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Working Paper

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WIDER Working Paper, No. 2021/190

Provided in Cooperation with:
United Nations University (UNU), World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER)

Suggested Citation: Su, Phi Hong; Hakimi, Hameed (2021) : Securitized reception: Revisiting contexts confronting Afghan and Vietnamese forced migrants, WIDER Working Paper, No. 2021/190, ISBN 978-92-9267-130-3, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki, https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2021/130-3

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/249496

UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY
UNU-WIDER

WIDER Working Paper 2021/190

Securitized reception: revisiting contexts confronting Afghan and Vietnamese forced migrants

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December 2021

United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research
wider.unu.edu

Abstract: In a 2017 UNU-WIDER project, 'Forced migration and inequality', one of us collaborated on a comparison of Afghan and Vietnamese refugee resettlement across four Western countries. In the light of the Taliban return to power in August 2021, we revisit the contributions of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* special issue that resulted from that earlier project. In doing so, we re-evaluate the framework of contexts of reception that shape the resettlement of (forced) migrants: governance policies, labour markets, and coethnic communities. We consider this framework alongside securitization—the construction of an actor as a threat that must be resolved. Rather than being a function of governance, we argue, securitization can precede and shape each context of reception. Linking to current developments in Afghanistan, we conclude that a framework of securitized reception illuminates the challenges and possibilities confronting forced migrants.

Key words: Afghanistan, contexts of reception, Middle East and South Asia, migration, refugees, securitization

JEL classification: F52, J15, N95, R23

Acknowledgements: We thank Rachel Gisselquist for the opportunity to undertake this collaboration. We drew insights from contributors to the JEMS SI, several of whom we continue to be in conversation with as we research, teach, and mobilize around refugee resettlement.

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This study has been prepared within the UNU-WIDER project Addressing group-based inequalities.

Information and requests: publications@wider.unu.edu

ISSN 1798-7237 ISBN 978-92-9267-130-3

https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2021/130-3

Typescript prepared by Joseph Laredo.

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The Institute is funded through income from an endowment fund with additional contributions to its work programme from Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom as well as earmarked contributions for specific projects from a variety of donors.

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1 Introduction: comparing Afghan and Vietnamese forced migrants

On 17 August 2021, two days after the Taliban came to power, a *New York Times* analysis of the situation in Afghanistan opened with a singular reference: 'Saigon'.[1] Two weeks later, President Joe Biden remarked on the US 'complet[ing] one of the biggest airlifts in history'[2] and, in explaining his decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, displaced full responsibility on the Afghans, in a move echoing the Nixon Administration policy of Vietnamization:

> The assumption was that more than 300,000 Afghan National Security Forces that we had trained over the past two decades and equipped would be a strong adversary in their civil wars with the Taliban.
> That assumption—that the Afghan government would be able to hold on for a period of time beyond military drawdown—turned out not to be accurate […]
> We were ready when [the Afghan National Security Forces] and the people of Afghanistan watched their own government collapse and their president flee amid the corruption and malfeasance, handing over the country to their enemy, the Taliban, and significantly increasing the risk to U.S. personnel and our Allies.[3]

Media images have evoked the chaotic evacuation of US civilians and allied South Vietnamese personnel during Operation Frequent Wind in 1975, and these otherwise disparate capitals, Saigon and Kabul, have been discursively linked through tropes such as 'forever war' (Herring 2020).

Interdisciplinary scholar Long T. Bui anticipated that politicians would Vietnamize US military entanglements in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, arguing that Vietnamization as a strategy 'updates the old Western "civilizing mission" of *helping others help* themselves […] with a postcolonial maxim: *We can't help you if you can't help yourself*' (Bui 2018: 12). Biden's speech has precisely this effect of rhetorically absolving the US of responsibility for the military failure in Afghanistan. Further, he declares the US withdrawal to be a wise course of action that marks the end of the war. But rather than terminating abruptly when they are declared to be over, wars decompose with slow and uneven effects for everyday people (Baik 2020; Bui 2018; Kwon 2010).

As with the Communist triumph in Viet Nam in 1975, the Taliban victory raises key questions that concern Afghans confronting forced displacement. How will forced migrants fare in the countries where they resettle? What factors shape their ability to 'integrate'?[4] Afghans already faced food insecurity, drought, and violence before the Taliban came to power; the current exodus is only the

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[1] Clay Risen, 'Afghanistan, Vietnam and the Limits of American Power', *The New York Times*, 17 August 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/17/us/politics/vietnam-war-afghanistan.html.

[2] 'Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan', White House Briefing Room, 31 August 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/31/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-end-of-the-war-in-afghanistan/.

[3] Ibid.

