For people in Afghanistan, the events of September 11, 2001, are remembered primarily as the trigger that prompted massive U.S. military action in their homeland. As the Taliban regime persisted in “sheltering” Osama bin Laden that autumn, the United States retaliated by invading the country, establishing a long-term military presence and promoting an uneasy political transition that continues to evolve today. While the hunt for bin Laden and Al Qaeda members was cited as justification for the war, ultimately it was the Afghan people who were caught in the crossfire, and who have accounted for the greatest number of its casualties.

The changes wrought by military interventions extend well beyond the tragic statistics of body counts. One of the various unforeseen effects of the U.S.-Allied military campaign in Afghanistan has been a significant alteration of the country’s musical landscape.
Most prominent, the ousting of the Taliban regime ended a period of severe music censorship, rooted in their imposition of an extreme interpretation of Islamic law.¹ This development was widely reported in the Western press, as coalition forces were eager to portray their campaign as a “humanitarian war” against the Taliban, and the end of music censorship in Afghanistan thus emerged as a key symbol of the war’s “just cause” and success.² Less discussed in the press were the actual efforts to revive music in the country, which emerged on two key fronts. First, exiled professional musicians began to return to the country, hoping that once again they would be able to make a living by playing music. Second, a number of other interested individuals and institutions began the difficult work of creating and supporting projects, particularly educational initiatives, capable of regenerating Afghanistan’s ailing but historically rich musical culture.

For many reasons, Afghan musical culture today remains in a state of flux. Decades of war, the exodus of many musicians, and periods of restrictive censorship have contributed to a decline in both the quantity and quality of musical performances, even as many new influences have penetrated the country’s musical culture in recent years. Western influences are noticeable, and the themes of some songs reflect the experiences of conflict and recent world events.

In contrast with some of the articles in this volume, however, post-9/11 music in Afghanistan does not commemorate the lives lost in the United States on that day, for a number of reasons. First, Afghan people do not mark September 11, 2001, as an important date, and they have very little sense of the cost of human life in the 9/11 attacks. Rather, the significant (and clearly 9/11-related) moment occurred in December 2001, when the Taliban rulers departed from Kabul. Second, when it comes to mourning the dead, Afghan people have many martyrs of their own. The current U.S.-led “war on terror” has cost thousands of Afghan lives, including those of many innocent civilians who died in the initial U.S. bombing strikes. What is more, these are only the most recent casualties of political violence in the country; prior to 9/11, more than two decades of conflict had already taken the lives of at least a million people (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 3).

Few people in Afghanistan are likely to commemorate those lost on 9/11 for another reason, also recognized by many foreign political analysts: namely, that Western countries bear much historical responsibility for creating and fueling the forces that engineered those events. The United States in particular supported Islamic fundamentalist movements during the Cold War against the Soviet Union, and this
had the ultimate effect of promoting the kind of autonomous terrorism embodied in Al Qaeda. Many Afghans are keenly aware of this history of foreign political interference, and the destructive impact that it has had on their country.

In this article I draw on the work of ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, filmmakers, and political analysts, as well as my own long-term involvement with Afghanistan, Afghan people, and Afghan music, to present a portrait of music and politics in the country before and after 9/11. Tracing the roots and reconfiguration of traditional poetic themes that include religious piety, patriotism, lament, satire, and ridicule, I argue that the politicization of Afghan music largely began with the period of armed conflict in 1978. By comparing preconflict song texts with material recorded in 2003, I also illustrate how Afghan social consciousness as a whole has broadened during this period. Turning to the post-9/11 era specifically, I focus on two important social themes in contemporary Afghan musical culture: the impact of the Afghan diaspora on music inside Afghanistan and the continuing power play between conservative Islamic values and secularized modernity, including how that struggle is playing out in recent music educational initiatives in Kabul. I conclude with an overview of the state of Afghan music in the post-9/11 world, and the ongoing impact—musical, cultural, and otherwise—of the fallout from that fateful day.

MUSIC IN AFGHAN HISTORY
In Afghanistan, as in many other Islamic cultures, “music” is rather narrowly defined. The term musiqi refers solely to instrumental music, or singing accompanied by instruments. Singing or chanting, such as lullabies, Sufi chants, Koranic cantillation, and the Islamic call to prayer, are considered separate, non-“musical” phenomena, and this important conceptual distinction has shaped public policies and had a tremendous effect on the status of music and musicians. In contrast, music-making with instruments is associated with celebration and enjoyment, especially weddings. Significantly, music is not to be played after someone has died, and ideally, a forty-day mourning period is observed in which no music should be heard. These notions about appropriate contexts for music-making had a considerable impact in the politicized (not to mention violent) environments of the 1980s and 1990s.

Further discussion of music’s place in this turbulent history requires at least a cursory overview of recent Afghan history itself. In this essay, I will refer to the relatively peaceful decades preceding the
pro-Soviet coup d’état of April 1978 as the “preconflict” period. The “conflict period” that began in 1978 has not really ended, as military action, political violence, and pro-Taliban insurgencies are ongoing. Within this long era of conflict, the “communist period” (1978–92) was marked by strife pitting Islamist resistance forces (mujahideen) against the communist government. In 1992, amidst the collapse of the communist regime, the mujahideen leaders formed an Islamist coalition government, marking the beginning of the “coalition period” (1992–96), but civil war continued between rival factions. The Taliban movement emerged from Pakistan in 1994, gradually sweeping across the country and taking Kabul in 1996. “Taliban rule” (1996–2001) refers to the years when the Taliban controlled Kabul and much of the rest of Afghanistan (but never the extreme northeast). The U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan was initiated in October 2001, and the “Karzai period” began in early 2002, with Hamid Karzai’s inauguration as leader of the interim government. Karzai was later elected president, and at the time of this writing (May 2005), is still in power.

Each successive stage of the conflict period has had a significant impact on musical practices. After the 1978 coup and throughout the communist period, violent conditions led many people to flee the country, including many professional musicians, although some stayed in Kabul to work for the state radio and television stations. Successive communist governments promoted music for propaganda purposes, while the mujahideen groups tried to prohibit civilian music-making in areas that they held. They argued that in conditions of war, when so many families had martyrs to mourn, music-making was forbidden. In any case, in such grim circumstances, many people simply lost the heart for music. Beginning in 1992, the Islamist coalition government severely restricted music broadcasting, and the roots of official music censorship took hold. These policies reached their most extreme form under the Taliban, when musicians were penalized and sometimes even beaten and imprisoned, musical instruments were publicly destroyed, and it became illegal to play or listen to music. In short, the Taliban tried to erase music from everyday life. The only melodious sounds they officially allowed were religious singing and *taranas* (commonly termed “chants”), consisting of male unaccompanied singing, sometimes with new lyrics about Taliban heroes. In Taliban-held areas very little live music-making existed otherwise, although some people defiantly continued to play in secret.
THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICIZED SONGS

As implied by the special place accorded vocal music even under Taliban censorship, sung poetry is an important aspect of Afghan culture, practiced and appreciated across all levels of society. Prior to the 1978 coup, however, Afghan music-making was not generally concerned with social or political themes. Rather, the most important topic addressed by singers and poets was love: romantic love, mystical love, the sorrow of separation from loved ones, and love for the homeland and countryside. Consequently, the literature on Afghan music in the 1960s and 1970s rarely refers to songs with social or political themes. ⁸

After 1978, professional singers were encouraged by ensuing regimes to address more topical and politicized themes, as all political entities, including eventually the Taliban, attempted to capitalize on the power of sung texts. Often new poetry would be set to existing melodies, though existing poetry (sometimes adapted) could also acquire a new significance and popularity. ⁹ We know little about the pro-communist propaganda songs of state radio and television in the 1980s, due to a lack of scholarship and/or reporting on the topic, and these songs have fallen into disuse along with the communist ideals they espouse, which have no place in today’s Afghanistan. ¹⁰ In contrast, a number of the rousing songs that appealed to the mujahideen still have some currency, as they express heroic, devotional, and Islamic ideals that are still relevant and cherished by a significant segment of the population.

