

Talking about Internal Migration, Displacement, and Getting by
in the City of Mazar-e Sharif, Afghanistan

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For Ustad Barzin-Mehr, Balkh University, Mazar-e Sharif,
who generously opened his house for me and did everything to make his wondrous
and wonderful country a comfortable place for me.

Kein Wort ist wahr, nur weil es dokumentiert ist,
und nichts wird klar, nur weil es gut recherchiert ist,
und nichts wird erlöst, nur weil Du ständig nachdenkst über Ungerechtigkeit.

Maike Rosa Vogel
Kein Wort ist wahr. 2012: Fünf Minuten

Summary

As a compilation of interviews this book provides insight into the narrations of internal migrants who have come to the Afghan city Mazar-e Sharif, a metropolis located in the north of the country. Mazar-e Sharif is an important commercial center with lively bazaars. It is home to both private and state universities and, due to a comparatively good security situation, Mazar-e Sharif became the seat of many international organizations and NGOs in the time of research. It was also an attractive travel destination with many restaurants, hotels, and recreational and athletic facilities.

At the same time, it is a destination for large numbers of poor internal migrants and returning refugees. Migration to the city is provoked by poor economic prospects in many rural areas of Afghanistan which also suffer from violence, threats, and insecurity. Once they reach this city, however, many of the mostly poor migrants face precarious living conditions, unemployment and legal insecurity, poverty, and a lack of support. Against this background, the interviews in this book show *what* people say about their relocation to town and *how* they say it, emphasizing the important function of narrating as one of several livelihood strategies in difficult surroundings.

Zusammenfassung

Dieses Buch gibt durch eine Zusammenstellung von Interviews Einblicke in die Erzählungen von Menschen, die als Binnenmigrant_innen in die afghanische Stadt Mazar-i Sharif gekommen sind. Mazar-i Sharif ist eine wichtige Metropole im Norden Afghanistans. Die Stadt ist ein wichtiges Handelszentrum. Es gibt dort mehrere private und staatliche Universitäten. Mazar-i Sharif wurde durch die vergleichsweise gute Sicherheitslage zur Zeit dieser Forschung Sitz vieler internationaler Organisationen und NGOs und war ein attraktives Reiseziel mit vielen Restaurants, Hotels, Freizeit- und Sporteinrichtungen.

Gleichzeitig ist Mazar-i Sharif der Anlaufpunkt für viele arme Binnenmigrant_innen. Die Migration in die Stadt wird durch die schlechten wirtschaftlichen Perspektiven in den ländlichen Regionen Afghanistans aber auch durch die Flucht vor Gewalt, Bedrohung und Unsicherheit verursacht. Doch auch in der Stadt sind viele der meist armen Zuziehenden mit prekären Lebensverhältnissen, Arbeitslosigkeit und Rechtsunsicherheit, Armut und fehlender Unterstützung konfrontiert.

Vor diesem Hintergrund zeigen die in diesem Buch vereinten Interviews *was* die Menschen über ihre Umsiedlung in die Stadt erzählen und *wie* sie dies tun. Es wird herausgestellt, dass auch das Erzählen selbst eine wichtige Funktion hat und ein Teil der verschiedenen Lebenssicherungsstrategien der Menschen in diesem schwierigen Umfeld wird.

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¹ Notes on transliteration follow in the part "Presenting data"

two employ in your enthusiastic research work. I learned a lot.

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² From 2011-2016 Crossroads Asia aimed as an interdisciplinary competence network to provide research on a certain region without it as a geographical area. Therefore, a focus is laid on translocal links that are generated by multidimensional flows of people, goods, and ideas. For further information visit: www.zef.de/crossroads (last seen on 04/20/2023)

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1. Introduction

I remember standing in the Afghan city Mazar-e Sharif in a crowded, busy, and loud bazaar. Cooked food, bread, vegetables, and fruits were being sold all around me on pushcarts and on the ground. People were busily running their errands before dinner. I talked to a young man, who, searching for work, came to town from a remote area. To make ends meet he began working as a construction worker during the day and as kitchen helper in a restaurant at night. While we talked, he cleaned a large iron pot. *“What is the difference between the people in your village and the people here in town?”* I asked him. *“There is no difference”,* he answered laughing, *“two feet, two hands. No difference”*.³

Like this first snapshot exemplifies, my research is about people who came from the Afghan countryside into the city Mazar-e Sharif, and about their life as newcomers in town.⁴ My investigation traces how these people talk about their relocation. These conversations include accounts about the areas left behind, the conditions there, and the reasons that might have influenced their decision to move. They also cover descriptions of the act of moving to and arriving in the city. Finally, these predominantly poor newcomers spoke a great deal about their lives in town. Three different stages of the migration process and their respective spaces and points in time will be assessed: before migration in the countryside; on the move; and at their urban destination after migration. All these stages and places cannot be regarded as isolated as they are linked in various ways. To a large degree they are also interconnected through the narrations of the conversational partners whose voices are heard in this book.

In this book I ask what can be learnt from what people told me about their migration and what is special about the representation of mobility and the issues connected to the topic of moving: What assessments and justifications for moving from one place to another are given? Can these descriptions be connected to theoretical discussions on mobility and especially to the debate about

³ Interview on 12.09.2011

⁴ The term *newcomer* is used to describe the range of people that are of concern in my research. It is not linked to the geographical dimension of a relocation nor - and this is perhaps more important - with reasons why people move to town. I also use the term migrant for internal migrants. Additional terms describing this research's interlocutors are: Internally Displaced Person (IDP), internal refugee, refugee and also the Dari term *mohāġer* and its plural *mohāġerīn*. Most central and present when talking about forced migration is the term 'refugee'. The 1951 United Nations' Refugee Convention is the relevant basis for the concept, defining a refugee as someone who:

"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country". www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html (last seen on 04/20/2023)

The most important characteristics of this official definition are the involuntary movement and the geographical position of the refugee outside of their own country. From this point of view, the term internal refugee is futile, maybe even wrong. But the awareness rose that people were also in refugee-like situations in their own countries, being displaced from their home regions and facing problems similar to those of refugees who left their country. The fact that these people are also in special need of external protection and support showed the insufficiency of the category refugee as a basis for political action and humanitarian work. Therefore, in 1992 the UN started to use the term internally displaced person, abbreviated as IDP. Based on the UN attempts to define IDPs these are understood as:

"persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border" (UN-OCHA 2004: Introduction).

As opposed to refugee, IDP is not a legal definition in international law and has less political implications.

coercion in migration? Which social relations, livelihood strategies, and survival tactics become apparent in these interviews and in the ways that mobility is presented? How do we understand talking and narrating in the context of widespread poverty, rapid urbanization, and international intervention?

More than a decade has passed since my fieldwork in Afghanistan and my study has unexpectedly soon turned into a historical one. The Taliban takeover of 2021 deprived me of any chances to go back for a final checking and updating before publication, so that some uncertainties remain unresolved. Many basic conditions taken for granted in the early 2010s have dramatically changed or may have altogether disappeared: from the overall embedding of Afghanistan's economy and politics in a global web to the dynamic local new money-nurtured labor market of, for example, the public and private construction sector and petty industries catering to new middle-class consumption needs; from a thriving NGO-driven rent seeking business to women's options of action outside of the home; and many more. The (in)security situation in rural areas is very different from what it was back then, and so is the condition of the city of Mazar-e Sharif. Perhaps next to everything has changed for people of modest means such as my interlocutors – but maybe it hasn't; there is no way for me to know. I cannot include any of the new developments in this study, which should therefore be understood as what it is: a snapshot from one short phase of Afghanistan's recent history, aiming at shedding light on some selected social phenomena connected to movement and migration.

Afghan Urban Spaces

My field research in 2011 and 2012 took place in a special period of time: People in Afghan urban centers had witnessed about a decade of state building and reconstruction efforts after 30 years of war.⁵ Their towns were showing signs of a global economy and world politics. New means of communication connected these places with other places worldwide. Capital flows from diverse directions facilitated massive building activities. Lively trade and flashy luxury existed and seemed to be influenced in their styles and forms by images, ideas, and ideals of manifold origins. This global connectedness by trade, trends, and images might be seen as a consequence of globalization in general. It was also a result of all those far-traveled and widely-scattered Afghans who brought - or sent - home what they had seen and experienced in Pakistan, Iran, and other places all around the world. International military, foreign governments and various international organizations were shaping the built environment (e.g. Issa 2009). The security demands of international actors strongly impacted on the mobility-related opportunities of 'normal' city inhabitants. Translocal flows and global connections were influencing the invisible world, too, like ideas about, and discourses on values, art, popular culture, traditions, and social change.

Since 2001, Afghan cities had been sheltering many thousands of returnees who came home from exile in neighboring countries, as well as masses of poor internal migrants from the rural areas.

⁵ This does not mean that fighting ended after 2001. Many conflicts went on and various efforts establishing peace and security proved to be unsustainable. The number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan remained high and the overall security situation deteriorated constantly and culminated with the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

These people dwelled on the sprawling outskirts of the cities and on inner-city fallow lands, often in makeshift or otherwise low-quality homes. People also settled in large refugee camps that became a precarious yet permanent home for many. Like in many urban and urbanized regions across the world, in the urban areas of Afghanistan global developments became intertwined with local conditions.

We found a particular political and economic situation in the Afghan cities of that time that was shaped by global, regional, national, and local movements and relationships. This specific dynamic influenced how the people who are at the center of this study managed their livelihoods and how they interacted with, and reacted upon, one another. A detailed look at these actors in Afghan cities also lays open how people with everything they do shape spaces and create new links and relationships. In this research, I will retrace the movements of several of these poor newcomers to Mazar-e Sharif in their everyday lives. I will also scrutinize their manifold reasons for relocation, and their opinions on and assessments of their personal migration and the migration phenomenon at large. Thus, in this study I am taking on my conversation partners' perspective on migration and moving as an individual experience as well as a large-scale social process.

Forced Migration?

While reviewing literature on rural-urban migration, I found several instances of growing numbers of internal migrants and increasing internal displacement due to ongoing or new conflicts and violence, even after 10 years of continuous state building efforts and security sector reforms. These isolated reports mostly came from humanitarian agencies or Human Rights groups (e.g. Refugees International 2011; UHCHR 2012). Reporting on a state of affairs in Afghanistan which they described as less than satisfactory at best, they contradicted the narrative of progress that, at least until the early 2010s, was still being touted by foreign governments and other big international players involved in the 'reconstruction' of Afghanistan. This discrepancy was what sparked my interest in migration and within that broad field of research, in forced migration in particular.

My basic assumption was that rural dwellers increasingly flee from conflicts in their home regions and come to the cities, which are regarded to be a safer place. I wanted to learn about the dangers people had been, or at least felt, exposed to, and how the fact that their moving was represented as 'flight' might have influenced the process of migration itself when compared to types of moving that might be regarded as 'voluntary'.

Violence affects migration decisions and migratory processes in a decisive manner. However, mass migration to towns and the urbanization which comes with it is also driven by people's hope for better economic prospects and access to social services and education, and possibly by the desire for a new life in town with less strict social control and moral norms, just to name a few. Although Chamberlain (1997) points out rightly that asking for the reasons of migration is a moot question as "*[p]osing the question itself presupposes that migration is an abnormal condition*" (Chamberlain 1997: 5), I was particularly interested in exactly those reasons. The responses provided by my interlocutors would hopefully provide an explanation and deeper understanding of reasons for migrating.

Yet, talking to people in Afghanistan, asking why they had migrated to town only yielded difficult answers. Things turned complicated when I discovered that there is no sharp delineation between forced and voluntary migration and that, for example, economic migration, which by many standards is considered ‘voluntary’, can take on a very coercive character for individuals. Complexity increased in situations where different stories arose from people’s descriptions about supposedly same things. Sometimes contradictions appeared within one person’s descriptions or people tried to teach me how to understand accounts of others, purportedly knowing exactly who was telling me ‘the truth’ and who was not.

So, what was to be done with information that was provided to me, but which was far from being clearly intelligible, definitive or representative? How was I to handle stories that came as impressive accounts of flight, but were subsequently devalued by information gleaned from someone who ‘was in the know’? Is it possible in such a case to derive valid knowledge from any of these interviews?

An additional obstacle I came across was the broad narrational and stylistic variety of stories and biographies, and consequently, migration patterns extracted from these. Forced and other migration was experienced and expressed in different ways by different people for many reasons. It soon became clear that there was no way of finding out the one and only ‘true’ story about the relocation of poor dwellers to the city: The diversity of data would not permit simple and easy insights of the kind ‘insecurity elsewhere instigates migration, and the city is per se a safe haven and convenient place for the movers’.

Narrations

While I was still undecided about which research approach to take, I read a remark by Nazif Shahrani that inspired me to set my focus on how people were talking about their migration processes. With reference to Afghan migration and flight he wrote: “*The choice of language and the use of a particular vocabulary, both in the discourse of the refugees as well as in the discourses about them, can serve to mystify as well as clarify the social processes and historical realities depicted*” (Shahrani 1995: 188).

These words are to be understood as part of the post-modern impulse to question and deconstruct established terms and seemingly well-known categories. They are in line with the linguistic turn in the social sciences and inspired me to delve into the field of narrative research,⁶ a topic I had not paid too much attention to before. Additionally, I was backed by the fact that much importance is given to language and oral accounts at the Central Asian Seminar, the institute at Humboldt University Berlin where I was working and studying during this research project. In this way, the work and comments of colleagues supported my venture. Besides paying attention to *what* was told, the *how* and *why* something is told also gained significant importance in my research methodology.

I started by inquiring about the use of the term *mohāġer* (Wenzel 2013a). This central concept

⁶ Denzin 2000; Eastmond 2007; Hyvärinen 2008; Merrill 2007; Riessman & Quinney 2005

from the Islamic tradition is today the most commonly used term to denote expatriate refugees from Afghanistan.⁷ I began to realize that conversational partners in our interviews often used the term *mohāġer* not only in the way I had expected, but in other ways as well. Realizing that the term *mohāġer* was interpreted and adapted in response to how people understood their situation and surroundings has opened up new possibilities in my understanding of this phenomenon, too. The focus of my analysis moved on to the migrants' internal views. It showed how crucial the use of a certain vocabulary is for the construction of narratives and discourses that disclose particular perspectives on developments and social processes in present-day Afghanistan.

As a result, I adjusted the focus of my study away from the sweeping claims about forces of migration based on the examples of poor Afghan rural dwellers on their way to the city. Instead, I took a closer look at their accounts by listening to their conversations and observing their new living situations. By giving space to people's own words, there is no need to judge every single utterance or action. Instead, diversity and inconsistency of narrations, and conflicting stories, which would have complicated my 'objective' evaluation became topics in themselves which could be investigated as 'discursive struggles' (e.g. Lessa 2006; Lin 2008). Instead of merely being secondary to the content of the interviews, accounts and representations of certain issues have therefore come to play a primary role in this study.

Adjusting the focus of the analysis like this also plays into a fact I had regarded as a blemish before: Mainly out of security concerns I did not travel to the migrants' previous living areas but only met people in the city and learned about their earlier lives elsewhere by listening to their stories. Hence, people's narrations became the essential sources of my study.

Bringing Together What Is Told and How Things Are Told

The focus on migrants' narrations and the inclusion of elements of narrative research and narratology into my analysis and interpretation does not at all imply that while paying attention to *how* things were told we should ignore the content of the talks. I see my approach as a double one: The topics themselves, issues such as internal migration, processes of displacement, networks, and struggles for a livelihood continue to be of central interest. The strong focus on the act of telling complements the content analysis, each method putting into perspective the respective other.

The issues I paid particular attention to within the migrants' narrations were influenced by different research approaches dealing with migration and mobility. Readings on migration, about Afghan migrants in particular, prompted me to include the conceptual ideas of networks⁸ and translocality.⁹ Like much geographical research on migration and development, my research is additionally inspired by vulnerability and livelihood approaches.¹⁰ The idea, in particular, that the city might function as a 'space of refuge' for the rural dwellers profited from the livelihood

⁷ In the decades of war after the communist coup in 1978 and the Soviet intervention in 1979 many Afghans left their country. The pre-war population of Afghanistan was estimated at 13 million (Eighmy 1990, cited in Schmeidl & Maley 2008: 133). Colville (1997) states that in 1990 an estimated 6.2 million Afghans were living outside their country, most of them in Pakistan and Iran (Abdelkhah & Olszewska 2007; Boesen 1990; Shahrani 1995; Koser 2011; Kronenfeld 2008)

⁸ Harpiviken 2009; Monsutti 2010, 2007, 2005; Opel 2005

⁹ Freitag & von Oppen 2010; Pries 2008; Schetter 2012

¹⁰ Chambers 2006 [1989]; Etzold and Sakdapolrak 2012; Shakya 2009

perspective.

The insights into the daily lives of newly-arrived city residents gathered during my research quickly showed how limited their opportunities were in the city. Poverty, informality, insecurity, and rapid changes made it very difficult for the migrants – most of them from a poor family background – to meet daily needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. The ways in which people coped with these situations are far from being strategic, planned or even intended. Following de Certeau (1984) these people resort to ‘tactics’ that are much more fragile and short-term ways of acting and responding, as compared to ‘strategies’ that might be purposefully applied (Datta et al. 2007; Williams 2006). For the people I met during this research, among those tactics, exploiting existing and establishing new social networks and cooperative alliances figures prominently. As will be shown, narrative also fits into tactical behavior when it comes to constructing common ground and building trust, forging alliances, and utilizing advantages. The acts of telling, be they strategic or tactical, join or even support the other manifold struggles for livelihood. My book will show how narration is becoming part of people’s survival experience after migration.

In the empirical chapters, topics will emerge, reappear, and advance; the relationship between forced displacement and internal migration, as well as the links between the presentations of mobility, people’s livelihoods, and their social and physical surroundings will become clear as my narrative unfolds.

Methodology

On the ground, people’s talks about migration and arriving and living in the city took quite different directions and the observations, notes, and recordings I took home from different meetings suggest a deeply fragmented character of the discovered ‘reality’. This raises questions about data analysis and presentation, and especially about the structure of this book.

I have chosen to form chapters out of excerpts from different interviews. The final efforts represent a compromise between presenting a sufficient quantity of empirical material collected independently from my interlocutors’ narrations, presenting interviews and observations that vary in terms of form and character but all exemplify the salience of the act of talking itself, and the constructive character of narrations.

By providing rich empirical material in the respective chapters, I took advantage of the kind of insights made possible through the presentation and analysis of qualitative primary data. This allowed me to integrate the very diverse material, ranging from single utterances and unsolicited remarks recorded in the streets, to longer stories told while sitting together, into my research.

I arranged the data and combined fragments from different interview situations in order to display particular circumstances I was confronted with during my fieldwork, to chart the course of talks, and finally to get a more detailed picture on certain issues. This means that out of the conversation texts I selected passages relevant to aspects I wanted to stress, while other parts of the texts were left out. This draws specific attention to selected topics, interlocutors, and places. Utilizing such a mode of presentation makes it possible to highlight differences and variations in people’s mobility, actions, and narration of their experiences.

Additionally, chapters are linked by recurrent issues and by certain individuals that appear as common threads throughout as they re-emerge and develop over the course of the book. The insights presented are explained and discussed at the end of each of their respective chapters. In the conclusion, findings from the empirical chapters are summarized and related to the more general theoretical considerations briefly introduced here.

This research is not a monograph on Mazar-e Sharif, nor is it an all-encompassing report on the lives of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Afghan cities. As a qualitative study, it introduces a limited number of individuals who are newcomers in town. Within this very specific category of informants, I discovered a great variety of migration patterns, living and working conditions, as well as successes and disappointments. The aim of my work is to chart this underprivileged part of recent Afghan society. It is a study of how the social life of internal migrants is formed and how they construct spaces of interaction. Inevitably, this book has also become a report about my research experience in Afghanistan.

Collecting Data

I remember visiting the *hawli*¹¹ of a migrant family. I had been to their place a few times before and wanted to stop by as I was in the neighborhood. For me the act of entering somebody's place always came with a certain degree of suspense: I never knew who was around, whether I knew those who were there, what situation I would be facing, or if my visit was perhaps unwelcome at that particular time.

That day I loudly knocked on the small and rusty iron door and called out some greetings to make the residents aware of my arrival. I waited some time. I heard the kids playing in the yard and entered slowly because the door had been slightly ajar and had already swung open after knocking. I was immediately recognized and greeted warmly. I greeted the kids and those who were around and sat down with one of the older sons of the family in one of the two rooms of the small house. He showed me pictures on his mobile phone and we talked about his friends at work.

Suddenly his mother rushed in. She was obviously furious and explained that the family's goat has vanished from the courtyard. Her son leaped up and started looking for it everywhere in the courtyard. While running around he quickly called his brothers and his brother-in-law. Except for the youngest kids, all family members now started searching for the goat in the neighborhood. Little by little those family members who he had been called also arrived at the *hawli* and started searching for the missing animal, too. I was left alone with two children sitting on an old carpet in front of the house. While waiting I repeatedly asked myself if I might have forgotten to close the gate properly. I felt uneasy as I saw all these people in such distress about their possible loss. I blamed myself for my carelessness and already saw myself buying a new goat for the family. I wanted to be a welcomed guest to these people and I certainly had not intended to cause them any trouble. But now this poor family might have suffered a significant economic loss and it was all my fault.

After what felt like endless unpleasant waiting, the mother of the family finally turned up with her goat. She told me that the animal had been picked up by one of the more distant neighbors, who had found it straying through the neighborhood, already early in the morning. I was innocent.

By presenting this little anecdote I want to show that collecting data in this environment was, for me, much more than just asking people questions.

Making Acquaintances and Talking to People

Data for this research was collected from August 17 to September 13, 2011 and from June 20 to August 23, 2012. My starting point was the city of Mazar-e Sharif that was chosen because of the relatively good security situation and because some personal contacts of mine lived there who could help me to find accommodation, would put me in contact with other people, or would simply be there for enjoying leisure time together. These contacts proved to be a blessing as they enabled me to find a comparably cheap hotel in an area where the presence of international organizations

¹¹ *hawli* - a walled courtyard with the belonging buildings

and NGOs had made prices go up significantly at that time. I was even more grateful for the private accommodation I was offered for some weeks, which allowed me some insight into Afghan family life, and for a stay at a student hostel, where I also had many memorable experiences. From this vantage point I saw much of Mazar-e Sharif's daily life, made excursions to the countryside, and got involved in various gatherings, celebrations, and leisure activities.

To start off with my research and make helpful acquaintances, I took three approaches: First, I tried to contact people directly. I would address these persons straightaway, introduce myself and lay open my research interest. The success of this approach varied greatly. Some of the interviews that resulted from this approach have been utilized in Chapters 1 and 2.

