims elsewhere. Shahina Parveen, Siraj's mother, who calls her son "not very mature" and says his IQ has been measured at 78, insists that the informant, a 50-year-old Egyptian engineer named Osama Eldawoody, manufactured the terror plot and drew her son into it. Eldawoody "kept manipulating him emotionally and mentally, showing him pictures from the war in Iraq, what's happening in Palestine, from Abu Ghraib, from Guantanamo, telling him stories about the rape of young girls in Iraq as a way to emotionally incite him," Parveen said through a translator. "In this way they incited him and set him aflame, and then they blamed him for being incited."

Eldawoody first appeared at the Islamic bookstore in Brooklyn where Siraj worked in the early fall of 2003, nearly a year before Siraj was arrested. Beside showing the inflammatory photographs, he also advised the younger man that violence against Americans -- at least, against American soldiers and law enforcement agents -- was authorized by Muslim theologians. Claiming to be connected with a fictitious "brotherhood" of militants in upstate New York, Eldawoody told Siraj and another young recruit, James Elshafay, that his organization would supply explosives for an attack; at one point, he even talked about acquiring nuclear materials from the Russian mafia. (Elshafay, who had been diagnosed as schizophrenic, pleaded guilty in the case and later testified against Siraj.)

Eldawoody only began taping their conversations in late spring or early summer of 2004, so there was no record of the many exchanges over the first eight or nine months of their relationship. That meant there was no conclusive proof whether the idea of blowing up the Herald Square station or other targets they periodically discussed was truly "the brainchild and handiwork of the defendant," as prosecutors maintained in a pre-sentence filing,¹¹ or if Eldawoody had strayed from legally permissible ground and was the true author of the criminal plot he enticed Siraj to join. Some on his jury were concerned that Eldawoody, who received a total of \$100,000 from the NYPD for his work, might have crossed the line into entrapment. But without any tapes, it was a hard

¹¹ "Would-be subway bomber awaits sentencing," *USA Today*, Jan. 7, 2007

claim to prove, and the legal hurdle is high, requiring a defendant to "show by a preponderance of the evidence that the government induced him or her to commit the crime charged."¹²

"I believe it could have been entrapment," one juror told a *New York Times* reporter after the trial, "but the defense didn't come up with the evidence." Another juror said about the months of conversations before Eldawoody began taping, "We don't have those conversations, and other conversations and the other reports. So we don't know what happened up until that time. It could have happened. He could have been entrapped back then. We don't have the evidence to prove it at that point."¹³

Countering the entrapment argument, the prosecutors introduced evidence that Siraj had made approving comments about violent terrorism well before he met Eldawoody -- speaking admiringly about Osama bin Laden and Palestinian suicide bombers, and expressing a hope for further attacks in New York. None of those comments gave any indication that Siraj was thinking about or planning any terrorist attacks himself, but they showed, prosecutors argued, that he was already sympathetic to terrorism before he was "inflamed" by Eldawoody. Even had Siraj been able to meet the demanding legal standard for proving that he had been induced into his criminal acts, the testimony about his earlier statements could have torpedoed an entrapment defense, because even a defendant who is successful in proving inducement can still be found guilty if the government can prove beyond reasonable doubt that he was "predisposed" to commit the offense he is accused of.

"They incited him and set him aflame, and then they blamed him for being incited." -- Shahina Parveen, mother of convicted would-be subway bomber Shahawar Matin Siraj

"I'm not proud of my government for what it did in this case. There would have been no crime here except the government instigated it, planned it, and brought it to fruition....The essence of what occurred here was that a government, understandably zealous to protect its citizens, created acts of terrorism out of the fantasies and the bravado and the bigotry of one man in particular and four men generally, and then made these fantasies come true." -- U.S. District Judge Colleen McMahon, while sentencing the last of the convicted Newburgh Four defendants

In the end the jury did not accept the defense argument that Siraj was illegally entrapped into his actions, and prosecutors and police officials declared the verdict and

¹² Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, *Targeted and Entrapped: Manufacturing the "Homegrown Threat" in the United States*. New York: NYU School of Law, 2011, p. 15

¹³ Jennifer Lee, "Entrapment Evidence Lacking, Jurors Say," *New York Times*, May 25, 2006

the heavy sentence were appropriate for the threat he had posed. New York Police Commissioner Ray Kelly even called Eldawoody "a hero who did a great service to the people of New York." Others, though, continued to see the case as morally, if not legally, a clear example of entrapment -- the result of overzealous law enforcement rather than any true terrorist crime.¹⁴ (It's worth noting that the legal standard for entrapment may not correspond with the common-sense standard, as indicated in several comments from the judge in another controversial terrorism case in which an informant, in this case working for the FBI, clearly played a major role in the supposed terror plot. "I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt," U.S. District Judge Colleen McMahon told the defendants in what became known as the Newburgh Four case, "that there would have been no crime here except the government instigated it, planned it, and brought it to fruition." But, she added, "that does not mean that there was no crime. The jury concluded that you were not entrapped, and I see no basis to overturn their verdict." Over the course of the trial and in subsequent sentencing hearings, McMahon made other scathing comments criticizing the government's case, though without finding that the defendants' constitutional rights had been violated. At one point she observed, "The FBI did not infiltrate a plot. There was no plot." And later, before sentencing the last defendant, she said: "I'm not proud of my government for what it did in this case," adding that the four convicted men were guilty of terrorism only "because the government made them terrorists.... The essence of what occurred here was that a government, understandably zealous to protect its citizens, created acts of terrorism out of the fantasies and the bravado and the bigotry of one man in particular and four men generally, and then made these fantasies come true."¹⁵)

Whether real or dubious, the number of terrorism cases prosecuted in the United States after 9/11 has been relatively modest, measured against the massive counter-terrorism effort by federal and local law enforcement agencies. Far more common was the pattern in Ansar Mahmood's case, where authorities looking for possible terrorists found no evidence of terrorist plans or connections but did find technical immigration violations or past criminal convictions -- usually for very minor offenses -- that became the grounds for detention and deportation. There may have been some threats that were

¹⁴ The quote from Commissioner Kelly is in Armen Keteyian, Phil Hirschhorn, and Michael Rey, "The Cost of Cooperation," CBS News, Sept. 10, 2006. Two highly critical accounts of official conduct of the Siraj case are in Amitava Kumar, *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010; and Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, *Targeted and Entrapped: Manufacturing the "Homegrown Threat" in the United States*, New York: New York University School of Law, 2011, p. 33-37. For a more positive perspective on police and prosecution actions see *The Herald Square Plot*, New York: NEFA Foundation, March 2008. Additional sources include Craig Horowitz, "Anatomy Of a Foiled Plot," *New York Magazine*, May 21, 2005; William K. Rashbaum, "Man Gets 30 Years in Subway Bomb Plot," *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 2007; Robin Shulman, "The Informer: Behind the Scenes, or Setting the Stage?" *Washington Post*, May 29, 2007.

¹⁵ Karen J. Greenberg, "Crisis of Confidence: How Washington Lost Faith in America's Courts," Truth-out.org, Aug. 22, 2011; Adam Klasfeld, "Would-Be Bombers Say FBI Set Them Up," Courthouse News Service, March 24, 2011; Bruce Golding, "Judge 'not proud of my government' for anti-terror sting operation," *New York Post*, Sept. 7, 2011. For a wider ranging report on the use of informants in terrorism cases, see Petra Bartosiewicz, "To catch a Terrorist: The FBI hunts for the enemy within," *Harper's Magazine*, Aug. 2011

never detected, but almost certainly, in the vast majority of cases, the reason investigators found no evidence of terrorism was that there was nothing to be found. Between September 2002 and September 2003 the NSEERS program (National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, commonly known as "special registration") registered more than 83,000 men, almost all Muslims, who were in the United States but without immigrant status. More than 13,000 were issued deportation orders, in the great majority of cases for overstaying their visas or other immigration violations, and almost 3,000 were detained for various periods. But as one critical report noted, the program "has not resulted in a single known terrorism-related conviction." As far as available records show, earlier large-scale roundups of immigrants after 9/11 did not turn up any terrorists either. Nor did six years of surveillance conducted by the New York Police Department's secret Demographics Unit, which spied on mosques, Muslim student organizations, and a wide range of other individuals and groups targeted only because they were Muslim.¹⁶

If it contributed only minimally to meeting the terrorism threat, NSEERS did succeed in a different realm of terror -- creating widespread panic among Muslim immigrants, particularly those in less affluent areas with many more people holding temporary visas or who were in the country illegally. "As a result of NSEERS," one immigration lawyer wrote, "the Muslim communities felt very much under siege. It seemed that the legal standard changed and they were guilty until they were proven innocent. They were placed in a state of constant anxiety and fear."¹⁷

The fear appeared most acute in the large South Asian community in New York, where, unsurprisingly, emotions after 9/11 were stronger than elsewhere in the country. Thousands of the city's Pakistanis and other Muslims abandoned homes and businesses to seek asylum in Canada. Similar exoduses occurred from other cities. Typically, when families reached Canadian border checkpoints, they were sent back to wait for an appointment to be interviewed by Canadian immigration officials. But when they came back through border posts on the U.S. side, men who did not have valid immigration documents were detained, subject to bail. Wives and children were set free on their own recognizance -- but with no place to go. Refugee service agencies near the border tried to assist with immigration procedures and find shelter where stranded families could stay while waiting for their interviews on the Canadian side. Once those were scheduled, in most cases, families could post bonds for the detained men (as long as they were not already under deportation order) and then go back to Canada together, where most were

¹⁶ Rights Working Group and Center for Immigrants' Rights at Pennsylvania State University Dickinson School of Law, *The NSEERS Effect: A Decade of Racial Profiling, Fear, and Secrecy*, May 2012, p. 4; New York City Profiling Collaborative et al, *In Our Own Words: Narratives of South Asian New Yorkers Affected by Racial and Religious Profiling*, March 2012, p. 10; Adam Goldman, "Muslim spying led to no leads, terror cases," Associated Press, Aug. 21, 2012

The most controversial part of NSEERS was the registration requirement, which applied to "non-immigrant" men over 16 from a list of 25 countries, all but one (North Korea) with predominantly Muslim populations. The registration procedure was ended after a year, though various other parts of the NSEERS program remained in effect until April, 2011. The rule had a greater impact on Pakistanis than on the Afghan community, because most Afghans in the United States were admitted as refugees and thus had permanent residence and were not subject to the registration process. Afghan Americans were, of course, affected by the general climate that NSEERS helped create.

¹⁷ *The NSEERS Effect*, p. 13. For a fictionalized but true-to-life account of these events, see Marina Budhos's young adult novel *Ask Me No Questions*, New York: Atheneum, 2006. Budhos's fictional family is from Bangladesh, but the circumstances for Pakistanis would have been identical.

eventually granted asylum. The bonds usually ranged from \$2,500 to \$5,000, a formidable amount for immigrant families.

For organizations responding to the crisis, it was not only the number of asylum seekers that was unprecedented. The implication of their arrival was unprecedented too. Groups such as Vermont Refugee Assistance (now Vermont Immigration and Asylum Advocates) were accustomed to dealing with people seeking refuge in America from danger or persecution in other countries. Now, they were seeing people who were fleeing from danger in the United States. Almost all the Pakistani and other families desperately trying to reach Canada were outside U.S. law, to be sure. Still, says Michele Jenness, then the Vermont Refugee Assistance legal coordinator, "they had adopted this country... they had found safe haven in the U.S., established lives and families, they were part of the web of the community," and now were forced to move again because, for no other reason than their religious and ethnic identity, the American government was punishing them for a crime they had not committed.

Ejaz Haider, a Pakistani newspaper editor temporarily in the United States as a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, made a similar point in a commentary for the *Washington Post*. "For more than a century," he wrote, "people from all over the world have come to the United States to escape repression and enjoy its freedoms. Perhaps for the first time in American history, we are witnessing the spectacle of families migrating from the United States in search of safety." Haider wrote the article after his own arrest for inadvertently failing to comply with NSEERS requirements -- despite painstaking efforts, from the vantage point of a sophisticated and very well connected visitor, to find out what they were.

"I did not know I was in violation of the INS policy," he wrote. "Brookings did not know I was in violation. My friends in the State Department did not know I was in violation. And if -- even after following the policy closely and calling the INS for information -- we could not understand the law, what hope can there be for the cabdriver or the restaurant worker who doesn't have the leisure to discover the letter and intent of INS policies?"¹⁸

The headline on Haider's article, "Wrong message to the Muslim world," captured a further point about NSEERS and the repressive post-9/11 climate it reflected. The registration program was not just ineffective against potential terrorists. In all probability, it actually damaged anti-terrorism efforts, by alienating or frightening away exactly the people who were most likely to have useful information about possible threats. The same can be said about controversial criminal prosecutions like those against Matin Siraj or the Newburgh Four. Those cases and the scary headlines they produced may have persuaded some Americans that terrible events had been narrowly avoided, but they also left many Muslims convinced that anyone in their community could become a target for a made-up terrorism charge -- so the safest course might be to avoid contact with law enforcement authorities no matter what the circumstances. There is no way to know how many more tips might have come from a Muslim community that was less fearful and less alienated, but it seems beyond reasonable doubt that a different government approach, aimed at gaining trust and cooperation instead of spreading fear, would have been a better way to learn about and intercept terror threats.

¹⁸ Ejaz Haider, "Wrong message to the Muslim World," *Washington Post*, Feb. 5, 2003

Muslim community leaders have consistently delivered that message ever since 9/11. Irfan Malik, president of the USPAK Foundation, says the Muslim leadership needs to educate both sides, law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies on the one hand and wary Muslim Americans on the other. "My job... is to build that balance," he said. "I'm trying to educate our community," telling Muslims that civil liberties violations, profiling, entrapment and other abuses are real issues but should not be overblown to the point of refusing all cooperation, while at the same time warning the government that losing the trust of the Muslim community would be a great loss for counter-terror efforts. At every opportunity, he said, he and other leaders "tell the FBI, Homeland Security, Department of Justice and all those, you have to be careful how you implement your policies as well... if you put this community not at ease, you're losing a partner." Muslims have strong reasons to cooperate in anti-terror investigations, Malik added. "We are very much aware, this is my country, this is my home now, the safety of people around me is really important to me. So if I have a bad apple in my community, the best person who can identify that bad apple is me."

* * *

III. Religion and the 'American Generation'



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"I want to be recognized as a Muslim. I want to hold on to that identity.... For my parents, it was different. They didn't have to prove it." -- Tamana Pardais

"Your own religious faith is enriched when you're exposed to other thoughts. I wouldn't want to live in a society where everyone is born Muslim and dies Muslim and nothing changes, because I don't think I would understand God." -- Bilal Asakaryar

The first time I encountered Sadiqa Pardais, in the lobby of the motel where she works, she was wearing a hijab, or headscarf. She had started wearing it a few months earlier, she explained, because it was a way to practice her religion -- and a way to know who she is. "It's important to keep the faith I was born in, and my culture as well," she said. Sadiqa, 22, had lived in America since she was 10. Her family left Afghanistan when she was three years old, spent seven years in Pakistan and then came to the United States. Adopting the hijab, Sadiqa told me, represented a choice not to be a Muslim "only in name" but "to practice, to be a real Muslim, and find out about my faith.... I think it's important to know who you really are."

A day or so later, in the family's home on the outskirts of Rochester, New York, Sadiqa's mother, Abida, came out to the living room to greet me. Abida, a cheerful, vigorous woman of 47 with curly black hair, was not wearing a scarf, and when she introduced herself, she walked over and extended her hand for me to shake -- something most strictly observant Muslim women would never do. It was also during that visit that Sadiqa's father, Murtaza Pardais, a painter and art teacher, defined his identity in capacious, humanistic terms: "I am artist. I am Muslim, I am Christian, I am Buddhist, I am Hindu," and, for good measure, went on to list Afghanistan's ethnic communities as well: "I am Pashtun and Tajik and Hazara... the world is a house, a big house." Murtaza was laughing when he said this, and no doubt in a different context he would have identified himself more prosaically as a Muslim. Still, that expansive sense of who he is had a different tone from Sadiqa's effort to locate herself in the single religion she defines as hers by birth and heritage.

The pattern in Sadiqa's family -- with members of the "American" generation identifying more strongly as Muslim, and observing religious practices more strictly, than their immigrant parents -- is not universal but still a very noticeable one in the Pakistani and Afghan American communities. "This is definitely a very large movement," said Fariba Nawa, an Afghan American journalist. When she returned home to California after six years away reporting from post-Taliban Afghanistan, the trend was noticeable. "I saw this change, all of a sudden... the girls are wearing hijabs, and defining themselves through that, the guys are wearing [Muslim-style] hats."

Like several other people I talked to, Nawa, 40, sees an Arab influence in the religious style, particularly in the Afghan American generation just a few years younger than her own, young men and women in their 20s or early 30s. "They've renounced Afghanness and they take on Arab Islam... they get indoctrinated either in Muslim student associations in college, most colleges here have them. Or they just want to belong somehow, and this is one way. They feel that Islam is more inclusive than being Afghan." If the style is more Arabic, though, Nawa thinks the evolving beliefs and religious practice are not really the same as Arab Islam but "its own distinct American Islam, and it's very conservative."

Hena Khan, a 40-year-old communications consultant and author of children's books, doesn't cover her hair and considers herself "a pretty mainstream moderate" Muslim. When it comes to religious practice, she said, "I'd put myself smack in the middle, really. On the liberal to conservative spectrum, I'd be right in the middle." Still, Khan is an example of the trend toward stronger identification with Islamic belief and practice. Religion is significantly more important in her life now than it was in her Pakistani American family when she was growing up in a comfortable Maryland suburb

outside Washington, D.C. Although her parents sent her to religious classes for long enough to learn elementary Islamic teachings, she recalls growing up without much knowledge or understanding of the true beliefs and values of her religion. The identity she absorbed from her family was national and cultural rather than religious, connected to her Pakistani roots more than to her faith. But now, Khan said, if she has to label herself, "I don't put myself as Pakistani first. I put myself as American first, Muslim second and Pakistani third."

It was only when she got to the University of Maryland and began meeting Pakistani and other Muslim students with different backgrounds from her own that Khan began seriously thinking about her faith. "I realized how little I knew and really wanted to be more Muslim than I had been," she said, adding that "a lot of people I knew went through a similar phase while they were in college. Maybe it's just part of identity formation in general and finding yourself in that period of time when you're 18 to your early 20s." In her own case, Khan said, she found herself leaning towards more conservative ideas of religious practice than the ones she had grown up with. "I started to question things, like should I wear the headscarf, all sorts of stuff." She did not adopt the hijab but did start dressing more modestly, no longer wearing shorts, for example, as she had done while playing high school sports.

In adult life, Khan has come to be somewhat less preoccupied with issues of "ritual and external appearance." But religion is a central theme in her children's books, *Night of the Moon*, which explains the rituals and meaning of Ramadan through the eyes of a 7-year-old Pakistani American girl, and *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors*, where rich illustrations by her collaborator Mehrdokht Amini are accompanied by short verses that teach about Islam -- e.g. "Red is the rug Dad kneels on to pray/Facing toward Mecca, five times a day." Religion is also an important part of her family life -- clearly more so than in her home when she was a child. A teacher comes to the house every Sunday to teach her two children to read the Koran in Arabic, and Khan's husband, also from a Pakistani American family, meticulously performs the five daily prayers and observes all the required fasts. (Her own observance, Khan admits, is not as regular as her husband's. "I fluctuate. It's always my ambition to be more disciplined, and then I'm not.") Following his father's example, the year their older child was 10, he also kept most of the fasts, even though Khan told him he didn't have to fast because of his age. "He just loved it," she said. "He loved to do it, he loved the challenge."

For many American-born or American-educated children of Pakistani and Afghan Muslim immigrants, the turn toward a stronger religious identity among arises in large part exactly because of the divided world they live in. Aminah Mohammad-Arif, a Paris-based scholar who has studied attitudes among both Muslim and Hindu immigrant communities, has observed that a religious identity that was automatic and unexamined in the home country is often "renegotiated, reconstructed, reinterpreted in a somewhat more self-conscious way in the United States." Religion can also play "a cathartic role" for many immigrants, she added. "It may help individuals who have been socially and culturally marginalized and psychologically destabilized by the diasporic experience to exorcise their fears and frustrations and to find landmarks" in an unfamiliar world.¹⁹

¹⁹ Aminah Mohammad-Arif, "The Paradox of Religion: The (re)Construction of Hindu and Muslim Identities amongst South Asian Diasporas in the United States," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic*

Many of the people I interviewed for this report echoed that reasoning. In Pakistan, your religion is "taken for granted," explained 31-year-old Wajahat Ali, a writer, activist and practicing lawyer in Fremont, California. "Everyone is a Muslim. Everyone knows the culture. You don't have to explain it, you don't have to define it, you're not interrogated every day, you don't have to prove it. It just is." But in America, it is not possible to be a Muslim without thinking about your religion, because you are reminded every day that it is different from the majority faith -- and not just different, but in the post-9/11 era, frequently under attack. For many young Muslims that becomes a reason to "cling to those identity markers or values that you believe will be under threat," Ali said. "You end up valuing it more, you end up associating with it more. And furthermore it helps you bond with like-minded individuals. It gives you more assets, resources, community, and so forth."

Others said similar things. In Afghanistan, people follow what they see around them, without actually studying it themselves, said one young Afghan American woman who asked not to have her name published. "If you're in a Muslim country, you tend to go with the majority. Here, with so many religions, you study it more, you see what the differences are," and, she added, because you hear different people saying so many different things about it, "you study it yourself" in ways that might not happen in the homeland.

Bilal Askaryar, an unusually thoughtful 27-year-old Afghan American who works for a Silicon Valley technology company, offered this metaphor: "No matter how secular an Afghan family is, there is still the seed of Islam in all of them, that seed is here, and living in America lets you water it at your own rate. I think a lot of youth here have really looked into that, because it's something they've always been curious about. And also outside pressure is making you think about it, you can't forget. Or you can forget, but there will be reminders every once in a while, right?" Askaryar agrees that his generation is more religious than their parents, but thinks being in America can make religion more meaningful for members of the first generation, too -- his mother, for example. "She said in Afghanistan we never learned about Islam in the same way, we just memorized the prayers in Arabic and we didn't even memorize the meaning. But she said here in America she's been able to attend talks and learn so much about religion that she was raised in."

I heard exactly that story from Shahla Arsala, who was in her mid-20s when she fled from Afghanistan with her husband and two small children after her father, an army general before the Communist coup, was arrested and then executed by the leftist regime. She had religious education in school, but as with Bilal Askaryar's mother, it was rote memorization rather than meaningful learning. Reading the Koran was just reading meaningless sounds, because it's in Arabic, she said. Similarly when she prayed, she didn't know what the words meant. "When I was doing prayer I'm saying it in Arabic, I didn't know, what am I saying to God." Now, in her late 50s and after more than three decades in California, she is studying the Koran again. "I'm thinking I missed it, so even if I'm old, if there is an opportunity, I want to learn." When she looks at the younger generation, though, Arsala thinks some "have gone to the extreme" in their religious views. The reason, she believes, is the same that drives other young people in the

opposite direction, toward rejecting their faith and culture. The ones who tend to go to either extreme are those who "are kind of lost, caught between two different cultures, and they don't know how find a middle way, to be comfortable."

Unlike Hena Khan, Zahra Billoo grew up in a "more than usually religious family." As a child in Alhambra, California, she took Koran classes, went to the mosque every day, and began wearing a hijab at 10. In the evenings at her home, the children "didn't watch Bollywood videos or Disney cartoons," she told me. "Our bedtime stories were stories of the prophets... we fell asleep to stories of Noah and Adam." When she was 7 years old her parents took her with them on a haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that is a religious duty for observant Muslims. In other families she knew, it was unusual for parents making a haj to take children that young. But her parents "made it a priority to make sure we had the experience of the pilgrimage," just as they made it a priority for the children to attend mosque regularly.

