

# Roots, Repatriation, and Refuge: Pakistan and the Afghan Refugee Crisis

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## Abstract

Today, registered Afghan refugees total approximately 1.6 million people with one to two million more living undocumented in border nations like Iran and Pakistan. They are the largest protracted refugee population on the Asian continent and have existed in a perpetual state of displacement since the Soviet-Afghan War from late 1970-1980. The status of these refugees in Pakistan remains connected to the concepts of displacement, migration, settlement, and repatriation. This paper explores how the Afghan refugee crisis evolved within the confines of socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical crises created and imposed by international actors who sought to control Afghanistan for their own purposes, while additionally providing the author's own personal experiences of the Afghan refugee crisis. A major component of finding a solution to the Afghan refugee crisis requires the international community to move away from the overworked objective view of the refugees' situation and toward a more subjective identification of their personhood and how they dealt with and continue to deal with repatriation to Afghanistan and resettlement in Pakistan. Furthermore, the Afghan refugee crisis is an ongoing global dispute that requires much more discussion, attention, and sincerity than it has been granted by the international community.

**Keywords:** repatriation, citizenship, resettlement, protracted crisis, refugee, humanitarian assistance

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"It's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out."

Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (2003).

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## Introduction

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is an individual who has been forced to flee his or her home country because of persecution, war, or violence. In many cases, refugees cannot return or are afraid to do so. Life threatening scenarios or 'push factors' such as war, ethnic, tribal, and religious violence are leading causes of them fleeing their homeland.<sup>1</sup>

Today, registered Afghan refugees total approximately 1.6 million with one to two million more living undocumented in border nations like Iran and Pakistan. They are the largest protracted refugee population on the Asian continent and have existed in a state of displacement since the Soviet-Afghan War severely compromised their safety and security. In the midst of this war and a series of military coups in the late 1970s, a massive exodus of Afghans ensued almost over night. Large populations migrated to the northwestern border city of Peshawar, which is located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan, among other border cities. In the late 1970s, Pakistan's prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, maintained a policy of temporary protection with voluntary return in mind; however, even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, a successful return of Afghan refugees to their homeland did not fully take place due to the latent nature of Pakistan's official Afghan policy and protracted fighting in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Almost two decades later, by 2009, 3.5 million Afghan refugees had returned with the aid of the UNHCR and its partners, and nearly 2.5 million remained in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> The status of the millions of registered Afghan refugees (and those outside the registered refugee system) in Pakistan remains connected to concepts of displacement, migration, settlement, and repatriation. Moreover, the foundations of this crisis enable the navigation of an important question that lies at the core of the crisis: who or what is responsible for the perpetuation of Afghan refugees'

experiences of repatriation, refuge, and resettlement within their homeland and in the border nation of Pakistan? The Afghan refugee crisis was spawned by socio-cultural and geopolitical instabilities created and perpetuated by international actors who sought to control Afghanistan for their own purposes. Ultimately, this paper seeks to inform future conceptualizations of global refugeeism, resettlement, and repatriation.

## Historical Background: The Afghan Soviet War of 1979

Set against the backdrop of the Cold War, the Soviet Union (USSR) invaded Afghanistan in the winter of 1979. A Marxist coup in the country brought Afghan statesman Nour Mohammad Taraki to power as president against the rising current of opposition to his modernizing reforms by Islamist insurgents and guerillas.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the USSR sent thousands of soldiers to prop up Taraki's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan government<sup>5</sup> and hold off the mujahideen<sup>6</sup> who were Muslim freedom fighters supplied with weapons and training by the United States and Pakistan (among other nations like Saudi Arabia, China, Iran, and Egypt). By the mid 1980s, the mujahideen had gained enough traction to expel the USSR from Afghanistan. Thousands of Pashtuns, one of Afghanistan's largest ethnic groups who made their livelihoods as farmers, peasants, small landowners, and local religious leaders in their communities, fled to neighbouring Pakistan with the intent to protect their cultural and traditional lifestyle from being endangered.<sup>7</sup> The war lasted nearly a decade (1979-1989) and the political changes and civil strife between warring factions in Afghanistan after the Soviets absconded, prepared the ravaged landscape for the domination of the Taliban from 1996 onwards. The success of the mujahideen was ultimately a result of the diplomatic framework put in place by the United States and Pakistan, whereby the insurgents had received huge quantities of armaments paid

<sup>1</sup> USA for UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, "Who is a Refugee?" 2018, <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

<sup>2</sup> Nasreen Ghufuran, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Current Situation and Future Scenario" *Policy Perspectives* 3, no. 2 (2006): 84.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel A. Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Not All Refugees, Not Always in Pakistan, Not Necessarily Afghan?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (2008): 43.

