Coping with disrupted lives – a study of Afghan girls and their family networks

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the practical and emotional ways of coping of the generation who has grown up with the war in Afghanistan, and in exile in Peshawar, Pakistan. Based on nine months of fieldwork in 1998/99, the study describes the life histories and the everyday lives of a number of young girls and their families during the various phases of war in Kabul, and in exile across the border. The study is concerned with the “new” refugees; the urban middle class of educated professionals who left Kabul at the outbreak of the civil war. By focusing on a section of the Afghan refugees that has received little attention, I highlight Liisa Malkki’s point that refugees are not a homogeneous group. In order to address their concerns and understand their coping strategies, they must be seen in the context of their specific political histories. Peshawar is described as a key place in the Afghan diaspora, and the refugees maintain strong links with Kabul as well as with their extended trans-national family networks.

Another objective has been to challenge the tendency in international refugee discourse to view people affected by war and displacement as mere victims. I focus on the young girls as social actors without disregarding the difficult circumstances of their lives, attempting to bring out the coping, creative aspects of their life experiences. The girls live within the context of their families, and I have explored the changes in roles and relations within the households. Many of the girls live in female-headed households, and some are income earners. I explore how the girls adapt their new roles to the ideal of the khub dakhitar, the respectful daughter. The girls have all had their educations disrupted by the war, and dream of a future where they can attend schools and universities. Lack of education and livelihood opportunities in a war stricken Kabul, and increasingly difficult living conditions in Peshawar motivate more and more families to attempt migration. The successful ones are those who are able to mobilize resources in their extended family networks abroad. These networks are crucial to the coping of the girls and their families, and the study concludes that despite drastic changes and geographical dispersal, the role of the family has not diminished; the reciprocity norm in family relations still stands strong.

The study also explores the various religious and cultural practices the girls and women draw on in order to cope emotionally with grief and loss, practices rooted in a cosmology that emphasize resilience, dignity and the ethos of hiding ones troubled heart with a smile.
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Deep gratitude and thanks in particular to my two assistants who also became my friends, discussion partners and key informants. I thank you for allowing me to write your life histories. I have tried to repay your trust in me by treating the material with respect and dignity, just like you treated me.

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Bente Damsleth, Oslo, October 2002
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INTRODUCTION

FIELD AND FOCUS

This thesis explores the emotional and practical ways of coping of the generation who has grown up with the war in Kabul, and in exile in neighbouring Pakistan.

At the beginning of the 90s, before the withdrawal of the Soviet army, the estimate for Afghan refugees was six million people, almost half of the country's pre-war population of fourteen million. The majority fled to the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan: 3 million to Pakistan and 2.5 million to Iran, and half a million went to Europe and North America (Bauck og Moren, 1987). When the Mujahedin launched a final offensive on the capital in April 1992, and the Soviet-backed regime fell, the Afghan people thought the war was over. One and a half million refugees returned from the camps in Pakistan, mainly going back to the rural areas (Griffin, 2001). However, many of those who returned to Kabul were soon to be displaced again, together with new waves of urban refugees, as fighting broke out in Kabul a few months after the new Mujahedin government had taken power. New waves of urban refugees came with the continued fighting and take-over of Kabul by the Taliban in September 1996. At the end of 2000, Afghan refugees made up for 3,6 million, approximately thirty percent of all refugees in the world, and although the figure has been almost halved since the 80s, Afghans constitute the largest refugee population in the world.

Peshawar, the capital and frontier city of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, provides for a large Afghan exile community whose ebbs and flows have followed the events of the war across the border. With the end of the communist regime in 1992 the locus of the war shifted from the countryside and the provinces to the capital of Kabul. Peshawar started seeing the emergence of a new type of refugees, the urban professional middle class, many of them former civil servants, bureaucrats and army officers. It is these “new refugees” that are of concern to my study, a choice I made since little has been written about their experience of war and life in exile.

I followed the young daughters in a number of Kabuli families, girls whose lives had been changed and shaped by more than two decades of war and displacement, exploring the following questions. How had the girls and their families adapted to and coped with the
changing and volatile life conditions under war and in exile? What was their experience of growing up in Kabul during the various phases of the war? How did they cope with and adapt to life in Peshawar and what was their everyday life like? What were their dreams and hopes for the future?

The main themes that emerged during fieldwork were the dynamics of the extended family network, and the various changes in the households and families of the girls of this study. I explored the multiple concerns of the families when deciding whether to stay or leave. Many of the families were on their way to a third country, regarding Peshawar as a place of transition. I also explored dimensions of an Afghan cosmology and religious practices that offered ways of emotional coping when war became part of everyday life.

The fieldwork took place between September 1998 and May 1999, and the choice of field was based on my four years of living and working in Pakistan and Afghanistan, from June 1993 to June 1997. My initial plan was to do fieldwork in Kabul, at the time hot spot for attention of the international media, donor countries and human rights organisations. The reason for the attention was the Taliban, who at the time of my fieldwork were in control of the capital as well as most of Afghanistan, except the northern provinces where fighting continued. In Kabul, the Taliban’s strict gender policy and heavy handed practices gave fuel to various conflicting discourses on Afghan women’s roles and rights; the international community and the United Nations holding up the Human Rights convention and the Taliban holding up their traditionalist interpretation of Islam. One objective of my study became to provide a small window for a third and silenced discourse, that of Afghan girls and women.

Political events put a halt to my plans of living in Kabul, so I based myself in Peshawar. Peshawar and its surroundings housed maybe as much as half a million Afghan refugees at the time of my fieldwork. Since Kabulis were my research focus, I concentrated on meeting with Kabuli families in the Afghan exile community. During my fieldwork I also went on three field trips from Peshawar to Kabul when the security situation allowed it. It made my fieldwork multi-sited, and improved my understanding of the dynamics of mobility within the extended and often geographically fragmented family networks that the girls are embedded in.

2 I worked three years as a project officer with Norwegian Refugee Council/ Norwegian Church Aid in Peshawar, Pakistan and one year with the United Nation Development Programme in Mazar-e-Sharif, North-Afghanistan. Throughout the four years I travelled extensively in most parts of Afghanistan, both rural and urban centres.
The field location is often thought of as a situated community, such as a refugee camp, a village or a neighbourhood in a city. However, as Appadurai has suggested, it is useful to extend the concept of the field to social networks and categories that are not necessarily tied to a specific place, but that are still local in the sense that subjects can be known and organised (quoted in Gilen et al., 1994:10). I find this way of thinking useful, as my field is located in the dynamics of the relations and networks of the girls and their families more than in one specific geographical location.
Analytical concerns

Coping with disrupted lives

In what sense are the lives of the informants disrupted, and what do I mean by coping? With relevance to this study, coping can be defined as how people master the emotional and practical sides of life when a critical incident occurs (Ingestad, 1997:49). For the people of this study the critical incident is a continuous experience and ongoing life-condition. My young informant’s lives are characterized by displacement, discontinuity and disruptions with respect to their homes and families, livelihoods and education opportunities. War and exile have become integral parts of their life histories as well as everyday lives, having implications for the economic, practical, political and emotional aspects of life. How the girls ‘master the emotional and practical sides of life’ when war has become an integral part of everyday life, is the theme of the thesis.

In her psychosocial study of refugees, Sveaass (2000) argues that in order for individuals to cope with critical events, whether single events or ongoing life conditions, it is crucial to be able to make sense out of the seemingly meaningless. She argues that the motivating factor in the construction of human culture is the meaning-making process whereby the order of things are put in place and given meaning. Traumatic stories become part of individual life narratives as well as collective narratives. We construct cultural mind maps from which we can ‘read the world’, and these mind maps determine whether an event is experienced as matter in, or out of place. Part of my study explores the cultural mind map that gives meaning to my informants when they try to recreate order out of chaotic experiences.

When people cope with the disruptions caused by war and flight, they strive to re-establish what Sveaass calls the basic human need for meaning making; a basic sense of coherence, of trust and a sense of control (Sveaass, 2000). In light of my material, I will add a sense of belonging to the list; it seems that my informants owe much of their resistance and coping abilities to a strong sense of belonging in their extended families.

There is a widespread assumption that war and displacement has caused an erosion’ of family values, reported in numerous socio-economic evaluations of the situation in Afghanistan. The quotation below is an example, taken from a vulnerability study done by the United Nations in Afghanistan in August 2000,
"The coping capacity of the civilian population has been severely weakened as a result of the war and the erosion of many traditional coping mechanisms including in particular the role of the extended family networks."\(^3\)

In light of my material, the above quotation fails to grasp the nature of change that has taken place in Afghan society over the last twenty years of war. ‘The role of the family network’ refers to the strong cultural norm and the practices of Afghan families of looking after their own, in particular the vulnerable members such as elders, children and widows. My experiences with Afghan families indicate that these values and practices still represent a crucial coping resource. I attempt to show that the family network has not been eroded but transformed, and that exchange and communication between family members take place at a high frequency and over great (geographical) distances. I argue that the Afghan family should be seen as a flexible institution that can easily adapt to changes, and as a latent resource that can be mobilized. This is an argument in line with the works of the Swiss anthropologist couple Centlivres, who have followed Afghan families in diaspora for more than twenty years. The Centlivres point out that the scattering of neighbourhoods and family groups does not necessarily implicate their disappearance, neither the disintegration of society nor culture nor the impossibility of their reproduction.

Returning to the quote from the UN report, I direct attention to the choice of terminology. The reporter has used the term “mechanism”, indicating an analytical approach to the relationship between the individual and the society as one of function, rather than relation. In similar reports coping “strategy” is used. The latter is associated with an actor-oriented perspective seeking to depict people as social actors. Even though the actor-oriented approach is underlying my study, I will reserve the term strategy for action based on a conscious calculation of maximum opportunity and minimum risk. The way people plan and carry out their migration aspirations are as such a strategy. However, some ways of coping are less strategic and more related to internalised norms and practices, such as when the girls and women find an emotional outlet through religious practices.

**THE ACTOR-ORIENTED APPROACH**

I have based this study on an actor-oriented approach, where I focus on people as social actors and creative agents in their own everyday lives, embedded in fields of social relations and without disregarding the socio-political circumstances that often constrict human action.

Inherent in the concept of social actors is the notion of the human being as an active subject with the capacity to process social experience and to invent ways of adapting to and coping with life even under extreme conditions such as war and coercion.

This theoretical position is grounded in my experience of working with Afghans over many years, and what seemed like an Afghan ability to persistently cope with the adversities of life. The portraying in western media of Afghan refugee women as double victims: of war and flight, and of patriarchal and oppressive gender ideologies and practices, stood in contrast to my knowledge of Afghans as they see themselves. Afghan women I knew project images of strong, capable and proud persons with social identities rooted in to them meaningful and respected roles within their families, communities and society.

The media representations of refugees as victims has been criticised by Malkki who argues that the tendency in the international (western) refugee discourse is to portray refugees, and refugee women in particular, as speechless emissaries and helpless victims of war (Malkki in Fog-Olwig and Hastrup, 1997). Malkki argues that the prevalent refugee discourse turns the refugees into a faceless and voiceless group, and that what she calls the victim-discourse does not pay attention to the strength, creativity and coping abilities of individual refugees.

Within contemporary social theory both Long (1989) and Giddens (1984) are central advocates for the actor-oriented approach, and both emphasise that people attempt to solve everyday problems within the limits of their socio-cultural context in which they are embedded. This necessitates a thorough knowledge of the socio-cultural context as well as the political history of events in order to understand and analyse the particular ways of coping and adaptations of the social actors in concern, Long argues. I follow this line of thought by placing the micro histories of my informants within a socio-cultural context of life in Kabul and Peshawar, and the macro history of the war in Afghanistan.

Long writes that actor-oriented analyses has been criticized for being too focused on the individuals and on the small-scale practices of everyday life at the expense of understanding large scale social phenomena. But as he points out, this critique rests on the assumption that the actor-oriented analysis works with the individual as the basic unit of analysis. It is however not the individual per se that is the focus of the analysis, but the interaction of the individual in social relations and situations that are of analytical interest, Long argues (1992:226). I have attempted to follow this line of thought by highlighting the relational

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4 According to UNHCR, a refugee has crossed international borders fleeing political violence in the homeland.
dimensions of the social life of my informants, seeing them within the context of their social networks.

**GENDER AND GENERATION**

My entry point and focus within the families I study are the young daughters, representing the war-generation who has, in the words of a nineteen-year-old informant, "known of nothing but war my whole life." For the older generation, the war turned their lives upside-down, but for the children and youth upside-down became 'normal'. This is the reason why I will focus on young people, particularly girls, who for reasons explained below, became my informants. Although this study is not primarily a gender-focused study, a perspective on gender and change is certainly present. The concept of gender refers to the cultural interpretation of biological sex, and gender identities that are socially constructed (Stølen and Vaa, 1991, Moore, 1988). The most intense processes of socialization take place during childhood and youth when the young individual becomes a social person with a gendered identity. Stølen argues that the actor-oriented approach is particularly useful for studying gender and social change, since it depicts girls and women as active shapers of their own lives and at the same time recognizes the socio-cultural constraints embedded in potentially oppressive gender ideologies and practices.

The young female informants of this study share the experience of being confronted with and expected to conform to the Afghan socio-cultural ideals of a *khub dakhtar*, a good daughter. However, gender is not the only aspect of a person’s social characteristics that will influence her ways of coping and style of adaptation; her position of class, family, kinship, age, religion and ideology are also crucial. In addition to being positioned according to gender, the girls of this study are positioned within their families according to age, and within their communities according to their status as members of educated families of urban middle-class.

What men and women do and how they behave and interact, together with cultural ideas and interpretations of gender differences, constitute a gender system (Stølen et al, 1991). The gender system is constantly being transformed and recreated as socio-economic and cultural changes take place, and the macro history of the war has certainly posed new opportunity structures and changes within the household for many Afghan families. But the values and

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5 A gender-focused study would concentrate on the relational aspect of the social roles and identities ascribed to men and women, including the perspectives and experiences of both men and women (Stølen, 1991). My study has a female bias.

6 I return to the socio-cultural values and norms underlying the concept of 'khub dakhtar'.
ways of thinking about 'maleness' and 'femaleness' that goes with a gender system, are often the most resistant to change, as Rudie among others has pointed out (Rudie, 1984). She labels such gendered notions for hard programmed ideas.

This study will explore how certain traditional gender roles have changed at the micro-level, in everyday social life within the families. It is therefore important to clarify some analytical concepts related to the above themes of change (and continuity), and the relationship between the macro-historical events of politics and conflict and the micro-histories of my informants.

MICRO AND MACRO-HISTORY

Rudie proposes a distinction for analytical purpose between what she labels the macro-history (den store historien) that is recorded on societal level, and the micro-history (den lille historien) that unfolds in individual life courses (Rudie, 2001:94). The purpose of the distinction is to explore the interaction between the micro and macro level, the individual and the society, as she explores the dynamics of social change in her analysis on life courses.

I find the concept of the macro and micro history useful for shedding light on my material, which consists of individual life histories embedded in a specific socio-political context and historical epoch.

Rudie argues that the micro-history is ingrained in living people's memories as well as in their actions. It follows that it is not sufficient to record life histories as biographies of the past, the micro-history must also be observed in synchronic situations of social practise. Following Rudie's line of thought, the construction of life history material in the thesis are based on a method of triangulation where the verbal statements of the informants combined with their social actions are seen in the broader context of society (Rudie, 2001,1-2:95). In other word it is not sufficient to listen to the informant talk about her life, past and present, her actions must be observed. Then observations of social action (what the informant actually do) are combined with what she says she does, and the two types of data interpreted in the light of a socio-historical context (triangulation). The micro-history constitutes an adaptive process whereby the individual continuously modifies her skills as a response and in exchange to the demands and challenges posed by society (Rudie, 2001). This view is associated with the actor-oriented approach outlined above, and postulates a view of social change where the relationship between person and society is conceived as a process of interaction rather than one of imposition.

There are diverse views on what constitute the analytical distinctions between a life course and a life history (Danielsen, 1995, Rudie, 2001), which I do not get into here.
Long observes that actors have multiple ways of coping with similar macro historical processes. He attributes the varieties of responses, to socio-cultural prerequisites that are historically and culturally specific to the situation in concern. In accordance with this, I will explore the socio-cultural context that is specific to the Afghan participants of my study. Omidian, an American anthropologist, holds forth the view that there is a particular Afghan way of coping, based on her years of researching Afghan refugee communities (Omidian, 1996). I will attempt to explore this theme in light of my own material.

**CONSTRUCTING LIFE HISTORIES**

Life histories are complex data, which are at the same time historical and social facts and subjective representations of these. Danielsen (1995) argues on the basis of this insight that life histories must not be taken ‘at face value’. She argues for directing attention to the dialogue between the informant and the researcher; and the positioning of both vis-à-vis each other and the contextual setting of the data collection. Knudsen (1993) expands on this theme in his analysis of life history material in the context of Vietnamese boat refugees interviewed in a transitory camp in Hong Kong. He argues that refugees are people in transition, and will construct their stories of the past in the light of a very uncertain present and future. These are valid points, and I discuss it further in chapter four, under “Tense pasts”. In light of my own experience, the life history material I gathered from informants varied in quality according to have much time I had with people, and if I had opportunities to follow them in different social contexts.

With regard to the use of life history material in my study, I argue with Omidian that the life history approach is a useful tool for illustrating the drastic life course changes and rapid shifts in social roles that individuals exposed to war and flight undergo, from a personal perspective and with contextual information. However it is important to note that the construction of a life history is a selective process, both from the point of the informant and from the point of the researcher who re-structures the story while transforming it to text. I have tried to be true to the ‘voice’ of my informants, but realise that the voice of the researcher is also present as I hold the pen, re-constructing, re-presenting and re-interpreting the life histories and my observations.
The structure of the thesis

In the introduction I present the field and focus of the study, as well as central analytical concerns. In chapter 1) I present the socio-cultural background and the macro-history of the war, as well as the Afghan exile community in Peshawar. In chapter 2) I discuss the methodology of my fieldwork. In chapter 3) I present the detailed ethnography and micro-histories of four of the participants of the study, with one case as the master story. In chapter 4) I look at the ways the girls and women cope with emotions and health problems related to living with war, and how Afghan cosmology and religious practice offer ways of coping with grief and loss. In chapter 5) I am concerned with the more practical and strategic dimensions of coping, and how the extended and trans-national family network offers ways of coping through the remittances economy, mobile livelihoods, migration and marriages across borders. Finally there is the conclusion, summing up and highlighting the main findings of the study.
AFGHANISTAN - Roads and airports

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. These maps may be freely distributed. If more current information is available, please update the maps and return them to ReliefWeb for posting.
CHAPTER 1: HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

“We have seen it all: we had a king, then a republican, then the communists, the Mujahedin and now the Taliban. In our experience nothing lasts…” Kabuli woman. April 1999

The intention of this chapter is to provide a contextual ‘thick description’, to give a brief outline of the macro history within which the individual micro histories are embedded. The first part outlines certain key aspects of the socio-cultural context that forms a frame of reference to my informants. Then the history of the war is briefly outlined, giving an overview over the last thirty years of relevant socio-political developments in Afghanistan. I have only included the developments up to the end of my fieldwork (June 1999), which means that major macro-political events such as the American bombing of Afghanistan after September 11th 2001 and the subsequent fall of the Taliban, are left out. The last part describes the status and situation of the Afghan refugees in Peshawar, the different settlement patterns of the town and camp dwellers, the characteristics of the old and the new refugees and the mobility of the latter.

Afghanistan and its people

Described as a “harsh, brutal and beautiful land” (Dupree, 1973) landlocked and mountainous Afghanistan has for centuries been the meeting place of four geographical and cultural areas, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and China. Throughout history there has been a constant coming and going of diverse peoples from the surrounding regions, brought to the area by conquest, by migration, by trade and by religion, all contributing to the intricate maze which makes up Afghanistan's ethnographic picture.
Present-day Afghanistan borders to Pakistan, Iran, China and the former Soviet republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The borders can be seen as an outcome of the 19th Century great game between the colonial powers of the Russian and British empires, and their need for a buffer state in the region. The border is still a bone of contention between the two countries. The eastern border, the Duran-line, was drawn by the British in 1893, and divides the traditional homeland of the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns constitute the largest and most dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan. The Shah (king) and political leaders have throughout most of Afghanistan's history been Pashtun. Of the pre-war population of around 14 million inhabitants, six million were Pashtuns, with an equivalent number across the border in Pakistan. The subsequent group comprised of four million Tajiks, 1,5 million Uzbek, 1,5 million Hazara, 0,8 million Aimaks, 0,5 million Turkmens, 0,1 million Nuristani, 0,1 million Baluch and some other minor groups. (Bauck and Moen, 1987). Other sources give varying figures, reflecting the difficulties in gathering reliable statistics in a long-term conflict area. With an estimated annual population growth of 2,5 the population of Afghanistan today is estimated to 26 million, including the approximately five to six million Afghans who have taken refuge in the neighbouring countries (Centlivres, 1988). Because of the high population growth in a short time span, more than half of the population are children and youth under the age of eighteen.

Four fifths of the population speak Iranian- and Indo-European based languages, the two national languages being Pashto and Dari (Afghan Persian). Other languages are Turkic based, primarily Uzbek and Turkmen, and another thirty minor languages, primarily Balochi and Pashai, which are Indo-European languages. Bilingualism is common, particularly in urban areas where Dari has been the official language of public institutions such as the court, the universities and the bureaucracy.

Afghanistan's peoples are predominantly following Sunni Islam, except a minority (the Hazara population) who follow Shia Islam. Since the introduction of Islam to the region 700 AC, Islam has been the most important binding factor in the cultural, ethnic and linguistic mosaic of Afghanistan. Islam is an important source of identity for those who participated in this study, regardless of the level of involvement in religious rituals. But the Islamic identity creates a mask of homogeneity that is not maintained in Afghan society. The Hazaras has

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8 Ethnicity and ethnic boundaries will not be discussed theoretically in this thesis, as it was not a central theme to my informants.
9 Census of June 1979, UN Demographic Year Book 1984 (Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont, 1988:92)
10 A more recent source presents the following estimates; Pashtuns (38%), Tajiks (25%), Hazara (19%), Uzbeks (6%), and other minor groups. (CIA publications, The World Fact Book, 2000)
throughout history been discriminated against due to their Shia practises, regarded by many in the Sunni majority as religiously inferior.

Human settlements in Afghanistan are primarily rural. Although there was an increasing labour migration to urban areas in the 60s and 70s, it was in 1978 estimated that only 14 % lived in urban centres. 76 % of the population lived in villages, commonly sited on irrigated valley floors or near natural sources of water, and 10 % were nomads (Bauck og Moen, 1987). Apart from the capital Kabul, the major cities are Kandahar in the south, Herat in the west, Mazar-e-Sharif in the north and Jalalabad in the east. During the Soviet occupation in the 80s, these cities swelled with refugees from the countryside, people who fled the destruction of their land and villages and who sought protection and a livelihood in the government controlled urban centres.

KABUL IDENTITY

High altitude Kabul has always functioned as Afghanistan’s window to the world, with better access to education, work and “modernity” in the various forms a city and capital can offer. People with both parents and preferably also grandparents from Kabul are Kabul azil, meaning “real Kabuli” 11. Those who are Kabul azil take pride in it, and often confirm the stereotype attitudes of the urbanites that see the villagers as illiterate, backward and dirty. Villagers on the other hand were known to view the more liberal culture of Kabul with distrust and contempt. Formal education served as a class marker.

Afghan intellectuals blame the last two decades of war partly on the widening socio-political and economic gap between the city and the village, and the lack of comprehension on behalf of the ruling urban elite when they tried to reform the countryside 12. The following story illustrates the urban-rural divide; I visited a camp school in Peshawar, and asked the girls in the class if any of them were from Kabul. All twenty raised their hands. When we started talking it turned out that most of them were in fact from Laghman, Gazhni and other provinces in Afghanistan. The teacher took me aside afterwards and explained that the girls had “lied” because my question had been the same as asking, “who are educated?” Being from Kabul equalled being educated in the minds of the girls, and to admit to not being from Kabul was admitting to illiteracy.