"I don't know that my conviction would have been so strong had I been surrounded by Muslims. I had to learn my religion, I had to learn to be proud of it, had to learn how to explain it, and that was really big part of my experience growing up."

-- Zahra Billoo

Billoo traveled to Mecca again at 21, fulfilling the requirement that the haj should be made after puberty. As with other religious observances, she has the impression that her peers, the generation of American Muslims who grew up in the United States, are more inclined to make the pilgrimage than many of their parents were. While the immigrant generation was absorbed in finding a livelihood and establishing themselves in their new home, members of her generation with American educational credentials have more easily achieved the comforts of middle-class life, including the means to make the pilgrimage -- a choice Billoo sees as "more and more common and more and more a priority" for her contemporaries.

Billoo, whose parents met in the United States after immigrating separately from Pakistan in the 1970s, is now 30, a lawyer and executive director of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of CAIR, the Council on Islamic American Relations. She didn't always appreciate having to study and going to the mosque when she was a child, she said, but "as an adult, I'm so grateful that I went all the time because I think it really shaped my identity." But she believes that being in a minority outside her home influenced her beliefs too. She and her brother were the only practicing Muslims in their high school, and she thinks that strengthened her faith. "I don't know that my conviction would have been so strong had I been surrounded by Muslims," she said. "I had to learn my religion, I had to learn to be proud of it, had to learn how to explain it, and that was really big part of my experience growing up."

Tamana Pardais, Sadiqa's older sister, made the same point. For her parents, growing up in a society that was 99 percent Muslim, practicing the religion was a normal

part of daily life, she said, but for their children in America, "it's different. We have to go to the mosque and learn." She is studying Arabic, something her parents didn't do in Afghanistan, so she will be able to read the Koran in the original language, and decided to wear a headscarf because "I want to be recognized as a Muslim. I want to hold on to that identity.... For my parents, it was different. They didn't have to prove it."

For many young Pakistani and Afghan Americans, as for other American Muslims, the 9/11 attacks and the aftermath were a turning point in their religious life, as well as for their image and identity in general. The event itself, carried out in the name of Islam, led them to look (or look again) at their faith to find out what it really teaches about violence or the murder of innocent people. And the anti-Islamic response from many Americans, including political and religious leaders, also led young Muslims to learn more about their religion so they would have answers for the slurs -- and honest questions, too -- that were hurled at their community.

The post-9/11 "Islamophobia machine," as Hena Khan calls it, "sort of galvanized Muslims to challenge these views, to get our voices out there, to correct misconceptions and fight fiction with fact." Waleed Mansury, whose high school in Alexandria, Virginia, was barely five miles from the Pentagon, had just graduated when 9/11 happened, and soon after began reading religious texts. His feeling, he recalled, was: "Let me learn my religion a little bit more... . Is it what CNN is telling me, or is it the Koran?" Bilal Askaryar put it this way: "Because of all that negative attention that we got, and all the attacks directed towards Islam, we naturally found ourselves defending it, no matter how superficial our relationship to the religion might have been in the past. We all found ourselves defending it, and saying oh, I'm a Muslim, I may not pray five times a day but I still believe in God and I still believe in the Prophet Mohammed and I know those things you are saying aren't right." And, he added, when you defend something to others, you come to believe it more strongly yourself.

Not everyone who looked at the Koran found reassurance. One young Afghan American woman, also of college age when the 9/11 attack took place, feels it pushed her away from, not toward, Islam or any religious faith. In her reading of the Koran, she found passages that when read literally, can be understood as justifying acts of violent terror. Her family was not strongly observant and she had never been very religious, she told me, but the attacks were "kind of the nail in the coffin" for her own belief. With the Koran, she concluded, "if you take it with a grain of salt, it's fine, you can interpret a lot of it to fit the modern day," but reading the actual words in many passages, she went on, one can "totally understand why al-Qaeda did what they did. Reading the Koran word for word, and taking everything literally, then absolutely they could justify what they've done." Exactly the same, she pointed out, can be said of the Bible, which she has also read.

A small handful of young Muslim American men who turned to religious studies after 9/11 were drawn to a violent jihadi ideology, and a far smaller number went on to become involved in planning or carrying out acts of terror. But the great majority of American Muslims reached the opposite view. Reading the Koran taught him that Islam "is not a religion of violence, not a religion of oppression," Waleed Mansury said, and the terrorists and the Taliban who practice violence in its name are "demonizing my religion."

Bilal Askaryar was a high school student in Newark, California, when the 9/11 attacks occurred. With American attention suddenly riveted on his homeland and his religion, he said, it was inevitable that he and other Afghan and Muslim Americans were drawn to think more about their faith. "It was on everyone's mind," he said. "We Muslims ourselves wanted to understand how could someone claim to be speaking for us when they do something so vile." The beliefs he had been taught were at complete odds with those that motivated the 9/11 terrorists: "The way I was raised, the most defining virtues of God are that he's merciful and gracious. The two most repeated words in the Koran, after the name of God, are mercy and grace. It's not a religion of terrorism or violence or hurting anyone" -- or, he added, intolerance toward other religions. "Every religion says that it's the truth," Askaryar said, "but one thing that I respect about Islam and the prophet Mohammed is that one of his most famous sermons was 'to you your religion and to me mine.' We have separate religions but we can still be neighbors, those are his words. To you your religion and me in mine. Islam of course teaches that that's best way to God. But it doesn't deny other religions, that there's truth in other religions, and it also says to be humble and remember that before God none of us is better and no one has monopoly on truth, and to always treat everyone else in the best way that you can."

Reassuring themselves that the Islam they believe in is a humane religion -- and not the violent, fanatical one Americans are often told it is -- does not mean that Askaryar or other young American Muslims are blind to the violence and fanaticism that clearly exist in the Islamic world. At the same time he found himself becoming more committed to his vision of his religion after 9/11, he said, "I can't deny that I was disheartened by seeing horrible things done by Muslims in the name of Islam... It was disheartening and it was frustrating, it also made me realize how different I was from a lot of Muslims. I talked to my cousins who grew up similarly to me, and we were trying figure out what is it that makes us different from groups of Muslims that are so reactionary, so unthinking."

Even though they were sparked by the wave of intolerant anti-Islamic attitudes in post-9/11 American life, those questions led Askaryar to appreciate American values and principles more deeply, not less. Along with making him feel more strongly Muslim, his introspection after 9/11 also "made me cognizant of being American," he said. "Here in America, we were able to think about our religion for ourselves and to read Koran for ourselves and come to our understanding, seek out leaders we want. In other countries either they only have extremist leaders, or they aren't allowed to question what they're taught, or they don't even have the means -- if you're worried about feeding yourself, you don't have the luxury of trying to think about the philosophy of religion."

Askaryar's experience also led him to value American diversity and pluralism. "Societies are stronger" if they are not homogeneous, he said. "Your own religious faith is enriched when you're exposed to other thoughts. I wouldn't want to live in a society where everyone is born Muslim and dies Muslim and nothing changes, because I don't think I would understand God."

Tamana Pardais knows that it takes "some courage to identify yourself as Muslim" in America. But like Askaryar, she is thankful for the American freedoms that let her find her own way and make her own choices. "I can practice my religion freely here," she told me. "I can breathe here." Her decision to wear a headscarf was important to her, but it was also important that the decision was hers, not forced on her by religious authorities or social pressure. She is grateful that in America "we don't have police out

there who are forcing me into the dress code, like in Iran." And she is also grateful for the many other choices she can make as an American that would have been far less possible in Afghanistan -- finishing her education, not being pushed by custom or family pressure to marry in her mid-teens, like the female cousins she met there and in Pakistan a few years ago who at Tamana's age, 25, "have five or six children and were never able to finish school." By contrast, in America, Tamana was able to graduate from college, majoring in women's and gender studies, and hopes to go on for a master's in counseling or perhaps Islamic studies. That sense of her right to make her own choices and chart her own course seems as much a part of her as her religion: "My American identity goes hand in hand with my Muslim identity.... I treasure the freedom I have," she said, and added firmly: "I'm American."

In my interviews for this report, the line from the Koran that was mentioned more often than any others was this one: "There is no compulsion in religion."

Waleed Mansury quoted that verse. So did a full-bearded young Pakistani American named Shahid Bhatti, whom I met in an inner-city mosque in Albany, NY, and who is the most devout and conservative believer of all the people I spoke with. So did Rohina Malik, the Pakistani American playwright and actress. For her, she said, the idea that religion cannot be compelled represents "what I love in Islam" and is in fact the core of true religious belief. "I feel like anytime there's compulsion in religion it makes people hate the religion and hate the rules and hate the faith." As an example, she said, her one-woman play "Unveiled," in which she portrays various women who express their faith (as Malik does) by wearing a headscarf, sometimes angers playgoers who come from more repressive Muslim societies. At times when there are Iranians in the audience, for example, she has gotten "a very negative response from them, saying well, it's OK for you to say these things about the veil, but we come from a country where we're forced. So they get very angry toward me.... I understand that the anger is coming from this whole idea of being forced, whereas for me the veil was never something that was forced on me so I have a different view of it."

Another person who cited that verse from the Koran was Sabira Qureshi. Qureshi doesn't quite count as a Pakistani American. She's a Pakistani citizen whose husband, also Pakistani, works for the World Bank in Washington, D.C. But she has lived in the United States for a long time, most of her husband's close relatives immigrated many years ago and are U.S. citizens, her children all went to college here (and the youngest attended an American high school as well), so Qureshi has many connections with the Pakistani American community and, if from a slightly different perspective, has shared much of the Pakistani American experience.

For Qureshi, the injunction that "there is no compulsion in religion" is also central to understanding the Muslim faith -- an understanding she thinks is completely missing in the common American stereotypes of Islam and what many Americans believe to be Islamic law, or Shari'a. True Shari'a is *not* compulsion but its opposite, Qureshi argues. The word means "a path, the right path. I don't need a law to tell me the difference between right and wrong. If I want to follow something that's written in the Koran, I'll do it. If I want to give certain proportion of my salary to charity as ordained in the Koran, I'll do it. I don't need a law to do that." And, she went on, religious rules cannot be enforced by state power. If they are, that changes the essential meaning of Shari'a -- even if

religious movements in many Muslim countries do want to establish Shari'a-based legal systems.

"You don't legislate belief," Qureshi said. "You don't legislate lifestyle." Muslims have to decide for themselves how to live, she believes; if they are not allowed to do that, they cannot truly live by their beliefs. "The whole concept of my faith, the test of my faith, is my choice between right and wrong. If you take away my choice then I no longer have that right to choose, you're deciding for me."

It's impossible to know whether I would have heard as often or as much about "no compulsion in religion" if I had been asking those questions in Pakistan or Afghanistan instead of in the United States. Certainly there and in all Muslim countries there are many people who value the right to think and choose for themselves, and who would agree more with Qureshi about the nature of Shari'a and how to enforce it than with the positions taken by the Taliban or similar fundamentalist groups. Still, listening to Tamana Pardais and Rohina Malik and many others, I felt I was hearing American voices expressing an American experience of searching freely, in a land of many beliefs and many identities, for what they believe and who they are.

"Look at any icon of Mary and her hair is covered. And the world is fine with that, but a Muslim woman, she's oppressed. The girl goes, 'But nuns wear it for God.' Who do you think I wear it for, the bloody Queen of England?!"

-- "Shabana," a character in Rohina Malik's play "Unveiled"

None of this is to say that living as a believing Muslim in America is easy or uncomplicated. It may not be hard to live in this country and say the daily prayers or not eat pork or drink alcohol, but other issues are much less clear-cut -- the rights and status of women, for example. For young people like Bilal Askaryar and Tamana Pardais and their peers, defining their religious identity also means finding the line between true religious principles and practices that their faith requires them to follow, and national or tribal or cultural traditions that can be adapted to fit in the American culture they are living in. That's a distinction their immigrant parents often don't see in the same way, if they see it at all, since in their upbringing, culture and faith were typically undifferentiated.

To the extent that the second generation is more distant from traditions and practices in their ancestral homelands, they may find it easier to distinguish faith from custom. "I think that they are more able to separate the religious values from the cultural values of those countries," said Saqib Ali, a Pakistani American who belongs to that generation. "For the immigrant generation, perhaps, it isn't as easy for them to separate being Pakistani with Muslim or being Arab with Muslim or Afghan with Muslim, because their identities are fused." American Muslims like himself who grew up in America, Ali believes, "feel like they can let go of the immigrant baggage and maintain their religious identity," not just preserving their faith, he feels, but reaching a purer

version of it. Still, young Muslim Americans seeking to define what their religion really is and which rules to follow have to figure it out for themselves -- and with no clear road map, either from their parents or from religious leaders who, up to now, are also likely to come from the immigrant generation.

"For me it's very important to separate my religion from my culture," said 25-year-old Sufia Alnoor. But it is also confusing. Once, she remembered, in a television program she was watching with her grandmother, there was a scene in which a man hit his wife. It made her grandmother furious, Alnoor said. "She was like, 'he's a coward, he has no pride.' I thought that was really interesting. She's an elderly Afghan woman and in her mindset, it's wrong for a man to hit a woman. But then I'm thinking, OK, all this news I hear about the Taliban hitting women, and they say it's the religion.... It's just so mixed, honestly. I feel the more and more I try to understand Afghan culture, the more and more confused I get. Really, it's so complicated."

Mizgon Shahir Darby, who was trained as a journalist but now directs the mental health program for the Afghan Coalition in Fremont, California, sees young Afghan Americans trying to find their own path, "picking and choosing what's right and what's wrong in culture and religion, and they're negotiating it." But, she went on, "there is no handbook on how to be a good Afghan girl or boy, but then everyone expects it." The result, often, is confusion and generational conflict, sometimes open, sometimes hidden, and all the more painful because it occurs in a culture that puts great value on family name and reputation. "Name, honor, image, play a huge role" in Afghan families, a young woman named Maryam Ufyani told me. "You don't hurt the honor of your family." Khalid Shekib, who came to the United States as a small child, grew up in the Virginia suburbs of Washington and now practices law there, explained: "In Afghan culture, a lot of times if a kid does something wrong, they don't really blame the kid. They always look at the family and say the family is not raising their children properly. It always goes back to family" -- so that if a daughter dresses immodestly, by traditional standards, or goes out on dates, it is not just a question of her turning away from custom and culture; to her parents, she is bringing shame not just on herself but on them as well.

Not infrequently, instead of confrontation, families respond to such situations by not speaking about them. As I was told in more than one conversation, there is a sort of conspiracy of concealment, "a culture of silence and secrecy," Mizgon Darby calls it, in which parents know that a son is drinking or a daughter is dating, and the children know their parents know, but no one ever says it out loud. That silence may avoid open conflict, but it surely does not lessen the pain.

During one of my first interviews for this report, I had an unexpected glimpse of just how sharp and hurtful the clash of cultures within a family can be. I had just spent an hour or so talking with a young woman just past college age and her mother -- I won't identify them any further -- in the living room of their modest home. We had finished our talk and I was about to walk out the front door when the younger brother appeared on the stairs, coming down from his second-floor bedroom. Behind him came his American girlfriend, who it became obvious had been sharing the room with him. I had already said goodbye to the young man's mother and did not see her reaction. But his sister, who had walked to the door with me, stepped outside and explained that her brother's issues with the family were not just about his girlfriend. He had also rebelled against the family's religion, making friends with a group of Christian students at his community college and

for a time, she said, wearing a chain with a cross around his neck. (Whether the girlfriend was a cause or a consequence of that rebellion -- or unconnected to it -- I did not learn.) Not surprisingly, this caused very serious conflict in the family. But her parents in the end had to resign themselves to living with her brother's attitudes and his girlfriend's overnight visits, his sister said, for one reason: if they hadn't, they feared they would lose their son completely.

There is no way to know with certainty how common that kind of cultural and generational collision is behind the walls of Afghan or Pakistani American or other Muslim American homes. But there can be little doubt that the situation I accidentally glimpsed that morning, or something like it, must occur in many families' lives.

It's also likely that the outcome in that particular family -- and almost certainly in most others, too -- would have been quite different if the child who strayed from religion and custom had been a girl instead of a boy. The prevailing perception is that girls are in general more successful than boys at navigating between the world of their immigrant families and the American world outside. But that doesn't mean the pressures on girls are any less. As in many cultures, girls may be more dutiful, more motivated to please their parents, more conscientious and harder working in school, and less likely to use drugs or break laws. Girls tend to care more than boys about "what will people think, what is so-and-so gonna think about me," Mizgon Darby said. But, she went on, in the double life that immigrants' children often lead, girls are also "trained to lie. They love their parents so much that they don't want to break their parents' hearts by being who they are. But at same time they're in American culture. They're going to date, they're going to have relationships, they're going to do these things, and they have to hide it. It's hard."

It's symbol, not substance, but the question of wearing a hijab, or headscarf,²⁰ often seems a metaphor for the complexities of growing up in America as a young Muslim woman. I cannot verify this, but I had a sense that like many other things, the hijab issue may loom larger for Muslim American women than it would in their ancestral homelands -- if for no other reason than in America, it's not imposed by law or custom or social pressure, so that every woman has to decide for herself whether to cover her hair or not. The women I spoke with had so many different ideas about the rules and so many different reasons for wearing or not wearing a hijab that in the end, the only thing that truly seemed clear was that on this subject, nothing is clear.

"I don't wear the hijab," one young woman told me, "but I hope someday I will have the courage to do it." She does not want her real name published; I will call her Darya. "It's not easy to do in this society," she said. "If you're not in an Islamic country, it's difficult. If you have the hijab on, people look at you differently. Even Afghans. They fight about the hijab," she said, and about whether the Koran clearly requires women to wear it or not. "I've seen the way people judge the person who wears the hijab," she went on. "They expect them to be angel-like. If you have on the hijab, they expect you not to make mistakes ever.... A person sees a girl wearing a hijab but with tight pants, or talking to a guy, they say she's a hypocrite. If she has it on her head, people are more critical."

²⁰ A hijab covers the hair and neck, but not the face. A more conservative veil is the *niqab*, which covers the lower face, leaving only the eyes and part of the forehead exposed. Most concealing of all is the *burqa*, a full-length garment that hoods the head and the entire body with a small mesh panel in front of the face for the wearer to look out through.

For a couple of years, Darya did put on a hijab during Ramadan, but found that even other Afghan Americans criticized her. In her own mind, she said, "I do believe God's words," and she accepts that wearing the hijab "is part of Islam," so not wearing one is following "what people want me to do rather than what God wants me to do." That makes her sad. "I do constantly ask God," she said. "I hope to do it one day.... if I lived in an Islamic country, I would definitely wear the hijab, no question about it."

Darya wrestles with other issues, too -- such as how to behave while interacting with men. Under strict Islamic standards of modest conduct, a man should look down when speaking to a woman, not making eye contact, and there should be no physical contact such as a handshake. But Darya recognizes that that is simply not practical in dealing with the non-Muslim men she sees every day in her workplace. "Islam doesn't forbid interaction, it just forbids inappropriate interaction," she said, so as long as there is no disrespectful intention, she thinks it's OK to follow American custom and shake hands or look directly at a man she is talking to.

Rohina Malik would be more comfortable not shaking hands with men, but frequently feels she can't avoid it. "It's an awkward situation in this society," she said. "It can be very awkward for me to say we don't do that in my religion... so I end up shaking hands, most of the time. Sometimes I sort of place my hands on my heart, and sort of bend my head like a bow, and that sometimes is an indication people get that we don't shake. But it just depends where I am. You can't always do that." Islam, she added, teaches that actions are judged by intentions -- "you will get reward or punishment for what you intend." So, since God sees her intentions, "I think that's what makes it OK for me to do what I gotta do."

When I asked what she tells her daughters on that issue, Malik replied, "We haven't had that discussion. I would tell them to just" -- and she left the sentence uncompleted. "I don't know. I'm not sure."

Naheed Hasnat, a 40-year-old Pakistani American writer living in the San Francisco area, doesn't wear a hijab. When she looks at young women who do, she sees it as a mark of identity that is generational as much as it is religious. "The parents, like my mother's generation, weren't covering their hair, but their daughters are," Hasnat said. (Her own generation, as she sees it, "is in the middle... I would say we're more even-keeled." Her description of her own religious practice sounded that way too. She thinks of herself as a practicing Muslim, she said, but not 100 percent observant: "I don't do what I'm not supposed to do, but I don't do everything I'm supposed to do.") In the aftermath of 9/11 when young American Muslims were reexamining their connection with their faith, Hasnat agrees that many became more spiritual or religious. But she also saw a trend toward *looking* more like Muslims: "college students becoming more outwardly Muslim looking, more girls are covering their hair, boys are growing beards... I think it's more a reaction to the political situation than it is anything else." For Rohina Malik, though, deciding to cover her hair had to do with her inner life, not her outward identity. "I think it was just something between me and God," she said. "For me it was like an act of worship to God."

Making the headscarf issue even more complicated is the fact that for many non-Muslims, the hijab or other forms of the veil are not symbols of belief, but of oppression -- specifically, oppression of women. In Iran, or Saudi Arabia, or Taliban-controlled regions of Afghanistan or Pakistan, there is certainly good reason for that perception. But

listening to Muslim women who wear the hijab in America, I heard over and over again that they are *not* wearing it because someone has forced them to.

"The stereotype of Muslim women is that they're forced to wear the veil," Malik said, "but for most of us, at least my friends and the people I know, it's usually the opposite, families opposing the daughter putting on the veil." One of the characters in her play, a rapper named Shabana, wears a hijab over her family's objections -- a story that is quite common but, Malik says, seldom told. "A lot of people would never even think of that kind of scenario. They would always think maybe it's the mom forcing the daughters or the dad forcing the daughters, which does happen... that's the problem with stereotypes, often they do come from a truth, it's not that they don't come from a truth, but it's not everybody's truth." Shabana, the daughter of Pakistani immigrants in London, also defies stereotypes in being a hip-hop performer who raps about her life as a Muslim woman -- including wearing the veil, and the false perception that it's not her choice. (One of her lines says: "Look at any icon of Mary and her hair is covered. And the world is fine with that, but a Muslim woman, she's oppressed. The girl goes, 'But nuns wear it for God.' Who do you think I wear it for, the bloody Queen of England?!")

Her characters are not her, but Malik has some things in common with Shabana. She was also born in England, living there until her family moved to the United States when she was 15, and like Shabana, she met some resistance from her family when she decided to wear the hijab. At the time, her mother did not cover her hair, and was uncomfortable when Malik and her sisters began to do so. But eventually, she followed her daughters' example. "She saw me, then my other sister, then my other sister put on the veil, and then something happened within her own spirituality and she put it on last."

Just as her mother did not decide for her, Malik does not intend to decide for her own three daughters. "My eldest daughter is 9, and I've had some more devout women say to me oh, she should be covered, and I would say, you know what, she's 9.... It bothers me when some parents are really really really encouraging their children to cover and wear the hijab, because I feel like that's their childhood. I understand they're trying to prepare them for life when hopefully they'll be covered, because that's what they believe, but I feel like it should be every woman's choice -- the choice of a woman, not a girl.... For us womanhood begins at puberty. When a woman gets her period, technically, that is when she is required to wear the hijab, [but] many women don't. Some women take a couple of years after that before they'll put it on, and some women will take 20 years after that, and some women will never put it on. But I've made it very clear to my daughters that this is something between you and God." She also makes it clear that they should consider their decision carefully and make it seriously. "You see some women who start wearing the hijab and they take it off, and then they're wearing it again and then they're taking it off. Rather than do that it's better give it some time, give it some thought. When you feel like you want to wear it, then wear it, and if you don't, don't."