Mujahideen songs of the communist era typically extol the virtues of those fighting a “holy war” (jihad) against “unbelievers.” In Badakhshan in 1996, Jan van Belle recorded one such example that dated to the communist period whose lyrics, by singer-composer Mehri Maftun, are strongly religious and forcefully anticommunist. ¹¹ Maftun bluntly states that Afghanistan has fallen into the hands of Satan, and that the government is “the slave of Russia.” In a passionate style, with percussive accompaniment on his own dambura (long-necked lute), he rouses fighters to bravery, using Arabic invocations to God as a refrain and drawing on the language of love poetry:

\[ \text{Mujahed! mujahed! feda-ye peykar-e tu} \]
\[ \text{Mubariz! mubariz! khoda madadgar-e tu} \]

\[ \text{Mujahed! mujahed! I sacrifice myself to your person/figure} \]
\[ \text{Fighter! Fighter! May God be your helper!} \]
Pious wishes, invocations, and prayers are common tropes in these newly composed Islamic political songs, which began to be performed publicly after the 1992 fall of the communist regime. In 1994, I recorded another such song in Herat, *Khoda-ye mehraban* (“O kind God”), performed by a band led by the well-known professional singer-harmonium player Mahmud Khushnawaz.¹³ The singer told me that it had been composed in Kabul two or three years previously. The chorus runs:

*Khoda-e mehraban darbarat ast kalan
Arezu o hawas darim arami Afghanistan. Allah! Allah! Allah!*

O kind God, your court is great
Our wish and desire is for peace in Afghanistan. God! God! God!¹⁴

The chorus also asks for help from the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law and follower, Hazrat Ali, who is known in Afghanistan as a healer and “Problem-solver.” Interestingly, two years later van Belle recorded this same song in Mazar-i Sherif, sung by the professional singer Hassan Besmil and accompanied by a band. It had obviously achieved fairly wide currency as a public expression of pious desires.

The most typical poetic themes emerging from the Islamic resistance movement were prayer, lament, patriotism, and heroism. The long tradition in Afghanistan of solo heroic epics lent itself well to political treatment. In the past, epics provided singers with the opportunity to explore idealized social values through telling stories about mythical heroes. Under present circumstances, singers turned their attention instead to contemporary heroes and their feats in battle. Outside the immediate war zone, across the border in Pakistan, Afghan professional singers were able to elaborate on this art form, and they recorded sung narrations of modern battle epics on commercial audiocassettes. A single song describing a battle might take up an entire forty-minute audiocassette. The mujahideen enjoyed listening to these epics, which were performed in an intense martial style, with the sounds of real gunfire or tabla drums imitating guns and rockets.

Male singers and poets have been largely responsible for composing new political music, but some interesting female songs also emerged from the refugee camps of Pakistan. These were composed and recorded (with musical accompaniment played by men) by girls from a school run by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in Quetta. One example is very much within the tradition of Pashtun heroic and patriotic poetry:
Zerah dai Asia chai qahraman dai
Da watan mu gran Afghanistan
Soak cai puh yerghal der ta ragheli dee
Goad aw puh ghashuno mot wateli dee
So cha baturan dai watan kai shori
Bia puh kazho strego soak nagori

The heart of Asia [Afghanistan] is a hero.
This country dear to us is Afghanistan.

Those who have come to assault you
Have left limping with their teeth broken.

As long as your brave sons are in the country
No one will look at you [Afghanistan] with bad intentions.\textsuperscript{15}

In the atmosphere of post-Taliban Kabul, patriotic songs are genuinely popular. They seem to express people’s desire to feel unified and secure in a national identity. A prime example is the much-loved and ubiquitous Pashto-language song \textit{Da zemu ziba watan} (“This is our beautiful country”), which has become something like the unofficial national anthem.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{verbatim}
Da zemu ziba watan
Da zemu leila watan
Da watan mu zan dai
Da Afghanistan

This is our beautiful country
This is our lovely country
This country is very dear to us
This is Afghanistan\textsuperscript{17}
\end{verbatim}

Composed and popularized in the preconflict period by the great Pashtun radio singer Awal Mir, it enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in the 1980s among Pashto-speaking Afghan refugees in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{18} In Kabul it is now played when President Karzai makes official speeches,
and it regularly crops up in all kinds of musical performances. There are three versions in John Baily’s film *Kabul Music Diary* (Baily 2003). Known among all ethnic groups, its meaning transcends Pashtun nationalism and expresses warm emotions about Afghanistan as a homeland, asserting that such feelings are central to every Afghan.

A different sort of proud and militant nationalism is contained in the songs recorded in the post-9/11 era by Malang Kohestani, a remarkable poet-singer who was filmed by the anthropologist David Edwards in 2003. Kohestani’s home region of Istalif is strategically situated north of Kabul, close to the Panjsher Valley and the site of a great deal of fighting. Kohestani described himself to Edwards as a “mujahed,” and explained that local people enjoy songs that refer to the recent struggles. The following verse expresses a defiant confidence and patriotism similar to the RAWA song quoted above:

```
Lashkar-e najat-e meihan
Afghanistan zadeim
Yak musht o yak parchegi o
Mardom-e azadeim
Az Sikander ta Britania
Har biganei
Tarikh-e dandanshekan darim
Jawabash dadeim
```

We are the liberation army of this country
We are from Afghanistan,
A single fist and united,
We are a free people.
From Alexander to Britain,
And all invaders,
We have a teeth-breaking history
And we have defeated them all!

In another verse of this song, a mother tells her child to grow up prepared to struggle for the homeland which, interestingly, is personified as a beloved female:
Jawan shu farzand-e man
Dar nabard o ruzegarat
Kamarat mahkam beban
Ba tu shiramra ke dani
Dar maqamat sar baland
Yak madarat man mibashum
Madar-e digar watan

Grow up my child,
Prepare yourself for the struggle of your time.
Take pride
In the milk I gave you.
Your mother I am;
Your other mother is your homeland

Islamic and patriotic songs such as these that emerged during the decades of conflict remain current and popular, expressing a continued concern with Islamic values and nation-building. They are not the only thematic treatments of Afghanistan’s long-running conflict in its music, however; songs of lament, dealing with the traumas of death and destruction that inhabit the popular memory, are also widespread.

THE POETRY OF LAMENT
Lament themes have a strong presence in Afghan culture, prominent in the poetry and expressive arts of both Persian and Pashto speakers. The folklorist Benedicte Grima makes the general point that the “tragic esthetic” is “deeply rooted in Indo-Iranian perception and world-view” (1993: 143). In the past, however, lament poetry was normally concerned with love: love of a person who had died or gone far away, or love for one’s distant homeland.