11 Afghans identifies with the birthplace of his or her parents, even though it is a different place than their birthplace.
12 They also blamed the geo-political interests of the superpowers at the time, and the neighbouring countries.
EDUCATION

Functional literacy is very low; in pre-war Afghanistan approximately fifteen percent of the population had access to higher education, even less for girls. In the villages the traditional form of education was, and still is, the village mosque where the local religious expert, the mullah, runs a madrasa (Quaran school). The urban centres all had university level education before the war, as a result of an effort during the 60s and 70s to improve and expand the education system. By 1978 (urban) women could at least in theory follow virtually any career they chose. There were women in the police force, in the army, in business, in industry and in all government departments (Dupree, 1998). During the communist regime in Kabul, the university and the schools were open and active. They had to close when the fighting started in 1993, and have since only been partly in function. At the time of my fieldwork, the Taliban had banned female education after the age of nine, and the only education opportunity were the locally organized “home schools”. In Kabul the home schools were illegal, but there were still hundreds of them in different neighbourhoods. Teachers who had lost their jobs when the girl schools closed, taught pupils in their homes for a small fee.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Afghanistan is a country with myriad levels of fragmentation. People see themselves as part of their family system, religious sect and village, but also as part of a tribe, region, and finally, country (Omedian, 1996). Loyalty goes first and foremost to the minimal unit, the family. An informant told me, “People will help their famili first, then the khashawand [extended family, relatives], then the quam [tribe] and finally the millat [nation].”

In the countryside people live decentralized and tribally structured lives, centred on an ideology of protection, where values such as honour and shame stands central (Tapper, 1991). These ideals, although described as the Pashtun way, or Pashtunwali (ref.), are in large shared by most ethnic groups of Afghanistan. Honour is achieved through (male) independence, bravery, revenge, religious piety and the successful protection of a man’s land, property and women (Barth, 1981). This creates tension between cousins who compete over the same land, heritage and wives-to-be. But family units ally against outsiders who contest their power base, following a system that can be classified as a segmentary lineage system. The system works as an opportunistic mechanism of splitting and melding based on circumstances and family pressures. This is of course an idealized model, taking no account of individual actors and their actual choices and concerns.
The concept of *quam*\textsuperscript{13} (tribe) is a central ingredient in the model of socio-political organization. Tribal identity is based on an imagined common patrilineal ancestor, and can go as far as twenty to twenty five generations back. The *quam* system is an important asset and a relational concern, when activated it carries mutual rights and obligations for protection and help towards your kin. It is predominantly Pashtuns that have the tribal system, but other ethnic groups follow it too. According to my informants, Tajiks also identify with *quam*.

Tribal solidarity and identity is in general weaker among the urban population. In the cities, people have access to other networks as well such as the network of colleagues at the work place or fellow students from the university. Urban women are likely to keep in closer contact with their kin family also after marriage, providing a better network than for village women who often become solely reliant on the *quami* of her husband.

The ethnographic literature from Afghanistan has mostly been concerned with Pashto-speaking rural society, from a male perspective. There are brilliant exceptions where female researchers have gained access to the life worlds of Afghan women, but it has still been focused on rural village life (Dobleday, Tapper, Grima). In contrast, my study will be concerned with families speaking both Dari and Pashto, with an urban background and from a female perspective.

*WOMEN AND HONOUR*

The concept of honour (*namus* in Pashto, *ezhat* in Dari) is central in Afghan patriarchal culture and in understanding the dynamics of gender relations. The key to the honour of men, and ultimately the entire family, rests with the girls and the women. Fathers, brothers and husbands have to protect, defend and control the chastity of their unmarried daughters and sisters and the fidelity of their wives. Their honour is at stake if she gets a reputation, a bad name. According to Islam, a girl is born *fitna*, which means both lust and chaos (Stang Dahl, 1992). Female sexuality as an uncontrolled force outside the sacred domain of marriage signifies danger and matter out of place, and ultimately the collapse of the family and society.

In light of my material, it is the girls and women of the family as much as the men who uphold the honour of the family; mothers by watching their daughters closely and teaching them proper conduct, and the girls by watching and judging each other. The very real threat of being the victim of gossip is an efficient sanction on inappropriate female behaviour.

\textsuperscript{13} Quam is an Arabic word which translates to "tribe" in English, and correlates to a patrilineal extra-familial unit with religious and political components (Lapidus, 1990)
Some analysts have argued that it was the Kabuli based communist reforms of obligatory literacy courses for village women and the banning of the veil, that sparked the resistance movement in the provinces to declare *jihad*, holy war. They saw it as first and foremost an attack on the honour of their women, their religion and way of life (Surkhe, 1990).

**The macro history of the war**

*The Monarchy and Modernization*

Even before the Soviet invasion in 1979 Afghanistan was among the poorest and least developed countries in the world. There were large social and economic differences between the rural and urban populations, especially those living in the capital. Kabul was the seat of the king, who since 1747 has been of the Durrani family, one of the largest Pashtun tribes (Barth in Bauck et al, 1987). The provincial chiefs accepted the monarchy as long as it did not challenge their local power base, and local norms and culture. Early 1920s king Amonullah and queen Soraia started a process of modernization in Kabul; among other things they banned the veil for women and opened the first school for girls. This combined with the queen’s European-inspired fashion, lead to a revolt by the conservative tribal chiefs in 1928. The last king of Afghanistan, Zaher Shah (1933-1973) seemed to better balance between modernization and respect for the autonomy of the tribal chiefs. Although he let his queen appear unveiled in public in 1959, he did not try to force his ideas on the people. The *burqa* \(^{14}\) was still popular and in use chiefly among the urban conservative middle and upper class families who wished to signal that they could afford to keep their women in *purdha* (seclusion) and that they did not have to work outside the house. Village women wore the *burqa* when they occasionally ventured to town, otherwise they would cover in various local variations of the more convenient *chador* \(^{15}\).

During his regime there was an emerging urban middle-class of educated people who voiced a growing resentment towards the nepotism of the royal family and a small political elite. During the late 60s and early 70s, the protest was channelled into urban and university-based communist parties of Maoist and Soviet orientation, as well as radical Islamic groups inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The latter would form the core leadership for

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\(^{14}\) *Burqa* is an all-covering Islamic garment for women, with a knitted piece covering the eyes.

\(^{15}\) *Chador* is a large shawl that can be worn in different ways according to what parts of the head, face and upper body the woman wishes to cover.
the various Mujahedin parties who later fought the Russians, with substantial Pakistan-based military support and training.

**The Republic Coup and the Saur Revolution**

In July 1973, after a reign of forty years, the king was overthrown by his cousin Mohammad Daud who declared the country a republic. But Daud's reform program did not live up to the expectations of the more radical People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). In April 1978, the PDPA led by Taraki carried out a Marxist coup d'etat and killed Daud. The coup has become known as the Saur-revolution, after the Islamic month of Saur. Taraki became the President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. In the summer of 1978, the government began issuing decrees concerning agrarian reforms, the abolition of mortgage debts, the status of women and education. Applied with brutality and with a lack of understanding of the rural society, these measures gave rise to armed revolts against the Kabul government in a large number of provinces. The repression that followed caused the first great departures of refugees towards Pakistan (Centlivres, 1988).

**The Russian War and the Jihad**

In September 1979, Taraki was executed, as was his successor, Amin, when the Soviet military intervened on 27 December 1979. With the backing of Moscow, Babrak Karmal became the President and Prime Minister until May 1986, when Najibullah, a Soviet-educated Pashtun known to Afghans as Dr. Najib, replaced him as the head of the government.

Throughout the ten years of war, the Kabul regime had the urban centres as their strongholds. The Soviet-backed regime met massive resistance in form of guerrilla warfare in the provinces and villages, and the war became known to Afghans as the Russian war. As the war in the countryside escalated in the 80s, areas never fully reconciled to central rule in the king's time joined in the *jihad*\(^\text{16}\) for the defence of Islam and, beyond that for many, the defence of tribal hegemony (Omidian, 1996). The resistance fighters became known to the world as the *Mujahedin*\(^\text{17}\) and were recruited both among the male refugee population in Pakistan and among the remaining rural population. Seven Mujahedin parties were formed, with base in Pakistan. They received military training and financial support from the USA via Pakistan (Yousaf and Adkin, 1992). The fact that the Afghan refugees had to be members of

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\(^{16}\) Jihad is holy war defending Islam.

\(^{17}\) Mujahedin are holy warriors fighting the jihad.
one of the seven parties to receive assistance in the refugee camps in Pakistan highlights the highly political nature of the humanitarian tragedy.

The ten year long war caused enormous suffering and destruction. More than one million Afghans lost their lives, several hundred thousand where physically and mentally disabled, and it produced the world's largest refugee population ever; almost half of the pre war population became refugees. It was a war that destroyed villages, roads, fields and irrigation canals and left 10 mill mines scattered around in the countryside when the last Soviet troops withdrew in January 1989.

**DR. NAJIB AND THE MUJAHEDIN GOVERNMENT**

When the Russian Army had left Kabul and Afghanistan, the Mujahedin and the rest of the world expected the communist regime in Kabul to fall like a house of cards. But Dr. Najib held on to power and defended the city for another three years. Paradoxically, Dr. Najib was both known for his brutality as well as his competent statesmanship. Under his presidency there were employment opportunities, people received their salaries and the children and youth went to school and university. An airborne link to Moscow provided for goods like petrol, oil and foodstuff that were scars in the provinces, and those who worked in the bureaucracy had access to ration cards for these kinds of essential goods. During the time his rule, "life was good" my informants told me. The war was elsewhere; it was something they heard about on the radio, reports from distant provinces. For the majority of the population of Kabul, the war came to Kabul with the Mujahedin.

Without the support and presence of the Soviet army, it was impossible for Dr. Najib to hold on to Kabul. In April 1992 he accepted a United Nation negotiated plan of reconciliation offering Dr. Najib asylum to India if he gave up power. An interim regime consisting of leaders from the different Mujahedin parties had already been formed in Peshawar, and when Dr. Najib stepped down they quickly filled the power vacuum. But the promise of asylum to Dr. Najib was not held; the Mujahedin kept him a prisoner in Kabul during their rule and the following civil war, and he ended up being brutally killed by the Taliban when they took power in Kabul four years later. The event has turned into a powerful image still lingering in people's memories; Dr. Najib, mutilated and hanged in a public place worked as a stark warning to all of Kabul the night the Taliban took control.

The new Mujahedin government declared Rabbani for president; he was the leader of one of the major Mujahedin parties. Afghanistan was declared an Islamic state. Rabbani appointed
Masood, another Tajik, to be minister of defence. Hekmatyar, a Pashtun, became the prime minister. The hope for peace was high among the Afghan people both within and outside the borders. More than 1.5 refugees returned home from Pakistan and Iran, mainly to the rural areas where major rehabilitation works awaited them.

However, the hope for peace dwindled fast. With the defeat of the common enemy, internal disagreements along ethnic and tribal lines of the Mujahedin became apparent. Hekmatyar whose party had been the most dominant in the jihad, was not satisfied with his share of the power. He broke out of the Rabbani government and based his forces outside Kabul. Dostum, an Uzbek and a former general under the communist regime, had opportunistically joined the Mujahedin after the fall of Dr. Najib, and in January 1994 he switched side again, from the Rabbani government to the opposition of Hekmatyar. It was an unholy alliance, two old enemies from the Russian war joined hands to get their share of the power. From the hillsides of the mountains surrounding Kabul, Hekmatyar and Dostum's rocket launchers and missiles where fired indiscriminately at military targets and civilian neighbourhoods.

Whereas it had been the countryside that was hardest hit in the period from 1979 to 1992, the urban populations were the chief victims of the civil war between 1993 and 1996. Between 1992 and 1995 Kabul had more bomb strikes than in the preceding 13 years (Omedian, 1996). Large parts of the once so beautiful city was turned into rubble and ruins, an estimated 25,000 were killed, thousands fled across the border to Pakistan and at least half a million were internally displaced (Suhrke et al., 2002).

When I talked with the youth that had grown up in communist Kabul, they referred to “the war” as the time of Mujahedin, the time of civil war. Fighting had raged in the streets for weeks at a time, and nobody could leave their basements. During short breaks in the firing people would risk going out of their house to gather more food and fuel, go to the houses of relatives to check if they were alive or if they had an option, to grab a few belongings and get out of the city on the bus, taxi or by foot.

**THE TALIBAN**

In September 1996, after almost four years of civil war in Kabul, the Taliban forces toppled the Rabbani government after months of besieging the capital. Taliban means religious student, and the movement had gained strength since the beginning of the 90s through recruiting young Afghan and Pakistani boys, mainly Pashtuns, who studied at the madrasas, the religious Koran schools. When the Taliban took power in Kabul, the heavy rocketing
halted and they were credited for having brought back safety in the streets. Their initial program of de-arming the warlords, re-establishing security and "cleansing" Afghanistan for non-Islamic behaviour by introducing a blend of traditional tribal custom and *sharia*\(^\text{18}\) was popular in particular with the rural Pashtun dominated provinces (Marsden, 1998).

In Kabul however, their restricting iron-rule did not go well with the more liberal culture of the urban population, and journalists and others labelled the phenomena of the Taliban for "the revenge of the countryside". It was particularly a number of harsh restrictions on women’s freedom to dress, work and move where they wished that caught the attention of the international community, and in the western media the *burqa* became the foremost symbol of the oppressive Taliban regime. However, according to my informants, the obligatory wearing of the *burqa* turned out to be the least of their worries. The regime’s incompetence in recovering a war-wrecked economy, as well as the loss of work and education opportunities was conceived as far more serious.

The Taliban gender policy contained four main elements; a ban on the employment of women with few exceptions in the health sector; a ban on girls and women’s formal education; the imposition of strict dress codes on both men and women requiring women to wear *burqas* and men to wear beards, turbans and the traditional garment of *shalwar kameez*\(^\text{19}\); and the introduction of strict controls on the movement of women outside the home so that women should always be separated from male strangers or escorted by a *maharam*\(^\text{20}\), a male relative (Marsden, 1998). A creation of the Taliban regime was the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue that constantly put out new decrees concerned with proper Islamic dress and conduct for men and women. People walked in constant fear of reproach and harassment from the Vice and Virtue patrols of young Taliban, who delivered corporal punishment and humiliation to those who broke the dress code.

A war ravaged and deteriorating economy, lack of livelihood and education opportunities and security concerns compelled those who had the means to leave the city. Another reason to leave was the harsh winter. Families in houses damaged by rockets had no walls, windows or fuel to last them through the freezing Kabul winter.

\(^{18}\) Islamic law interpreted by the Taliban as classic *sharia* as it was written before the 10th century.

\(^{19}\) *Shalwar-kameez* is the term for traditional Islamic dress for both men and women; a loose tunic over baggy pants.

\(^{20}\) Maharams are too close relatives to get married, whereas namaharams are those that can potentially marry.
KABUL - A POPULATION ON THE MOVE

High-altitude Kabul has undergone major demographic changes during the twenty years of war. The pre-war population of Kabul was less than 500,000 (Adamec, 1991). During the initial years after the Saur-revolution and Soviet occupation there was a large exodus from the provinces and to the city. In 1983-4 the city population had mushroomed to approximately three million, due to the constant flow of people from the provinces who sought refuge from the atrocities of the government army and the Russians.

The tide turned with the civil war in Kabul. In 1992, as the Mujahedin government took over in Kabul, UNHCR registered 70,000 Kabulis crossing the border to Pakistan, most of them educated, many who had worked with the Najibullah government. A high number had also been leaving Kabul since 1990, as the population there feared for a takeover by the Mujahedin. Following the increased fighting from January 1994, an estimated 300,000 fled Kabul. The majority were refused to enter Pakistan and had to reside in camps in Jalalabad, although a number of them eventually made it to Pakistan. In order to cross the border they had to pay the guards at Torkham, or go with smugglers by the mountainous back routes.

A new wave of a further 50,000 fled just after the Taliban take over in September 1996, especially as the girl schools closed. A number of families with girls managed to get them into Pakistani schools to continue their education. Since 1992, maybe as much as half of Kabul's inhabitants have fled the city (UNHCR).

Each successive phase of the conflict has led to further displacement of the urban population, both within and between urban centres, with the result that one cannot talk in terms of a stable urban population. It is therefore difficult to know whether the population of Kabul is nearer to half a million or a million, but most estimates are around one million, a report from British Agencies Afghanistan Group claimed in 1997 (Marsden, 1997).

A study undertaken by the ICRC in December 1996 found that a significant proportion of the population of Kabul had moved several times as a direct result of the conflict. Similarly, monitoring undertaken by the UNHCR at the main entry points to the city found a high level of moving back and forth. Foremost those who have left were professionals working for the government administration. The findings of the mentioned reports coincide with the experiences of the informants of this study.

Those who are left behind in Kabul are likely to be among the more impoverished because those with the means to leave for Pakistan, Iran or other parts of Afghanistan have already
done so, Marsden (1997) argues. This reality combined with a deteriorating economic situation within the capital helped to produce a population close to destitution.

**THE WAR ECONOMY**

The war led to a running inflation, and disrupted the economy of the country. An elderly refugee in Peshawar said that in the time of king Zahir Shah, seven kg of wheat cost fifteen to twenty Afghanis. Twenty-three years later seven kg of wheat cost 70.000 Afghanis. In the 80s, during communist rule, the economy was artificially stable in the urban areas. The Russians brought goods and food into the capital, and people where given ration cards and coupons but had to stand in long cues to purchase anything. When the factional fighting between the Mujahedeen started, the prices shot up in Kabul. The roads to Peshawar were often blocked, leading to a scarcity of goods and food in Kabul. When the Taliban took power, the roads were opened because they had a better relation to Pakistan. But even with available food in the markets of Kabul, people could not afford to buy it. The inflation had made prices too high, and salaries (if people received their salaries at all) too low. A Kabuli taxi driver in Peshawar told me he had left Kabul and his job as a civil servant there because he had not received salary from the government for six months. His salary had been around five dollars or thirty-five Nkr a month (paid in Afghanis).
Life in exile - Peshawar

Peshawar is the dusty frontier city and capital of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. An hour’s drive through Tribal Area, lays the Khyber Pass and Torkham; the border passing to Afghanistan. Before the war there was an unrestricted and continuous flow of goods and people across the border. The Pashtun population on either side of the border share language and culture, a fact that made the housing of more than three million predominantly Pashtu speaking Afghan refugees an easier task for the local government of NWFP during the 80s. The Pashtuns of Peshawar are by the people of the other cities of Pakistan, regarded as the most conservative and traditional with regard to religious fervour and the observance of purdha\textsuperscript{21}. A visible symbol of purdha is the way women cover up while moving in public spaces. The majority of local women use the traditional all-covering burqa, or a large chador wrapped around body and head. Peshawar’s population was in 1989 estimated to 500,000 (Shaw, 1989), but the city has since then doubled its population partly due to general urbanization and partly due to the influx of Afghan refugees. At the time of my fieldwork the population of Peshawar was estimated between 750,000 and one million. The figure for Afghan refugees in NWFP is one million, of which around 400,000 live in the Peshawar area\textsuperscript{22}.

THE STATUS OF THE REFUGEES

Pakistan has never ratified the United Nation refugee convention of 1947 but as long as they regarded the refugees as mujaherin\textsuperscript{23}, it was a religious duty to Pakistan to provide shelter to their Muslim brothers and sisters. When the communist regime in Kabul fell and the Mujahedin regime declared Afghanistan an Islamic state, Pakistan argued that the jihad was over and the refugees should return. This was the reason given by the authorities for the closing of the Torkham border passing in 1993, when a new wave of refugees fled the civil war in Kabul. Although the border was “leaking” and after a while reopened, the closing was a clear message to the Afghans and the international community that ‘enough was enough’. Pakistan was increasingly putting pressure on the refugees to return home, assisted by UNHCR run programs for voluntary repatriation.

\textsuperscript{21} Purdha (litt. curtain): multiple practises of gender segregation, meant to protect and control the sexuality of women.
\textsuperscript{22} Estimates based on various verbal sources. It has proved impossible to obtain reliable numbers, illustrating the tricky political nature of demographic figures in a refugee context.
\textsuperscript{23} Mujaherin are refugees of holy war, jihad. A mujahed is a soldier of jihad, and the two terms are connected in Islam.
The push for repatriation grew stronger when the Taliban took power in Kabul in 1996. Pakistani papers praised the “peace” that had come with the new regime; it was time for the refugees to return. During the time of my fieldwork there was a growing concern about security among my informants and generally in the Afghan exile community. Informants told about increasing harassment from the local police, how fathers and brothers were stopped for no reason and asked for identity papers. They ended in prison if they did not pay a bribe. At the beginning of my fieldwork, the autumn of 1998, all Afghan-run universities in Peshawar were closed by the Pakistani authorities, disrupting the chance for a higher education for several thousand young Afghans, including some of my informants.

A common view I heard voiced among the Pakistanis was that the refugees was pushing the housing market and bringing weapon- and drug smuggling, terrorism and crime. It was in particular the refugees from Kabul that were regarded with mistrust; the conservative Peshawaris associated Kabul with a liberal culture and with communism. A Kabuli woman summed it up when she explained how her life in Peshawar was becoming increasingly difficult, and sighed “zamin sarkht as, asan dur”. The dari proverb translates to “the earth is hard, the sky far away”, meaning her position was between a rock and a hard place. It was a common experience for the urban refugees in Peshawar; they could neither stay nor leave. The woman ended up finding a way out, when she defected in London during a conference she had obtained an invitation to through the international NGO she worked for in Peshawar. As it turned out, she was representing a pattern of the growing diaspora of educated urban Afghans.

**The Afghan Diaspora**

At the beginning of my fieldwork I tried to find out where in Peshawar the Kabulis and the new refugees had settled. Was there a “little Kabul” somewhere? I asked a Kabuli friend where people from Kabul settled. She laughed and answered “abroad”. Throughout my fieldwork it became clear that Peshawar is a key place in the Afghan diaspora. Diaspora is defined as “the maintenance of group consciousness defined by a continued relationship with an original homeland within a population dispersed between several different locations” (Safran, in Fuglerud, 1999:4). Such diasporic processes seemed to be at work among the Afghan refugees in Peshawar, in particularly the urban refugees who had an extended family network abroad, and who saw Peshawar as a transitory place while they worked to realize

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24 For further reading on diaspora, see Clifford, 1994 and Fuglerud, 1999.
their aspirations of migration to Europe and North America. They kept regular contact with each other through visits, phone calls, letters, videos and photos, and electronic mail with relatives; a cousin in Hamburg and an uncle in New York. There was a continuous exchange of information, news, marriage partners and remittances flowing in these networks. Many of my informants viewed Peshawar as a stopover on the way, increasingly so as their hopes of returning to their homes, jobs and schools in a peaceful Kabul faded away. I have used the micro histories of chapter three to illustrate and analyse these processes.

THE NEW REFUGEES
As previously explained, most of the refugees who came to Pakistan in the 80s were small farmers from the rural provinces of Afghanistan, sharing language and culture with the Pashtun population of NWFP. They settled in the camps resembling large villages along the border. With the collapse of the communist regime in 1992 and the subsequent power struggle in Kabul, a new type of refugees started arriving in Peshawar. They were urban Afghans, with little experience of village life. Many of these refugees, both men and women, had university degrees from Kabul and worked as teachers, lawyers, medical doctors, professors, engineers and civil servants in the government administration. In other words the migration could be characterized a “brain drain”\(^\text{25}\). The UN and NGO community labelled them the ”new refugees”. The labelling has been applied to different groups since the original first wave of urban refugees in 1992. There were new influxes of urban refugees in 1994 and 1996, years of particular high war intensity in Kabul, and the pattern from 1992 continued; it was the educated urban class that left.

The practice of the old refugees had been to flee in groups, whole villages would leave together under the leadership of the elders and settle in camps that at first were locally organized and later came under the control of UNHCR and Pakistani authorities. The refugees built mud houses and walls, mosques and bazaars within the camp area, only the scale being different to the village back home; an Afghan village would normally contain a few hundred individuals while the camp area could contain several thousand. Studies from the camps have shown that the rural refugees found comfort and safety in staying in segregated all-afghan camps, and saw the camp as an extension of the homeland while waiting to return.

The new refugees of urban origin however, preferred to be town dwellers, living outside any camp context and dispersed in non-refugee neighbourhoods in Peshawar. The urban refugees

\(^{25}\) Interview October 1998 with local staff of the Social Welfare Cell for Afghan refugees. UNHCR Peshawar office.
who stayed in the camp, often regarded the stay as a transitory period while looking for accommodation in town, or they chose the camp because they could not afford the more expensive option of living downtown\textsuperscript{26}. The new refugees of urban origin seemed to have more individual and family based strategies and aspirations, and saw the exile in Peshawar as a transit to further migration rather than to return.

Malkki (1995) describes similar processes among Hutu refugees in Tanzania, where she finds radical differences between camp and town refugees in settlement practice and in the meanings that people ascribe to national identity and history. It is not within the scope of this study to compare the town and camp dwellers among the Afghan refugees, but I would like to note that the town dwellers that overlap with the new refugees have a different experience and history of the war than the old, predominantly rural refugees who settled in collective camps in the early 80s. Borrowing Malkki's terminology, the old refugees represented a pure state of exile whereas the new refugees were impure, "soiled" from fraternizing with the enemy, the communist regime of Kabul.