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Following are stories I heard about three young men's journeys into their faith. I only met one of them in person. Mohammad Hassan Khalid's story was told to me by his lawyer, with some details taken from news accounts. The journey of the young man I'll

call Naim was described by his sister. The third story, Shahid Bhatti's, I heard directly from him.

Mohammad Hassan Khalid: The Khalid family's story in the United States, Jeff Lindy said, could have been a chapter in a textbook on the American dream. He might have added that it could also be in a book on the Pakistani diaspora.

Lindy, a defense lawyer in Philadelphia, represented Mohammad Khalid after he was arrested and charged with conspiring to provide material support to terrorists. Before his arrest, Mohammad was an honors student at his Maryland high school and had been accepted, with a full scholarship, to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. He was not yet 16 when he committed the acts he was charged for, and 18 when he stood in a federal courtroom in May 2012 and pleaded guilty to the charge -- a heartbreaking end to what might have been a hopeful tale of immigrant parents' hardship and sacrifice helping their child create a rewarding life in America.

When Mohammad was small, his father, Khalid Mehmood, took the family to the United Arab Emirates, a magnet for Pakistanis seeking better employment than they can find at home. They lived there until Mohammad was 11, when they returned to Pakistan. Not long afterward Mehmood emigrated again to the United States, where he worked for several years saving money to bring his wife and children to join him. As with the great majority of Pakistani immigrants, educating the children was a top priority. Mehmood searched for the best school district he could afford to live in, and settled on Maryland's Howard county, west of Baltimore. It's one of the richest counties in America (fifth in some rankings, third in others) and a high-priced housing market for a family with modest means. The Khalids' home in Ellicott City is a crowded two-bedroom townhouse apartment where, Lindy said, Mohammad and his older brother shared a mattress in one room and their two sisters sleep in a back room next to a set of floor-to-ceiling shelves jammed with miscellaneous items their father sells at a local flea market, supplementing his income from delivering pizzas.

In the classic pattern of Asian immigrant families, their parents constantly pushed the Khalid children to become star students. Mohammad, like his brother and sisters, did very well in school. But he had a much harder time than his siblings, Lindy said, in becoming comfortable in American life. "He was a fish out of water. His brother and sisters were able to adapt better; he had trouble adjusting... he had a hard time putting down roots." He kept up his studies and remained on his school's honor roll, but became increasingly moody and withdrawn, symptoms that would eventually be diagnosed as depressive disorder.

Out of that feeling of isolation, Lindy said, Mohammad "reached out for something familiar, and that was Islam." He began exploring Islamic sites on the Internet and, inevitably, found some that espoused extreme, militant doctrines. Over time he made his way into progressively more secure chat rooms focused on fighting a holy war to protect Islam against U.S. aggression and decadent, corrupt Western ideas. Using the Arabic he had learned as a child in the Emirates, Mohammed translated various documents and statements from Arabic or English into Urdu. His translations included at least one speech by Osama bin Laden, along with other videotaped material from al-Qaeda. He posted his own writings as well, highly emotional tracts proclaiming the spiritual superiority of Islam and denouncing corrupt American culture and values. They

reflected, in Lindy's view, a young, emotionally troubled mind "intensely interested in ideology, intensely exploring ideology." And as he became increasingly radicalized, Lindy believes, identifying with the jihadi cause and the attention and praise he received "made him feel good and important." For a lonely, alienated teenager, that was a powerful drug.

Alongside his diatribes, Mohammad put up videotapes circulated by al-Qaeda and other groups showing attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq or Afghanistan, or other scenes sending a similar message. He also chatted with other jihad sympathizers, musing on one occasion about an apparent daydream of carrying out a mass shooting at his high school, where, he wrote, many students' parents worked for the National Security Agency and "all the security agencies of amrika." His family didn't know just what he was doing, but they grew increasingly disturbed at how much time he was spending on the Internet. At one point, right around the time of Mohammad's 16th birthday, his parents took away his laptop. His response was extreme, to the point that he was hospitalized, first in a medical facility and then in a psychiatric hospital.

In the course of his Internet explorations Mohammad had established contact with a small group including a woman from Pennsylvania named Colleen R. LaRose, who in a twist that sounds like something from a comic strip rather than from real life, identified herself on the Internet as Jihad Jane. She and several others were involved in a bumbling plot to assassinate a Swedish artist, Lars Vilks, who had outraged Muslims by drawing an image of the Prophet Mohammed with the body of a dog. The plot was never carried out, and Mohammad never met any of the other plotters in person. But after a series of messages to and from LaRose, he posted online appeals for funds that were intended for her project. Several weeks later, according to the federal indictment, LaRose sent him a package containing a stolen U.S. passport along with "other documents and material," which Mohammad was supposed to send to another co-conspirator in Europe. For some reason, Mohammad kept the passport and hid it instead of sending it. But he did send the rest of the material, including, one of Lindy's associates said, some rare coins that were presumably to be sold to raise funds for the operation against Vilks. Legally, that was the most damning act, since it clearly crossed the line from expressing support to actively assisting the planned assassination.

If helping Jihad Jane was a crucially wrong turn in Mohammad's life, there was another turn yet to come in his spiritual journey. In their alarm after the confrontation over his laptop and Mohammad's hospitalization, his family asked the imam at their mosque for help. The imam in turn began to meet with Mohammad, Jeff Lindy said, and little by little learned what the boy had been doing. And when he did, as Lindy tells it, the imam told Mohammad, in effect: "You have this wrong." In their conversations, the imam patiently explained why the jihadi ideology Mohammad had embraced does not represent true Islamic beliefs. For every Koranic quote the jihadis cite to justify their violence, Lindy said, "the imam would point out why it didn't mean death to infidels, it meant something more peaceful." And ultimately, Lindy believes, Mohammad was convinced. It was hard to give up the attention and approval he had been getting, but in the end, "this guy saved Mohammad's life. He turned him around."

Lindy thinks the Mohammad he came to know is not the terrorist he once hoped to be. "He now is a very spiritual, very knowledgeable Muslim who I don't think is a

jihadist." The day of Mohammad's guilty plea, Lindy told a reporter: "This is the saddest case I've ever been involved in."

Naim: When I heard his story from his older sister in California, Naim was in Saudi Arabia. He was studying there at the University of Medina, in the third year of a six-year program in Islamic jurisprudence.

He comes back in the summers to California, where he was born and brought up, his sister told me. So when summer came, I wrote her and asked if he was home and if he might be willing to tell me about his life himself. She relayed my request, but he declined. "He's a far more private person compared to his sister," her e-mail said. That made me think he would probably be more comfortable if I didn't use his real name; Naim is a pseudonym. I'll call his sister Yasmin, also not her real name.

Naim and Yasmin are the children of Pakistani immigrants who settled in California in the early 1980s. Their parents are devout Muslims, active in their mosque. When Naim was five or six years old, a "recruiter" came to the mosque looking for parents who were willing to send their sons back to Pakistan for religious education. (Yasmin doesn't like the word recruiter, which she thinks can feed negative stereotypes of Muslims. But she agrees that that's what they are.) Naim's father liked the idea, as did the father of another little boy who was Naim's friend. The mothers were not so enthusiastic, Yasmin said. "The idea of sending their babies to another country where they hadn't lived in a decade was really frightening for them." But the boys were excited and wanted to go, particularly since they could go together. In the end the families sent them off, and the boys spent ten months in Pakistan attending a madrassa, or religious school, where the entire curriculum consisted of learning to recite the Koran by heart, in Arabic. During his time there, Yasmin said, Naim memorized about one-fourth of the Koran -- the words, that is, but not the meaning, since boys that young were not taught the language, just to repeat and remember the sounds of the words.

When the boys returned to their families, their parents learned that they had been regularly beaten in the madrassa -- this despite explicit promises from the recruiters that there would be no corporal punishment. Naim's parents were horrified. Physical discipline is common in South Asian homes but in her family, Yasmin said, she and Naim were never hit or spanked, so the beatings in the madrassa must have been all the more traumatic, not just physically but emotionally as well. The boys had relatives living in the same town whom they were allowed to visit every two weeks, but during those visits they never told anybody about their treatment at the school. "To have never been beaten your entire life and then... being beaten for a year" and never speaking about it left the boys in emotional turmoil for a long time -- as long as two years, Yasmin believes -- after they came home.

Naim does not excuse the madrassa teachers' abuse, but it did not turn him against the Koran or Islam. "It distanced him from a certain type of religious leader," but not his faith, Yasmin said. Her family knows other young people who fell away from Muslim practice after being mistreated by religious teachers, but it didn't happen with Naim, and Yasmin thinks that's because of what he heard from adults at home about the abuse at the madrassa. "Religious leaders in our community and our parents were very clear that this did not have anything to do with the religion, that this was wrong, and the religion was what informed their own understanding of it being wrong," she said, and that "gave him a

really solid grounding in religion." Long afterward, Yasmin said, her brother remains ambivalent about the madrassa. "I think he looks at it like the darkest chapter of his life," but there is also "some level of gratefulness for that experience" -- he hates the way his teachers treated him, but at the same time he values what they taught him and is thankful to them for opening the door to religious learning.

Back in California, Naim returned to his public elementary school and also continued his Koran studies, though at a slower pace than in the madrassa (Yasmin thinks he was about 12 when he finished memorizing the entire text). Through high school, Yasmin said, Naim was observant, keeping the required fasts even when they coincided with his basketball team's schedule. But her sense is that he did not think of himself as intensely religious, just someone who had learned a lot about the religion. "He was just sort of an average American teenager" with an unusual level of religious knowledge, but not unusually spiritual. It was after he entered college, she said, that he began to be more seriously committed to the faith. After his freshman year he went to Egypt for a year, learning fluent Arabic. He returned to his California college for one more semester, then decided to enroll at the University of Medina.

Ultimately, Yasmin said, her brother and others like him will bring a new leadership for Muslims in the United States, succeeding today's religious leaders who are still largely immigrants from Islamic countries who came to minister to the immigrant generation in the American Muslim community. For younger Muslims who were born or grew up in America, those leaders may be respected but are also on the far side of a wide gap in experience, culture and consciousness. Naim, Yasmin thinks, will be "part of a generation of American religious leaders who will have a grounding in American culture, and therefore will be able to better relate to the community they serve."

As a member of the American generation, Yasmin feels she would connect better with someone like her brother as a religious leader because "he doesn't have an accent, he was born and raised in the United States, he understands basketball and various pop culture issues that someone who not from the U.S. can't understand." She would feel that way even if Naim weren't her sibling, Yasmin said, though the example she gave was from their life as sister and brother: when she wanted to go to her high school prom -- wearing a headscarf and not with a date -- her parents were against it, but Naim "stuck up for me" and in the end she was able to go. On that particular issue, Yasmin admitted wryly, Naim might not take the same position now. But he still has the experience of growing up in America and will understand that generation in ways no immigrant could.

When I asked Yasmin if Naim's choice to study in Saudi Arabia reflected alienation from American life, she shook her head. "I think it's a way of integration, actually," she said. "I think it's part of the Americanization of Muslims. He's going to be this kid who went to an American high school, who played varsity basketball.... He has this American experience but also he can balance that with a traditional understanding of Islam and then provide service to the American Muslim community in a way that maybe someone who's a recent Pakistani immigrant might not be able to."

I can't be certain that Naim would answer the same way, but for Yasmin, her brother's journey toward a religious life does not represent a rejection of American culture or his American identity. It's the reverse, she said, "a desire to see how you balance the two." And, as I realized in writing down her words, whatever the specific details in an individual life, that is the journey all Muslim Americans have to take.

Shahid Batti: As a child, Shahid Bhatti lived in several different worlds, but could never quite fit into any of them.

At times Shahid lived with his Pakistani father. At times he lived with his American grandmother in Georgia, miles from any other Muslims. (Shahid knew he was Muslim, but the only thing he knew about it was that he wasn't supposed to eat pork.) For two different periods he lived with relatives in Pakistan. In all those places, he had trouble adjusting. He wasn't mean or aggressive, didn't lose his temper or get into fights, but he was one of those kids who just couldn't sit still and couldn't follow the rules, particularly the one about attending school.

From a very early age Shahid was happier spending time with animals than with human company. As much as he could, he tried to live outdoors instead of in a classroom. In Pakistan, he told me, he would walk into his school in the morning and keep going through the building and out the back door, then spend his day wandering around after the flocks of goats that roamed the town streets. When he heard the school bell ring at the end of classes, he'd come back to the school, walk through the building from back to front, and go home. At the end of the term no report card came to his relatives' home, he said, and when his uncle went to the school to ask why, he was told that no one had seen Shahid since the day he registered. He did much the same thing in Albany, New York, where his father owned a halal grocery and then a convenience store. Instead of going to school in the morning Shahid would go straight to Washington Park and stay all day, catching crayfish and other small creatures in and around the small lake in the park's western corner.

Shahid's father came to Albany from Dalton, Georgia, where he had worked in a carpet factory and lived with Shahid's Irish-American mother, whom he met and married after entering the country illegally by walking away from the ship he had arrived on as a seaman. His mother died when Shahid was very young but he continued to have a relationship with his American grandmother, going back and forth from his father's home in Albany to live with her in Georgia from time to time.

Shahid's affinity for wild creatures continued beyond his childhood. Indeed, on the day that changed his life, the last thing he did before leaving one world for another was to collect some pet snakes he had been keeping in his Albany apartment and release them in a nearby patch of woods.

Shahid still has the notebook where he wrote about that day and some of what followed. It was in the spring of 2002, a few weeks before his 25th birthday. He was making his living as a taxi driver, struggling with a disastrous first marriage and with the beginnings of emotional swings that would later be diagnosed as bipolar disorder. His journal begins:

Day 1. I came home from work and saw a car pull up with three guys with beards. They were dressed like Muslims. I went up to the car and said salamaleikum. They got out of the car and we went to my uncle's garage. They were talking about Islam and that there was going to be a talk about it in the masjid. They asked me to go with them. At first I said I couldn't then I thought it would be good if I did. When I got there we prayed and someone gave a short bian [the Urdu word for a speech] about Islam. Then I spoke with a

guy named Hashir and told him my situation. He suggested that I go to Pakistan with him and learn about Islam. So that night we went back to my house. I got my money and some clothes. The next morning we were off to NYC. That day I got my passport, visa and plane ticket. The next day I was on a plane on my way to Pakistan.

The men in the car were from an organization called Tablighi Jamaat, a movement founded in India in the 1920s that seeks to bring "lost" Muslims back to the faith. (In accord with their founder's motto, "O Muslims! Become Muslims," they never proselytize among non-Muslims. Shahid told me he now thinks that's not exactly in accord with true Islamic teachings, because as he understands it, Muslims are supposed to bear witness for their religion to all people.)

At the time, Shahid's religious views were, by his description, unformed and deeply confused. He didn't eat pork because "God says don't eat it, that's the only thing I knew about Islam. On the other hand, I was drinking.... my cousins are eating pork rinds and I'm like no, no, give me a beer." He may not have gotten along very well with formal education, but Shahid was an intelligent, thoughtful person who was not satisfied just to be told what to do and what not to do, which had been his Muslim relatives' approach to teaching him the religion. "If I didn't understand something, I wanted to know what and why and where. Like before you eat, you say 'bismillah,' 'in the name of Allah.' Now if I don't know why I'm doing this, if I don't know what it means, I'm not doing it. That was my attitude." When someone told him to say "bismillah" before a meal he wanted them to tell him why, "instead of saying just shut up and say it.... Like with the Koran, they say memorize it, recite it, but don't understand any of what it says. Because they themselves don't know. For generation after generation all they've been doing is reciting it and memorizing it and then they don't know anything about it, don't act upon it, just recite it and memorize it. I didn't want that. If I don't understand it I didn't want to do it, that was the mentality I had."

Shahid began thinking more about practicing the religion when he married a non-Muslim American who converted to Islam. But, he said, "when I got married I had no knowledge of what Islam was. All I knew was what my family practiced. I tried to implement what my family was doing, but that was a disaster.... the things my family was doing, a lot of things are opposite of what Islam teaches." One of those, he told me in another conversation, was the idea that the husband is the ruler in the family and the wife has to obey, which he now sees as un-Islamic because it goes against the teaching that there is no compulsion in religion. Once in a while he went to the mosque, but because he had never had religious instruction he didn't know much about the rituals or their meaning. "I would just do what other people were doing, and then I would leave. So I wasn't really connected."

When he met the Tablighi Jamaat missionaries, Shahid and his wife had just separated, which also contributed to his impulsive decision to go with them to Pakistan. There, he spent part of his time with a group of several hundred Muslims from around the world receiving instruction at the Tablighi center in Raiwind, near Lahore, and part traveling with smaller groups to visit mosques and meet with people in different cities to talk about what they had been taught. Tablighi promotes a deeply conservative, fundamentalist form of Islam, holding, as Shahid put it, that the teaching of the Prophet Mohammed "was final, you can't add to it, can't take away from it." But it also tends to be

nonpolitical, emphasizing personal religious commitment and observance more than conflict with nonbelievers or the less devout.

In his time with the Tablighi, Shahid said, he heard not a word from them promoting violence or terrorism. Among the students a few may have leaned toward that ideology; Shahid remembers one young man who spoke about going somewhere to buy guns. "He asked me if I wanted to go. I said no, no thanks, I don't want no part of that. I was just trying learn about Islam at that point... anything I learned, guns didn't have any part in it. So he left, and then no one heard from him again."

The program was supposed to last four months, but halfway through, Shahid's bipolar symptoms worsened -- "something flipped in my brain," he said -- so he flew back to the United States after just two months away. I wondered what happened when he came through the airport. This was less than a year after 9/11, and here was a young Muslim man coming back from two months in Pakistan, whose passport photo showed him as clean-shaven and was now wearing a full, bushy black beard, and who was acting strangely to boot. Surely, I thought, he'd have been pulled out of the passport control line to be grilled. But remarkably, he wasn't. Other passengers were stopped and searched, he told me with an amazed laugh, but "I went through like nothing. I came through, they searched my bag. I had this whole big thing of water from Mecca that my aunt had given me to bring here, so they're 'what's this?' I said that's holy water. So they let me go. See you later. Didn't check nothing. Have a nice day."

Whatever charm got Shahid through the immigration control at the airport was apparently still working a short while later when he was hospitalized for his bipolar disorder. Somewhere in the process of his admission, when he was explaining about his trip to Pakistan, a nurse or technician making notes for his file wrote "Taliban" instead of "Tablighi." A doctor noticed the word and came back to ask about it, then corrected the file when Shahid explained. Investigators from some law enforcement agency did come to talk to one of his uncles after that, but oddly, Shahid himself was never questioned.

While he was still in Pakistan, Shahid wrote in his journal that with all he had learned, "I'll have such a strong *iman* [faith, or true belief] when I get back that nothing can touch me." But his life after coming home was not as straightforward as he had imagined. Along with outward upheavals -- his stint in a psychiatric hospital, continuing mental health problems, divorce from his first wife and painful conflict over their children -- his inner life was uneven too. Instead of staying strong, his belief "bounced up and down," he said, and he didn't consistently practice as strictly as he had been taught.

When Shahid married again, it was a somewhat modernized version of an arranged marriage, which is still quite common in the Pakistani American community. A Pakistani immigrant who came to work for his father had unmarried daughters in Pakistan, and agreed with Shahid's father that one of them, Sadaf, should come and marry his son. The two got engaged, long distance, and after about a year of telephone calls and internet chats, Sadaf flew to the United States and the couple were married a few days later. At the time Shahid was not practicing much, and Sadaf, when she arrived, was not particularly devout either. But somehow his marriage pulled Shahid back to a religious life. He began studying again and attending mosque regularly, and after a while, so did Sadaf. After taking some classes and reading religious texts, he said, she began covering her hair again, which she had stopped doing when she came to America, and quit her job

in a bank, because receiving interest is not allowed in Islam. When I met her, the morning after my first conversation with Shahid, Sadaf was wearing a hijab and an abaya, the floor-length cloak commonly worn by women in the Middle East. She is hoping to get licensed as a day care provider, she told me, in the apartment she and Shahid are remodeling. That way she can earn some money while also taking care of their three small children.

Shahid wanted to make very sure that I understood that the changes his wife had made were her decision, not made at his order. "What I learned is that there's no compulsion in Islam," he told me. "If she decided not to cover, I can't force her, because then she's not doing it for God, she's doing it for me, so if she's doing it for me, that's not Islam. That's something other than Islam. For her to cover or to do anything in regard to religion, is her choice. I can tell her, I can advise her, but what she chooses to do is on her. I'm not going to get the sin, if I tell her to do something that is according to religion. It's my duty to advise her. If she chooses to do it or not, it's nothing I can force. I can't force anything." His own preference, he added, would be for her to wear the niqab, the veil that covers the face. But he doesn't expect her to do that; "she's not that type."

Something else Shahid wanted me to understand is that his religion does not approve or tolerate violent acts of terror or embrace those who practice violence. When I asked if he felt his religious awakening was at all related to the 9/11 attacks, he nodded. "In a way," he said. "I wanted to know why people were doing this.... I went to learn what Islam is all about." And what he learned, he went on, is that "attacks, stuff like that, have nothing to do with Islam. Any of the books that I read, they condemned people doing this. I hear a lot of people saying oh, these Muslims, when things like this happen, they don't say nothing. They don't say nothing to the mainstream media, but if you go in that store" (a religious bookstore in a small shopping arcade across the street from the mosque where we met) "and you read those books that scholars published for Muslims to read, they're telling Muslims, you can't do these things... in Islam, what I learned is that to kill one person that is innocent is like killing all of humanity, so that's not a good thing. And to kill yourself also is a big sin, like suicide bombers and stuff like that."

The Muslims who support terrorist organizations don't know their own faith, Shahid added. They are products of a culture that tells them to blindly follow what they are told, without thinking or learning for themselves what the religion really teaches.

Perhaps it's because of his own mixed heritage and his fondness for his Christian grandmother in Georgia, who Shahid remembers "was not at all prejudiced in any type of way" and often challenged racist comments from others in her all-white neighborhood. Or perhaps it's just his nature, but Shahid seems remarkably free of the intolerance and closed-circle life that can often go with a strong religious commitment. His close friends include a family of Pakistani Christians, who are widely treated by Pakistanis as a despised minority. He doesn't share the common prejudice in the South Asian community against African Americans. "I always kept an open mind growing up because I been around so many different types of people," he told me. "I never really judged people by way they look."

Americans don't always treat him the same way. Once on a construction job a plumber, a former marine, walked up to him and said, "if anything like September 11 happens again, I'm killing you and all the people like you." Shahid recalls another odd

encounter in a Motor Vehicles Department office where he went to deal with some issue about his license or car registration. He was wearing a skullcap and robe that day, and when he started to tell the clerk at the counter what he needed, she said, "Can you please speak English?" Nonplused, Shahid began to say that he'd been speaking English, but the clerk got up, flounced over to a coworker and said in a loud voice, "I can't understand a word this guy's saying!" That story struck me as a remarkable little study in the physiology of fear and what it can do to the senses. English is Shahid's native language; he speaks it entirely naturally and without any trace of a foreign accent, but for that woman behind the counter, his bearded face and Muslim dress must have looked like her mental picture of a terrorist, and the horror and fear from that visual image was so powerful that it apparently overwhelmed her other senses, including her ability to hear that the words he was saying were in her own language.