The Persian-language northern genre of quatrains known as *falak*, for example, laments the trials of fate, taking its name from “the wheel of fate” (*charkh-e falak*). The ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin quotes a quatrain, sung around 1970 by the Badakhshani singer Baba Naim (who then lived in Kabul), which alludes to the flight of refugees from the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan (Kulab) to Afghanistan (Balkh) in the
1920s and ’30s. This example shows how historical events may be retained in the poetic memory for many decades (and, indeed, centuries):

Charxe felak mara dar Balx awordi
Kulab budim mara dar Balx awordi
Janam dar Kulab budim u mixurdim abe shirin
Az abe shirin bar abe talx awordi

O wheel of fortune, you spun me around
I was in Kulab, you brought me to Balkh
Dear, I drank sweet water in Kulab
You brought me from sweet water to bitter

Other laments mourn tragic heroes, and they may convey messages about social values. One example is an old Herati song about a bandit called Asadullah Jan, who was eventually caught and killed. In the song the bandit’s mother tells her dead son that he sealed his own fate by defying the king’s authority:

Ku takht-e tu ku bakht-e tu Asadullah jan
Ku madar-e kambakht-e tu akh amir-e madar
Sad bar goftum yaqi mashu Asadullah jan
Be padashah yaqi mashu akh amir-e madar

Where’s your throne, where’s your luck, Asadullah Jan?
Where’s your unlucky mother, o prince of your mother?
A hundred times I told you not to be rebellious, Asadullah Jan
Not to rebel against the king, o prince of your mother

During the conflict period, the lament genre was reconfigured as an appropriate means of mourning the dead and the losses of war; numerous songs were composed lamenting the ruin of Afghanistan itself. One example was recorded on video in 1997 at a public concert in the United States organized by the Afghan-American community in Virginia. The visiting singer was Ustad Amir Mohammad, a respected Kabuli ustad (master-musician), with a remarkable new version of his classic Persian-language song Chaharbeiti Shomali. (“Shomali” refers both
to an area near Kabul that was devastated and to a melody type.) In the well-known original, recorded by John Baily in 1974, Amir Mohammad used traditional folk quatrains about unrequited love: the pain of separation, and of waiting, chiding his loved one for her cruelty and faithlessness. This is the first verse:

*Gham-e eshqat biaban parwaram kard*
*Hawayat morgh-e bi bal o param kard*
*Mara gofti saburi kon saburi*
*Saburi khak-e alam ba saram kard*

Sadness at love for you has made me frequent the desert
Your air has made me into a bird without wings or feathers
You told me to wait, to wait
Waiting has brought me a world of unhappiness

The new version laments the ruin of Kabul, using the language of traditional love poetry and personifying Kabul as a beloved:

*Shomali jang shod o shahr-e kalanat*
*Ba bala-e sarash mehr-e jahanat*
*Bia ziyarat konim Seyed Jafar Agha*
*Hamishe dastegir-e bikasanat*

*Chera Kabul tura weiran namudan*
*Tanatra bi sar o saman namudan*
...

*Ala ai Kabul-e nazdana-ye man*
*Chera atash zadi dalanan-e man?*
*Keshidam saleha bar-e ghamanatra*
*Chera az man gerefti khana-ye man?*

*Sarosar Kabulam weiran gashte*
*Hame pir o jawan diwana gashte*
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War came to the Shomali area and its principal city [Kabul].
May the love of heaven come down onto Kabul.
Let’s go and pray at the shrine of Seyed Jafar Agha,
Who always supports the dispossessed.

Why did they ruin you, Kabul?
Why did they leave you bereft like this?
....

Alas, o Kabul, my sweetly alluring one,
Why did you [i.e., enemies] set fire to my alleys?
For years I’ve carried the weight of your grief
Why did you take my house away?

All of Kabul has turned to ruins,
Old and young alike have gone mad.27

Visiting a privately run orphanage in Kabul in 2002, John Baily recorded another lament for Kabul. The young girl who sang it had learned it in the state orphanage where she had previously lived. Such songs may have partly been composed in order to touch the hearts of visitors. This one, in Pashto, has the poet’s name, Haidari, in the last verse. Like the previous lament from Amir Mohammad, it names specific areas of Kabul:

Golan rishigi lagidelai pre khazan jan jan
Puh lambu swazi Kabul jan jan jan
Kote Sangi toti toti dai
Da Chihilsutun puh gham akhtah dai
Khe ratapai hadirei di
Uran awijar de tarikhi Darulaman jan jan
Puh lambu swazi Kabul jan jan jan
Tortsu ba da jang o jagre wi
Zamun puh sarba ba mele wi
Kala sare kala tau di wi
Haidari wai khodaya tah she mehraban
Puh lambu swazi Kabul jan jan jan

Flower petals are falling as though it’s autumn, dear, dear
Beloved Kabul blazing, dear, dear, dear

Kote Sangi is in bits and pieces
Misery has been inflicted on Chihilsutun
I’m aware that it’s a graveyard
Historical Darulaman is ruined and destroyed
Beloved Kabul is blazing

How long will this war and fighting continue?
How long will they have fun doing deals over our heads?
How long will this blowing hot and cold continue?
Haidari says O God, please be kind
Beloved Kabul is blazing

Given its prominence in Afghan culture, the sung lament lends itself well to the expression of pain resulting from forced migration and other emotional hardships of war. Haidari’s song also sounds a note of anger, especially in its mention of powerful people doing deals at the expense of Afghanistan’s innocent civilians. Its concluding lines, however, are pious, praying for God’s mercy.

SATIRE AND RIDICULE

Anger at the ruin and exploitation of Afghanistan is perhaps best expressed through open criticism, and singers have occasionally satirized and ridiculed specifically targeted enemies. For much of the conflict period, however, it was not safe for singers to take too many risks. In this section I will focus mainly on material from the preconflict and post-9/11 periods.

Satire and ridicule are significant elements in Afghanistan’s expressive culture, normally occurring less in songs than in stories, jokes, poems, and comic dramas. Verbal inventiveness and wit are esteemed,
and poetry and storytelling have long been used to highlight controversial social issues. In her study of Herati storytelling, Margaret Mills illustrates many satirical commentaries on social issues, and she notes a populist tendency to “lodge legitimacy of judgment with common people” (1991: 24). Allusions to corruption and social inequalities were also important in Herati satirical folk dramas performed by low-status barber-musicians who used instrumental music, singing, and sometimes puppetry in their plays. The 1977 study by anthropologist Hafizullah Baghban shows that these plays covered particularly sensitive social topics: domestic issues such as arranged marriages, polygamy, divorce, and “liberated women,” as well as broader social dichotomies between the strong and weak and rich and poor. Verbal play was also a feature of the teahouse culture of northern Afghanistan, where singers engaged in competitive and satirical performances focused on socially topical themes (Slobin 1976: 161–75).

In times of repression, Afghan audiences have become adept at interpreting coded messages. For instance, even under strict Taliban censorship it was occasionally possible for singers to covertly ridicule the regime. Ordered by the Taliban to sing on the radio, the noted singer Nairiz chose this text:

\begin{verbatim}
Ba khabar bash ke in khalkh khodayi darad
Akher in naleh-e makhlouq sedai darad
Ah-e mazlum be zudi migirad zalemra
Har amal ajre o har karda jazai darad
\end{verbatim}

Remember the people are protected by God
Their cries will be heard at last
Their oppressors will be punished
Since wrongdoing brings retribution

The Taliban liked this song, apparently not understanding that it could be referring to them as the “oppressors.” Because of its subversive message, the song enjoyed great popular success.