Second, I tried to foster relationships with people who held core positions within the community of internal migrants, who would later help me in finding yet some more possible informants. Research in an environment like Afghanistan works out best with the support of a 'gatekeeper' or 'door opener'. This should be a person of a significant status who has a strong social network available and is not hesitant to ask people's support on behalf of the researcher. This might be of even greater importance if research is intended to be undertaken with uneducated and underprivileged people who are unfamiliar with research in general. In my case the most beneficial contact was a woman, herself a notable person in the Uzbek migrant community. To protect her identity, I will name her 'Azita'. Azita helped me navigate the field and enabled me to meet more migrant families. Of course, this approach is not unproblematic as will become obvious in Chapters 6, 8, and 9.

Third, I tried to conduct expert interviews with staff of Afghan government offices, international organizations, and NGOs working for internal migrants in and around Mazar-e Sharif. I was welcomed for interviews by the UNHCR office and by the Risk Management Office of the German development agency, GTZ. While the meeting with GTZ resulted from a personal contact, other international agencies did not respond to my requests. One reason for this might be that each of my research trips partly coincided with the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, in which brings about shortened working hours for most offices, and is by many of the international staff members used for a vacation outside the country.

With members of the Department of Refugees and Repatriations (DoRR), the local branch of the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations (MoRR) in Mazar-e Sharif, my request for cooperation was much more successful. An officer of the DoRR allowed me to join him on his trips to the field and also organized few group interviews for me. Thus, he actually acted more as a 'gatekeeper' than an expert. He will reappear in this book under the alias of 'Shahab'. Of course this way of finding interlocutors bears the danger of facing a preselected sample of informants, whose cooperation may lead to one-sided, biased findings. Research that has been done on an excursion with a government employee may be met with skepticism. However, since I not only collected data but primarily considered the manner in which it was represented to me, the unbalanced relationship between the mostly poor migrants, the state officer, and myself suited my research perfectly, as will become clear in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Based on these different approaches in contacting interlocutors, interviews took place in different locations and involved different kinds of interlocutors in constellations of varying size. All of this had a direct impact on the types of interviews I was able to conduct, which will become apparent in the all chapters of this book.

All the interviews were carried out in Dari, the most common language in Mazar-e Sharif and the North of Afghanistan. Conducting interviews without a translator worked out in most of the cases. Admittedly, I sometimes missed some point or another, so that sometimes I became aware of certain interesting aspects only while re-listening to interview recordings after my return home from the field. Only in some such instances did I have the chance to follow up.

Most of my solicited and unsolicited meetings were overtly recorded with a voice recorder. This approach was justified by explaining that I had only a limited command of Dari and otherwise might miss out too much information. This reasoning was always accepted. Hence, making a voice recording never seemed to be a problem. Only on a few occasions I was asked to turn the recorder off. The information given in these ‘confidential’ talks was not really scandalous but in most cases involved complaints about the work of the DoRR. Not having these unpleasant issues recorded made it easier for some informants to talk freely.

I did not carry a questionnaire with me. My approach is best described as a semi-structured guided interview. I did not ask the same standard questions in every situation. Instead, I tried to assess each particular situation and to react accordingly with my way of guiding the conversation.

I never paid any reward for information. As better-off Afghans sometimes do, I occasionally made donations to very poor individuals or families. I usually had some sweets or crackers with me to hand out to children. When I took consented photos of people, I often made prints and handed them out to those in the picture. This was highly appreciated, as many people had no, or only very few, printed pictures of themselves and their families.

I hoped that people, especially those I met repeatedly, would get used to my presence or maybe even enjoy spending time and chatting with me. I was aware of the importance of hospitality and courtesy towards foreigners in Afghanistan. In some situations, this may have meant that my questions were answered purely out of politeness or a sense of duty. Nonetheless, I only rarely felt that I was bothering or upsetting my counterparts with my questions. Only in the case presented in Chapter 2 did I stretch people’s patience and experienced protest against some dull questions of mine.

Of course, the security issue cannot be left out when talking about research in Afghanistan. Throughout my time in Afghanistan, I did not knowingly face any difficult, dangerous, or intimidating situations. The vast majority of people I met were friendly, open-minded, interested, and cooperative. I always tried to act carefully and responsibly, observing a few basic security measures and keeping a low profile. When moving through town or while traveling in the countryside, I avoided unnecessary attention by dressing in local attire. I walked, cycled on a rusty Chinese bicycle I had purchased, and traveled by public transport such as minibus, shared taxi, and rickshaw.

I avoided too much contact with international organizations and generally stayed away from

places popular among expatriates, Afghan governmental buildings, and police stations, because these places were prime targets of attacks at that time. On the other hand, I never concealed my status as a foreigner and openly talked about my whereabouts and research interests, although the kind of work I was doing may not always have been obvious to my counterparts. I enjoyed chatting with people in shops, on the streets, in parks, and in taxis. Security concerns did not limit my mobility inside the city of Mazar-e Sharif.

As outlined before, I spent much time with people who had little to do with my research. I do not know the extent to which their cautious and supportive care was out of affection or of perceived responsibility. I trusted their ways to support me and followed their advice. I had, for example, a very kind host who provided me with accommodation for a significant part of my research stay in his private home. He was never reluctant to introduce me to third parties as his guest and as a young scholar from Germany. He allowed me to join his travels to different places in the countryside together with his family. Under the twilight he would even take me to the neighborhood mosque next to his home only to sample free meals at fast breaking, which proved to me that he had no serious doubts about our security in his neighborhood.

Without question my generous host was aware of potential risks: He always gave me recommendations regarding clothing, appearance and behavior. His advice sometimes resulted in the odd circumstance of me being the only one wearing traditional Afghan clothes among a group of students and young men all dressed in jeans and shirts. In his artful and humorous manner my host also suggested that I should not introduce myself as ‘German’ but instead as ‘born in Germany’ which, in his opinion, was definitely not a lie but a way in which - when combined with my alien manner of speaking Dari - to suggest that I might have at least one Afghan parent or Afghan ancestors that raised me in exile.

One day this true friend unexpectedly changed our daily route to ‘work’ from his house to the next minibus stop. We took a different and longer route. When I asked why we had changed our route, he explained that he wanted to avoid the dust of a nearby construction site. His adolescent son, who had joined us, heavily disagreed and strongly complained that our detour route was quite dusty, too. I never found out if that new route was taken out of caution to avoid danger or indeed only as a measure against dust exposure. Anyhow, this event made me ponder my responsibility towards the people I spent time with, and if I possibly put them into difficult situations.

In general, I took all warnings seriously. The only time I consciously refused advice, I turned out to be right. The acquaintance I made on that occasion was very important due to that person’s essential role in providing information and access to the field. Shahab had advised me not to meet one particular contact person, who was a woman we had earlier visited together on my own initiative. Shahab’s only explanation was that as a male I should not be seen visiting a woman alone. Referring to Afghan culture, he said that doing so could create trouble for me. My refusal to follow his advice ultimately earned me one of my key informants and most important gatekeepers: Azita.

One last story about the research conditions and the way I experienced the security situation in Mazar-e Sharif is set in the guest room of an informant’s house. I had an appointment with the head of the household, but he did not turn up. Only the family’s children were around, but after some

time they lost interest in me. Sitting in the room alone, waiting, I fell asleep on the *tōšak*.¹² When I woke up later, my only reward from this visit turned out to have been a peaceful rest. Although not quite an example of my typical work ethic, that incident may serve as evidence of my feeling comfortable and free of fear during my research stay in Afghanistan.

Analyzing Data - Two Levels of Analyzing Talks

I decided to conduct a two-level analysis, distinguishing between content ('What is being told?') and the way how information was represented ('How are things told?'). Even though the recorded accounts are not necessarily narratives by common definition¹³ narrative research, which suggests an equally deep analysis of narration content and contexts, proved most helpful for my work. Obviously, there is a wide range of options for the analysis of information offered in interviews. While some of the stories told to me "*tell their own significance to a sensitive reader*" (Andrews et al. 2000: 4) as they are at the same time impressive accounts rich in information and in emotion, other pieces of information handed out to me needs much further explanation and contextual embedment in order to reveal its full value.

Oral accounts become valuable sources as Denzin rightfully argues: "*We have no direct access to experience as such. We can only study experience through its representations, through the ways stories are told*" (Denzin 2000: xi). In researching displacement and forced migration, oral accounts are particularly important sources as they are "*the only means we have of knowing something about life in times and places to which we have little other access*" (Eastmond 2007: 249).

For security reasons, many parts of Afghanistan were inaccessible to me at the time. Therefore, I had to turn to alternative ways of gathering information. Oral accounts were the method of choice in this particular research setting. Asking people to talk about places and times and their human experience was for me the most obvious and natural way even without much further elaborate theorization.

As "[s]torytellers have agency and self-reflexivity" (Denzin 2000: xii), the process of telling shapes individuals' perception and presentation of themselves as well as the social categories, relations, and realities they employ and depict. There is a mutual relation that Merrill calls "*a bridge between the two: between individual and society*" (Merrill 2007: 7), or, to use Denzin's words, a "*[n]arrative's double duty*" (Denzin 2000: xi). Authors argue that this circumstance brings benefits when studying individuals and society in an embracing manner, making narratives in social science "*(both) complex and revealing*" (Merrill 2007: 1). This clearly shows that individual and society

¹² *tōšak* - mattress used for sitting and sleeping

¹³ Obviously, the term narrative is used in variety of ways in different scientific disciplines as well as in everyday language. In English it often serves as a synonym for story. Regarding this inflationary use, Riessman & Quinney even speak of a "*tyranny of narrative*" (2005: 393), meaning that narrative can be defined as "*anything and everything*" (ibid.). Due of this manifold usage, Merrill calls for defining a narrative in a generally accepted way, this task being "*one of its most divisive, indecisive, and potentially pressing dilemmas*" (Merrill 2007: 5). From the point of view that a narrative can be anything and everything, I could have also called my basic material narratives, particularly since, for some people, quite short text elements are also regarded as narratives. Riessman & Quinney quote the alleged classical example of Labov (1982). In his sociolinguistic work, looking for the smallest formal elements of narratives (Labov & Waletzky 1997, quoted in Hyvärinen 2008: 453), a topically-centered and temporally-organized answer to a single question can be understood as a narrative (Riessman & Quinney 2005: 394).

"[...]are constructed in relation to each other" (Andrews et al. 2000: 1). Obviously, *"stories are not produced in a vacuum, but their telling is always situated within an interactional and sequential context"* (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998: 131, cited in Abell et al. 2000: 181).

Riessman & Quinney (2005) emphasize that an analysis that goes beyond the mere content is central in narrative research particularly if one understands narratives as discursive items and is not satisfied with the stories as such: *"Analysis in narrative studies interrogates language – how and why events are storied, not simply the content to which language refers"* (Riessman & Quinney 2005: 394). Further, Riessman & Quinney criticize most approaches of narrative research for not including this second step of interpretation: *"Missing for the narrative scholar is analytic attention to how the facts got assembled that way. For whom was this story constructed, how was it made, and for what purpose? What cultural resources does it draw on – take for granted? What does it accomplish? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest alternative counter-narratives?"* (Riessman & Quinney 2005: 393). Following this claim, a thorough examination of several aspects becomes central, namely the ways of representing certain contents, the perspectives the speakers take on, the very act of telling, and the relations between narrators and listeners. As such, the role of narratives in constructing and constituting the social world becomes obvious (Hyvärinen 2008: 447). For analysis *"[t]hese notions motivate theoretical investigation on how narratives are constituted, what their place is in human life, who is entitled to tell them and when, how they are received, and how they work in the social world. Narrative analysis is thus inseparable from concerns of the narrative constitution of selves, identities, and social realities"* (Hyvärinen 2008: 447). In this study I intend to ask, based on my material, who tells which stories and why does (s)he do so, how are the stories received and perceived, and what are the effects on people's everyday lives.

Narrative Practices

Several suggestions useful for my attempt at a two-fold analysis of the kind just described are provided in the work of Hyvärinen (2008), who focuses on narrative practices. I will elaborate on how his work has influenced my own. According to his and his forerunners' comprehension of narrative, the *"emphasis is on narrative activity as sense-making process rather than as a finished product in which loose ends knit together into a single story-line"* (Ochs & Capps 2001: 15, cited in Hyvärinen 2008: 452). The narrative practices call for a shift from a strictly textual study of stories towards investigating the process of how the story is represented. Hyvärinen (2008) calls on scholars to *"recognize the relevance of the conceptual distinction between the story and storying process"* (Hyvärinen 2008: 453). Gubrium & Holstein further explain their view on the 'storying process': *"Concern with the production, distribution, and circulation of stories in society requires that we step outside of narrative material and consider questions such as who produces particular kinds of stories, where are they likely to be encountered, what are their consequences, under what circumstances are particular narratives more or less accountable, what interests publicize them, how do they gain popularity, and how are they challenged?"* (Gubrium & Holstein 2007: 19 cited in Hyvärinen 2008: 453).

To “step outside”, as it is put here, was exactly my intention. My aim was to investigate who tells which stories, with what goals in mind, and with what outcomes. Gubrium & Holstein call this an examination of the “*narrative environment*” (Gubrium & Holstein 2007: 26). Hyvärinen asks who has “*narrative control*” (Hyvärinen 2008: 453) over a particular situation and how this control is produced, asserted and possibly questioned.

Narrative Environment

Here, the concept of ‘narrative environment’ comprises much more than the physical environment and people’s living conditions. It puts the attention on narratives on different levels: “*Master narratives structure how the world is intelligible, and therefore permeate the petit narratives of our everyday talk*” (Bamberg 2004: 361 cited in Hyvärinen 2008: 455). Therefore, my focus was on the influence of these larger narratives on everyday talks and, crucially, on how to detect this influence in the interview recordings. To grasp the influence of ‘master narratives’ in people’s responses, De Cillia et al. (1999) suggest the method of focus-group discussion as it “*enables one partially to study the recontextualization and transformation of specific political concepts and identity narratives which are expressed by politicians, taught in educational systems (e.g. by teachers and in schoolbooks), promoted in the mass-media, etc., and which are expressed in everyday situations and interactions. Specifically, it allows one to observe the local co-construction of meaning of concepts (like ‘nation’ and ‘identity’) during an ongoing discussion, by individuals, but under the interactive influence of groups*” (De Cillia et al. 1999: 152/153). Yet it is not the production or dispersion of masternarratives that is central to my research, but the way these ‘grand narratives’ find their way into ordinary people’s accounts about their migration and daily lives: Speakers might subscribe to these or construct their own stories in opposition to them.

Hyvärinen refers to Jean-Francois Lyotard (1993 [1983]) and describes his merits in the rejection of the ‘grand narratives’, which allows for a closer look into the “*alternative, small, forgotten, and untold stories*” (Hyvärinen 2008: 450). This is exactly the strategy I adopted, since by doing so I was able to give a voice to people who are often marginalized and unheard. My goal was, in accordance with Eastmond’s (2007) claims, to depict the complexity in those ‘simple’ lives: “*With the more interpretive approach, narratives have become interesting also for what they can tell us about how people themselves, as ‘experiencing subjects’, make sense of violence and turbulent change. From personal accounts we may also glean the diversity behind over-generalized notions of ‘the refugee experience’*” (Eastmond 2007: 249).

Analyzing Narrative Practices and the Narrative Environment

De Cillia et al. (1999) offer a concrete approach for analyzing people’s responses in a way that takes narration practices as well as social conditions into consideration. They suggest to analyze the relationship between discourse practices and the surroundings in which these take place, using the ‘principle of triangulation’: “*To explore the interconnectedness of discursive practices and extra-*

linguistic social structures, we employ the principle of triangulation (Cicourel 1974), i.e. we combine various interdisciplinary, methodological and source-specific approaches to investigate a particular discourse phenomenon” (De Cillia et al. 1999: 157). To accomplish this triangulation, De Cillia et al. scrutinize three interrelated dimensions: contents and topics, strategies, and linguistic means and forms of realization (De Cillia et al. 1999: 157).

De Cillia et al. suggest investigating contents and topics that show the constructive character of ideas, narratives, and discourses (De Cillia et al. 1999: 158). Looking into the strategies, the second dimension suggested by their approach has been my own second line of approach as well. How do De Cillia et al. define ‘strategies’? *“Generally, we use the term ‘strategies’ to refer to plans of actions with varying degrees of elaborateness, the realization of which can range from automatic to conscious, and which are located at different levels of our mental organization”* (De Cillia et al. 1999: 160). They suggest differentiating between constructive strategies, perpetuation and justification strategies, transformation strategies, and dismantling or destructive strategies (De Cillia et al. 1999: 160). Examples of all these strategies have come up in the talks with my interlocutors, too, and they will be analyzed here in detail.

On a third level of analysis, De Cillia et al. zoom in on linguistic means and forms of realization. Their analysis comprises lexical units, argumentation schemes, and syntactical means (De Cillia et al. 1999: 163). In my analysis, I did not separate this field of investigation from the strategies, but instead integrated both, since I did not intend to carry out a linguistic analysis properly speaking. Furthermore, I intended to show how these two dimensions interlock and why they cannot be regarded separately from each other. Linguistic devices might even be understood as ancillary, supporting elements of the above-mentioned strategies.

De Certeau’s (1984) discussion about strategies and tactics has been yet another important source of inspiration for my work. Listening to people’s stories and acknowledging their contributions to discussions means to appreciate their agency. Interlocutors normally lacking ‘narrative control’ (cf. Hyvärinen) due to their marginalized social standing did speak up in quite a few situations documented in this book, be it at a specific moment of a group discussion or in a face-to-face interview in a government building. In these situations, people made efforts to rise to speak and did so in ways that are much more tactical than strategic. Marginalized people try to achieve their aims by talking and the link to De Certeau’s ‘tactics’ becomes obvious. I argue that the narrative accounts of these poor newcomers to town display tactics that, as will be shown, go hand in hand with their practical and factual livelihood struggles.

One last crucial point is my role as a conversational partner, researcher, and author in gathering data and producing this text. Since all the talks were inevitably influenced by my presence, I am describing the interview settings and the course of the conversations in detail and in an explicit manner. Riessman & Quinney write about the role of the author in text production: *“By locating herself [the author Poindexter, 2003] as an active presence in the text, rather than cloaking herself in rationality, distance and dispassionate analysis, [...]... readers can see how the interview context shaped the developing narrative”* (Riessman & Quinney 2005: 400). Acknowledging the impact my presence has had on the narrations and the narrative environment, I

do not want to ‘cloak myself’ in that kind of ‘rationality’. Instead I stay part of the interview situation also in the presentation of the data in the chapters of this book.

Presenting Data

I am presenting the data in reconstructed encounters including extensive excerpts from the original conversations. Going for this particular form has been a conscious decision. What at first glance may look like straightforward transcripts has indeed undergone several conscious and unconscious filtering processes, and the final product bears constructivist traits that cannot and should not be argued away. Each excerpt tells a story and to my understanding, therefore merits inclusion into this book. Even though some of the material might only reveal snippets of the informants’ lives and self-perceptions, they serve as good examples that provide meaningful and detailed information on just one particular aspect of the whole context. Other fragments shed light on certain power constellations, they reveal what ways to talk about mobility are accepted and which narrative strategies can be employed; all in all, they exemplify particular tactics. That is why I deem it appropriate to present them here the way I actually did.

Every chapter has a certain focus, concentrating on a particular place, a certain set of actors, and/or one particular topic. At the same time, the information given in this manner contributes to an overall picture, in that it reveals how these people, who came to the city in a complex interplay of fear and desperation but also hopes and desires, represent their relocations while describing how they try to get by after migration.

The chapters are based on rearranged original material and complement each other, although neither one relates to one single topic only. As such, the data remains in the context of the places, situations, and chronology of the interviews.

Some of the accounts resemble each other, and several topics recur as they are of central interest to many of the interviewees. I sought not to allow similarities to gain the upper hand though. Instead, I tried to stress those aspects in the talks that show exactly the multifacetedness of individuals’ opinions, the multiplicity of connections, contradictions and ambiguities, and minor and major variation in topics over the course of the presented interviews and in the entirety of the collected data. My data presentation thus goes along with the two-level approach of data analysis as outlined above, because for one thing it lays open ‘what is being told?’, and ‘how are things told’, for the other.

Geographical terms like cities, regions, countries, and places are generally written in the way that is common in English. In the same way I used those words that are known in English by their repeated use in everyday speech and media reports. Examples for these terms are bazaar or Taliban. In the same way I treated names of persons.

The few other terms that derive from Dari, one of Afghanistan's major languages, are transliterated in a simplified way orientating on the spoken Dari. I utilized length marks for the long vowels in Dari. These are ā, ī, and ū. Further on I used ġ for the Persian letter *jim* and š for the letter *šin*.

2. Chapter 1: “It Is Not Enough for Living Nor for Dying“ - Sitting on the Dusty Curbstones

I remember standing among hundreds of men of different ages in tattered clothes. Some were sitting, dozing in the sunbeams of the early morning. Others were quickly gathering, crowding at certain spots, speaking loudly and shouting. I was at a place called *kārgarī*, a ‘labor market’, one of several such places in town, located at an important crossing in the city center of Mazar-e Sharif. These spots, *kārgarī* or *kārbāzār*, are frequented by men looking for employment as day laborers. Unskilled laborers crowd up here, ready for any kind of work on construction sites, in storehouses or elsewhere. Other spots are reserved for skilled workers like painters and bricklayers, who often wait there with some basic tools at hand. Workers and their potential employers meet in these places and agree, often in loud and quick discussions, on the conditions for hours of hard work.

I knew that many of the newcomers in town tried to earn their livelihood through the aforementioned labor markets. Therefore, I planned to find interlocutors who were willing to tell me about their migration to town. However, my first attempts caused great confusion until I understood that labor markets were not an ideal location for making contacts, especially in the early morning when the atmosphere was tense and very competitive with everyone trying to get hired for the day. As long as I wasn’t approaching anybody, not much attention was paid to me. But as soon as I stepped out of the anonymous crowd of workers and directly approached someone, I was immediately surrounded by several men, all asking loudly: “*How many people? How many people?*”, the question referring to the number of people whom I, as a perceived employer, wanted to hire. All attempts to explain what I actually wanted just attracted more people and more asking “*How many people?*”. Those who had started talking to me before then felt compelled to explain what they had found out about me earlier. No matter how hard I tried to explain my actual needs – I ended up only being good for diversion for those men who didn’t find a meaningful job early in the morning, an effect which I might have anticipated but had to learn that way.

The situation was much more relaxed later in the morning. At that time the vast majority of people had already been hired or had gone home because there was no job for them. Only a few people were still squatting along the walls which gave lesser and lesser shade as the hot summer sun was rising towards noon. Some people still hoped to find work for at least a few hours. Others were just killing time there sitting together, chatting, and awaiting whatever the day might hold for them. At that point it was much easier to start a conversation.