Mostly, Shahid shrugs off that kind of episode. "Don't argue with the foolish," says a maxim in one of the Islamic scholars' books he read, and he tries to live by it. That's of a piece with a more general search for a calm life. With his wife's help he is being far more careful to take the medications that control his bipolar disorder, and he is also better at taking things easy and not getting fatigued, which can bring on manic episodes. He doesn't pay attention to the news, just keeps focused on his family, his religious duties, and understanding Islam. "I'm learning as much as I can, implementing what I learn, according to religion," he said, "and I've found so much peace, tranquillity." Life in Pakistan would be simpler than life in America, he believes, so he is thinking of moving there.

Listening to Shahid's story, it occurred to me that he almost perfectly matched the profile for young Muslims who are targeted by terrorist recruiters, or by trolling undercover security agents. A young man confused about his identity, with a chaotic personal life and mental health problems, and looking for guidance about his religion, represents exactly what is considered the prototype of a potential jihadist -- Mohammad Hassan Khalid, for example. I wondered, if the three bearded guys he ran into on that Albany street had not been from Tablighi Jamaat but from al-Qaeda, or from some other violent extremist movement, whether Shahid might have been drawn into that world. But when I asked him exactly that question, he shook his head. "I was always against that kind of stuff. It's just like my nature, I realized you can't kill innocent people, it's not good. So even if someone like that were to have come up to me, even with the limited knowledge that I had about Islam, most likely I wouldn't have gotten involved in something like that."

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The Pakistani and Afghan Americans I met whose religious commitment has become stronger in America clearly represent a significant trend in those communities. But not everyone reflected that trend. Some have grown distant or fallen away altogether from their Muslim faith, like the Pakistan-born son and daughter of a mother who left her homeland to escape an unsatisfactory arranged marriage and eventually became a lawyer for a U.S. government agency. The children were 5 and 8 when they arrived with their mother in America. (She decided to emigrate because if she remained in Pakistan after divorcing her husband, he would have automatically gotten custody of both children, the

son immediately and the daughter as soon as she reached puberty.) The children are both now in their 40s. Both are lawyers like their mother, and both are married to non-Muslim Americans. The daughter, Saira, married a strongly believing Roman Catholic and some years after her marriage converted to Catholicism; their two children are being brought up in that faith. The son, whose Urdu name is Iftikhar but has adopted Andrew as his professional name, married a woman from a nominally Christian but non-observant family with German and Slovenian roots. He follows some Muslim rules, such as not eating pork, his mother said, but the family has no affiliation with any organized religious community and his children are not being raised as Muslims.

The mother, whose name is Shaheda Sultan, has taken her own spiritual journey away from formal religious practice. For most of her life, including most of her years in America, Sultan was moderately observant, like the family she grew up in. But seven or eight years ago, something led her to reexamine her beliefs. The increasingly conservative religious climate she encountered both on visits to Pakistan and among a sizeable number of Muslims in America was disturbing and, Sultan said, not consistent with Islamic principles as she understood them -- on small things, like one imam's ruling that nail polish is un-Islamic (because it keeps out water and thus prevents proper ablution before prayer), and on larger matters such as growing restrictions on women, which Sultan believes do not really reflect the teachings of the Koran but are promoted and used by men "to control their wives to a point that my mother and I were never controlled by our husbands." After a period of extensive reading and thought about her own and other faiths, she said, she decided that "the interpretations given to Islam as it is practiced by the vast majority, not extremists but the vast majority," were interpretations she could no longer accept. "I seriously said to myself, OK, I cannot practice any such religion."

Her decision is actually compatible with Sunni Muslim tradition, Sultan believes, which allows people to find their own paths to moral principle and practice. "In Sunni Islam... each Muslim is free to communicate directly with God, to read the Koran and draw whatever interpretation they want out of it. I have chosen the path of believing in God but not practicing any particular religion. I practice by following the Ten Commandments, for example. I believe in doing good, but I don't spread out a prayer mat and say the required prayers."

Sultan makes some effort to keep her children and grandchildren connected with their Pakistani heritage -- for example, by holding an annual gathering for the Eid al-Adha holiday,²¹ with everyone dressed in Pakistani costume. She is gratified that her Catholic granddaughter likes to bring Pakistani ornaments or cookware for show-and-tell programs at her Catholic school, and very proud that the same daughter stood up in the classroom and challenged one of her teachers, a priest, who had made a disparaging and inaccurate comment about Islamic beliefs. But to all appearances Sultan has no sense of sadness or loss at her children's and their children's passage into a generally unhyphenated American identity -- a passage that in a way mirrors her path away from identifying with any sectarian religion, and toward defining her own way to live by what she believes.

²¹ Not to be confused with Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of Ramadan. Eid al-Adha, also called the Feast of Sacrifice, celebrates the story of Ibrahim and his willingness to obey God by sacrificing his son Ishmael -- the story also told in the Old Testament, with the names rendered as Abraham and Isaac.

I also met people who observe religious rituals as a way of expressing their heritage, but not religious belief, and others who follow the rules selectively or hardly at all. Most continue to call themselves Muslims, because it's the identity they were born with or perhaps only because that's what everyone else assumes they are. "I'm a cultural Muslim," one Afghan American woman told me. "I celebrate the holidays, I might even fast here and there. It's solidarity with the community, respect for the religion. But I'm not a believer, I don't believe in organized religion." She added, with a rueful smile, that it would sound awkward even in her own ears to identify herself as Afghan without being Muslim. "To say you're Afghan and not Muslim is an extremely difficult sentence. It's much easier to say I'm Muslim and Afghan, because the two go in one sentence."

Among the believing Muslims I spoke with, not all have joined the movement toward more conservative beliefs and practices. Sahar Habib Ghazi is one example. "I identify as Muslim, I choose to be Muslim," Ghazi told me. But the faith she identifies with is very different from the one she has seen develop among many American Muslims of her generation, a version of Islam that is "very influenced by Arab culture, and conservative." Ghazi was born in Long Island, New York, then moved to Pakistan at 9 years old when her parents decided to return there -- not without difficulties in adjustment that in many respects, she acknowledged with a smile, represented the immigrant experience in reverse. When she came back to the United States to go to college, she found pressures on her university campus in America that she had never encountered while living in Pakistan. There, she said, if she was praying in public during Ramadan or at a funeral or some other occasion, nobody would approach her to criticize her for not dressing appropriately. In Pakistan, there was "no one coming up to me and saying oh, you're not covered properly... no one saying where your arms should be covered. That's not how I learned to pray. I always just put a loose thing on my head, draped it and prayed. That's how my mom prayed and that's how my grandmother prayed. But the first time I went here to a mosque, three people told me I should cover up properly.... This was when I was in college, in Ann Arbor. I think it was during Eid prayers or something."

Instead of being drawn to stricter observance, Ghazi, now in her early 30s, was put off by attitudes that she feels are meant to enforce surface conformity rather than the moral principles that should be at the center of religious belief. After that experience at the mosque in Michigan, "I said, I'm not going back to one of these places, I don't need to be subjected to judgment by people who don't know anything about religion. That was my reaction to these things, being 18 years old. And I kind of hold to that," she added. She remains a believing Muslim, but on her own terms, and in the more liberal Sufi-influenced tradition that she inherited from her parents. In California, where she and her husband now live, "we've never been to a mosque. Even on Eid, we don't go."

The most outspoken nonbeliever I met was Masood Haque, who makes his living as an emergency room doctor in New York's Westchester County but combines that with his real love, filmmaking. His parents, who brought him and his brother and sisters to the United States in the late 1970s when he was 13, are practicing Muslims, but none of their children are, Haque said. Nor are his children or his American-born nieces and nephews. "In my family," he told me, "the only people who are religious are the Catholics" -- his brother's Irish-American wife and their children, who were baptized in the Catholic faith although the brother himself, like Haque, remains a nonbeliever. Haque is now married to a Pakistani but his first marriage was also to a Christian, though a non-practicing one, and

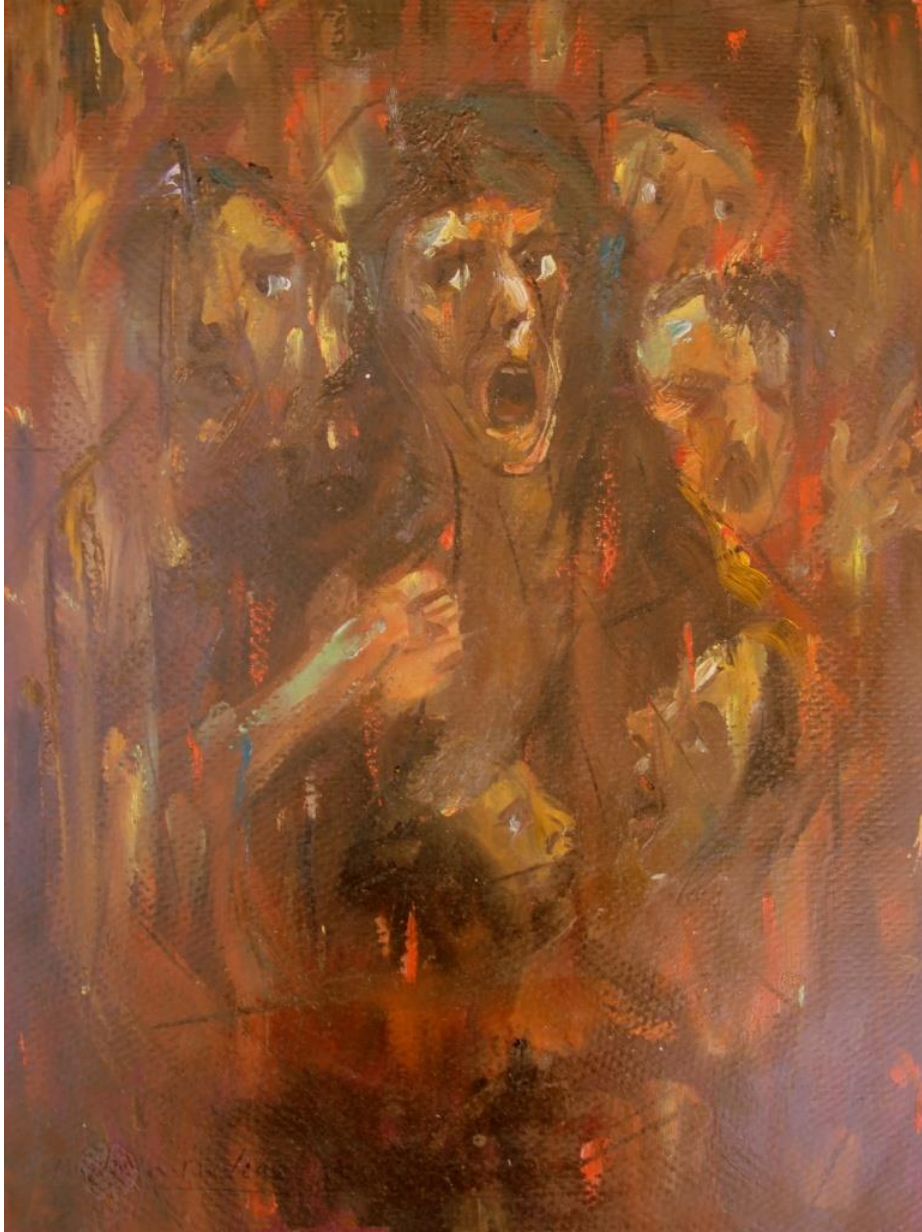
they didn't bring up their son in any religion. His oldest niece is married to a Jew, which Haque said "would be a shocking scandal in Pakistan."

Living in a multicultural society -- the same experience that has driven other Muslims to identify more strongly with their faith -- led Haque to reject not just Islam but all dogmatic religion, which he came to see as the cause of intolerance and conflict and a burden on people's lives. "I think culturally I'm a Muslim, because I come from family that observes traditions, this is what my upbringing was," he said. But he doesn't consider himself a Muslim in terms of religious belief. "If anything, I've read about Buddhism and I find myself much more attuned to their philosophy than Islam."

By coincidence, I met Masood Haque and Shahid Bhatti on the same day, with just a couple of hours driving time in between. The distance between the paths they had taken, one to secularism and nonbelief and the other to strict, almost unworldly piety, was astronomically greater. Their two stories reflect how many different paths there are for Muslim Americans to find on the chaotically diverse terrain of this country. What they show is that three-quarters of a million Pakistani and Afghan Americans and several million other Muslims in the United States are not just a challenge to American pluralism. They are also its mirror.

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IV. Afghan Americans and the Heritage of Trauma



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"I want the older generation to talk about their pain with their children and the children to talk about their pain with the older generation"-- Mizgon Darby

To listen to Afghan refugees' stories is to be reminded, over and over again, of how immense and devastating Afghanistan's 30-year catastrophe has been.

In researching this report, I did not specifically seek out people who had lost family members or had suffered some other personal tragedy, but I kept finding them. Here are some of the stories I heard:

When the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan at the end of 1979, Tahera Shairzay was living in Saudi Arabia, where her husband was working as an engineer and she taught in a girls' school. But the rest of her family, including her younger brother Naim, was still in Kabul. Naim was in his early 20s, in his fifth year of engineering school. Shairzay and her husband had urged him to leave and offered to support him if he went to study in Europe, but he refused. "He said 'No, I don't want that. If all of us who are educated in this country leave this country, what will happen? I don't want to leave.' He wanted to make a difference, to do something there."

After the invasion, Naim was active in student protests against the Soviet presence. In April 1980, the fourth month of the occupation, he was in a crowd of demonstrators when police opened fire. His family never saw him again. Shortly after the shooting, a friend called his parents to tell them Naim had been wounded and could not run away with the others, so he had presumably been arrested. Later, Shairzay said, a different friend told them that he had been taken to a Kabul hospital. "So they went to that hospital, they asked the doctors, they asked everybody," but the only answer they got was "We don't know, he was taken out of here." And there the trail went cold. Periodically his family received notes or telephone calls saying that Naim might be in this or that place, but none of the tips proved true. Bribes to government security and other officials were fruitless too.

The overwhelming likelihood was that like many others who were arrested for anti-government activities in that period, Naim had been taken away, secretly executed and left with other slain dissidents in an unmarked mass grave. The family understood that, but without certainty, their grief could not be definitive. Even now "it's still hard to believe he's dead," Shairzay says, even though they are sure he is. The uncertainty left them susceptible to false hopes that were always followed by renewed disappointment. Two decades after Naim disappeared, Shairzay said, the family heard that a handful of long-missing Afghans had returned to Afghanistan after being kept as prisoners for many years in a remote region of Russia. His mother, by then in the United States, was elated at the news. "Maybe your brother will show up someday," she told Shairzay. But Naim did not come. "These are things that Afghans went through," Shairzay said. "These things happened to many many families."

Like Tahera Shairzay, Najla has never learned what really happened to her brother. His name was Farid, and he was only 17 when he disappeared. Najla, who asked not to have her family name published, was 15.

Farid had been drafted out of his tenth-grade class in school and like thousands of other young Afghans, became an unwilling soldier in the pro-Soviet government army. In 1985, the sixth year of the Soviet occupation, he was sent on an operation against guerrillas belonging to a U.S.-backed mujahideen force known as the Haqqani Network after its founder, Jalalludin Haqqani.²² Farid's unit was surrounded and taken hostage by the Haqqani fighters, Najla said, "and he never came home. They didn't give us the body, they didn't tell us if they killed him or if they kept him alive. No matter what we asked, we couldn't get the right answer."

Najla also had a younger brother, four years younger than Farid. After Farid vanished, her father decided to leave Afghanistan, abandoning his jewelry business there, rather than risk losing another son in the war. The family fled to Pakistan and in 1990 reached the United States, settling in Greensboro, North Carolina. Najla, after returning to Afghanistan for a couple of years as an interpreter for U.S. troops there, now lives in Gambrills, Maryland, where I spoke with her at a local mosque and Islamic center a few minutes drive from her home. When I asked if her family has ever learned anything more about Farid, she shook her head. "No, we never found out. Twenty-seven years now...."

Technically, Najla's brother Farid and Tahera Shairzay's brother Naim were on opposing sides in the war, one serving in the pro-Soviet forces and one demonstrating against them. But neither sister thinks of the other's lost brother as an enemy. Farid and many thousands of young men like him "had no choice" about joining the government army, Shairzay said, and she thinks about them the same way she thinks about Naim: they were all victims of the same tragedy. She and Najla have never met but she believes they are mourning for the same reason. "We lost our brothers because of the Russians." Najla agrees. No one in her family supported the Communist regime, she said, and Farid joined its army only because he was forced to. When I asked the same question I'd asked Shairzay, if she felt those two young men were each other's enemies, Najla gave the same answer. "Of course not," she said firmly. "No."

Many others told of similar horrors. Jawid Ahmad was just three years old but he remembers when his family's home in Herat was destroyed by Soviet artillery fire after the neighborhood was occupied by mujahideen fighters. His younger brother, still an infant, was killed; Jawid's grandmother lost an eye, and one of his aunts was also wounded. Jawid, who told his story in intervals between attending to customers at his little kebab restaurant on Central Avenue in Albany, New York, also remembers walking for hours, without shoes, when the family fled to Iran a few months later. Also in Herat, Fariba Nawa was nine when a mujahideen rocket slammed into her school, called Lycee Mehri. They targeted the school because, the mujahideen claimed, the girls were being taught Communist propaganda there. Though classes were in session, Fariba and her mother happened to be at their home, a few hundred yards away. At the sound of the blast they raced frantically to the school, where her older sister Faiza was in class. In her book *Opium Nation* Fariba described the scene at the gate to the school grounds: "an ambulance overflowed with injured students. The ground was deep red, and people were running in and out of the school grounds. I saw Maha -- a classmate I often played hide

²² The network was one of the resistance groups that received strong CIA support when it was fighting against the Soviet occupiers, but later joined with the Taliban and is now one of the leading insurgent groups opposing the U.S.-led military effort in Afghanistan.

and seek with -- carried out by a man in a white coat; her arm was missing and she was bleeding from one eye. I recognized Jaber -- the son of a teacher and the only boy in the school -- from his clothes; his head had been blown off."²³

Faiza was unhurt, but after the rocketing, Fariba's parents decided it was too dangerous to stay in Herat. Their son, the oldest child, had already left Afghanistan to avoid being drafted into the Communist-led government army. Two months after the attack on their daughters' school, the two girls and their parents slipped across the border to Iran and then made their way to Pakistan and eventually to the United States.

Shahla Arsala knows how her father died, so she doesn't live with quite the same void of uncertainty as Najla and Tahera Shairzay. But the family doesn't know where he was buried, so they have no grave to go to and mourn. A general in the Afghan army, Arsala's father remained in his post for a couple of months after the Soviet invasion, but then refused to continue serving under the occupation. He was arrested and imprisoned for a year, then executed along with seven other high-ranking prisoners. After the execution, the authorities notified the family and summoned Arsala's oldest brother to come to the prison and retrieve his Koran and other belongings. But they did not release the body or even let family members view it, and would not tell them where he had been buried. "Till now we don't know," she told me sadly.

Twice, in 2002 and 2003, Arsala traveled back to Afghanistan from California, where she arrived as a refugee in 1980 and now works with a social service agency that assists newer refugees. On both trips, while also helping carry out humanitarian aid projects, she tracked down documents and surviving friends and associates of her father, gathering material for a book on his life. She also searched for information that might help her find her father's grave, but got no answers. But she still has hope, rekindled by news that in 2008, the Afghan government had found and identified the remains of the assassinated President Mohammed Daoud Khan and more than a dozen relatives who had been secretly buried with him during the Communist coup more than 30 years before. If that could happen, Arsala reasons, possibly her mystery will be solved someday too.

Moments of hope during the decades of conflict were few and fleeting. A woman I'll call Afsana (a pseudonym, at her request) remembered one brief interval of optimism in her Kabul neighborhood after Afghanistan's Communist government collapsed in 1992, when she was 18. "We were all very happy that the mujahideen were coming," Afsana said. But, she went on, "When they came, the rockets started." Rather than peace and national restoration, the mujahideen victory brought an even worse nightmare of violence. In Kabul, fighting between different factions broke out almost immediately and continued for four terrible years, killing tens of thousands of civilians and turning large areas of the city into lakes of blackened rubble. Early in the fighting, a stray rocket destroyed Afsana's father's small clothing shop, a half-hour's walk from the family's comfortable two-story home. By luck, her father was not in the shop when it was hit. Neither was her brother, who often worked there. But her father's hired helper was at work and was killed. When they found him, Afsana said, his body was cut in half. A few months after that, heavier fighting broke out in the neighborhood where they lived. For four days, until the factions declared a ceasefire, she and her family stayed in the

²³ Fariba Nawa, *Opium Nation*, Harper Collins, New York: 2011, p. 14-15

basement of their home. During lulls in the gunfire, her mother would go upstairs and cook a meal and bring it back down to the basement for the family to eat.

After that battle, they fled to another neighborhood and rented a house there. But after only six months in their new home, a neighbor came one day when Afsana was home alone and warned her that fighters from another mujahideen faction were coming to kill Hazaras, her family's ethnic group (although Afsana says they had no connection at all with any military or political group). In a panic, she packed a plastic bag with a spare set of clothes for her mother and herself, grabbed the portable radio/tape recorder her father liked to use to listen to the news and play music, and bolted with her packages into the street, which was already jammed with fleeing people. As she ran, her headscarf blew away. Rockets began falling. One landed a few dozen yards in front of her, where a street vender -- a familiar figure in the neighborhood -- was standing with his children around him next to his cart. Running toward him, Afsana saw the explosion and then the shredded bodies of the vender and his children, who were blown to pieces by the blast. There was nothing she could do but keep running past the bodies.

And then there's Murtaza Pardais's story. The casualty list in his extended family, spanning different sides and all the chapters of Afghanistan's wars, reads like a kind of capsule chronicle of more than 20 years of bloodshed. Among the numerous sons of his father's four wives, one died in the fighting that took place after the 1978 Communist coup. During the Soviet occupation, two more of Pardais's half-brothers were killed by mujahideen fighters while serving in the Soviet-backed government army. Then his father died in the civil war between mujahideen factions that devastated Kabul after the last Communist government collapsed. That was also the time when one of the mujahideen armies burned down Kabul university, including its art faculty, where Murtaza Pardais was a young but prolific and already distinguished teacher. Pardais's home, which was on the university grounds, was also destroyed, along with several hundred of his paintings. He was able to rescue several hundred others, mostly smaller works. After selling some of them to raise money for his escape, he hid the rest in piles of blankets and pillowcases and loaded them and his family onto a rented truck for the dangerous trip to Pakistan, where they would live for the next seven years before relocating to the United States.

In October 2001, one more of Pardais's half-brothers died during the U.S. invasion following the 9/11 terror attacks. He had been living in Peshawar, Pakistan, but when the invasion began, he went back to the Afghan city of Jalalabad to find one of his daughters who was living there and bring her to safety. Instead, during the journey, he was killed, apparently in an American bombing attack.

Memories of his country's and his family's long arc of violence run like a discordant musical theme through Pardais's paintings and sculptures, hundreds of which, representing a wide range of subjects and artistic styles, are stacked floor to ceiling in the garage next to his modest home in a suburb of Rochester, New York. In one piece that directly commemorates the first of his half-brothers to die, sleeves from a shirt the dead man had worn are draped around the forearms in a sculpted image of two clasped, bloodstained hands with a padlocked chain circling the wrists. Another work, a painting, shows five missiles, marked with the numbers 1 through 5, slanting downward from a dark sky. Below them are luminous images of historic Afghan sites, one of them recognizable as a famous 15th-century tomb in the city of Balkh, and another as the arched gate that has stood for a thousand years outside the city of Lashkar Gah in

southern Afghanistan. There are also crosses, symbolizing Christianity, and an image of the great pre-Islamic Bamiyan Buddha statue that stood until it was blown up by the Taliban in 2001. He put those in the painting, Pardais says, to show that before the rockets started falling, different religions coexisted peacefully in Afghanistan. Filling the lower left quadrant of the canvas is a frightened child's face, streaked with blood and seen in profile with her mouth open in a terrified scream, reminding me a little bit of the faces in Picasso's "Guernica." Behind the figures, disembodied eyes look out through what look like splotches of red and orange flame. Pardais put himself in the painting too, though I didn't notice that until he mentioned it in a much later conversation; next to the frightened girl's eye, and between the streaks of blood running down the side of her head, there is a faint outline of the artist's face and below it, his palette.