In present-day Afghanistan, singers now have more freedom to express political ideas that are not necessarily pious and/or conformist, and themes relating to the traumatic experiences of conflict, displacement, and political upheaval are at the forefront of people’s minds. I will illustrate this radical change of Afghan social consciousness by comparing songs in the satire/ridicule vein from two northern
singers, the first recorded in 1972, and the second—Malang Kohestani, discussed above—in 2003.

In 1972, the ethnomusicologist Lorraine Sakata recorded the poet-singer Islam in the city of Faizabad, in Badakhshan. Islam was an amateur musician of some verbal talent who composed his own material and accompanied himself on the *dambura*. He used direct accusations in his texts, poetically addressing a local “traitor”:

\[
\begin{align*}
&Ai setam paisha-ye bad kar tura migoyam \\
&Khain-e khalq o del awar tura migoyam \\
&Man ke reshwat khori hgadar tura migoyam \\
&Ai daghal parwar-e taraz tura migoyam
\end{align*}
\]

O oppressor, I’m telling you
Traitor, offender of hearts, I’m telling you
O bribe-taker, I’m telling you
Deceitful one, I’m telling you

He identified his target by listing specific family possessions:

\[
\begin{align*}
&Pedarat kuti Parwan be khoda dasht nadasht \\
&Tamiri sorkh ba paghman ba khoda dasht nadasht \\
&Motar laine-ye laghman na khoda dasht nadasht \\
&Hama shab yak labak man ba khoda dasht nadasht nadasht \\
&Pas tura kar o fari motar-e walga zi kojast \\
&Qasri shash manzela-ye sar ba sar ya zi kojast
\end{align*}
\]

Did your father have a building in Parwan, by God, or not?
Did he have a red building in Paghman, by God, or not?
Did he have a bus line to Laghman, by God, or not?
Did he have a morsel of bread every night, by God, or not?

Then where did you get your Volga car and splendor?
Where did the six-story building come from?
The singer also claimed that the man lacked certain socially recognized, admirable qualities:

Rahm o ensaf o morowat tu nadari chi konam
Pai dar marka-ye jahl tu gozari chi konam
Khuni mazlom zadai mast o khomari chi konam
Dar sar-e shana-ye iblis tu sawari chi konam

You don’t have mercy, justice, kindness, what should I do?
You always join the ignorant ones, what should I do?
You have tasted the blood of the oppressed and are intoxicated by it, what should I do?
You are riding on the devil’s shoulder, what should I do?

The entire song is a powerful invective against an individual, criticizing his evil qualities and even linking him with the devil. The song’s references—to particular towns, to the (Soviet-made) Volga car, to a particular building—locate both its protagonist and antagonist as neighbors living in a shared milieu.

The singer of the second, post-9/11 example, Malang Kohestani, has already been mentioned as self-professed mujahed from a heavily affected conflict area. He belongs to a similar critical tradition, but his songs have a much broader content, displaying a remarkably informed view of international political interference in Afghanistan. For the filming, he simply sat on the ground surrounded by people and accompanied himself on a long-necked lute (Figure 12.1).

Kohestani’s first song contained a mocking attack on Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, focusing especially on their personal cowardice. Cowardice is a shameful quality in Afghanistan; the Herati anthropologist Baghban ranks it third in his list of “unmanly” qualities (after miserliness and inhospitality) (Baghban 1977 vol.1: 212 n. 33).

Koja shodi bin Laden?
Khod meshi dar mushkhane
Chi amal kardi ke tura
I dunia midawanad
Figure 12.1 The poet-singer Malang Kohestani filmed in the Kapisa/Parwan area as he sings about Osama bin Laden. Photo by Greg Whitmore (2003).
Koja shodan washiha?
Ba tofang o topkhane?
Koja shod Radio Shariat?
Har shab mikhand tarane

Yake me didi zura
Rafti be Tora Bora
Dar gurekhtan bin Laden
Be khod nadari jura

Where are you, bin Laden?
You are hiding in a mousehole!
What have you done
That the world is running around after you?

Where are the savages [Taliban],
With their guns and cannons?
What happened to Radio Shariat,
Playing those chants [tarana] every night?

Once you saw the force against you,
You ran away to the Tora Bora [mountains]
Bin Laden, in fleeing
You have no rival!

Animal imagery is quite common in Afghan rhetoric, and elsewhere in the song Kohestani describes the brave Afghans as mountain lions. Bin Laden, on the other hand, is ignominiously likened to a mouse, which is fearful, tiny, and insignificant.

Kohestani’s second song addressed another enemy: Pakistan, the neighboring state that created the Taliban movement and exported religious zealotry to Afghanistan for its own ends. Again, Kohestani pressed the theme of cowardice:
Koja shodan chopanan?
Koja shod ghulha-ye biaban?
Koja shodan muy-kashalan?
Datsunharam midawand

Where did the country bumpkins [“shepherds” i.e., Taliban] go?
Where did the desert ogres go?
Where did the dirty long-haired Taliban go?
Who used to drive the Datsun trucks?

The two singers (Islam and Kohestani) use notably similar techniques of social criticism, scorning or ridiculing their victims, and identifying them by means of personal markers, such as the rich man’s Volga car, or the Taliban’s hallmark Datsun trucks. Both singers also criticize their targets on the grounds of unmanly behavior. There is, however, an importance difference: whereas the earlier singer’s target was a local person, Kohestani’s songs address internationally known political entities such as bin Laden and the Taliban.

Kohestani’s third song further enlarged the compass of his wrath, railing against interference by other nations:

Hawahakhan keshwar-e mastan
Dast-e razi e namude har dushman
Siahsatbazi o guru karde be kar
Az zaman-e Sikander o Russha
Az Britania o ham Chengisha
Hame nobat resid be Pakistan
Chechen o Arabha hamra eshan

Greedy people want our country
And enemies have interfered with us.
They think about colonizing us
Through political games and support of different military groups.
From the times of Alexander, the Russians,
Britain and Genghis Khan’s people.

Now came the turn of Pakistan,

And Arabs and Chechens with them.

The United States is a significant omission in Kohestani’s song about political interference in Afghanistan, which may reflect an Afghan ambivalence towards the U.S. presence. While many Afghans are grateful to see the end of Taliban rule, they are also aware that bin Laden originally received significant U.S. backing when he entered Afghan politics in 1980. People are also angry about the U.S. treatment of Afghan prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and in prisons inside Afghanistan.

Kohestani’s songs have reached a reasonably wide audience in Afghanistan, as he has sung for Mazar-i Sherif’s radio and television station, but unfortunately we do not know if many other singers are composing and performing such songs. My main point, however, is to illustrate the striking contrast between the Afghan worldviews of 1972 and 2003. The earlier singer’s focus is strictly local (although one suspects that if he were alive today he would have plenty to say about wider political issues), whereas Kohestani’s songs refer to historical and international aspects of Afghan politics.

Kohestani’s songs illustrate the extent to which many people in Afghanistan have become politically aware of their circumstances, particularly in the post-9/11 era. Three factors help to explain this politicization. First, the presence in Afghanistan of many foreign people and organizations (for purposes of military intervention, diplomacy, journalism, humanitarian aid, etc.) has brought numerous Afghans into contact with new people, ideas and projects. Second, there has been a great increase in the scope of the media, with new radio stations and television channels and the wide availability of imported videos and DVDs. These have brought news and film footage of the outside world into people’s homes. Third, the significant displacement of Afghan people within and outside the country has broadened people’s perspectives. This final point is crucial. Family life is central to Afghan culture, and family ties with Afghans living in Pakistan, Iran, Europe, North America, and Australia have had a significant impact on both Afghan political consciousness and Afghan musical culture. It is to these diaspora issues that I now turn.