The following passages are taken from conversations at the *kārgarī*. These talks did not follow any strict interview structure, nor was I able to collect much biographical information on the speakers or dates and origins of their migration. Still, the interview excerpts offer insights into several topics that I would like to introduce. Despite variation in content and length, the examples are typical of what one could experience when talking to people at the *kārgarī*. The ‘heroes’ of this chapter are as follows: the workers Rahim, Abdul-Karim, and Naser, the boys Abdullah and Mohammad, and an old worker named Alem. Others bystanders and men who uttered a few comments are simply named Bystander. They do not play a major role in the course of the

conversations. Nonetheless, what they said often emphasized the statements of the main interlocutors.

Rahim¹⁴

Rahim: My name is Rahim and I am from Balkh province, district Keshendeh. I wait at this place every day. If I get hired, I go and work. If not, I sit here until nine or ten o'clock and then I go home ... What else ...? What can I say ...? There is no other work for poor people like me.

Ch.¹⁵: How is life in your home region?

Rahim: Life in my home region is good. If the year is good, if there is snow and rainfall, we guys work in agriculture. If the years are good and the wheat grows fine, there is also good work for us poor people. If this does not happen, we leave. We come to town. We work here.

Ch.: In your opinion, is life in your home region good in times of enough rain?

Rahim: In times of rain, it is very good. Always good. If there is good fortune, watermelons grow. Honeydew melons grow. Everything is fine there. Things are good, if rain falls.

Ch.: How much time has passed since you have come here?

Rahim: It's been about one year since I've come here. In the meantime, I have gone to my village only once. I did not go back anymore.

Ch.: And do your people still live there?

Rahim: Yes. There are many people of my *qaum*¹⁶ who live in my area, in my village.

Ch.: What *qaum* are you?

Rahim: Uzbek. I speak Uzbek and Dari.

Ch.: That one time, why did you go back?

Rahim: There was a wedding.

Ch.: What is the difference between life here and life there?

Rahim: Here it is good, nice. This is a city.

Ch.: What do you mean by that, Rahim?

Rahim: It is a city. It is nice. You can find what you need. If somebody gets ill, there is a hospital. You can get there very quickly. My home region is in the desert. There are no people there. You cannot get anywhere. Tamarisks are growing there. And junipers. That's all. Here it is good.

Ch.: Did anyone come along with you or did you come by yourself?

Rahim: I came by myself.

Ch.: Are you married?

Rahim: No, I am not married but I am engaged.

¹⁴ Interview 09/12/2011

¹⁵ Ch. is the acronym for Christoph and is used in these passages to mark myself.

¹⁶ *qaum* - term used to show belonging to a certain group, often based on a shared ancestry or heritage

Ch.: When are you going to marry?

Rahim: I do not know. I need money first.

Ch.: Is this what you are working for?

Rahim: Yes.

Ch.: Rahim, do many people leave your area?

Rahim: Yes, many do.

Ch.: Where do they go?

Rahim: They go everywhere. To Mazar-e Sharif, to Kabul. Those who have money go abroad. But me, I cannot go.

Ch.: Is anyone from your family abroad?

Rahim: No, no one.

Ch.: Is the security situation good in your home region?

Rahim: Yes, security is good.

Ch.: Is there a difference between the people in your village and the people here in the city?

Rahim: There is no difference. But wait, one second, there is a difference: The people in town have money. People over there have no money. The economy is very weak there.

Ch.: What kind of work are you doing here?

Rahim: I work as a day laborer. [laughs] I do any work. Day laborers do any work: shoveling, digging, laying bricks, paving, digging graves. That's how things are.

Ch.: How do you stay in contact with your family? Do you call them by phone?

Rahim: No, I do not call them.

Ch.: But how do you get news from home, Rahim?

Rahim: Regarding telephone the situation is like this: In some areas of my home region people have mobile phones, in other regions they don't. If there is phone connection, people have mobile phones. If there is no telephone pole, they do not. And you have to go up [to an elevated spot] to get connection. People walk up the hills to make a call. But at my place you cannot get any connection at all.

Ch.: In case you go back home, will you bring some money?

Rahim: Yes, I work here. I have some money. I keep as little of it for myself as possible. I do any work I can get. If I find a lot of work, I work a lot; it means, I get more money. If not, it's less and I only have what God gives as a generous gift. Maybe it is one thousand [Afghani], maybe it's two thousand, maybe it's ten thousand. It is not much. That's how things are for day laborers. Yesterday I had work, today I don't have any. There is no work.

Ch.: In one week, how many days can you find work?

Rahim: I work four days, and I stay unemployed another four days each week. Same thing every day. I come here, I wait, I work, or I don't. If not, I go home. My

- home is right here in the city.
- Ch.: Whenever you are jobless, what do you do?
- Rahim: I go home, I sleep.
- Ch.: And what do you do on Fridays?
- Rahim: On Fridays I do not go to work. I go to Friday prayer; I do this and that.
- Ch.: You said you have been in the city for around one year. How was it when you first arrived here in town?
- Rahim: It was good.
- Ch.: Okay. What I mean is, how did you find a place to stay?
- Rahim: I have no place of my own here. I have rented a *hawli*.
- Ch.: Sure, I understand. But how did you find this *hawli* you rented? This is what I want to understand.
- Rahim: I asked a *kalāntar*.¹⁷ I asked him to find a *hawli* I could rent. A *kalāntar* of a quarter, someone who is an authority for the people and works on behalf of the state. I went to the *kalāntar* and said that I needed a *hawli* and then heasked around. He found someone and afterwards he introduced us, and I rented the place. That's it!
- Ch.: And do you have friends around here?
- Rahim: Friends? No, no ... [laughs].
- Ch.: What do you think, Rahim: How is the life for young people in Afghanistan?
- Rahim: As we see it here. Look, people are vagrants. The economy is weak. We see that all these people have to work so hard but they always have one foot in the grave. There is no work. If there were work and the fields would yield a good harvest, people would not be so homeless.

Abdul-Karim¹⁸

- Abdul-Karim: I am Abdul-Karim from Sholgara district. Now I live in Mazar-e Sharif.
- Ch.: Nice to meet you, Abdul-Karim. What caused you to move here?
- Abdul-Karim: What happened? Nothing special. This is what the world is like. I have come to town. This is where the work is. I live here because this is where you find work. Sometimes you find work, sometimes you don't. Our hands are tied. What can we do? Other than that, here or there does not make a big difference. In my home region there was no work for me for several years. Because things are different here, it is better here. Life is okay here in the city. We have no problems, and we get by. But as little money as we earn, what we need for life and eating, it all vanishes from our hands. The two hundred or three hundred Afghani you can make per day do not go a long way.
- Bystander: It is not enough for living nor for dying.

¹⁷ *kalāntar* - chief of district, chief of neighborhood, elder. A *kalāntar* can have an official position as a state representative or just be considered to be prominent (*kalān* = big) due to his social or economic position.

¹⁸ Interview 09/12/2011

- Abdul-Karim: You cannot survive on less than that in a month. You work and work, but you never have enough money.
- Ch.: Where do you live here in town?
- Abdul-Karim: Here I stay in Faqirabad [laughs]. And I do live like a *faqir*¹⁹[laughs]. Faqirabad - there is a neighborhood by that name, along the road heading to the capital. I live a little way up the hills from that area. There is the place where I sleep. I pay only 10 Afghani per night. Normally they ask 45 Afghani, but I said, please, honorable man, make it cheaper for me, I do not have much money and I have to save some money because I want to see my family again.
- Ch.: And how often do you go back to see your family?
- Abdul-Karim: To my home region? It depends. Once a month. But if I can't find good work I only go every four or five months. And if I have good work and good money, I go home every night. It is not far. Only 56 kilometers. Very close. But if I do not have work, I might not be able to go home for a year if I cannot find work or money. When I have earned money, I call my people, my family, and I tell them that I am coming. Then I go there. Every night. And I come here in the morning. Or I stay there for some time. For ten days, or five days, or four days. This is how things are. When you are going back to Germany, how many hours is that by plane?
- Ch.: What?!? Plane? I don't understand.
- Abdul-Karim: How long does the plane take to Germany?
- Ch.: Ah, okay. Maybe eight or ten hours. But I go to Uzbekistan first. Why?
- Bystander (to A): Don't ask him like this! He is asking questions and we are responding. Not the other way round!
- Abdul-Karim: Why not? I also have some questions. He is learning from us and we are learning from him. Isn't it so?
- Ch.: Sure, of course. You are right. I learn from you and you learn from me. Of course. And if you have any questions I will try to answer. Hopefully I will have good answers.

And then - not for the first or last time - the focus of the conversation turned towards traveling to Europe and Germany, visa regulations, invitations, and asylum. I realized how little knowledge I had to share with my counterparts regarding topics of interest to them.

Barat Ali²⁰

- Ch.: Please, introduce yourself and then tell me what happened that made you come to the city.
- Barat Ali: My name is Barat Ali. I am here because I am a *mohājger*. I am from Bamiyan.

¹⁹ *faqir* - mendicant dervish, utterly poor person

²⁰ Interview 09/12/2011

When my family had to leave home, after we became *mohājger*, we moved here. We bought a house close to the city of Sholgara. Now we live there. It's been around 20 years since I came to Mazar-e Sharif.

Ch.: 20 years?

Barat Ali: Yes, for 20 or maybe 25 years I have been living here in Mazar and I live the life of a day laborer.

Ch.: Tell me, Barat Ali, how were the times when your family left Bamiyan?

Barat Ali: It was the times of war. At that time the *Hezb-e Eslāmī*²¹ was fighting the state. Then we left and came to Mazar. And we have been living here ever since.

Ch.: When you came here, how old were you?

Barat Ali: At that time, I was a little boy.

Ch.: Yes, that is what I thought.

Barat Ali: I was a little boy, and I grew up here, in the city.

Ch.: With whom did you move here?

Barat Ali: With my father and mother. The whole family came here.

Ch.: What kind of work did your father do at that time?

Barat Ali: He was a farmer.

Ch.: And is he still a farmer?

Barat Ali: Yes, he still is. He lives in Sholgara.

Ch.: Are there any relatives of yours still living in Bamiyan?

Barat Ali: Yes, there is a paternal uncle and a maternal uncle. And there is one son of my paternal uncle. He also lives there.

Ch.: And do you sometimes go there?

Barat Ali: Yes, just two or three months ago I went there for a trip. About once a year I go there.

Ch.: In your opinion, how is life there?

Barat Ali: Life there is good. It is not bad. The property of my father is still there. I have some land there. But it is a very small plot, and it is rain-fed. It is very little for farming. All you can get from it are a few sacks of potatoes.

Ch.: How is life for young people?

Barat Ali: For the young people who live there? For example, it's good if you have enough land and livestock. You can have a decent life there if you have money. Poor people cannot live there. You need to have enough land. Then it's okay, your life is better. Or if you are a rich man or a *mīrāb*,²² then you have a very good life in my area.

Ch.: Do you come here from Sholgara every day?

Barat Ali: Yes, I come here for the *kārgarī*. I have to pay 100 or even 150 Afghani for the taxi. That's the fee. Then I work here in town. I work as a day laborer, and

²¹ *Hezb-e Eslāmī* - the oldest Islamist party in Afghanistan. *Hezb-e Eslāmī* played a central role in the fight against the Soviet occupation in the 80s and 90s.

²² *mīrāb* - Person responsible for the water distribution in the irrigation system

then, afterwards, I go back home. That's it.

Ch.: But today there is no work.

Barat Ali: Right, no work today. It's been two days now that I am jobless.

Ch.: This is not good for you.

Barat Ali: No, not good for me.

Ch.: Your family consists of how many people?

Barat Ali: There are eight of us. Two breadwinners and six, no eight, eaters.

Ch.: Why? Are the others too young or too old? Or are they women?

Barat Ali: They are women and of course they cannot work. What is the price for a passport in Germany?

Another discussion follows about leaving Afghanistan, about how to get to Germany, and what would be the potential costs of migrating there.

Ch.: Would you like to go abroad, Barat Ali?

Barat Ali: I would.

Ch.: Why?

Barat Ali: Oh, just for a trip. I made a trip to Iran once. I stayed there for one year. After that I decided to make another journey abroad.

Bystander: Germany, he says. Germany! All the time. [Laughs].

Ch.: So, you have seen life in Iran, Barat Ali. How is it?

Barat Ali: Life in Iran is really good. There are many jobs. But you need documents. They always say: "The documents ...". The economy and life are really good. But you need a registration card or a passport. If you do not have these two, your life is better here.

Ch.: Is this the reason why you've come back to Afghanistan?

Barat Ali: Yes. That's just the way it is. For this reason, I have come back. Because I did not have a passport or a registration card.

Ch.: But this is just the same in Germany and all the other European countries. If you do not have the right documents your life can become a big problem over there.

... Once again, the conversation goes on about work in the West etc.

Hussain, Jawad, and Alem

At the beginning of my field research, I was particularly interested in adolescents and young men who had come to town. This is why I always kept my eyes open for young people and opportunities to talk to them. Later, hanging around the *kārgarī*, I spotted a young boy who was standing among older men, also waiting for a job. I had already chatted a bit with some of the men standing around and had asked them some questions, among other things about that boy. At last I

directly addressed the boy.²³

- Ch.: Hello, boy. Please, you are very young, and this is interesting for me. The other men around said that you are twelve years old and that you came to town alone. Is that right? Tell me a little bit.
- Hussain: Yes, I am twelve. My name is Hussain. But I am not by myself. My family is also here.
- Ch.: So, you did not come to town alone?
- Hussain: No, we've come here all together. We are from Bamiyan.
- Ch.: How was the time when you arrived here in Mazar?
- Hussain: It was good.
- Ch.: Why?
- Hussain: Now there aren't so many problems.
- Bystander: Life is much easier here.
- Hussain: Yes, compared to life there, it is easy here. Here you can work every day. There, in the village, there is no work. The only work you can find is in agriculture. Only agriculture. And here you find work if you want. You can go to any of the *kārgarī*.
- Ch.: I always thought the soil is fertile in Bamiyan and the agriculture is rich there.
- Hussain: That's right. Bamiyan's agriculture is rich. But all the people are farmers.
- Bystander: The only work you can do is that of a farmer. There is no other work. Here you can do all kinds of work.
- Hussain: And in the village you are jobless in wintertime. Always. Here you can also work in winter. This is why it is better to live here.
- Ch.: So, how was the time when you arrived here? I can imagine that it was difficult for you. You came to new surroundings. Maybe you had no friends here at that time.
- Hussain: No, I have many friends living here. Here are many of my relatives and also other people from Bamiyan. There are really a lot of families here from Bamiyan. So, I have many friends here.
- Ch.: That is good. But is there anybody from your family who is still living back there?
- Hussain: No, we've all moved here.
- Alem: You will find many different people here. There are Uzbeks, there are Pashtuns, there are Hazara, there are Tajiks, there are Turkmens. There are many languages around here.

Alem, who just got into the conversation, introduced himself and a conversation ensued about the positive fact that I had learned some Dari; and - as often the case when Afghans speak about languages – one of the bystanding workers quoted the proverb “with every language you speak, you

²³ Interview 09/12/2011

are a new, additional person.” While talking, I spotted a very young-looking boy among those standing around us. I attempted to initiate a conversation.

Ch.: Hey, boy, hello. Come here. You also look very young.

Alem: This is Jawad. He is thirteen. He is from my town.

Ch. [still trying to talk to the boy]:

Have you come here alone, Jawad?

Alem: Yes, he has come here alone to work in town. He was also driven here by force. Do you understand? What else can he do?

Ch.: Where is your home, Jawad?

Alem: He is from Shibergan, from Faizabad district.²⁴

Ch.: That’s far. Please tell me why you’ve come here, Jawad.

Alem: Him?

Ch.: Yes, him! I am very grateful for your help, Alem, but I would like to talk to the boy. [addressing the boy] Please tell me about the time when you left your home. How was that?

Alem: He left his home. In his family there was a big problem with unemployment. He had to work early on. First, he herded cows. Then he herded sheep, then camels, and finally donkeys. Do you understand?

Ch.: Yes, I understand. But he can also speak to me. There is nothing bad about talking to me. [addressing the boy] I only want to have a chat with you.

Alem: ... and then he arrived here. He is working as a day laborer like all of us. He is carrying his head to this place. He comes to this place. Every morning he comes. He waits for work. Often there is no work. Then he waits here, hungry, thirsty, for hours. He either finds work or he doesn’t. What else does he do? He sleeps.

Bystander: His life is really bad.

Ch.: Yes, I understand. Where is your family living?

Alem: His family is a poor family from the village.

Ch.: And how is life in your village? Please tell me.

Alem: It is not too bad. Didn’t I tell you? I have told you. Isn’t that right?

Bystander [towards the boy]:

So, boy, tell him something! [To me]: He is shy. See, he has no money. He is poor. He is forced to work here.

Alem: I already told him.

Ch.: Yes, you are right. Thanks for your help, Alem. I just thought it might be interesting to talk to him because he is so young, and he is living here without his family. I am only looking for information for myself, for my research. I am not a spy. It is not for any government, not for any organization. I want to learn

²⁴ Shibergan is the capital of the Province Jowzjan. Faizabad is a district in southeast Jowzjan.

about your lives here.

Bystander: I'll tell you something.

Alem: No, now it's me talking!

Ch.: [to Alem]: Okay, Alem, I am happy to meet you. Where are you from?

Alem: I am from the district of Faizabad in Jowzjan Province.

Ch.: How long have you been here in town?

Alem: I have been here for one month.

Ch.: How often had you come here before?

Alem: I am here for the first time. I did not come here for work before.

Ch.: I understand. And how is life in your home region? What made you come to the city for this first time?

Alem: Oh, it's very bad. Life there has many problems. There is no water. If I had not been forced to move, would I be here? Look at my clothes! Look at my body! Look at my hands! Life is really hard over there. Too little water. No work. It is because of all these problems that I have come here. Do you understand?

Ch.: I understand. You had a very hard life. Did anyone come here with you?

Alem: No, I decided to come here, and I've come here on my own.

Ch.: Where are you staying here?

Alem: I live in a *hotal*.²⁵

Ch.: And when do you go back?

Alem: I am going back. Right now, I don't know when exactly. I go when I have bought rice and soap, peas, tea, wheat. All the things you cannot buy there. There are nine of us. Nine people who need food. And only one breadwinner. There is no wheat. We have to purchase everything. For nine people.

Ch.: Do you have contact with your family?

Alem: Yes, we talk by telephone.

Ch.: About what?

Alem: Is everyone healthy? Is everything okay? What has happened? What is good? What is bad? Where are the Taliban? Are there any Taliban around? Are they in the village?

Ch.: Are the Taliban a problem there?

Alem: Yes, they are a big problem there. The security situation is not good at all. The Taliban are on one side of the river. On the other side there are the *ārbakī*,²⁶ the National Police, and the National Army. War is going on there. There is killing. There is displacement. Many problems. I call my family very often. Minute by minute. First in the morning, and then three or four times a day I call them to

²⁵ *hotal* in this case is a very cheap teahouse, where at night people are allowed to sleep in the dining area.

²⁶ *ārbakī* - tribal militias. In the years of my research there have been attempts to include these militias into the state security structure because the build-up of the Afghan police and Afghan army made to little process. By this the international actors tried to have another armed lever to fight the insurgent Taliban at that time. The integration of the *ārbakī* was criticized by human right groups because several of these militias were violent actors involved in illegal drug trafficking, extortion, and suppression of the local population in remote areas. Former criminals were now labeled as *Afghan Local Police (ALP)*.

ask if everything is alright. There is war over there and it is really dangerous. If things get worse, the war, I'll go there and bring my family here.

A pickup car arrived. A few men jumped up and hurried to the car. Others came closer and began to ask what was going on here. Those who had gathered some information about me were proud to share it. Then, questions were again raised about the possibility of going to Germany.

One may ask how this piecemeal information about peoples' lives provides clues to the overall situation of impoverished internal migrants in Afghanistan. Do these short excerpts from the *kārgarī* give any hints about the relationship between forced displacement and voluntary migration? What is special about these narrations and what is universally valid? Do these statements about moving and daily difficulties in making a living in the city disclose any discursive struggles? Are there any tactics discernible behind these seemingly simple remarks, tactics employed by the speakers in order to achieve particular goals through speech? I shall first discuss the contents of the talks and afterwards I will examine the way how the interviews developed and what was noteworthy about the situations in which they unfolded.

What is being told?

All those who have a voice in this chapter are internal migrants. They originate from different places and are part of different ethnic groups. Their age spans from teenage to elderly. According to their accounts some of them had come to town alone, others had migrated together with their families. Some had just arrived; others had lived in the city for almost all their life. Their purported reasons for migration differ and, without question, some of the depicted situations show that these migration processes were not yet concluded at the time of our talk but were ongoing. My interlocutors were leading a translocal (Freitag & van Oppen 2010), bidirectional or circular (Droz & Sottas 1997) life, and interactive processes were going on among them and between the migrants and their surroundings, just as has been described by Hahn & Klute (2007).

While all these men from different places were trying their luck at the *kārgarī*, not all did so under equal conditions. From a functional livelihood perspective, the personal mobility of some of them can be understood as part of a larger social entity (family, ...)’s economic diversification strategies.²⁷ The fact that work opportunities as were available in the urban area did not exist not in their home villages is an important topic in all of the men’s conversations. But their statements touch on many more issues that are central to internal migrants’ lives.

Relocating to the city as has been described by Rahim appears to be the most widespread type of migration. Rahim works in Mazar-e Sharif in order to earn and save money so that he will be able to marry one day. Rahim states that there is no other option for poor people like him but to move to the city to find work. Like most of the others he had to cope with poverty in his home region: Due to the poor harvest of that year, which led to a shortage of work opportunities in the countryside men could hardly contribute anything to their family's livelihood and could not even

²⁷ Bohle 2007, Schetter 2011, Marsden 2011

feed all those for whom they were responsible. Situations like these, when drought dramatically lessened agricultural yields, had repeatedly arisen across Afghanistan and had caused an increase in internal migration. For example, drought-induced internal migration had in the 1990s contributed to the significant growth of Mazar-e Sharif at that time (Schütte 2006: 2).

Rahim described the difficulties in accessing health care and modern means of communication in his remote and mountainous home area in the far south of Balkh province. Although he lived in town permanently and had rented a courtyard, he emphasized that he was not feeling at home there: *"I have no place, I have rented a hawli."* In his last sentence quoted here he makes clear that he understands this form of mobility as homelessness.