When he showed me the painting, Pardais explained the numbering of the missiles, which represent all the outside countries that have been involved in Afghanistan's spiral of conflict. No. 1 was from Russia, no. 2 from the United States, no. 3 from Pakistan, and no. 4 from Iran. Missile no. 5, he said, was from the Arab world, the region that sent al-Qaeda and its violent religious extremism to Afghanistan. That conversation took place before I learned any of the details of his father's and half-brothers' deaths. But later I thought that as well as a general view of recent Afghan history, that painting could express the history of this particular family history, too, which had suffered so much violent death at the hands of not one but several different sides in the conflict. (A similar theme is in another painting that shows a grieving mother sitting in front of framed photos of two sons, one with a neatly trimmed mustache and dressed in military uniform, and the other with a full beard and wearing a pakol, the flat woolen beret-shaped hat that was typical headgear for mujahideen fighters.)

Not all of Pardais's work reflects violence or tragedy. There are peaceful images too -- portraits in the style of Persian miniatures, impressionistic landscapes, happy scenes of life in Afghan villages or quiet springtime streets in Rochester. His painting has helped him live with terrible memories, Pardais said; he thinks it's true of all artists that expressing pain in their art makes them feel better. But easing his own pain is not why he paints, he added quickly. He paints to show people the reality of what has happened to his people and his country.

Murtaza Pardais kept painting during his seven years as a refugee in Pakistan, at first selling his work at an open-air market in Islamabad but eventually showing in several major galleries. Since coming to the United States, where he lived briefly in Chicago and Cleveland and then settled in Rochester, he has continued making art, showing at several important arts festivals. When I met him, he was in the last stages of publishing a kind of visual autobiography,²⁴ reproducing several hundred of his paintings with an accompanying text by his son Shansab. He showed me an advance copy, and as he leafed through the pages to show me particular images, I realized that in keeping his profession, Pardais had kept being who he was. His identity was still artist, not refugee. With all the things he had lost -- his brothers, his home, his teaching -- he had not lost himself. In that, despite all the tragedy in his life, he seemed more fortunate than many other Afghan refugees. Fariba Nawa's father, for example....

²⁴ Murtaza Pardais and Shansab Pardais, *A Diary on Canvas*, Xlibris Corp.: 2012. It is available for purchase at <http://bookstore.xlibris.com/Products/SKU-0109624017/A-Diary-on-Canvas.aspx> or at other online bookselling sites.

Nawa is actually a pen name, though the family adopted it as their legal surname in the United States. It means tune or voice, Fariba explains in *Opium Nation*; another meaning is solution. Her father used it to sign his essays, written in beautiful Farsi calligraphy and not meant for publication but for self-expression and his own pleasure and to give enjoyment to the relatives and friends, many of them writers or scholars or poets, who read them. He went to work every day as an administrator for a state-owned fertilizer company but his real place in life, as his daughter puts it, was as a personality -- an irreverent intellectual; a warm, exuberant storyteller; and an entertaining host who loved far-ranging discussions about Afghan culture and history and a vast number of other subjects.

Fazul Haq Nawa was 52 when Fariba's school in Herat was rocketed and he decided his family had to leave Afghanistan. He had no illusion of finding a better life in another country, she writes, "but life wasn't about him anymore -- it was for his children." And he was right not to come with illusions. After the family arrived as refugees in Fremont, California, Fariba recalls, he was an active and attentive father to his two daughters, but otherwise his life became empty. Except for two years as an assistant at a refugee-aid agency, he did not work. The gregarious conversationalist "became homebound and reclusive. He no longer cared for parties or entertainment. The skills he had could not get him a job in the United States. His respected family and intellectual background, both so important in Afghanistan, did not matter any more." From time to time during his early years in Fremont, he was able to recapture snatches of his former life in gatherings with relatives and other refugees who shared his love of literature and knowledge. But those occasions faded away as families dispersed and he and his friends grew older, lonelier, and more depressed. "For my father's generation of Afghan men," Fariba sadly concluded, "America was not the land of opportunity but a place to die. Exile was the end."²⁵

I heard many similar stories. Mizgon Shahir Darby, who directs the mental health program for the Afghan Coalition in Fremont, sees that pattern of loss and depression every day at work -- and in her own family as well. When her mother was a young woman in Afghanistan, working as a secretary, "she was a very modern woman," Darby told me. "She went to work every day, she was actually one of the providers of the family." But that life, and the satisfactions and feeling of self-worth that came with it, disappeared when she came to the United States. She never learned English, and became isolated, chronically fearful, and "incredibly depressed." Those feelings have persisted. Even now, Darby said, "I can't have a normal conversation with my mother without her telling me about how sad or upset she is. So in turn I prepare myself. Every time I call my mom I know I'm going to be sadder and upset after I get off the phone with her."

Stories like those of Fariba Nawa's father and Mizgon Darby's mother and many many others reflect a common experience in immigrants' lives: a loss of status and loss of identity that can be more deeply painful than any material loss. It's an aspect of the immigrant experience that Americans often don't recognize. When we see an immigrant

²⁵ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, p. 69-73. See also "An Exile Finds Home," Nawa's moving videotaped talk about her father at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAgwg2TPQM4&feature=youtu.be>

taxi driver or a hotel maid, it seldom enters our minds that we might be looking at a scientist or a nurse or a teacher or a skilled craftsman -- though with immigrants, that is not at all an uncommon case. When Americans experience that loss of status in their own lives, it can be a shock. I once heard a highly trained nurse describe what happened when she was finally evacuated after voluntarily staying in her hospital in New Orleans through the worst days of Hurricane Katrina. When she and her colleagues became evacuees, her knowledge and skills and professional qualifications and dedication became invisible -- making her feel invisible too. "We were no longer citizens of the United States. We were refugees. We were herded like cattle, we had to go through checkpoints, we had to be frisked. We had to stand outside of porta-potties to guard the doors for each other. It didn't matter that we were people who worked in the hospital. We were combined with the people from the housing projects. We were all put together. So Katrina really was the great equalizer. It didn't matter that I came from an affluent African American community here in New Orleans; it didn't matter that I worked at the hospital. We were given a ration of food, we were all equal." She may or may not have realized it, but that perfectly describes the experience of many, many immigrants -- except that the New Orleans nurse could expect with some confidence to resume her professional life and identity after the crisis, while many immigrants will never have that chance.

Loss of status and identity is not only an issue in people's working lives. It arises in their family lives as well. Parents' authority as guides and caretakers is upended when their children have to help them navigate American life. When children translate for their parents at doctors' appointments or in meetings with teachers, fill out forms for them, or drive them to places they could not find by themselves, it leaves parents feeling inadequate and not infrequently angry and resentful -- angering the children in turn at their parents' ingratitude. Family conflict also arises when wives or daughters depart from traditionally restricted women's roles. A wife working outside the home, for example, can be threatening for a husband whose culture taught him that supporting the family is the man's responsibility.

Losing the breadwinner's role is another loss of status and self-respect, and can become part of what psychologist Nahid Aziz calls "complex traumas" in Afghan American families. Aziz, who became a refugee herself at the age of 15, teaches and practices in the Washington, D.C. area and has written widely about mental health issues among immigrant and refugee women and also about women in Afghanistan. Many men feel they have lost their pride when their wives go to work or become too independent, Aziz said, and become angry, depressed, and "highly traumatized," while women may be traumatized in turn by physical abuse from their husbands. (Not a few Afghan women brought the trauma of domestic violence with them from Afghanistan as well. One young woman told me that she has never learned her grandfather's name -- her grandmother won't say it, because of the violence she had experienced at his hands. "Every time I'd ask her his name, she would say 'the man who sits and eats.' Till this day I don't know my grandfather's name. He's the man who sits and eats.")

Inevitably, the experience of Afghan refugees has led to high rates of physical and emotional problems. A study of refugees in California reported that nearly half of the study sample -- 31 percent of the men and a startling 58 percent of the women -- met the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, although only a small fraction had

been diagnosed or treated for it.²⁶ Another report from the Washington-based Cultural Orientation Resource Center noted that "many Afghans suffer physical symptoms of stress caused by culture conflict, family role change, isolation, financial and job problems, and loss of family, property, privacy, and social status. Common symptoms include back pain, other body aches, asthma or breathing problems, headaches, and stomach problems. An increase in mental problems among the educated elite is associated with a severe drop in social status." For men, it continued, "the sense that they have lost control over their lives and over their wives and children is a source of great stress. Alcohol abuse is not uncommon. Domestic abuse has been an issue all along, but until recently it was not acknowledged." Also unacknowledged is a need for mental health treatment: "Although it is agreed that mental health is a problem in the community, families seek psychiatric care only as a last resort, as the need for mental health care is often considered shameful."²⁷

The burden of traumatic memories is especially heavy in the more recent wave of Afghan refugees in the United States. By comparison with the earlier arrivals, the newer refugees lived through many more years of conflict in their homeland and spent more time in demoralizing conditions in camps in Pakistan. Beyond that, changes in U.S. refugee policy meant that many were admitted precisely because they had suffered particular forms of terror or abuse. Instead of the broad, Cold War-inspired guidelines that gave refugee status almost automatically to Afghans fleeing the Soviet occupation, U.S. refugee policy in the post-Soviet era set narrower criteria. The new guidelines gave preference to two groups: those persecuted because of ethnic identity or for political reasons, and a category called Women at Risk that included widows with young children, victims of sexual abuse or domestic violence, and other women in dangerous or damaging circumstances.

By definition these were people who had gone through particularly harrowing experiences. As the Cultural Orientation Resource Center report noted about the women-at-risk category, "they have experienced physical and sexual abuse, the persecution and loss of family members, detention, forced marriage, harassment, destruction or loss of property, and landmine injuries." In a very large number of cases, the emotional consequences of those events are made worse because, for reasons of fear or social or family pressure, they are wrapped in silence. Victims of sexual abuse, in particular, do not speak about their experiences. One doctor, herself a refugee, recalled that during the five years she worked in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, not a single one of her female patients ever reported a sexual assault, despite ample anecdotal evidence that rapes occurred in the camp.²⁸ Victims of domestic violence are similarly silenced.

Violent abuse and physical danger and destruction were not the only seeds of emotional wounds. A sense of having no future, no chance for self-realization, also led to

²⁶ Carl Stempel, "Health and Mental Health Needs of First Generation Afghans in Alameda County," Photocopy, N.D

²⁷ Barbara Robson and Juliene Lipson with Farid Younos and Mariam Mehdi, "Afghans in the United States," in "The Afghans: Their History and Culture," Cultural Orientation Resource Center, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington D.C.: 2002; <http://www.cal.org/co/afghan/aintro.html>

²⁸ Nooria Mehraby, "Counselling Afghanistan Torture and Trauma Survivors," *Psychotherapy in Australia*, Vol 8, No. 3, May 2002

demoralization and depression. This may have been most visible among women and girls who lived under the suffocating restrictions of the Taliban era. "Life basically stopped for women" under the Taliban, said Esmael Darman, one of Afghanistan's small community of clinical psychologists. "Most of them got depressed" -- like his older sister, "an A student, a very bright student" who was homebound for six years after girls' schools were closed. For her, Darman said, losing the chance to learn was like "seeing your dreams evaporating before your eyes."

Though strict Taliban policies fell most heavily on women, the regime's rigid ideology and practices constricted men's futures too, especially if they belonged to ethnic minorities. In Afsana's family, it was her brother who lost his dreams. Despite coming from a largely uneducated family (their mother had some ability to read and write, but their father was illiterate, and so was Afsana, who never went to school) and despite the years of violent chaos they had lived through, he had managed to get enough schooling to pass the entrance exam for medical college. But as he was walking away from a ceremony at his school, still wearing the flower garland he had been given to celebrate his success, a Taliban follower walked up to him, put a gun to his head, and roughly informed him that Hazaras had no right to study medicine. If he tried to go to classes there, the man told him, he would be killed. He never went.

As the first generation of Afghan refugees grows older, their emotional difficulties often grow worse. Those who were middle-aged when they arrived in the 1980s are now in their 60s or 70s or 80s, typically with less autonomy and even more dependent on their children than in earlier years. Even if they are economically secure, aging can mean loneliness and depression and weakened defenses against traumatic memories. To the extent that their children have established themselves as middle-class Americans, many have also become more dispersed in American society, and less tightly connected with the network of first-generation friends and relatives who once formed their parents' community. So, ironically, the more successful the second generation has been, the lonelier life may be for their aging parents.

As in most traditional cultures, old people in Afghanistan are respected, Tahera Shairzay points out, and are not cut off from friends as they often are in America. "They have people to take care of them, they can go everywhere. There is some dignity." In the United States, by contrast, the elderly "do not have that dignity and that pride.... They are all dependent on their children. They are lonely.... They cannot do anything by themselves, they are totally totally dependent. If they want to visit somebody their own age, one of the kids has to drive them there." In the American pattern of life, where both men and women of working age usually work outside the home, older people tend to be homebound by themselves, which would be rare in Afghanistan. "Everybody is stuck in their own house," Shairzay said. "The kids go to work, the grandchildren go to school, and these people are completely lonely."

Shairzay's own mother, now approaching her mid-80s, is a case in point. She spent most of her life in America in Worcester, Massachusetts, where one of Shairzay's brothers had settled after coming to the United States as an engineering student in the early 1970s. As her other children arrived, they came to Worcester too, so in their early years in the United States the family was together (except for Shairzay's father, who could not bear to leave Afghanistan without knowing what had happened to their missing

son). In Worcester, Shairzay's mother learned fairly good English, became an active volunteer, and moved around independently on local buses. But meanwhile the next generation scattered. When no one was left who could give her the care she needed as she grew older, Shairzay's mother had to leave her life and friends in Worcester and follow her children to other states. She first joined one of her sons in North Carolina and then, after her health deteriorated -- and with it her English -- moved to a nursing home in Missouri, where another son practices medicine. There are no other Afghans in the nursing home, Shairzay said, no one her mother can talk to or understand, no activities she can comfortably join, no food that she is used to, no prayer rug for her daily prayers. Sadness, an Afghan refugee once said, "is the sickness Afghans are faced with."²⁹ If so, like many other illnesses, it particularly afflicts the old.

If the first generation of Afghan refugees in America is haunted by memories, the second generation, in many families, is haunted by their parents' silence.

"I want the older generation to talk about their pain with their children and the children to talk about their pain with the older generation," said Mizgon Darby of the Afghan Coalition's mental health project. As she spoke, it was not hard to hear her own pain in her voice. When the parents don't speak, she went on, that silences their children too. "None of the younger generation dares say anything about how that makes them feel, that their parents are doing things that are as a result of their trauma.... you're not supposed to ask, how dare you ask and bring up that kind of pain."

The silence may reflect several things: an unwillingness to speak openly about being afraid or helpless, a culture that doesn't foster easy communication between parents and children, a wish to shield the children from painful knowledge. "The first generation is so private and secret they don't communicate this to the children, they don't communicate this to the second generation," Darby said. "There 's this excessive pride, this huge hubris, this thing they call *ghairat*" -- a Farsi word imported from Arabic, usually translated as honor, self-respect, dignity, with an implication that one must make any sacrifice to keep it and never give the slightest hint that it might have been lost. But along with concealing grief and shame, one can guess there is another reason for the silence: that memories are not articulated because there is no explanation for them, no way for people to make enough sense of their experiences to put them into words that can be understood by someone else. So when their pain is transmitted to their children, its incomprehensibility is too.

"A part of me had always hoped that the suffering of my father's generation would turn out to be for something great and good after all. I had hoped that one day those men and women would be able to return to a peaceful country of which they could be proud. But my hopes were in vain. Afghans had collectively failed to make sense of their suffering, and so it not only continued, it was also handed down to the next generation."

²⁹ quoted in Juliene G. Lipson and Patricia A. Omidian, "Health issues of Afghan refugees in California," *Western Journal of Medicine*, September 1992, p. 273

The American-born daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors once wrote about her inherited grief: "for years it lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was. I knew it carried slippery, combustible things... more dangerous than any shadow or ghost. Ghosts had shape and name. What lay inside my iron box had none."³⁰ Many children of Afghan refugees would recognize that feeling, though with this difference: with Afghanistan's catastrophe continuing, the outcome of Afghans' suffering remains unknown, so it's not just personal tragedies that remain unexplained and unresolved, but their historical meaning as well. After visiting her father's grave in Germany, where her family fled during the Soviet occupation, the author and essayist Nushin Arbabzadah wrote an essay for the American public television show *Frontline*, called "Making Sense of Suffering." In it, she wrote: "a part of me had always hoped that the suffering of my father's generation would turn out to be for something great and good after all. I had hoped that one day those men and women would be able to return to a peaceful country of which they could be proud. But my hopes were in vain. Afghans had collectively failed to make sense of their suffering, and so it not only continued, it was also handed down to the next generation who inherited their parents' unresolved conflicts."³¹

Like other survivors of violent, tragic events, some Afghan Americans are haunted and emotionally troubled by their personal and collective past. Others are numbed, locking away their memories in their own iron boxes. And still others somehow manage to emerge from sadness and trauma with a greater capacity for goodness and compassion. Mizgon Darby is one of those. Obaida Omar is another.

Omar was 6 when her family fled Afghanistan and her memories are fragmentary, but she vividly remembers a scene in the mountains between Jalalabad and the Pakistani border, where she and her mother and sister had to climb over piles of bodies lying on a stretch of ground that had just been struck by Soviet bombers. Her mother tried to cover her eyes so she couldn't see where she was walking, Omar said, but she saw the bodies, including several dead children. That memory, she went on, is what made her want to become a nurse, and spend her life helping people.

As it turned out, Omar was unable to finish nursing school, mainly because of the demands of caring for an autistic son. But she did not lose her desire to help others who need help. She works with refugee families as a volunteer for the Catholic Family Center in Rochester, New York; is studying for a degree in counseling, and dreams of someday doing humanitarian work in Afghanistan, perhaps to help people with disabilities, like her son.

Toward the end of our conversation, Omar mentioned that her 19-year-old daughter, Deena, plans to study medicine and become a scientist. Her ambition, Omar said, is "to invent something to cure autism." When she set that goal, I thought, Deena was exactly recreating her mother's path, transforming early experience with tragedy into a wish to make things better -- a sign that if trauma's pain and sadness can be inherited by

³⁰ Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979, p. 1

³¹ Nushin Arbabzadah, "Making Sense of Suffering," Nov. 1, 2011;

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/11/region-making-sense-of-suffering.html>

the next generation, perhaps the capacity for a more humane response can be inherited too.

* * *

V. A Clash of Civilizations?

"It really became impossible for me to even listen to the news or to read the news because of all the horrible things that were being said about Islam, about Muslims, all the generalizations, all the stereotyping, and all the distorted information," -- Mara Ahmed

"This whole anti-Shari'a hysteria. What does that have to do with 9/11?" -- Saqib Ali

From the first days after 9/11, U.S. national leaders consistently declared that the war on terror was *not* a war on Islam, and that Muslims were not America's enemy. Just six days after the attacks, President George W. Bush demonstratively went to the Islamic Center of Washington to deliver a seven-minute speech declaring that just as Americans were appalled and outraged, "so were Muslims all across the world," and that violent terror does not represent Muslim beliefs. To the contrary, Bush went on, "these acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith. And it's important for my fellow Americans to understand that." Through his administration and Barack Obama's, that view has remained a basic premise of stated American policy, international and domestic. But the years after 9/11 also saw continuing flareups of anti-Islamic rhetoric. Particularly after President Bush left office, the anti-Islamic message was taken up by a number of nationally prominent conservative politicians, including several contestants for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination.

Four years later, anti-Muslim attitudes reappeared in more inflammatory form. By then, the touchstone was no longer the 9/11 attack but the emergence of the violent Islamic State movement in the Middle East and the gruesome terror attacks it organized in Europe, and particularly the December, 2015, slaughter of 14 Americans in San Bernardino, California, by husband-and-wife shooters who were apparently inspired by the Islamic State, though not directly connected with it. (The husband was the American-born son of Pakistani immigrants; his wife was born in Pakistan but lived for much of her life in Saudi Arabia before coming to the United States to marry.)

In the aftermath of the San Bernardino shooting, Donald Trump, the leading Republican presidential candidate, proposed banning nearly all Muslims from entering

the United States. A number of Republican governors demanded that federal authorities stop resettling any Syrian refugees in their states, while several of Trump's rivals in the presidential campaign called for accepting only Christian refugees, not Muslims, from wars in the Middle East. A couple of months later, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, by then Trump's strongest competitor, announced a "national security team" of advisers that included prominent activists in the Islamophobia network. One name on Cruz's list was retired Lt. Gen. William "Jerry" Boykin, who holds that "Islam is not a religion and does not deserve First Amendment protections." Boykin, an active evangelical Christian, has called on Christians to "go on the offensive" to prevent Muslims in America from building any more mosques. He also once preached a sermon declaring that when Jesus returns, he will be carrying an AR-15 assault rifle. Another member of Cruz's team was Andrew C. McCarthy, a former federal prosecutor, who charges that President Obama shares "a common dream" with America's Islamist enemies. (In his 2014 book *Faithless Execution*, McCarthy included "an ill-conceived policy of appeasing Islamists" in a 60-page list of possible "articles of impeachment" against Obama.)³²

An early starting point in the new anti-Muslim phase was the somewhat manufactured controversy over a proposed mosque and Islamic community center a couple of blocks away from the site of the destroyed World Trade Center in New York. Some of the more lathered comments on the so-called "Ground Zero mosque" came from former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who likened the mosque's proponents to Nazis or Japanese aggressors in World War II. "The folks who want to build this mosque," he said in a television interview, "are really radical Islamists who want to triumphally prove that they can build a mosque right next to a place where 3,000 Americans were killed by radical Islamists.... Nazis don't have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust Museum in Washington," Gingrich went on. "We would never accept the Japanese putting up a site next to Pearl Harbor. There's no reason for us to accept a mosque next to the World Trade Center."

Gingrich was also an early and vociferous adherent in the campaign to ban the "infiltration" of Shari'a law into the U.S. justice system. In one speech, he called Shari'a "a mortal threat to the survival of freedom in the United States." He and other conservatives regularly made Shari'a a virtual synonym for violent terrorism, as when former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum declared that "Shari'a and its violent iteration jihadism" are the "new existential threat to America." In an earlier speech, Santorum lamented the growing Muslim population in Europe, which he warned is a model for what America will become if it loses the "long war" against its Muslim enemies: "Europe is on the way to losing. The most popular male name in Belgium -- Mohammad. It's the fifth most popular name in France among boys. They" -- that is, secular Europeans -- "are

³² For Boykin comments, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-7RqOwMAnM> and <http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/family-talk/custom-player/the-threat-of-islamic-terrorism-165155.html?displayFutureEpisode=True>. His sermon on Jesus's return can be heard at; <http://aattp.org/ex-army-general-claims-jesus-will-be-returning-to-earth-sporting-an-ar-15-audio/>; McCarthy's comments are from Andrew C. McCarthy, *The Grand Jihad: How Islam and the Left Sabotage America*, New York: Encounter Books, 2010, p. 17, and *Faithless Execution: Building the Political Case for Obama's Impeachment*, New York: Encounter Books, 2014, p. 151

losing because they are not having children, they have no faith, they have nothing to counteract it.... And they're creating an opportunity for the creation of Eurabia, or Euristan in the future." In the same speech Santorum linked the present-day conflict to a thousand years of warfare between Muslims and Christians. America's enemies today are Muslims who want to continue that battle. "They want to reconquer the world. They want to establish a new Kalifat," he told his audience. "...We are in a war, and theology is its basis. Just like we were in a war against Communism, and ideology was its basis."³³

Before the rise of the Islamic State, the New York mosque controversy and other anti-Islamic eruptions were often described as a backlash after the 9/11 attacks. But Saqib Ali, a Pakistani American software engineer who served in the Maryland House of Delegates for one term in 2006-2010, thinks they arose from an ugly turn in American politics, not the experience of 9/11 or the threat of terrorism.