THE IMPACT OF THE AFGHAN DIASPORA ON MUSIC

The exile of musicians had a serious impact on morale and on musical standards inside Afghanistan. Most of the musicians who have settled
in Europe and North America have little realistic prospect of ever visiting Afghanistan again, but many of them continue to perform and make commercial recordings. Several important musical figures died abroad, including Ustad Rahim Bakhsh, a great classical singer, who died in Pakistan; the singer Ustad Amir Mohammad, who died while traveling from Pakistan to Iran; Ustad Hashem, the famed tabla master, singer, multi-instrumentalist, and composer, who died in Germany; and Ustad Malang Meshrabi, the virtuoso zirbaghali (goblet drum) player, who died in France. The loss of so many skilled and knowledgeable musicians has been devastating for Afghan musical culture.

Despite the attendant dangers, throughout the conflict period Afghan civilians have continued to move across the borders with Iran and Pakistan, visiting one another and doing business. A steady flow of messages, news, and recorded music into and out of the country has resulted. The two-way flow of videos of weddings was especially significant in keeping people in touch with changing musical tastes. The fall of the Taliban in 2001 dramatically opened up these international communications, allowing numerous Kabuli musicians to return from exile in Pakistan. Since then, the traffic of music cassettes, CDs, and videos has become more open and extensive. Many families in Iran and Pakistan have returned home, bringing new tastes and ideas with them, and Afghans who had settled in Europe and North America are now able to visit the country, although they rarely return permanently.

The music coming into Afghanistan from the Afghan diaspora has introduced certain new features, particularly the use of new instruments. Afghan musicians in North America and Europe found it hard to obtain certain traditional Afghan instruments, such as the rubab, tanbur, or dutar (types of plucked lute), and they adopted keyboards and drum machines in their place. After 9/11, with the opening of markets, Western instruments became available inside Afghanistan as well, and they are now popular among the younger generation. Following the diaspora trends, young Afghan musicians inside Afghanistan are also incorporating Western electronic effects and harmonies into their music, and some Afghan singers have even partially modified their style of vocal production in favor of a more Westernized sound. At weddings in Kabul and other cities, clients now want Westernized Afghan pop music with a fast dance beat, emulating Afghan weddings in the United States. A parallel trend for Westernized sounds in Iranian-American pop, known as *los angelesi*, is also filtering into Afghanistan. If they have the means, urban amateur musicians try out electric guitars or electronic instruments. In Kabul, musical instrument shops display hand-painted signs depicting keyboards,
synthesizers, and guitars beside traditional instruments like the *rubab* (Figure 12.2).

Most recordings of Afghan music produced in Europe and North America incorporate some degree of innovation, but not all of it is Westernized. Some demonstrate influences from Indian music, such as a CD recorded in 2002 in Delhi by the New York–based veteran radio singer Hafizullah Khyal. His voice is accompanied by a range of Indian instruments: *sitar*, *sarod*, Indian-style violin, *sarangi*, flute, tabla, and *dholak*, with keyboards and Bollywood-style arrangements (Khyal 2002). A CD of the California-based female singer Mahwash, entitled *Radio Kaboul*, was produced in France in 2003 as an interesting “homage” and memorial to musicians of the past. She is accompanied by Afghan musicians and instruments supplemented by an Indian tabla player and a French disciple of Hariprasad Chaurasia playing Indian *bansuri* flute (Mahwash 2003). This influence of North Indian music on Afghan music reinforces a long-term relationship dating from the 1860s, when the king of Afghanistan imported Indian musicians to his court (see Baily 2000).

The flow of musical influences has been reciprocal, and Afghans abroad have been eager to watch and listen to music recorded in Afghanistan, especially by performers they knew in the past. Afghans are accustomed to sending and receiving personal greetings and messages through the medium of audiocassettes and videos, and singers have
been known to exploit this possibility in their songs. In 1996, Jan van Belle recorded one such song from the northern singer Hassan Besmil. It is a lament, stating that no one in Afghanistan has been untouched by the war, pleading for Afghans to forget their ethnic differences and stop fighting, and also appealing to those outside Afghanistan for support and help. Besmil’s last verse mentions explicitly that the cassette would be sent to “Germany” (via van Belle).  

The return of Afghan professional and amateur musicians from abroad is obviously important for the rebuilding of Afghan musical culture. Many are unable to return on a permanent basis, but it is now possible for diaspora musicians to give concerts or work on fixed-term contracts. In 2004–5, the activities of one greatly respected individual had a significant impact on the hereditary musician community. Ustad Asif Mahmood, who has lived in London since 1990, went to Kabul in 2004 on a year’s paid returnee scheme organized by the International Office of Migration (IOM), a nongovernmental organization (NGO). He is the most esteemed tabla player from Kabul’s hereditary musician community, and his return was thus greatly appreciated by fellow musicians. Funded by IOM to work at Radio Afghanistan, he succeeded in galvanizing the demoralized musicians into a more creative and optimistic state. His work has included training musicians, arranging new pieces, and composing new material himself, but he has been hampered by a lack of funds, instruments, skilled singers and instrumentalists, composers, and necessary technical equipment and support.

Concert appearances are also very welcome. In 2004 the popular U.S.-based Afghan singer Farhad Darya sang for a huge and rapturous audience in Kabul’s football stadium. It was an emotive occasion, as the concert—a once-forbidden public event—took place at the very site where the Taliban had previously staged public executions. Such events remain fairly rare, however, as Darya and other diaspora musicians fear reprisals by the still-powerful antimusic lobby. The singer Mahwash has said that if she returned to give a concert, “They would kill me.” Her fears are understandable; before migrating to California, she received death threats from the mujahideen. In any case, it is always a big emotional step for exiled Afghans to return to their birthplace after many years of destruction and change.

CONSERVATIVE ISLAMIC VALUES VERSUS SECULARIZED MODERNITY

At present two important opposing trends are at work with regard to music: the continued assertion of Islamist antimusic attitudes and the
proliferation of modern, secular, Westernized influences. The power play between forces of conservatism and modernization is a familiar feature of Afghan history, and to understand the dynamics of the present situation it is necessary to look briefly back to the past.

Antimusic attitudes existed in Afghanistan long before the Taliban movement, but in the decades preceding the 1978 coup, religious arguments about the immorality of music had relatively little influence. At that time music was much enjoyed, and secular values were in their ascendance. This was particularly evident in the modernizing agenda of government broadcasting policies and, since its inception in the 1940s, radio broadcasting has been an important indicator of the politics of music-making in Afghanistan. As Baily notes, the radio station “started to replace the royal court as the principal patron of musicians, and as the institutional sponsor of new developments in music” (2000: 808). Radio Afghanistan employed a large number of skilled professional musicians to compose, arrange, rehearse, and perform new pieces. The singer Hossein Arman describes the 1950s and 1960s as “a very creative era” for radio music, with everyone “conscious of participating in the building of a national cultural identity.”

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Slobin observed that the Afghan people enthusiastically embraced Radio Afghanistan as a regular presence in their lives, paying most attention to the music, rather than the spoken programming” (1976: 28).