Regardless of their negative overtones, Rahim's remarks show that he views migration as a normal and common phenomenon. He described it in an unbiased way. For him it seems to be neither novel nor extraordinary. For the people of his area, migration is business as usual. The pragmatic manner in which Rahim described migration gives the impression that being and remaining mobile is not an extraordinary circumstance but rather an inevitable condition.

Abdul-Karim views on work and life in the city sound even more pragmatic. For him, this is what the world is like and he does not seem to care a lot about the difference between city and countryside. The descriptions given by 12-year-old Hussain and old Alem first of all emphasize the economic hardship they experienced in their home regions. The pressing need to earn more money to make a living for their families had driven them to the city.

Relocation was presented in most cases as being caused by some external force and as ultimately brought about by the circumstances yet facilitated by people's individual abilities to cope with these circumstances. Many speakers stressed this point. Remarks like that made by young Hussain to the effect that life is easy in town because of employment opportunities may sound terrible from a children's rights perspective. However, accounts like these impressively illustrate what vast economic pressure many poor families have to cope with. To get by, income has to be earned by as many family members as possible.

However, this is not the only reason for migration to town recounted by the men at the labor market. Barat Ali, the Hazara from Bamiyan, found himself in another typical situation: His family had left their home province around 20 years earlier due to ongoing warfare and for many others I came to talk to, lack of security also was a major issue up until the time of our encounters.

The conversation with Alem is a powerful example to that point. He also first mentioned the economic problems of his home region. Next, however - after I asked him what he talks about when he calls his family - he brought up the massive security problems troubling his people. For Alem, evidently, the city is much more than just an economic opportunity. It is the very space of refuge that he has been searching for. He even considers bringing his family along to this safer environment. Moreover, the fact that he, despite his old age, had only recently moved in search of a safer place indicates that things recently worsened in his home region in the southeast of Jowzjan. His story is different from the plain story of labor migration as represented by Rahim and Abdul-Karim. Instead, based on his narration Alem has to be viewed as an internal refugee, IDP or, in the local language, a *mohāğher*. While Barat Ali described himself as a *mohāğher* while talking about his family's historical migration, Alem did not use that term although he had just recently been

displaced for reasons of ongoing violence.

Emic terminology and its usage, as can be seen from that, do not draw clear lines between different types of migration – here, caused by economic hardship on the one hand or by insecurity on the other. The fact that Alem now stands on the *kārgarī* together with men who had moved for economic reasons shows that forced and ‘voluntary’ migrants take the same routes, employ the same mechanisms and strategies, and often benefit from the same effects of migration (Monsutti 2010), e.g. finding labor opportunities in the city. Alem’s example illustrates the category of mixed migration pursued by the *UN’s Mixed Migration Plan of Action* (UNHCR 2007) and studied in the monograph *Migration-Displacement-Nexus* (Koser & Martin 2011) which lays open the difficulties of using the dichotomous categories of ‘voluntary’ vs. ‘forced’ migration, especially in light of the in-between forms seen in empirical observation, like the cases presented here.

Alem’s flight from a dangerous region did not seem to be too important to him when he started talking to me about his relocation to town, even though the situation of his family seemed to trouble him constantly. However, he ended up recounting that he was in continuous phone contact with his family out of fear of the potential dangers in his conflict-ridden home area.

Barat Ali’s case provides a manifold migration pattern. Like many other Hazaras he had spent some time in Iran.²⁸ There he benefitted from better economic prospects and work opportunities, but he also suffered from discrimination and persecution because he had no work permit. In his opinion the difficulties Afghans face while working in Iran ultimately do not annihilate the advantage of better salaries. Regarding his present situation of having to come to the *kārgarī* for work, he described similar problems as the other workers did. Barat Ali added that the number of breadwinners in his family was not enough for the large household. In his opinion life in his home region is only decent when one enjoys a certain degree of wealth or influence, for example, by holding an important position such as that of a *mīrāb*.

Barat Ali’s description of how he moved to the city is different from the others’. He introduces the main part of his migration process, which happened some 20 years ago, very prominently in the beginning of the talk. Reportedly his family did not migrate right to the city center of Mazar-e Sharif but first to the Sholgara District that borders the southern outskirts of the city. They bought a farm there and continued farming as they did before the family’s relocation. Thus, Barat Ali’s migration cannot be regarded as rural-urban migration in a narrow sense, nor as a complete change of livelihoods. Nonetheless the son of the family, my respondent Barat Ali, is by now dependent on the employment opportunities of the inner-city *kārgarī*, despite having sought employment in Iran. To earn money for the family he still depends on the long daily commute and expensive transportation. Even though the family’s house is far from the city center, Barat Ali says he grew up “*here, in the city*”.

The livelihood strategies pursued by Barat Ali’s household are not uncommon amongst the interlocutors: The household relies on various income streams, including agriculture and wage labor. The long daily commute to work is also far from unusual. People from a large geographical area commute into the city center in search of employment. For some of them, the commute takes

²⁸ Monsutti 2007

hours. Finding affordable accommodation or even a plot of affordable land near the city center is very difficult. Therefore, people living under circumstances similar to those of Barat Ali's family purchase land in the more distant environs. Out of all examples presented in the first chapter, Barat Ali's family seems to have the most solid economic basis since they own some tilled land and their livelihood is based on earnings from various streams of income. The family seems to benefit from a multilocal strategy enabled through mobility. At the same time Barat Ali was most outspoken about the forced character of their initial migration two decades ago.

If one considers the multifaceted character of migration processes shown in these examples, it comes as no surprise that connections and relationships with the home regions also differ largely from one another. From Abdul-Karim's narrations we learn that his ability to visit home depends on his earnings. He explained that in times of unemployment he stays in the city where he lives very cheaply. He can then escape from his commitment to provide for the family. In his case, mobility is dependent on the urban labor market, and his social life is framed by economic success in the city and expectations by his family at home which he is supposed to meet.

How are things being told?

All points taken up by my interlocutors at the *kārgarī* are noteworthy as information and offer a broad overview of the difficulties that give rise to internal migration. At the same time, these examples also show the importance of studying how the narrations are constructed.

Conducting research on the street is not easy at all. The street is a special narrative environment (Gubrium & Holstein 2007), and not everybody feels comfortable to speak in a situation like this. Some people were reluctant to communicate with me in these surroundings. I assume that they are uncomfortable talking about personal affairs in the public with unknown people around. But there are others who really like to have an audience when they talk, and therefore willingly share stories, anecdotes, and opinions in as unshielded a setting as this. In most cases presented here, people let each other have their say and dissent, if there was any, seems to have been stifled. Rarely did people interrupt each other while speaking. One of the bystanders even reprimanded Abdul-Karim for asking me questions while it was perceived my turn to interrogate, not his.

Sometimes I was left with the impression that the informants were indifferent to their situations and that was why they did not address the topics I was interested in. Alem, for example, only by chance mentioned the insecurity in his home region, although that remark then changed his whole story in one second. Maybe he just did not want to give away personal information regarding his family, for whatever reason, with all these talkers and listeners around.

A remarkable way of representing migration has been brought up by Barat Ali. Already in his first sentence he made a point of clarifying that he is a *mohāğer*, although at the time of his family's migration he was still a child. Barat Ali did not represent his migration to the city as mainly driven by economic hardship like all the others, but as being caused by violence in times of war. By claiming the denotation *mohāğer* for himself, he actively used his agency as a storyteller (Denzin 2000) and represented his family's fate in relation to an important concept of Islam, one of his religion's 'grand narratives' in De Cillia's terms (1999).

The Arabic root contained in the word *mohāğer* is *h-j-r*. According to Ansari (1990) it indicates

dissociation, separation, partition and also emigration. Ansari writes: “Moreover, the root “h-j-r” also has the nuance of “dislike” as the motive for dissociating oneself from or leaving something or someone” (Ansari 1990: 9). He also stresses that “hijrah has come to denote migration from Domain of Disbelief to the Domain of Faith, similar to the migration from Mecca to Medina” (Ansari 1990: 9). In reference to the historic event of *hiġra* also for Afghan refugees in the 1980s “‘hijrat’ and ‘muhajir’ did not simply mean a displaced person or a refugee but meant very specifically a ‘Muslim refugee’” (Shahrani 1995: 189) and, as Shahrani argues, it also implies the temporary character of the exile and the hope to return one day to the places one had to leave behind (Shahrani 1995: 191; Boesen 1990: 160). As I have shown elsewhere (Wenzel 2013a), a shift in language use has occurred here and someone who is now displaced within the country is also denoted by the word *mohāġer*.

By calling himself a *mohāġer*, Barat Ali highlighted the importance of displacement for him and his family and – consciously or unconsciously - showed how important it is to his family. This distinguishes Barat Ali from all the other interlocutors at the *kārgarī*. His narration is an impressive example for what Bakewell (2011) describes: He argues that the act of migration may be concluded but displacement continues to imply “not being where one wants to be” (Bakewell 2011: 22). Displacement is an enduring subjective perception that can be reproduced over a long period and is even transferred to the offspring who did not move themselves.

Unwritten rules of how to speak in public shape the narrative environment as defined by Gubrium & Holstein (2007). These rules became obvious when I tried to talk to the young boy Jawad. He was shy and did not answer my questions. Things were odd for young Jawad since he found himself confronted with a stranger carrying a voice recorder and asking him questions out of the blue while he was surrounded by several elders, some of them hailing from his village at that. Jawad was reluctant to respond, and for good reasons so, as the reaction of much older Alem shows, who answered instead of the boy. From Alem's point of view, which is most probably in line with general perception, an elder is in a much more appropriate position to provide information, given the strict rules about who can speak in public in Afghanistan and who can't (cf. Rzehak 2004: 206). Alem impressively demonstrated how these rules work when he repeatedly and unbelievably asked if out of all those present it really was the boy whom I wanted to address with my questions.

Comparison between rural and urban areas by my interlocutors at the *kārgarī* often came in simplifying dichotomies: “Here it is good, nice. This is a city,” said Rahim, referring to work opportunities, short distances and better access to health care provided in town as compared to his home region, which in its turn he called a ‘desert’. People’s reports about their home areas often include negative descriptions of landscapes and agriculture, as reinforced by the frequent characterization of the region as a ‘desert’. Rahim portrayed life at home as basically good, but only as long as there was not threat of drought or security issues. When I directly asked him about the difference between life in his home region and in town, he viewed the inhabitants of these two spaces as falling into two different groups: poor and rich. He presented the situation as almost natural: people in the countryside are poor whereas people in the city are rich. He seemed to, in his categorization, ignore the rich landowners in the countryside, for whom he and his friends had been

working before migrating. In the same way, he ignored the urban poor, the masses of workers, internally displaced persons, and returnees from the neighboring countries who were flocking to the city and formed a large marginalized population there. Even though Rahim is part of this marginalized group himself and was constantly suffering from the hard competition on the labor market, he did not seem to place himself in that category. On a second thought, for Rahim not everything in the city was as 'good' and 'nice' as he initially stated but what counted for him was the wealth of (some) urban residents and the general advantages of an urban life. His account underlines the primarily economic character of his relocating to the city. Rahim clearly stated that for poor people like himself, internal migration is the only option while migration out of the country is an alternative for the rich only, that is, a group neither himself nor his kin are part of. They cannot afford legal or illegal migration out of Afghanistan, since transborder migration requires money and/or good contacts. Poor versus rich, poor internal migrants versus rich people who go abroad, village life versus city life: All these clear-cut demarcations help Rahim describe his situation, which in actual fact is much more complex. Due to his mobility, Rahim is part of an entangled whole which to him appears as binary contrasts. What he actually said, for an outsider seems to only partly correspond with his own life trajectory or the social reality around him.

Conclusion

These first examples are in many respects indicative of the rural-urban migration that pushes people to the urban areas of Afghanistan. The conversations lay out the multiple face of people's migration processes as well as their various ways to render depictions thereof. They explain several characteristic patterns of migration and coping strategies. They further demonstrate how mobility is verbally represented. Minimal yields in agriculture in a concrete situation and poor economic prospects in general were repeatedly put forward as triggers for migrating. In effect, migration is described as forced by the interviewed persons although they may not call it that. Insecurity is touched upon in diverse ways by the interlocutors, a topic which will recur throughout this book. Economic struggles of migrants in the city, the high unemployment rate, and fierce competition among the laborers will be recurrent themes as well. Internal migration is the only expedient people had in their actual situation, whereas migration to other countries was considered to be costly and hence, not a viable option.

While in verbal representation my interlocutors established a strict dichotomy between the rural and the urban, the way they factually acted and spoke shows that these spaces are closely interconnected. Methodologically speaking, these examples highlight that there might be petty little remarks and small pieces of information - sometimes given in passing or just incidentally - which a researcher wants to regard as very important, even though the informants themselves do not seem to pay a lot of attention to them.

A number of topics already raised here will reappear in the subsequent chapters. We will see that these laborers from the *kārgarī* are not the only ones who have "*not enough for living nor for dying*".

3. Chapter 2: “Our Country Is No Home for Us.” - Managing Expectations

I remember approaching a group of makeshift dwellings, tents, and put-up tarps. I was strolling through the Western outskirts of Mazar-e Sharif, where these quarters were spread out on wasteland between regular houses and courtyards. I had noticed this squatting area when I visited a friend’s home nearby and was wondering who might be living there. Maybe I could gather some useful information for my research.

I approached two men reclining on dry shrubs in the shadow of a worn-out plastic sheet and successfully initiated a conversation. I introduced myself as a student who wants to learn about poor people’s lives in Afghanistan, about where these people are from, why they have come to this place, and the problems they face in their day-to-day life. While we were chatting, some others gathered up around us, expressing curiosity about what I was doing there. We ended up in a conversation with mainly two men (Sikander and Khan) and several bystanders who time and again came in with comments. Towards the end of the interview another man, who is listed as Kabir here, also brought up a few interesting points.

- Sikander²⁹: We are from the Temuri Pashtun *qaum* from the Chahar Bolak district in Mazar province.³⁰
- Ch.: What made you come here?
- Sikander: We were in Iran before we came here.
- Ch.: And how long had you been there?
- Sikander: Seven years. Then we were robbed in Iran. We were robbed and chased away like animals. This is why we have come here. They took away everything from us. They took our houses. Our bare lives were all that was left. We were expelled from Iran. All of us together. Every household. Every family. Do you understand? Every household. Every family. Everyone who had a wife and children had to go back. They also took away our money.
- Khan: We were trading sheep. Our sheep were all we had. And they just took them away. They also took away our motorcycles, our refrigerators. Everything.
- Sikander: Yes, our motorcycles as well. Confiscation. They confiscated everything.
- Ch.: Oh, this is very bad. But before that, why did you go to Iran? When did you first leave Afghanistan?
- Khan: It must have been around ten years ago. First, we spent two years in Pakistan, then we moved on to Iran. In Pakistan we had a residence permit. We were *mohāḡerīn* there. And in Iran we were *mohāḡerīn*, too.
- Sikander: We left [in order to escape from] starvation. At that time, you could not find anything to eat anywhere in Afghanistan. You could not find one single piece

²⁹ Interview 09/07/2011

³⁰ He means the province of Balkh.

of bread. This is why we left.

Khan: We were afraid. There was a lot of fighting going on at that time. On one side, the Taliban. On the other side, the commanders. We were afraid. And us, we had nothing. What could one do? The Taliban, for example, would come to our house, they would eat and drink, and then they said: 'Fight with us, come with us.' But me, I do not know how to fight. Many things like these happened back then. We simply had to leave. For example, if someone is fighting - the kids, what are they going to eat? Our family, what will they eat? Our mother, what is she going to eat? We had no other way. We left. From here we went to Pakistan. From Pakistan we went on to Iran. We stayed there for seven or eight years. Our life there was very good. We had many things. Motorcycles. Refrigerators. [...] And there we also had many sheep.

Sikander: We were able to save some money there. But we did not have enough money to get passports. Since we did not have that much money, they tore down our houses.

Bystander: We were asleep when our problems began.

Khan: [He shows me a document from his wallet.]
Here we have a copy of our certificate of marriage. For one copy, for example, [in Iran] they demand two million, three million, five million. What for? And for the motorcycle you need an annual license plate, and so on. So, what can you save from the money you earn at work? Still, we did have something. Life was okay. But then, suddenly we had to leave from there. 'Go back to your own country', they said.

Another man shows me some of his documents and copies:

This is from Iran. An expensive document. And this is from the Department of Refugees and Repatriation. And this is from the Afghan Consulate in Iran.

Ch.: But here, how is your life here?

Khan: As you see, now we are here. We have nothing. Living under a tarp. No work. No house. No food. No doctor. People are dying of cold in winter and of heat in summer. Now, our own country should really help us all. Our country is no home for us. For example, we have no well. Here, things would be much better if we only had access to water. Close to this place there is no water we can drink. And we have no food either. And there is no work either to earn some money.

Sikander: We have no money, so what can we do?

Khan: If your state could provide any help, we would be very happy. If you have any kind of job for us, we would be happy to do whatever work you can offer us.

Ch.: As I said, I am not here to help, unfortunately. I cannot offer you any work. I am only here for research. But who has been providing support to you so far? The Department of Refugees and Repatriation?

Khan: Yes, we went there and then they helped once or twice. That's not much. Otherwise nothing happened.

Ch.: And where are the other people from your family? Your uncles and brothers and so on, where do they live?

Khan: All are here. We have no land, no place. We have no other place to go.

Ch.: And how many people live here?

Sikander: 100 or maybe 110. Our life here is very poor. Losing everything made our life in Iran very difficult. And here we are all starving. We have sick people. These sick people don't have money to see a doctor or get medicine. We have no money. We have no money for food so that we cannot supply ourselves. We have no money to supply ourselves with medicine. We have to live under a tarp, on the bare ground. All of us. Three of our kids and one woman have died. One woman and three boys. Right here. After this had happened the *kalāntar* of this area, the *kalāntar* offered us a basement room that was not as hot as this place here. And in wintertime everything was covered with snow. The cold kills us people. People get ill. Cold and ice are deadly in wintertime. We folks have nothing, nothing to eat nor a place to stay. We people demand from you, from Muslim countries and from foreign countries, but also from our own state, from our Republic of Afghanistan, from Karzai, the president of our republic, from him we demand that some help be given to us, we demand some support. We demand that we folks should not die from hunger in wintertime. If you cannot help, if the support of your people from outside does not come, if no support is delivered by the Department of Refugees and Repatriation, we people will depart from this life. And all of our children are going to die. We do not have the economic means. We have no money to buy a loaf of bread. We have no money to buy clothes. We have no power. We have no money. We people are very, very poor and very, very desperate. We left Iran because we were forced to. It was not our choice. We were doing great when we first went to Iran but slowly-slowly our wealth vanished. I will tell you: Once we were prosperous, our herds were big. And when we left Iran, we lost everything: our money, our motorcycles, our vehicles, our cars. They expelled us by force from Iran and so we people came back to the dust of Afghanistan. In the dust of Afghanistan there is much less work for day laborers. Here, you see, a family of twenty lives under one single tarp. And out of these twenty people there is only one who can look for work. And if there is no work there is nothing to live on. So, what shall we do? Shall we folks all die? So, what kind of work should we do? There is no work. There is no money. There is no food. There is no water. There is no money for medicine. So, what shall we do? Shall we folks all die? If Allah is our friend someone should really grant us some support. We folks, we really are in desperate need of support. We have a big need for your support. We have a big demand for land; the Department of Refugees and Repatriation should really help us with this issue. We need their help to get some land so that we can build homes for ourselves before winter

comes again. Of course, we people thank the head of the Department [of Refugees and Repatriation] who provided at least some help to us. We thank the Department for drying our eyes from tears and for - if God wills - drying our tears again. And we thank you for coming here to listen to what we are saying.

Ch.: I thank you for telling me all this. You are really in a very bad situation. And once again, I am sorry that I cannot help you.

[Pause.]

But, regarding the topic of work: How do you find work if there is any?

Sikander: We only find work if somebody like you comes here and offers us some work to do. Then we have work. But if you go downtown³¹ and try to find work there, you only hang round there, and you sit there and you sit and you won't find any employment. Find work? Where in Afghanistan can one find work? All people in Afghanistan are poor. Once the Russians came and brought misery to the whole country. Do you understand? And then the Taliban came. And then the war between the Taliban and America happened. And today the Taliban and America both attack the people. Two sides. America is a curse to the people just like the Taliban are a misery to the people. Hunger is everywhere. Things have been like this since the time of the Russians. We die of hunger and we die on the bare ground. What else do we people need? What can we people do if not even you can help us? Where should we get help from? If you do not help us, where else do we get help?

Ch.: As I said, I am very, very sorry to tell you that I am a student, and I came here mainly to gather some information about poor people's lives. I do not work for any office or organization. I am here on my own. I do not have much money. I am not paid as much as you believe. I only get little money for this work. I am planning to write a book and then one day people can read about your fate. I know this is no help for you right now, but I am only here for research. I only want to understand what your life is like. I am sorry that I did not explain this clearly at the beginning. I cannot help you. I am very sorry for this and I am very sorry if you did not understand this.

Khan: He said he is doing research. He is asking people questions. He is a student. He cannot provide any help. But this is what he told from the start. He wants to hear about our problems and our lives. That's all. He already said that.

Sikander: As we already said, during winter, what should the people do? Some people

³¹ To the *kāregari*, as described in the previous chapter.

died here last winter, as we said. And some people also died from the heat. Cholera.

- Khan: You know, our problem is that we do not know who to talk to. We have gone to the *wuluswāli*.³² We have gone to the Department of Refugees and Repatriation. We went to different councils. And they all said we are only passers-by [so that no one is responsible]. But we have no other place to go.
- Ch.: And are all your people here from Chahar Bolak district?
- Sikander: Yes, we all went to Iran together. And we are all from Chahar Bolak.
- Ch.: So, all of you left from there, went to Pakistan together, then on to Iran, and then all of you have come back?
- Bystander: Yes. You know, war was going on here. People died because of the war in those days. What was that like? Day and night there were air raids and other explosions, brother. And then the Taliban came, others came, there was fighting. We fled. We left. 'Let's go', we said, 'let's just go'.
- Ch.: So, please tell me about that time. What was that like?
- Sikander: At that time, during the time of the *moğāhedin*³³ here in Afghanistan, the Russians had left but the killings went on. The *moğāhedin* showed up. And in Afghanistan nothing was left. There was only war and fighting. It was also the time of famine. Not much food was left. There was a lot of unemployment. Some years of unemployment went by. The Taliban showed up. Once again there was war. And then America came. More fighting. We people, we took the decision to leave for Iran. It was mainly because of hunger. There was a drought that lasted for several years. We did not have enough food. And then the war between the Taliban and America happened. The whole country was on the move. Afghanistan on the move, heading towards Pakistan, heading towards Iran, heading towards Germany, heading towards America. Almost everyone. People left because they were forced by starvation and by other problems; they left so as not to be killed in the bombardments. Do you understand? And after we had been robbed in Iran we came back to our own country. We folks are doing so badly that we do not know what to eat from the morning until the evening. Is this really happening? Is this real? We are so desperate that we don't know what to eat. Do you understand? We fled from the problems of war. What condition was Afghanistan in? You probably have seen it yourself on the radio or television.
- Ch.: Yes, I know about those times. Very bad. And I know that today there are many problems in Afghanistan, too. But why did you come here, to this place?
- Sikander: [angry and loud] We came here from Iran to our own country because we were

³² *wuluswāli* - district governor's office

³³ *moğāhed*, pl. *moğāhedin* - member of one of the Islamic resistance groups which fought against the Soviet occupation in the 80s and 90s

forced to. Back to our country, which is no home for us. This place was not our choice!