\textit{THE TOWN DWELLERS}

One reason that the new refugees of 1992 and 1993 preferred to not settle in the existing camps, was a concern with security; the old refugees in the camps were hostile because they associated the urban refugees with the enemy; the communists. Another reason was that the urban refugees had no experience with village life and did not feel comfortable in the village structure of the camps. They had no practical skills in building their own mud houses. Many came from neighbourhoods in Kabul with apartment blocks where electricity and running water had been the standard up till the outbreak of the civil war.

Therefore they preferred to settle in town, renting accommodation from local landlords. After the first influx of urban refugees in 1992, clusters of Afghans appeared in various urban neighbourhoods. Two of my key informants lived in the neighbourhood of Hayatabad where there is a large Afghan population, ranging from the relatively wealthy to households where several families share a flat. Hayatabad is part of the urban sprawl of Peshawar, but is effectively a separate town, with reasonably big houses laid out on a grid plan over a large area. There is ongoing construction work in the town, which provides a source of employment for refugees in the Nasirbagh camp close by.

\textsuperscript{26} Based on my own data as well as interview with UNHCR (see above).
Many of the new refugees relied on relatives already living in Peshawar who could house them for a while. Host families could have ten or more extra people to feed, everybody sharing the space of a one or two-room flat. The fine balance between the obligation to help relatives and the increasing constraints on the economic capacity of the host families was being pushed. The Social Welfare Cell for Afghan refugees noticed this when more and more new urban refugees found their way to the UNHCR office in Peshawar to ask for assistance in the form of rations. It was however only the registered refugees who were eligible for assistance, and to be registered the refugees had to live in the camps. The town dwellers posed a problem for UNHCR because it proved difficult to register them, and most of these families remained unregistered and unassisted by the official system. Instead they helped each other.

Two or three related families would go together and rent a house, or the floor of a house. The sharing of rent was a way to cope with the costs of living in Peshawar, which was higher than in Kabul. This meant a change in household composition from Kabul to Peshawar; more people shared less space. Other relatives would try to rent accommodation close by, in the same street or neighbourhood. In this way, small Afghan exile communities were constructed, based on previous social networks from Kabul. It provided continuity in social relations that offered security and familiarity for the refugees. The continuity with past networks was further strengthened by the constant coming and going of relatives from Kabul. Migrated relatives would also return regularly from Europe and North America, to visit for months at the time on occasions of weddings, funerals and holidays.

Even if the urban families shared their rent with other households, they could still be described as more wealthy than most of the refugees who settled in the camps. Most of the town dwellers received financial assistance (remittances) sent by migrated relatives living abroad. In my material all the informants who are town dwellers, have relatives living in diaspora. An Afghan informant estimated the level of remittances to an average of 150 US $ per family per month, information that seemed correct in the light of my own material. None of the informants who were camp dwellers said they had contact with relatives abroad who could assist them.

THE CAMP DWELLERS
Although initially most of the refugees from Kabul settled in the urban areas, the pressure on the housing market and on the relatives housing the new families grew to the extent that in 1994 the Nasirbagh camp area just on the outskirts of Peshawar was designated for the new
refugees. Nasirbagh camp is situated a few kilometres from Peshawar city and is accessed by means of a side road that leads from the main Peshawar-Hayatabad-Khyber Pass road. At the junction of these two roads is a bazaar known as the Board bazaar where many refugees buy medicines and consult private doctors. Four of my informant families lived in New Nasirbagh.

The urban camp dwellers were often families who stayed in the camp while they looked for housing in town or who could not afford the rent in town. Some also preferred the camp because it provided the security of an all-Afghan environment with camp clinics and schools for the children. The part of Nasirbagh that was designated for the new refugees quickly became a kind of model camp since it attracted a lot of assistance being so close to Peshawar. The short distance to town also made it easier to find a livelihood for these refugees who mostly were educated urban families. The general pattern was that the men worked as money exchangers, started small shops or worked as teachers. The women worked in factories and cottage industries.

One of the reasons the camp dwellers gave for living in the camp was the cheaper cost of living. The rent was lower in the camp than in town; 100-400 rupees per month (50-200 Nkr) for a mud house in Nasirbagh camp compared to around 2000 rupees (600 Nkr) for a privately rented two-room flat in Hayatabad. In the camp UNHCR provided the most vulnerable families with ration cards on ghee (food oil) and wheat, a resource the town dwellers did not have access to unless they had family registered in the camp. The camp administration routinely checked that the camp dwellers were actually spending the nights in the camp, and withdrew the ration cards of those who were found to live outside the camp.

The increasingly bad economic position of the refugees that were coming from Kabul during the time of my fieldwork indicated that the livelihood conditions for people in Kabul were rapidly deteriorating. The inflation in Kabul combined with the diminishing work opportunities was the main cause for the poor peoples migration. They came to Peshawar in search of a livelihood and because they had heard about the camps and the possibility for rations. They were people who were more concerned about the loss of work opportunities than about the closing down of educational facilities in Kabul.

Marsden concluded in his study of the exiled Kabulis in December 1997 that the economic insecurity had touched its last level of the population. I will not disagree, but based on my findings argue that there were more complex reasons than purely the economic, behind families decision to stay or leave Kabul. As my material show, many families practiced a
strategy of dispersal, whereby some members of the family stayed while others left, sharing various obligations between them such as looking after the elders of the family, making a living, and looking after property.
CHAPTER 2: FIELD AND METHOD

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this chapter is to describe my fieldwork and the various methods I used for data collection.

My informant sample consists of thirteen girls and their families, ten in Peshawar and three in Kabul. The youngest girls were seventeen and the oldest twenty years old, born in Kabul around the time of the communist revolution in 1978. The girls are not representative of the ethnic composition of Afghanistan, but they are representative of the urban middle-class from Kabul, where the majority speak Dari either as a first or a second language. My focus was not so much on ethnic, religious or political affiliations, as on the urban-rural divide.

Their narratives from childhood and up growing in Kabul, reflects the various phases of the war and displacement, and the fast changing environment of macro-politics that formed the backdrop of their lives. I have chosen four informants (presented in details in the next chapter) to represent the sample.

FIELDWORK UNDER FIRE
To make plans and to be able to see them through is often a luxury in a conflict-ridden area. And so it proved to be for my fieldwork. As already mentioned, my initial plan and project proposal was to do fieldwork based in Kabul. A month before I was to leave for Kabul, the Taliban regime banned all foreigners and international NGOs from the capital - a reaction to the US bomb raid over Afghanistan in late August 1998.

I had to react to the events of macro politics that had made it impossible for me to follow my original plan. Instead I did

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27 The bomb raid was ordered by president Clinton in an attempt to strike Osama Bin Laden's training camps.
what so many Kabulis do when the security situation sets them off on a search for a safer place to live; I settled in neighbouring Pakistan, in the dusty frontier town of Peshawar.

After three months of my arrival in Peshawar, the ban on foreigners in Kabul was lifted and the international NGOs gradually returned to their work. I was able to make three trips of one to three weeks to Kabul during winter and spring of 1999. I stayed with an informant and her family from Peshawar who were on a return visit to their old home in Kabul. In Kabul I met relatives of my informants in Peshawar, who for various reasons had not left Kabul, and got the perspective of those who had “stayed behind”. During this time it was relatively quiet in Kabul since the frontline was located at some distance north of the city. The short distance between Kabul and Peshawar, only a day’s bus journey across the border gives opportunity for frequent movement between the two places. As mentioned, border crossing restrictions has at times been imposed on the Afghan refugees, but generally people move back and forth, for reasons of security, to escape spells of intense fighting, for trade and work opportunities, to visit relatives, or to escape the heat of the summers in low-land Peshawar or the freezing cold of the winters in high-altitude Kabul. I tried to explore the dynamic of this movement between Kabul and Peshawar, through moving myself. My fieldwork trips to Kabul also enabled me to better comprehend the retrospective narratives of life in Kabul told to me by the refugees in Peshawar. I got further insight into the difficult choices families from Kabul are faced with when they consider whether they should stay or leave, and maybe decide whom within the family should stay and who should leave. All options carry risks and rewards and no choice is optimal in such a situation of a complex and ongoing conflict.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, my fieldwork became multi-sited since I travelled between Kabul and Peshawar. But more than in any of these geographical sites, my field is located in the dynamic of the relations and extended networks of the families I write about.

THE TWO PHASES OF FIELDWORK

My fieldwork can be described as having two distinct phases. The first phase of around three months, I worked systematically trying to get to know and visit as many families as possible, using semi-structured interviews and “mapping” of social relations. I collected information both on the past and present situation of the informants, focusing on family background, childhood and life in Kabul, the war and flight, and life in exile. I also had opportunity for observation, since all the visits were in the homes of the families.
The last five months my fieldwork changed character as I gradually got to know the two assistants I worked with. It was the time I spent with them and their families; in their homes, on travels to Kabul and in family events; following them in various social settings, that gave me in-depth understanding of and complimented the information I had gathered through the first part of the fieldwork.

In the second phase I kept visiting the informants families I had interviewed; informal visits to drink tea and talk about everyday life issues. Apart from being very enjoyable, the visits were important social occasions for maintaining relations, for me and for the girls and women. I had less opportunity for regular visits in Peshawar, as I also went on three fieldtrips to Kabul during this last phase.

**My Positioning**

It is important to reflect on my own positioning in relation to my informants. It is an undisputed position in anthropology that the background, status, age, gender and personality of the researcher are bound to influence choice of field, access to and interpretation of data. My position as a married but childless woman seemed to be a helpful combination for my study. Being a woman was a necessary condition for being allowed into the private and gender segregated sphere of Afghan family life. Being thirty-three at the time, I was only a few years younger than the mothers of the girls. They could identify with me because I was married and shared with me jokes about husbands and mothers-in-law. If I said I could not stay the night because my husband was expecting me home, and I received sympathetic understanding. At the same time, not having children, I was somehow still a young girl that the daughters could relate to. An Afghan proverb says that you are a child until you have one.

I was careful to position myself as a student, saying that I was a student of cultural studies as I found no word for anthropology in Dari. The concept of being a student might have seemed a little incomprehensible as I was too old for such a role in their eyes, but it worked to place me in the position of learner and listener. When doing the semi-structured interviews I had to emphasise that I was not working with an NGO. Especially in the refugee camps they are used to most western foreigners either being aid workers from an international NGO or the UN, or journalists. I did not work with any family who knew me from the time I was working with an NGO in Peshawar, since that would have implied a problematic shift of role. Neither did I keep it secret that I had previously worked in Afghanistan. It seemed to be an "ice breaker" in the conversation that I had travelled in many parts of Afghanistan.
A man who once accused me of “not doing anything for Afghanistan, just asking questions” was told by those who knew me better that I had in fact “worked for Afghanistan”. Still, I understood his accusation as I often felt uncomfortable in the role of a passive witness to the hardship of others. My justification and hope was that the study would contribute in some small way to inform those who plan and implement humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees. This hope was inspired by my previous work in the region and my interest in applied anthropology, a direction that sets out to bridge the gap between the researcher and the practitioner.

THE USE OF INTERPRETER
The use of interpreter is rarely discussed in texts on methodology. When mentioned it is mostly referred to as a practise that complicate an already problematic communicative relationship and should therefore be avoided. (Borchgrevink, 2000) takes a more pragmatic view and argues that in the absence of the ideal situation (where the ethnographer is fluent in the local language prior to the research period) the use of an interpreter can be a good solution to data gathering while the ethnographer learns the language. He also points out that understanding a language is a relative concept. I had a basic grasp of Dari at the start of my fieldwork, but judged my language skills to be insufficient for the in-depth understanding I was seeking. So I chose to use an interpreter for the initial part of my fieldwork, at the same time as I took private Dari classes.

I was aware that the interpreter’s position and status could influence my access to informants and type of data (Berremann, 1962), and tried to counteract this by working with two different interpreters, Farida (19) and Wafia (20). They were the same gender and age as the informants, with the same urban background, and became as such important discussion partners and key informants in the study.

The two girls were both from Kabul and as such representing the war generation of young Kabulis, the focus for the study. They grew up in Kabul in the 80s during shifting communist regimes. Farida’s family left Kabul shortly after the Mujahedin take-over in 1992, while Wafia and her family stayed on and did not leave before after two years of Taliban regime, in 1998. In Peshawar they were both town dwellers, living in the same urban neighbourhood of Hayatabad. The two girls had also lived in the same neighbourhood of Kabul, Microian, without knowing of each other.
The problem of the establishing and maintaining trust in this community cannot be overemphasized, as Omidian (1996) has pointed out in her study of an Afghan exile community in California. My two interpreters, or field assistants, were therefore invaluable to me in that they gave me access to networks I would not have been able to establish on my own, and also introduced me to their own families and networks of relatives. I became a frequent guest in their homes during the field period.

The fact that they were two, made it more acceptable to their parents when we went on long day trips for visits to the camp areas. Because they were young unmarried *dakhtars* I had a responsibility of providing a proper situation so that nobody would start to gossip. I had hired an Afghan taxi driver for our trips, a man I knew and trusted who acted a *maharam* (male protégé) on these trips. The alternative, to take public transport, would not have been accepted by the parents of the girls. Both girls had different courses to attend to, computer courses and English courses, and time-consuming obligations at home. There were days just one of them came with me, other days both came with me. I found that bringing both girls into an interview situation often created a less formal ambiance, laughing and joking with each other.

Throughout the nine months of fieldwork my relationship to my assistants changed from being a researcher and employer, and the informality and friendship we gradually gained enabled a more in-depth learning process for me. When our relationship stopped being of a contractual nature and their families no longer made special efforts towards me as a guest, I started gaining more in-depth understanding. As it became clear to me that the life histories of my two young assistants would stand central in my thesis, I got their permission to write their stories. I have protected their identities by changing names of all the informants I write about, and also certain aspects of their histories that does not change the experience and meaning.

**SELECTION OF INFORMANTS**

I knew it would ease my entree to be introduced by people who knew me, and I developed my research interactions by means of network building. In the process of establishing contacts, I realized that it was not so much a question of me selecting the informants, as the informants selecting me. Apart from me wanting to meet Kabuli families with a daughter, I was totally dependent on the girls and the families to take an interest in me and accept my visits and endless questioning. It happened two times that families rejected me because they thought I came with assistance and because they worried about what people would say. In the other families, I received the full treat of Afghan hospitality and generosity. The girls and women
saw me as the foreigner with a keen interest in Afghan culture and history, and took pride in explaining and teaching me.

My first contact, Farida, was the cousin of an ex-colleague who knew I was looking for a young girl from Kabul to work with me. As explained, she became my part-time interpreter as well as a key informant. She helped me find other informant families through her own networks, and introduced me to her family and relatives. To make sure I always had access to an interpreter for my interviews and visits to other informants, I was searching for another girl who also could work with me. A few weeks later a friend told me of Wafia who had just arrived from Kabul with her family. She had worked as an interpreter for an international NGO in Kabul, but had lost the job when the Taliban banned women from working outside the house. Wafia needed a job, she was at the time the only person in her household working and receiving an income. I became as such part of her family’s livelihood strategy when she started working with me.

As already mentioned my study has a gendered and generational bias because of my particular interest in families from Kabul with daughters of the war generation. In an Afghan context an unmarried woman is a girl. The dari word for girl is *dakhtar*, which literally means daughter. It also refers to the state of being a virgin. She becomes a woman, a *zan* or *khanum*, when she marries. Most of my informants where unmarried *dakhtars*, but I also got the perspective of married and older women through talking to their mothers, aunts and grandmothers. My gender bias was motivated by my awareness of the fact that I had a unique access to the gender-segregated world of Afghan girls and women. For a male researcher, this access would have been denied.

The time of arrival in Peshawar varied in time from one family to another, some fled Kabul when the Mujahedin took power in 1992, others had stayed on until the take-over of the Taliban in 1996. One family had been in refuge in Peshawar for six years, another family had arrived a couple of weeks before my fieldwork started. These differences became an excellent intake to information about the different phases of war in Kabul, as well as to about the motives to leave Kabul. They also made it possible to say something about the impact of life in exile, and to do a certain comparison between life for those who stayed behind in Kabul, and those who left.

In Kabul I got to know three girls, all of them living in female headed households with widowed mothers. I was introduced through an American woman who had lived in Kabul for more than thirty years. She ran a small NGO supporting micro enterprise projects for widows.
DATA COLLECTION

In the following I will describe and reflect on how I collected data; using the various methods of the semi-structured interview, "mapping" of social relations, participant observation and the non verbal intake to data.

THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The strength of a semi-structured interview is the informality and flexibility it allows (as compared to a structured interview with predetermined themes and questions). The researcher avoids steering the course of the interview, probing according to the informants concerns and priorities. The interviews theme focused, as well as allowing the informant to bring in her own concerns and memories. I took notes that went into my field diary, after each interview, identifying themes that were brought up regularly. I tried to crosscheck relevance by bringing up the same themes with other informants. I interviewed the ten informants in Peshawar between three to five times over the first three months, each interview lasting between one to three hours. Focus person in each family was as explained the young daughter of the household, but we were rarely alone. The conversation often became a discussion and negotiated between various family members present; mothers, grandmothers, sisters' aunts and some younger brothers. My role was to guide the interview and ask probing questions, but I cannot omit my own voice and concerns from the process. As Omidian phrases it; "The interview and participant observation process is one of a social negotiation, not consensus, and it cannot be reduced to a single voice since there are at least three active voices to be heard in the recording and writing of each story: (1) that of the storyteller recalling past events, (2) that of the anthropologist voice (an interpreting voice), and (3) that of the theoretical lens through which the anthropologist look" (Omedian, 1996:169).

"MAPPING" SOCIAL RELATIONS

One method of gaining insight into the social relations of the girls and their families was to ask the girls to draw a "map" on a large sheet of paper. We did this when the ambience was relaxed, after a couple of visits. Often other family members would gather around and participate in the discussion, correct the information and tell stories about relatives that were plotted in to the "map".

Initially I asked them to include non-relatives with whom they had close or frequent relation (like a neighbour, friend, teacher), but the maps soon reflected that the most significant social relations were within the family. A grown man or woman might have included non-relatives
such as work colleagues and people they had gone to university with. The girl’s drawings
turned out to be maps of their genealogies, with thicker lines and small hearts indicating to
whom the girl felt most attached to or had most frequent relation with. This was often a
female cousin or a younger aunt whom they had grown up with.

The maps proved to be a very helpful tool to learn about change and continuity in household
composition, relations within the household, with migrated family members and with family
in Afghanistan, and also flow of remittances and assistance, expectations and obligations. The
maps visualized how the war and migration had dispersed families, and trans-national nature
of the family network.

*PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION*

Anthropologists claim the use of participant observation during fieldwork, but what is it
exactly? Participant observation is a qualitative field method best suited to generate data on
the dynamics of intra-personal relationships and social processes. In my experience, the main
ingredient of participant observation is *time*.

When I started my fieldwork I shared the ideal that “the most genuine information to us is
that which naturally flows as if we were not present” (Wikan, 1982: 299), but I was uncertain
how to get myself into a situation where I could appear as unobtrusive as possible while
participating and observing as much as possible. How could I meet and get to know families
so well that I would eventually blend in and be treated as if “not present”? Afghan households
regard the display of hospitality one of the greatest virtues, and it is difficult to be a guest
without causing disturbance. This I understood when I finally became “one of the family” and
could sit back and observe the havoc an unannounced visit could cause. The unexpected guest
would politely be asked to sit down in the front room while the youngest daughters of the
household ran back and forth between the kitchen and the living room, making tea and
bringing sweets. It is part of the ethics of hospitality to put aside own worries and to make the
guest feel happy and welcome, and it was only after spending enough time that I started
blending in, became “one of the family” and no longer was the guest who needed endless
entertaining and attention.

However, I learnt during fieldwork that the ideal of being the “invisible researcher” is not
really so desirable after all, since I learnt so much from attending the social life of my
informants, interacting and participating. As Sheper-Hughes has put it; Anthropological
knowledge may be seen as something produced in human interaction, not merely extracted
from naïve informants who are unaware of the hidden agendas coming from the outsider” (in Michrina and Richard, 1996:23)

Participant observation is also defined this way; “Participant observation is a major method of anthropological research in which the researcher is intensively involved throughout the relatively long period of research project with the people being studied, participating in what they do and often living with them, while observing and making records of the information for the study” (Camino et al., 1994:150).

I will argue that I had opportunity to observe and participate in an “intensely involved” way, even though I did not live with an Afghan family except for when I was in Kabul and lived with Wafia’s family. In Peshawar I stayed overnight when my informants invited me.

An important part of participant observation is to follow the informants in the various social settings where they interact with others. I went with my informants to school classes, courses, the market place, picnics, visiting relatives, wedding parties and other social events. Visiting could take the form of sharing a meal, having a chat in the kitchen while I was taught about Afghan cooking, just sitting around drinking tea and talking, being introduced to other guests and relatives, joking and watching wedding videos. I also attended some funeral ceremonies (fatiha) and went with the girls and their mothers to holy shrines (ziarat). The social interaction led to the building of a more confident relationship, and was an invaluable intake to deepening understanding. The occasions also gave me opportunity to observe where the ‘map’ (peoples ideals about social norms and relations) diverts from the ‘terrain’ (what is actually happening).

THE NON-VERBAL INTAKE TO DATA

It has been argued that the vocabulary of the field is performative as well as semantic, and that the ethnographer strives to present herself as an acceptable person through conforming to bodily practises of dress code and conduct. For me to conform to such practises was a valuable intake to data. In Kabul, I used a burqa to follow the norm and to hide that I was a foreigner. The Taliban did not allow females to walk alone, so I always walked together with other women. The personal experience of walking with and wearing the burqa provided an intake to data about how the world looked “from behind the veil” (to use a cliché), something that was not easy for my informants to explain to me. I learnt how it is possible to look at the world without the world looking back at you (the men we met only stared at our feet, the only visible parts of our bodies) and how the burqa gave a feeling of moving in a protected space (an illusion of course, since the mad traffic in Kabul almost killed us when we tried to cross
the streets). I also learnt how the *burqa* restricted my vision and made me hesitate and slow down my steps. I shared with Wafia the frustration of having to wear the *burqa*, as she was as inexperienced in it as I was. It had not been her custom before the Taliban made it compulsory.
CHAPTER 3: THE GIRLS AND THEIR FAMILIES

"One of the benefits of using the life history approach is that in doing so we are better able to bring out the coping, creative aspects of a person's behaviour." (Mandelbaum, 1973:195)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present four girls and their families. They are selected from my sample, because they represent various dimensions and ways of coping with life in Kabul and in exile in Peshawar. I have constructed four micro histories, based on the girl's own narratives as well as on observations of social practice.

Rudie proposes a distinction for analytical purpose between the micro history and the macro history (Rudie, 2001:94-102). I have outlined her argument in chapter one, and will only repeat here the purpose of the distinction, which is to explore the interface between the micro and macro-level; how the individual life courses of my informants are embedded in a specific socio-political context and historical epoch.

In the construction of the micro histories, I focus on the family background of the girls, the social relations in which they are involved, the impact of the war and displacement on their families, livelihoods, education and hopes for the future.

Three of the girls lived in exile in Peshawar at the time of my fieldwork, Farida, Wafia and Meena. The two first were town-dwellers, whereas the last girl was living in a camp. The fourth girl, Sadia, lived in Kabul. Her story allows me to describe how she coped with everyday life under the Taliban, and why she and her family had chosen to stay.
I have chosen to use Farida as a master story, because my data and knowledge of her past and present life became richer in insights and details than with any other of my informants. I was able to follow Farida in her daily life and doings, and was invited into several of her social arenas in Peshawar. I chose Farida’s story because of the quality and richness of the data, but also because I believe her story illustrates some general themes about being a young Kabuli girl of the war generation, with the experience of flights and adaptation to a new life in exile. It also gives an insight into a young coping, creative mind, who with freshness and insight describes her own life, family and her hopes for the future.

**FARIDA AND HER FAMILY**

Farida, nineteen years old, was a young girl in between childhood and adulthood. She was thirteen when the Mujahedin took power in Kabul. During 1993 and 1994 factional fighting devastated much of the Afghan capital and there was a wave of new refugees crossing the border to Pakistan. Farida’s family was one of them. When I met her, she and her family had lived for six years in Peshawar, as self-settled refugees and town-dwellers, in the house of an uncle in the suburb of Hayatabad.

In Peshawar Farida had adapted to wearing the Pakistani *shalwar-kameez*, a long tunic with wide trousers underneath, and a *chador namaż*, a large white shawl she used to cover her long braids. Farida had internalised the conservative dress code of Peshawar; she wore her *chador* with natural ease although it had not been her custom when she first arrived. Farida’s father, a man of around fifty, had also adapted to the male *shalwar-kameez* after moving to Peshawar, and after the Taliban came to power he had also grown a bushy beard. “*This is my visa to Afghanistan!*” he laughed and pointed to his beard. Adaptation and humouring seemed to be coping responses to the various dress code restrictions and regulations, both for men and women.