Conservative attitudes toward music reasserted themselves strongly during the communist period. Television was a new medium in Afghanistan at the time, and the government used it to promote the Marxist cause. Musicians and dancers were pressured to perform patriotic pieces on television, and the public display of alluring female performers particularly upset conservative viewers, especially since communist ideology was widely felt to be alien and atheistic. The public violation of local Islamic norms of behavior fueled negative attitudes toward music, and the mujahideen capitalized on this. Their antimusic rhetoric masked a certain hypocrisy, however, as they used singing and, significantly, instrumental music, to further their own cause. To mention but one example, the mujahideen tried to force the female Pashtun singer Naghma to sing for their cause, but without appearing in public. She refused, and continued to sing for the communists, and one night they killed her sister, mistaking her for Naghma herself.

After 1992, the Islamist coalition government removed the female presence from radio and television altogether, but some selective music broadcasting continued. Later, under the Taliban, Radio Afghanistan was renamed “Radio Sharia [Islamic law].” Conventional music was
completely prohibited, but the radio regularly broadcast unaccompanyed songs performed by male singers. Many of these *tarana*, as I have already discussed, had new texts that praised Taliban heroes and denigrated their enemies.

During the U.S.-led military campaign of 2001, as each important Afghan city fell, the jubilant sound of music once again blared out from its local radio station, and the sound of this broadcast music was a clear signal that the Taliban had fled. As widely reported in the international media, the demise of the Taliban was indeed greeted with music and dancing in the streets. Unfortunately, this freedom has not persisted in all areas, and the antimusic lobby has gradually reasserted itself through threats and acts of public intimidation. A 2003 Human Rights Watch report, for instance, describes how in Paghman, an area close to Kabul, the governor publicly beat up shopkeepers who were listening to taped music. He also sent soldiers to beat and humiliate Kabuli musicians who had come to play at a wedding.  

President Karzai’s Ministry of Information and Culture has been cautious in its music broadcasting policies. Under pressure from fundamentalists, it completely banned singing by women on radio and television until January 2004. Then, with the ratification of the new Afghan constitution, the state television station took the bold step of broadcasting old footage of two female singers. The Supreme Court immediately ordered this exposure of female performers to be stopped, and the deputy Chief Justice, Fazl Ahmad Manawi, declared: “We are opposed to women singing and dancing as a whole and it has to be stopped.” As Johnson and Leslie point out, this view was based on no existing law and with no case before the courts (2004: 171).

The ban on female broadcasting was lifted in March 2004, but coverage of female performers on state radio and television to date has still been very limited. This is partly due to a dearth of trained female singers. Although two amateur female singers have offered to sing at the radio station, their standard of performance was considered to be too low, and in 2005 no women were being trained. In the present political climate, very little video archive material of female singers is suitable for broadcasting. Images from the communist period are too eroticized for contemporary Afghan audiences, as female singers’ heads were uncovered, and they usually wore un-Islamic Westernized clothing and heavy makeup.

In contrast to state broadcasting, private sector radio and television and satellite television are all booming in Afghanistan. Videos of foreign films also enjoy great popularity, although many of the screened images
are controversial. Scenes from Bollywood films, for instance, with their scantily dressed female singing and dancing, attract adverse comment.

The hardline lobby that opposes music and female rights is still powerful, as evidenced by one shocking and widely publicized incident that occurred in 2005. Shaima Rezayee, a twenty-four-year-old female television presenter, was murdered, and, although the murderer was never identified, her death was related to her “shameful” image on television. She had hosted a “racy” music program on Tolo TV, a controversial MTV-style private station that was the brainchild of a returnee Afghan from Australia. Two months before her death the managers dismissed her, under pressure from mullahs who were disgusted by her music show. Their objections were not surprising, since the show screened eroticized performers, such as Madonna, and Turkish and Iranian pop stars (the latter from Los Angeles). After the murder, the deputy minister for information and culture told a foreign interviewer that “the government prided itself on not censoring the show” but had been compelled to ask Tolo TV for changes with regard to Rezayee’s program. Mullahs and members of the Supreme Court were reportedly still incensed after losing the battle to have women removed from the nation’s television screens in 2004.  

These opposing forces of conservatism and modernism are still battling over the issue of female public performance. At the same time, the hardships experienced by women under Taliban rule have made liberal Afghans and foreign aid workers all the more eager to promote female interests with regard to music. In an interesting development, an NGO called the Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society has created four provincial female community radio stations. The first was established in Mazar-i Sherif in 2003, and the others are in Kunduz, Maimana, and Herat. They broadcast women’s phone-in discussions and play recorded music from a computer (on random play, without announcements), although they hope to expand their music coverage.

**MUSIC EDUCATION INITIATIVES IN KABUL**

Due to the high media profile of Taliban censorship, the international aid community has supported several music-education initiatives, with the Goethe Institute and the Polish Mission especially active. The Goethe Institute has organized projects at Kabul University’s music department, sending equipment and making provisions for teachers to work with students, while the Polish Mission has supported music classes at other venues. As with many aid agencies, the Polish Mission wished to incorporate girls into their projects, since female rights for education were denied under Taliban rule. The problems they encountered
are instructive, both for understanding current cultural dynamics in Afghanistan as well as for other entities interested in promoting such initiatives in the country.

The Polish Mission began operations in 2002, financing the rebuilding and reopening of Kabul’s Arts High School (Lycee Honari), which in the 1970s had offered a normal school curriculum plus specialist training in Western classical music and other arts. The current school director, however, did not want to compromise his school and refused to admit girls, so the Mission withdrew support. The Mission then forged a partnership with an NGO working for Afghan women, and succeeded in establishing a music class for fifteen to twenty girls. No female teacher could be found, so they employed a man (who had actually been trained in Western music). After three months local mullahs objected, and, bowing to local pressure, the NGO director asked the Mission to discontinue the project.

Eventually the Polish Mission found two workable venues. One was a large orphanage whose female director wanted her girls’ music class to learn to play Afghan instruments. The Western-trained teacher taught Afghan music on the harmonium and tabla, although he could not play them well himself. The classes were popular, but it seemed unlikely that the pupils would reach a very high standard. The other venue was an Afghan NGO for girls, where the two male teachers were skilled players of tabla and rubab, but did not work efficiently together. Although circumstances are not ideal, it is an achievement to set up music courses for girls, and the pupils are challenging gender conventions about the use of musical instruments.

As these examples demonstrate, while it is clearly preferable for women to teach girls in Afghanistan, it is hard to find women with the necessary skills and confidence. In July 2003, the BBC’s correspondent Kylie Morris interviewed a woman named Najiba Samin, who was then giving female singing classes. Eight pupils had enrolled, but an armed guard had to stand at the door to protect the class against “extremists.” In the interview Samin expressed considerable psychological tension, and by 2004 the course had been discontinued.49

Kabul University may become the most significant venue where girls can learn music in a coeducational context, but the music program is in its infancy. In April 2003 a broad four-year music degree course was inaugurated (of the sixteen pupils, one was female). The students currently enter with minimal knowledge of music, however, and there is an urgent need for good teachers in a range of instruments—an inevitable outcome of the repression of music under Taliban rule.

A separate humanitarian initiative in the post-9/11 era worthy of mention focuses specifically on Afghan art music, which has suffered
considerably in recent decades due to a lack of patronage and the exodus of musicians. With the return of some musicians to Kabul after 2001, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture organized an education program featuring four significant and respected ustad\textsuperscript{s} as its teachers: Ustad Salim Bakhsh (vocal/harmonium), Ustad Amruddin (delruba), Ustad Ghulam Hussein (rubab), and Ustad Wali Nabizada (tabla).