- Bystander: They expelled us. First, they exploited us and stripped us of our belongings and then they said, 'Go! Go to your own country'.
- Ch.: Yes, I understand this. What I mean is: What happened to the place where you had lived before? Your homes in Chahar Bolak? Why did you not go there?
- Sikander: We do not have anything. Nothing is left. We have no land, we have nothing. Where shall we go?
- Ch.: This land [where you live now] belongs to whom?
- Sikander: To others. It belongs to others. It is not ours.
- Khan: It is private land. The land does not belong to us. We only put up our tents here.
- Sikander: We have no land. They chase us away like animals. 'Go', they say. 'Go, go, go away', say the landowners. We will not stay on here. We will move again.
- Bystander [shouts]:
When we came back from Iran we lost everything. All the things we had collected, all we had acquired, all the household items, and also the sheep, all those things that had been our life and wealth, all these things were lost and have remained in Iran. In the middle of the night they came. It was two o'clock. They came into our houses, grabbed our hands and pulled us onto a truck and, without further ado, they took us to Afghanistan. We had nothing to eat, and - Allah knows this - we had nothing to eat when we arrived here. Do you understand? And this is why we do not have a place to protect our wives and children from the cold and heat. We really need a shelter. If we only had a house where we could sit on the floor. We do not need any more than that.
- Bystander [shouts]:
There is no medicine. There is no money. There is no clinic. There is no safe drinking water. There is no pump or well so that we people have water we can use.
- Sikander: We people, we take water from a river where we walk to. I will show it to you. The water we take from there is part sewage and part water.
- Khan: Our condition is getting obvious while we are talking, isn't it?
- Ch.: Yes, it is. A very bad life. Something should really happen so that you get some support. [Pause.] But how was life back in Iran?
- Kabir: We worked as day laborers there, mainly in agriculture. Some worked as traders.
- Ch.: Were things better there?
- Kabir: It was not any better. We worked hard, and all we brought home was just enough to feed our wives and children. In this sense it was okay. But, for example, we were always afraid. When we went to work, out of fear we did not take a taxi or a bus, and there was no bicycle or car either, so we had to walk. We were afraid that someone in a car would cause trouble: they might

arrest us or send us back to Afghanistan in bonds.

Ch.: I understand. So, some people worked as traders, selling sheep, while others worked as day laborers in agriculture?

Kabir: No, we sold sheep and we worked as day laborers. Both. Some had more sheep.

Ch.: Okay, I understand. One more question: How is life especially for young people and kids in this place?

This question caused quite an uproar, which I had already anticipated over the previous minutes of the conversation. People were talking more and more excitedly and simultaneously. They were convinced that they had already explained their situation at length and if I had only listened carefully I should have been able to infer that life for children under these conditions was more than simply bad.

Bystander: We have told you that three kids died. What else do you want to know?

Khan: What do you think? There is nothing here. People live under a tarp. There is no school. What do you think the life of our children is like?

Sikander: We people, all we have is dust, dust, dust. Our houses are dust, our life here is dust.

I tried to calm the situation and thanked my conversation partners for their time and patience. The situation eventually calmed down. Once more the questions of where I had learned Dari and how and where I was living in Afghanistan came up. Some people were still angry that nothing would come out of our conversation to support them. At one point, someone brought over a watermelon. I made sure to eat only a few pieces, passing some pieces out to the by-standing kids, having in mind the situation just described to me.

What is being told?

This meeting introduces another group of people who constitute the urban poor and homeless population in Afghan towns like Mazar-e Sharif. The narrations during this meeting laid bare a lot of suffering and despair as they centered around an instance of migration that is by all standards clearly a 'forced' one, involving in particular a forceful eviction from Iran.

This expulsion was for the time being the latest relocation for this group of Pashtun villagers, who first fled from Afghanistan in the late 1990s. After a short stay in Pakistan they had moved on to Iran from where they were deported around 2008. After being deported to Afghanistan they found neither a home nor a stable livelihood. While talking to me the different times and places included in their migration stories were mixed up. During the whole conversation reports prevailed about the deportation as well as the miserable situation in which people were now living. These two topics comprehensibly marginalized any narrations about other stages in people's lives. Still, it does make sense to look at what people say about all different stages of their migration.

The first migratory act of these respondents was their escape from Afghanistan. It happened

when fighting intensified in their home region not too far from Mazar-e Sharif, and this first step is representative of one type of emigration experienced by millions of Afghans after the 1979 Soviet invasion. Like the descriptions of other *mohāḡerīn* I spoke to, the reasons these interlocutors gave for fleeing from Afghanistan were a mix of economic and security aspects. In this conversation Khan described the terrible situation of being caught in the middle of a conflict without actually being part of it. His recount of the Taliban's recruitment attempts is quite impressive.

Leaving the country only around 1997/98 - when battles for Mazar-e Sharif were fought between the Taliban and the local commanders (Schetter 2007: 128) - was quite a late point in time, compared with mass emigration of others that had happened much earlier. Almost two decades of war had passed in Afghanistan and the majority of the refugees had since long left the country, particularly in the country's northern districts, which is where these interlocutors were from. Their districts had been afflicted by the war from the very beginning, since those districts were close to the main supply routes during the Soviet invasion and occupation. But these general trends do not tell us much about the fate of the people I met that day and the particular reasons that made them finally leave their home area. As Dorronsoro argues "*there was no automatic linkage between the number of departures and the intensity of the fighting*" (Dorronsoro 2005: 170). It is also possible that this group of people was on good terms with one of the civil war parties and only changes in the local power structure led to a situation in 1997/98 that urged them to take the decision for flight. In times of our talk there might have been good reasons for them not to mention these links to one of the former civil war factions. One may even ask oneself if the situation of these movers, which was at the time of my field research obviously a very difficult one, really was just due to the overall poor condition of the Afghan state on the local level in the present, or if it was rather some conflict of the past that now yielded some effect on the marginalized and miserable situation those people found themselves in while I was there.

Not much was told about the time in Pakistan except a short reference to the residence permit and their status as *mohāḡerīn*. Being *mohāḡer* in Pakistan brought some advantages in those days as Afghans were accepted as formal refugees and were supported by the state of Pakistan.³⁴ The actual number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan was always only roughly estimated, and movements back and forth between areas of exile and home have never stopped completely (Monsutti 2010: 47). These constant movements, the so-called 'recycling of refugees' (Schmeidl & Maley 2008: 147), in 1986 induced the UNHCR to stop counting the officially documented Afghan refugees in Pakistan, even though new people were still arriving then (Shahrani 1995: 203). In addition, many refugees settled in Pakistani cities without having themselves registered (Conner 1987). Kronenfeld sums up the problem of official refugee statistics by referring to the period after 2001: "*500.000 more refugees returned to Afghanistan in the first four years of repatriation than we thought to exist in the first place*" (Kronenfeld 2008: 2).

To my interlocutors in this chapter, being acknowledged as refugees by the Pakistani state and by parts of Pakistani society meant a lot and it gained even more importance in retrospect, when

³⁴ Shahrani 1995; Grare 2003; Roy 1990; Lischer 2005

they compared it to the situation they faced in Iran and the ensuing miserable conditions in their home country of Afghanistan.

The accounts about Iran contain different aspects and assessments. On the one hand my respondents proudly listed all the belongings they possessed there. It seems they had acquired a certain status and standard of living, highlighted here by the enumeration of household items and commodities. Yet, they also dropped statements that make one question their quality of life there. There were high costs for all sorts of bureaucratic affairs, and lots of regulations that caused difficulties for my interlocutors. While the two main speakers presented the exploitative bureaucratic costs as a major pain in the neck, Kabir, who joined the conversation later, mentioned yet another difficult aspect of their lives in Iran: the permanent fear that goes along with a life lived in illegality, exemplified by the danger of being inspected on public transport, which could lead to arrest and deportation.

The brutal ultimate deportation, which is given a prominent position in the accounts, may not have come as quite that much of a surprise for these people as the remarks by the first two speakers might indicate. Life in Iran was for Afghans generally characterized by insecurity and uncertainty about the future. We heard a similar story from Barat Ali in Chapter 1. However, in retrospect everything was unsurprisingly idealized: Compared to living under a plastic tarp in the extreme climate of North Afghanistan with hot summers and freezing cold winters, almost anything may have appeared desirable, regardless of harassment and discrimination these people experienced by the authorities in Iran. As Kabir said, just to be able to go to work and feed the family would have been a desirable condition yet was currently out of reach for these people.

The deportation from Iran overshadowed this whole conversation. Since that experience went along with the loss of most of their property, the event was characterized as robbery or confiscation by Sikander. The migration story presented here was an extreme example of forced migration; however, the experience of this group was shared by many other Afghans. Brutal deportation from Iran happened repeatedly in those years.³⁵ The menace of impending large-scale deportation of Afghans with improper or no resident papers became an explosive political issue between Afghanistan and Iran. An actual deportation from Iran, however, of all illegal Afghan immigrants would probably affect both countries negatively: It would have caused a significant reduction of remittances to Afghanistan, and a loss of cheap labor to Iran.

Officially people coming back to Afghanistan from exile were regarded as returnees. Since the end of the Taliban regime in 2001/2002 many Afghans returned voluntarily and involuntarily to their country. Refugees were in large numbers turned into returnees. In view of ongoing insecurity and of lack of livelihood opportunities, the prospect of 'going back' for good for many would have implied to give up the multilocal lifestyle which they had previously chosen consciously, and for good reasons (Schetter 2012). Or, as Calogero puts it, *"It is only possible to conflate refugee-repatriation with 'returning home' to an audience that is well-insulated from the living conditions, life-opportunities, and political constraints of refugee households"* (Calogero 2011: 2).

³⁵ www.nzz.ch/keine-spur-von-islamischer-solidaritaet-ld.1075309 (last seen on 04/20/2023)
www.focus.de/politik/ausland/iran_aid_55390.html (last seen on 04/20/2023)

On top of the harsh and poor conditions these people were living in, they could not find any authority to tend to their needs. They did receive some minor support, but no office had so far felt responsible for improving their situation in an effective and sustainable manner. The main problem seemed to be that the returnees were seen as passers-by. They received some emergency supplies from the local authorities but were relegated to their district of origin for permanent solutions, such as the procurement of land and housing. This was the general practice before the National IDP Policy was enacted at the end of 2013³⁶. However, as many districts had reportedly no means or power to carry out resettlements, people had good reason to believe that perhaps life in the city offered more prospects than going back to where they had lived before they first left Afghanistan. For these respondents it was quite obvious that returning to where they hailed from was not an option. Although the group apparently received some support from the neighborhood where they squatted at that time, the men were not confident they could stay there for much longer. “We will not stay on here. We will move again”, said Sikander, underscoring the permanent danger of being chased away yet again.

During the interview the men described difficulties in earning money similar to those workers I met at the *kārgarī* in Chapter 1. What is different was that I met these informants at their dwellings. As they said in the interviews, they preferred to wait right there for employers to come and offer work since they were far from the city centre and commuting would have been too expensive, especially since the prospects of finding decent employment there were anyway regarded as being very limited.

How are things being told?

The interview with these Pashtun returnees abounds with tales of suffering. The presentation of their desperate situation took up a large part of the interview. In various utterances the two main speakers as well as the bystanders give detailed accounts of the deprivation and problems they encountered. Sikander, in particular, flew into a rage during the conversation, which made him utter rhetorical questions and multiple repetitions of single remarks. Sikander employed impressive rhetorical devices when he spoke about the recruitment attempts of the Taliban: By listing all his family members one by one and each time posing the question “What are they going to eat?”, he highlighted his hopeless position and his unsettling inability to live up to his responsibility as breadwinner. Later, he asked me straightforward if I wanted all these people to die; in so doing he put responsibility for his people’s fate in my hands. On his part this may have been a desperate rhetorical move, even sort of a device he had successfully employed in other situations when addressing authorities or potential supporters.³⁷

It became obvious during the conversation that not all participants, including Sikander, had realized that no support was to be expected from me. This led to an uneasy tension between me and my counterparts and also within the group. Khan tried to calm down the situation by siding with me and explaining my position as a researcher once again to the other men, who were very upset.

³⁶ www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-national-policy-internally-displaced-persons (last seen on 04/20/2023)

³⁷ Of course, categorizing this linguistic behavior as a trained act and as intentional does not imply a judgement whether these people were needy or not.

Sikander's anger and frustration come as little surprise if we take into account on how many occasions he may have asked Afghan officials and strangers like me for support to no avail.

Later in the conversation my tenacious questions, which were interpreted as a lack of attention and understanding, further fueled tension. Some participants lost their patience when I, without any means or intentions to provide support, kept asking silly questions. When I asked what had happened to the respondents' land in their home region I received a rebuke: it was not for me to insist on getting an answer to this. Reasons for this rebuke can be manifold – anything from traumatic events to self-induced mischance. I never found out what was behind it and all I understood was that the men definitely did not want to talk about this topic, for reasons that were none of my business.

Finally, Kabir's role is very interesting in the context of how information is provided in this interview. After Sikander and Khan had described life in Iran as fine, Kabir's interjection changed the picture significantly. He provided a more diverse description of his people's life in exile. Kabir's remarks departed from the widely positive accounts of the other two men. Additionally, his intervention shows that Sikander and Khan are not the only ones who can speak for this community and that their narrative of their shared history may not go unchallenged. Sikander and Khan are not in exclusive 'narrative control' of their story (Hyvärinen 2008). Kabir managed to broaden the picture in a very calm way: While the other two speakers were talking excitedly and loudly for a long period, he waited for his turn to add his perspective. His approach in the talk is a good example of tactical behavior. He did not contradict his two enraged fellows but made his point only when the other speakers were tired of describing their bitter fate and miserable situation.

A review of the concept of 'strategies' and 'tactics' by de Certeau (1984) proves to be useful at this juncture. De Certeau wanted to examine "*everyday practices, 'ways of operating' or doing things*" (De Certeau 1984: xi) without returning to the perspective of individuality, but instead focusing on patterns and operational logics. He intended to "*make explicit the systems of operational combination which also compose a 'culture'*" (De Certeau 1984: xi). In his examination of patterns of acting and the practice of everyday life in spheres such as language, culture, and commerce, one of his suggestions is to divide peoples' acting into 'tactics', which are opposed to 'strategies', a model originating in the military (De Certeau 1984: 38). The approach is repeatedly utilized in science. Datta et al. describe tactics as "*reactive, fragmented and fragile*" (2007: 425) actions, and Williams points out that tactics are employed by marginal groups in order to make best use of their resources and capabilities (Williams 2006: 867) or even to contest existing power, as Khosravi stresses (Khosravi 2008). The applicability to my research topic becomes obvious when looking at de Certeau's text: "*We are concerned with the battles or games between the strong and the weak, and with the 'actions' which remain possible for the latter*" (De Certeau 1984: 34). What is more: "*The space of a tactic is the space of the other*" (De Certeau 1984: 37).

Returning to the story told here, two loud and self-confident speakers at first sight seem to have 'narrative control' in this 'narrative environment'. Kabir then tried to find a way to bring in his view about life in Iran. His only chance was to wait until the other two speakers had repeatedly and intensely told their versions of the story, which they postulated as valid for all members of the community. Only then Kabir interjected his alternative narration.

On the other hand, when we look at Sikander's long and deftly narrated accounts, we can see them as being instances of tactical behavior, too. As a representative of his community, suffering greatly under the stresses of poverty, hunger, illness, and a very uncertain future, he reportedly sought help from many people and institutions. Now I showed up all of a sudden and asked about their lives. This was his chance to tell me everything, and of course he narrated his story in a dramatic manner. This, too, can be understood as a tactic of the poor and unheard, as Sikander seized the opportunity that came with my unexpected arrival, and tried to make the best of it for his community.

This is not the end of our encounters with 'tactics'. More examples illustrating the use of tactics during the talks will be presented in the following chapters. Further on, tactics will become important when we look at the daily lives of poor migrants moving to the city, entering a space that is not theirs and where they have little chance of agency over their lives at first glance.

Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced a group of people who experienced an oppressive deportation from Iran and afterwards came to live in the miserable situation of homelessness in the suburbs of Mazar-e Sharif. Migrants such as these constitute another large proportion of the urban poor along with internal urban-rural movers.

In the conversation I was confronted with speakers' pent-up despair that resulted from their harsh living situation; their most vital concerns were left largely unheard. Parts of the talk may have consisted of narratives that had been successfully told before, which shows how often these men are trying to voice their concerns. Nevertheless, their situation continued to be disastrous. Sikander employed the tactic of sharing his misery with me, the unexpected visitor. Kabir's tactic was of another kind: as an individual with a non-conformist view he took an opportunity in the course of the conversation to interject his personal opinion into the dominant narrative of this desperate group of people, or more precisely, the narrative of those who were in narrative control of that given situation. Finally, the interview recorded during this visit demonstrates the difficulties of researching topics that are of vital importance for the informants while laying bare the researcher's helplessness and challenging his moral self-perception.

4. Chapter 3: “We Are the State and We Have Nothing.” - Managing Displacement

I remember sitting in a dusty and drab office, looking at a water boiler that was struggling hard to heat water for tea. It consisted of a large metal pot and an immersion heater tied to it with some duct tape. Due to the sparsity of sockets in the office the plug had been cut off and the thin threads had been directly connected to another plug inserted into the socket which supplied the office computers. I was waiting for Shahab.

Shahab worked for the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), the local branch of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR). It was not easy for me to find the department in town when I went there for the first time. The reason why I missed it on my first attempt on foot – my usual means of transportation in town – was because the building was quite unremarkable. The department was located on one of the main streets in an ordinary three-storey building with a small courtyard behind. I don't know why, but I expected it to look much more pompous, like other government buildings, with some kind of a front garden and a guardhouse. However, this office had little splendor or protection. The only noteworthy security measure was an elderly man who occasionally sat on a plastic chair at the gate. Since he was also responsible for making and serving tea, sweeping the old and dusty carpeting, and watering the few flowers in the courtyard, anyone could enter the house. Many department stores had better protection than this government building.

Most taxi drivers in town had no idea where to find the DoRR office. Funnily enough, this did not prevent them from starting the ride with me as the paying customer and along the way asking other taxi drivers where to go. This, of course, lengthened the route substantially. Having arrived, I found the office to be surprisingly small given the relevance of its purpose, which involved, among other tasks, the major duty of providing support for an estimated 10.000 IDP families in and around Mazar-e Sharif at that time.

The Head of Department was a busy, kind, and cosmopolitan man who regularly traveled back and forth between the Ministry in Kabul and his office in Mazar-e Sharif, but also used to go to Tajikistan where, so he told me, he was working on a PhD in Economics. This similarity of both being PhD candidates, even though quite different in status, topic, and academic field, convinced him to support my request for assistance with even more empathy and outstanding kindness. He referred me to Shahab, who had been instructed to take care of me. I got the chance to join Shahab on his occasional field missions on behalf of the office. Except for our first meeting, I only saw the Head of the Department one more time although I spent quite some time in the office.

The arrangements, route, and character of the trips on which I joined Shahab were quite similar every time. Usually these trips needed some preparation: meeting in the department the day before, having a chat and some tea, and, finally, agreeing on a joint trip for the next day. In most cases it was Shahab who suggested the destination. The day after upon my arrival at the department around the agreed time, mostly early in the morning, we would have more tea and chat a bit more. Normally Shahab had to finish some work before we were ready to leave: a lengthy search for specific undiscoverable documents or the manual copying of long lists of names, which he executed with great care about the hand-drawn lines for which he used the back of a worn-out book. The office

had a copy machine that would have saved hours of this time-consuming work, but it had run out of ink a long time ago.

For our first trip together, we had a departmental car which like all office and NGO cars at that time was a white all-terrain vehicle, most likely the only car that belonged to the office. Normally the employees did not have staff cars at their disposal, nor did we any time after. All later trips were undertaken with Shahab's car, the most common model of car in Afghanistan those days: a Toyota Corolla. It was painted yellow and white and looked like a taxi. This was very good for my security, Shahab explained, because it attracted no attention at all. Shahab, who lived outside of the city, used the car to go to work and to earn some extra money on the way by picking up customers. For our trips we had agreed that I pay him money for fuel. Over time the price of fuel seemed to rise, and at the same time he also started to pick up additional passengers along the way.

For Shahab, traveling around with me seemed to be more than just a duty. I had the impression that he enjoyed it. Although field missions like these were part of his job, he liked being released from his daily routines. He liked chatting with me and finding out about all kinds of obscure topics related to Germany. He enjoyed dirty jokes and tried to get translations for all kinds of expletives.

Nonetheless, when I came back to Afghanistan a second time, he candidly explained how embarrassing these visits to migrant communities were: The people I wanted to talk to would not understand my intention of only listening to their stories and problems without promising any help. If I had nothing to offer, why should they share their time and knowledge with me? These people were suffering greatly and had to spend their time working, finding money and bread, rather than talking. On top of that, I had already visited several places the year before. From his point of view, the talks and stories we would hear resembled each other so much that there was no point in visiting more places. I still remember how uncomfortable I felt in that situation. Nonetheless I tried to use his knowledge and contacts to find some new research spots.

The locations we went to were places he knew of, which accommodated a large number of IDPs registered with his department. Usually he would call a contact person he knew from the respective community to instruct him to summon some people who could talk to me. Group interview scenarios were set up with varying numbers of participants. The way Shahab would normally introduce me was as follows:

Shahab: This is Christoph. He is from Germany. He wants to have information about the life of the poor people, about people like you who have come to the city. He wants to write a report on this. He has recently arrived in Afghanistan. He is a student, and he cannot deliver any help even though help would be needed urgently. He is working on a book. This is for research. He asks you questions about your life and your problems and afterwards he will send the findings there, to Germany. He will ask you questions, and you will tell him what your problems are, why you have to live on so little, where you are from, and why you came here.³⁸

³⁸ Interview 07/03/2012

One of my first trips with Shahab was to Dehdadi, a village close to Mazar-e Sharif. Shahab introduced me. A man introduced as Nazar Gul did almost all the talking while some other men, who were sitting with us added occasional comments.³⁹

Nazar Gul: We are from the Koh-e Alburz in the district of Chimtal. At this place in Dehdadi, on this street, we are all living in rented places. We live in one courtyard with five or ten families. We have come to this place due to problems resulting from drought, war, and insecurity.