[4] In the introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* on which this working paper builds, Gisselquist (2020) notes that 'integration' can be applied uncritically to suggest that migrants alone should adapt to a new context, rather than integration being a two-way process of change. Like the special issue, this paper uses the term as an analytical tool rather than a one-way, normative objective.

most recent manifestation of an ongoing humanitarian crisis.[5] Although Kabul in 2021 is not Saigon in 1975,[6] we nevertheless find the analogy worthwhile for illuminating the role of US empire and militarism in producing forced migrants (Espiritu 2014).[7]

In this paper, we reject the position that refugees are wholly different from migrants (Feller 2005) and instead discuss internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, and refugees as categories of migrants (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). We do so recognizing that a 'migrant/refugee binary' (Hamlin 2021) obscures the fact that very few who need protection from violence receive it. Moreover, an architecture of 'remote control' (Zolberg 2003) prevents many with legitimate claims to asylum from ever reaching the shores of Western liberal democracies to apply for it (FitzGerald 2019). We therefore use the term 'forced migrant' to encompass IDPs, asylum seekers, humanitarian parolees, recipients of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), and formally recognized refugees. As two of the largest forced migrant 'groups' in the world, Vietnamese and Afghans began to leave their origin countries en masse in the mid-to-late 1970s. Their dispersal over several waves to widespread countries affords us leverage to explore how resettlement plays out over time.

In a previous UNU-WIDER project on Forced Migration and Inequality, one of us collaborated on precisely this comparison of Afghan and Vietnamese resettlement; the resulting *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* special issue (henceforth JEMS SI) highlighted the relatively poorer social and economic integration of Afghan versus Vietnamese forced migrants in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany. To understand this discrepancy, the JEMS SI analyses the contexts of reception that confront new arrivals. These contexts include the policies of the receiving government (or governance), the labour market, and coethnic communities (Portes and Rumbaut 2014: 139). Additionally, several articles in the JEMS SI note that migration has been increasingly securitized after 9/11, alongside the rise of Islamophobia.

Mining this insight into increasingly severe border regimes, we revisit contexts of reception and migrant resettlement through the lens of securitization. Our goal is to build on the theoretical and policy implications of the JEMS SI in the light of recent events in Afghanistan and urgent questions of whether and how countries will provide refuge. We first consider whether securitization might be productively subsumed under contexts of reception, particularly governance, as suggested in the JEMS SI. However, we argue that securitization often precedes and shapes contexts of reception. In the three sections that follow, we analyse each aspect of securitized reception as it pertains to Afghan forced migration, emphasizing resettlement in the Middle East and South Asia region. Our paper subsequently raises questions about some of the premises underlying 'regional solutions'. It also challenges distinctions between resettlement versus transit countries and, relatedly, of being resettled versus 'unsettled' (Tang 2015).

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[5] Hameed Hakimi, 'Whatever happens next in Afghanistan, a humanitarian disaster is already in train', *The Guardian*, 13 August 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/13/whatever-happens-next-in-afghanistan-a-humanitarian-disaster-is-already-in-train.

[6] Hamraz Ahmad, 'Why Kabul is not Saigon', *Al Jazeera*, 21 August 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/8/21/why-kabul-is-not-saigon.

[7] Viet Thanh Nguyen, 'I can't forget the lessons of Vietnam. Neither should you', *The New York Times*, 19 August 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/19/opinion/afghanistan-vietnam-war-refugees.html.

2 Revisiting the JEMS SI through a securitization lens

2.1 Overview of the JEMS SI

Taken together, the JEMS SI articles suggest that Vietnamese forced migrants and their children have made significant gains in education and employment in the decades since their arrival in Western countries of resettlement. Vietnamese refugees have 'achieved substantial upward mobility' in the United States (Bankston and Zhou 2020: 16) and 'closed initial earnings gaps with other immigrants' in Canada (Hou 2020: 16). With regard to UK-born Vietnamese, 'the apparent educational achievement of the younger generation and their employment in professional mainstream sectors suggests that the second-generation has become significantly upwardly mobile by comparison to the first-generation [*sic*]' (Barber 2020: 15). In Germany, Vietnamese migrants paint 'a generally positive picture' of integration (Bösch and Su 2020: 13). Although the JEMS SI points to persisting areas of concern, it documents the gains Vietnamese forced migrants have made compared with natives as well as with migrants from other countries of origin.

By contrast, the articles on Afghan resettlement emphasize the challenges forced migrants and their children have encountered in the labour market. Afghan refugees in Canada 'continue to face both social and economic challenges', albeit ones that seem to be tempered for second-generation women (Pendakur 2020: 18). For young Afghans in the UK, 'the deleterious impact of precarious immigration status in the lives of so many of this group limits, or in some cases entirely negates[,] the benefits of education' (Gladwell 2020: 19). Instructively, one of the JEMS SI articles explicitly compares forced migrants from Afghanistan and Viet Nam. Drawing on the American Community Survey, Carl Stempel and Qais Alemi find that 'despite Afghan's [*sic*] higher levels of cultural capital, Vietnamese refugees and, to a lesser extent, Cuban refugees, performed better on several measures of economic integration' (Stempel and Alemi 2020: 11). The authors urge future research to consider the role that anti-Muslim discrimination may play in Afghans' resettlement. In this spirit, we turn to securitization as a tool with which to reinterpret the contexts of reception that Afghans and other forced migrants encounter.

2.2 Defining securitization

Securitization as a theory emerged from the Copenhagen School, which sees it as a 'speech act' that constructs certain actors as threats to the state (Wæver 1995). In this framing, security is the condition in which a state actor identifies a problem and then mounts a response; insecurity is the absence of a response (see Aradau 2005 for a criticism of the theory's treatment of desecuritization). This concept helps explain how state actors legitimize exceptional methods by reframing certain objects as existential threats (Balzacq 2010). This is because 'the politics of insecurity is […] always also the politics of belonging' (Huysmans 2006: 63). In the European Union, for example, Islam (Cesari 2012) and forced migration (Hammerstad 2014) have both been securitized. Globalization, racism, and xenophobia in the EU mean that 'migration has been increasingly presented as a danger to public order, cultural identity, and domestic labour market stability' (Huysmans 2020: 752). The urgency of this security framing moves an issue from the normal sphere of democratic politics into 'emergency politics' (Buzan et al. 1998).

