



Refugees from an "IDP" camp standing in line at Médecins du Monde's clinic. Refugees trapped inside the borders of their country are labeled "Internally Displaced Persons" by the United Nations. Zaranj, March, 2002.

AFGHANISTAN, 2002: NO REFUGE

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In the break between "evil regimes" and their former ally, the United States; in the rift between post-Soviet civil wars and post-September wars on civilians; in the breach between profit politics and people's well-being; in between the holes in the mountains where the Buddhas stood and those on the grounds where the bombs fall – what happens to the millions who do not make it to the "safety" of detention centres in the West? *Where is the refuge?* For the massive numbers of humans displaced and struggling for survival amidst the ongoing global strife – played out in their land, at their cost and ours – this question is an incessant preoccupation; indeed, it is life itself.

The tragic inadequacy of emergency aid services – such as we have seen in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq – renders visible the fundamental flaws in our conceptualization of "aid" and, thus, its inherently structural failure: 1) The need for such "aid" services is created by the "emergency" political, economic and military wars that disenfranchise, displace and (literally) "disarm" civilians. 2) Therefore, the flow of "aid" – presumably from the global north to the global south – is a continuation of colonial power dynamics that mask enforced dispossession with missionary practices and rhetoric. 3) No wonder, then, that the majority of Western "aid" agencies are hugely inefficient bureaucracies that consume most of the resources for their own continuance.

The new forms of "aid" displayed in the state-corporation in-camera deal-makings – towards the "reconstruction" of the "liberated" countries on the one hand, and towards the incarceration of refugees arriving in the West on the other – rapidly renders current models of "aid" marginal and then useless. In this global "theatre" of "aid," indigenous grass-roots organizations – such as Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) – provide the only viable alternatives that can aid (as opposed to applying Band-Aid™). Armed with their intimate knowledge of the local and refusing to divorce aid from the politics of the global, these organizations achieve such manifest success in attending to emergency *and* long-term needs of their communities that should help us re-conceptualize aid as sustained solidarity. Although much remains to be addressed and articulated about the ethics, politics, and forms of trans-border solidarity, one thing *is* clear: Solidarity acknowledges the inter-connectedness of our lives and destinies and, thus, our inherent equality. It is only within this conceptual space that we may begin to establish viable relationships and practical networks to change the political and economic conditions that produce massive displacement and trauma.

This essay is a partial account of the lives of Afghani refugees, on the move en-masse, within the borders of wars and lies about wars, between state violence and embedded reportage. Remember: Beyond a mere case study, Afghanistan is a land inhabited by real people: For the records: Afghanistan, 2002.



*A billboard advertisement.
Khandehar.
April, 2002.*

The Liberation



*U.S. soldiers.
Khandehar Airport.
April, 2002.*



One of the bodies of a group of refugees who were killed, apparently, while attempting to cross the border to Iran. Corpses were found with their hands oddly and "inexplicably" stiffened mid-air.
Zaranj.
March 17, 2002.

Border Crossing



Burial of the group of refugees found "mysteriously" dead near the border to Iran.
Zaranj Cemetery.
March 17, 2002.



Living conditions in an "IDP" camp. Near Zaranj. March 13, 2002.

Tent City



Water delivery by Médecins sans Frontières in an "IDP" camp. Near Zaranj. March 13, 2002..



Refugees waiting outside the Médecins du Monde's clinic. Zaranj. March 13, 2002.

Aid

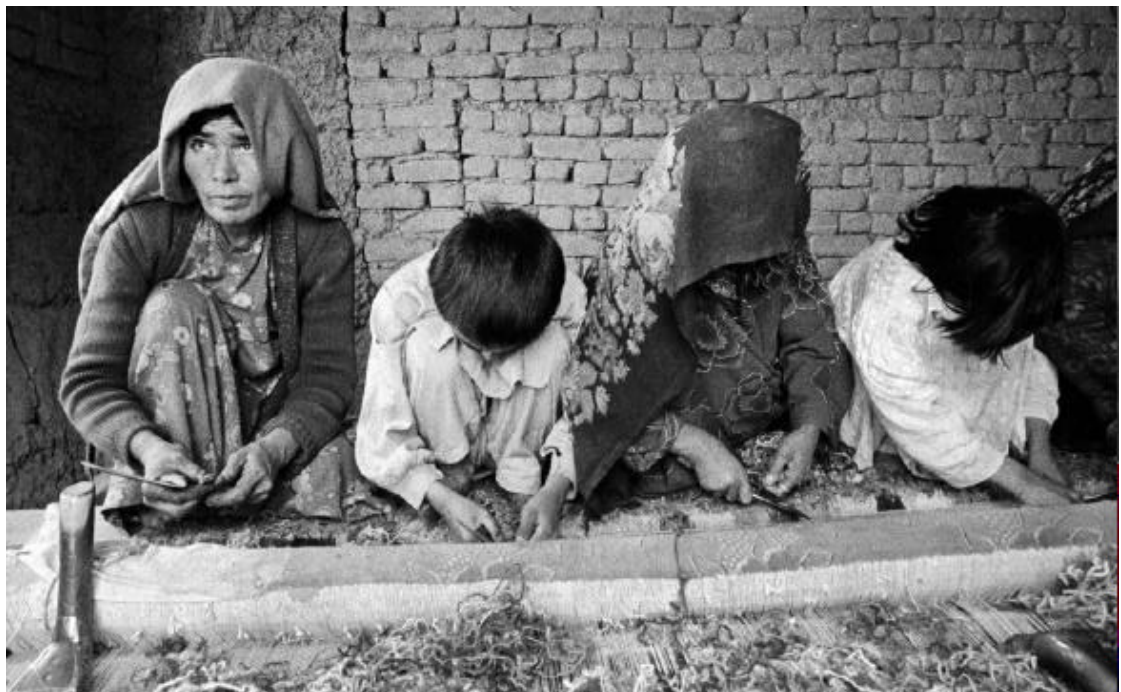


Headquarters of Komite-ye Emdad-e Imam Khomeini (Imam Khomeini's Aid Committee, funded by Iranian government). Zaranj. March, 2002.