<sup>4</sup> Hasan-Askari Rizvi, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Influx, Humanitarian Assistance and Implications" *Pakistan Horizon* 37, no. 1 (1984): 41.

<sup>5</sup> The USSR's communist proxy in the territory.

<sup>6</sup> The Islamic term for an individual who is participating in jihad. In this context, the guerilla militant groups and Afghan fighters opposing the invasion of Soviet troops.

<sup>7</sup> Anchita Borthakur, "Afghan Refugees: The Impact on Pakistan" *Asian Affairs* 43, no. 3 (2017): 490.

for by the former and military training in the latter, and operations were established by both actors to slowly suffocate the Soviet influence in Afghanistan. With this diplomatic framework, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) also worked with Pakistani Intelligence to provide aid and communicate with the mujahideen, fuelling their victory by bridging linguistic and socio-cultural lacunae. Pakistan held an estimated 3.3 million registered Afghan refugees by 1989, and the outflow, which was a result of widespread executions, arrests, violence, and civil unrest, provoked an unprecedented humanitarian response.<sup>8</sup> In retrospect, socio-economic, spatial, political, and cultural realities had clearly, and perhaps permanently, changed for Pakistan and Afghanistan. Prior to the war, their relationship had been strained due to the porous colonial-era territorial division that was the Durand Line and the issue of Pashtunistan's sovereignty. On a more domestic level, Afghan nomads seasonally left in search of labour in Pakistan but would return before the winter, and many of them had family and friends in Pakistan whom they would visit. Due to the war and the various migrations it prompted, the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan became a principal focus in the formulation of Pakistan's Afghanistan Policy.<sup>9</sup>

The expanding presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan became a point of contention for not only the government of Pakistan, but also the local population. Rising resentment toward the shifting socio-economic circumstances of their surroundings mixed with a passive-aggressive approach among the citizens of Peshawar, where many of the refugees lived in both camps and housing complexes, led to the belief that the Afghan refugees would never go back, even if the political situation in their homeland improved.<sup>10</sup> However, the merging of refugees into a monolithic mass by Pakistanis in general only served to disjoint any unity that could have been engendered between them and their Afghan "guests." As they were under the protection of the UNHCR, the ill-equipped government of Pakistan grappled with the decision to grant citizenship status and legal rights to Afghan refugees, as well as their repatriation and resettlement. As the Afghan diaspora in Pakistan grew to a sizable quantity, the demographic growth put tremendous strain on Pakistan's resources, especially on its provision of basic amenities to its

citizens.<sup>11</sup> In the background of allegedly escalating domestic security concerns produced by the increased presence of Afghan refugees—including the "talibanization" and criminalization of Pakistani society and fundamentalist militancy, anti-state activities and rhetoric under wraps in madrasahs,<sup>12</sup> and increased drug abuse and arms trading—the government of Pakistan made several attempts to repatriate Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan. Although these efforts did yield positive results due to the use of legal and operational frameworks for voluntary repatriation born as a result of a tripartite agreement signed by the UNHCR and the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2003, a lack of communication between the governments of both nations, the virulence with which Afghanistan and the United States censured Pakistan for what they deemed to be coercive repatriation measures (despite the efforts of the latter to house and support the Afghan refugees living within its borders); criticism by human rights organizations for the methods utilized by the UNHCR in its attempts to solve the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan; the Western world's lack of accountability (particularly the United States and Russia); and the protracted nature of the crisis amalgamated to make matters worse and continued to silence those undoubtedly suffering most: the Afghan refugees.

## Refuge, Resettlement, and Repatriation

More than anything, how we count refugees and conceptualize them enables the formation of the mechanism by which we define the social, political, and economic elements that are foundational to migratory realities. Why do refugees flee, with what intent, and for how long? How do they view themselves? What are the push and pull factors inherent in migratory thought and action, and how can we understand the dilemma of Afghan refugees through this lens? Afghan refugees have long constituted the world's largest refugee population.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the fault of external actors such as international governments or the UNHCR or donors who seek to "help" the Afghan refugees is nestled in a neocolonial world narrative that fails to recognize them as culturally, ethnically, and politically distinct people with specific needs and concerns. The

<sup>8</sup> Peter Marsden, "Afghans in Pakistan: Why Rations Decline" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 5, no. 3/4 (1992): 290.