Yet securitization has also been criticized, most recently, for its Eurocentrism, methodological whiteness, and antiblack racism (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2020). Detractors of the theory argue that it assumes 'normal politics' to be the province of 'civilized' Western societies and treats Africa as a prime example of a 'state of nature' that requires securitization. The presumption is that places marked by de-escalation or desecuritization are desirable. Opponents of securitization

theory highlight how structural racism and the everyday violence of liberal states go unexamined when the lens is trained on places that do not meet the criteria of 'normal politics'.

Even as we consider how security concerns are socially constructed, we show how seemingly nonsecuritized contexts of reception rely on a form of desecuritization. Namely, we investigate desecuritization not as a lack of a response to a problem, but as a result of states—in the Global North as well as South—responding in a way that *hides* the problem. There are (at least) two ways to merge the frameworks of contexts of reception and securitization. In what follows, we first consider securitization as an aspect of contexts of reception, before exploring securitization as occurring prior to and thereby shaping contexts of reception.

2.3 Securitization and contexts of reception

The first dimension of contexts of reception, namely governance policies and practices, clearly overlaps with security concerns. Take, for example, migrants' opportunities to stay in a country and access pathways to permanent residency or citizenship. Vietnamese arriving in the UK in the 1980s were given the status of quota refugees (Barber 2020). By contrast, Afghans who entered the UK as unaccompanied minors but have since aged out of protection may be deported at any time (Gladwell 2020); as a result, they reside in a state of 'liminal legality' (Menjívar 2006). Security concerns surely shape who is free to cross borders, resettle, and seek public assistance in the era of a global 'War on Terror'.

But rather than being enfolded within governance policies and practices, security concerns drive governance decisions, starting with whether people seeking asylum will be granted entry. With Executive Order 13769, for instance, the Trump Administration temporarily prevented individuals from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen from entering the US. The politics of global security drive the 'calculated kindness' (Loescher and Scanlan 1998) shown to some people fleeing violence but not to others. This *realpolitik* stratifies people by legal status, creating a hierarchy among various recipients of humanitarian relief such as through the Violence Against Women Act and Temporary Protected Status (Abrego and Lakhani 2015). Securitization therefore does not just function through governance, but also shapes the policies and practices that migrants must navigate as a result.

The second dimension of contexts of reception, the labour market, may initially seem more removed from security concerns. Labour markets include the economic conditions under which migrants arrive and which shape their opportunities to translate existing skills or human capital into employment opportunities. Migrants may fill important niches in local economies, as was true of those living in Riace, a southern Italian village in decline because people of working age had migrated northward for jobs. Mayor Domenico Lucano established a government-funded scheme to provide migrants with job training and housing.[8] Just two years after making headlines for their contributions to the local community, however, Riace's migrants were transferred to 'centres' following orders from Italy's Interior Ministry.[9] By 2018, anti-immigrant politicians had come to power in Riace and swiftly transformed the former 'beacon' of immigration into a 'ghost town'.[10]

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[8] 'Riace: The Italian village abandoned by locals, adopted by migrants', *BBC*, 26 September 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-37289713.

[9] 'Italy: Migrants in Riace to be transferred away', *BBC*, 13 October 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45852952.

[10] Christopher Livesay, 'Riace was once a beacon for immigrants, now it's a ghost town', *PBS*, 15 December 2019, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/riace-was-once-a-beacon-for-immigrants-now-its-a-ghost-town.

Although labour markets certainly structure migrants' ability to support themselves and their families, economic interests may be overridden by the desire to secure borders. Crucially, then, the economic rationale of providing migrants with access to the labour market can be eclipsed by the desire to instrumentalize migration for success in electoral politics.

Yet securitization configures where migrants fit within a labour market even before they cross an international border. Indeed, labour market conditions are deeply intertwined with securitization and governance policies. We can productively read labour market conditions through a securitization framework by centring the rise of surveillance technology and migration control. For example, although Canada is often touted as a bastion of multiculturalism, it has partnered with Palantir, a tech giant that uses facial recognition technology to detain and deport migrants. Such government–industry contracts are immensely lucrative, amounting to millions of dollars and numerous jobs to police border crossers. Engineers draw on algorithms and artificial intelligence to determine immigration claims,[11] track refugees' movements as they go about their everyday lives,[12] and predict future flows.[13] Discrimination that happens in a national labour market may be just the tip of an iceberg of migration management apparatuses that only exist so long as there remain border crossers to manage and border crossings to thwart or facilitate. The efforts and technologies deployed to secure borders have expanded a 'migration industry' (Hernández-León 2008) that is profit-seeking and increasingly privatized.