Man sitting in the round:

Many of us decided to come here because of drought after the month of *hamal*.⁴⁰ At that time many families fled. [Groups of] ten families, five families, three families escaped from the area. There is no long story to tell. What can we say? Our problem are the high prices. Our problem is unemployment. These are the words of us people who became displaced. With some support from our God or from somebody else we might get into a better life. But now we have a lot of problems.

Ch.: Are all these families from Chimtal? Is that right?

Nazar Gul: Yes, all from Chimtal, all from Koh-e Alburz.

Ch.: And are all of you from the same village?

Nazar Gul: No, we are from several villages, from neighboring settlements. There are a few families from every village. Two families, five families. People from one family live together in one place. Brothers or cousins of one family stay together if possible.

Ch.: So how was the time when you arrived here in town? Did you purchase the land? Did you rent a place? What happened?

Nazar Gul: Our heads are all we have. So, all these places are rented. If someone rents a house, for example for 1000 Afghani, he shares it with four or five other families to lower the expenses. We do not know how to feed ourselves. We cannot even dare to think about buying land.

Ch.: Ok, I understand. So how is life in Koh-e Alburz today?

Nazar Gul: If security were fine in our area, it would be like home for us. But security needs to be good in any event. If there were no insecurity in the villages, no one would move his entire family and household from one place to another. From Alburz, the last time I saw it when we left, we brought all our things, our animals, everything we owned. There is insecurity, there is war. There is war every day. They [the Afghan state and its international partners] are fighting the

³⁹ Interview 09/07/2011

⁴⁰ *hamal* - first month of the lunar calendar: 03/20-21 – 04/20. If there is no rainfall until that month, the rain-fed crops will go to waste.

Taliban from planes over there. From one side the planes come to bomb, from the other side the Taliban come.

Ch.: And what do you think? When the security situation improves, will you go back?

Nazar Gul: Oh sure, we will go back to our home. We will not become poor refugees in the city. If the security gets better and the weather is suitable for farming, our home is home. Then there is no better place. Home is home.

Ch.: That's right. Do you still have people living in the area?

Man: Many people are there.

Nazar Gul: Some people still hold out. But not every household has someone who stays. So, who stays? The old, the weak, those who cannot leave, those are the people who stay. Those people who have children, they do not stay in most cases because the Taliban come and take their sons to war. People flee because of these reasons. They pack their few poor belongings to save their own heads. They are tired of the war. All of them have had a taste of all kinds of war for 25 years now. They do not want it anymore. They are all fed up because it is the war that brings suffering and disaster to them. This is what people say, and this is what they do to save their heads.

Ch.: And do you sometimes go there?

Nazar Gul: No, no, I don't go there at the moment. People just come here.

Ch.: So, you talk on the telephone if there is an urgent situation?

Nazar Gul: Yes, yes.

Ch.: Here in town, what kind of work do you do?

Nazar Gul: You know, it is not that easy to find work. We people try to do any kind of job we can find, but it is not easy. We are used to do day labor, building homes, working there. Too often we find no jobs. Especially for the young ones it is very bad. They want to work and they can because they are young. But they just sit there and wait.

Man: That's right, there is no work.

Man: Yes, I have now been jobless for twenty days. It is difficult to find a job in town since so many people fled from the Taliban.

Nazar Gul: We have several times gone to all these offices that give work to people. Several times. The office of *mohāğērīn* [the DoRR] even gave us the address of places where we could go and work. We said, 'give us some work, we want to work', but it did not work out. I don't understand why. We went to the office of public works;⁴¹ we went to other places. We got no job. 'We have no job programs right now. We have no projects', they said. But we really do need work.

⁴¹ This government office organized cash-for-work or food-for-work assignments for needy people in that time.

I remember how we left the interview location. Shahab explained his work while the car was bumping along the dusty road. Some men were running behind the car, stopping us to ask for a ride up to the next major road.⁴²

Ch.: Shahab, please explain your work to me. How did you find these people? Will you help them get some support?

Shahab: See, this is how our work is. We do not find these people because we are not looking for them. People come to our office. They give us a report about their situation, where they are from, where they are living, what their most urgent problems are. After that we go there, take a look at who these people are, how their life is and so on. It is like a survey and after that we inform the other offices. We make them aware of the people and their problems so that they can deliver some help. And if then the foreign NGO offices can deliver some support, they do; then something happens. If not, we cannot do anything. Then nothing happens.

Ch.: So, you have to check? In the office, when people talk to you, the problems sound very big of course. So, you don't know if it is all true what they are saying and you have to go there to see the situation for yourselves. What kind of help is then given to people?

Shahab: Every kind of help. Some agencies are specialized in providing food supplies. They give some wheat and rice and oil. Others give tents, plastic sheets, tarps.

Ch.: All this is from your office?

Shahab: No, not from our office. From the other offices [international actors, NGOs]. We are the state and we have nothing. We are just like the *mohāğērīn*. We have nothing in our hands. Being the office for *mohāğērīn*, we are *mohāğērīn* ourselves. We have no help, nothing to deliver. Do you understand?

Ch.: No, I do not understand.

Shahab: We have nothing.

Ch.: So, you just gather information and pass it on?

Shahab: Yes, we write it down. We report. We only raise awareness. We bring people together. Those who are in need and those who can help.

Ch.: Okay, and the help comes from other offices like UN and foreign countries.

Shahab: Yes, you got it. We pass on the information, but we cannot deliver any support. Information comes from us - help comes from you [i.e., international agencies and NGOs].

In the subsequent part I will change the structure of the analysis. I will not provide separate headings for 'What is being told?' and 'How are things being told?'. Instead, I will discuss the role of the DoRR office in the context of the two interview excerpts presented in this chapter.

⁴² Interview 09/07/2011

The DoRR office

The national DoRR office in Mazar-e Sharif does not reside in a physically prominent, or at least easily recognizable, building. Not many people are aware of the office, not even the nearby shopkeepers seem to know it. The department had very little staff and almost no funding. Work there was neither effective nor professional, as far as I can tell. While ordinary staff like Shahab earned extra money in side jobs, the Head of Department did not seem spend much time at the office at all, possibly working elsewhere as well.

This is surprising because, officially, the DoRR office was responsible for supposedly 10,000 families in and around Mazar-e Sharif at the time of my research. Being entrusted with this major task yet so poorly equipped to carry it out, highlights the miserable condition of Afghan administration on local level. This disproportion is probably paired with problems like embezzlement and corruption, problems that have been observed in many other cases.⁴³

The office's work was further complicated by its employees having almost no power of action, like Shahab explains in the car. The staff solely had a mediating role, bringing together needy internal refugees and agencies that possibly deliver help as best they can. Based on my observations about the office's work, there is reason to doubt that the office works fast and effectively for the benefit of the masses of poor migrants stranded in the city. The reports from migrants I presented in the first two chapters also speak to this assumption.

In addition, the inconspicuousness of the DoRR office has another important effect: access to its services was quite exclusive. A newcomer to town needs the exact address in order to get there. Without knowing someone who has this information, even asking for help can be difficult. This was crucial as the responsible department staff was not actively searching for needy persons but relied on the poor migrants to come up to them, as Shahab told me in the car. One could imagine that many people are excluded from help simply because they do not know where the office is. Given the fact that the staff is overburdened and that very little support and relief was available compared with such great demand, we can assume that the visibility was being limited on purpose: the lesser persons seeking help the better. Access to help from the DoRR office was exclusive and the information on where to go and whom to ask for support became a vital resource in the everyday struggles of the poor newcomers. How the necessary contact information becomes available and how people can get in contact with the office will become clear later on.

The interview

The information gleaned from my visit to Dehdadi sheds light on typical features of recent migration processes. When migrants talked about their displacement, they described dangers, especially threats arising from the Taliban in their home region. As others before them, they found themselves trapped in the middle of a conflict. The speakers emphasized how important it was to take young men out of the region, as they are a special target of the Taliban's recruitment efforts. Reportedly, everyone who was able to flee did so. According to the reports, old and weak people

⁴³ General overview: www.transparency.org/en/countries/afghanistan (last seen on 04/20/2023)

had to remain, obviously because they would not be able to survive the journey. In addition to the insecure situation, the villagers faced economic hardships and the combination of these two factors prompted many people to move to the city. Nazar Gul made clear that he would not have migrated without these problems. He obviously regarded the city as a place of temporary exile and still hoped to go back to his home one day. Further on, my conversational partners described how they share houses and courtyards to save rental costs. Seemingly all those families formed a community based on social ties outside kinship networks and acquaintances, the bond being their common home region. Faist calls such fundamentals of cooperation, which in this case lead to otherwise unrelated people living together, symbolic ties (Faist 1998: 218). Poros (2011), speaks of ‘composite ties’, probably because the types may not be mutually exclusive.

Another central topic in our discussion was again the high level of unemployment. Reportedly, men of this community tried hard to find work everywhere, including jobs in sponsored cash-for-work or food-for-work programs. According to Nazar Gul, it is mainly the state who should take care of providing this kind of projects in order to give people an opportunity to earn their own money.

Shahab was not very active in this talk. He did not say anything regarding the interlocutors’ remarks. Afterwards, in the car, he gave me some additional information. His remarks culminated in his comparison of the situation of his office with the powerlessness of the poor *mohāġerīn*, the very people they were meant to assist.

Conclusion

This chapter portrays yet another group of migrants in Mazar-e Sharif. As was the case with other informants, ongoing conflicts, violence, and economic hardships had caused these people’s relocation to the city. Hailing from the same area gained importance at the new location as people were forced to share houses and courtyards due to their desperate economic situation. This topic will be further investigated in the subsequent chapters. Unlike other interview partners, the spokesman of this group did not generally reject the option of going back to his home village someday. Like the previously presented interlocutors, these informants complained about the lack of employment and support to improve their situation.

An important institution offering support for migrants was briefly portrayed in this chapter: the DoRR office. Obviously, the means made available to this government office were far too scanty to enable the officials to handle the task of ensuring safe living conditions for around 10,000 internal migrants in the wider Mazar-e Sharif region. The limited services that could be delivered through the office’s staff made access to the office – a rare and sought-after chance. Only few people had the opportunity to voice their needs there, which increased the non-beneficiaries’ frustration and hopelessness; these were sentiments I also observed in the interview presented in Chapter 2. The situation was frustrating not only for those who suffered from the lack of relief but also for those who worked for the department and were unable to deliver support to the migrants in the city although they were responsible to do so. Hence, Shahab’s remark: “We are the state and we have nothing“.

5. Chapter 4: “You Have Not Been There Recently, Have you?” - Contested Narrations 1

I remember sitting in Shahab’s car once again. We were passing by some very simple dwellings made from branches, mud, plastic sheets, and waste. "Do people live in those huts?", I asked Shahab. „Wait and see", he replied. We were in Qala-i-Jangi, a few kilometers west of Mazar-e Sharif. The car stopped in front of a *hawli*. Several men were already waiting for us, since Shahab had called one of them before. In the obligatory introduction I explained my intention to learn something about the lives of these people, who hailed from villages of Koh-e-Alburz just like those in the previous chapter. Three men did most of the talking. One of them, who is being introduced as Mohammad Musa here, took the lead in describing their situation. Additionally, Abbas and Wassem made detailed remarks and took important positions in the discussion. Like in some other interviews a few more people were around and added comments.⁴⁴

Mohammad Musa:

Our life here, Mr. Christoph, our life here is not good. Our days here pass by, but life is not good. We are people who were born in Afghanistan, we have lived here all our lives, but this country is not a good place for us. Here you find 270 families who arrived around three years ago because of drought. They came to this place three years ago. They had all worked in farming, but crops did not grow. Recently 200 families have come here because they hoped to find a better life than in the mountains of Alburz, where our home is. But these 200 households are so poor that they have to live in tents, under tarps, and in the shadow of the thorny shrubs along the road. They do not have any cooked food. They do not have proper clothes and they do not have proper mattresses. This is why they cannot manage their lives on their own. And the cold winter is coming. These people do not have the amount of food that would be needed. These 200 families are hit so hard because they came recently due to the violence of the Taliban. These people, and us, we are really *mohāgerīn*, we have become homeless. We are all in need of food and clothing. We all lack proper shelter and drinking water. All these people have too little of everything, in particular doctors’ services are missing. Once, the head of the DoRR brought a doctor along. And because we had a certificate,⁴⁵ his services were cheap for us. He was a doctor from the public hospital. But this is not enough. We need regular weekly medical services here, not just a one-off visit. If we want to see a private doctor, we have to go there and then we have to wait for a long time to get treatment. And often the medicine is expensive. You know, we have 13 or 14 kids, family members, women, brothers or uncles who fall ill. So, we have a high demand for doctors. But because service is missing we are neighbors to

⁴⁴ Interview 09/07/2011

⁴⁵ Probably a document that recognized these people as IDPs.

the graveyard. You see, we are short of means. But what shall we people do? What else can I tell you? We have no good future. Soon it will be 4 years that we have persevered in this place. Our village elders have gone everywhere, to every office and tried to explain our situation. But all they were told there was: 'It is all known. We are aware of your fate and we know that you are there'. But the help we get does not suffice. We only have one advocate and that is ourselves. Besides us, there is nobody who is supporting us to reach out to those on top. There is nobody we can communicate our needs to. So, nothing will change for us. You can ask every single person here: men, women, children. They will all tell you that we need much betterment here. And we are not only a few people. 460 or 470 households [stay] in this place alone.

Abbas: Us people are in a condition of such big need that we leave early in the morning and go to the *kārgarī* to find work as day laborers. People go here and there and everywhere for work. Some days they get a job, on other days they don't. If they don't, they return back, all the time thinking how they are going to pay the rent. If we look at all the people who have come here, who have left behind their homes and fields, who now live a life like this, then we know that we are alive only by the grace of God; we have not died thus far. Still, the situation for most of us is very bad. Many are weak, they do not know how to go on. We used to be farmers, those who arrived three years ago. Here we need to find some other work. If the weather had been different, if rain and snow had come, many of the farmers would have gone back to our home region.

Ch.: Where do you go for work?

Mohammad Musa:

We go to the *kārgarī*. On some days we find work, on others we don't. Then we come back without.

Ch.: But from here to the city it is a long way. How much is the cost for transportation?

Mohammad Musa:

30 Afghani one way. Same for going back. Makes 60. It is not a big deal if you find work. Then it is little money, but when you do not find work it is a lot for us people. And like I said, sometimes there is work, sometimes there isn't.

Abbas: And those folks who have become *mohāḡerīn* only recently, those who have arrived just now, they think they cannot bear another one of God's burdens. They cannot accept this kind of burden. They lived in a very bad and unfortunate situation, no proper drinking water, no clinics, no proper food, no cooked food. And these people have no power. Because they have no power there, no power to make a living there, no power to fight the Taliban, because of all that they were forced to leave.

Shahab: So, Christoph, do you understand? Here are the people who have come because of the drought. There was no rain in their area in the mountains of Alburs. And

then there are the other people who came here for yet another reason. They came here because of war, because of insecurity that is recently caused by the Taliban. In their region there is war. The Taliban plague the people, bother them, beat them. 'Give us fighters! Do some military service for us! Buy us a gun! Do this, do that! Give us money! Do what we say or go away!' This what war is like.

Abbas: People are pressured from two directions. On one side there is the state that is coming with soldiers, with airplanes, and so on. This puts pressure on us civilians. This is force. And on the other side the Taliban put pressure on the people: 'Give us weapons. Buy us a motorcycle. Brother, find a motorcycle'. Nothing else. 'Buy a motorcycle. Buy weapons. Give us people. We have to beat that man, help us for a night or two'.

Ch.: How did you make the decision to leave the area and come to this place? Was it a decision you all made together or how did you all end up in this place?

Mohammad Musa:

Many of us came together. We came to this area around three years ago at times of drought, like I said. We came to this piece of land because we had support. The land was ceded to us in an act of humanity in desperate times. Ešān Kamal,⁴⁶ one of the rich people from our area who had some land here, said: 'Go to that place. It is my land. Stay there. The land is no good. I'll just take little money from you. Go there and stay there so that you can go find work in the city. I know that you are in a very bad situation in these times of drought.' This is why we have come to this place.

After this happened, we people from the villages came here. We took this land and built proper accommodations, and now we have settled here. We first only made four walls, or we lived in tents or under tarps. But now we are fine. Those who have no houses and who fled from the Taliban right now, they are truly living in very bad conditions, as you can see if you go out and have a look.

Man: He should go and see!

Mohammad Musa:

Yes, we will go there so that you can see those poor dwellings.

Abbas: Yes, seeing something with your own eyes is always good.

Ch.: You are right. Did you buy this land from Ešān Kamal?

Mohammad Musa:

Yes, yes. Look: This land was given to us as an act of charity. Out of mercy, the price for it was very low. The owner of this land, Ešān Kamal, took very little

⁴⁶ *Ešān* (an honorific title meaning) 'saint', 'a person venerated for special moral qualities', 'member of a distinguished family of spiritual leaders'. Their followers sought out these saints for special services like counseling, healing or protective incantations. The clients of saints can form big networks of informal social affiliation and the saint himself forms a node in this network (Canfield 1988). Often the places where these saints lived and worked become pilgrimage sites after their death. In this case, Ešān Kamal is a rich landowner.

money for it, for this land here and another plot of land in the area of Dehdadi. It was intended as a kind of charity because no one, no office, no organization was giving support to us at that time. So, the land was his before. And we approached him, we were a group of around twenty people, elders, and we described our situation. We said that we've had bad days and years, that we have no drinking water and that our crops did not grow because of the drought. This was four years ago. We said, 'Give us a piece of your land,' we were begging, sitting in front of him, 'You are our *qaum*.' And then this person gave us the land, and he also gave us proper documents for it. This was a very merciful deed performed by Ešān Kamal.

Ch.: What happened to your own land back there?

Mohammad Musa:

We sold it. Otherwise we would have had no money to come here.

Ch.: To whom did you sell it?

Mohammad Musa:

To Ešān Kamal, but also to others. It was not worth a lot because of the drought.

Ch.: The people who lived here before, are they good neighbors to you?

Mohammad Musa:

They are.

Abbas: Those poor *mohāḡerīn* who have recently arrived, they cannot go anywhere. They cannot move. They have no money to move and no money to stay at any place where they have to pay rent. So, they are here with us. They stay with someone in Dehdadi or somewhere in town [Mazar-e Sharif]. They can't find any other places. And they can only walk. They have no money for transportation.

Man: They cannot afford paying rent anywhere.

Abbas: [angrily] But you cannot just squat somewhere if you cannot pay the rent. We cannot look after just everyone.

Man: But they did not choose to come here. They were forced to.

Man: They can go somewhere else.

Man: They cannot go anywhere else.

Mohammad Musa:

The people who arrived just recently, these poor people who have come here, they were forced to move. The local Taliban demanded them to buy things for them: 'Buy us a motorcycle or give us *zakat*.'⁴⁷ But the crops did not grow. There is no money to buy anything. It is beyond people's means.

⁴⁷ *zakāt* - obligatory payment by Muslims of a determinate portion of specified categories of their lawful property for the benefit of the poor and other enumerated classes or, as generally in koranic usage (https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/zakat-COM_1377?lang=de) (last seen on 04/20/2023)

We are stuck, we are struggling. We are forced into homelessness, we are forced to flee. We do not want to fight their *ġihād*.⁴⁸

There are these 200 households that arrived here, but there are many others at other places around Dehdadi, everywhere around the town. There must be more than 2,000 households that live the life of *mohāġerīn* in this area. These 200 families are now staying with us, but everywhere there are more. In every place between the mountains and the city you will find *mohāġerīn* from Koh-e-Alburz.

Abbas: This is why everyone has a friend he knows, someone who is already here, somewhere in the area. Or you know this or that person, who is already living around here, or a friend of a friend. Everyone will find someone and then say that they are in such a big need, that they have no other option, that they have no other place to go. And then they move in together with their people.

Mohammad Musa:

The *mohāġerīn* who are moving here at the moment ... we are working together with one or the other of them. And it is good that there some help has come from the Office for Refugees. The chief of the office was here. Before that, the UNHCR delivered some help. They helped the *mohāġerīn*. But did they also help the poor homeless in the past? They did not. We were 270 families. No help was given to us. Nothing. Until today there has been no help for us. For those people who are coming now there is help. It is good for them.

Ch.: You said you joined up three years ago. You asked the *kalāntar*, you asked your *ešān*, and he agreed to help you out with this plot of land. Did the new *mohāġerīn* also band together?

Mohammad Musa:

They are coming little by little. Five families, two families, a single family. They flee in the dark of the night. They do not flee by day. So, slowly-slowly, people are coming. They did not come here all at one time. Every day a family arrives. Same thing today. Two families have arrived this morning. They have pitched their tent over there. They are straying around. The street is the place for the helpless people. For all of them the only place for their pillows is on the road. [Pointing at a man] He has arrived yesterday.

Where shall he go? He has no tent. He has no tarp. He has nothing; the family is helpless. He also escaped from the hands of the Taliban. They said to him: 'Brother, buy us a motorcycle, give us money, help us, do this and that for us.' If people are not doing as told, they are beaten or arrested. This is why he and all the others have come here.

Ch.: How is life in the mountains today?

⁴⁸ *ġihād* - struggle, or striving, but often understood both within the Muslim tradition and beyond it as warfare against infidels. The term *ġihād* derives from the root j-h-d, denoting effort, exhaustion, exertion, strain. (https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/jihad-EQCOM_00101) (last seen on 04/20/2023)

Man: There is no life there.

Mohammad Musa:

Ask them.

Man: [At a very low voice] We cannot manage our life there. The Taliban really mess up our lives there. It simply does not work.

Mohammad Musa:

They cannot manage their lives, he says. Their lives do not prosper because of the Taliban, he says. The Taliban exert a lot of pressure on the whole region. People are forced at gunpoint: 'Give us money,' or, for example, 'go and buy us a motorcycle, buy us a Kalashnikov.' If people don't do as they are told, they are beaten up and taken captive. What can these people do?

Man: The Taliban bother us at night, the state bothers us during the day.

Wassem: [directed to Mohammad Musa] You have not been there recently, have you?! On top of all this talking about the Taliban: you can't find one glass of water there. You can't find one glass of drinking water there. It is really an emergency situation. You can't find anything there.

Mohammad Musa:

Those who are arriving here come to us and ask for a place to stay. What is their situation? They only place they have is the street. They have no house, no *hawli*, no place. Where can they go? They were forced to come here. We can only tell them to put up a tent here, hang a tarp. We cannot do more.