<sup>9</sup> Borthakur, "The Impact on Pakistan," 489.

<sup>10</sup> Ghufuran, "Current Situation," 84.

<sup>11</sup> Borthakur, "The Impact on Pakistan," 492.

<sup>12</sup> The Arabic word for a school or educational institution, either secular or religious. In the case of the latter, students gather at madrasahs to study Islamic theology and the Holy Qur'an.

<sup>13</sup> Pierfrancesco Maria Natta, "Anchoring Return: The Role of the Solutions Strategy" *Forced Migration Review* 1, no. 46 (May 2014): 12.

prolongation of their displacement has generated multifaceted concerns that transcend simply returning them to Afghanistan. Citizenship, identity formation, disenfranchisement, intergenerational trauma, loss of personhood, poverty, integration, autonomy, marginalization, and the position of Afghan refugees within these phenomena have not been acknowledged by international actors, let alone prioritized. We are predisposed to conflate 'refugee' with 'victim' and by taking part in this, dehumanize the refugees we claim to feel for. It is important to ascertain the personal characteristics of Afghan refugees, their relationships within and outside their community, and what role self-settlement plays in lessening the problematic aspects of their presence to build a climate of trust and equanimity, defeat the presupposed linearity of the contexts in which refugees operate, and understand how colonialism, capitalism, geopolitics, and imperialism are embedded in discourses of migration, resettlement, and repatriation in the developing world.<sup>14</sup> There are multilayered stages in the process of obtaining and exercising agency, which inevitably permeate the formation of relationships and the meaningful ways in which they change over time. According to the Pakistani political scientist Hasan-Askari Rizvi, the Afghans who fled Afghanistan since the coup of 1978 can be divided into five categories: a small minority of elites belonging to wealthy and politically prominent families; a number of refugees who were businesspeople and able to bring their movable assets; a few educated Afghan refugees; those who were able to bring their household goods and livestock;<sup>15</sup> and of all the ordinary Afghan citizens who entered Pakistan, of which two-thirds were incapacitated, homeless, hungry, and fled with the mere clothes on their backs. This latter group consisted of ordinary Afghan citizens who were by far the largest and most vulnerable group.

Finding a solution to the Afghan refugee crisis requires us to move away from the overworked objective view of their situation and toward a more subjective identification of their personhood as refugees. This requires us to critically analyze how they dealt with and continue to deal with refuge and resettlement in Pakistan. The personal

attributes that influence settlement behaviors of Afghan refugees can be compressed into the categories of geographic origins, ethnicity, education level, employment background, and political involvement.<sup>16</sup> Each of these attributes function at their own efficacy depending on the socio-cultural background of the refugees and the depth of their integration into Pakistani society. The degree of difficulty in adjustment certainly varies as well. Nevertheless, in the backdrop of overlapping religio-political and ethnic concerns, supporters of permanent refugee settlement in Pakistan uphold that the Afghan refugees are an integral and long-term part of Pakistan, and that the government of Pakistan should consider developing an 'amnesty scheme' which would allow Afghans to become legal citizens of the state.<sup>17</sup> Aside from the discourse surrounding their identity transforming from one of valiant and brave mujahideen defending their homeland from the Soviets to purveyors of extremist Taliban ideology and activity, Afghan refugees brought commercial and infrastructural advancements to Pakistan. They established flourishing businesses and engaged in trade, facilitated the growth of the healthcare system and local hospitals, enrolled their children in schools, and effectively underwrote economic growth in both rural and urban areas while forming deep social and communal bonds with Pakistanis through friendships, marriages, partnerships, and as neighbors and colleagues.<sup>18</sup>

The act of repatriating the Afghan refugees, or systematically sending them back to their homeland, provides an important case study of how societies and specific actors respond to prolonged socio-economic and environmental disruption.<sup>19</sup> As their numbers increased, the local administration and provincial governments of KPK and Baluchistan assumed the responsibility of providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan refugees. Against this framework, the federal government had been in the process of developing an elaborate administrative mechanism for dealing with the issues caused by the influx of Afghan refugees.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the National Database and Registration Authority of Pakistan (NADRA) began issuing proof of registration cards (PoR) to help registered

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<sup>14</sup> Kerry M. Connor, "Factors in the Residential Choices of Self-Settled Afghan Refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan." *The International Migration Review* 23, no. 4 (1989): 906.