The project was partly aimed at younger members of the hereditary musician community. All the teachers have brought in their sons, and many other pupils come from Kabuli professional musician families (Figure 12.3). The students are motivated and often talented, but most of them are hampered by a lack of funds to purchase instruments on which to practice at home.

In short, these are early years for the rebuilding of Afghanistan’s music culture, and its future will depend on securing funding and continued institutional backing.

**MUSIC IN THE POST-9/11 KARZAI ERA**

At this point, only a general assessment may be made about the present situation of music in Afghanistan. For years very little fieldwork on
music has been undertaken, and only scanty information is available about conditions in the provincial cities and countryside.\textsuperscript{50} Most is known about music in Kabul, through short research trips and journalistic reports, but sustained fieldwork is necessary to gain a proper understanding of how musical practices have developed and changed.

Many old venues for music-making have simply been lost. The excellent urban concerts performed each evening of the month of Ramadan, once a musical highlight of the year during the preconflict era, have disappeared. Similarly, the urban theaters that were once common sites for live music have now long been closed. Other possible losses include the musical culture of teahouses in northern Afghanistan. This suffered a decline during the 1990s, when van Belle reported that owners were unable to afford the cost of hiring musicians (2000: 831), and we do not know if this tradition has survived.

Economic hardship continues to affect musical institutions. Since the fall of the Taliban, Kabul’s state radio station, formerly a hotbed of musical creativity, has functioned with extremely limited resources. In 2002, facilities for recording music were very restricted, so musicians were rehearsing pieces that had no immediate prospect of being broadcast.\textsuperscript{51} The valuable radio music archive, mercifully intact after the Taliban years, did not possess reel-to-reel tape recorders with which to play the music, although tapes could be sent to another section for broadcasting. In 2005, at the time of writing, facilities are a little better, but still extremely basic.

Tastes have also changed, and many outside influences have filtered into Afghan music. In the past, live amateur music-making was a valued form of domestic entertainment, but television and video culture has to some extent replaced it in the post-9/11 era. Patronage patterns are also changing. At urban weddings, which were previously one of the main contexts for serious traditional art music, families now want the kind of fast dance music they have seen on videos of weddings in the United States.

People in Kabul comment that there is a generation gap in terms of musical tastes. Members of the older generation prefer the kind of music that existed before the conflict years, whereas younger audiences are enamored of Western pop culture and Westernized music broadcast on commercial radio and television stations. There is also a gap between traditionalists who seek to discourage many forms of music, and liberals who embrace change and want to participate in twenty-first-century globalized culture.

It remains to be seen what will be resurrected in this uncertain milieu, and it is unclear to what extent the politicized music of the
past decades will remain relevant and popular. By way of comparison, Naila Ceribasic reports that in postwar Croatia popular music “mainly reverted to its traditional themes of either happy or unhappy love” (2000: 233). If peaceful conditions are maintained, it is likely that romantic love will regain its ascendancy in Afghan song texts. My sense is that patriotic songs will probably remain popular for some time, to help heal the wounds of war and to assert a sense of unified identity in a politically fragmented country. The lament theme has deep roots in Afghan culture, and verses lamenting the experiences of conflict will likely endure within traditional performance genres. If conditions are safe, more critical and satirical songs may be composed. As to the continued popularity of Westernized styles, much depends upon the role of the West in Afghanistan’s political and economic future.

CONCLUSIONS: THE IMPACT OF 9/11 ON MUSIC IN AFGHANISTAN

At the beginning of this article I mentioned three significant effects of the post-9/11 U.S. military actions on the musical culture of Afghanistan: the easing of musical censorship, the return of exiled Afghan musicians, and the founding of new initiatives to regenerate the country’s musical culture. Having examined the situation of music in some detail, I will conclude with some final comments on each of these points.

First, with regard to music censorship, it is clear that Taliban-era repression had a number of serious and long-term effects on Afghan musical practices. Stretching well back before Taliban rule, the normal process of musical transmission had been halted and disrupted by the decades of conflict, but the years of Taliban prohibition were especially crushing. A generation of young people has grown up having very little experience of live musical performance, and in some areas Taliban-style antimusic attitudes persist. Nonetheless, there is a strong desire among many people to listen to music today, and many musicians have demonstrated a continued desire to maintain their hereditary profession.

The easing of censorship has also greatly broadened the scope of music being played and heard in Afghanistan. There is a virtually unregulated free market in recorded music, and independent radio and television stations are popular with the younger generation. The importation and copying of recorded music, videos, and DVDs from outside Afghanistan has also fostered an increased demand for Western instruments such as guitars, keyboards, and synthesizers. Despite such developments, censorship issues remain a problem for the Afghan
government, and the Islamist antimusic lobby is particularly opposed to female public performance.

My second point concerns the post-9/11 return of professional musicians from exile. This has been crucial to the restoration of musical normality in Afghanistan, and was an essential step toward reestablishing musical standards, particularly in art music. The professional circumstances of these musicians, however, leave much to be desired. Public resources are scarce, and the state radio and television stations are in a state of poverty, housed in crumbling buildings without basic equipment or reliable electricity. Patronage is a problem for some professional musicians, as traditional music is in far less demand at weddings than previously. There is, however, a thirst for music, and some musicians are offering private music lessons as an additional source of income. Given these constraints, it is also significant that not all musicians have returned from exile; though many have moved back from Pakistan and Iran for economic and family reasons, they rarely return to settle from farther afield. The rift between diaspora musicians and their relatives and former colleagues inside the country remains as a source of pain and potential resentment and guilt.

Third, on a more positive note, in the Karzai era it has become possible for musicians and aid agencies to support initiatives to revitalize Afghanistan’s musical culture. Although operating on a small scale at this stage, there is opportunity for tremendous expansion. Music education classes appear to have a dual function: not only do they disseminate musical knowledge, they also function as a symbol of optimism and change for the good.

The regeneration of Afghanistan’s musical culture will not, however, be a simple process. Afghan officials have become wary of the ideological or economic self-interest that is potentially attached to offers of humanitarian aid, and mistrust has delayed or derailed some projects. Various agencies have sought to help digitize the Radio Afghanistan music archive, for instance, but to date the Afghan authorities have not reached any partnership agreement. They appear hesitant due to an understandable concern over safeguarding their national musical heritage from copyright theft. As a result, however, the music archive is still in urgent need of digitization.

The institutional structures of the country that might support musical activities remain severely impaired and impoverished. After years of bombing, rocket attacks and neglect, the radio and television stations, universities and schools are in a state of poor repair and lack the resources to rebuild (Figure 12.4).
There is also a shortage of skilled Afghan personnel to staff music initiatives at this point. Furthermore, the advent of foreign agencies operating in Kabul, including military and diplomatic personnel, security firms, journalists, and aid workers, has raised rents and salaries, making funding issues even more critical. In short, the rebuilding of Afghanistan’s musical culture needs more support if it is to succeed.

The presence of a large community of foreigners has had other effects, too. Foreign residents have become significant patrons, and the Kabuli ustads are in demand at embassy parties. Members of the aid community, including returnee Westernized Afghans, have also brought new perspectives to ideas about gender roles in Afghanistan. In some quarters this is welcomed, and in others it is resented. The initiatives to help girls learn musical instruments previously assigned to men are laudable, and it remains to be seen to what extent gendered roles do change along more egalitarian lines.