The third dimension of contexts of reception, coethnic communities, can also be illuminated by a discussion of securitization. Coethnic communities may offer material and emotional support for new arrivals, providing in-language access to information about housing, schooling, and jobs (Zhou and Bankston 1998). But, as the introduction to the JEMS SI notes, 'Afghan' and 'Vietnamese' are labels that mask significant internal diversity along ethnic, regional, linguistic, religious, and other lines (Gisselquist 2020). In Germany and the UK, migrants from the northern and southern regions of Viet Nam have often clashed with one another. The same is true of Afghans: recalling his fieldwork in Pakistan in the 1980s, anthropologist David B. Edwards (2017: 6) observes that '[t]here was no "there" there, or, rather, there were so many "theres" that you could not keep all of them straight'. Coethnic relations are therefore not undisputed goods and can involve networks of exploitation rather than of resources (Cranford 2005).

However, securitization can shape ethnic networks and divisions in ways that affect whether and how migrants will be received abroad. In Afghanistan, Hazaras, Shias, Sikhs, and other minoritized groups stand to gain from decoupling themselves from the national label 'Afghan'. To be sure, they suffer state violence because of their ethno-religious difference. Yet, as the Taliban made territorial gains across the country and advanced on Kabul, the areas in the south dominated by Pashtuns, the majority ethnic group, suffered the fiercest destruction.[14] In practice, the experiences of persecuted minorities as well majority-group individuals oppressed by an illiberal state look remarkably similar—with the difference that the asylum claims of the former appear more urgent

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[11] University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 'Canada's adoption of AI in immigration raises serious rights implications'. 26 September 2018, https://ihrp.law.utoronto.ca/news/canadas-adoption-ai-immigration-raises-serious-rights-implications#overlay-context=news/canadas-adoption-ai-immigration-raises-serious-rights-implications.

[12] Bethan Staton, 'Eye spy: biometric and system trials in Jordan'. *The New Humanitarian*, 18 May 2016, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2016/05/18/eye-spy-biometric-aid-system-trials-jordan.

[13] Matt Petronzio, 'How the U.N. Refugee Agency will use big data to find smarter solutions', Mashable, 24 April 2018, https://mashable.com/article/big-data-refugees#DNN5.AOwfiqQ.

[14] 'Timeline: the Taliban's sweeping offensive in Afghanistan', France 24, 15 August 2021, https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210815-timeline-the-taliban-s-sweeping-offensive-in-afghanistan.

than those of the latter to Western audiences and receiving contexts.[15] By disaggregating national labels, we move beyond the JEMS SI concern about social capital in coethnic networks to uncover a landscape of internal conflict over narratives of oppression, for example, assuming that only some minoritized groups in Afghanistan face threats of violence. By exploring this diversity in the sections below, we reveal how security concerns rely on or exacerbate coethnic divisions.

By conceptualizing securitization as a framework that encompasses and exceeds contexts of reception, we can reinterpret contributions to the JEMS SI in a new light. For the sake of brevity, we offer just one example here of Bösch and Su's (2020) discussion of the conflict between Vietnamese contract workers and refugees to Germany. These migration labels were themselves manufactured by state and regional actors who did not regard Vietnamese from the north as true refugees because their claims of persecution were 'not credible' (Lipman 2020). Because they were not recognized as refugees, northerners who later went abroad did so as economic migrants, even if they had directly experienced state violence (Su forthcoming). When we reexamine different migration pathways through a securitization lens, we can tease out how coethnic conflicts were the result of the media and the unified German government creating a stigma around (northern and contract worker) Vietnamese ethnicity (Bui 2003). Fearing that this stigma would attach to them, southerners and refugees began to distance themselves from contract worker coethnics. Similarly, Afghans leaving after 1975 and especially after 9/11 needed to differentiate themselves from conationals who were assumed to be either connected to the Taliban or at least less persecuted by the Taliban because of their ethnicity.

In the sections that follow, we analyse securitized governance policies and practices, labour markets, and coethnic communities confronting Afghans from 1979 to 2021. In contrast to the JEMS SI, we emphasize migration to the Middle East and South Asia region. By doing so, we take up the call to consider 'how patterns and influences in "Southern" countries [might be] different or similar to those highlighted in […] "Northern" countries' (Gisselquist 2020: 15). We focus specifically on migration to Iran and Pakistan, the two countries that have hosted the largest Afghan forced migrant populations for over four decades. We discuss four waves of migration that each correspond to a regime change: the first beginning in 1979 with the Soviet invasion; the second in 1992, the start of civil war; the third following the Taliban removal from power in 2001; and the fourth following the August 2021 return of the Taliban to power.

3 Securitizing governance policies and practices confronting Afghans in the region

3.1 *Muhaajerin* and 'local hospitality' in Iran and Pakistan, 1979–1991

Although they would host the majority of Afghans who fled after the Soviet invasion in 1979, neither Iran nor Pakistan 'accorded Afghans the status of refugees based on the 1951 [UNHCR Refugee] Convention and its 1967 Protocol' (Turton and Marsden 2002: 14)—this despite Iran being signatory to both documents. By 1991, Iran and Pakistan were hosting more than 6 million Afghans (Turton and Marsden 2002). Afghans in both countries have been commonly described in academic and policy literature as 'refugees' but have only been hosted or registered as 'refugees' under nationally drawn laws. Afghans in these countries do not have UNHCR refugee status. This

[15] Human Rights Watch, 'Afghanistan's Shia Hazaras suffer latest atrocity: insurgents' increasing threat to embattled minority', 13 October 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/13/afghanistans-shia-hazara-suffer-latest-atrocity?gclid=Cj0KCQiA5OuNBhCRARIsACgaiqX-hDtQ6pL3oQpSn0cCh39DqN_grAw_TI1m1TEa9Y5soE1KEZDvSJMaAlYcEALw_wcB.

apparent contradiction bears repeating: Afghans have never been granted security of residency or settlement—even when Iran and Pakistan implemented policies with the involvement of agencies such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Both countries received Afghans as *muhaajerin*, or people who seek exile for religious reasons,[16] but did not grant them a path to citizenship. The implications of this are profound.