<sup>15</sup> Rizvi, "Influx, Humanitarian Assistance and Implications," 43-44.

<sup>16</sup> Kerry, "Residential Choices," 83.

<sup>17</sup> Sanaa Alimia, "Violence and Vulnerabilities: Afghans in Pakistan" *Forced Migration Review* 1, no. 46 (2014): 25.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> William B. Wood, "Long Time Coming: The Repatriation of Afghan Refugees" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 79, no. 3 (1989): 345.

<sup>20</sup> Rizvi, "Influx, Humanitarian Assistance and Implications," 46.

Afghan refugees living in Pakistan identify themselves while providing temporary legal stay and freedom of movement. Currently, there are numerous card modification centers across Pakistan which were established by the government to update, modify, and replace existing PoR cards.

From the advent of the Afghan refugee crisis, Pakistan had been keen on repatriating and attempting to rehabilitate the refugees and mobilized efforts in the international community by encouraging the creation of necessary conditions and economic opportunities in Afghanistan as an incentive to return.<sup>21</sup> Although the thought of return was marred by an association with fear and political unrest among the refugees, large numbers of them truly wanted to go back to Afghanistan despite the hardships they had endured and the ambivalent conditions of their homeland. In the spring of 1988, both Pakistan and Afghanistan signed the Geneva Accords while the USSR and United States simultaneously signed a Declaration of International Guarantees calling for the safe return of Afghan refugees.<sup>22</sup> In 1992, four years before the start of the Taliban regime, 1.4 million refugees returned to Afghanistan after the mujahideen overthrew the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.<sup>23</sup> The political discord sown by the Afghan Civil War merely two years later generated a new wave of internal displacement, and more refugees fled in great numbers to the northernmost cities of Pakistan that were free of Taliban rule. In 2001, with the support of the UNHCR, Pakistan repatriated over 5 million refugees and this opened up a path of gradual and sporadic return by the thousands. By 2016, the UNHCR had introduced a Supplementary Appeal for the repatriation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, outlining updated population data, financial summary and requirements, planned activities, and coordination efforts. At the time, it was tentatively projected that by the end of the year, approximately 221,000 documented and undocumented refugees would be returned. Into the contemporary era, what may be observed is that the Afghan pursuit of refuge in Pakistan and government repatriation (both voluntary and forced) coalesced into a rigid socio-historical pattern that refused to be mitigated.<sup>24</sup> This pattern is best conveyed through the simple observation that Afghans came, Afghans were born,

Afghans lived, and Afghans left. The impact of their arrival and departure left noticeable footprints on the socio-economic, political, linguistic, and cultural *matière* of Pakistan that altered it in undeniably permanent ways.

Furthermore, the aforementioned noxious cycle persists as an underlying principle of the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan. In the context of food rations and distribution among refugee communities, Peter Marsden of the London Refugee Council points out that the willingness of the Pakistani government to supplement rations and permit refugees to work, trade, and cross freely into Afghanistan to keep land under cultivation has relieved donor governments of the need to take collective responsibility for the refugee crisis.<sup>25</sup> This rings true because international actors (like Russia and the United States) who had vested interests in Afghanistan and destroyed the land, livelihoods, and lifestyle of the Afghan people, pithily labeling it the 'Graveyard of Empires,' comprise the very decisionmakers and policymakers who refuse to take accountability for their neo-colonial and imperialistic misdeeds. The burden of liability is placed on Pakistan alone, an economically strained nation the West packages together with Afghanistan as a bastion of terrorism and corruption. What is left for us to ponder is the industrialization of relief and exactly who has the power to direct peace and security-based organizations and bodies to help or hinder protracted humanitarian crises.

## Aftermath & Solutions for the Afghan Refugee Crisis

Absolving the government of Pakistan of the numerous errors it made in handling Afghan refugees living beneath its roof would be foolish. However, we cannot overlook the fact that the local residents of Peshawar and Quetta among other cities in KPK suffered many losses too. The consequences of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan fostered violent internal conflicts within Pakistani society.<sup>26</sup> Peshawar, Pakistan is the city I was born in and where the majority of my family lives. My ancestors are from Afghanistan, and my father used to travel to Kabul with his

<sup>21</sup> Ghufuran, "Current Situation," 91.