"I think those things have settled down," Ali said about post-9/11 issues. "Now what it's about is being Muslim in a post-Obama world.... Because of Obama's election, there's a huge industry of racists and bigots who target him and slander him as being Muslim. My own personal opinion is there's a lot of racists and because you can't be openly racist in this country against African Americans, they say well, he's a Muslim and they use that as a proxy. In the past three or four years, there's been a huge rise in America of this nasty, anti-Muslim bigotry, this whole industry, and I think it has nothing to do with 9/11, and I think that defines the American Muslim experience more than 9/11." Rather than fear of terrorism, Ali said, the anti-Muslim movement plays on anti-immigrant sentiment and widespread unease about an increasingly multiracial and multicultural American society. An example is "this whole anti-Shari'a hysteria," he added. "What does that have to do with 9/11?"

The anti-Shari'a campaign, presenting a vision of Shari'a that would be unrecognizable to the great majority of American Muslims, was one of the odder anti-Islamic movements -- odd, in the first place, because the idea that Muslims could overturn the U.S. constitution, take over American courts and institute Shari'a law is so utterly implausible. As one commentator noted, even if Shari'a were as sinister as its opponents say it is, "the extreme Christian right in America has been trying for decades to inscribe its view of America as a 'Christian nation' into our laws. They have repeatedly failed in a country in which more than three-quarters of people identify as Christians. It's extremely unlikely that an extreme faction of American Muslims, a faith community that constitutes approximately 1 percent of the U.S. population, would have more success."³⁴ Yet much of the material generated by anti-Shari'a and anti-Islamist activists presents a Muslim takeover of America as a serious threat.

³³ Clips of Gingrich's interview on the New York mosque are posted on dozens of websites, among them <http://gawker.com/5614016/newt-gingrich-ground-zero-mosque-like-nazis-putting-sign-next-to-holocaust-museum>. His speech calling Shari'a a "mortal threat" can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-ZN1QzddRE>. For Santorum's comment on Shari'a see Adam Serwer, "Santorum Winning The Coveted Gaffney Primary," <http://prospect.org/article/santorum-winning-coveted-gaffney-primary>, April 29, 2011. The text of his "Eurabia" speech is at <http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/news/2472/speech-by-senator-rick-santorum>

³⁴ Wajahat Ali and Matthew Duss, *Understanding Sharia Law: Conservatives' Skewed Interpretation Needs Debunking*, briefing paper, Center for American Progress, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2011, p. 6

In a film called "The Third Jihad," for example, the principal narrator, a Syrian American doctor from Arizona named Zuhdi Jasser, proclaims that "the true agenda of much of the Muslim leadership here in America" is "a strategy to infiltrate and dominate America." To drive home the point, the film shows an image of the White House with a flag inscribed with Allah's name flying over it. Jasser goes on to ask, in deeply earnest tones, if his viewers have "ever stopped to think about what would happen if the Islamists won and their version of Shari'a law was put into place? All you need to do is look at countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, and places like the Gaza Strip."³⁵ Following that statement are images of a burned-out church in Indonesia, women in Iran being dragged away for not dressing modestly enough, men publicly beating women with clubs in Afghanistan, a Saudi sheikh advocating the execution of homosexuals, and other scenes of horrendous repression, with the clear suggestion that the same scenes could become reality in America if the Islamists' plans are carried out.

By any realistic standard, the vision of a Muslim flag flying over the White House and women being beaten in American streets for violating Muslim dress codes is a lunatic fantasy, not a real danger. But "The Third Jihad" was taken seriously enough to be shown over a period of months to nearly 1,500 New York City police officers, while the imaginary threat of Islamic law displacing American law led legislators in more than a dozen states to propose laws banning Shari'a in their states. The most extreme was a proposal in the Tennessee legislature that would have made following Shari'a a felony, which one sponsor declared would give state and local law enforcement officials "a powerful counterterrorism tool."³⁶ Like most of the anti-Shari'a statutes, the Tennessee bill was not written by lawmakers in that state, but by an outside activist -- in this case, an Arizona lawyer named David Yerushalmi who, in addition to being a leading voice in the anti-Shari'a crusade, has also written disparagingly about African Americans. If -- as was the case with many who jumped on the anti-Shari'a bandwagon -- the Tennessee legislators' understanding came entirely from Yerushalmi's and similar writings, they would not have known that Shari'a to most Muslims is principally a guide to proper religious practice, so that their bill would effectively (and unconstitutionally) prohibit Muslims from practicing their religion in Tennessee.

Explosive comments like Gingrich's and Santorum's and inflammatory statements emanating from the anti-Shari'a movement, the New York mosque debate and other public controversies drew plenty of criticism from both Muslim and non-Muslim organizations and individuals. Donald Trump's call for banning Muslims from visiting the country, and proposals from other 2016 candidates to impose a religious test on refugee resettlement, accepting Christian refugees but turning away Muslims, were widely criticized too. But Muslims were painfully aware that anti-Islamic views were being expressed in ways that would have unquestionably been out of bounds in American discourse if they had been aimed at any other minority. Activists such as Pamela Geller,

³⁵ Excerpts of the film can be seen at an Israeli website, <http://www.aish.com/jw/s/48969486.html>. Jasser is a Muslim, but as a strong critic of "political Islamism," a supporter of Israel and a vocal opponent of most of the organizations that usually speak for American Muslims, he has been associated in various ways with the anti-Shari'a network.

³⁶ "Tennessee bill would make following Shariah law a felony," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2011; also see Amy Sullivan, "The sharia myth sweeps America," *USA Today*, June 13, 2011

who touched off the mosque firestorm in New York, and former Defense Department official Frank Gaffney have regular access to mainstream platforms for their views. Gaffney, who once declared that President Obama's pledge to deal "with respect" with Muslim countries was "code" for the message "that we will submit to Shari'a,"³⁷ is a regular contributor to the *Washington Times*, the host of a Washington radio program and periodically a guest on national talk shows. (Gaffney was also one of Ted Cruz's team of national security advisers.) It is difficult to imagine that anyone expressing similar ideas in similar language about Jews or African Americans, say, would be given the same standing as legitimate, if not uncriticized, participants in the national debate.

It is even harder to imagine that the kind of anti-Islamic material that has been widely used in military and law enforcement anti-terror training programs would ever have been tolerated if it were directed at any other minority. Long after 9/11, the armed forces, the FBI, and the New York Police Department were all embarrassed by disclosures of anti-Islamic content, some of it quite rabid, in training programs. Despite stated policy at the top, a small army of self-declared expert instructors and training consultants regularly presents the Muslim world's most violent and repressive forces -- the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Saudi Arabian wahabism -- as representing the true character of all believing Muslims. A startling example was an elective course on "Perspectives on Islam and Islamic Radicalism" taught until the spring of 2011 at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, by an army lieutenant colonel named Matthew Dooley. In Dooley's presentations, Islam is described as a "barbaric ideology" and in another passage, as "an ideology and system of governance that demands the extermination of anyone who does not subscribe to each and every one of its tenants (*sic*)."

Other outlandish statements declare that "there is no such thing as 'moderate Islam,'" that "Islam has already declared war on the West, and the United States specifically," and that "destruction of Islamic capital cities and major Islamic 'holy sites'" would be justifiable acts in that war. (On that last point, Dooley's course materials explicitly suggest that "the historical precedents of Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki" would be "applicable to ... Mecca and Medina." This would be legitimate, he explains, because "due to the current common practices of Islamic terrorists," post-World War II international agreements on the conduct of war are "no longer relevant" and thus the United States and its allies would have "the option once again of taking war to a civilian population wherever necessary.") As that war is envisioned in Dooley's course documents, its long-term goal is that "Islam undergoes a fundamental transformation to something that it currently is not."³⁸

Briefings and training presentations for FBI agents and many thousands of local police officers may not have advocated obliterating Mecca and Medina with nuclear bombs or forcibly transforming the entire Muslim faith, but they carried exactly the same message about America's conflict: Islam and its teachings and its believers are the enemy. Among a trove of FBI training documents obtained by Wired.com's Danger Room blog in 2011, one declared that in Islamic doctrine, "War is a permanent condition against

³⁷ See <http://thinkprogress.org/security/2009/04/06/37356/gaffney-fan-cheney/>

³⁸ See

http://www.wired.com/images_blogs/dangerroom/2012/05/dooley_counter_jihad_op_design_v11.pdf

non-believers." Another contains a chart showing that while Christians and Jews have moved continuously toward more peaceful doctrines over the lifespans of their religions, "pious and devout" Muslims' commitment to violent beliefs has remained unchanged for the last 1,400 years.³⁹

The army, the FBI, and the New York police all repudiated such teachings after they were brought to public attention, but less whole-heartedly than many Muslims and other critics hoped. The NYPD apologized for showing "The Third Jihad," but only after a good deal of stonewalling. The FBI agreed to consult with representatives of a number of Muslim organizations on revising its training documents. But Irfan Malik, who was one of the group, said that in the meetings he attended, except for some manuals that had already become public, officials refused to show them either the original or revised versions of most of the material. Nor did the bureau respond to another concern he and others raised: that "thousands of agents have been trained with older material that now everyone realizes was flawed. so what about the retraining of those thousands of agents? None of that has happened." In the army's case, after a student complained about anti-Islamic content in his course, Colonel Dooley was relieved of his teaching assignment and issued a letter of reprimand, but remained on the staff of the Joint Forces Staff College.

A common thread in anti-Islamist arguments is the claim that Islam allows Muslims to lie for their religion, so Muslims who profess moderation or opposition to extremist violence cannot be trusted. The "stated purpose" of one of the FBI documents acquired by Danger Room is to "identify the elements of verbal deception in Islam and their impacts on Law Enforcement." ("Not 'terrorism,'" the author of the blog report commented. "Not even 'Islamist extremism.' *Islam*.") The same argument is standard fare in presentations to local law enforcement agencies by instructors who have managed, often with thin or no credentials, to get on the gravy train of federally funded anti-terror training.

A *Washington Monthly* magazine profile of one such trainer described a session he conducted for about 60 police officers in Florida, telling them things like "Islam is a highly violent radical religion that mandates that all of the earth must be Muslim" and "Anyone who says that Islam is a religion of peace is either ignorant or flat out lying." At one point the trainer, a man named Sam Kharoba, asked the class, "Would Islam be tolerated if everyone knew its true message?... From a Muslim perspective, do you want non-Muslims to know the truth about Islam?" As the magazine's reporters described it, the exchange continued this way: "'No!' came the audience reply. 'So what do Muslims do?' Kharoba demanded. 'Lie!'"⁴⁰

³⁹ Spencer Ackerman, "FBI Teaches Agents: 'Mainstream' Muslims Are 'Violent, Radical'" Danger Room, Sept. 14, 2011; <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/09/fbi-muslims-radical/>. "War is a permanent condition" appears in a presentation titled "Strategic themes and drivers in Islamic law," http://www.wired.com/images_blogs/dangerroom/2011/09/fbi_islamic_law.pdf; p. 14

⁴⁰ Meg Stalcup and Joshua Craze, "How We Train Our Cops to Fear Islam," *Washington Monthly*, March/April 2011. Like many others who have set themselves up as expert anti-terrorism instructors, the article pointed out, Kharoba had "no professional experience in law enforcement, no academic training in terrorism or national security, and is not himself a Muslim" (he is a Jordanian-born Christian who before going into business as a counter-terrorism trainer worked as a computer programmer). Kharoba and other trainers they interviewed "have a remarkably similar worldview," the authors wrote. "It is one of total,

As well as being self-serving for the promoters of the anti-Islamic agenda, since it discredits exactly the people who will criticize their message, the deception argument was a trap for all Muslims. If they didn't denounce religious extremism strongly enough, they were excoriated for tolerating the perpetrators of violent terror. But if they did, they were declared to be lying.

In fact, despite all the vilification directed at American Muslim organizations, not a single piece of credible evidence has ever supported the charge that they are secretly conspiring to establish Muslim dominance in the United States. Nothing in any domestic terrorism case has ever suggested such a motive, either. Faisal Shahzad, Najibullah Zazi, and other men like them dreamed of striking back at the United States for its actions in Iraq and Afghanistan and its support of Israel, not about turning America into an Islamic state and raising a Muslim flag over the White House. Neither Shahzad nor Zazi nor any other accused terrorist had any known connection with any mainstream Muslim American organization, and none of those groups has ever been connected to the commission or coverup of any terrorist act.⁴¹ To the contrary, there is a long list of Muslim religious and civic leaders who have helped authorities identify and protect against possible terrorist threats. One of many examples was the case of five young Muslim men, all U.S. citizens, who traveled to Pakistan in late 2009 with the apparent intention of joining a violent jihadi movement there. After the five disappeared from their homes in Fairfax County, Virginia, several of their parents informed leaders in the local mosque and then, together with mosque officials and representatives of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), contacted the FBI, showing agents a disturbing videotape one of the men had left behind. That contact led to the men's arrest in Pakistan, where they were eventually convicted and given 10-year prison sentences for planning terrorist attacks.⁴²

civilizational war -- a conflict against Islam that involves everyone, without distinction between combatant and noncombatant, law enforcement and military."

41 Anti-Islamist activists have made much of the fact that the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Muslim civil rights group, was named on a list of several hundred "unindicted co-conspirators" in a criminal case against the Holy Land Foundation, which was found guilty in 2008 for charitable activities in the West Bank and Gaza that were ruled to have constituted material support for the Palestinian organization Hamas. The facts are far from justifying any suggestion of a link between CAIR and any terrorist act, however. CAIR's name arose in the case because of a much earlier association of its founder, Omar Ahmad, with the U.S. Palestine Committee, an umbrella group for the Holy Land Foundation and other organizations. Ahmad's activities took place in the early 1990s before Hamas was designated as a terrorist group, and nothing in the material prosecutors presented in the foundation's trial linked him or CAIR to any criminal act. In 2010 an appeals court ruled that the government should not have released the co-conspirator list, which it noted was "unaccompanied by any facts" indicating a possible terrorist connection. The court ordered the list sealed, but did not grant CAIR's request to be removed from it. See Case 3:04-cr-00240-P, United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, Dallas Division, "USA v Holy Land Foundation," http://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/F_D_2011_usa-v-hlf-order-07012009.pdf?V=1

42 Jerry Markon, "Pakistan arrests 5 N.Va. men, probes possible jihadist ties," *Washington Post*, Dec. 10, 2009 ; Jerry Markon, Karin Brulliard and Mohammed Rizwan, "Pakistan charges 5 Northern Virginia men in alleged terrorism plot," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2010; Shaiq Hussain and Brigid Schulte, "5 N.Va. men convicted on terrorism charges in Pakistan, given 10 years in prison," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2010

Available evidence doesn't bear out claims that the majority of Muslims in the United States are religious fanatics and alienated from American or pluralistic values, either. An extensive survey by the Pew Research Center in 2011 shows an American Muslim community bearing no resemblance to the scary vision propagated by the anti-Islamists. While Muslim Americans are overwhelmingly strong believers in their faith, the Pew study found, almost two-thirds of them "see no conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society," and more than half believe that many different religions, and not just theirs, can lead to eternal life. (Those results, the Pew researchers noted, are strikingly close to the responses to the same questions from Americans who identify themselves as Christians.)

Despite believing that Muslims face significant discrimination, only 16 percent of Pew's respondents felt that ordinary Americans are unfriendly to Muslims, while a large majority agreed that the quality of life for Muslims in the United States is better than in most Muslim countries. On both those questions, incidentally, Pakistani Americans responded more positively than those from the sample as a whole. One can guess that that reflects the larger number of Pakistanis who have reached upper-middle-class status and affluence and, not surprisingly, feel more at home and secure in American life.⁴³ The Pew survey also showed that on social and gender issues such as women working outside the home -- approved by 90 percent of its respondents -- and even acceptance of homosexuality, American Muslims' attitudes are much closer to those of the American public in general than they are to those in Muslim societies.

Even for those comfortably situated in the American mainstream, though, the post-9/11 climate could be painful. "It really became impossible for me to even listen to the news or to read the news because of all the horrible things that were being said about Islam, about Muslims, all the generalizations, all the stereotyping, and all the distorted information," said Mara Ahmed, a Pakistani American financial analyst turned artist who now lives in Rochester, New York.

Of all the stories I heard about 9/11 in interviews for this report, Ahmed's was the only one relating the experience essentially as it is remembered by the American majority, rather than a Muslim minority (although curiously, she is also the only person I spoke to who is not entirely certain she believes the official story about who was responsible for the attack). At the time, she and her husband lived in Hackensack, New Jersey. Her husband, a doctor, worked in Brooklyn Heights, just across the East River from New York's financial district and barely two miles from the World Trade Center. He was in his office on September 11, and like many thousands of New York area residents with family members working downtown, Ahmed spent agonizing hours dialing her husband's cell phone but could not reach him. When he finally managed to phone her from his office, she recalled, "he said there was debris even outside his office, smoke everywhere, there was debris. He told me they had sealed all of New York City basically, all the tunnels, all the bridges shut down. So I told him to stay at his boss's office, don't even think about coming back, but he said 'no, I really don't know what is going happen tomorrow, I feel this is a very uncertain time, and I want to be with you and kids.'... He

⁴³ "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism." Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, Aug. 30, 2011. The full report can be seen at <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/Muslim-American-Report.pdf>

rented a car and I think he drove all the way around through upstate New York. He got home at two or three in the morning."

If Ahmed experienced that day as a New Yorker rather than a Muslim or Pakistani, the post-9/11 climate pushed her into a new identity with a new label: a "moderate" Muslim. She didn't like that label, which she felt leaves all Muslims under suspicion unless they can prove they are not radical fanatics. And she was frustrated that the picture of Muslims she was getting from American news reports and political debate and popular entertainment bore so little resemblance to the Muslims she knew. That thought gave Ahmed the title for her first documentary film, "The Muslims I Know."⁴⁴ The title is literal in that much of the film portrays her own community of Pakistani American professionals in Rochester.

Ahmed, who is the documentary's narrator as well as its director, made the film to show post-9/11 Americans a different picture of Muslims in their country -- a message that being Muslim does not make them America's enemies, or a threat to American principles and values. Instead, she and the Muslims she shows in the film chose to be Americans and identify with American ideas. And that means that it is false to speak of a conflict between irreconcilable American and Islamic civilizations. "For me," she says in the closing lines of her narration, "there can be no clash of civilizations, for that split would be within myself."

* * *

⁴⁴ © Neelum Films, 2008. An excerpt is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAyTpFMT1Fg>; DVDs are available for purchase at http://neelumfilms.com/buy_page.html

VI. Who Am I?

"I am 100 percent Pakistani, 100 percent American. That's not something I just say. I really feel it." -- Shahan Mufti

"I will always be a stranger, without a home, no matter where I am" -- Sabrina Shairzay

"I feel like we're forced to be individuals, forced to think more. You have to think about who you are. You have to. You're confronted with an identity crisis whether you like it or not and that's a good thing in some ways because you're thinking about who you are, it's not just given to you. You make up who you are.... And that is my identity. It's being able to adapt." -- Fariba Nawa

One of Murtaza Pardais's paintings shows the face of a teen-aged girl. The left side of her head is covered in a flowing scarf that drops down over a blue high-necked garment covering that side of her neck and shoulder. The other half of her head is uncovered, showing a punk-style hairdo. On that side of her face she is wearing a lip-ring and a stud in her nose. Her right shoulder is bare except for a spaghetti strap and what might be tattoos. The painting is titled "Yesterday/Today?", with a caption under the title saying: "Afghan Girl Between Two Cultures." When I saw it, I asked Pardais's 22-year-old daughter Sadiqa if she ever felt like the girl in the painting. She nodded. "Yes," she said slowly, "I do feel like that." For his part, Pardais didn't mean his painting to take

sides between the two cultures. American and Afghan and all other cultures have good and bad aspects, he said, and people should "try to embrace the good and leave the bad."

The feeling of being divided between two worlds is not unique to Afghan Americans or to the present moment in our history. The image in the painting reflects the immigrant experience from far back in America's past, as wave after wave of newcomers and their children from all parts of the globe looked for ways to fit into their new country and become American. In that sense, Afghan and Pakistani Americans are making the same journey as many others, past and present -- sometimes, indeed, facing exactly the same cultural issues. Journalist Fariba Nawa recalls a youth conference she once attended where a Vietnamese American girl told the group: "When my teacher in school talks to me, I have to look her in the eye, it's disrespectful to cast my eyes down. But when I go home and I look my father in the eye, he slaps me, he says, 'how dare you look me in the eye!'" That felt "so true," Nawa said, because it sounded just like generational conflicts she has seen in Afghan families. "It's very similar in our community."

But as successive groups wrote their chapters in the long history of immigrants in America, each one had its own story, too. The experience of Pakistani and Afghan Americans has been shaped by its intersection with particular issues and circumstances, including 9/11, America's war on terror, and religious differences that have become more sharply politicized than ever before in modern American history. And, while Afghans and Pakistanis in the United States wrestle with who they and their children will be in their adopted country, they are doing so against a background of crisis and unremitting bad news from their homelands as well -- meaning, among other things, that their American world has almost no positive images or impressions of their Pakistani or Afghan worlds. That leads to feelings like the one Wajahat Ali remembers, when the news came that a U.S. Navy Seal team had tracked down and killed Osama bin Laden. Ali was at a fund-raising dinner for a Muslim attorneys group when he got a Twitter feed that Osama had been found. Before additional details came in, he recalled, he and the other Pakistani American lawyers at the table "were just praying, *please* let him be found in Syria, let him be found in Iraq, let him not be found in Pakistan. And then when he's found in Pakistan, *crap, crap!* he's found in Pakistan."

When he was growing up in California in the pre-9/11 era, Ali said, Americans did not differentiate Pakistan from the rest of South Asia. The usual jeer when other kids teased him was to call him "Gandhi" -- an Indian, a Hindu, and even if delivered as a childish taunt, the name of a much-admired, positive figure. That all changed after 9/11. Now, while many Americans may still not be very clear where Pakistan is on the map, they are very aware that it exists and that it is a Muslim country. Rather than confusing it with India, the post-9/11 American public associates Pakistan with a general and often demonized image of a Muslim world that is antagonistic to the United States and Western civilization. Inevitably, "that colors the American Pakistani experience," Ali said. Pakistani Americans and other American Muslims are constantly asked about "creeping Shari'a and stealth jihad and do you practice *taqqiya* (deception) and this and that, and Pakistan has been kinda lumped in as the haven of the enemy, or as *the* enemy," with the consequence that "you are indicted and convicted in the court of public opinion for the criminal misdeeds of a few. You are perpetually asked to explain, define, apologize for not only American Muslims but 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide and 1,400 years of Muslim civilization."