Iran and Pakistan opened their borders to this influx of Afghan refugees for security as well as religious reasons: to welcome *mujahideen* (Muslims who fight on behalf of the faith) trained to fend off a feared Soviet encroachment from Afghanistan.[17] In Pakistan, Arab Sunni jihadists found cause to support Afghan *mujahideen* groups against the 'infidel' Soviets who had invaded 'Muslim' Afghanistan, and the Pakistan-based *mujahideen* groups drew fighters from Afghan forced migrants in the country. This led Arab sympathizers—especially from Saudi Arabia—to pour significant resources into Pakistan. These were in addition to the substantial US-led Western donor support to Pakistan for the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union. Yet even as donors provided money to Pakistan to support Afghan migrants, the lack of internationally recognized status as refugees meant that Afghans in both countries were afforded merely a form of local hospitality (Turton and Marsden 2002). In practice, this left Afghan forced migrants in a state of permanent limbo, vulnerable to arbitrary arrests and at risk of losing any temporary protection afforded them by their host states.

3.2 Regional asylum fatigue amid the outbreak of civil war, 1992–early 2001

The increasingly securitized context of the Afghan civil war in 1992 threatened to spill across borders and shaped how Afghan forced migrants were received in Iran and Pakistan. The second wave of outmigration from Afghanistan is marked by the events after the Soviet-backed communist regime collapsed and the Western-supported *mujahideen* came to power. Initially, as the *mujahideen* worked to form a new government, 650,000 Afghans voluntarily returned from Iran and Pakistan (Abbasi-Shavazi and Sadeghi 2014), but this optimism would prove short-lived: internal conflicts among *mujahideen* factions triggered a civil war that led to the near destruction of Kabul between 1992 and 1994. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 civilians were killed in Kabul in this period (Lee 2019). The ensuing state collapse deterred further return migrations and exponentially increased the number of displacements within and the exodus from Afghanistan.

As the number of Afghan forced migrants grew in the urban centres of Iran and Pakistan, tensions with local communities heightened. Pakistan authorities also blamed a host of social ills on Afghans, further deepening divisions (USCRI 2001). As a result, second-wave Afghans found their movements increasingly restricted to designated residential areas and camps in both Iran and Pakistan (Rostami-Povey 2007). Moreover, as civil war and Taliban rule in Afghanistan persisted, Iran and Pakistan saw both economic and societal shifts away from welcoming more forced migrants. US officials visiting Islamabad months before 9/11 summed up the Pakistani position on Afghans: 'If donors have donor fatigue… then [Pakistanis] have asylum fatigue'. If donors' patience with the Afghan situation had run out, so had Pakistanis' (Turton and Marsden 2002: 15).

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[16] The term *muhaajer* (singular of *muhaajerin*) comes from the root word, *hijra*, which refers to Muhammad's departure from Mecca, where he was persecuted, to seek refuge in Medina (Shahrani 1995).

[17] Alan Taylor, 'The Soviet war in Afghanistan, 1979–1989', *The Atlantic*, 4 August 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/08/the-soviet-war-in-afghanistan-1979-1989/100786/.

Over a decade after the first wave of asylum seekers had arrived, neither Iran nor Pakistan yet provided Afghans with permanent legal status.[18]

3.3 Regionalizing 9/11, 2001–2021

The third wave of exodus from Afghanistan began in 2001, following the 9/11 attacks that turned Afghanistan into the epicentre of the 'War on Terror'. Iran and Pakistan sought to close their borders to Afghans as part of a largescale securitization effort and, drawing on the logic of asylum fatigue along with economic hardship, the two countries deported between 800,000 and 2.7 million Afghans (IOM 2014; Monsutti 2006). Meanwhile, Afghanistan continued to experience significant instability and high levels of violence (Abbasi-Shavazi and Sadeghi 2014).

These developments reveal how the discourse of the 'War on Terror' forcefully shaped the regional practices of the Middle East and South Asia, the examples of Iran and Pakistan highlighting how actors in the region responded through increasingly restrictive governance policies and practices. Afghans encountered barriers to legal migration, especially skilled migration, and increasingly faced harassment and violence as neighbouring states perceived them to be security threats.[19] Fears of deportation to Afghanistan loomed large, as corroborated by extensive interviews with Afghans in Iran.[20] Individual forced migrants often did not have documentation—when they did, it was temporary—and even registered Afghan forced migrants stood to lose their status as the Iranian authorities introduced bureaucratic hurdles to retaining it or encouraged them to adopt other temporary statuses that put them at risk of loss of rights or deportation.[21] As we will see in the discussion of coethnic communities below, the regionalization of the 'War on Terror' meant that Afghans who shared religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities with Iranians and Pakistanis nevertheless became constructed as securitized Others.