The father was from the province of Laghman, where his father had been an important landowner and member of the village *shura* (the elders’ council). Like so many other young men of his generation, Farida’s father had moved from the village to Kabul for education and employment. He served as a government soldier under the regime of Daud, the republican, when he married Farida’s mother. She was from Kabul, a second cousin on his father’s side. The father became the principal at a boy’s secondary school, and the mother worked as a teacher before Farida was born. Farida was the eldest child and only daughter, when I met the

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28 The self-settled refugees are those who have settled without being registered or assisted by UNHCR or the Pakistani authorities.
family in Peshawar she had three younger brothers of twelve, eight and two, the last one born in exile. In Peshawar, Farida’s father sold second-hand clothes in an Afghan bazaar, and her mother was a housewife. Farida’s mother, a woman of forty-something (she does not know exactly her age), told me that she went horseback riding outside Kabul when she was young, and that her mother, Farida’s grandmother, had been one of the first women in Afghanistan to travel abroad for education. King Amonullah had at the time decided to fund a stipend for young women to go to nursing school in Turkey. She remembered that the clergies raised objections and concerns of morality, but it had no influence over the king and his queen in their quest for modernisation.

A fifteen-year-old photograph in Farida’s family album shows her father in a cord jacket and a tie, with a clean-shaven face except a moustache. Her mother has a short haircut, and is wearing a knee-length skirt and a blouse. She said at that time she never covered her hair. The photo is taken during a picnic in one of Kabul’s green public gardens, and four year old Farida is standing between her parents.

GROWING UP IN KABUL

For the first years of Farida’s life they lived in the house of her mother’s parents. They had a spacious house in Shar-e Now, a neighbourhood in central Kabul. Her grandfather worked in the Ministry of education, and was a well-respected professor. Farida was very proud of him. When her father became the principal of one of the boy schools, the family could buy a flat in Microian, a suburban area with apartment blocks at the outskirts of Kabul. Farida’s parents were among the first generation to live in a flat with electricity and tap water. Microian was at that time considered a modern, up-town area. But the modernity did not apply to traditional gender roles, which dictated that a girl, a khub dakhtar (good daughter) should behave in a certain way when she reached puberty. Farida says about this matter,

“As a child I was very free, I ran around in trousers and I had a bicycle. I was very sad when my father sold my bicycle... I was twelve, he said it was not for a young girl; I should be a khub dakhtar. My younger brothers were never restricted like this. It felt very unjust.”

Farida went to Malalai girl school, named by an Afghan heroin who had been a brave revolutionary and who had died in her struggle. The pupils wore school uniforms; black knee-length skirts, white blouses and white small headscarves. Farida loved school, and regrets that

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29 The first class of students went to Turkey in Oct. 1928, when Kabul’s first hospital for women opened.
she could not complete all twelve grades; her education was interrupted at grade eight when the civil war broke out.

In the communist 80s, it was Moscow that dictated the curriculum in Afghan schools, but Farida still remembers having Islamic subjects together with math, physics and dari. She was brought up with Islamic values and practices such as keeping namaaz (the daily praying) and ramadan (the month of fasting). She said, “First I am a Muslim, then an Afghan”.

She describes the period under dr. Najib as “good”,

“Our life was simple but happy. I went to school, my father had a good job, there was enough food and things to buy, we had ration cards for petrol, sugar and ghee (food oil), and salaries were paid. I went to school with the daughter of president Najib. People said he was a cruel man. But he was not as cruel as president Karmal30. And he was much better than the Mujahedin! I cried when Najib was killed31.”

During the time of Dr. Najib (1986-1992), the war was something she heard about on the radio, something terrible that happened in the provinces. The radio reported of fighting between the Soviet backed national army and the Mujahedin in the rural areas. The cities, which were held by the government, were relatively secure and undamaged

THE WAR COMES TO KABUL

For Farida, the war came to Kabul with the Mujahedin. This view was common among my informants. In retrospective, the rule of dr. Najib seemed like a peaceful and happy time compared to the destructions and violence that followed with the time of the Mujahedin and the Taliban. As Farida pointed out, “People complained (during Najib time), they said they wanted the Mujahedin to come, and then they complained when the Mujahedin came. People never know the good things they have before it is missing!”

When the Mujahedin took power in Kabul, in April 1992, Farida was thirteen years old and was in grade eight. The Mujahedin had besieged Kabul for more than two years, trying to bring down Dr. Najib who held on to his power after the Soviet troops had pulled out in 1989.

30 Babrak Karmal was the PDPA leader in Kabul from 1979 -1986. He was known for his cruelty. At Moscow's behest, general Najibullah replaced Karmal as president in 1986, in an attempt to win the Afghan people over.
31 The Taliban killed Dr. Najib when they took Kabul in 1996.
Farida describes her memory of when the Mujahedin managed to take over the capital:

"I was in my grandparents house. We watched TV when they announced on the news that the Mujahedin had taken power and thrown Dr. Najib in prison. They announced that Afghanistan was an Islamic state and that all women should wear chaderi. I was very frightened!"

Farida's father had angrily said the Mujahedin were ordinary people; “We are Muslims, and they should not use force in any way!” This sentiment was one I heard voiced many times about the Taliban as well, when their turn came to “re-establish religious norms and values.”

Farida continued her memory:

“I had never seen people like the Mujahedin before. They wore turbans or pakuls [woollen Chitrali hats] and had long hair and beards. They were very dirty and behaved like they had never seen a city, or a woman! Many were qelimjams [bandits].”

Farida’s father told her to wear a chador; the rumour was that some of the Mujahedin and the Uzbek militia of general Dostum (who previously had supported the regime of Najib) were kidnapping young Kabuli girls. It happened to one of Farida’s aunts, she said, and the aunt had been forced to marry her violator. Farida said with pride that her father would rather kill her than have her dishonoured in such a way. I think she found it hard to imagine her gentle father hurting her, but she understood his display of emotions as love and a wish to protect her. The story must be understood in a context of honour and shame, values that stand strong in Afghan culture (as I have discussed before). Farida told the following story about what happened to her aunt just after the Mujahedin came to Kabul:

"My aunt went to the bank where she worked, she was wearing a blouse and skirt. A young Mujahed stopped her and said he would kill her if he saw her again without tomban (trousers) under her skirt. She was very scared. She had to go home and sew herself a pair of tomban, as she had none from before. It was the same Mujahed who later came with several armed men and forced her family to give her in ‘marriage’ to him.”

Farida said that the Mujahedin were most strict in the beginning, when they came straight from the war and the village and looked at Kabul as full of communists and immoral people (same attitude the Taliban came with three years later). The way liberal Kabuli women dressed (with a very feminine sense of style, fashion and make-up) became for the Mujahedin the foremost sign of urban immorality and decaying Islamic values. (However, they did not go as far as the Taliban, who institutionalised restrictions on dress code down to the smallest

32 *Chaderi* is the same as *burqa*, the all-covering veil with a grill over the eyes.
detail.) After a while the Mujahedin became used to city life, and relaxed the rules; “life became more free again.” The girl schools, which had been ordered closed for a while, re-opened.

Farida’s neighbourhood Microian often became the frontline in the factional fighting. When Hekmatyar split with the Rabbani government, his positions bombarded indiscriminately civilian targets with rockets from the surrounding mountaintops. Farida and her family spent days and weeks in the basement of their block of flats, while the rockets came in.

“One time we where in the corridor for more than a week. It was safer in the corridor, all the neighbours gathered there. It was dark, the electricity always went and mother and I cooked on fuel stoves. There was nothing to do, just wait, and listen to the sound of the explosions. We always could hear if it was an outgoing or incoming rocket. We had no way of knowing what had happened to our relatives, and when there was small break in the fighting we would run out to get news about the others, whose house had been hit, was anybody killed? Then we had to store up on fuel, food and water for the next spell of fighting.”

Another aunt who lived in a block nearby Farida, lost her husband during one of the rocket raids. He was killed when he had to go outside to fetch water. They could not move his body to the burial ground because of the continuous and intense rocketing, and his grave was hurriedly dug just outside the door of the house. In Peshawar the widow showed me a photo of her husband’s grave, a heap of earth covered by the green cloth, which symbolize the martyrdom of the shaheed, those who are killed in war. I tried to find the grave when I went to Kabul, but the area was covered with rubbles and ruins. Farida’s father took on the responsibility for his widowed sister, and she and her children went with Farida’s family to Peshawar when they fled the first time.

**THE LOST OPPORTUNITY**

Farida’s father had a nephew who had escaped to Germany during the time of Najib, to avoid conscription. He asked Farida’s father to bring his family and come to Germany, but the father decided to stay in Kabul since he was looking after his old father, Farida’s grandfather who was getting sick. The old man did not wish to die in a foreign country. When he later died in Peshawar (which he did not regard as a foreign country, but as part of Afghanistan), his sons took his body back to Laghman and he was buried in the village where he had been born. Later Farida had been upset with her father for not taking the opportunity to go to Germany; “It was an opportunity for me to complete my education.” But she had not argued...
with her father, it would have been disrespectful for a daughter to say against her parent, she said.

**THE FLIGHT**

It was the snowy, cold month of January 1994, and the fighting between the factions had intensified with the new alliance between Hekmatyar and Dostum, who at first had supported Rabbani. Once again the frontline went through Farida’s neighbourhood. She recalled,

"I was in the bedroom when the rocketing began. My father said to me I should come out, and that we should go and sit in the corridor as usual. I had just left the room when I heard a big explosion. A rocket had gone through the wall of our flat, just above my bed!"

This incident of the rocket spurred the father into taking the decision to leave Kabul. Farida continued her memories,

"When there was a break in the fighting, we took our blankets, and some kitchen utensils. It was early morning, before sunrise. I saw many dead soldiers along the road, but we just kept walking. We got on a bus to Jalalabad, where we took another bus to Torkham (the border to Pakistan). The border gates were closed; the Pakistani guards did not want to let any refugees across. We had to walk for many hours on a mountain path to cross the border. At the other side we got a bus to Peshawar."

Farida left Kabul with her parents, her two younger brothers, her old paternal grandfather and the widowed aunt. In Peshawar they split up, and Farida’s grandfather and her aunt went to the house of the brother of her father, whereas Farida and her parents went to the house of the brother of her mother. It was the first time they fled.

**THE FLIGHT II**

After six months in Peshawar they returned to Kabul. As for so many of the refugees in Peshawar, it had proved difficult for the father to find work, except occasional and manual labour at a building site. Back in the neighbourhood of Microian, they found their flat looted and taken over by Mujahedín, and they moved into Farida’s grandparent’s house in Shar-e Now. The father had lost his job at this point because rockets had destroyed the school he had worked at.

After some months back in Kabul, the fighting intensified again, and Farida remember her mother and father discussing whether they should stay or leave. The multiple concerns her parents brought up in the discussion, illustrates the complexity behind the decision to flee.

33 When the fighting in Kabul started in 1994, the Pakistani authorities closed the border for the refugees for a long period. This led to the opening of a refugee camp for 30,000 people, on the Afghan side of the border.
The mother wanted to stay in Kabul; she had not felt welcome in the house of her brother in Peshawar. His family had only one room to share, and their resources were stretched. Farida’s mother was also reluctant to leave her old parents, who said they were too old to move. But Farida’s father argued that the security in Kabul was deteriorating fast, the civil administration was falling apart and he had not received his salary for months. This was a common problem for civil servants during the Mujahedin time, and it continued under the Taliban. He was also concerned about Farida, being a young girl of thirteen. What if the Mujahedin did anything to her? Farida’s father decided they should leave.

Towards the end of the summer of 1994, they fled for the second time to Peshawar. This time they moved in with Farida’s paternal uncle, oldest brother of her father. The uncle had a good job with an NGO, and could afford to rent a house in Hayatabad. Apart from his own family, he was already housing his father, Farida’s grandfather, and the widowed sister with her two children. The uncle let Farida’s family have a room in the second floor of his house, and said the father could start sharing the rent when he had an income. He also gave his brother a loan of 1000 US$ so that he could start a second-hand clothes shop to make a living for his family. Farida did not know when or how they would be able to pay back, but that did not worry any of the parties. These kinds of loans can be crucial for families to cope with the higher cost of living in Peshawar as compared to Kabul. The expenses related to migration can also be high, and it is common to borrow money from relatives for this purpose. It is important to be able to mobilize the family network for financial assistance and loans also for other costly events such as weddings and other high festival celebrations. I will discuss this aspect of the economy in the next chapter, under “family and social networks”.

THOSE WHO STAYED BEHIND

Farida’s maternal grandparents stayed behind in Kabul, and a younger unmarried brother of Farida’s mother stayed with them to look after them. This uncle (his name was Shekeb) regularly came to Peshawar to visit his relatives and to purchase grocery goods for a small shop he ran in Kabul. He also needed to come to Peshawar for the informal banking connections, the hawala system, which he received remittances through. Shekeb had a sister (Farida’s aunt) who lived in Saudi Arabia with her Afghan husband. The sister sent 100 US$ every second month to Kabul via Peshawar, to support her brother and parents in Kabul. When Shekeb came to Farida’s house in Peshawar, he brought the latest news about the situation in Kabul, and he brought gifts and messages from the family.
I visited uncle Shekeb in the house of Farida’s grandparents, when I went to Kabul in the spring of 1999. Farida’s grandfather had died and the grandmother was preparing to leave Kabul to migrate to Saudi Arabia to live with her daughter. She said she wanted to free Shekeb from the responsibility of staying in Kabul and looking after her. “Business in Kabul is very bad now,” he said. “The Talibs only know about religious stuff, they don’t know how to make a good economy and life for people here!” He was planning to leave for Moscow and after that maybe Holland, where a brother and a sister already lived. They migrated in the mid-80s, and stayed in touch through regular phone calls with family in Peshawar. Shekeb had heard it was difficult to be accepted as a refugee in Holland, but that it was very easy to find well-paid work as soon as you were in. He had already borrowed 1000 US$ of his brother-in-law in Saudi Arabia, money he needed to pay to the organizer of his journey, the quashaqbar (people smuggler).

**BETWEEN KABUL AND PESHAWAR**

Shekeb is illustrative of the connection between Kabul and Peshawar, he had a mobile livelihood that necessitated his continuous contact with and visits to Peshawar. The cross-border mobility has always been high between Afghanistan and Pakistan (as explained in the chapter two), and has increased with the war and the flow of refugees. The strategy of “keeping a foot in each place” was practical for many reasons, for instance when Farida’s younger brother the first year after the family had moved to Peshawar, could stay with his uncle in Kabul while he finished his school year. This was possible because the boy schools were still functioning in Kabul, and it was typical for the families I met in Peshawar that their daughters went to school in Peshawar while their sons stayed with relatives back in Kabul in order to continue classes. I also met a fifteen-year-old Kabuli girl in Peshawar who stayed with her uncle and aunt in order to go to school in Peshawar, while her own parents and brothers remained in Kabul.

Farida’s mother illustrates another pattern typical of many Afghan refugees, the seasonal migration. Often in the summer she went for some months to stay with her parents in Kabul, leaving her family in Peshawar. Farida took over the domestic responsibilities while she was away, and a few summers she had also followed her mother on the journey. For the mother it was a way to be with her kin, and also to escape the sweltering heat of the plains of Peshawar. In the summertime the longing for the cooler high altitude of Kabul grew strong among the exiled Kabulis, and the weather concern outweighed the security and risk concerns for many. One visible sign was that in the camps, the administration observed that the tents and mud
houses became visibly emptier in the summer time. When Farida's mother travelled (by public transport) to Kabul, she had to borrow a *burqa* from her Pakistani neighbour. The mother had never owned or worn a *burqa* before the Taliban made it obligatory.

**MAKING A LIVING**

Many educated and professional Kabulis experience a loss of status when they come to Peshawar. It is not uncommon to meet an Afghan taxi driver who once was a civil servant in a department in Kabul, or an ex-professor from the University of Kabul selling vegetables as a street vendor. Centlivres (1998:224) who has done research on the Afghan diaspora, puts it this way, "For the majority the exile is the theatre of declassification." Farida's father is no exception; he went from being the principal of a school in Kabul to selling second-hand clothes in Board bazaar, an Afghan market in the outskirts of Peshawar. The bazaar had narrow muddy lanes and was crowded with people and ram shackled stalls made of planks and plastic sheets. But the market was a popular meeting place for Afghans, and Farida's father made a sufficient everyday living for his family. He said about the conditions for Afghan refugee traders in Peshawar:

"The Pakistani police don't want us here. They come and tell us we have to close our shops if we don't give them *bachees* [bribes]. They stop Afghans all the time and ask for our identity cards. If we don't give them money they beat us - or arrest us."

In the struggle to make a living, many families had to let their children work to contribute to the household economy. Farida's two younger brothers used to work with their father in the shop after school hours (which were from early morning to mid-day). When the father went to Karachi for a month at the time, to purchase second-hand clothes and textiles, the sons ran the shop in his absence. Also Farida had made her contribution to the family economy since they came to Peshawar. She had had a job as a teacher assistant at a Pakistani school where she made 800 rupees (200Nkr) a month. The money paid for her course fees when she started taking computer and English classes.

**THE DREAM OF EDUCATION**

Farida's college education had been interrupted because of the fighting and flight from Kabul. She had not continued school in Peshawar. She had a strong wish to continue her education, but the family economy had at first not permitted it, and priority had been given to her brothers. Now she was worried she was getting too old to learn. She often talked to me about what she would do if the family managed to get to Canada; her dream was to return to school.
and take a higher degree in computer science. The year I met Farida, she had started to take private computer and English classes in the afternoon. Such classes were very popular among Afghan youth, and thought to be necessary to get attractive work in an office or with the foreign NGOs. In Hayatabad there was private computer and English courses on almost every street. I met many young people who attended these courses, some aspiring to get a job with an international NGO, others as a preparation for life abroad in an English-speaking country.

Farida’s younger brothers had both continued their classes in Pakistani schools, and Farida said they had become very strict, “They are so young, they get affected easily” she said disapprovingly, referring to the conservative mullah-teacher they had at school. Her twelve-year-old brother had told her to cover up and would have preferred her to wear the burqa. Many of the girls with brothers commented on this change in attitude when they came to Peshawar. She had no worries for her brothers when she talked about their possible future in Canada. “They will learn the language quickly, they will get a good education and be like Canadian people,” she said. She was more concerned about her parents, who did not speak English and who, in her opinion, were too old to “change their ways.”

Farida’s mother was not worried however; she seemed very optimistic about the prospects of a future in Canada. She said they migrated for the sake of their children’s future, so that they could get good education. A good education in her mind was to study medicine. The mother joked that in Canada the children would be looking after her and her husband; “We will be a family of four doctors and two patients!” she joked.

**HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION**

The concrete house in Hayatabad had two floors, and Farida, her parents and brother shared one room at the second floor. The second floor had three rooms and a kitchen, and before he died, Farida’s grandfather had one of the rooms to himself. In the third room Farida’s widowed aunt lived with her two grown, unmarried children; a son and a daughter. The two families shared bathroom and kitchen, but cooked and ate their meals separately.

On the first floor Farida’s paternal uncle, his wife and one daughter lived, as well as his married son, the daughter-in-law and their baby-boy. In total eighteen relatives made up four households that were related (and who comprised four generations). The families had separate economies, but they shared the rent and depended on each other for financial assistance and loans when necessary. They also depended financially on family members who resided in other places, and as such the definition of household transgresses that of a locally bound unit.
The one room Farida’s family shared, she spoke of as *khana*, meaning home or house in *dari*, but even after six years the place had a temporary feeling to it, as if they were not planning on staying. The one barren room served as living room at day and bedroom at night. Apart from a TV and a carpet, there was six *toshaks*, flat cotton-filled floor mattresses. The *toshaks* served as seating at day and beds at night. At night, the two grown-ups and the four children slept next to each other on the floor. In summer when it was unbearably hot, they slept outside on the flat roof.

*EVERYDAY LIFE*

Farida’s mother ruled the ground at home. She cooked, cleaned and looked after her old father-in-law and her three sons with the help of Farida. Farida had always had such responsibilities at home, and since she had no younger sisters to share them with she was often tied up with such work when she did not attend her courses. But it was her brother who was sent to the local Afghan baker every morning to get fresh *nan*, loaves of bread made in the *tandoor*, a clay oven. A *khub dakhtar* should not go alone to the market, and it was often the brothers and the father who brought home groceries and vegetables. Farida cooked a great *pillaw*, the traditional Afghan dish (a pile of rice sprinkled with raisins, almonds and sweetened carrots, hiding pieces of lamb, ox or chicken inside). Friedman says about food that “you are what you eat” and “eating is an act of self identification” (1994:104), and for the refugees the cooking of traditional Afghan dishes such as *pillaw* can be seen as a way of maintaining Afghan identity in exile.

The meals are particularly important events where the family gather and solidarity and unity is confirmed, as well as rank and position within the family. In Farida’s family everybody ate together, but if there were non-related male guest, the women would eat next door or after the men had eaten. The meal is also the most important occasion to display hospitality towards guests.

I was often invited to stay and eat the evening meal with Farida and her brothers and mother, and the father if he was at home. The tone between the parents was warm, with a lot of joking and laughter. A *dost-e-khana*, long “table” cloth was rolled out on the floor, and everybody sat cross-legged and close together around it. Farida and her mother would bring in trays of food. Everybody ate with his or her hands, sharing the same plate. Being a guest, I was given my own plate, and Farida and her mother kept putting the best pieces of meat on my plate. They always made comments that I should eat more (it is considered very impolite to not eat, and eat well, of the food given to you). They joked that Afghans have much better...
appetite than foreigners. “Just look at my wife!” Farida’s father laughed, pinching his chubby wife’s cheek. After dinner, Farida and her mother tidied and brought the customary chai sabs, green tea, to complete the meal.

Sometimes the conversation turned on to politics, and “the situation” back in Afghanistan. Farida’s father sometimes wanted to talk politics, demanding to know what I thought of the Taliban. He did not have much good to say about the Taliban, saying they were “zealots” and “stupid donkeys” that punished poor thieves by mutilating them. Farida’s mother said she would move back to Kabul immediately if the Taliban left. Her husband said that he did not think the situation would improve. He was concerned about making a living in a war-broken economy and the possibility for the children to get a proper education. The best that could happen in Afghanistan would be if King Zahir Shah returned from his exile in Italy! This view I had heard many times before, but always expressed more as a hopeless wish for a utopian future, than a reality to look forward to.

After the chai the father went outside on the roof for the evening namaz, the prayer. On Fridays he would go to the local mosque with the other men to attend prayers there. Farida also prayed, but always inside the house in privacy. She could not pray when she had her period, she explained, it is haram (forbidden) according to Islam because the girl is in a state of impurity. In order to compensate for the irregularity of her prayers, Farida often did a day or two of fasting, outside the month of Ramadan (the holy month of fasting). She said it gave sawaab, religious merit, but I knew she was also thinking that the fasting was good for her figure. I never saw the mother pray, but I knew that she used to visit the local shrine, the ziarat, which is as important to Afghan women in their religious life as the mosque is to the men.

Finding a Way Out – Migration

When the Taliban took power in Kabul in 1996, Farida’s father decided that the family could not return to Afghanistan and had applied for asylum to Canada. Farida’s mother had a cousin in Canada who was willing to guarantee for them. The long process of applying to the Canadian embassy in Islamabad, being interviewed and weighed for acceptance or rejection came to a conclusion at the end of my fieldwork period. One evening I came to Farida’s house, her mother was sitting on the floor with forms and papers spread around her. Farida was helping her fill in the forms to the Canadian embassy; they wanted to know the details of all the family members in advance of a final interview which was going to take place at the embassy in Islamabad the following month. Farida’s mother was in despair because they
wanted to know the birth dates of her four children, and she had no idea which date they were born. It had never been important before. Farida helped her make up some dates, and then the mother repeated the dates over and over again, afraid she would fail the test when she was going to be interviewed. She had heard stories about these admission interviews, that the embassy people asked trick questions to reveal lies, and that they only took young and healthy people who could work in their country.

The day of the interview I went with the family to Islamabad. It was early dawn when we took the bus from downtown in the old city of Peshawar. The night before, the atmosphere in the house had been nervous and the jokes less loud. Farida’s father came early from work to take a bath and dye his greying hair and beard pitch black. “So that he looks younger, and they will think he is healthy and strong.” Farida explained. She was worried about the health check and x-rays they had to take, because her father smoked so much. If anybody in the family had tuberculosis they would not be allowed in to Canada. Her widowed aunt, the older sister of her father, had also come with us to Islamabad. She had also applied for asylum. Farida whispered to me that they were going to say she was the grandmother in the family, she looked so old and it would be easier for her to come with them than to apply on her own. After all, she was part of the household. I was surprised at this information, but not because I did not know that the Afghan idea of who is close family differs from the western concept of close family being only the nuclear family. But it was rare that Afghans in Peshawar gave information about their plans and actions in the migration process, the whole thing was covered by silence and secrecy even between family members. A woman I knew did not even tell her own parents that she was planning to defect with her child and husband on a trip to London. She called them when it was already done, and told them she would not be back. This secrecy I believe is related to a very real fear of gossip, jealousy and attempts to interfere with and prevent the realization of the migration plans.