For Afghan and Pakistani Americans trying to find where they belong in American society, there is not just one divide to be bridged, but many. There is the racial and religious divide between them and the majority population. Within the community, there is the divide between generations and the divide between men's and women's experiences. There is also the divide that reaches them from their homelands, where national and cultural identities are also in flux. The first wave of Pakistani immigrants to the United States and the earlier Afghan refugees came predominantly from a modernized, cosmopolitan elite class with quite liberal attitudes on religious practice and traditional social customs. In Afghanistan, those attitudes were officially promoted in the 1960s and early 1970s by the reformist King Zahir Shah, who sought to remake his country into a modern nation where, among other changes, women would have full political rights and take off their veils.

That way of life survives now only in exiles' memories and in old family photographs and black-and-white scenes captured by home movie cameras, showing social gatherings where men in European suits mingle with women wearing short western-style dresses and beehive hairdos, without a beard or a headscarf in sight. The Kabul in those pictures is now utterly, entirely gone. Most Americans, whose consciousness of Afghanistan begins only with the post-9/11 U.S. military intervention, have no idea that it ever existed. For Afghans who remember inhabiting that world, like Tahera Shairzay, the memories are glowing. "We were all free. Women had big positions in the government, they were senators, they were representatives, they were ministers, they were doctors. When I grew up, I never wore a veil in my whole life."

(It is also worth remembering, though, that the liberal world Shairzay recalls was short-lived, lasting only a few decades, and was itself part of a "cultural schism," as the Afghan American writer Tamim Ansary calls it, that became one of the roots of the national catastrophe. Indeed, though I did not think of it the first time I saw Murtaza Pardais's painting, he could just as aptly have painted the same split portrait showing an Afghan woman of his own generation and class with a burqa covering half her head and an uncovered western style hairdo on the other half. He could even have used the same title, though here it would have been ambiguous which half of the image represents yesterday and which represents today.)

In Pakistan, the changes have been less extreme. The world of the educated elite from which many Pakistani Americans came has not been completely destroyed, as in Afghanistan. But its liberal values and its place in Pakistani society have come under steadily growing pressure, as the country's explosive social and religious tensions have increased and its political life has deteriorated. In both countries, the cultural climate and way of life are profoundly different from what they were just a few decades ago -- leaving many Pakistani and Afghan Americans uncertain not just about what it means to be American, but what it means to be Afghan or Pakistani as well.

In different ways, that creates complicated feelings for both the immigrant generation and their children. When Maryam Masumi's parents returned to Afghanistan for the first time in 2007, it was "very emotional for them," Masumi said -- especially for her father, who came to the United States as a student in the 1970s, when the country was still at peace. The contrast between the prewar Afghanistan he remembered and the one he saw on his return three decades later "was very devastating for him," Masumi said. It was not just the physical landscape that had changed; Afghans were no longer the same

people he thought he belonged to. "People had been such victims of war that their own demeanor has changed, their personality has changed," her father found. The Afghans in his memories were "very hospitable and friendly, but now they're just very bitter and cold, because they're trying to survive....It was very disturbing for him."

Masumi was born in the United States and has never been to Afghanistan, but the feeling of a lost world is part of her life, too. Her father's sadness for his homeland makes her sad also, she said, "because I don't know if I'll ever be able to see it the way my parents saw it. I'd like to be able to but I just don't know if that opportunity will come in my lifetime."

When Maryam Masumi tells of her own experience of growing up in two worlds, her story makes that phrase sound almost more literal than metaphorical. Her parents took pains to teach their two American-born daughters to speak Farsi, and sent them to a mosque in their northern Virginia community for Sunday religion classes, which the girls attended from early childhood into their teens -- altogether eight or nine years, Masumi thinks. At the same time, however, they put her and her younger sister in a Christian school for their elementary school years. The primary reason was that they believed the education there would be better than in local public schools, Masumi said. But they also thought it could help their children navigate more comfortably in the American world of different beliefs and cultures. "They felt it was important for me to get a balance... to learn about other religions, to make myself more aware of what else was out there and be more tolerant of what else was out there."

Masumi and her sister were, as far as she knows, the only non-Christians in the school. But through some combination of the school climate, her parents' attitudes, and family and personal chemistry, that was never difficult or uncomfortable. She remembers almost no disturbing moments in school, no feeling that anyone was trying to draw her away from her family's Muslim faith, and no troubling doubts about who she was. "I would go to school Monday through Friday, the Christian school, and every Sunday I'd be at the mosque" learning about Islam, without any confusion about which religion was hers. At home, her parents made it clear that the values they were teaching her were Muslim values, but with no suggestion that they conflicted with what she was learning at school.

"As a kid I was never confused," she said. "I don't know why, if it was because they raised me the way they raised me, but I never felt confused... I never said oh, why am I not Christian, why am I not Jewish, why am I not Catholic." Nor did she feel any conflict in participating in Christian religious observance during the school day. "It never bothered me" to join in prayers or Christian religious services, she said, "and my parents were never bothered by it either, at least I don't ever recall their expressing that to me." Instead, they came to student performances and praised their daughters for learning things like the Ten Commandments and the story of Jesus.

"Muslims are forced to wear different masks... a mask in front of their family, a mask in front of their mosque, a mask in front of their culture group, a mask in front of their white group, a mask in front of

their workers. And it becomes very exhausting for many Muslims to navigate this.... in some cases they're reasonably comfortable with that, it's a way of managing. And in some cases they are really haunted, they feel they can't be open and honest about who they are and what they are."

-- Wajahat Ali

The arc of Masumi's sense of her Afghan identity was the same as that of many Afghan and Pakistani Americans in her generation who grew up, as she did, in families that were well established in middle-class American life. In early childhood she didn't realize she was not like everyone else. When she became aware, at 9 or 10, for a time she "felt a bit weird" when she had to tell anyone that she was Afghan and Muslim. That changed in her middle school and high school years, when "it almost became cool to have your own culture and have a different religion." But it was in college, where she became active in the Afghan student organization and much of her social life revolved around the Afghan student community, that being Afghan became truly important. "I think when you're younger you want to assimilate with other kids and be like other kids," she said, "but the older you get, you become more proud of who you are."

In her own family, Masumi experienced relatively little conflict over cultural issues such as socializing between boys and girls. Her parents were quite open-minded on those matters -- particularly her mother, who came to the United States while still in her early teens and had her own memories of the tension between Afghan custom and American teenage life. Masumi's father was "a little bit strict" about her dress, but unlike girls growing up in stricter homes, she went to her high school prom and was free to attend mixed parties. In other Muslim families with different attitudes and personalities, those sorts of issues can be much more painful. For the younger generation, they often mean leading a kind of double life, assuming one personality at home, and another outside. "A schizophrenic identity," Wajahat Ali calls it, "where Muslims are forced to wear different masks... a mask in front of their family, a mask in front of their mosque, a mask in front of their culture group, a mask in front of their white group, a mask in front of their workers. And it becomes very exhausting for many Muslims to navigate this."

When young people develop such divided identities, Ali said, "in some cases they're reasonably comfortable with that, it's a way of managing. And in some cases they are really haunted, they feel they can't be open and honest about who they are and what they are." Or there can be an even more haunting question: not what they can tell others, but how to figure out for themselves who they are, and which of their different selves is real. In Helena Zeweri's master's thesis on "Defining Afghanness," she quotes one young man who told her that growing up in America, he was "always being told by my family that, like, we belong here, we are part of this place" but at the same time not really part of America "'cuz we have to be a certain way -- 'You can't do that 'cuz you're Afghan'.... It's not our way.'... There's this constant, like, you know, 'You don't belong in America,'...

yet I can't go to this other place [Afghanistan]...it's this bizarre experience -- like, okay, what kind of person am I then?"⁴⁵

What kind of person am I then? Answers to that question cover a very wide range. "I think of myself as American," said 37-year-old Saqib Ali, the software engineer and former Maryland state legislator. As the American-born son of immigrants from Pakistan, Ali calls himself a Pakistani American. But rather than identifying primarily with his parents' homeland, he thinks of that identity as making him part of a much broader American experience, as one more of the millions and millions of Americans who are descended from immigrants of this or past generations and whose faces, over time, have become or are becoming part of the American group portrait.

"My family are newer immigrants than people who came over on Ellis Island, but it's the American story. Everywhere I go in America there are other people like me. I live near a Nigerian person, a Korean person, a Turkish person. We're all Americans -- that's the beauty of America."

-- Saqib Ali

In his own case, he is married to a white American Christian from Pennsylvania, so his family is "kind of all over the map and I think of that as quintessentially American," Ali said. "Over history, there have been so many immigrant groups that have gone through the same assimilation process and retained elements of their identities, their immigrant identities, and those immigrant identities become part of the American fabric, so that's where we are.... My family are newer immigrants than people who came over on Ellis Island, but it's the American story. Everywhere I go in America there are other people like me. I live near a Nigerian person, Korean person, a Turkish person. We're all Americans -- that's the beauty of America."

Like Ali, Maria Janjua, also the U.S.-born child of Pakistani immigrants, locates herself in the broader American experience as well as in her own immigrant roots. Among her friends in the comfortable Philadelphia suburb where she grew up and still lives, some "have Irish American pride, Italian American pride," she said. "...Their grandparents, great-grandparents are ones that came from Italy, or from Ireland. They've never been there, but they have that identity. It's the same thing for me. I'm Pakistani American, that's where my parents are from, that's my national origin, so that's what you relate to, but you still are American in that same way."

Janjua, Saqib Ali and Maryam Masumi are all products of the socially and educationally advantaged segment of the Pakistani and Afghan American communities that has become well assimilated in American middle-class life. They and others like

⁴⁵ Helena Zeweri, "Defining Afghanness: Performing and Claiming Afghan Identity Within the New York Diaspora," unpublished master's thesis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, New York University, April, 2010, p. 47

them were certainly not unaffected by the post-9/11 climate. But as native-born U.S. citizens and as successful and well educated professionals comfortably integrated in American society, they have been far less vulnerable than many other American Muslims to acts of discrimination or threats to their security. That in turn means they have less conflict or ambivalence in thinking of themselves as American with the same rights as all other Americans.

Masood Haque came with his family from Pakistan at 13, so is not a citizen by birth. But his sense that he has personal rights that the authorities must respect represents, he says, "a part of me that is very, very American." Haque, a physician in New York's Westchester County who is also a serious film-maker, came under FBI scrutiny because of a short film he made as a project for a film school class that shows a suicide bombing and also includes some propaganda clips he downloaded from jihadist websites. Agents called him at work, left a note on his townhouse door, and posted a surveillance team for several days in a row outside the gated community where he lives (explaining to the gate guard that the watch was connected to a domestic violence investigation). Haque was angry but, he said, not really fearful, "because first of all I hadn't done anything wrong, and I knew that I was protected, I knew I had certain rights... I was a citizen, those rights were really important to me and I was aware of them."

In the end the investigators accepted his explanation, supported by faculty members in his film studies program, that the film had nothing to do with a terrorist plot or terrorist sympathies. The last agent who came to see him -- a Korean American woman, he remembers -- asked politely for the fake suicide vest he had created to use in the film. Haque refused at first but then handed it over, and as far as he knows, that was the end of the investigation. "She said 'OK, thank you, I really appreciate it,' and that's the end of that, it was over.... I never had to speak to anybody else, they disappeared." That outcome, he thinks, partly "had to do with who I was. I was somebody who had lived in this country for a very long time, I wasn't about to take shit from them.... I haven't done anything, there's nothing for me to hide, and at some point they got it." They got, that is, the same thing Haque himself got: that "who he was" was an American with an American's birthright of legal protection from the power of the state -- and, it is relevant to add, not just an American citizen but an American in a high-status profession and on the upper rungs of the income ladder, with not only the knowledge of his rights but also the connections and resources to defend them if he needed to.

For people without those advantages, the sense of belonging to America is much more fragile. Even if they are citizens or legal residents, those who are farther down on the social and economic scale are more likely to encounter profiling or discrimination, and in consequence, less likely to feel secure in their status as Americans or share a sense that the American state protects their rights. A large number speak English poorly or not at all, which sharply limits their interaction with the wider society or American culture. Many live in immigrant enclaves that are more distant from mainstream American life -- and, for that matter, distant from the more affluent and assimilated members of their own national communities as well. The scholar Sunaina Marr Maira, who spent a year in 2002-2003 interviewing high school students from working-class South Asian and mainly Muslim immigrant families in a Massachusetts city she calls Wellford, noted that those families had almost no connection with Indian or Pakistani American organizations in the area, whose membership comes predominantly from middle or upper-middle-class

suburban families. The experiences of the young people she interviewed, Maira added, are rooted in an urban, working-class life "that is often completely unknown to their more privileged South Asian American counterparts in the area."

That life also makes a profound difference in what has been called "cultural citizenship," an identity and sense of belonging that goes beyond the legal definition of a citizen. For the young people Maira met in Wellford (which internal evidence in her book indicates is actually Cambridge, Massachusetts) questions of identity were heavily freighted by the sudden and explosive changes in American official acts and public attitudes after 9/11. Her subjects, Maira wrote, came to the United States "shortly before or during a moment when their 'Muslim' identities were highly politicized and intertwined with the War on Terror," and had to adapt to their new country in that atmosphere. In their dual world, at times they were able to identify with both sides of the cultural and political divide, as when a 17-year-old she calls Osman from a Pakistani immigrant family spoke about the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. It seemed that's what Americans wanted, he told Maira, because they were scared of another terror attack, but he wasn't sure how he felt because he could imagine the other side too: "I think they're both right, the people of Afghanistan who don't want to be attacked, and the people here that's scared." He didn't add but surely knew that "the people that's scared" were not just scared of Afghanistan but also scared of people in the United States who looked like him and his family -- who in turn were scared too, not without reason, about what angry Americans might do to them.

"I don't really talk to other people about this," Osman told Maira. "It's just something you don't want to talk about. That's what my father says too." His father didn't talk much to his family about 9/11, Osman went on, but he put up a big American flag on his taxi, while another taxi driver, his father's friend and a Sikh, "took off his turban and shaved his beard. My father told him not to do it, but some men who took his cab shouted at him about trying to kill Osama's brother, so he was scared."⁴⁶ Flying a flag and shaving a beard were meant, one can safely assume, to show people that they were not America's enemies. Those acts may have helped Osman's father and his friend feel a little safer in America, but it is harder to imagine they did much to help them feel more American.

If divisions of class and income are one schism in Afghan and Pakistani Americans' quest to define themselves, gender is another.

In Afghan and Pakistani families, women's and girls' cultural issues tend to be more visible because they are largely about visible things: covering their hair, how they dress, how they interact with men in public settings. Those are also the issues that most visibly represent differences with American custom and living styles. A girl wearing a headscarf to an American school or not wearing shorts for gym class stands out from her classmates in ways that boys do not. She will also be more noticeable if she doesn't go out on dates or attend mixed parties or dances -- noticeable to her non-Muslim fellow students, that is; but she will also be more noticeable to her family and in her own community if she does those things, because, as in many other cultures, traditional rules are stricter for girls than for boys. Too, in part because of that very visibility, gender

⁴⁶ Sunaina Marr Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire after 9/11*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, p. 9, 39, 88

issues are a crucial piece of the wider society's perception of Muslims, with women's rights and status serving as a kind of tape measure of cultural difference.

For all those reasons, the face that people see in their minds when gender questions arise is nearly always a woman's face, veiled or unveiled; the wife's or the daughter's face, not the father's. And seeing those faces, people also tend to see changes in gender role and identity as things that happen mainly to *women* in Pakistani or Afghan families in America. We think of girls facing conflicting pressures and having to choose which traditions to follow: deciding how to dress, whether to date or not date and whether to tell or not tell their families if they do. In my research for this report I heard a good deal about those choices and the pain that often accompanies them. Less often and much more faintly, I heard other things that made me aware of something I had not thought very clearly about: there is pain on both sides of the gender gap, not just one.

However repressive the customs and however contrary they are to professed American values, the traditional patriarchal rules governing men's and women's roles and behavior are deeply imbedded in the identity many men brought with them when they came to the United States, and in the culture they do not want their children to lose because if it is lost, they will be lost too. Fear of that loss is wrenching: "They feel like if they accept these changes, they're going to give up everything they are," said Fariba Nawa. Wajahat Ali put it this way: "When it comes to sexuality in particular, that seems to be the one question where the great fear is everything will fall apart. This fragile identity that we've created for ourselves, put together by equally fragile threads, will be unraveled. Girls will get pregnant and everyone's going to have tattoos and there will be orgies...."

Also often overlooked is that gender issues in Afghan and Pakistani American families affect sons, as well as daughters. Boys may not have to decide whether to cover their hair or not, but they do have to find their way between the values taught in their homes and those in the wider society, just as girls do, and decide how those values will shape their own lives and relationships. In interviews done in the mid-1990s for her undergraduate thesis, which reported on several dozen young Afghan American men and women who were either engaged or newly married, Fariba Nawa found a variety of responses from her male subjects. Some were struggling with "displacement and a loss of Islamic patriarchal status" -- the same issues, one can guess, that their immigrant fathers were dealing with. Others, she found, felt "a lack of role models and direction."

Among Nawa's interviews, a particularly poignant one was with a young man she called Walid, who came to the United States at 15 and was 25 when Nawa spoke with him. For his father, as with many Afghan refugees, leaving Afghanistan meant leaving his role as the household breadwinner -- a central piece of an Afghan man's selfhood. In America, without a job, Walid's father was also without the place he had held in his family's life, as the wage-earner and also the unquestioned power figure who could enforce his authority with his fists with no challenge from his wife or children. "When we came here, he realized he doesn't have that kind of control," Walid told Nawa. "He would get frustrated. That's why he didn't like America. It was difficult for us and for him."

Adjusting to America wasn't easy for Walid, either. He missed his life in Afghanistan, too, and while he didn't excuse the physical violence, he understood his father's values and sense of loss. But Walid still felt angry at the pressure and abusive treatment that was supposed to make him conform to Afghan ideas of how a man acts and

what he is. Trying to cope with his anger, Nawa reported, he turned to self-help books and Eastern philosophy and found an outlet for his rebellious emotions in punk rock music and the Bay Area punk subculture. That searching led him to identify less with his Afghan roots and more with the universal human community. He knows that his birthplace and his experience and knowledge of the culture make him Afghan American, he told Nawa, but he would rather think of himself as simply a human being.

Walid also found his way to a strikingly different view of gender relations than the one traditionally taught in Afghan culture. Also striking is that his path to that view did not begin in America but when he was still a boy in Afghanistan, where a maternal uncle told him that "women are not men's property." His uncle's words made him think about his own family, Walid said:

I saw how my dad treated my mom. For example, I would see how my father told my mom who to talk to and what to wear, with who to shake hands with and I would remember my uncle's words. When I came here, I saw how America's woman is so independent and stands on her own two feet, and how women know not to let men treat them that way. They were like parasites in Afghanistan, they took from the men but here no, a woman is on her own, it's not necessary for her to be attached to her husband. And this influenced me. Because of this, ...whether it is my sister or wife, I don't own her. She's not mine. When a woman and man get together, they do it to share life, not to take each other's life, but to share it together. That's all.⁴⁷

Girls' issues may get more attention, but in interviews for this report, I encountered a widespread view that it's the boys in Afghan and Pakistani American families who typically have a harder time fitting into American life.

Tamim Ansary, the Afghan American writer, believes that Afghan boys tend to inherit the feelings of fathers who lost status and identity when they came to the United States. A lot of the boys he sees "are overwhelmed by the psychological shadow of their fathers' gloom about what happened," Ansary said. The fathers who were heads of their families and important men in Afghanistan "came here and became children," depending on their children to help them navigate in America instead of commanding their own lives. The sadness and shame they feel generates a powerful sense of nostalgia and a longing to go back, which Ansary said in turn leads to "an urgency not to let their kids lose their Afghanness." The nostalgia passes to their sons, who "stay kind of Afghan" to identify with or just not to disappoint their fathers -- but in doing so, Ansary feels, many become less able to adjust to American culture. "Because they stayed Afghan, they couldn't deal with this society."

In part because they may be less burdened by their fathers' past, and in part because girls in nearly all cultures are taught to be more responsible and more respectful

⁴⁷ Fariba Nawa, *Out of Bounds: Afghan Couples in the United States -- A Study of Shifting Gender and Identity*, Originally published 1996, Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts; republished 2001 by Aftaabzad Publications, San Francisco; p. 29, 32-33, 42

of the rules than boys, Ansary sees Afghan American girls as adapting more successfully than boys to American life. They do better than boys in school -- as is also true of girls in American society as a whole -- and, Ansary thinks, in spite of growing up in a community where patriarchal attitudes are still strong, are often "more ambitious and directed" than their brothers and more likely to attain higher education and comfortably secure status in American middle-class life.

The issues are somewhat different but I heard comments about a similar gender gap among Pakistani Americans as well. "My friends that were guys, they might have had a tougher time" navigating between their two worlds than the Pakistani American girls she knew growing up, Maria Janjua believes. "As a female, I don't think I had that much of issue... The guys I think had more of an identity type crisis." She speculates that boys might have been picked on in childhood more cruelly than girls for being different, which could leave both stronger anger and a stronger wish to be like everyone else. As in the wider community, boys are much more likely to rebel against parental controls and institutional rules and school requirements. They are also more likely to fall into gangs or experiment with frowned-upon activities -- drinking alcohol, for example, which is prohibited in the Islamic faith and thus a particular source of conflict in Muslim families.

Girls, Janjua thinks, are under more scrutiny than boys and are more concerned about avoiding conflict and living up to their parents' expectations. "I feel like girls feel that more," she told me, "...especially the first-born." A first-born daughter herself, Janjua, now 30, is a picture-perfect example of that model. The child of a Pakistan-born dentist, she followed him into the profession and, after four years as a dental officer in the Air Force, joined her father's Philadelphia practice. She also thinks girls are less prone than boys to reject the community's or their parents' values. In her view, the girls in her community were not under the same peer pressure to adopt American customs that conflict with theirs, such as drinking, so, in comparison with the boys, "they didn't have as much internal conflict about 'where I belong.'"

Whether they involve sons or daughters, the cultural rifts in a great many families don't lead to overt conflict but are covered over in silence. In part this may reflect an unspoken understanding on both sides that the gap is not going to be closed. No matter how strongly immigrants parents feel about preserving the culture they brought from their homeland, their children live in a different world with different styles and beliefs. And no matter how much the children want to respect their heritage and avoid defying or disappointing or hurting their parents, their lives are shaped and their identities are formed in that different world. At some level, one can guess that most Pakistani and Afghan Americans are aware of that underlying reality. But not speaking about it can make it less painful.

"Maintaining this facade of an identity that is safe gives comfort to the older generation," Wajahat Ali explained -- a point I heard from many others as well. "They kind of secretly know" that their children believe and act differently, he added, "but they don't want to know.... You'll never ever ever ever hear a mother say, 'Oh yeah, my girl's dating someone.' Never happen. Never happen. Even though she could be here dating with her boyfriend right now, you could go to her and say 'Hey, I saw her with her boyfriend,' 'Oh, nonononono, what are you talking about? My girl doesn't do that. They were just talking about business.'" Lifting that curtain of silence will happen but it will take a long time, Ali thinks. "Slowly but surely there will be a new space created which is

a merger of both worlds, which allows more open space for acknowledgement and communication, but ... not in my lifetime, probably not even in my kids' lifetime. Maybe grandkids...."

"You'll never ever ever ever hear a mother say, 'Oh yeah, my girl's dating someone.' Never happen. Never happen. Even though she could be here dating with her boyfriend right now, you could go to her and say 'Hey, I saw her with her boyfriend,' 'Oh, nonononono, what are you talking about? My girl doesn't do that. They were just talking about business.'"