3.4 Return of the Saigon–Kabul analogy, 2021

The fourth wave of Afghan mass migration is currently unfolding, sparked by the Taliban takeover of Kabul on 15 August 2021, which resulted in the collapse of the Western-backed Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Following the Taliban's return to power, US-led NATO coalition countries mounted one of the largest mass evacuations in recent history. Precise data on numbers are lacking, but estimates point to at least 130,000 people airlifted from Afghanistan by the US by late August.[22] Roughly 123,000 Afghan asylum seekers have arrived in Europe since August.[23]

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[18] Instead, Pakistan gave Afghans in the country an exemption from the provisions of the 1946 Foreigners' Act and 1951 Foreigners' Order, which would have marked Afghans as holders of nonvalid visas and permits, and therefore subject to detention or deportation.

[19] Golnaz Esfandiari, '"I am also an Afghan"—Iranians condemn racism on Facebook', *Persian Letters*, 2 April 2012, https://www.rferl.org/a/iran_afghan_racism/24535458.html.

[20] Human Rights Watch, 'Unwelcome guests: Iran's violation of Afghan refugee and migrant rights', November 2013, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iran1113_forUpload_0.pdf.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Margaret Brennan and Camilla Schick, 'Aid groups urge U.S. to help Afghan allies', *CBS News*, 31 October 2021, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-evacuations-us-allies-aid-groups-letter/.

[23] Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, 'Can the new European Pact on Immigration and Asylum respond to future migration challenges?', *European Issues* 609, 4 October 2021, https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0609-can-the-new-european-pact-on-immigration-and-asylum-respond-to-future-migration-challenges.

Although it is an evolving context, ironically, the return of the Taliban regime to power is not the biggest hurdle to the outmigration of Afghans; rather, it is the reluctance of neighbouring countries to admit asylum seekers. Soon after the Taliban victory, Human Rights Watch (HRW), which has extensively documented mistreatment of Afghans in both countries, reported that Pakistan and Iran were hesitant to allow new Afghan forced migrants across their borders.[24] Resettlement programmes by Western nations remain dismally slow as the international community mulls over the issue of engagement with the Taliban regime. As of our writing in early December 2021, the Taliban remain unrecognized and the assets of the country frozen.

The mass evacuations have created new 'transit' hubs in Albania, Qatar, and Uganda that stand to gain much from temporarily hosting Afghans. While the US and other Western nations 'process' individual claims for resettlement,[25] Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeje Odongo has stated that his country has offered to temporarily host up to 2,000 Afghans[26] and Albania has committed to the same for up to 4,000 Afghans. Qatar reportedly hosted 60,000 Americans and Afghans at the peak of the evacuations in August,[27] and as of September, it was still hosting 20,000 Afghans, including families and children. These new transit sites playing host to the fourth wave of Afghan forced migrants are spread across three continents. However, they are united in their reason for temporarily hosting Afghans: because of the money and instruments of influence deployed by the hegemonic superpower, the United States. Albania, Qatar, and Uganda could not conceivably host any Afghan asylee without the direct involvement of the US government to vet applicants, and all three countries stand to benefit from improved relations with Western agencies led by the US. Afghan forced migrants are thus instrumentalized for political aims. As the situation is rapidly developing, we hope this focus on the securitization of governance policies and practices of resettlement will prompt further analyses of how asylees are instrumentalized in the politics of modern empire.

4 Securitizing labour market conditions confronting Afghans in the region

Afghans in Iran and Pakistan interface with a migration management system that securitizes their labour market opportunities. In both countries, the securitization of Afghans' access to the labour market leaves them vulnerable to discrimination, unemployment, and marginalization. This is compounded by the refusal of Afghans' host states to grant them pathways to permanent settlement and citizenship. In Iran, officials stress close cultural and religious ties with Afghans and claim that Iran spends at least US$2 per day 'for each Afghan refugee'.[28] Such claims remain unchallenged and unverified by international agencies and by donors such as the European Union.

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[24] Human Rights Watch, 'What's Next for Afghans Fleeing the Taliban?', 9 September 2021, https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/09/whats-next-afghans-fleeing-taliban#Q2.

[25] 'Sun, sand and stress: unlikely lives of Afghan exiles in Albania', *France 24*, 24 September 2021, https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210924-sun-sand-and-stress-unlikely-lives-of-afghan-exiles-in-albania.

[26] Jeje Odongo, 'Uganda's doors will remain open to refugees', *Al Jazeera*, 23 September 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/23/ugandas-door-will-remain-open-to-refugees.

[27] Ben Hubbard, 'From Afghanistan to the World Cup, tiny, wealthy Qatar steps up', *The New York Times*, 7 September 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/07/world/middleeast/afghanistan-qatar-airlift.html.

[28] Statement by the Representative of the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran, 'People on the move—Geneva Afghanistan Conference', UN Web TV, 27 November 2018, https://media.un.org/asset/k1r/k1redss2to (accessed 1 December 2021).