On the way to the bus station, we stopped by a ziarat, a holy shrine, where a group of local women were gathered for prayers. Farida went up to the shrine and asked for protection for the journey (very necessary, knowing the accident rate of the ‘flying coach’ on the Grand trunk road) and also for success at the interview later that day. Just after I left Peshawar, Farida and her family received the final yes from the embassy, and went for Canada.

Farida and her family did not have to get help from the qashaqbar, the organized people smuggler, since they managed to get accepted by the Canadian refugee program. Most other
cases I heard of where Afghans migrated to Europe or North America, they had to go through the smuggler. It was in most cases the only available option, provided that the aspiring migrant could mobilize the resources to pay the price. An example is Farida’s uncle Shekeb in Kabul who wished to go to Holland, and who borrowed money from his sister in Saudi-Arabia. The information Shekeb heard about Holland when he still was in Kabul, was typical for the mixture of rumours and facts that floated around about the various potential countries for migration. The countries were rated first and foremost according to their job markets, and to migrate to a country with a low level of unemployment ranked highest at the price lists of the smugglers. The smugglers were often working undercover from travel agencies in Peshawar. “The typical qashaqbar is not Afghan, he is a Pakistani with the right contacts at the embassies and the international airports,” a Peshawari travel agent told me.

**SUMMARY**

What does the life history and experience of Farida and her family say about ways of coping? The material can be read and interpreted at multiple levels, for instance can I analyse how Farida cope with the gendered experience of growing up as a young girl during the war years in Kabul. However, the gender dimension is something I will come back to in the second part of the chapter, where I analyse some major themes related to the life histories. Here I will highlight some themes of general interest although rooted in particular experience.

The story of Farida and her family illustrates how migration and dispersal becomes both a consequence of, and a way to cope with the war. The story also illustrates how this strategy (the strategy of dispersal of the family) depends on the ability of a household to mobilize their social network. Farida’s household exceeds the locality of her family in Peshawar, since there is a continuous circulation and exchange of information, people, money and other resources between several location; Kabul, Peshawar, Holland, Canada and so on. The reason Farida’s family in Peshawar had a chance to migrate to Canada was because Farida’s mother had a sister in Canada who guaranteed for them. Without this connection they had not been accepted by the Canadian government’s refugee program.

Farida’s story also gives insight into who stays and who leaves. Studies on the dynamics of forced migration from Kabul (Marsden, 1997) demonstrate that it is the poorest and most destitute that remains in Kabul, those with the means to do so leave. This is true at a general level; in order to move anywhere a certain minimum amount of resources is required. However when focusing at the micro-level (family/household) a strategy of dispersal is
revealed, leading to the question of why some members of the same household stay on in Kabul while others leave for Peshawar and others again for countries abroad. My material indicates more diverse and complex reasons behind why some stay and some leave than just the economic factor. The macro-development of the war as well as the multiple concerns of the family such as livelihood opportunities, consideration for the elderly, health concerns and education opportunities for the children were factors behind the decision of a family to leave, stay or do both. As in the case of Farida’s family; her uncle Shekeb stayed on in Kabul to look after the old parents and the property when his brothers and sisters with families left Kabul. It was possible for him to stay because the sister who had migrated to Saudi Arabia sent monthly remittances via Peshawar. When Farida’s uncle was free of the responsibility of looking after the old parents, he prepared to migrate as well.

Figure 1: Farida’s household in Peshawar (white symbols), including her paternal relatives in diaspora (black symbols)
WAFIA—"I AM LIKE A MAN"

When I met Wafia (20) in Peshawar in September 1998, she had arrived from Kabul some months earlier. Wafia’s story illustrates some of the coping strategies of a female-headed household, where the daughter had become the main income-earner. How does this impact the traditional roles and responsibilities of a daughter in the household, will be discussed in the analysis. The family had left Kabul because the Taliban was threatening to arrest the father, who had gone into hiding. Wafia said they did not know where he was. Because of the Taliban ban of women working, the mother had lost her income as a teacher, and the daughters had had their education disrupted. These multiple concerns motivated the move to Peshawar, combining both security and livelihood concerns.

The timing of the move was decided by the fact that Wafia’s maternal grandmother got sick and needed hospital treatment only available in Peshawar. When I met Wafia, her grandmother had just died. The family were in chel roz, forty days of mourning. In this period they could not travel, and they stayed in Peshawar. During the mourning period, Wafia’s family decided to not return to Kabul, but to find a way to migrate to Europe. The mother said she did not have any relatives left in Kabul; they had all migrated abroad. Being the eldest daughter, she had had to stay with the responsibility for her old mother, Wafia’s grandmother. Now that both her parents were dead, she wished to move on, to secure the future of Wafia and her other daughters since in Kabul girls did not have any opportunity anymore to
complete their education. And if the girls were not going to school or working and bringing income to the household, it was better for them to get married, Wafia’s mother explained. And it was the mother’s job to find a suitable partner. In her mind only a Kabul-azil, a real Kabuli young man with a good education would do, and it was an advantage if he had migrated to Europe or North America. I will return to the theme of marriage, and how marriage practices have changed and taken on a new aspect of coping strategy for migration.

Wafia’s mother saw herself as the reis-e-famili (head of the family) in the absence of her husband. But it was Wafia who was the main income earner. Wafia’s mother was angry with her in-laws for not supporting her; she had no contact with them due to some old unresolved hostility. As I have mentioned, the cultural ideal is that female-headed household should receive assistance from her in-laws. Instead she received help from her sister in Hamburg (who had migrated in 1992) who sent around 50 DM (200 Nkr) per month. This money was used to pay the rent, and without this help they would have been obliged to live in the camp, Wafia said.

What did the fact that Wafia was the main income earner do to her position in the household? “I am like a man”, Wafia told me with pride, and meaning that she did the job her father should have done which was to bring money to the household. She said she resented her father for not being there and taking care of them, as well as feeling guilty for not paying respect towards him. Wafia did however not see herself as the head of the family when it came to decision making, this position belonged to her mother who was the oldest person in the house after the death of the grandfather. But she admitted that she had a different position than her younger sisters, who went to school in Peshawar. Part of Wafia’s income paid for her sister’s school fees and she said she wished for her sisters to have a different life. “I want my sisters to be young and without worries, not like me who never felt I had a youth.”

Because Wafia worked outside the house, she seemed to be released for many of the domestic tasks that should have been her responsibility. When her mother told her to do a job in the house Wafia passed it on to her younger sisters. She laughed and said that when her older sister had been living with them, she had been ordered by her in the same way. Her younger brother never did anything in the house, being a boy he was not expected to.

The fact that Wafia held a key role in the economy of the household challenged in some ways the hierarchy of the family and the traditional gendered role of the young daughter who is expected to obey and respect her parents. Wafia moved as she wished in public, and was often
taking public transport on her own. She moved in a self-assured way, and was not timid in the manner I often experienced other unmarried Afghan girls her age to be.

Wafia had a salary while she worked as my research assistant for four months, including me, the researcher, in her livelihood strategy. Simultaneously she (like Farida) took private classes in computer and English, to improve her chances of finding a job with an NGO. The investment paid off when she was offered a job as a clerk assistant at the office of an international NGO in Peshawar. Both jobs (the one for me and the one for the NGO) were obtained through contacts, stressing the importance of having personal contacts when searching for work, especially when you are a young girl with a disrupted education and not much experience.

I met several unmarried Kabuli girls who worked (for the NGOs) and supported their parents. They said they were proud of having this role, and that it made them feel independent. They experienced greater power to resist potential marriage plans from the parents, and since that the parents saw the benefit of not “loosing” the daughter through marriage. “I am the oldest, and should be married first, but last month my little sister was engaged with an Afghan who lives in the States. My mother called me to ask if it was ok, that my sister got the chance before me,” a twenty-four year old girl told me. She was unmarried, lived with her mother and father and her income from an international NGO was the only income of the family. It seemed that this new key role in the household gave her a position from which to negotiate with her parents about the timing of her own marriage. This girl also told me that she enjoyed her work so much she would not accept getting married to anybody who would not let her continue her job. But she knew it would be difficult.

The other source of income for the family was remittances sent by Wafia’s maternal aunt in Hamburg. The aunt migrated with her husband in 1992 to Germany. They were both university-educated teachers. In Hamburg they had jobs in the service industry, she worked in a warehouse and he worked in a pizza restaurant. The aunt was visiting her family in Peshawar when I met Wafia; she had come because of the chel roz (the mourning period) of the grandmother. She complained that she did not make much money working in a warehouse, and Germany was very expensive. I understood there was a subtle negotiating going on between her and Wafia’s mother who wanted her to send more money each month.

Wafia’s household in Peshawar consisted of seven people; Wafia, her mother, her two younger sisters and a younger brother. A third and older sister of Wafia had obtained asylum
in Sweden the year before. Wafia's two maternal aunts, younger unmarried sisters of her mother, lived with them as well. They shared the first floor of the two-storey concrete house with two other families, both related on her mother's side. The house was in Hayatabad, the same neighbourhood as Farida. The three families made up independent households with separate economies, but the fact that they were related made them obliged to help each other when in need, financially or otherwise. The families cooked in the same kitchen, but ate their meals separately. Wafia's had two grandmothers since her maternal grandfather had two wives. The grandmother who was the widowed second wife of her grandfather, stayed in the room next-door with her two young sons of sixteen and seventeen. They were Wafia's uncles. The grandmother managed economically on remittances from a son living in Germany. Wafia's mother disliked her "second" mother because she remembered a lot of rivalry between the two wives, but Wafia was close to her two young uncles; they were like brothers to her. Often they spent time together talking, joking or watching TV, and she could count on them to be her protégé or maharam if she needed it.

In Kabul, Wafia's maternal grandparents had been part of the household. Wafia's grandfather had taken responsibility for the family when the father disappeared. In Kabul the family still owned a flat in Microian, the same neighbourhood as Farida had lived in. The flat had two bedrooms, but one room was locked and used as storage for a family who had migrated to America four years back. They kept a room with their furniture in case they should be able to return at some point, again an example of "keeping a foot in each place."

While I knew Wafia's family, they returned twice to Kabul to visit relatives and look after the flat to check whether the authorities had confiscated it. The mother tried to sell what was left of valuables (I was asked to smuggle out the old video recorder, an illegal object) in order to raise cash. I was their guest for a week at one of their return trips to Kabul, an opportunity that gave a deeper contextual understanding to Wafia's stories about her past. In Kabul I stayed with Wafia's family in Microian. The Taliban had forbidden people to have foreign, western guests, and Wafia expressed how absurd she thought it was since hospitality is so important for Afghans. She told me not to worry, and I had to learn to hide myself in public behind the burqa. The mother also told me to stay away from the window in the flat so that none of the neighbours could see there was a foreigner there. But apart from these precautions, I believe that having me as a guest in their Kabul home provided a sense of resistance and defiance towards the Taliban. We would sit every night and listen to the religious state-radio shariat announcing more edicts, and these sessions always sparked a lot
of jokes about the mullahs and the Taliban, who in their opinion did not know Islam, and were only "illiterate village boys".

Prior to the Taliban and the disappearance of the father, their livelihood had been from the mother and father's work as teachers. Wafia and her older sister had also contributed to the family economy by working for an international NGO after school hours. Their aunts had worked in the civil administration, as clerks. All the women of the household (except the oldest sister who worked in a health program accepted by the Taliban) had lost their jobs due to the ban on women working, and Wafia and her sisters had their education disrupted when the girl schools were closed.

For a year and a half Wafia and her sisters attended in secrecy a private home school for girls in their neighbourhood, a risky initiative since the teacher and the pupils could be punished if the Taliban discovered them. They sneaked off early every morning to gather together with ten other girls in the home of one of the teachers, who knew she risked severe punishment if it was discovered that she taught sixteen to seventeen-year-old girls English, *dari* and mathematics. The illegal home schools in Kabul became the most potent symbols in Kabul of local resistance towards the Taliban regime and their ban on education for girls. The home schools worked well to boost morality and the "fighting-spirit" among the women and girls I met in Kabul, but they were also sadly aware that the standard of the home school classes were below the requirements needed to receive any useful study qualification. And even if the teachers only took very small fees from the pupils, the cost of attending the classes made them unavailable for the fast growing number of increasingly destitute families.

When Wafia's older sister (22) got an opportunity to travel to Sweden to participate in a workshop, a trip paid by the international NGO she worked for, she seized the opportunity to defect. She had promised her employer to return to Kabul after the seminar, but she did not return. She had found a way out. She applied for asylum when she arrived, and based her case on the trouble the family already had with the Taliban. She had travelled alone to Europe without *maharam* (a male relative who has the role of protégé), and could have been arrested by the Taliban if she returned to Kabul. The asylum meant that Wafia's sister could start taking higher education in Sweden. Wafia and her mother were happy for her, although they missed her a lot. I often saw the mother cry while she read the letters from her daughter, and I understood on the phone calls they made that the daughter missed her family and felt very alone in Sweden. But she had a maternal aunt and uncle in Hamburg who came as often as
they could to see her. Wafia said the sister had migrated “for the sake of her family” although it meant having to be away from them. She knew that with a proper education and a good job, she could support her family in the future. And maybe she could be a useful link for them to realize their own migration plans.

I never met Wafia’s father, but learnt after the completion of my fieldwork that when the family finally managed to obtain asylum in Denmark (after two years in Peshawar), the father had been reunited with them.

SUMMARY
Wafia’s family, like Farida’s, follow a strategy of dispersal and find ways of coping through the kin-based social network. When they moved to Peshawar, they coped with the increased expenses for rent by the help of remittances from Wafia’s aunt in Hamburg, and by sharing a house with other families who are relatives. The change in household composition was not just structural, but also relational. Wafia’s household had become female-headed in exile, her mother being the head of the family. But it was Wafia who was the main income earner and contributor to the family economy, and said she felt “like a man” since she had taken on the role of provider. There was ambivalence in that Wafia was proud of her role as provider, and at the same time she regretted that her youth had been “taken away from her”. She felt time was running out for her with regard to completing a higher education, her ultimate dream. Wafia’s story illustrates how a quest for education is a strong motivating force for many Kabuli families and influence their strategies for whether or not they should attempt migration, when and where. The drive to continue school was also strong enough to risk attending illegal home school classes back in Kabul, risking punishment if discovered by the Taliban. Farida’s salary in Peshawar pays for her younger sisters education, as well as her own computer and English classes after working hours. Education is as such valued and prioritised in her family, and is a strong motivation for further migration aspirations. In fact, life in exile offers opportunities that the girls did not have in Kabul. Generally a strong motivation for Afghans to migrate (as it was for Farida and Wafia’s parents) is the future and education of the children. The children and youth are the future, also for the parent generation, who does what it takes to invest in this future.
Meena-LIFE IN THE CAMP

Meena (19) was a shy and modestly covered girl, who had been living in the Nasirbagh camp for ten months when I met her. She had come with her family to Peshawar in December 1997, because her grandfather, who was the head of the family, had lost his job at the university when the Taliban took control. Without any income it would have been very difficult to make it through the cold Kabul winter without any money to buy fuel or food.

I include Meena’s story because it illustrates life for some of the camp dwellers, as opposed to the town dwellers. Most Kabuli families shifted from the camp to a house in town as soon as they had the economy or a relative who could house them. In Meena’s case, her family could not afford the rent in town, nor had they close relatives who could help them financially. The family rented a three-room mud house for 400 rupees (100 Nkr) a month plus electricity. The house was in “New” Nasirbagh, a section of the camp that had been set up in 1994 to house the urban refugees. Four years later the area had blended in with the rest of the twenty-year-old camp, the tents were gone and the area looked like a large extended village of mud houses, mud walls and narrow muddy lanes with raw sewage running through open drains. In Meena’s courtyard, a small hen house gave shelter to two scruffy-looking chickens, a donation from an NGO working in the camp.

Meena’s family consisted of her maternal grandfather who was the head of the household, her grandmother, her widowed mother, a younger brother and two unmarried younger sisters of her mother. Meena’s father who had been a doctor, had been killed when she was two years old, and since then they had lived with her grandparents in Kheir Khana, Kabul.

Meena’s mother tongue was Pashto and both her parents were Pashtuns from the province of Laghman. But since Meena grew up and went to school in Kabul, she spoke Dari as well.

First time I met Meena she had cried when she told me that her father was dead. I was bewildered because the other women did not take any notice of her tears or made no efforts to comfort her. Later I understood that her tears had been “out of place”; they were seen as being weak, and not accepting of her fate. I was explained that it would have made it worse for Meena if anybody had paid attention and tried to comfort her.

Meena had been in Peshawar before, those times they had stayed with an aunt who lived in town. But this aunt could no longer house them; she now had two other families from Kabul staying with her. The grandfather was not happy with the security situation in the camp, he had three unmarried young women to be responsible for, and there were constant rumours of incidents in the camp of girls being kidnapped, raped or murdered. The grandfather had no
other choice than to live in the camp though, it was the cheapest option. Some camp dwellers also opted for staying in the camp because the quality of the school was good, and the fee was very small compared to private schools outside the camp.

The Taliban regime had expelled more than 160 colleagues together with Meena’s grandfather who had worked as a professor of literature at the University of Kabul, the old man told me. He said the Taliban did not approve of the curriculum and their way of teaching. The grandfather had taken his family to Peshawar where he soon got work as a teacher at one of the private Afghan universities. When I met Meena, her grandfather had just lost his job there as well because the Pakistani government had closed several private universities, claiming they were illegal institutions without a proper standard. Meena’s grandfather argued that this was just another attempt to try and force the refugees to return to Afghanistan. He also said that their plan was to return if he could find no work, the cost of living was after all, lower in Kabul than in Peshawar.

In Kabul, Meena’s two unmarried aunts who were part of the household had been studying at the university until the Taliban closed it to women. They had been studying at the Law faculty and the Medical faculty. Meena also had her education interrupted several times, first a couple of times due to the fighting in the time of Mujahedin and later due to the Taliban ban on girl schools. She had spent her days at home doing housework and watching TV. She said it was boring, but she loved watching the Hindi-films with Indian music and dance scenes. These films were stopped when the Mujahedin took power. After the Taliban took control, owning or watching TV had been completely banned, and the radio only played religious prayers and Taliban-controlled news. For this reason Meena said she liked being in Peshawar, they had electricity in the camp and they had a small TV. Another reason why she enjoyed being in Peshawar, was that she could continue her education. In Nasirbagh she went to a camp school supported by UNHCR, with 3000 pupils.

Meena’s dream had been to study medicine, like her aunt. But her mother had engaged her the week before, to a cousin who worked as a construction worker in Karachi. The mother said the future is so uncertain, she wished for Meena, her last unmarried daughter, to be safely married. When I met Meena, she was sad for the lost opportunity to study, not knowing whether her husband-to-be would allow her to continue studying after marriage. “It is my faith,” she sighted. She was also sad because to marry meant to leave her mother’s house. Her elder sister was married and lived in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, and she only came visiting once a year. Her mother argued that if Meena did not get married, people would talk,
mardum gab mezanam. “People will talk” was a commonly used phrase when I asked for explanations for various rules and norms for “correct” behaviour, and seemed to be an effective and powerful sanction.

Four months later, when I visited the camp for the last time, the composition of Meena’s household had changed. The grandfather, who had not been able to retrieve his job since the Afghan universities in Peshawar remained closed, had gone back to Kabul with the younger brother of Meena. The boy had classes to attend to at his school in Kabul, since the boys’ schools were still open. The rest of the family remained in Nasirbagh camp, awaiting the security situation in Kabul.

Meanwhile Meena’s aunt of twenty-eight, the one who had had her law studies interrupted, had got a job as a teacher at the camp school. She received a salary of 1200 rupees (300 Nkr), and was now the main income earner of the family. The other aunt of twenty-six, who had been to medical faculty in Kabul, had continued her studies in Peshawar at one of the Afghan universities. When the local authorities closed the university, she stayed in the camp and provided a home-based health service in the neighbourhood. People came to their house for injections and treatment of minor ills, and in return she received a few rupees or some eggs or fruit. Meena’s mother was taking care of the domestic chores, cooking and cleaning. The household was as such female-headed, but when I asked who was reis-e-famili (head of the family), they all answered that it was the absent grandfather.

When I asked about Meena’s wedding, she told me it had been postponed since her fiancé had decided to go to Moscow to find work, and Meena was to wait for him until he sent for her. Meanwhile she attended her classes, and did embroidery, an activity that gave a small income from neighbours in the camp who ordered front-pieces for their shalwar suits.

Meena said she was hopeful that her wedding would be put on halt for a long time, so she could complete her degree at the Nasirbagh camp school and be able to start taking medical classes when she went to Moscow, if her husband-to-be would let her. Or maybe they could go to Europe from Moscow, she had heard there were so many opportunities there. Then Meena confided with a low voice that her aunt, who had a salary from teaching in the camp, was putting aside a small amount every month for Meena’s education, just in case. The grandfather did not know about this, she said. I thought this was an interesting glimpse of rebellion, a subtle strategy from the woman of the household who was in fact the main income earner. She did not challenge the grandfather’s role as head-of-the-family by openly
questioning his decisions; she just quietly ignored him and took the necessary measures to ensure a different outcome than he had planned for his granddaughter.

**SUMMARY**

For Meena’s family, as for the other families, the move to Peshawar was a way to cope with life when their livelihood crumbled in war-torn Kabul. But unlike Farida and Wafia’s families who were town dwellers in Peshawar, Meena’s family settled in a refugee camp. Meena’s grandfather, the head of the family, said they had to live in the camp because it was cheaper than town. They had lived in town if they could, because the security was no good in the camp, grandfather said.

At the same time, camp life provided opportunities that was unavailable to the family outside the camp. For Meena camp life meant an opportunity to continue her education. She attended the UNHCR supported secondary school. For her aunt the school provided a work opportunity when she got a job as a teacher. Meena’s family was one of the few Kabuli families I met in Peshawar who did not receive any remittances from family living abroad. This information supported my conclusion that the access to remittances made up the dividing line between those who lived in the camps and those who lived in town. The families who had relatives abroad and who managed to mobilize their network, could afford to live in town, and eventually to migrate themselves.

Meena’s story also illustrated how marriage practices changed in exile; she was engaged and it was too early in her opinion. She felt too young and wanted to go to university first. She blamed the war and that her father had been killed, it was because the family had become poor that she had to get married. But she had a hope that the marriage could become a way out, since her fiancé was had gone to Moscow (transit to Europe) and maybe she could go to university when she went abroad to join him.

**SADIA- LIFE IN KABUL**

I met Sadia (19) in Kabul. I include her story because it illustrates the everyday life of a girl who has not left Kabul and who at the time of my fieldwork had to cope with life in Kabul under the Taliban regime. Her mother was a widow, and she lived in a female-headed household. She had been a classmate and neighbour of Wafia, and when I went to Kabul it was Wafia who introduced me to her.
Sadia was born five days before the Saur revolution, of April 1978, when the communist party carried out the Soviet-backed coup d'etat. Communists killed Sadia's father shortly after the coup. "He was neither a Mujahedin nor a communist, he was a free-thinker," Sadia's mother said to me. Sadia's mother, who also had been politically active, was thrown in prison with an indefinite sentence. Sadia and her younger brother lived with their maternal grandparents till the mother was set free two years later when president Karmal gave amnesty to all political prisoners in Pul-e-Charki, the infamous prison of Kabul.

Her mother had been working as a teacher, and the last couple of years as an administrator for an international organisation that ran an income-generating project for widows in Kabul, one of the few workplaces where the Taliban accepted that women were working. Her job and her income was the reason she did not want to take her children and leave Kabul, although a brother of her husband, who lived in Islamabad, had offered her assistance. During the Mujahedin time Sadia had been sent to the uncle in Islamabad to go to school. The mother had sent for her to come back to Kabul, and Sadia regretted it deeply. She wished to go to another country where she could complete her education, and her dream was to get an education in fine arts. This, she knew, was against her mother's wish. She knew she ought to follow her mother's wish, but argued that her mother ought to consider her wish too. She had defied her mother before, when the mother wished to marry her off to a cousin that Sadia did not like. Sadia had only been seventeen, and it had taken her a year of subtle resistance and negotiations with the mother, but the wedding was called off in the end. "If it had been peace, if father had lived and I had been able to go to university, mother would not have tried to marry me so young," Sadia claimed.