In the aftermath of U.S. military and political intervention, Afghanistan’s future remains fragile and unpredictable. The U.S. “war on terror” in Afghanistan is not over, and the Taliban movement is not dead; for several years now there has been a resurgence in southeastern Afghanistan. As I write this in 2005, in Kandahar a mullah who spoke out against the Taliban has recently been assassinated, and his funeral was then targeted with a bomb that killed and injured many people.  

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**Figure 12.4** A broken grand piano affords entertainment for two boys in a ruined Kabul ballroom which the Ministry of Information and Culture’s Music Department now uses as a rehearsal space. Photo by Veronica Doubleday (2004).
In the future, much will depend on the actions of the United States, its allies and enemies, interested neighboring states, the international peacekeeping forces, and the policies of the United Nations and NGOs. In 2003 Kohestani reminded his audience of Afghanistan’s poverty, and correctly pointed out that those who interfered in Afghan politics have a duty to provide compensation:

*Dar qazawat-e i jahan-e bashar*

*Arz-e bichareganad kard nokar*

*Hawahakhan ke chi sar zakhm zadan*

*Mahram gozarad o jezire konan*

For the people of this world to judge,

I am expressing the complaints of the poor.

The greedy ones who have inflicted wounds

They should apply healing ointment and provide compensation.

Afghanistan has been destroyed by decades of war, and it sorely deserves the “compensation” for which Kohestani asks. After years of repression, musicians and musical institutions need support. As the Herati musician Ustad Rahim Khushnawaz said in 2002, likening his musical culture to a sick patient, “it still needs injections.” Ultimately, however, the main task of the international community needs to be the preservation of peace in the region for, above all, the constant, destructive presence of armed conflict needs to end if Afghanistan’s remarkable musical culture is to regenerate fully and flower again.

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Veronica Doubleday


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NOTES

1. For music censorship in Afghanistan, see Baily 2001, 2004, and forthcoming, and Broughton’s 2002 BBC film (for which Baily was the consultant).

2. As Chris Johnson and Jolyon Leslie point out, the idea that the war was “fought only for the best of motives” characterized most Western press coverage, and although it was Al Qaeda and not the Taliban that planned and executed the 9/11 attacks, “the terrorism of one was easily elided with the oppression of the other” (2004: 84–5).

3. Many Afghan deaths were not officially recorded, and the real figure is likely to be much higher.

4. This argument is outlined in Halliday 2002: 37 (qualified with further points about political responsibility).

5. Johnson and Leslie point out, “While the West caricatures Afghans as war-loving people, recent conflict has been largely fueled by others.” In 1980–89 the annual mujahideen military-aid allocations of the U.S. administration for the war were about $2.8 billion (Asia Watch 1991, cited in Johnson and Leslie 2004: 3).

6. There is an extensive literature on this topic; see Neubauer and Doubleday 2001.

7. Baily (2001a) has an accompanying CD with two tracks of Taliban chants (Tracks 9 and 10).


9. An example of adaptation by the Pashtun singer Shah Wali Khan is discussed in Misdaq and Baily 2000: 836–40.

10. Research has not been done on the pro-communist songs. At the time it was too dangerous to do fieldwork, and today it is difficult to gain access to the archive material at Radio Afghanistan.

11. For biographical information about Mehri Maftun, see van Belle 2005.

12. Persian text from van Belle’s unpublished recording (1996); translation mine.

13. For biographical information on the Khushnawaz family, see Baily 1988. The portable Indian hand-pumped harmonium is commonly used by urban singers (and was originally taken to India by Christian missionaries).


16. The idea of Da zemu ziba watan as an unofficial national anthem is widespread (Harun Youssefi, pers. comm. 2005), though an official national anthem is in preparation (Ustad Asif, pers. comm. 2005).

17. Pashto text from the orphanage performance in Baily 2003; translation as in subtitles.
18. Awal Mir was a famous singer from Peshawar, in Pakistan, who came to the Kabul radio station in 1970, where he lived and worked until his death in 1982. His songs were very popular during his lifetime (Abdul-Wahab Madadi, pers. comm. 2005). In the refugee context in Pakistan the song carried additional undertones of Pashtun nationalist separatism.

19. The three versions occur in the following chapters of the DVD: 7, “The children of Khorasan House [orphanage]”; 8, “Kabul University’s Department of Music” (an instrumental version), and 10, “A concert at Kabul University” (in the final act).

20. These and the following Persian texts from Kohestani are taken from film footage shot in the Parwan/Kapisa areas by David Edwards and Greg Whitmore in 2003. At the time Maliha Zulfiqar did rough translation into English. Yama Yari helped me with the Persian textual transcription, and we have refined the translation.

21. “Expressive arts” includes women’s stories of misfortune and grief, as discussed in Grima 1993.


23. I have been unable to establish when Asadullah lived, but it was probably in the twentieth century.


25. Chaharbeiti is a common type of quatrain in Afghanistan, and it also refers to a generic song type (see Doubleday 2003).


27. Persian text from private video recording of a concert in Virginia, 1997. The Persian textual transcription and translation were done with the help of Leila Zazayery and Yama Yari.

28. Pashto text from Baily 2003, Chapter 7; transcription and translation were done with the help of Nabi Misdaq.

29. The text refers to people “picnicking” or “partying” (mele) “over our heads,” meaning at our expense, as explained by Nabi Misdaq.

30. As early as the 1930s the “traditional satirical poetry of a famous wit and raconteur” was published in Herat (Mills 1991: 79, n. 8).


32. Information from a scene in Broughton’s 2002 film.

33. I obtained additional information on this singer from Sakata (pers. comm. 2005).

34. These Persian and English texts are quoted from Sakata 2002: 153–54.

35. In 1997 Pakistan provided the Taliban with an estimated $30 million in aid. The political analyst Ahmed Rashid points out that the issue of Kashmir was a prime reason behind its support, since pro-Pakistani insurgents were being trained inside Afghanistan for anti-Indian operations in Kashmir (Rashid 2000: 183–84).
36. At bin Laden’s first mujahideen camp in Peshawar, volunteers were trained by Pakistani and American officers, using weapons supplied by the Americans (Rashid 2000: 132).

37. In May 2005 riots against the U.S. treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay started in Jalalabad and spread to other parts of Afghanistan.

38. This phenomenon is documented in Baily’s 2005 DVD, *Tablas and Drum Machines*.

39. Unpublished recording (van Belle 1996). The cassette was in fact destined for Holland, not “Germany.”

40. Baily 2000 describes the beginning of radio in Afghanistan.


42. Margaret Mills points out that many Herati people could not easily understand the language of Radio Afghanistan, and this problem would apply to other provincial areas, so music was more accessible than speech (Mills 1991: 88).

43. Naghma describes this incident in Broughton’s 2002 film, and her statement is also cited in Baily forthcoming.

44. Cited in Baily, forthcoming.

45. Women had a presence on radio from its very early years. For information on this and other aspects of Afghan women’s history, see Rahimi 1986 [1977].


49. In 2004 in Kabul I heard that Najiba Samin had succumbed to mental illness.

50. During the Taliban period, van Belle and Koepke did research in northern areas not under Taliban control (see, for instance, Koepke 2002). In Herat in 2004 live music traditions seemed to be in a reasonably healthy state. Male professional musicians were playing traditional and Westernized styles, and three women’s bands were allowed to entertain women in wedding halls where correct standards of gender segregation were guaranteed.


53. This incident was widely reported; see, for example, Catharine Philp, “Police Chief Among Dead in Mosque Attack,” *The Times* (U.K.), 31 May 2005.