In Iran, undocumented Afghans face severe marginalization and precarity in the labour market, and even documented Afghans can seek work only in menial and often dangerous occupations. UNHCR offices in Iran assert that 'refugees have been given access to education, health and livelihood opportunities—helping them thrive, not just survive.[29] However, Iran-based researchers' findings conflict with such claims:

> Afghan refugees, generally, have to accept any hard, dirty and low paying job. They cannot ask for insurance or any form of social security. They live in Iran by the fear of being fired of work and deport[ed] to Afghanistan. So they prefer the work places that are far from the city centers that can hide them from the eyes of labour and social security supervisors. They usually live in work places or live in small rooms with unsuitable conditions. Not paying high rent charges, they can live with low wages in Iran (Karimi Moughari 2007: 65).

Where Afghans have sought to enter university, they have faced two distinct barriers, both stemming from securitization of the migration system. First, they have often needed to give up their de facto refugee status to become eligible; second, they are barred from a variety of degree programmes that are perceived as 'threatening' if opened to Afghans, such as information technology related to energy, nuclear physics, petrochemical engineering, and computer network security.[30]

The situation in Pakistan is similarly fraught, with Afghans unable to enjoy basic freedoms such as international travel, property ownership, and bank accounts. With assistance from the UNHCR in 2007, the Pakistani federal government introduced a Proof of Registration (PoR) scheme for Afghans; this was treated by UNHCR as proof of registration as a refugee.[31] By January 2020, there were 1.4 million PoR cardholders who, in principle, had basic rights including access to the labour market. In practice, PoR cardholders cannot access skilled labour positions or formally register businesses without excessive scrutiny. Afghans are also barred from accessing certain healthcare facilities, working in the Pakistani government or non-government sectors, and establishing start-up businesses. The PoR scheme is also vague in offering assurance on the length of its validity, and when PoR cards expire, Afghan refugees face harassment by the authorities even when the Pakistani government has announced de facto extensions to the scheme.[32] Moreover, Afghan forced migrants have few opportunities to receive quality education. Confronting marginal economic opportunities, some turn to Pakistan's religious seminaries, *madrassah*s, for access to education. The number of *madrassahs* is contested, but it is estimated to be between 30,000 and 40,000 across Pakistan, enrolling nearly 5 million students, who predominantly come from poor and marginalized segments of society.[33] Afghan forced migrants have been allowed to study in the

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[29] 'Refugees in Iran', UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/.

[30] Ahmad Shuja, 'Iran bans Afghan and Iraqi refugees from moving regions for employment', UN Dispatch, 6 June 2012, https://www.undispatch.com/facing-financial-pressure-iran-bans-afghan-and-iraqi-from-moving-to-cities-for-employment/.

[31] Marissa Quie and Hameed Hakimi, 'The EU and the politics of migration management in Afghanistan', Chatham House Asia-Pacific Programme and Europe Programme Research Paper, November 2020, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020-11-13-eu-migration-management-afghanistan-quie-et-al.pdf.

[32] Zuha Siddiqui, 'For Afghan refugees, Pakistan is a nightmare—but also home', *Foreign Policy*, 9 May 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/09/for-afghan-refugees-pakistan-is-a-nightmare-but-also-home/.

[33] Myriam Renaud, 'Pakistan's plan to reform Madrasas ignores why parents enrol children in first place', *The Globe Post*, 20 May 2019, https://theglobepost.com/2019/05/20/pakistan-madrasas-reform/.

madrassahs while being prevented from mainstream education. Importantly, this has contributed to a rise in religious extremism over the last 40 years among Afghan forced migrants who have been channelled through *madrassahs* and subsequently joined Islamist causes, including the latest Taliban insurgency. As we discuss further in the section below, this marginalization intersects with and exacerbates coethnic divisions.

5 Securitizing coethnic communities confronting Afghans in the region

The difficulties confronting Afghans in Iran and Pakistan may be unexpected, considering that Afghans have cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic ties with both countries. As a multi-ethnic country, Afghanistan includes ethnic Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and other, less populous, groups (although no census has been conducted for decades). The country also includes different sects of Islam such as Sunni and Shia. In Pakistan, the majority of Afghan forced migrants identify ethnically as Pashtuns and Sunni Muslims who lived in the southern and south-eastern regions of Afghanistan that border Pakistan. By contrast, early flows of Afghan forced migrants to Iran included largely Tajik and Hazara ethnic groups,[34] the latter of whose Shia background mirrors the majority of Iran. Although both Iran and Pakistan have advanced migration policies that tend to treat Afghans as a homogeneous national group, these countries have also instrumentalized the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of Afghans to fulfil national security agendas.

In Iran, the government has instrumentalized its shared Shia identification with Afghans to military ends. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian security and political establishment supported certain *mujahideen* groups largely from the Shia-dominated factions.[35] Several Afghan Shia groups that were based in Iran eventually developed into Afghanistan's Hazara-dominated *Hizb-e-Wahdat* (Unity Party), which was involved in the Afghan civil war of 1992–1996 and also emerged as a key patron representing Hazaras in the post-2001 period.[36] In 2013, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps recruited thousands of Afghan forced migrants, mostly Hazara Shia, to join the *Fatemiyoun* division to fight in support of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria.[37] The families of Afghan fighters in the *Fatemiyoun* division were granted privileges, including residency in Iran, and 'honoured' with religious titles.[38]

Afghans in Pakistan similarly saw their shared ethnicity instrumentalized by their host country. When Pakistan-based Afghan *mujahideen* groups fought against the Soviet military in Afghanistan, the Afghan recruits with the closest ties to the Pakistani security and political elites also assumed a sense of elevated hierarchy among the wider migrant communities, but in reality they were used as cannon fodder. The same trend of recruitment by religious extremists continued when the

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[34] Alireza Nader et al. (2014), 'Iran and Afghanistan: a complicated relationship', in *Iran's influence in Afghanistan: implications for the U.S. drawdown*, RAND Corporation. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt1287mjf.8?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

[35] Iran also maintained relations with Sunni Afghan *mujahideen* groups such as Hizb-e-Islami Hekmatyar, and Jamiat-e-Islami, and with the Northern Alliance forces prior to 2001.