Afghani refugees working at a brick factory (the figure in the foreground is a former high-ranking army officer). Charat Camp. Peshawar, Pakistan. February, 2002.

The Other Side



Afghani refugee women and children working at a carpet "factory." Charat Camp. Peshawar, Pakistan. February, 2002.

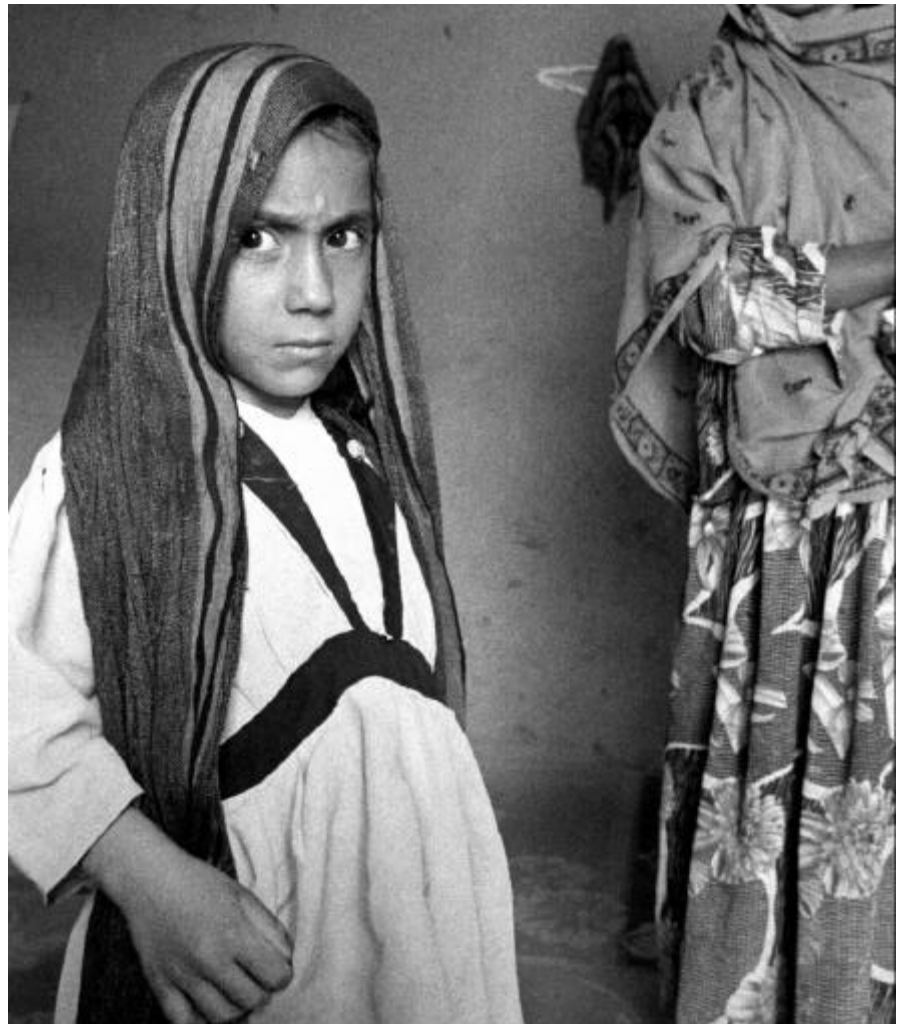


Girls at a school set up for orphaned children by Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Peshawar, Pakistan. February, 2002.

RAWA School



Boy's Dormitory at the school run by RAWA. Peshawar, Pakistan. February, 2002.



*7-year-old refugee
child suffering
from severe trauma
caused by
witnessing her
father's death in
the war.
Zaranj,
March, 2002.*

Babak Salari has been living and practicing in Canada since 1983. For the past two decades, he has presented his work to the public in a number of group and solo exhibitions. As a cultural and political activist, his photo-documentaries reflect his deep concern with people who live at the margins of society. Salari's work includes the following: People In Between, reflected his own personal experience of marginality, and confronted the lived experience of rupture highlighting the reality of exile; Time in Hjuichitan, explored a small Mexican town's daily strife and anguish against the odds of global expansion; I Am Naked, I Am Human, addressed the practice of Islamic veiling (hijab) under fundamentalist rule; Queer at the Margins of Society and Triangle of Desire served as an account of the marginalized public practice of queer eroticism in Cuba, and candidly reflected the unique marginal experience of queer artists and intellectuals in that society; Let Me Live, I Will Unveil Myself captured the cry of Afghan war.
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Gita Hashemi is a transdisciplinary practitioner in politically engaged art. Her recent individual and collaborative projects include Of Shifting Shadows (CD-R, 2000), The Word Room (wordroom.net, 2001), Creative Response (creative responseweb.net, 2002-...), Many Stones for Palestine (2002), Locating Afghanistan (with Babak Salari, 2002), Negotiations: From a Piece of Land to a Land of Peace (negotiations2003.net, 2003), Olive Fair (olivefair.net, 2003), and Post-Coitus (post-coitus.net, 2003). Hashemi is a founding member of Post-Exile Collective and Creative Response. Currently, she teaches as an adjunct faculty at York University, and lives in Toronto, Canada.