-- Wajahat Ali

American values were not just threatening. Like immigrants all through American history, Pakistanis and Afghans arriving in the United States in the last four decades have found powerful reasons to feel liberated by their new country's freedoms. With all the abuses and questionable practices of the war-on-terror era, the rule of law was still a vastly stronger principle in America than in the countries they had left. And if America's wide latitude for personal choice made it possible for their sons and daughters to stray from tradition, the same openness also gave them an incomparably greater space for education and self-development.

For some immigrants, American principles have special value. Maria Janjua's father, for example. The Janjua family are Ahmadiyya Muslims, a minority community that under a 40-year-old Pakistani law is not considered to be Muslim at all and that has been a chronic target of official discrimination and hate crimes -- most notoriously, an attack that killed nearly 100 Ahmadis in two mosques in Lahore in May, 2010. Sami Janjua, whose father's business was burned down by a mob because of his Ahmadiyya affiliation, still thinks of himself as a loyal Pakistani who values his homeland and its culture. But, he said, the religious freedom he found in America makes him ultimately "more proud to be American than to be Pakistani" -- and not just religious freedom alone, but the broader American principle of respecting people no matter what faith or community or nationality they belong to.

While his daughter was still in the Air Force, Sami Janjua recalled, he and his wife drove with her from her previous base to her new post at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri. Maria was in uniform, with her captain's bars on her shoulder. When they got to the entrance, Maria was driving. At the gate, she showed her ID card to the enlisted guard, who looked at it, stepped back, and saluted her as she drove past. Sitting next to her in the passenger seat, Sami told me, he suddenly felt his eyes fill with unexpected tears. Here he was, he thought, an immigrant with what would be to American eyes a Middle Eastern face, watching his daughter wearing the same uniform and receiving exactly the same courtesy and respect as any other American officer. As a Pakistani in Pakistan, he was despised and at risk of officially condoned persecution because of his religious belief. As an American, his country's laws and traditions kept him safe. That's what he was thinking about, he said, as Maria drove through the gate: "This nation has provided us an umbrella of protection, freedom of speech, freedom of religion. I was so

emotional... I was so proud to be American, and I hope and wish and pray that this nation will keep these good values."

"It's hard to be making your own rules but I guess I got no choice."

*-- "Ozaer," quoted in Fariba Nawa, *Out of Bounds**

For Aitezaz Ahmed, American ideas spoke to something in him before he ever left Pakistan. He grew up "feeling I was an American citizen living in the body of a Pakistani," he explains in Mara Ahmed's film "The Muslims I Know." As a boy he read avidly about the United States, spent hours with a book of photographs of American landscapes, and learned about the American system, "the constitution of the United States, the idea of free speech, the idea of equal rights, the idea of civil liberties. And of course the greater economic opportunities," he went on, but more meaningful was "the whole mindset of this country, the society, the openness, the freedoms, the individuality." Those were things that Ahmed understood even as a boy were missing in Pakistan, then under a military dictatorship that among other repressive policies, promoted religious intolerance. Reading about America in the oppressive climate of his own country, Ahmed reached his decision in his early teens: "this is the country I want to go to."

"It's hard to be making your own rules but I guess I got no choice," one of Fariba Nawa's subjects told her in an interview for her college thesis.⁴⁸

Hard, but also an inescapable part of becoming American, since the American freedom to make choices means having to choose. It also means, Nawa came to realize, that there is no rulebook, no checklist of prescribed actions and attitudes that determines who someone is. In a diverse society like the United States, she says, "identity is something very fluid and changing," not a factory-made package handed to people but a thing they have to discover for themselves. For Nawa, that is a positive fact: "I feel like we're forced to be individuals, forced to think more. You have to think about who you are. You have to. You're confronted with an identity crisis whether you like it or not and that's a good thing in some ways because you're thinking about who you are, it's not just given to you." Deciding that this or that belief or behavior makes someone "authentically" Afghan is false, she went on. She thinks of herself as Afghan, but by her own definition, not someone else's. "The notion of 'authentic' went out the window," she told me. "There is no such thing. You make up who you are.... Everything evolves. Things change whether we like it or not, and we have to for lack of a better term go with the flow. And that *is* my identity. It's being able to adapt."

Adapting, though, is not the same as belonging. Belonging requires answering not just the question "who am I?" but also another one: "who is us?" There can be multiple answers to that question. Many people have no trouble feeling that they belong and can be comfortable in more than one world, without any sense of conflict. The Pakistani American writer Shahan Mufti, who was born in the United States but spent substantial

⁴⁸ Nawa, *Out of Bounds*, p. 28

stretches of his 32 years, both in childhood and in adult life, in Pakistan, is an example. "I am 100 percent Pakistani, 100 percent American," Mufti said, repeating a line from his book *The Faithful Scribe*.⁴⁹ "That's not something I just say," he added. "I really feel it." For others, though, belonging to two worlds leaves a chronic feeling of being somehow incomplete in both. In part that may be because the different worlds never meet, so there is never any sense of wholeness. Sabrina Shairzay feels that way. In a recent conversation with her brother, she recalled, they asked each other, "do you consider yourself American, or Afghan, or neither?" Both, she said, gave exactly the opposite of Shahan Mufti's answer: "Both of us kind of feel like neither."

Even in her quite assimilated and culturally liberal family, Shairzay grew up with the feeling of a dual life. "My sign is Gemini, the sign of the twins," she said. "Both my brother and I are Gemini, and we've always had these two separate lives, the lives we lead in the family and the lives we lead with our friends, and they rarely cross paths." She has always wondered about two things, she went on. "One is what my parents' voices would sound like without an accent. I've never known what they would sound like speaking English without a trace of an accent. And the other one is what would I be like if I'd grown up with American parents." She has also asked the converse question: who might she be if her parents had never left their homeland? "What if we were still in Afghanistan, even through all the wars, or if Afghanistan had never gone through the war and my brother and I had grown up there, what would we be like? Again it's like that split life thing, in an alternate universe if I was really Afghan, and I'll never know what that would be like."

Those questions rose to the surface when Shairzay made her first and only trip to Afghanistan in 2005, at the age of 24. "I really thought it would feel like I was coming home," Shairzay said about that trip. Settling where home was might also settle who she was. But it didn't. Instead, it made her feel even more foreign from the Afghan piece of herself. Even her own behavior was unsettling, as when she found herself falling into the traditional Afghan woman's way of not meeting people's eyes while speaking with them. Involuntarily, or so it seemed, "especially if it was a man talking to me, I'd be looking down. It was so strange how just being there for a few days, it was like 72 hours, I started noticing that.... It was strangest thing, that shift in myself. And it made me think, what if I had grown up here?" But she knows that she cannot answer that question. "I only know what I know, I don't know what they know. You can only imagine what it would be like, but you don't know for sure. So, now here I was... imagining every time I saw a girl who looked my age, that could be me, that could have been me." In a long poem she wrote about her visit, she asks, "Do I belong here?" and answers:

*My history is here, but my future is not.
My past is not. My present is not.*

Elsewhere in the poem she wrote about the sense of having an alternate life that she would never know:

My could-have-been is dried away in the tears of the snow-capped mountaintops,

⁴⁹ © 2013, Other Press

*My would-have-been is blinded into the rays of the sun dripping over everything
and shining in the people's eyes,
My should-have-been is hiding in the shadows cast from the sky buried in
untouched corners.*

In the end, she wrote in still another passage,

*I will always be a stranger, without a home, no matter where I am
Here or there.
My home is my heart and nothing more.*⁵⁰

Home does not always have to be a place on the map, however. It can also be heritage, custom, tradition, a way of being that gives a sense of community, of having roots. Adnan Hussain, who was born in Brooklyn but spent several of his mid-teenage years in his family's home province in Pakistan, believes that remaining close to his ancestral identity has been a better choice than growing away from it. Some of the children he knew in the Pakistani immigrant neighborhood where he spent his early childhood have grown up to consider themselves "totally American," Hussein said. For them, Pakistan is just the name of the place where their parents were born, not otherwise connected with their lives. There may be some benefit in that kind of assimilation, he acknowledges. But Hussein, who moved to Maryland with his family while still in elementary school and later studied to be a police officer, feels that preserving his heritage has given his life more meaning than if he abandoned it. Keeping his identity and its traditions and religious faith helps him maintain "respect for family, respect for self," he said, and that respect helps keep him and his family strong in their adopted country.

If there are those like Sabrina Shairzay, who muses about an alternative self that would be fully Afghan or fully American, or like Adnan Hussein, whose sense of Pakistani identity remains an important foundation of his life in America, there are also those who cannot imagine themselves as members of any identifiable group, at least not entirely. Mara Ahmed is one of those. While her husband was growing up in Pakistan feeling like an American citizen who happened to be born in the wrong place, Ahmed spent most of her childhood in Belgium, where her father was a diplomat posted in the Pakistani embassy in Brussels. She was in her teens when her family moved back to Pakistan, finished high school and university there, and then married and moved to the United States with her husband, who was doing his medical residency in Connecticut. Their life in America has been comfortable and rewarding; she has had success in her first career as a financial analyst and then as an artist; they and their children are thoroughly integrated in American life. But through all that Ahmed has never felt that she was an undivided insider either as an American or a Pakistani or anything else.

"I never belong anywhere," she told me. A Belgian friend, she recalled, once told her about his family's roots in Antwerp and how knowing their origins and using the local dialect and expressions at family dinners made him feel at home, that he was where he belongs. "I said to him, 'I never feel like that,'" Ahmed said. "I don't know if it's good or bad, but I actually never ever feel like that. In Pakistan I always felt like an outsider

⁵⁰ From "Amongst familiar strangers..." © 2005, Sabrina Shairzay. Quoted by permission.

because I had grown up in Belgium and so I was different from the other kids. In Belgium I was an outsider because I was originally from Pakistan, I was a Muslim, I looked a little bit different. In the U.S., again I never quite belong anywhere." But, she reflected, that may mean America is actually the right place for her, because in a country where so many different cultures meet and jostle, there are more and more people like her who are outside the boundaries of a particular identity.

Thinking about her words, it occurred to me that perhaps the place where Mara Ahmed can be an insider is not a country or a tribe but the future. There, as the mixing of peoples continues, identities will increasingly have multiple strands, not just one, and will be shaped less by automatic inheritance and more by personal choice -- each person's attempt, as Murtaza Pardais put it, to "embrace the good and leave the bad" from the different parts of their heritage.

More than any other country on earth, America has been moving toward that future almost since its founding, recreating its own identity generation after generation. As Pakistani and Afghan Americans find their path to who they and their children will become in their new country, they will also demonstrate yet again that "Who am I?" and "Who is us?" are not just questions for Pakistanis or Afghans or Muslim Americans or the latest immigrants to start that journey. They are and always have been questions for all Americans -- with answers that are never fixed, always changing, always new.

* * *

Acknowledgements

My first and deepest thanks go to the Afghan Americans and Pakistani Americans who shared their memories, feelings and thoughts with me during the course of my research for this report. Afghan culture and Pakistani culture are not the same, but they share very strong traditions of hospitality and storytelling. Rediscovering both those traditions, which I first encountered while traveling in South Asia as a reporter nearly 40 years ago, was a welcome bonus of my work on this project. I am grateful for that and for all that I learned about the lives and experiences of the men and women who spoke with me. Their stories included much that is painful, but they also taught valuable lessons about resilience and the human capacity for hope, and I am grateful for that too.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to the Okura Foundation, which supported the initial research. In particular I thank Dr. Bertram S. Brown of the Okura board, who was the first to encourage this idea, and board member Ford Kuramoto, whose support opened the way for the project to be approved. It is worth noting here that the foundation's original funds came from the compensation checks that its founder, the Japanese American psychologist Pat Okura, and some of his associates received for having been interned during World War II. That gives a kind of resonance to the foundation's support for this project, which looks at another Asian American population in a vastly different era but whose face, like that of Japanese Americans 70 years ago, looks to many Americans like the face of an enemy. In that sense, Okura's support for this inquiry is an example of the saying that while history may not repeat itself, it sometimes does rhyme.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Murtaza Pardais and Shela Qamer for allowing me to reprint several of their art works in this report. In addition, I am grateful for administrative assistance from the Ochberg Society for Trauma Journalism, "a global network of journalists who advance the compassionate and ethical coverage of trauma, conflict and social injustice."

* * *

About the Author

Arnold R. Isaacs is a writer and educator and the author of two books relating to the Vietnam war, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* and *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy*. He was formerly a reporter, foreign and national correspondent, and editor for the Baltimore Sun. Among other assignments for the Sun, he spent six years reporting from Asia, first as the paper's correspondent in Vietnam during the closing years of the Vietnam war and later as chief Asia correspondent, based in Hong Kong. Reporting trips during those years took him to countries throughout Southeast and South Asia, including Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since leaving the Sun, Isaacs has taught at universities in China, Bulgaria and the former Soviet Union. He has also conducted training programs for journalists and journalism students in various countries in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

* * *

Appendix 1

Amongst familiar strangers...

By Sabrina Shairzay

Enormous mountains like giant waves sanded into these rock formations
This is where I came from?
My history from this earth?
The blood of my blood; here lies my past
The flesh of my flesh; the same color as the sand
How far beneath do my roots run through this ground?
How deep are my ancestors buried in this earth?
The land stretches so far beneath and melts into the beginnings of heaven
The blood of my blood; I return to fulfill.
Lost in my home, found in foreign land.
The flesh of my flesh; my heart covers this country.
Some memories come full force, I feel as if I have been here before.
Maybe in a past life? Maybe I died in these mountains?
The mountains and sun cast such beautiful sharp shadows, only God could have
imagined this.
The cuts of the earth are so deep, so painful, so beautiful. Have they all been
discovered?
Has every inch of this earth been touched by human hands? Impossible, there is
too much.
Ashes to ashes
The language is burned in my brain, but still foreign on my tongue.
And my heart? Dust to dust.
The water patterned sand covers my heart ridden with guilt
I suffered too, I want to shout to them-
I will always be a stranger, without a home, no matter where I am
Here or there.
My home is my heart and nothing more. I have no land to call my own, to kiss, to
pray to, to return to.
I hope they understand I cried for them, I wished, I prayed
Do not judge of me for I did not chose this life of mine, I was blessed with it and
so are you with yours.
I live alone in my own world, without a home, without a people,
Rejected from all sides – a new race of my own design.

But these mountains call to me and whisper
Welcome home
Blood of my blood, I see the past, I feel the present, I am the future.
I feel the battles waged here by fists, by words, by hearts.
Death with love, hate, vengeance-
These things I may never know.
But I hear the stories the mountains have to tell, flesh of my flesh.
The lives of these people – can I say my people? Dare I say my people?
Are scattered in these mountains,
Bathed in sunlight, surrounded by heaven, blessed by God, lost in a dream.
This is what my life could have been? Would have been? Should have been?
Hanging over my head will always remain the simple question...what if?
This is it
This is it
This is it
Blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh, my soul has returned.
I am following the dried up rivers and sand storm paths to find my homeland
The earth is stained and wrinkled from its own weary life,
Veins of the earth snake through this sand, like life lines.
Is my life line here? Was it ever? Maybe it was never meant to be for me and this
country.
Buried deep in this earth here is the secret of my what-if other life,
My could-have-been is dried away in the tears of the snow-capped mountaintops,
My would-have-been is blinded into the rays of the sun dripping over everything
and shining in the people's eyes,
My should-have-been is hiding in the shadows cast from the sky buried in
untouched corners.
But here I am now, am I welcome?
I do not practice, I do not speak, I do not follow in foot steps.
I am only by name, not by heart.
Do I belong here?
My history is here, but my future is not.
My past is not. My present is not.
Is this returning home or simply visiting?
This country is as any other to me – foreign in its beauty, foreign in its people,
foreign in its life.
Is this earth angry with me for claiming it to be my own when I had never set foot
on it before now?
How dare I say I came from here when not a drop of my own blood had ever been
spilt on this earth.
And yet, the ground breathes so slow and steady, the ground moves in waves so
subtle.
I feel its force, its power, its strength, but it is not my doing.
A part of my soul wants to roll around in it, breathe in it, bathe in it, melt away in
it, become in it –
But would I be welcome to do this?

Would I have felt the strength of this earth, these mountains this sky, and the sun
that covers all of it,
If I had been born into it? Or only this way, coming as a stranger?
Was this the only way for me? Was there not a what-if life for me? Was this my
destiny?
Will I feel the same about myself, my heritage, my life, after this?
Will I feel ashamed, neglected, remorse, grateful, miserable, lost, found,
discouraged, inspired?
Will I ever realize the true wonder of God and these people? Will I realize it
here? Can I see it here?
Will I look at life differently now? Will I be different now? Is anything different
now?
Or is still in its sameness, and if it is, is that wrong?
If I leave here and learn nothing, feel nothing, is that wrong? Am I to be judged
again?
And what if I answer the inquiring questions on my views and feelings about this
country incorrectly?
Are there right or wrong answers to my views and feelings? Should I feel a
certain way about this?
After seeing this, breathing this, sleeping this, tasting this?
Is this it?
Is this it?
Is this it?
I have returned for the first time.
I close my eyes and see everything.
Blood of my blood?
Flesh of my flesh?

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Appendix 2

Portfolio

About the Artists

Shela Qamer studied art in Karachi before emigrating from Pakistan, and continued her studies at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C., after arriving in the United States. Her work represents a variety of styles and subjects, including calligraphy, architectural images, and abstract paintings. She is active in Muslim women artists organizations and in interfaith art projects, working with non-Muslim artists in the hope that coming together to create and learn from art can bring together people of different beliefs and communities. Qamer lives in Vienna, Virginia.

Murtaza Pardais was a prominent and prolific artist and professor of fine arts at Kabul University for twelve years until much of the university was destroyed, as well as his home, in the devastating civil war between different mujahideen factions fighting for control of the capital. Salvaging some but not all of the artwork that had been stored in his home, he and his family fled to Pakistan, where they remained for seven years before emigrating in 2000 as refugees to the United States -- again bringing with them several hundred works painted in Kabul and during his years in Pakistan. In the United States, the family lived for brief periods in Chicago and Cleveland and then settled in late 2001 in Rochester, NY, where they now live. Throughout, Pardais never stopped painting. After arriving in America, he recalls in *A Diary on Canvas*, the book he coauthored with his son Shansab, "I was unemployed, sick, and poor. But even with these problems, I did not leave the pen, brush, and canvas. I continued to paint all day and night as I thought about my compatriots and the world." His works, painted in many different styles, are a visual record of the violence and destruction he and his country experienced for many years, but also document peaceful scenes from better times in Afghanistan and from his new home in the United States. They reflect, Shansab wrote in the introduction to the *Diary*, the artist's ultimate wish: "eventually Murtaza Pardais hoped to inspire peace through his paintings."

Divided worlds...



Architectural Image

© Shela Qamer

The slanting stripe that bisects this painting represents a path: "a journey people take," the artist explains, through terrain that is "a mixture of west and east." The image reflects her hope of moving forward in her adopted world while remaining connected to her ancestral faith (symbolized by the outlined structures in the top right area of the painting) and the legacy of her homeland.



Yesterday/Today?
Afghan Girl Between Two Cultures
© Murtaza Pardais
Watercolor on paper, 16 x 20 in.

Images of faith...

The First Kalma
Calligraphy
© Shela Qamer

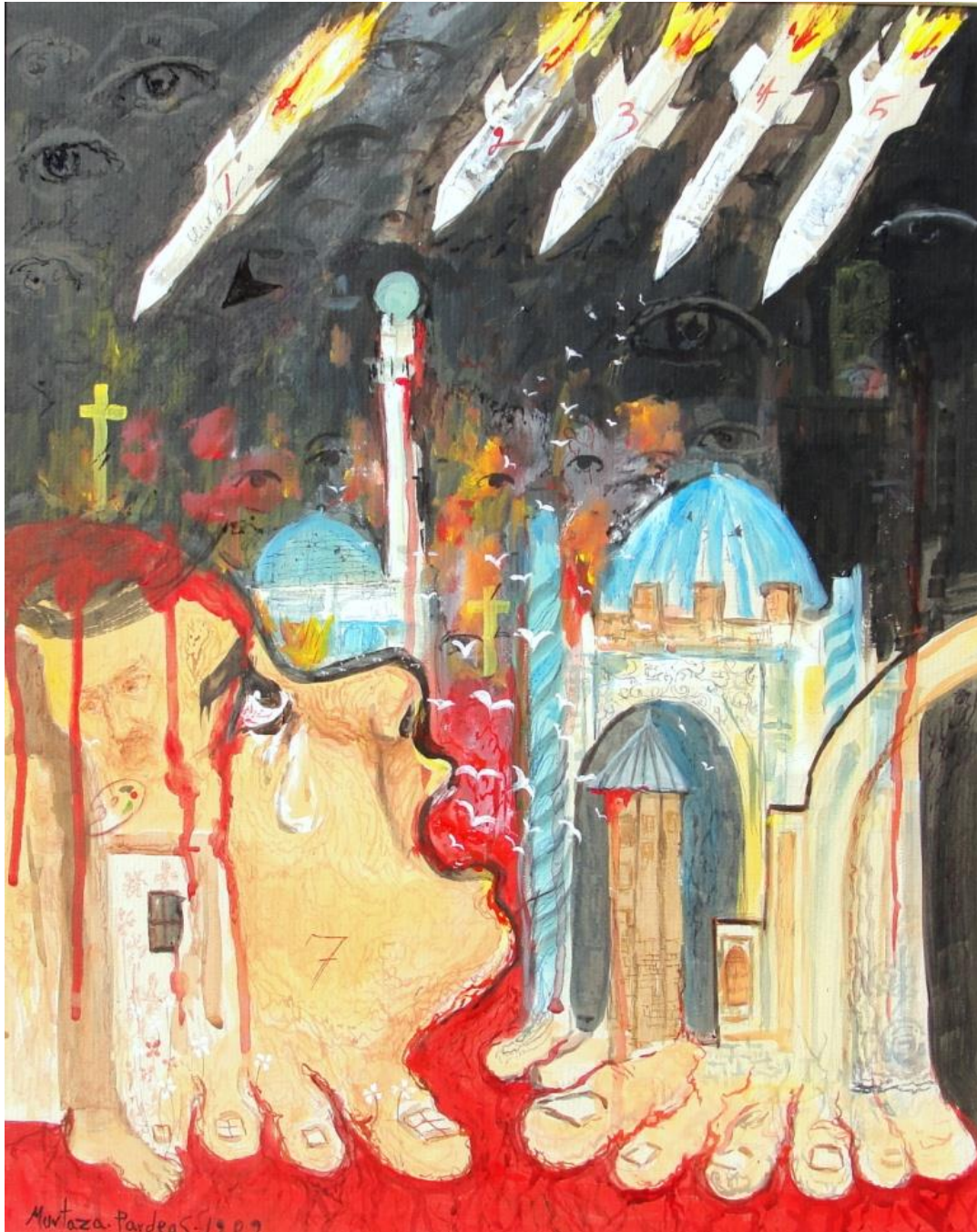
The first Kalma, also known as Kalma Tayyabah (Word of Purity) states the central belief of Islam. The translation is: "(There is) none worthy of worship except Allah. Muhammad is Messenger of ALLAH."



Mosque
© Shela Qamer



Memories of war...



Missiles Without Mark
© Murtaza Pardais
Gouache color on paper, 16 x 20 in



War in Darlaman Kabul
Oil color on canvas paper, 9 x 12 in.



Escape from War

© Murtaza Pardais

Oil color on canvas
paper, 9 x 12 in.

And peaceful places...

Yellow Wheat

© Murtaza Pardais
Oil on canvas
40 x 45 in.



**Spring in Peace
(Rochester NY)**

© Murtaza Pardais
Oil on canvas
16 x 20 in.