[36] Nader et al., 'Iran and Afghanistan' (*op. cit.*).

[37] Ahmad Shuja Jamal, 'The Fatemiyoun army: reintegration into Afghan society', United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 443, March 2019, https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/03/fatemiyoun-army-reintegration-afghan-society.

[38] Nader et al., 'Iran and Afghanistan'.

Taliban rose to prominence and then retreated to Pakistan after 2001, settling in the largely Pashtun-dominated regions of the country and among Pashtun populations in Karachi.

States also directly shape coethnic relations by determining whether unions are recognized or allowed. The case of popular Pakistani Pashto folk singer Nazia Iqbal illustrates how securitized migration policies prevent Afghan forced migrants from establishing a coethnic family life. Iqbal's husband, an Afghan forced migrant in Pakistan, had sought residency and citizenship because of his marriage to Iqbal but was denied both by Pakistani authorities. Being unable to return to Afghanistan, he then sought asylum in the UK, and so Iqbal was forced to relocate to the UK in order to live with her husband and two children as a family.[39] Similarly, Iranian women married to Afghan forced migrants in Iran face substantial socioeconomic and legal repercussions, including denial of birth certificates and Iranian nationality for their children.[40] Despite shared ethnicity and religion, then, Afghan forced migrants in Iran and Pakistan largely share a sense of collective stigma and marginalization, combined with severe precarity over residency rights.

6 Discussion and conclusion

Building on the JEMS SI, this paper has revisited the contexts of reception that shape resettlement for Afghan and Vietnamese forced migrants and aims to further develop and refine analytical frameworks, rather than to test hypotheses. We heeded the observation by Stempel and Alemi (2020) to consider the role of post-9/11 security concerns in shaping the opportunities available to Afghans. But rather than restricting the discussion of securitization to the period following 9/11, we have analysed how securitization shaped resettlement in the decades before 9/11. And rather than treat securitization as a type of governance policy or practice, we have applied it as a framework that precedes and shapes each of the dimensions of contexts of reception. To demonstrate the utility of this reframing, we discussed four waves of Afghan resettlement to neighbouring countries in the Middle East and South Asia region.

Our review of Afghan forced migration to Iran and Pakistan since the late 1970s raises questions about the basic assumption underlying 'regional solutions'—namely, that migrants will fare better in their own region, where their ethnicity, language, or religion are shared. Observers raised this point with Syrians fleeing in 2015, asking why they did not leave for nearby Gulf states, which were closer than Europe.[41] The challenges Afghans continue to face in host countries, whether 'temporary' or 'permanent', should remind us that shared language, ethnicity, and religion do not necessarily lead to better humanitarian protection. Indeed, 'the region' itself is contested. Although often lumped together with 'the Middle East', Afghanistan is at a crossroads between Central, West, and South Asia. The conflation of Islam with Arab states misses the internal heterogeneity we have tried to detail above. Decades after the arrival of the first wave of migrants in Iran and Pakistan, they continue to be unsettled. This was also true of the Vietnamese, many of whom were stuck for years in camps in Hong Kong while awaiting a decision on their asylum claims (Lipman 2020). The protracted nature of forced migrants' time in countries where they do not intend to stay challenges the distinction between transit and resettlement country. Despite hosting forced

[39] 'Pashto folk singer shifts to England with family', *Dawn*, 28 July 2019, https://www.dawn.com/news/1496605/pashto-folk-singer-shifts-to-england-with-family.

[40] 'Legalizing marriage to Afghans', *Financial Tribune*, 1 February 2016, https://financialtribune.com/articles/people/35487/legalizing-marriage-to-afghans.

[41] Amira Fathalla, 'Migrant crisis: why Syrians do not flee to Gulf states', *BBC*, 2 September 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34132308.

migrants for decades, Iran and Pakistan have yet to fully become countries of permanent resettlement for Afghans. The fact that forced migrants to Iran and Pakistan do not have legal pathways to citizenship prompted some to return to Afghanistan in the 1990s and predicts further exits to countries where they hope to achieve more permanency.

Bringing together the frameworks of securitization and contexts of reception, we have argued that governance policies and practices, the labour market, and coethnic communities are themselves driven by security concerns. Instead of asking, as the JEMS SI does, 'what factors contribute to variation in the integration of groups over time', we shift the focus to 'how might actors, driven by securitization concerns, be shaping the capacity of migrants to cross an international border, seek employment, and build community'? Correspondingly, this broadens the enquiry from one centred on conditions within a single country *after* people migrate to one also concerned with the regional and global circumstances that operate *before* people migrate. The crisis that now confronts Afghans will require such cross-border, regional, and global considerations.

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