

Roots and Routes Revisited: The Hurdles of Identity Formation among Afghan Migrants and Refugees in German^{1,2,3}

^{1:} Abdullah Attayi, Berlin Von Humbolt University, Germany

^{2:} Mustafa Nasiri, Weltweit e.V., Bad Sodan, Germany

^{3:} Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany

Abstract

Migration has been an inevitable part of the human journey in their pursuit of safety, opportunity, and prosperity, driven by a combination of push and pull factors. The Afghan diaspora in Europe, particularly in Germany, is a clear example of migration driven by such forces. Despite their hopes for a better future, Afghan refugees in Germany face numerous challenges beyond the initial struggles of seeking asylum and integration. One significant challenge is the issue of identity, which places them at a crossroads between preserving their “heritage identity” and embracing an “evolving identity” as they integrate into the new society. To theorize this dynamic, Amarya Sen introduces the concept of “solitarist” versus “pluralistic” identity. The solitarist approach emphasizes a singular identity, viewing individuals as members of exactly one group such “as religious” identity. In contrast, the pluralistic approach allows individuals to affiliate with multiple identities simultaneously, such as being a German citizen, with Afghan roots, a nurse, a musician, and so on. The insistence on a “solitarist” identity is prevalent among many Muslim immigrants and has, in some cases, resulted into criminal behavior– also by Afghan refugees. This has sparked intense debates and social and political tensions within the host country, frequently amplified by nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric against refugees. Using the “solitarist” versus “pluralistic” approach to identity as a theoretical framework, this study explores the complexities of identity crisis among Afghan refugees in Germany. It investigates how Afghan refugees navigate and negotiate their cultural heritage and identity while integrating into German society. The research examines the social and cultural barriers to integration, as well as the perceptions of refugees toward German attitudes. Additionally, the study also explores how second-generation Afghan refugees conceptualize their identity, and what strategies do they employ to reconcile their Afghan roots with German cultural expectations to forge a more “pluralistic” and evolving identity. Employing qualitative methods, including interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges Afghan refugees face and the strategies they use to construct a more pluralistic identity that fosters social cohesion. It may also shed light on the broader dynamics of migration, identity formation, and cultural integration in a multicultural context. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how migration shapes identity and how pluralistic approaches can facilitate successful integration.

Key words

Identity, culture preservation, migration, diaspora, integration, social cohesion