Wassem: There are many problems. After bad days, worse days follow.

Ch.: What about those people who are Taliban in your villages? Are they from the region or from somewhere else?

Mohammad Musa:

They are also from other places.

Ch.: From where?

Mohammad Musa:

From everywhere.

Man: There are Arabs, Pakistanis, Punjabis.

Ch.: If you talk to your people back home on the phone, what do you talk about?

Mohammad Musa:

We talk about the weather and about farming, of course because this is most important to the people. And then they say there is a drought again, the crops do not grow, and so on. This is what we talk about. And we say that here in the city, life is not easy either. See, people everywhere people say, 'We are people of Afghanistan, why is our life so bad? Why is there so little support?' This is what we are saying. But the 200 households that arrived just now, they really are in trouble.

Man: Yes, indeed, they do have a lot of problems.

Mohammad Musa:

Dear Mr. Christoph, I tell you in summary. We are 470 households here; we

live in this village. From the whole region, from Koh-e-Alburz about 2,000 families had to leave. They are now squatting all over the place, in every corner, in every courtyard, wherever you can rent some space.

The main problems of all these people, regardless of when they arrived and where they have ended up, are problems of nutrition. Since the crops did not grow properly during droughts, these people are all reliant on the state, on the agencies that should deliver some help but in fact do not deliver anything. In town you can try to care for yourself. But it is not easy at all, and if you have to pay 60 Afghani for the way to town although all your work brings you is 50 Afghani, you will not go there. Our life here is very bad. We have the worst life here. We are in bitter need of proper food, clothing, fuel, doctors ...

Man: ... and medicine.

Abbas: And those 200 households that have arrived only recently are even more needy. There are no places for them to rent; often they don't have tents. They stay under a tarp. They use a piece of plastic - anything they can find. They pick up some branches for a home. They borrow a tent from someone, but all that makes for very bad living conditions. They really need food and proper housing.

The narrations in this interview resemble other interviews and group conversations I experienced during my fieldwork, some of which I have already discussed in Chapter 2., which show some parallels, as similar reasons for migration and same problems are mentioned. At any rate, there are two important findings which stand out in this example: We find two groups of migrants that only in migration have come to form a community. Their cooperation is based on their common home region. They are all fellow countrymen.

What is being told?

This case is about families from a few neighboring villages in the southernmost part of the Chimtal district, which is a mountainous area. Like many other rural-urban migrants these families have moved to a place close to the city. Similar to the previous cases, their home region was afflicted by drought and ridden by by insecurity. Victims caught in the middle of the conflict were constantly harassed by the different factions, yet they did not associate with either of the warring sides.

They had come to Qala-i-Jangi at different times, mainly in two waves. Some of the migrants built houses whereas others had no choice but to live in tents and makeshift shelters from various materials. They were facing a number of problems in their new environment. Similar to other poor newcomers in town, they complained about malnutrition and lack of access to safe drinking water, insufficient medical care, lack of employment opportunities, and difficulties in finding proper accommodation for their families. The lack of support from the government and other institutions was also part of people's narrations about their difficult everyday lives.

The account of the relocation to the city of the first wave of migrants was especially interesting. Reportedly, these poor farmers, had approached a local spiritual leader in their home area. Ešān

Kamal is a spiritual authority and a wealthy landlord all in one. When the home villages of these migrants were affected by drought, several elders approached him and asked for a way out of their problems. In their narration they emphasized their obsequious and beseeching attitude and the generosity of the saint. The movers and the local saint were obviously bounded by a patron-client relationship (compare Canfield 1988: 187) and the patron reportedly helped out and found a solution for his followers.

Indeed, Ešān Kamal ceded a piece of land near Mazar-e Sharif to the needy farmers, thereby enabling his followers to relocate to town. My informants stressed that Ešān Kamal sold the land to them at a low price and that they received official documents proving their landownership or at least land use rights. In this regard these migrants were in a much better position than many others I met: They have a safe place to live and are liberated from the burdensome fear of being expelled from the plot any time. Nevertheless, their living circumstances in town were still difficult and got further complicated by the arrival of more newcomers.

The opportunity to acquire landed property – given to the informants a few years before I met them - demands some further attention. My informants described the opportunity to buy this land as a generous act of support by the benefactor Ešān Kamal. They casually mentioned that their old land - useless to them because of the drought - had been mainly sold to the allegedly generous donor. Although the saint, as a rich landlord, might not have benefited directly from owning this land because of the drought, one could imagine that this exchange of a small plot in the lowlands next to the city for agricultural land in the mountains has led to a significant change in property structures in the villages. The opportunity to acquire land in or at least close to the city was traded for the abandonment of the land in their home region. Without knowing the details of this transaction, one can only suspect that the rich saint further enlarged the size of his property holdings with this transaction. Thus, he profited from the neediness of the poor dwellers and indirectly, even from the insecurity in his area.

There are reports from India showing how increasing migration of small-scale peasants has led to the abandonment of many small and marginal farms, which advanced the transition of self-sufficient small-scale agricultural production towards market-oriented large-scale agriculture. These processes are mostly seen positively in Indian society, politics, and media, without considering the fate of those who give up their farms in exchange for often exploitative and insecure working conditions in urban areas (Deshingkar & Farrington 2009: 297). A similar trend can be detected in the informants' example. The departure of poor dwellers was at the same time an opportunity for the landlord to enlarge his estate. At the same time, he provided some very needed support to his followers and took a function which not the state nor any NGO was able to satisfy.

The arrival of the second wave of migrants is a good example of chain migration, another pattern of migration along pre-existing social ties.⁴⁹ Contact persons, who aren't even necessarily close relatives or "friends of friends" as described by Abbas, play a central role in enabling relocation. The initial migrants are the first ones to adjust to the new surroundings, as they often already have accommodation and employment and possess vital information about livelihood

⁴⁹ Harpviken 2009

strategies at the new location. This shows the dialectical condition of migration networks as people's mobility leads to the spread of networks, while networks in their turn facilitate migration: *"Migration [...] is a relational act. It shapes networks; it creates possibilities for new networks, and it changes relations within old and new social ties. The interactions between configurations of social ties cause certain types of migration, and migration streams produce and reproduce networks that affect migrant's physical, social, and economic mobility"* (Poros 2011:161).

Even though we do not find precise descriptions in the recorded conversation as to how individual encounters between earlier and later migrants first came into being, it is clear that the more recent movers requested help from those they felt close with, mainly because they all hailed from the same area. We do not know if they had been relatives or friends, neighbors or acquaintances from the past, or if those people were adherents of, and had also been helped by, the same spiritual leader, so that in fact they would all be part of a broader network established around spiritual authority.

Based on the narrations in this interview, we learn that this pattern of chain migration, which is based on preexisting social contacts, is advantageous for those who are on the move but can be an extra burden for those who have to accommodate friends and relatives and need to facilitate their support.

How are things being told?

The talk reported in this chapter was more than a question-and-answer-constellation involving the present representatives of the community and myself. Even though Mohammad Musa presented himself as speaker of this group of migrants, many of the men who happened to be there took an active part in the controversial conversation. Many speakers seized the opportunity to interject their views in this meeting. Secondly, this talk displays how different groups within the community were constructed by talking. Thirdly, this conversation shows how Mohammad Musa, who did most of the talking, assessed the effect of his narratives.

Mohammad Musa acted as a representative of his community. He welcomed me, introduced the group of informants and started explaining the fates of the migrants. He used expressions such as *"Let me explain this to you ..."* or *"I will tell you in summary."* He called on people to speak to me and repeated what others had said. On some occasions, he and Shahab added examples or more detailed descriptions to the accounts of others.

Mohammad Musa described all people living at that place as *mohāġerīn*. He labeled them as such because they had migrated mainly due to reasons beyond their power. The claim that all these people had been forced to leave their home area was repeated several times by himself and other speakers during the discussion. Additionally, all the members of this migrant community were presented as being in similarly miserable, helpless situations of desperation.

All commonality of being forced migrants set aside, Mohammad Musa distinguished between "those 270 households" and "these 200 families" right from the start, based on the respective time of migration and the reasons why people came to the city. Different reasons prevailed at differing times: Whereas those who came three years ago had supposedly been forced to leave their area due to large-scale agricultural losses, the recent migrants were presented as having fled primarily due

to pressure from the Taliban. Shahab, also endorsed this differentiation of two groups.

The difficult relations among the two groups became obvious when Abbas openly spoke up against the ongoing chain migration. He was discomfited by the fact that the earlier migrants, to whom he belongs, felt obliged to support the even poorer migrants who arrived later. *"They have no money to move and no money to stay"* is how he described the miserable situation of the newcomers. His anger is grounded in the fact that the earlier migrants were also facing very hard living circumstances and then got faced with the task of supporting the newcomers. While Abbas quite openly spoke on behalf of the earlier migrants, Mohammad Musa was stressing the aspects that unite them and highlighted their duty to help those who were suffering even more. He more than once underlined that recent migration was due to pressure from the Taliban. He sought not to position one group against the other although he acknowledged the distinction between two groups.

Despite the discussion about whether newcomers should be supported or not, Mohammad Musa's authority as representative of the whole group remained unquestioned during much of the interview. He had 'narrative control' over this entire group's story of migration. Things changed when Wassem joined the discussion and contested Mohammad Musa's right to speak for the whole community, especially for the newly arrived migrants. With a very short but effective interjection, the new speaker disqualified Mohammad Musa's narrations: *"You have not been there recently, have you?"*. He frankly denied that Mohammad Musa had any knowledge about the current situation in their common home region. Surprisingly, the latter did not react to this insult but simply repeated what he had already said earlier. However, Wassem's interjection indicates that the categorical distinction between the two groups cannot be maintained as such. By explaining that the recent migrants had also left the region mainly due to drought, Wassem denied insecurity as their predominate reason for migration. Their reasons for leaving may not have been all that different from the earlier migrants' ones and the situation in total may have been different from Mohammad Musa's claims. Increasing power of the Taliban and ensuing insecurity may have been an additional reason for migration rather than an alternative one.

Why did Mohammad Musa so strictly adhere to his version of the story then? He repeatedly said that the later migrants' reason to move was insecurity, even though we learned from Wassem's remark that there was still massive drought. One of Mohammad Musa's utterances about the different treatment of the two groups of migrants in town seems to be the key to understand the emphasis he puts on violence as the cause of migration for the second wave of migrants.

Mohammad Musa explained that there was no support from the state when he and his fellow migrants arrived three years before. In contrast, newly arrived migrants had received some support because of their registration status as IDPs. Obviously, by foregrounding the violence issue Mohammad Musa tried to depict the new migrants' condition which makes them, at least in his own opinion, eligible for support. After all, DoRR staff who were responsible for the distribution of assistance and supplies to the *mohāġerīn* were present at the interview and whatever help delivered would not only benefit the newcomers, but at the same time lift some pressure from those who currently felt obliged to rescue their compatriots.

Representing mobility as forced migration: The geographical working radius of the DoRR and other state actors as well as international organizations and NGOs had been significantly reduced

over the years before. While from 2002 to the early 2010s almost all regions had been accessible to their relief missions, most of them were now only allowed to move about the vicinity of Mazar and parts of Balkh Province. The international organizations were well aware of the difficulties arising from the restriction of their mandate to 'safe' areas. It was difficult for them to identify needs and undertake meaningful practical work since they were not able to go to where the problems occurred, but instead had to wait for people to come up to them. This created a 'narrative environment' in which certain kinds of accounts proved successful or were at least regarded as promising. Hence Mohammad Musa's great emphasis on insecurity. It is understandable that he made such an effort to procure support for the newcomers since the main burden of helping them otherwise rested on the shoulders of his own group, the earlier migrants.

Conclusion

The example presented in Chapter 4 introduces firstly a migration process that was planned by migrants who knew of a location near the city where they might procure building grounds for their dwellings. Their relocation was facilitated by a local saint from their home region who helped his clients establish a new livelihood in town. Next, the chapter exemplifies chain migration which comes with all kinds of difficulties and conflicts that may arise from economic pressure within and among communities, including the duty, on the part of migrants who are in their turn not well-off either, to uphold solidarity with needy people from the same region. Finally, the chapter brings up one specific type of solidarity network, namely, a network established by relations with a spiritual leader who helps out his clients (and benefits from them), and lateral relations among different groups of clients.

What is most interesting in the conversation presented here are some participants' efforts to construe and highlight aspects that bind and unify different groups of migrants on one side, while others foreground differentiating and dividing aspects through narration, on the other. Many attendants shared their views, debated, and contradicted the would-be 'master narrative' offered by the man who acted as representative of the community, Mohammad Musa. The documented disputes show power struggles regarding the question of who has the right to speak on behalf of a given community and therefore, who is in 'narrative control' over the fate of these migrants.

The controversy between Mohammad Musa and Wassem provides an example of a contested narration: First Mohammad Musa consciously tinged the migration history of some of his peers in one particular way, highlighting that they had fled from violence. He seized the chance to illustrate at length the fate of the more recent *mohāgerīn* and their miserable situation as he himself read it, knowing full well that a foreigner and some DoRR staff were present. His story testifies to his hope to receive economic support by highlighting economic issues pressing the newcomers who became more and more dependent on him and other earlier migrants. This reading of the facts was opposed by Wassem, who found things wrongly represented by Mohammad Musa's depiction.

Both men actually pursued the same goal of acquiring aid for the newcomers (and hence for themselves), but they disagreed on the best rhetorical tactics. Mohammad Musa's effort to use a narration focusing on the forced character of his peoples' migration was directly contested by Wassem, who trusted in the power of a narration on economic hardship.

6. Chapter 5: “Few Dangers, Many Lies!” - Contested Narrations 2

I remember sitting in the DoRR Office once again. I had another appointment with Shahab. The day before we had made a plan to visit some more people who were registered as IDPs with his office. Once again, I waited for our departure. An elderly officer who shared the office with Shahab entered data into a computer, typing letters one by one. While drinking tea and chatting with other office clerks, I heard some people speaking loudly in one of the other offices. Suddenly Shahab rushed out of the room where the voices came from, followed by two men. I witnessed the dispute that unfolded between Shahab and two applicants. (I did not ask them about their names and was myself mainly a bystander, I list an listing these two men as Applicant 1, and Applicant 2, not out of disrespect but since I had no opportunity to ask their names.)⁵⁰

Applicant 1 [trying to keep up with Shahab]:

Wait, look, you should really listen to me. One minute. Brother, one minute.

Shahab: That’s it. Sit down. Sit down.

Applicant 1: Oh, come on. Listen to me, brother, in the name of God, brother.

Shahab: I already listened to you. Now you listen to me! If you think you can get any support, if you think you are entitled to anything, then sit down and fill out the document. I have other things to do. But one question that you should really be able to answer is: Are you living in a house of your own, and are you farming [your own] land or not?

Applicant 1: We live in our own houses, but some people there also have rented houses or have no houses at all.

Shahab: You see?! You have houses of your own ... Are you a *mohāġer* then or aren’t you?! This is an office for *mohāġerīn* only.

Applicant 1: Yes, but listen, brother. There are many people who arrived as *mohāġerīn* and who are living there together with us right now. They do not have any property of course.

Applicant 2: And if only you could see these people. They are all very poor. And there is not one of them who can support himself.

Shahab: Why?

Applicant 2: How should I know? They have just only arrived, they have become homeless, brother. They have fled and now they are here. And there are 240 of them. 240 people! Some of them are staying with relatives.

Applicant 1: Me and the others, we moved closer together to give shelter to some of these people. My brother moved in with us. I care for them. I struggle to help. [Other] People also live in our courtyard. In the name of God.

Shahab: So, you have a house and land?

Applicant 1: Yes. But that is not the topic, brother. 240 other people have become *mohāġerīn*.

⁵⁰ Interview 08/07/2012

Shahab: And you gave a plot to your brother?

Applicant 1: What else shall I do? Your own brother standing in front of you. Having nowhere to go. Having no house of his own anymore. Having fled from the war.

Applicant 2: Find out for yourself! Take a tour of our village. There is poverty all over the place. We have many *mohāḡerīn* and, yes, many people do have houses.

Shahab: How come?

Applicant 1: We have arrived earlier. I have come here ten years ago.

Shahab: Listen, both of you have your own four walls. We support only people who do not have a room, let alone a house.

Applicant 1: But there are many homeless people along with us. They would have no place if we had not provided space to them. They cannot support themselves. It is good that we help them, but we need support, too. We are really in great need of your help. 240 people. Poor. Homeless. We cannot care for them all alone. In the name of God.

Shahab: But why didn't any of these people come along with you if they are in such bitter need?

Applicant 1: They do not have money to buy food for their kids. How can they pay to travel to this place?

Shahab disappears into another room. Applicant 1 takes a seat next to me and sighs.

Ch.: Hello. How are you? Where are you from?

Applicant 1: We are from Chahar Bolak.

Ch.: What is the problem? I do not understand.

Applicant 2 [drawing closer]:
He does not understand our explanations.

Applicant 1: I explained that I do not have any information about the *kalāntar* of our region. I am not lying. But he wanted to know. Who is the *kalāntar* of the region? Who are the leaders in your area? I do not know. Some crazy people. In our village there is no military, no state. No one. How should I know who the *kalāntar* is?

Shahab [comes back and speaks very fast and rude]:
*Kākā*⁵¹, listen. You find out about the *kalāntar* and then come back here together with him. Then we'll start the procedure. This is how we do it. This is an office. We do not make any assessments here in the office. We do not take decisions like that. So, after you come here together, after we write up a report, after that we fill out the documents, and somebody from our office will join you and go to your place. Then we'll conduct a proper survey of your village.

⁵¹ *kākā* – uncle (father's brother); term of address for male elders.

We'll have a look.

Applicant 1: Yes, please. Come, come.

Shahab: We decide who is entitled for support. But even then, it is not us who provides support. We pass on the information and other offices provide help. But I'll tell you this. We have often conducted surveys and we went to places and, in the end, we did not find one single person who was entitled to receive support. We are going to register all the people. If anyone lies to us nothing good will happen at all.

Applicant 1 [shouts]:

We have thirty people all depending on us. They did not eat, I tell you, they did not eat for days. They have nothing to eat and nowhere to stay.

Shahab: Ok, ok. We will conduct a survey.

Applicant 1: When? A survey does not help us now. When will you come? When will we receive anything?

Shahab: Listen, we'll conduct a survey ...

Applicant 1: But what shall these people eat until then? What can I tell them?

Shahab: Find the *kalāntar*. Bring him here. Afterwards we'll start a survey and, if it is God's will, eventually help will come.

Applicant 1: Do you need a survey to know that people need to eat? I can tell you: These people are hungry and everyone else will also tell you that. In the name of God, when will you come?

Shahab: Shut up and listen: When everything is prepared, we will conduct a survey. We will come to your place. We will sit down, and we will talk to everybody. We will check every single case. Everyone. Face to face. Where are you from? What do you have to eat? We need a lot of information. And then we ask: Who are you? Who are you? Everyone. Who are you? What do you do? Where are you from? Everyone. We will see how many people you are. Do you understand?

Applicant 1: Yes, yes, come, do come. Come to our village and you will see poverty all over the place. Until now only Allah has seen the poverty of these people.

Shahab: Yes, I know. There are many problems but not everyone can get our support. People who have a place of their own, people who have their own houses, people who have their own four walls cannot get our help. Do you understand?

Applicant 1: Oh my God. It's all so obvious. In the name of the Koran, it's all so obvious. These people have nothing, nothing, nothing. And what can they do? What can they eat? There is no work, in the name of God, no jobs. What can we do?

Shahab: Christoph, come on, let's go. We have work to do.

[Later on, in the car, after we finally set out for our ride, I ask Shahab about the dispute and he

tries to explain it once again to me. He is still furious]:⁵²

See, people do not understand. They think the state should help them. It's true, of course, the state should help needy people. But we cannot help just everyone who is poor. There are so many poor people in Afghanistan. And many of them just say that the state should help. They come to our office. They ask. They beg. They scream.

They say it is the task of a good Muslim to help them. They do not understand. They scream. But, first, as you know, we ourselves cannot give any support. Others do, but we don't have any means. Second, we are responsible for homeless people only, for *mohāğērīn*, for refugees. We cannot support just anyone. Third, not being able to assist everyone does not make me a bad person. Where should I find all this [support]? There are rules. We work in this office because we want to help people, but we cannot help everyone. That's how it is. People do not understand. They just hear from somewhere that they can get something from us. This man, yes, maybe he is poor, maybe he is not ... [Another car cuts us off. Shahab has to slam on the brakes, he honks and swears.] Son of a bitch!

We travel on to Kud-o Barq. On the way Shahab makes some calls to summon some people who we could meet. For quite some time we drive through the streets of Kud-o Barq trying to find our way to a certain *hawli*. Shahab is guided by phone and finally we arrive on spot. To my surprise I already knew one of the two men there. I had met him at another site where I took an interview. Back then he acted as *kalāntar* of that group of people and was introduced to me as Kalāntar Abu Sharif. He welcomes us and guides us through a yard and into a big room.

Only two men are in the room. Kalāntar Abu Sharif explains that the bulk of people are still busy working on one of the neighboring farms. As time passes, more people come in. The main speakers are Shahab, Kalāntar Abu Sharif, Abdullah, Rafi, and an elderly man named Jamal Khan. Later, Abed and Chamran join us. Several bystanders make comments, too. As in an earlier chapter, these people are here only listed as 'Man'.⁵³

Abdullah suddenly starts talking.

Abdullah: We people, one is dirty, one is poor, [but] we really make a big effort to find work and to get by. We leave nothing undone. We people, we have all fled on the hands of the Taliban. They bother all of us there: 'Your son has joined the army', they said. Or: 'He has gone to Pakistan, your son', they said. 'You have to give us 20,000 Afghani per month', they say. But we are poor people. We all have eight or nine children. Where should we find that much money, like

⁵² Based on interview notes taken from memory later the same day.

⁵³ Interview 07/08/2012

20,000 Afghani? So, let's get out of here. Let's just leave. Go, go. One poor guy left [and then another]. Every day. So, little by little, overnight, one household left, another household left. Some families fled from here, five families fled from another place. Everyone fled. Some people tried to sell all their belongings, their houses, everything. Some sold their land and went to Pakistan where they have some people. We all tried to find accommodation somewhere, anywhere. Only God knows what the days to come will entail.

Ch.: How long have you been living here?

Abdullah: Must have been more than six months.

Ch.: Where are you from?

Abdullah: We are from Sar-e Pul.

Ch.: Which *qaum* do you belong to?

Abdullah: We are Arabs.

Ch.: Did you live far away from Sar-e Pul?

Abdullah: Yes, very far. We are from the mountains. There is our place, in the mountains.

Ch.: How many families from there have come here?