<sup>22</sup> Wood, "Long Time Coming," 350-351.

<sup>23</sup> Valentina Hiegemann, "Repatriation of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Voluntary?" *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* 4, no. 1 (2018): 42.

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR, "Introduction," *Supplementary Appeal* (2016): 5, <https://www.unhcr.org/partners/donors/581713917/unhcr-repatriation-afghan-refugees-pakistan-supplementary-appeal-september.html>

<sup>25</sup> Marsden, "Why Rations Decline," 289.

<sup>26</sup> Borthakur, "The Impact on Pakistan," 493.

brothers as a boy, either to meet his extended family members or simply for a weekend excursion. For me, visiting Peshawar as a child meant subliminally preparing myself for a myriad of confrontations. With sights of extreme poverty, smog and a lack of sanitation, crumbling buildings, congested roads, drug traffickers, men touting guns on the streets, poor shop keepers desperately selling their wares, and orphaned children my own age begging for a few rupees. It is simply impossible to attribute all of these social failings to the hosting fatigue induced by the Afghan refugees sheltered in Pakistan for the past 40 years. However, by first-person accounts, some experiences speak loudly of the consequences. My parents were both teenagers living in Peshawar in the late 1980s, a time when Afghan refugees had begun setting up camps there. On the topic of his childhood in the post-Soviet-Afghan War era, my father once told me that it was as though millions of refugees came to Peshawar over the span of a single night and the days following were chaos. My paternal great-uncle, the late Saeed Ahmad Jan, was a well-known charity-worker and the Mayor of Peshawar at the time. He implored the federal authorities to send more aid and resources so injured refugees could be treated and fed. My maternal grandfather (whom I call "Abu"), also owned and operated a pharmaceutical business in Peshawar during the Afghan refugee crisis. From my mother, I heard stories about how the demand for medicine reached a climax in those years and how this financially and emotionally impacted her father. Although my grandfather was stunned by how rapidly his business was flourishing, the daily inflow of wounded and critically injured refugees arriving at Peshawar's overcrowded hospitals was a terribly grievous sight for him to behold. Peshawar was hard hit by the migration of Afghan refugees on a social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political level. I remember the look of sorrow on my father's face when I asked him about the impact of the refugee crisis on his city; he said that in his heart he felt deeply for the plight of the refugees but Peshawar, through no fault of its own, was ill-prepared and suffered dramatically as a result of it. The Pashtunwali<sup>27</sup> helped to bring people together, locals and foreigners, hosts and guests, Pakistanis and Afghans. It kindled fires to breathe back life, it made a proper meal eaten after weeks, maybe even months of travelling and searching, more satisfying, and it made agonized voices softer and stiller. Tracing fault is an ambivalent procedure, and in the greater scope of things, greed, power, and capital can be isolated as the driving forces behind the unending wealth of the global 'haves' and the debilitating poverty of

the global 'have-nots.' I believe that despite the circumstances, the citizens of Peshawar and the Afghan refugees were able to co-exist for many, many years. They became interdependent, relied on, borrowed from, and gave to one another, and continue to do so.

Although the government of Pakistan granted Afghan refugees legal status until the end of 2017 when Imran Khan and his Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), or Pakistan Movement for Justice party, came into power. Born to a Pashtun family, Khan is a former international cricketer and activist for national reform and human rights. Thus, when he became head of state in 2018, he wanted to grant citizenship to Afghan refugees in Pakistan, issue Pakistani passports to Afghan children born and raised in the country, and put an end to the violence faced by Afghan refugees. Before Khan became Prime Minister, his predecessors had often dealt with refugees forcefully by coercion and threatening deportation. His inauguration became a cornerstone of hope and change in the country, especially for the marginalized, underrepresented, refugees, and immigrants. It took 22 long and difficult years for Khan to become prime minister. From the beginning (1996) my father, a young, politically-savvy public health physician with dreams of improving healthcare for refugees and civilians, stood by Khan's side and promoted his vision. A photo in my family collection from the summer of 1996 in Peshawar, showing my father, prime minister Khan, and his other supporters sitting together in discussion at one of the PTI's first ever committee meetings commemorates this. Moreover, it is critical to remember that while small and careful steps hold the potential to break cycles of rootlessness and lay seeds of integration, promises become empty words when they are not kept. In this way, Khan has yet to follow through with the ones he made regarding Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Sanaa Alimia, a social scientist from the Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies, recommends that regional programming and advocacy in relation to Afghan refugees should be framed around thoughtfully responding to, rather than trying to solve protracted displacement.<sup>28</sup> Meeting the immediate needs of these refugees from a humanitarian perspective and the longer-term development requirements of their communities continue to pose challenges for policymakers; however, the particular character of the Afghan refugee crisis must be applied to all the actors involved in order to support those who are most vulnerable. The protracted nature of this crisis needs to be prioritized more, and more assertively, and solutions formulated around addressing it