When I met Sadia, she was a pale and nervous young girl who had stayed indoors for almost four months, afraid of going outside because of the Taliban. She hated wearing the obligatory burqa, and said it gave her a headache. While I got to know her, she became very ill for a while, having severe headaches and pains in her body that the doctor described as psychosomatic due to stress. Sadia herself had another explanation, as I have accounted for in the next chapter.

Before the Mujahedin and the Taliban, Sadia had been active outside her home all day, going to school, taking classes, doing sports. Now she spent her days in the flat in Microian, cooking and reading. When I visited her she was reading Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet; "We had to read this in our English class, it is my favourite," and watching the film about
Titanic\textsuperscript{34}, on her mother’s video player and TV\textsuperscript{35}, which was hidden behind a table. Watching television was a way to defy the edict that forbade TVs, video-players and cassette players because the Taliban regarded modern technology as un-Islamic and 
\textit{haram} (forbidden).

Her eighteen-year-old brother’s life was a contrast and daily reminder to her on what she was missing out on under the strict regime. He was hardly ever home, an active young man about to complete his college degree and with high aspirations of further studies in architecture. After school he played volleyball. But he was not unmarked by the war, on Fridays he went with his friends to the old sports Stadium that the Taliban had turned into an execution ground, and watched the weekly executions and the amputations of limbs, hands and feet. He told me this with shining and exited eyes, as if the brutality of the events were mere entertainment.

Sadia had a hope that she would receive a stipend and a study visa to the UK. She had met a British journalist in Kabul a year earlier, and the woman had promised her to help her come to London. She exchanged letters with the journalist for some months; the woman had told her she had started a campaign to collect money and to get her a stipend. But then it went quiet, and Sadia was loosing her hope when I met her. She said she was sure the journalist had forgotten her. At the same time, she knew that if she had an opportunity to leave, it would be difficult for her to be without her mother. A young, unmarried girl should not be alone without her mother, she said, and also she knew her mother needed the daughter to do the housework since she was working full time outside the house herself.

After returning from fieldwork, I had not been in touch with Sadia, but one night watching the BBC news in Oslo I suddenly saw her face. It was from Kabul during the American bombing before the Taliban regime fell, October 2001. Sadia was hiding her face to the reporter, but I recognized her eyes and her voice when she told the reporter how tired she and everybody she knew was with war, bombs and leaders who only fought for their own power and did not care about the people.

\textsuperscript{34} Titanic was an extremely popular film among young people in Peshawar too, when the girls dressed up for wedding parties they all wanted their hair done like Kate Winslet in Titanic. The film had elements of the romantic tragedy typical of Hindi-films, where the love of young beautiful heroes and heroines lead to tragic death because they are prevented by social barriers and family from having each other.

\textsuperscript{35} The Taliban had forbidden all electronics in the house, TVs, cassette players, videos. Radio was allowed because they broadcasted their own religious program, Shariat radio.
When I walked with Sadia in Kabul, I wore the burqa as she did. We often walked with the burqa thrown back so that our faces were open and we could breathe the fresh spring air and enjoy the view of the mountains surrounding the city. When we were in Microian, Sadia’s neighbourhood she felt safe, the other women would give her a signal if the Taliban approached. Then she would quickly cover her face and quiet her steps in order to avoid a reprimand or a beating. She said she was always nervous and preferred to not go far from the house. On one of our walks in Microian she pointed to an open field, a playground, in between the grey apartment blocks with the broken windows and shelled, blackened walls. In the middle of the field there was a gravesite marked by wooden poles with green flags on. Sadia quietly told me the story of how a group of children had been playing football when a rocket had hit and killed them all.

The physical reminders of the war are everywhere surrounding people in their daily activities. I was in Kabul during the spring of 1999, and Kabul’s once paved streets had turned into hard packed dust and mud, the same golden colour as the mud houses in the old part of the city where the flat roofs are used for sleeping in the hot summer. Sadia took me to the old part of the city where high walls ensuring privacy fenced in the houses, except where the shelling had hit and left gaping wounds in the walls. Particularly in this part of Kabul, the history of the war had been inscribed into the physical environment in multiple ways; heaps of rubble and ruins, stranded rusty Soviet army tanks as reminders of the Russian war, red paint on rocks and doorways signifying mined areas, burnt out car wrecks, check posts with armed men, the striking number of beggars and war disabled, the many crowded burial grounds with the characteristic green flags on the graves of the shaheed, the martyred.

Sadia told me how the scars from rocket attacks were mostly telling the story of the fighting between rivalling Mujahedin groups between 1993 and 1996. The Taliban had added another type of inscription on the city, carrying unambiguous messages of what they thought of the immorality of music and pictures. Her mother had a TV hidden away in the flat, but many had their houses searched and TVs, videos and cassette players confiscated. There were strings of videotapes and cassettes decorating their check posts and for a while smashed up TV sets where hanging from lampposts.
Another inscription of war on the city, that Sadia had seen during the **Eid** week of 1999, was when the Taliban had "decorated" the trees of the main road with the cut off hands and feet of thieves who had been punished during the Friday public execution at the Kabul Sport stadium. She also remembered too well the sinister image of the dead body of Dr. Najib, the ex president who was killed, mutilated and hanged in a public place as a stark warning to all of Kabul the night the Taliban took over the city.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

As I pointed out in the introduction of this thesis, Long argues that in actor-oriented analysis it is not the individual per se, but the **interaction** of the individual in social situations that is of analytical interest (Long, 1989:226). Therefore I tried to highlight the relational dimensions of the micro histories by describing the social relationships in which the girls are involved. Although the families and households had undergone considerable changes as a result of displacement and migration, and the roles the girls had within their families varied, the material shows that the social relations of the family network are central for the girls and their families in coping with and adapting to war disrupted lives. In the final chapter I will discuss the theme of the family as a social network and a potential resource that can be mobilised when needed, as well as the theme of changes in the family and household.

The next chapter looks at the cultural norms, values and practices from which the girls draw resources to cope emotionally with war and life in exile.

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36 Eid is the celebration following the month of fasting; Ramadan.
CHAPTER 4: HEALTH AND EMOTIONS

“If you really knew my heart, you would be sad forever” (Wafia)

“All social groups have their distinctive constructs about emotions, suffering and death, which must be understood when planning help for those affected by violence” (Richman, 1993:129).

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I explore certain core values and norms that guide the actions of the girls and women of this study, providing a frame of reference in their everyday lives. Finally, I explore social constructs of emotions related to grief and loss, and how the girls and women find emotional outlets in certain cultural and religious practices in order to cope with the changing and volatile life conditions during war and exile.

WHEN WAR BECOMES EVERYDAY LIFE

People associate ‘everyday life’ with repetitions, routines, predictability and stability. (Gullestad, 1984) What characterises the experience of war and violence is the irrationality and unpredictability of events, the lost ability to foresee what might come. The threat of loss of health, life and livelihood becomes a dimension of people’s daily existence. As Nordstrom and Robben (1995:2) has noted about war-stricken populations; “Violence is a dimension of people’s existence, not something external to society and culture that ‘happens’ to people.”

Also for Afghans who have crossed the border to Pakistan and have escaped the daily risk of war and rocket attacks, the war remains an integrated dimension of their everyday lives. Kabul and the war are very much present in the minds of the refugees, they receive news from Kabul about ‘the situation’ and they discuss politics, they worry about loved ones when there
are no news or bad news, they send money and they receive relatives who come to stay while the fighting is too bad, the winter is too cold and the work opportunities are too slim back in Kabul. A Kabuli family in Peshawar had the daughter of a relative staying in their house so that she could complete school, while her family remained in Kabul. The Taliban had closed her school in Kabul, and she had started attending an illegal home school, but the father thought it safer to send her to Peshawar.

My point is that the refugees carry the war with them when they cross the border; both in practical and emotional terms, and for the Afghan exile community in Peshawar the war is very real and very near. In my experience, Kabulis in Peshawar were even more worried about the risk and danger of going to Kabul than the people who had not left the city.

War is not just violence in the form of frontline actions; gunshots, mine blasts or rocket attacks. A main theme of my informant’s life histories is the discontinuity, displacement and disruption the war has caused, on livelihood, education and plans for the future.

THE WILL OF ALLAH

When I asked people about the war and their expectations of the future, they did not want to predict anything. As a man said, “We have experienced that when we wish for a change, there is a change for the worse”. He added, “A good Muslim does not question the will of Allah. Only Allah knows the future”. According to Islam each person’s fate is decided by God, even the time of death is predestined. It is quesmat, fate decreed by God, and to complain about one’s fate can be taken as questioning His will (Doubleday, 1988).

My informants also talked about quesmat, saying it was their fate when certain things happened that were hard to explain or accept otherwise. When they talked about things to come, they added insh Allah, “by the will of God”. I was important to cope with dignity in the face of hardship, and to accepting the will of God. However, the idea of a God-given fate did not stop people from trying to find ways to change the course of an undesired fate. Meena, who lived in Nasirbagh camp, insisted that “it was her fate” when she realized that her dream of going to university was broken. Her family could not afford it, and instead she had been engaged to a man who maybe would not let her study. She showed a brave face, and hid her disappointment. In secret, she and her aunt made a plan of trying to save money for a fund for Meena, in case she had an opportunity to start medical classes at a later stage. “God helps those who help themselves”, the aunt told me.
**TENSE PASTS - TALKING ABOUT THE WAR**

How did the girls and women express emotions while talking to me about traumatic events of violence and destruction related to the war? During interviews in Kabul and Peshawar, I was often surprised to hear dramatic stories of horror narrated with a “flat” voice and void eyes, in my view expressing no emotions. At other times stories of rocketing and fighting was told with a smile, laughter and radiant eyes. An expression, and perhaps performance, of emotion that are socially accepted and preferred is the use of humour, laughing and joking. Lifton (1983) describes similar reactions by trauma victims as ‘psychic numbing’ resulting from a crisis of meaning, and a way to distance oneself from the traumatic memory in order to cope.

There can be other explanations too, to be found in embodied ethics of courage and honour. Part of this lies in Islam, a faith that overcomes death, martyrdom, persecution and suffering, teaching courage and resilience in the face of difficulty (Doubleday, 1987 and Tapper, 1991). Quesmat, fate decreed by God, as described above, fits in to this picture.

The ethic of not revealing your heart stands strong among Afghans, as I will show in this chapter. When something tragic has happened, the best way to heal the wounds of the mind is to not bring it up. Research has shown that contrary to western trauma school of thought that recommend individual therapy and talking things out, Afghans think that if you bring such events up again, the memory will only deepen the wound (Riise, 2002). This was confirmed by comments from my informants such as “why should we talk about sad things, we don’t want to make our family upset”, when I asked who they could talk to about difficult past events. Thorbjørnsrud (2001) describes this attitude as common to the Middle Eastern cultures, and has labelled it “the sea of forgetfulness” (glemselsens hav).

Kirmayer (1996) argues that memory, rather than being like a photographic snapshot of a past event, is a reconstruction of the past. The reconstruction takes place in the light of the present and the future, and will as such be a selective process depending on the needs of the present and the future. He says that trauma-narratives must be understood as cultural constructs of personal and historical memory. Memory being a reconstruction, rather than a matter-of-fact description of a past event, makes it more important to ask what it is that authorizes and stabilizes a certain memory, than the accuracy of the actual event that inflicted the memory.

In the light of the ‘reconstruction view’ on memory, it was crucial for me, the researcher, to have a prior understanding of the present life conditions of the informants, as well as the
socio-historic macro context, in order to construct and extract meaning from their narrated memories of childhood and growing up in Kabul.

Moral scripts and ‘emotion rules’ always guide practical action (Hochschild, 1998). For Afghans it might be difficult to be asked to talk about traumatic memories of the war, when their emotion rule is to leave such memories in silence. Afghan hospitality ethics that dictate that the host should always try to please the guest, made it difficult for informants to not respond to my probing about the war. A good host will attempt to put her own worries aside to make the guest feel comfortable. The way out of the dilemma was to talk about war-related memories from behind a smiling face.

The following re-worked extract from a conversation with Meena recorded in my field diary illustrates this point.

Peshawar, April 1999: I went to Nasirbagh camp in the afternoon, to visit Meena in her house after school hours. Wafia came with me. It was our fourth visit; I felt I knew Meena and her family well by now. When we came to her house, we were invited in for tea and nan (bread). After some time we started talking about the time Mujahedin in Kabul. Meena’s two aunts told stories about rocketing and fighting; one time twelve rockets hit their house and a cousin had been killed. They talked with a lot of joking and laughing, and Meena who was a quiet and shy girl, had an embarrassed smile on her face. I was confused about the display of “happy” emotions when talking about the war.

Back at her house, Wafia explained to me that the smiles and joking were hiding troubled hearts; it was a way to cope with difficult emotions. Then Wafia started telling me with a seriousness and intensity I had not seen in her face before; her own memories from the fighting during the Mujahedin time in Kabul. The frontline had gone straight through Microian, their neighbourhood in Kabul, and the fighting had been so intense that Wafia and her family had spent almost two weeks, days and nights, in the basement of their apartment building. When they finally fled Microian by foot for a safer neighbourhood during a short seize fire, she saw “hundreds of dead bodies laying in the streets”. I asked why she had not told me this before, and she said that she did not want to make me sad or make herself sad. But it was hard to forget, she said she still remembered at night and had trouble sleeping.

I had known Wafia for seven months when she told me the above story. We had spent time together continuously, and I thought I knew her well. She stood out as a brave girl with a difficult life, but always with a smile and a glint in her eyes. But I started realizing that her gaiety and joking behaviour was hiding a troubled heart.
I started noticing how Wafia’s black shiny hair had a stripe of white, how her hands were shaking when she poured the tea, how her laughter was sometimes too loud and piercing. She also told me that she was afraid of “becoming mad”. She had seen imaginary insects on the carpet. She was itching everywhere. She had difficulties concentrating; often she started reading a book but could not focus on the pages. She was often tired with a headache, and she felt suffocated by always having people around; they were seven people sharing one room. The only place she could be by herself was in the bathroom. She said her younger sister was afraid of her because she often laughed out loud, without reason.

The doctor had prescribed Valium tablets; she said she took them in order to sleep. To use medication was not uncommon, there were several among my informants who had been prescribed Valium by the doctor because they had difficulties sleeping. With a vacant look, Wafia told me, “Sometimes I drink tea and I just wish to just smash the glass into the wall, or maybe to hit my younger sisters hard – but I manage to control myself”. Then she smiled again, saying, “If you really want to know my heart, you will be sad forever”.

The way of presenting a smiling and composed facade while hiding a sad heart has been described in Bali as well. Wikan (1990) found that it was ultimately fear of ‘black magic’ that compelled the Balinese to keep up a smiling facade. I will not attempt to explain the emic reasons for why Afghans I met seemed to hide their frustration and grief behind smiling faces, just quote a psychologist who has researched on the impact of war on children; “In some situations there may be a need to contain one’s feelings if stress is continuous” (Richman, 296).

The American ethnographer Benedicte Grima has carried out a study in a Pushtun village and describes how rural Afghan women explicitly express emotions of sadness, grief and suffering, making it a point to get their audience to cry in sympathy (Grima, 1993). Prior to my own fieldwork I was curious to whether I would find similar ways of expressing emotions among my informants. But my own experiences stood in contrast to her description, the reason probably being the cultural difference between urban and rural Afghan women. There is however some aspects of her study that is of comparative relevance to my material.

Grima describes in her ethnography how the women have ritualised ways of narrating their stories of personal misfortune. The story should be told in such a way that the listeners, the other women, are touched to tears. But the narrator must not cry herself. The main point of
their stories is how they have *endured* all the sufferings of their lives; from this endurance they gain honour, self-esteem and the respect of the other women.

The themes of endurance and acceptance are also main themes for my informants, as they refer to *quesmat*, fate decreed by God, described above. Also the performance of emotions of grief in Grima’s study, are complementary with the performance of grief during the Afghan funerals I attended, the *fatiha*.

**THE FUNERALS - A SPACE TO GRIEVE**

As I have explained, people ‘hide their hearts’ in most relations both within and outside the “private” sphere of the home, which leaves few arenas for expression of grief. There is however one arena where visible grieving and crying is not just allowed, but expected. It was the memorial ceremony or funeral called *fatiha*. An informant told me that the *fatiha* was maybe the only time the women were allowed to cry for all that they needed to cry for, it was their space to grieve.

The *fatiha* is the ritual gathering of relatives and friends in memory of a deceased person. It is held right after the burial, at the house of the family, and can last for three days. Then starts the *chel roz* period, the forty days of mourning for the close family. Women do not attend the burial, so for them the *fatiha* is the only occasion to publicly grieve the deceased. The *fatiha* is held in separate rooms for men and women. The women cook food, and people are expected to come and sit for a few hours, eat, drink tea and leave again. The closer the relation, the longer the guest will sit. It is obligatory for kin and family to attend the *fatiha*, but also neighbours and others who want to show respect are welcome.

The following story is based on extracts from my field diary, describing a *fatiha* I attended in an Afghan household in Peshawar. I did not have an opportunity to participate in a *fatiha* in Kabul, but was told that it take place in the same manner there. The field diary extract illustrates several themes; the way the *fatiha* is a space for expression of grief, but also how it is a social event where relations are maintained. It also illustrates respect and hierarchy based on age.

**Peshawar, May 1999:** I attended the *fatiha* of a neighbour of Farida. The wife of the household had been buried three days ago, and the *fatiha* was in its second day. The wife had died forty-five years old; she had suffered from cancer for two years. Farida told me that cancer was a disease one got from too much grieving, worries and asabi kharab, damaged
nerves from having a troubled life. I was told that in the case of the deceased woman, she had become sick from longing too much and missing her grown children who had been living overseas for the past few years. They had migrated to Australia and to Turkey, in order to study and work and could not afford to come home so often. Nobody had yet told them that their mother was dead.

The women and men were separated, in different parts of the house. I came with Farida and her mother; they had been neighbours of the family back in Kabul as well and wanted to pay their respect. Because they were not related they had waited to the second day of the fatiha before attending. The son of the household, a young man of twenty-five, was greeting us at the gate. Farida whispered to me that the son was very handsome, and later she used the opportunity to flirt with him. I though it inappropriate but nobody seemed to mind. It seemed that a fatiha was not only a time of grieving, but also a social occasion, an opportunity for meeting, building and confirming relations. The social life of the young girls are mostly spent with their mothers and other female relatives on occasions of fatihas, weddings and other family related events.

We chipped off our sandals and stepped into the room prepared for fathia for the women. The sister of the deceased as well as other close female relatives sat by the door. Farida explained that I was a friend of the family, and after respectfully greeting everybody I was shown a place to sit next to Farida’s mother. Farida disappeared into the kitchen to offer her help with the cooking. We sat down on the tushaks, the flat cushions along the wall. After some minutes the youngest daughter of the house came and placed a tray with sweets and tea in front of us.

One by one, or in groups of two and three, the women were pouring into the room. Young women in flowing dresses or shalwar-kameez in sober colours of light grey, shades of cream or white (white being the colour of grief), older women with kohl rimmed eyes and baggy, bright coloured trousers and white haired old grandmothers with a lifetime written in their wrinkled faces. Each woman, young and old, wore a white chador (headscarf) covering her hair. On a different occasion, at least the young women would have thrown off their chadors when coming indoors, but in the fatiha it was proper conduct to cover.

Every time a new woman came in through the door she went full circle and greeted everybody who sat in the room. Women of the same age would get to their feet, they would embrace and kiss each other’s cheek two or three times, depending on how close their relation was. The old women remained seated, offered the palm of their hand to be kissed by the
younger woman. Then the old woman would place a blessing kiss on the forehead of the respectfully bent head of the younger woman. The old women did not do the whole circle; they immediately sat down, and expected the younger ones to come to them.

An elderly woman started to chant verses from the Quaran with a loud, melodious voice. Farida’s mother whispered to me that she was a bibi haji, a woman who knows the Holy Koran and who has been to haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. It was customary to pay for a bibi haji or a mullah to come and perform at the fatiha. After a while the bibi haji started chanting the story of how the deceased had died, her cancer disease and her stay in hospitals, the pains she had endured and how she finally died. The bibi haji had an intense and loud voice that filled the room. Several women started wailing and crying with loud sobs. The sister of the deceased started chanting as well, singing praise to her beloved sister, and loudly mourning her. Nobody tried to comfort her or quiet her down; it was as if she was performing an expected and respected role.

Next to me Farida’s mother was crying quietly, not trying to hide her tears. A woman who sat close to us, was crying and wailing louder and louder. Finally the women around her gently stopped her by saying to her, “It is enough now”. Farida’s mother whispered to me that the woman was not a relative of the deceased, but she had lost a son in the war and was grieving him. There was not a woman in the room who did not have a personal reason to cry, and the outbursts of emotion was expected and accepted. But there was obviously a limit also in the fatiha; crying too much was seen as undignified behaviour unless for the close kin. I asked if the men were crying in their section of the fatiha. Farida’s mother looked surprised, no the men did not cry. It was not good for a man to cry. She frowned to underline just how bad it was for a man to cry.

When we left three hours later, maybe as many as forty women had visited the house, and more were coming. People would continue to come, stay and leave during the next couple of days.

The event of the woman, who was stopped in her crying, is a good example that even though crying is expected in the funeral, there is a limit. As explained, the concept of fate decreed by God is strong in Afghan cosmology. Even if culture allows grieving, religion puts a check on it (Grima, 1993:64). Beyond a certain limit, one is expected to remember that every cause of suffering is ultimately qesmat.
PROTECTION FROM TRAGIC NEWS

The denial or delay of bad news is a common practice, rooted in the mentality that emotional outbursts of grief can be harmful and that people must be protected and told the bad news in a gentle way. I experienced it myself in many situations and was also told stories that confirmed this. Nobody wants to be the bringer of tragic news, because if not told in a considerate way the receiver could get into shock.

To illustrate, I will retell the story of Wafia who describes how her family informed her maternal aunt living in Germany about the death of her grandmother. “Grandma struggled with cancer for four years, but khala was never told how serious it was. My mother didn’t want to worry her. She told her that grandma had kidney problems. A week after grandma died, it was my mother who called khala in Germany and said ‘please come, mother is in hospital, she is very sick!’ Twenty days later she arrived from Germany and we all went to the airport to receive her. She was asking where grandma was. My mother said that she was in hospital, they would all go but first khala should come to the house and have lunch. In the middle of the lunch, she got up and took me aside. She said, “let us go to the hospital now, to see mother, and not tell the others”. I started crying and mother came and told khala that grandma had died twenty days before. Khala started crying when she heard the sad news”

Another story I heard was about a young boy in Kabul who had both his legs amputated after a mine accident. His father had been killed in the same blast. But his family did not tell him for many years, they said the father had joined the Mujahedin. There are many stories like this one, about delay of the telling of tragic news. Letters written to relatives abroad does never contain bad news, and I was told that this makes the relatives abroad constantly worried that tragic news is being held back.

HEALTH AND EMOTIONS

The war as a dimension of women’s everyday lives is among others manifested through illness caused by asabi, nerves. There was a strong concern with health issues among the participants of this study, and for all dari-speaking Afghans a common first phrase while greeting each other, is “sehAt e tan khub as?”(Is your health good?). When I asked female informants, I was told that men does not talk so much about illness, and are less affected by asabi, because “A woman has more worries in her life!” It is out of reach of my material to
say how men talk about and cope with health matters, but it was a view among my informants that a woman’s life is tougher than a man’s, and that she has more health problems.

Health and sickness is a constant source of discussion and concern. Women describe headaches, body pains and general lack of energy due to *asabi kharab*, damaged nerves. They would lift their hands and hold their head, although the pains would be located elsewhere in the body. *Asabi* is usually used to describe undiagnosed problems and generalised pains. It is a direct reference to nerves and nervousness without the stigma of psychiatric-type diagnosis or folk diagnosis of madness, which is called *dewana*. (Omidian, 1996)

Emotions like grief and sorrow is also used to explain sickness like cancer, heart problems and so on. In Kabul, a widow showed me her scar after a kidney-stone operation, illustrating the size of the stone with her hands, saying “They took my grief out”.

Health can be affected by negative emotions such as grieving, worries, shock and sadness. It is therefore important not to evoke negative emotions by talking about difficult things, for instance the war. As I have explained, the only legitimate place and space for expression of emotions like grief and sorrow is in funeral rites.

An Afghan psychiatrist at the only existing mental hospital in Kabul, told me of an increase in patients since the Mujahedin in-fighting started in the city in January 1994, followed by a further increase with the Taliban take over of power in September 1996. The increase in patients with psychosomatic symptoms of depression was particularly high among girls and women, they said. This was during a visit to Kabul in April 1999. The doctor and the nurses argued that the women were more prone to depressions because they were isolated in their homes, nervous about going outside because of the Taliban restrictions. The reasons the doctors listed for depressions were the separation from and loss of family members, witnessing fighting and rocket attacks, poverty, problems due to loss of work opportunities and stress from continuous displacement because of fighting. These data supported what I found in my own material. My informants also told me about continuous headaches, insomnia, lack of energy and diffuse aches and pains due to *asabi* (described below).