<sup>27</sup> Pashto word meaning "The Way of the Pashtuns." An ancient unwritten code of ethics, tradition, and customary law that governs the lives of the Pashtun people in Afghanistan and Pakistan (and sometimes members of the Pashtun diaspora). Includes principles such as hospitality, asylum, loyalty, faith, and bravery among others.

<sup>28</sup> Alimia, "Violence and Vulnerabilities," 24.

should be thoroughly developed and researched. The late William B. Wood, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Analysis and Production with the American government, took a more technical stance on possible solutions to the Afghan refugee crisis. He warned that before large numbers of refugees begin to return, repatriation planners need to prioritize provinces and direct resources toward areas where outside relief assistance can be of greatest benefit to refugees and residents.<sup>29</sup> The role and conceptualization of borders, like the infamous Durand Line, for example, must be turned to in this scheme. Those who migrate or move and flee have distinctively fluid notions of borders, and this is evinced in evolving alliances, conventions, and access to resources. On the other hand, international aid organizations and governments in the West have an indisputably rigid and ethno-political notion of borders. This is a transnational and sociological perspective that by all means needs to be problematized in light of the Afghan refugee crisis as well.

In a similar vein, reconstruction efforts need to focus on rebuilding villages and irrigation systems, replanting crops, and re-establishing marketing networks within Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> What is also crucial to our formulations is the concept that policy-makers in Pakistan need to search for alternative solutions, as repatriation remains complicated in the face of insurgency, illiteracy, and poor socio-economic conditions.<sup>31</sup> While humanist notions like charity and support need to occupy a central place in solutions to the crisis, accountability and equal responsibility by the actors involved (Pakistan, and the Cold War rivals America and Russia among others who transformed Afghanistan into a battleground of self-legitimation and fragmented it into pieces) need to be seriously acknowledged in order to move toward a just and comprehensive resolution to the ongoing plight of Afghan refugees. Pulling troops stationed there to ward off “terrorist threats” in the name of the War on Terror does nothing but perpetuate a false narrative of primitivism, poverty, and passivity toward the needs of Afghan civilians. The global community and Afghans with an internalized antagonism toward Pakistan also need to acknowledge the good Pakistan has done as a nation for the Afghan refugees. Furthermore, the top-down hierarchical relationship between Afghanistan and the international actors involved in its decline must be dealt with and put to rest.

## Conclusion

Analyzing the socio-cultural, political, and historical foundations of the Afghan refugee crisis has brought us closer to developing a well-rounded, historically informed, and contextualized solution. That being said, a lesson remains: actions must prove the truth of words before those very words risk becoming lies. Millions of internationally displaced Afghans and refugees still live in Pakistan today, many more than those who have returned to their homeland. Although we continue to ponder if a change in mindset or course of action could truly bring the results we seek, we have established that the Afghan refugee crisis is an ongoing global dispute involving human lives that requires much more discussion, attention, and sincerity than it has received. This has been done by looking at Afghanistan in context of the Cold War era and global politics, refuge, resettlement and repatriation, and potential solutions for the Afghan refugee crisis. Khaled Hosseini, a famous Afghan-American novelist, talked about the pervasiveness and inescapability of the past in his award-winning novel *The Kite Runner*. We can never bury the past because it is intrinsically bound to experiences that exhume themselves the more we unconsciously invoke them. After Hosseini, I say history also talks much too loudly. Before our efforts to bury a past riddled with injustice, violence, and deception turn malignant, we must stop in our tracks, acknowledge our privileges, take accountability, and atone for our crimes. Only then can we hope to right our wrongs and apologize for the legacies of pain we create and use to oppress and exploit those in positions of vulnerability around us.

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<sup>29</sup> Wood, “Long Time Coming,” 345.

<sup>30</sup> Wood, “Long Time Coming,” 345.

<sup>31</sup> Ghufraan, “Current Situation,” 83.

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