**COSMOLOGY AND RELIGION**

By cosmology I mean the set of beliefs, norms and values shared by most Afghans, concerning the nature of the universe, or cosmos, and peoples place in it. People use their cosmology as reference for coping with and making sense out of life’s turnings and events,
particularly what is referred to as war related illness, death and violence. Cosmology, as I use it, include religious beliefs and practises.

I will look at the terms ‘the great tradition’ and ‘the little tradition’ with regard to the religious practises described in this chapter. The shrine cult, which stands strong in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Middle-East (Doubleday, 1988), can be described as part of ‘the little tradition’ of Islam, practised particularly by women in their everyday lives. To visit shrines (ziyarat), go to the mullah for a protective amulet (tawiz), or cook ritual food for blessing (nazr), are parts of women’s repertoire for gaining savab, religious merit. The concept of religious merit is as important in Islam as the concept of sin, and provides a counterbalance to it. The most obvious ways of accumulating merit are in the observance of the ‘Five Pillars of Islam’, the core of Moslem practice: faith in God and his Prophet, prayer, (namaz), fasting (ramadan), giving charity (zakhat), and if possible the pilgrimage (haj) to Mecca at least once during a lifetime. These practises are described and called for in The Holy Quran and are as such part of ‘the great tradition’. ‘The great tradition’ represents the aspect of a religion that are formal and literate, Islam as defined by the Holy Scripture and the theologians.

Many of my informants did not have the opportunity to regularly perform the prayer (namaz), the long Arabic recitations and formal prostrations at the five daily prayer times. Namaz required a state of ritual cleanliness that was impractical for the girls who looked after siblings and who were constantly being polluted with children’s urine. During menstruation they were totally banned from prayer, being unclean, and the same during the month of fasting, Ramadan. Because of this, the practices of the ‘little tradition’ was even more important in the religious life of the girls and the women since they were somewhat excluded from observance of their faith. Instead they could gain merit in practices such as cooking and eating halwa at a shrine, dyeing the hands and feet with henna for naw roz, or by uttering blessings upon the wearing of a new garment.

When the dichotomy of great and little tradition was introduced in anthropology, the contrast between the two corresponded in large with the urban-rural divide. In my material this is not so clear-cut, since for instance the practice of visiting the shrines stood strong also among the urbanites. The educated Kabuli families of this study had great faith in the powers of the shrines. Only in Kabul there are several hundred shrines.

Another ‘little tradition’ that was typical for the religious life of women in Kabul, was the practise of nazr, the cooking of a type of ritual food as an offering or blessing. However, my
experience was that many educated Afghans were reserved when talking about aspects of ‘the little tradition’, particularly the concept of nazaar, ‘the evil eye’. Many regarded such belief as ‘traditional’, and wished to present a ‘modern’ self to me. One informant said she did not believe in nazaar and at the same time admitted “talking about it will attract bad luck”.

**THE POWER OF THE SHRINES**

“Without the shrines during the long war, we would have all been crazy”, a young woman in Kabul told me. She added that whenever she visited a ziyarat, a shrine, her heart felt peaceful. A shrine is the sacred burial ground of a saint and shaheed, a martyr. There are hundreds of shrines only in Kabul, and there is a proverb saying that if Afghanistan had one more shrine, it would be like a Mecca (the most holy place in Islam). The healing powers of the shrines are recognised among both urban and rural Afghans.

The shrines in Kabul are a very important aspect of the celebration of naw roz, Afghan New Year that coincides with the appearance of spring and the blossoming of the almond trees. The celebration is an ancient tradition with roots in pre-Islamic times, which has blended with Islamic practices and beliefs. This was the reason the Taliban regime regarded naw roz for unislamic, and banned the celebration. A main activity of the naw roz celebration has always been to visit the shrines in Kabul to seek blessings for the New Year. When I was in Kabul during naw roz, people tried to visit the shrines but armed Taliban were blocking the roads and dispersing the crowd by force and beating. The celebration took place in privacy and secrecy, in people’s homes. Women told me that they would not let the Taliban stop them from celebrating. The subtle resilience gave them a way to manage the frustrations and feeling of powerlessness induced by all the restrictions, violent force and humiliation by being prevented from performing their religion and the naw roz ritual with dignity.

People go to the shrines to pray for their health, to heal mental disturbances, to pray for fertility and the birth of a son. Or they pray for the success of an exam, a journey and – as in the case of Farida in Peshawar, for the success of their migration plans. The following story illustrates how health was a central concern to Sadia when she went to the shrine in Kabul.
THE QUEST FOR HEALING

Sadia, who lived in Kabul, had been feeling sick for a month or so. She complained of severe headaches, pains in her stomach and her legs went numb. She had no energy, and when I saw her she was just lying silently under her blanket whereas before she had been a quick and energetic. Her mother took her first to a female doctor at the only working hospital for women in Kabul. The doctor checked her out, found nothing wrong and told her to "get married".

The headaches and pains continued, her mother kept on searching for a cure and in doing so she took her to a mullah. The mullah prescribed a tawiz, an amulet made out of cloth stitched up with a verse from The Holy Quran inside. The tawiz was pinned to her clothes. The power of the tawiz is traditionally believed to be strong, but Sadia told me that she had not believed much in it before she went to the mullah. Even so the tawiz seemed to help her and for some days she felt better. At this time I talked with her and asked what she thought was the reason for her sickness. First she told me that it was asabi, nerves, and that her condition was caused by her worries. She said it made her feel better to look at old photos of her and her brother when they were children, and photos of her father when he was still alive.

Being a skilled artist, she also distracted herself by drawing in a sketchbook she had. But this activity made her nervous. It was forbidden by Taliban-law to reproduce nature-like images of people in paintings, drawings, photos or sculptures. One month earlier, the Taliban had come by to question her mother about her work. They had searched through the flat and in the process they found Sadia’s sketchbooks. The young Taliban became angry, started shouting and took the books and drawings away to burn them. She told me she had got a very strong headache when they left, and became sick around this time. Sadia stopped going out because then she had to wear the burqa that made her dizzy. She described the feeling as if her head was ‘burning’.

When I visited Sadia’s house in Kabul two months later, I found her mother alone at home. She said Sadia had gone to a ziarat, a shrine famous for its healing powers at the outskirts of Kabul. The tawis amulet had only improved her condition for a short while, and then she had gotten much worse. Everybody had thought the girl would die. The mother described how Sadia had fallen unconscious, and described fits with rolling eyes, screaming and moaning. The mother had tried every cure and healer available. They had been to the doctor again and Sadia was given injections (probably with antibiotics). Then they had been to several mullahs who had given various tawiz amulets to wear for protection as well as recommended offering of na’ar (ritual foods). Finally the last mullah they went to had been able to explain the reason
for her pains and to prescribe a cure that worked. Sadia had to go to a particular ziarat (shrine) for healing, because she had accidentally disturbed a jinn (spirit) that may cause sickness and death. The cure was to stay overnight at the shrine while giving offerings and praying. Sadia’s uncle had accompanied her to the shrine located in an underground cave, and had left her there alone. The next morning she had walked out of the shrine by herself, feeling fine. When I saw her again, she had completely recovered. She demonstrated by dancing for me, defying the Taliban ban on music by using her mother’s illegal tape recorder.

Sadia told me that she had slept all night in the shrine, she had not been afraid and she had dreamt a beautiful dream of running around on a green meadow with the sun in her hair. She also said that she thought the diagnosis of the mullah was accurate, she remembered a night she had walked home in the dark, and she had not seen that she stepped on a gravesite before she had felt the jinn brush by her.

It was the first time I heard her talk about jinns, although I knew of the phenomena from other sources. Sadia was not so concerned with why she had been sick, but was very happy for having been cured by the shrine. I joined her when she returned to the shrine to do an offering of halwa (a nazr dish of sweet milky rice), at the site of the shrine to pay respect and thanks to the shrine for having healed her. She said she would repeat this ritual of gratitude every year from then on.

In the next case story, Wafia, her mother and aunt went back to Kabul so that the aunt who was sick, could visit a shrine. I went with Wafia on this trip from Peshawar, and lived with them for a week in their old home in Microian. They said that even though there are shrines in Peshawar as well, Kabul has the shrines with the strongest powers.

Wafia aunt said her nerves had been damaged, “asab’em kharab bud”, and that she had a constant headache. I had spent a lot of time in their home in Peshawar and had seen how the aunt always seemed tired and she cried a lot. She had been to both Afghan and Pakistani doctors, but the valium and anti-depressive medication they gave her made her feel even worse. Therefore she wanted to try the healing power of the shrine in Kabul. We went to a shrine an hours drive outside of the city. The name of the shrine was chel tan (forty bodies) because forty martyrs were buried deep underground in a natural cave. The women did not know (or care about) details of the history of the shrine, only that it was an ancient shrine from the making of Afghanistan. An old woman, a guardian of the shrine, sat at the entrance and uttered blessings when she received a few rupees from the visitors.
When we were at the shrine, Wafia performed the rituals of prayer with a natural ease. It looked like the rituals were very familiar to her and internalised knowledge. Afterwards she revealed that she had prayed for her own success in finding a job, her aunt had prayed for her failing health, and they had both prayed for me to have a baby boy.

There are shrines in Peshawar as well, and both Pakistani and Afghan women visit them. In Peshawar, I experienced how Farida and her mother went to a local Pakistani shrine to ask for help. The family was on its way to an interview with the Canadian embassy in Islamabad, to try and obtain permission to go to Canada as refugees. Farida stopped the car when we passed by the shrine, so that she could pray for the success of for the family in their migration effort. Her mother had told her to perform this ritual on behalf of the family, and for five weeks already she had been visiting the shrine every Wednesday, believed to be the best day for such activities. It belongs to the story that Farida’s family had success in their migration move.

When the shaheed, the martyr of the shrine hears your prayer and makes your wish come through, you have to continue to pay a yearly thanksgiving through making an offering of ritually cooked food. The ritual is called a nazr. In Wafia’s family the mother cooks several nazr every year, one is for her prayers being heard when she asked for the birth of a son (after having had three daughters), and one is for the success of her eldest daughter to migrate to Europe. The nazr of a woman can be like a diary over past and present important events in the life course of her family. It struck me as an interesting chart of times of family crisis or thanksgiving, faithfully remembered over the years. Illness and birth, particularly of sons, were common reasons for making vows.

I have focused on expressions of emotions, and how the girls use local cosmology and religious practices to cope with health problems related to asabi, nerves. I have also attempted to illustrate with case stories how the informants interpret and try to overcome their problems by various means, ranging from going to the medical doctor, the mullah to visits to the holy shrines. But what can the girls do about macro politics and the war? If the girls were to understand their asabi related sickness and problems in the macro context of war, then how would they regain control over their health, minds and futures? By
interpreting their past and present troubles in the light of local cosmology and religion, both a diagnosis and the means for healing are offered. In this sense they are active participants of their lives, instead of helpless victims of the war.
CHAPTER 5: FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will explore the changes that has taken place with in the households and the families, and how the extended and trans-national family forms a network that is a potential resource to be mobilized. I look at how Peshawar is a key place in the Afghan diaspora, and how the institution of marriage has taken on a new dimension as a strategy for migration. To be a desirable potential bride, the girls have to fulfil the role of the good daughter. I explore the norms behind this role, and how the fear of gossip in the social networks of the girl puts a check on behaviour. Changing dress codes as a result of the shifting regimes, and the move to Peshawar is an interlinked theme. I explore how the girls cope with these shifts.

THE EXTENDED FAMILY NETWORK

In the introduction to this thesis, I argued against the widespread assumption that the war has caused a severe weakening, or erosion, in the role of the extended family networks as a coping resource. This assumption has been voiced in vulnerability studies and other reports on the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan, and it was commonly heard in the international expatriate community in Peshawar and Kabul.

However, my material shows that the above assumption fails to see that although widespread migration and dispersal of households and families have followed in the wake of war, the role of the family as a coping resource is no less important today. It might in fact be more important now than prior to the war, since the state as failed to provider of welfare to civilians.
The traditional role of the family is to provide welfare for its vulnerable members (children, widows, the elderly), as well as to assist members of the extended family based on a strong norm of reciprocity and loyalty towards kin and clan. In my experience these norms are still valued and shared among both young and old. My material indicates that the role of the extended family network is of major importance for the participants of this study: the girls and their families, in finding ways of coping and in finding ways out. The family network has not disappeared, however it has been transformed, and I will explore in this chapter the various ways it has changed.

A number of scholars have drawn the attention to the family as the core of Afghan society (Dupree, 1973, Tapper 1991). They argue that the family is the minimal unit Afghans identify with and feel loyal towards. Although the above-mentioned studies focus on rural society, my material indicates that the family is at the core of urban society as well. The girls in this study live their lives within the context of their families, and I explore in this chapter how the role of the family has changed under the volatile life conditions of war and exile.

One of my informants told me, “People are loyal first to the famili, then the khesawand [extended family, relatives], then the quam [tribe] and finally the millat [nation].” According to Omidian (1996:21) none of the mentioned units are constant and fixed; they should be regarded as flexible institutions and latent resources that can be mobilised in varying contexts. She argues that kinship and family are conceptual tools, in other words, it is the relationship between individuals and groups that defines them, not the groups themselves.

The flexibility of kinship is expressed in the use of classificatory kin terms. An illustration of this is when I had hired an Afghan friend to be our driver and protegé when I went with my assistants to the camp. Although he was not related to any of the girls they called him kaka (uncle). I interpreted this as a sign of respect towards an elderly person, but also as a symbolic inclusion in the family to justify the role of maharam, protegé. The practice of using classificatory kin terms is a way of expressing respect and inclusion in the family; it gives certain privileges but it also carries moral obligations (Eriksen, 1993:125)

I argue with Omidian (1996) that family should be seen as a flexible institution that can easily adapt to changes, and as a latent resource that can be mobilized. This is an argument also in line with the works of the Swiss anthropologist couple Centlivres, who have followed Afghan families in diaspora for more than twenty years. The Centlivres (1988) point out that
the scattering of neighbourhoods and family groups does not necessarily implicate their
disappearance, neither the disintegration of society nor culture nor the impossibility of their
reproduction.

Before I continue the discussion, I will define what I mean by family as opposed to
household. Gullestad argues that the household and family have to be separated as analytical
concepts. A household, she argues, “represents an economic and spatially organised unit
where productive and reproductive work tasks are distributed according to the various roles of
the members” (Gullestad, 1984). Family as a concept assumes a relation based on kinship or
affinality, but the term does not indicate the social and spatial organization. In my material the
households overlapped with kinship, and contained extended families.

In my experience, the boundaries (or membership) of the household were not fixed. If
Gullestad’s definition of a household as an economic and spatially organised unit implies that
all the economic contributors to the household must live under the same roof, the definition
excludes the members of a household that live in diaspora and who contribute through
remittances. For the purpose of my material, I expand the concept of household to include
these transnational relations, since such relations were of importance to the livelihood
strategies of the girls and their families. A more useful concept however, might be the concept
of mobile livelihoods.

The majority of the informant families relied on what I will call a strategy of mobile
livelihoods (Sørensen et al). A complex web of factors led the families to draw on as many
potential sources of income as possible, a strategy that led to a high degree of mobility within
and between households. All families in my material were spread out geographically, and had
members living in Kabul, Peshawar, and many had family who had migrated and lived in
Europe or North America. Those who stayed in Kabul often had the responsibility of looking
after property, business and elderly parents. They would receive remittances via relatives
living in Peshawar, who in turn received remittances from those living abroad. This strategy
of mobile livelihoods was reliant on the ability of individual households to mobilize their
extended family networks.
MOBILE LIVELIHOODS AND REMITTANCES

The recently launched concept of mobile livelihoods goes well with the present trend of focusing on global processes of mobility (Sørensen and Fog Olwig, 2002). Sørensen construct an analytical framework for how to approach migration, advocating a shift in the focus from "place" to "mobility", and from "place of origin" and "place of destination" to the movements involved in sustaining a livelihood. I find this advice useful when I focus on the social networks of my informant families, and the flow of people, money and information that takes place. Sørensen et al also argue that livelihood should not be thought of solely in economic terms, but also in terms of social institutions, saying that "An important aspect of people's livelihood strategies is the social relationships and cultural values that various strategies involve, the communities of belonging they circumscribe, and the kinds of movement in time and space they make possible or necessitate." (Sørensen et al, 2002: 9)

I find this definition of livelihood very useful to my material because it draws the attention to the social relationships within and between households, and the flow of remittances and people in these networks, as well as the economic coping strategies of the various members of the household.

Remittances play a crucial role in the economy of my informant households as well as to most Afghan households with trans-national networks. Because of its geographical closeness to the homeland, its large exile community and its infrastructure (providing banking facilities and telecommunication that is not available in Kabul) Peshawar has become a key place in the Afghan diaspora, connecting the homeland with the dispersed communities in other parts of the world. An Afghan NGO worker in Peshawar reflected on the scale of the remittances economy, saying, "Afghanistan and Afghans are more dependent on remittances than on aid!" This statement corresponds well with the findings of recent migration research, suggesting that "the remittances (recorded and unrecorded) sent by migrants and refugees are likely to be double the size of aid" (CDA, 2002). These findings also confirm that remittances are an important resource for many households in conflict-ridden areas because they move directly from person to person and therefore have a more direct impact than other resource flows.

Sørensen et al. argue that the benefits of remittances are selective, that they tend to go to the better-off households and communities since migrants tend to come from these households and communities. This corresponds with my findings. Of my thirteen informant families, ten had relatives living abroad, in Europe and America. They all received remittances in some form or another, and had plans to migrate themselves. Of the three families who did not have...
such links, two families lived in Kabul. The family in Kabul said they would have left for Peshawar or elsewhere if they had had the means to do so.

The families who most successfully mobilized their trans-national network were families whose members had migrated a while ago. When a migrant had established him or her selves in the country of destination, it was easier to be in a position to send savings back home. Those who left for western countries right after the Saur revolution and during the regime of Karmal (1979-1986) were intellectuals and individuals from the educated middle class, who probably had better chances of finding work. As Sørensen et al suggests, “Extensive networks of trans-national ties may have developed well before the recent upsurge in mass migration from particular places. These networks may be premised on already existing international migration pattern, whether voluntary or forced.” (2002:9)

**Changes in Household Composition**

Dupree wrote in his ethnography on Afghanistan that traditionally the Afghan residence practice was patrilocal, both in urban and rural areas. The bride moved to the household of the groom and the newly wed couple would live in the same compound as his parents and brothers. However, in urban settings such as Kabul the residence practice changed during the 60s to be more focused on smaller households containing the nuclear family. Dupree wrote in 1973 that “The extended family currently serves as the major economic and social unit in Afghanistan, particularly among non-literates, although eventually the nuclear family may take over.” (1973:189).

My material does not support Dupree’s prediction of a growing trend towards nuclear families. It indicates that the urban residence practice of nuclear family households changed in exile. This was confirmed by surveys carried out by the UNHCR among the urban town-dwelling refugees in Peshawar in 1994 and 1996. The surveyors found a pattern of two to three or more families sharing accommodation, with seven to ten people sleeping in the same room. Of my material of ten households in Peshawar, none consisted of nuclear families, they were all extended families composed of three or four generations, whereas some of these families had lived as nuclear families back in Kabul. Of the three girls in my sample that lived

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37 Verbal information from interview with UNHCR officer in Peshawar, May 1999.
in Kabul, two of them lived in nuclear households (widowed mothers with children). The third girl in Kabul lived with her widowed mother, who had moved back to her parents.

The traditional practice of patrilocal residence as described above, where the bride moved to the household of the husband’s parents, presupposed a moral obligation of the husband’s kin to support the widow and her children. In my material, there are examples of the opposite, that it was easier for a woman to mobilise her own kin when in need. When Farida’s paternal aunt had become a widow, she had moved into her brother’s household with her two grown children, instead of moving to her in-laws. Another example is Wafia’s mother, who was responsible for her old parents the last years before they passed away, a role that according to tradition belonged to the daughter-in-law.

Roles and responsibilities within the Afghan household are ascribed according to gender, age and kin relation, depending on cultural and societal norms (Omidian, 1996). The traditional gender and age hierarchy dictates that it is the oldest male of the household that have the formal decision making power and who acts as the reis-e-famili, the head of the household. There were several female-headed households in my material, meaning that a woman was the formal decision maker in the household on an everyday basis, in the absence of the man. In Wafia’s household, her father was absent and her mother was the head of the family, but it was Wafia who had an income. One should think that being the main income earner would allow for more partaking in formal decision making, but the hierarchy of age is strong and children should not challenge the decision making of their parents (as discussed in the previous chapter). In Meena’s household in the camp, it was the grandfather who was the head of the family even though Meena’s two grown aunt were working and provided for the family. The issue here is formal versus informal decision-making power in the household. My material supports the presupposition that the girls and women of this study exercise more of the informal than the formal kind of decision-making power.
THE FAMILY AS A SOCIAL NETWORK

It is crucial to discuss the social relations and extended families of the informants, because it provides a network and a potential resource that can be mobilised when needed.

So what do I mean by social network? The Centlivres write that the dispersed Afghan family is “characterized by its network function, defined as configurations of more or less permanent ties which transcend social and spatial limits of particular groups, as well as state borders” (Centlivres et al,1998:221). This definition overlaps with the concept of a diaspora; a dispersed populations with a common origin. Clifford describes diaspora as “Separate places effectively become a single community through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information” (Clifford,1994:303). Clifford’s definition points to the relevance of how and what resources flows in the networks, a point I have attempted to illustrate in the micro histories of the previous chapter.

Wellman (1988) defines social networks as strings that simultaneously constrain our freedom and provide us with opportunities to take initiatives, a definition that is of relevance to my material because the social relations and networks of my informants are strongly characterized by the norm of generalized reciprocity. There is a strong obligation to put the welfare and needs of the family before the welfare and needs of the individual, and to assist relatives who are in a less fortunate economic position. It can be an asymmetrical relation, where those who give, do so without any formal and strict expectation of repayment except a moral obligation on behalf of the receiver to return the favour when needed. This is the case when a household puts together its shared resources to assist a member to migrate. The person might never be in a position to repay all the money, but more importantly he/she will be obliged to return the favour by being a bridgehead for others to migrate.

NGOS AS A RESOURCE

International non-organizational organizations (NGOs) offer a job marked for skilled, English speaking Afghans, both in Kabul and in Peshawar and several of the girls had been working in connection with an NGO. After Wafia had worked as my field assistant in Peshawar, she got a job in the office of a German NGO in Peshawar. Her sister got a chance to travel abroad through the international NGO she worked with in Kabul. It illustrates how contact with the international NGOs and with expatriates provided a potential and valuable resource in the networks of the girls.
When the Taliban took power in Kabul in September 1996, an estimated 20,000 Afghans were in one way or the other working for the UN or an international NGO. In Peshawar the number was even higher (Centlivres, 1998). Being connected to, or working for an international NGO goes well beyond the relatively high salary and the opportunity for training and improving one's English. When working with an international NGO, a person can acquire a certain technical competence or even the opportunity of doing a degree abroad which is very valuable in a world where diplomas from Afghan faculties are rarely recognized. Moreover, those who are sent abroad on a stipend get to make connections and can facilitate migration. The Centlivres argue that the knowledge and training received through work in an international NGO represent, in the eyes of other Afghans, a symbolic capital by the mere fact that this training is given by a foreign organization. The person working in an NGO also enriches his or hers network with expatriates, who can enhance the ability to realize future livelihood and migration aspirations.

**THE SOCIAL NETWORKS OF THE GIRLS**

The social relations that are of significance to the girls in my material are the relations to their families. Apart from the time they spent at school or work where they had had contact with colleagues, teachers and classmates, they spent their time with family. Much of the time in an Afghan home is spent on receiving guests or going for visits. The mothers would receive other female relatives and the girls would sit with the grown women, listen and learn, after having been sent to the kitchen to make tea and get sweets for the guests. The girls would also come with their mothers when they went for visits to other households, and most of the time these visits were paid to the extended family; the house of an aunt, a cousin and so on. This way of socializing was an important part of strengthening and maintaining the social network. I interpreted the code of hospitality and visiting as belonging to the reciprocity norm of the family; that there is a moral obligation to provide for guests and to come and visit at important occasions such as the birth of a child, the death of a member of the household, the wedding party with women only at the house of the parents of the bride and so on. The guests are mostly relatives, and in my experience the girls and women mostly did the visiting. mothers, cousins and other female relatives, forming a close-nit world of female relations. Men might have other arenas, but for the women it is more acceptable to socialize in the home.
THE ROLE OF THE DAUGHTER

An important role for a young, unmarried Afghan girl is that of a khub dakhtar (khub means good, dakhtar means both daughter and girl). The girls described the ideal role and responsibilities of a daughter: a khub dakhtar is obedient and respectful towards her parents, helpful in the home, kind hearted and mild mannered, and she is a virgin, moral and chaste.

To follow these norms and codes will help to avoid negative talk that can damage the reputation of the girl and the honour of the family. A proper girl has to follow a modest dress code and not be seen in “bad” parts of the city (like the bazaar) without bringing other female relatives or a maharam 38. If proper conduct were not followed, there would be gossip.

“People talk too much”, my informants often said, explaining that such talk could damage a girl’s reputation, her family’s good name and her value in the marriage marked. It was the other girls and women who were the first to gossip, since the girls moved in circles of mostly all-female relations. The threat of being talked seemed to exert an effective control on the conduct of the girls. It was within the close-knit circles of female relatives, that the girls crafted their gendered identities as khub daktars.

An illustration is that when hen the girls dressed for wedding parties, it was important to look beautiful and attractive, and at the same time decent enough to not damage ones reputation. At weddings, the young unmarried girls got up and danced one by one, showing off in the middle of the circle, but if they danced too much and grinned to wide the married and older women who sat and watched would put their heads together and say she was no khub dakhtar. It was an amusement for the young girls to tease and dear each other to get up and dance in the open circle, pushing the limit for a khub dakhtar.

Farida loved dancing; with the floor to herself and the other girls clapping their hands, she would transform into a sensual, self-confident dancer shaking her shoulders to the music, radiant with all the attention. But her friends teased her, they said that “Farida cannot help herself” and “she smiles too much”. Farida obviously felt the whip of the words. She sat down and nobody could get her to dance anymore that evening.

38 All males are divided in two groups, maharam being the category of men a girl cannot marry (father, brothers, uncles or others defined as close relative) and the namaharams, those they can marry (everybody else including cousins). When a maharam function as the protégé and escort of a girl she avoids potential gossip that she has been having illicit relations with a namaharam.
EtherAm, respect, and haisyat, dignity are also important terms\textsuperscript{39} to understand the norms and conduct of a khub dakhtar. A young person has to show respect towards an elder person, the hierarchy within a family following age as much as gender. To show respect is to have dignity, and to be without dignity is to be without honour. Respect is shown through obedience, a young daughter is supposed to obey her parents, and an older sister demands respect and obedience from a younger sibling. It is without dignity to defy and argue with your parents. Then people say \textit{bEhaisyat as}, he or she has no dignity. The ideal is to be calm and smiling; to not expose strong emotions such as despair or anger. There is \textit{haysiat} (dignity) in hiding your heart, thoughts and emotions. This code of ethics puts an effective check on behaviour, but does not mean that the girls cannot find outlets for emotions or different ways of responding.

With the various phases of the war and the shifting regimes, my informants experienced that their roles were altered both within their households and in society at large. The girls had to negotiate with their parents to get permission to attend school and classes, and to have jobs outside the house. Farida also had the role as main income earner, traditionally reserved for a male head of the family. Such activities outside the house meant exposure to potential gossip. How did the girls counteract the risk of gossip, maintaining their reputation as \textit{khub dakhtars}?

The most obvious way was by means of modest dressing when moving in public space, as discussed below. Another way to move in public space without risking rumours was the \textit{maharam} practice; they brought a younger brother or a boy with them as a protégé. It was tedious for the little brother, but useful for the girl.

Within the family, it was the head of the household who had the formal authority, and in Farida's family it was the mother who had this role. However, Farida who was the actual income-earner was given certain privileges such as not having to do the housework. Another way for the girls to contest authority, was to keep a low profile and go about their doings without asking permission. An example was the way Meena's aunt without telling the grand father, put aside money for Meena's education. She opposed the authority of the grandfather in silence, letting him believe things were as he had decided.

\textsuperscript{39} Both words have their roots in Arabic, but are also used in Dari.
DRESS CODE AND BODY POLITICS

Rudie argues that the micro history has the body as its medium (Rudie, 2001:94), and that to observe bodily practices and how they change can be an intake to understand the adaptive process of the individual life course responding to changing macro-historical events. This is why I will explore the changing body politics of the different regimes, which with various means have tried to control the dress code and conduct of their subjects. The means of control has been concerned in particular with the dress code of girls and women, because women embody the symbolic honour of Afghan society. I will also explore the ways the girls and women have coped with and adapted to the changing rules and restrictions.

To understand the analytical concept of body politic, I quote Scheper-Hughes and Lock, who argue that

"When the sense of social order is threatened, the symbols of self-control become intensified along with those of social control. Boundaries between the individual and the political bodies become blurred, and there is a strong concern with matters of ritual and sexual purity, often expressed in vigilance over social and bodily boundaries" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987:24)

Extending Douglas’s theory of the physical, “natural” body and the social, “cultural” body, Scheper-Hughes and Lock introduce a third body; the political body. As such they extend the analysis to include a perspective of power and control, indicating that when the ruling elite in society experiences instability and threats, the control over individual bodies becomes a political matter. The social control mechanisms are expanded to regulate the boundaries of the group. The control of boundaries of individual bodies corresponds with the control of social boundaries of the group. The concept of body politic is helpful to understand why it has been imperative for the various regimes to dictate dress code.

The following story from the mid-80s illustrates that body politic and the social control over individual bodies was effective also in the communist area, and not only in the time of the Mujahedin and the Taliban. The various regimes and ideologies have all attempted to dictate what people should wear. During the communist phase, the school children wore uniforms, boys wore white shirts and black trousers, and girls had white blouses, black skirts and white small headscarves. Farida recalled a story from when she went to 5th grade. A boy in her class had turned up at school in *peron-tomban* (the Afghan version of *shalwar kameez*) and the teacher had sent the boy crying back home to change into a shirt and trousers. The teacher had
scolded the boy for being “dirty” even though his clothes were clean. The boy’s family was from a village outside of Kabul, and I understood that the teacher thought the village way of dressing was inappropriate for going to school. The peron-tomban was matter out of place in the classroom in Kabul, where the school uniform symbolised the purity and modernity of the state and the communist regime.

When the Mujahedin took power, one of the first things the new regime did was to announce that all women in the city had to cover themselves. My informants tell that the women of Kabul were used to wear only small headscarves or no cover at all, and no tomban (trouser) under their skirts. The keenness of the Mujahedin to exercise control over the city population, faded after some time and their concern was directed towards defending their position at the frontlines. When the Taliban gained control, again there was an intense concern with restricting dress code and controlling the body. The Taliban went further, and established the Ministry of the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue, which produced edicts about dress code and proper moral behaviour. In Afghanistan the wearing of the burqa (or chaderi as it is also called) has traditionally been a matter of the family, until the Taliban made it a matter of the state. It should be said that despite the discomforts of girls and women who are not accustomed to wearing the burqa, most Afghan women I have met are more concerned with their rights (or lack of such) related to work and education, than with the dress code restrictions they face under the Taliban. It is easy to interpret “the problem of the burqa” as looming larger in the western media and opinion than in the minds of Afghan women, exactly because of the potency and symbolic power of the politicised body.

For my informants, moving to Peshawar presented yet again a change in expected dress code. The dress code of Peshawar is the Pakistani shalwar-kameez for both men and women. It is a garment that emphasise modesty; a wide and long tunic over loose, baggy pants, and for women also a large chador (shawl) covering the hair and body, and if preferred, parts of the face. As explained in the background chapter, many women in Peshawar wear the burqa, a practice that is decided by tradition within the family.

When I first saw Wafia in Peshawar, it was easy to tell that she was a Kabuli girl. She stood out with her small chador (shawl), blouse and long skirt without tomban (trousers). When she came inside the house she often took the chador as well as her skirt, revealing the jeans she wore underneath. She said that in Kabul she was used to wearing jeans and T-shirt in the house. Gradually she too adapted to the more conservative dress code of Peshawar. To cover
up and dress more conservatively became a way to cope and avoid the gossip that could result from her having a job outside the house. The girls also learnt to turn the limited range of appropriate models of the *shalwar kameez* into fashionable outfits by tailoring and experimenting in their homes with various textiles and colours.

Once I discussed the strict dress code of the Taliban regime with Farida’s father, he told me that he had changed his looks so many times, he had been clean shaven with a suit and a tie during the communist regime, had grown a beard when the Mujahedin came and put on a *shalwar kameez* when they moved to Peshawar. He was sure he would have to change again if they moved to Canada. Farida, who was listening, said that she would never stop wearing her *chador* even if they migrated. She said she did not want to “loose her culture” in a foreign country, and that she had seen it happen to other girls.

I spoke with Farida on the phone from Canada six months after they had migrated, and asked if she was still wearing her *chador*? She laughed and said that in the beginning she had been wearing a headscarf, but then everybody in her class thought she was an “extremist”. She had stopped wearing the headscarf, and now she felt more comfortable without.

**Marriage - an arena for networking**

A central theme in the families and for the girls of this study is marriage. Marriage as an institution has taken on a new significance with the development of a trans-national Afghan diaspora, and has become a way out for those with aspirations to migrate. Afghan weddings in Peshawar are frequently between brides from Kabul and grooms who have migrated to a western country. The wedding parties are in themselves arenas for networking, as they often gather as many as five hundred people of the extended family on each side. Relatives who live abroad come to Peshawar to attend the wedding and to visit family, as well as to actively look for potential marriage partners for their young sons and daughters back in the country they have migrated to. This way links between the diaspora and the homeland is maintained and expanded.

The parents arrange marriages; in particular the mothers are active in the matchmaking process. The fathers of the couple do the formal negotiations leading to the *nika* part of the wedding ceremony, the signing of the contract that spells out the juridical and economic rights and obligations of the two parts. But it is the mothers, particularly the mother of the
girl, who has the informal decision making power, according to my field experience and to literature on the topic (Stang Dahl, 1992).

Important criteria for a bride-to-be were beauty and proper conduct. For a groom it was his family background and income-earning position that were the foremost criteria, but as an informant said; “These days the parents only care about money”. She argued that in the Afghan community in Peshawar, parents were mostly concerned with paisa (money), when accepting a son-in-law. “First they ask how much money he has, then the name (reputation) of his family, then his education and finally his personality”. If the parents could get a marriage proposal for their daughter from an Afghan who had migrated to Europe or North America, they would not even ask his family name, she claimed, but would accept immediately thinking it was the luck of their daughter and entire family.

According to Muslim doctrine marriage and children is a duty to Allah and to society. Until a girl gets married and becomes a khanum (meaning both wife and woman), she will remain a dakhtar (meaning both daughter and girl) no matter her age. For my informants who were young and unmarried, the topic of marriage produced ambivalent feelings; it was a topic of romance and entertainment (when discussing and attending the weddings of other girls, and when fantasising about the handsome young man who should come and whisk them away) and of great concern and worry (would their parents find a nice man? Would he allow them to complete their education and have a career?).

Farida said wisely “To fall in love is a curse!” She knew she was expected to marry according to her parents’ choice, and therefore to fall in love could only result in a broken heart. She had, like so many other girls her age, seen the film “Titanic” several times on video, and had no problems relating to the tragic and romantic story of how the hero and heroine could not have each other because of their class and family background.

The girls worried because they knew that Afghan men expected an obedient wife who agreed to the job of looking after the house, the children and his old parents. They knew that many of the educated and broad-minded young men with whom they could imagine a good marriage, had migrated already. A girl in Peshawar joked, “It is only the old, ugly and poor left”. But not all migrated Afghan men are good potential husbands. Farida told me how her cousin had been shocked in her wedding. The cousin was only eighteen years old, very beautiful and well mannered, and the groom had been an Afghan man twice her age. She did not see him before the wedding because he was living in Australia. When she saw him she
thought he was so old and ugly, he had bleached his hair in a western fashion and was chewing gum under the wedding ceremony, totally without dignity.

I was told stories about alliances that would have been very unlikely before the war, girls with university degrees married off to men without any education, or older women married to younger boys. In these cases it was Afghan girls living in the United States or Europe who married Afghan boys living in Peshawar or Afghanistan. In such cases the aspiration to migration out ruled traditional gender roles and custom. For Afghan girls who had lived for a while in the west it was often difficult to find an Afghan partner, since the boys of the Afghan communities in exile preferred to marry "unspoilt" Afghan girls who had not lived in the west, I was told. My informants talked about such marriages as "green card" marriages and strategies for migration.

At the weddings I attended in Peshawar, men and women were separated in different rooms. The only mixed Afghan weddings I attended where held in Islamabad, the more liberal capital of Pakistan. Prior to the war, the wedding practice of the urban middle class in Kabul had been to mix guests at the wedding parties, with live music and dancing. With the conservative influence of the Mujahedin and the Taliban, mixed weddings with music had become impossible in Kabul. Those who could afford it would instead plan for their wedding to be held in Peshawar, where they could have live music and dancing if not mixed guests. The practice of gender segregation at weddings had been revitalized in exile, influenced by the conservative culture of Peshawar.

Even when the girls knew the wedding party was gender segregated, they put a lot of effort into their looks, dress and make-up. The girls dressed up in slinky and sexy dresses, and arranged their hair and make-up to look like the actress Kate Winslet from Titanic. Then they covered up in their chadors and burqas and hurried in a taxi to the locality of the wedding. When I commented on this, Farida said I was stupid to think they tried to look pretty for men. We dress for each other, she said. And it was a correct observation, because the girls and women were using the opportunity to look among the other female guests for potential brides for their brothers and sons. Because of the general gender segregation, young Afghan men had few opportunities to find a girl themselves; they depend on their sisters and mothers to do this job.

The wedding parties were always video taped, and the tapes circulated among all the guests and were sent to family abroad. In light of this, I understood better the importance for the
young, unmarried girls of looking their best at the wedding party; a potential mother-in-law in Germany, Holland or Canada could be watching and judging their appearance, way of dressing and way of dancing.

An arranged marriage of the “green card” category does not have to mean that there is no romance involved. Long distance can create sweet expectations. An informant got engaged to a young Afghan living in New York, whom she had never met before. The engagement party had taken place in Peshawar, but he had not been able to attend. The ceremony was held in his absence, and video taped with a lot of lingering close ups of her beautiful face. He watched it every night in New York, the girl told me, and they wrote letters and talked on the phone. She was very exited about the forthcoming wedding that was to take place in Germany (because her fiancé who had an American citizenship at the time could not obtain a visa to Pakistan, and because they both had relatives in Germany). After the wedding they would have to part again, and she would have to return to Peshawar to wait for her green card before she could join him in New York, a process that can take up to one year. Meanwhile, they communicated by letters, phone calls and videos.

I asked the girl who was waiting to go to New York, if she would miss home. She smiled and said that her husband’s home in New York now was her home too. She would miss her parents in Peshawar, but surely they could come and visit her in America and she expected to come and visit frequently in Peshawar. I asked if she hoped to be able to move back to Kabul one day, if the situation changed and there was peace and stability. She said she always had Kabul in her heart, and only Allah knew the future. She only knew that she wanted her children to grow up with opportunities she had not had herself, and she wanted her sons and daughter to get good educations and futures. This probably meant that her life would be lived in America, and she would make it her task to raise her children to be “good Afghans” and her daughters to be khub dakhtras. “And when peace comes to Afghanistan, insh Allah, then I will bring my children so that they can see with their own eyes the beautiful country we come from, and we can stay for long vacations”.

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CONCLUDING REMARK

The above story of the Afghan wedding that took place in Germany, with a bride who lived in Peshawar and a groom who lived in New York, illustrates the trans-national nature of the extended family network. It also indicates that the urban and educated middle class people are not so much "refugees" who are away from "home", and who live their life in exile in anticipation of the "return", but as mobile cosmopolitans with identities not rooted in place, but in the context of their extended family networks.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has tried to capture the mastering of the practical and emotional sides of life in situations of war and exile.

An objective has been to challenge the tendency within international refugee discourse of seeing people who affected by war and displacement as mere victims and speechless emissaries. I have attempted to bring out the coping, creative aspects of my informant’s life histories and everyday practice, focusing on young girls as social actors without disregarding the difficult circumstances of their lives.

The complexity and the diversity of the refugee experience of my informants show that people living under circumstances of war and displacement are not a homogeneous group, and that, as Malkki has put it, in order to address their concerns and understand their strategies and ways of coping, they must be seen in the context of their specific political histories (in Fog-Olwig et al., 1997). I have therefore attempted to place the girls within the context of the political history of war in Kabul, using the concepts of micro and macro history (Rudie, 2001). They are analytical tools designed to capture the relation between the micro-cosmos of social life and the macro-cosmos of historical and political processes. For the girls, the two spheres are not separate but are closely interconnected in their everyday lives.

I have introduced an analytical divide between emotional and practical ways of coping, a divide that does not exist in the life experience of the girls. Being an anthropologist my attention has been directed towards the relational and cultural aspect of emotional mastering of grief, loss and stress. I found that the girls and women drew on cosmology; religious and cultural practices in order to find emotional outlets. I will not list them all here, but repeat what a woman in Kabul said about visiting the holy shrines; “without the ziyarats we would
have all been crazy”. I was told that the shrines in Kabul have a more intense healing power than the shrines in Peshawar, and people in exile would return to visit particular shrines. To visit the shrines to receive blessings and healing seemed more urgent to the girls and women who were “stuck” in Kabul. In Peshawar, they had more ways of finding emotional outlets, for instance at the wedding parties were music and dancing was allowed, in contrast to the restrictions on all expressions of fun and female communion in Kabul. The wedding parties provided important social occasions for meeting the extended family and maintaining the social network. In Peshawar the wedding parties had also taken on the significance of networking occasions for the relatives who lived in diaspora and who had come back to find a bride or groom.

My material indicates that there is a strong concern and preoccupation with health problems related to *asabi*, nerves, and that the girls and women connect such problems to grieving “too much”. The best way to cope with difficult emotions is to hide them in your heart, behind a smiling face. To talk about troubled lives and past memories only makes one sad.

My material also challenge the idea that identity is rooted in place and that people risk loosing their cultures and identities in exile. Following this line of thought, repatriation should be the most desired solution for the refugees. This was not the case for the girls and their families. At the time of my fieldwork, none of my informants’ families regarded returning to Kabul a durable option, for reasons mainly linked to lack of education and livelihood opportunities. They were also uncertain about how the security and the political situation in Kabul would develop, not wanting to “put all their eggs in one basket” by moving back to a situation that experience had taught them could change overnight.

The mobilizing of resources and the planning for migration was a major concern in the lives of my informant families in Peshawar. I registered differences between the town dwellers and the camp dwellers, the camp dwellers having weaker links to the diaspora and almost no access to remittances. The majority of the town dwellers had relatives abroad who regularly assisted them financially, and who could facilitate the migration process of those in Peshawar. Those who stayed in Kabul at the time of my fieldwork were either the most destitute with no means to even pay for the bus fare to Peshawar, or they were more wealthy people who received remittances from relatives abroad while they looked after property and took care of old parents and business in Kabul.
A main finding of this study is that the family as an institution has not eroded because of the war, although important changes have taken place. The norm of reciprocity and loyalty is still, if not more, important in exile. Refugee households in Peshawar comply with the moral obligation to shelter and feed relatives who come from Afghanistan. The same happens with regard to the moral obligation migrants have to send remittances back to their families in Peshawar and Afghanistan. People, who used to live in nuclear family households in Kabul, now live in extended family households in Peshawar. More people share less space, and supplement by remittances from migrated relatives.

The high number of female-headed households in my material was not intended but seems to reflect the actual state of affairs. According to my informants this is a growing trend due to the increasing number of war widows and of women who are abandoned by their husbands who are migrants or involved in war related activities. Traditionally the deceased husband’s family should look after the widow and her children by including her into the household of the parents or brother-in-law, but in my material it was often the other way around, it seemed to be easier for a woman to mobilize assistance from her own kin than from her in-laws.

The refugee families maintained strong links with Kabul while living in Peshawar, and my material shows how the families travel back and forth between Kabul and Peshawar. They try to keep a foot in each place; if possible to keep property in Kabul and have a family member living there to look after it. It seems to be important to not burn all bridges, to have an opportunity of return, and at the same time being realistic about where the future lays. Parents were very explicit that they migrated to give their children an opportunity for a proper education, something they could only dream of in Kabul or Peshawar. Peshawar can be described as a key place that connects the homeland with the Afghan diaspora. The families of my two key informants have left Pakistan after the completion of my fieldwork; one family lives in Denmark, the other in Canada. The process of eventually leading to migration took several years while living in Peshawar.
The trans-national nature of the extended family network was another major finding. I had come to explore how people got by; instead I found that they got out. My material indicates that urban and educated middle class people regarded themselves not so much as "refugees" who are away from "home", and who live a temporary life in exile while waiting for the "return", but rather as mobile cosmopolitans whose identity is not rooted in place, but in the context of the family network.

An underlying theme of this thesis has been to explore whether there is an Afghan way of coping, without disregarding the uniqueness of the individual. On the basis of my material, which of course is limited, and the prior knowledge I have of Afghans, I will argue that there is an "Afghan way" or outlook on life that draws strength from a code of ethics rooted in the cosmology and in religion that emphasises resilience and bravery.

I do not intend to delve into the meta discussion of what constitutes culture, an ongoing theoretical debate within anthropology. But I think culture is about meanings, ideas and values that are shared at a general level, and like Geertz (1975:18), I suggest that culture cannot be studied in isolation from social action. By observing social action as well as engaging in dialogue with my informants, I have attempted to extract ideas and values that constitute a common outlook on life; a cultural mind map within which to interpret the various experiences and challenges life presents on an every day basis.
APPENDIX

Glossary

**asabi** nerves

**arusi** wedding party

**bibi haji** healer, elder woman who has been to *haj*

**burqa** women’s veil completely covering face and body

**chador** Iranian veil, covering head and body but not the face

**eid** religious festival: Eidi Ghorban, the Festival of the Sacrifice, associated with the pilgrimage to mecca; Eidi Ramadan, concluding the month of the fast

**ether Am** respect

**fatiha** funeral ceremony

**haj** pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars (duties) of Islam

**halwa** sweet ritual food distributed as alms

**haisyat** dignity

**jinn** spirit belonging to Islamic and pre-Islamic Arab cosmology, thought to cause sickness, madness or death.

**judo** intentional spell causing bad luck, sickness and death

**mujahedin** ‘holy warriors’

**mullah** Islamic cleric; man with religious learning

**namaz** ritual prostrations and Arabic recitations performed at the five daily prayer times

**nazaor** ‘evil eye’, unintentional negative spell caused by jealousy and envy

**nazar‘vow’**, ritual food cooked according to personal obligation during the month of Safar, often brought as offering to the local shrine.

**naw Roz** Afghan new year

**nekah** religious marriage ceremony

**quesmat** fate as decreed by God

**ramadan** lunar month of fasting during daylight
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sawab</td>
<td>religious merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shaheed</td>
<td>martyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sheikh</td>
<td>holy man, healer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shia</td>
<td>minority sect of Islam, state religion of Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sunni</td>
<td>orthodox sect of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tawiz</td>
<td>healing or protective prayer worn as an amulet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ziyarat</td>
<td>local shrine, the grave of martyrs, saints and holy men, believed to have healing powers and much visited by women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Appendix on Refugees

(Source: Essential Field guide to Afghanistan, 1997)

1978: First refugees begin fleeing from midsummer onwards as fighting erupts in the wake of the Saur (April) Revolution.
1979: 600,000 refugees by the end of the year, fleeing to Pakistan (400,000) and Iran (200,000).
1980-83: Refugee exodus increases dramatically to 3.9 million as Soviet-Afghan military strikes against the resistance, including deliberate attacks on the civilian population in what some observers describe as "migratory genocide."
1987: Refugee populations in Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere reach 5.9 million.
1989: Red Army troops withdraw in February. Fighting in Afghanistan reverts to that of a civil war as the Mujahedin continue their battle against the communist PDPA Kabul regime. Refugee numbers continue to rise to 6.1 million despite some refugee returns.
1990: The Afghan exile population reaches a record 6.2 million, nearly half the world's total refugee population. An estimated 350,000 have returned to Afghanistan since 1988.
1992: Najibullah's communist government falls to the Mujahedin in April. An estimated 1.6 million refugees return home.
1993-94: factional fighting devastates much of Kabul with fighters often showing complete disregard for civilians. Up to 1 million internal refugees ("internally displaced persons" or IDPs) are now believed to have fled to other parts of the country. Another 1.3 million external refugees return to peaceful areas of the country. 3.4 million refugees still outside the country at the end of the year.
1994: Taliban forces capture Kandahar. Refugee numbers continue to fall slowly with returns.
1995: Taliban capture Herat in September. Repatriation of refugees from Iran comes to a halt. The Taliban reach the outskirts of Kabul. Refugee numbers stabilize at 2.7 million.
1997: Refugee population in exile stands at 2.6 million.
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