Abdullah: Some ten families or less. But people are scattered all over the place. They stay at any spot that provides a roof over their heads. They set up camp and settle there. This is what our life is like. It is a time of suffering. Things are the same everywhere.

[Pause]

Ch.: The Taliban in your area, where are they from?

Abdullah: They come there from everywhere, Mr. Engineer. There are Afghans, many of them are Pashtuns, but there are also some Tajiks, and also people from abroad.

Ch.: But how is it? Are they around all the time or do they come and go?

Abdullah: Yes, that's what it's like. They are around. You find them. One day, two days, and then, they disappear, they are like getting lost. You can never know. There is no information.

Ch.: Is anybody from your family still there?

Abdullah: No, no one from my family is there. All of our people came here.

Ch.: And did you have some land there?

Abdullah: No, we did not have anything.

Ch.: When you arrived here, what did you think of this place?

Abdullah: All of us came to this place together, but then people separated. At every place you find five households, ten households. At every place where there is a good person with a room to share, people find shelter. And they charge rent from poor people. Many of our sons are in Pakistan. And we have come here. If there is only one corner, one wall, people will find accommodation. And then [they are] working all day long, coming back at night, working all day, coming

back at night. And this is how we came here.

Ch.: You said that your son is in Pakistan.

Abdullah: Yes, and they [the Taliban] knew it. They know my son is not around. 'Where is your son?' they asked. 'Where did he go? Did he get engaged to a foreign girl?' 'He has left for work', I said. 'Your son has gone to Pakistan. You sent your son to Pakistan. You must be a rich man. You have to give us some money. You have to fight with us, dear brother'. I said 'No. That's enough.' So, we have come here and things are not bad at all. If you're lucky you will find a place with good water. We people have so little that even something like water is a big deal for us. And we have found it here. We fled, we escaped, we arrived here. Everywhere you can find people like us.

[Pause]

And here we are close to doctors. In case a child falls ill we can get some treatment. Over there [abandoned region], what can you do? Where could you find a doctor?! Doctors are afraid to go there. They cannot go there.

Ch.: Before you came here, what kind of work did you do?

Abdullah: It's not easy to make a living there. There are only some jobs on the farms and very little work for day laborers. Aside from those who are already dead, no one is staying on there. Sons go to Pakistan, they try to go abroad. Others come here. This is how we have to do it. And many have no money. Where should they get money? Too many cannot support for themselves. So, you see, we were forced to leave, and we fled. But here, it's not easy to make a living and lead a good life either. We have no money to rent decent homes. We have not really arrived here.

Ch.: So, you are not paying rent here?

Abdullah: But no, of course we are paying rent.

Ch.: How much is it for a *hawli* like this?

Abdullah: You know, we share places like this with some families and we have to pay 500 Afghani for one room. But we also share our rooms. And if there is no other place and it is cold and icy outside, we people move closer together. As I said, we need to use whatever space we have. If we don't, the only place for many of us would be in the open. So, this is very difficult. God knows our situation, and sometimes there is a man, a good man, who helps, who helps us in our misery.

Ch.: I have a question about the time before you left Sar-e Pul and came here. Did you always live at the same place or did you also move around within that area? Did you move from one place to another and then again to another?

Abdullah: There? We also moved from one place to another. After summer, we would move to another place. The poor people would go wherever they could find work. If you are poor you have to move. And those of us who were free of

bonds, those of us who had no debts, we made our way towards Mazar. What else can poor people do? Wherever there is water, wherever you find a doctor, wherever there is some wealth: we'll go to any of these places, and it is a gift by God. But in the end? What can we do if there is no work for us?

Ch.: So, how is your life here?

Abdullah: As I already said, Engineer Sahib, we are working all day long until we return back at night. Early in the morning we will start to work again. We ask the *wālī*⁵⁴ if there is any work for us. And then we find out whether we can stay here and do some work, let's say for ten or twenty people, or if we have to move on to another place and look for work there. Now, we are here to lay bricks and build a wall. We have done this kind of work before. Or someone comes and says: 'Come, I need some workers for today.' And then we go there and work there until the evening. We lay bricks or we build something, or we dig the ground. Harvesting is also work for us. This is the kind of work day laborers do.

Ch.: During the six months you've been living here, in that time, did you ever go home to your village?

Abdullah: No, we are here now. Our life is here now. If we people went back, what do you think would happen to us? If we go, we we'll be killed, they'll finish us off.

Ch.: Do you talk with your son who is in Pakistan?

Abdullah: Yes, yes, we talk. We talk by telephone. I told him that we are here now and I asked how things are over there. It's now been a year since he went there.

Ch.: And how are things?

Abdullah: He works with the army in Pakistan. And yes, it's good for him. He says he would have no work here in Afghanistan. 'If I didn't have my work in Pakistan, what should I do for work?', he says. So, it's good.

Ch.: Where are the people who lived here earlier?

Abdullah: They are in downtown Mazar, in Pakistan, some are in Iran. They have left and they tried to sell their property, or they keep it and have found tenants like us.

Ch.: So how many people live in this room where we are talking right now?

Abdullah: We are two families in here, two households.

Jamal Khan: We are thirteen or fourteen people in here.

Abdullah: Yes, many people.

Ch.: And do you have any problems with the neighbors in this area?

Abdullah: Problems? No, it's more like they come and say: 'Come here, do this, do that. Do this work for us. Make a wall. Renew this part of the channel. Do not remain unemployed,' they say. But then they pay [only] 200, maybe 250. We are not unemployed then, we are working from morning till evening, but we get only little money. So, this is the problem. But on the other hand, it's good that

⁵⁴ *wālī* - provincial governor

we find work close by and do not have to travel too far.

Ch.: [asking Kalāntar Abu Sharif]:

To get it right: You live in the place we visited last week, but you are coming here for work. Is that right?

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

Yes, that's right. These people here were our neighbors back in Sar-e Pul. And I, I am the *kalāntar* of these people. I myself had lived here a while ago and then I myself and some others moved to the place you saw last week. Then, some people from my *qaum* in Sar-e Pul, some households, became homeless. They have come here. We are trying to find a place to stay for everyone from our *qaum*, as if it were my own brothers, as if it were my own uncles.

Ch.: The other place is closer to town, right?

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

Right.

Kalāntar Abu Sharif [addressing Shahab]:

There is the story of a man here in town, a *kalāntar* of a group of people who was very dissatisfied. He did not know what to do. He said: 'We have gone to Kabul, we met the head of the Department [of Refugees and Repatriations], but nothing happened. They are helping so many people but they say they cannot help us.' We people are not *mohāḡerīn*, they said. But [those for whom I am doing this] are not many people, and they need some help. Everyone who is obviously a *mohāḡer* should get some support by the Department. But those people received little help or nor help at all. Why?

[Shahab says nothing.]

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

And there was someone else, also at that office, who also bore a grudge on you, also because he did not receive anything. Why?

Shahab: Listen, so many people are coming to us. How do I know? But look, we just helped forty-two families. See, sometimes this is how it is. We go and conduct a survey. They first say: 'We are so-and-so-many people'. Then we make a list. We write down everyone and end up registering fewer families [than had been claimed before]. 'They went to work', people say. 'But where are their women and kids?', I ask. We went there three times. 'Where are all the people?' I ask. But we nevertheless did go there, we did deliver some help. We gave food to people. Again, they say: 'We've got nothing.' When this happens..., we have so many people who really need help. We cannot help everyone. How could we?

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

So, in the end you didn't help?

Shahab: How can we help everyone?

Ch.: [to XY] Why did you come to exactly this place, to the city of Mazar-e Sharif?

Abdullah: We have come here because there is insecurity in our area. The Taliban.

Rafi: This place is our home now. It is closest to our [real] home. We are poor, you know. From here all places are close by. This is our home. We cannot go elsewhere because we do not have money to go there. We do not have the money to pay for a car. Where should we get the money from? This is the closest place. After one or two days of walking we found this place. Other directions are very far away. How could we go there?

Ch.: So, you came on foot?

Abdullah: We came here on foot. We had no money for a car. We have come on foot.

Rafi: One night we came to one place. The next night we arrived at another place. We went from one place to another, from one village to the next. That's how it was.

Abdullah: At night we have run from the Taliban, in the dark of the night. This is why we could not go by car. We fled at night because they were menacing us. We didn't have an easy life; we had to walk all the way here. How could we pay the 20,000 they asked for transportation?

Abed [one of the participants who had joined us later]:
Do you know, Mr. Engineer, the life of people like us..., people are always on the move, our life is very hard. We are in bitter need of everything.

Ch.: Yes, I know.

Shahab: Mind, he is not distributing anything. He is gathering information, making notes. How is life? What is missing? He is collecting information about poor people's lives. He wants to put everything together and write a book. For research.

Ch.: That's right.

Abed: Our biggest problem here at the moment is the hot temperatures, you know?

Shahab: He is not sitting here for helping you. He is not providing help. He is only collecting information. What are the people's problems? What are the reasons for their problems? He is recording, making notes, translating, writing.

Jamal Khan: Every morning, when all the young guys would get up and go to work, I used to take the Koran and pray ... I have lived in so many places ... I have seen many bad things happening. I saw them all coming, all the bad people, coming and going. Different people, and also the Taliban...

[More people come in. Again, we all greet each other. I ask if they are also from Sar-e Pul.]

Chamran: Yes, we are all from Sar-e Pul. From the mountains of Sar-e Pul, from the mountains of Alburz where there are many villages, many places where we are from. Koh-e-Alburz is a large area that has many villages. Especially the remote places are in the hands of the Taliban. Robbers are also out there; only people like them stay on there.

Ch.: When did you arrive here?

Chamran: We arrived three months ago.

Man: Our arrival was only twenty days ago.

Ch.: And how did you know your people were here?

Rafi: They called us.

Abed: We had come here before because we knew someone at place. And those who came recently have come because we know each other. That's how it works: you know somebody and then he knows somebody else, and so on. We came because we knew people. For example, you know somebody who had left earlier, who went away, and you ask him: 'Where are you? Did you find a place? Do you know of a place for us? We want to work. Is there any work there?' And then they go there, and later they have somebody else who needs their help in turn. We came after he did. They came later than us. And he came after us, and he [came] after that one, and that one after another one, and so on. This is how it is. Everyone does it like this. We are many families here. Not all of them work as day laborers. No, not at all. Here in the village, there is only work maybe for three families. Those who do not find work here gather early in the morning and go to Mazar. They leave in the morning and come back in the evening. They tell their people whether they found good work or not. Then, maybe, more people go there the next day. If there is not enough work, people consider moving to other places. We go as far as Pul-e Khumri to find work. We go everywhere, you know.

Shahab: What do you earn for your work?

Abed: In principle it should be 300 Afghani [per day].

Rafi: But sometimes it's 200 Afghani or even only 150 Afghani. And we also have to buy our own food.

Abed: If somebody has better work, maybe he can earn a little bit more, but not more than 300.

Shahab: Sure, you are always paid whatever matches your work.

[Some people laugh]

Shahab: If you do good work, you will be paid accordingly.

Rafi: No, that's not true.

Shahab: I'll tell you something. Listen. There was a worker. He came along with five or ten others to do some work for me. They were supposed to do some digging for a basement. After two shovelful of soil those workers asked if there was tea for them. I said: 'No, we're not drinking tea now, please go on working first'. So, they continued, but very, very slowly. They shoveled a bit, then sat down, exhausted. 'Okay,' I said, 'have some tea first. If you can work better afterwards, drink your tea'. So, they drank tea, but slowly, slowly. And afterwards they started to work again. Only after another few minutes the first one of them brought more tea around the corner. 'Ok, leave,' I said, 'piss off, go'. And then, of course, the next one [left]. So, one after the other vanished to

the street. Slowly, slowly. And then, just after a little bit of working, of course very slowly, do you know what happened then?

Rafi: [interrupts]:

No, no, no! I object, Engineer Sahib, we people, we are not like this!

Shahab: Shut up and listen! Do you know what happened then? Then it was prayer time. And they had to go to somewhere else to pray. Why? I don't know. They all left the place. All the people went off to the road. Off to pray somewhere else. And they really prayed very properly. Do you know what I mean? Good people, good praying. Where are they now, I thought. Do I pay them for praying? Then, in the afternoon, they finished, at seven o'clock. I asked: 'What happens with the work?' 'We will come back tomorrow', they said. One day turned into one week. And there were eight of them. And: They were part of the same *qaum*, so, they were quarreling among each other all the time.

Rafi: Engineer Sahib, we do not argue with anybody.

Shahab: They were not arguing with me. They argued with each other. And babbled all the time. Argue, babble, argue, babble. So, you see, they were drinking tea, they were praying, and they were babbling and quarreling all the time: 'He said this and he said that', and so on and so forth. All the time. What do you think? Did they work? It took them one week to finish a piece of work which I thought could be finished in one day.

Rafi: This is not about us. We are good workers.

Abed: We really work. We work hard.

Rafi: We are dependent on doing good work because we need to earn the money. We cannot afford to come home with 5 Rupees.⁵⁵

Abed: We are *mohāḡerīn*. We are desperate. So, nothing like that comes from us. We work hard. This is what we came here for.

Chamran: Over there, back in our village, it is common practice to pay people 30 Rupees if they work until noon.

Abed: Yes, you go there, and pulling the plough earns you 30 Rupees. What can you buy with 30 Rupees? You can drink one glass of tea in the city with this money. That's what it's like if you work there from morning on – all you get is 30 Rupees.

Jamal Khan: How to buy food?

Abed: Yes, where is the bread in this money?

Chamran: That's how it is. When we came [to the workplace] and asked what we would get for our work they said: 'You bring your own water. You bring your own food. And now, start working.' How can we buy food with that little money? Our home region is a good region, but work is really bad out there. It's good if you can get by, if you have enough food.

⁵⁵ Rupee is the popular name for the Afghan currency: the Afghani.

- Ch.: Which region?
- Chamran: Koh-e-Alburz. If you get food, if you get meat, if you get everything from your employer, you'll be okay.
- Shahab: So, is it better there?! Here you say the money does not suffice for food and so on. There you get the food, accommodation, and some money.
- [Some men interrupt the conversation]
- Chamran: No, it was like this in the past. But now they do not provide anything anymore.
- Jamal Khan: They ask for rent for the accommodation they give to you. They ask you to provide your own food. You work for two or three days only to buy some food. Then you work a lot again only to earn the money for one meal. I remember times when the *bāy*⁵⁶ cared for his workers. Today nobody cares about the poor. Nobody. We stay hungry. We work, and the employer even asks for rent and, in the end, you are in debt. Do you understand?
- Chamran: And then, in the middle of the night, somebody knocked on our door and then all the trouble started as we already told you. Our region is not safe anymore. But the region of Mazar is a good and safe place.
- Ch.: Is anyone of your people still there?
- Jamal Khan: No, we have come here and we brought along all we have. I am a man of seventy years. And what do I have to do? Work, work, work.
- Ch.: Do you go to town?
- Chamran: If there is work, we go there. One of us just went yesterday to see what is up there. But there are a hundred people waiting for one single job. One man out of hundred finds work. There is no good news about work in the city.
- Jamal Khan: There is no work there.
- Chamran: No, if you get there early, there is some hope. But we have a long way to get there.
- Rafi: And then, also, out of five, only one gets a job.
- Ch.: Did you get the work you are doing here today from someone in the village?
- Chamran: Yes, if somebody has fields to be harvested or any other work, he comes along and says he would give 150-250 for that work. He tells us how much he is going to pay and we take it or leave it. If the work is important, like harvesting, payment is better, of course. If we have no money at all, we do it for any price.
- Ch.: How is life for the young people here?
- Abed: It's ok. They have the same problems. There is no work, and many families are poor.
- Kalāntar Abu Sharif:
- But there is one important difference compared to our home in Alburz. There was no place for young people outside. They could not move at any time. They could

⁵⁶ *bāy* - Landlord

not go out.

Ch.: Was it dangerous?

Jamal Khan: Yes, very dangerous. There was always the danger of the Taliban blackmailing you. They grab your son and then they demand ransom for release, for not recruiting him as a soldier. There was always the danger of them recruiting our sons as fighters. They take them and you do not know where they go. You do not see them again.

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

The Taliban said: 'Who is fighting with us? Who is giving us support? Give us someone to join our fight.' This is why we ran away at night. We were in danger of being punished, of being killed, because we are poor and cannot meet their demands. This is why we moved here.

Abed: What can we do? They have Kalashnikovs, they have motorcycles, and their whereabouts are unknown. You don't know who these people are, where they come from, where they eat and sleep, which *qaum* they belong to. We do not know where they get their food.

Jamal Khan: Once one of these Arabs came to me and told me to prepare meals for twenty people. How can I provide for twenty people? I did not have enough money to buy one loaf of bread.

Ch.: Isn't there someone else? Someone like the state, another big player, a commander, someone who can provide security?

[Some people interject]:

No, there is no one.

Abed: In our region they have all fled. Everyone has left. There is no one in charge.

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

There are not many things left in the area. You find only a few motorcycles. Some belong to the Taliban and some are our own.

Abed: And if the state really could come as far as our village, then they wouldn't be there. They come when no one is around. It is known when the state comes and then all of them just disappear; they flee from the area.

Jamal Khan: Then they are long gone, over the mountains, towards some other place.

Abed: We do not know where they have their accommodation. And if the army is around, they put pressure on us, saying that we support the Taliban. We say: 'No, we have to.' We say that we are forced to do what we do. But they do not believe us.

Ch.: But was there a time, in the past, when there was the state was effective in your area? At any time?

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

Yes, when it was safe, the state was there. Maybe two years ago. It was good, but two years ago the state withdrew. Ever since the Taliban showed up, they stay away from there. And when they do come, the Taliban disappear, as if they were lost. And when the state goes back to the city, the Taliban come again.

And when they come back, it's worse than before. The Taliban ask: 'What did you tell them?' They beat people up, they threaten to kill them or to arrest us if we have told anyone (what they are doing to us).

Abed: And when they come back in the evening, out of the blue, you do not understand where they have been. How can they come back so fast? You do not know where they have been hiding.

Ch.: Have you been abroad before? Did you go as a *mohāġer* to Pakistan or Iran?

Abed: I have been to Pakistan, along with some others. I stayed there for two or three years. But then I came back to my home. For two or three years, things were really good. Wheat was growing well; there was work and food. There was enough water, everything was growing. But then, about two years ago, things turned worse. Life became difficult and our situation became bad. Time passed and we needed something to live on. That is why we have come here. But in the beginning, there were two good years.

Kalāntar Abu Sharif:

During these two years there was no one [i.e., no bad people] in our region. No bad rumors either.

Man: It was safe in the beginning.

Abed: There were no rumors. The agriculture was good. The work was good. Everyone had work.

Man: It is the same story at any place, in any region. You do not understand why this [village] and that [village] and yet another village become bad places.

Later in the car

[While leaving the place I am still stunned by the stories I heard during the interview. I asked Shahab about it.]

Ch.: Shahab, from your point of view, is it really as dangerous over there as they say?

Shahab: Where?

Ch.: In the villages where those people are from. In that area around Sar-e Pul. In the villages. Do you think it is really like that up there?

Shahab: It is not as severe as they say. It has gotten a lot better. We had these problems of insecurity over there, but right now? No, they are lying!

Ch.: Really? Why? Do you think that these people assume that they have to talk about all these dangers to justify their migration?

Shahab: Maybe. It is dangerous, but only a little bit. It is only a little bit dangerous. Not as bad as they say. Few dangers, many lies! That's how it is. [Laughs.] Do you understand what I'm saying? Few dangers, many lies!

Ch.: Yes, I understand. I also asked myself what to think about these stories. Of course, me as a researcher I come here and I want to hear people's stories. Maybe they do not want to admit that they came here for work. Maybe they are

also afraid that people might ask them: Why are you here?

Shahab: They said the situation there is very bad, especially security and so on, so they said. The Taliban, they said. Do you understand? That's not how things really are. They are lying. There are some insurgents, but it is not as dangerous as that. You know, this place is very close to the city, isn't it? And in the city, there is a lot of work, a lot of work for poor people.

Ch.: It is a good place.

Shahab: Yes, a good place and (that is why) people come here.

Ch.: No, it is not a good place but probably a better one than their home region.

Shahab: Yes, it is truly better. It is safe. People find work. People find food. The city is close. People will go on living here. They cannot live like this in the mountains. They will not go back.

[Shahab stops the car and invites some people to travel to town in his taxi.]

This chapter, like the others, contains many reports about difficult living circumstances before and after migration. It also contains narrations about the events and developments that led to people's migration to town. Once again, the service and support that should be provided by the state are openly criticized the state is being criticized for not delivering the aid it should deliver. This chapter is a good example of how narrations are challenged by other speakers during the talks, even more than in Chapter 4. Stories and information are repeatedly called into doubt by some conversational partners. The question of why somebody has migrated and whether or not it was legitimate to do so, remains an important topic in this context.

What is being told?

The scene at the office showed that the building was accessible for anyone interested in coming in. The two visitors in the office put forward their requests even though they were actually not entitled to any support from this government institution. The visitors were of another opinion. They insisted that they were suffering greatly from the presence of internal refugees; their own livelihood was under massive pressure due to the presence of newcomers. In that, their complaints resemble those analyzed in Chapter 4, where a similar bundle of problems resulting from chain migration has been identified. Since the two men were unaware of any other place to seek assistance, they insisted on having their demands heard. Shahab, who was confronted with situations like this every day, harshly turned them down, putting forward that these two men were no internal refugees themselves. This harsh rebuff led to the escalation I witnessed, as both sides felt misunderstood.

The informants who participated in the interview in Kud-o Barq mentioned problems similar to those of other internal migrants presented elsewhere in this book. They started straightaway with a descriptions of how they were harassed by the Taliban before their relocation to town. Insecurity in their home region were a recurrent theme throughout their narrations. As was mentioned in the interview, almost everybody from their home region tried to run away because of problems relating to insecurity. *"Besides those who are already dead, no one stays there,"* was Abdullah's emphatic

remark. Later on, Chamran added that only Taliban and criminals stayed in the area. The informants stressed the arbitrariness of threats and blackmailing. Like other migrants before, they described how they felt caught in the middle of a conflict in a region without permanent state control. The migrants reported how they found themselves in a vicious circle: In their home region, they were forced to support the Taliban with food, money, and other things, having no power to resist these demands. And subsequently the state accused them of collaborating with the Taliban. The questioning by the state military, however unimportant, led to new trouble with the Taliban, who accused people of cooperating with the state. In several cases families reportedly split up, many of the young men having gone abroad, in this example mainly to Pakistan. Having sons abroad was then another reason for the blackmailing of parents back home. My informants suspected that there must be some traitors⁵⁷ among the state troops, as the Taliban were always well informed and were warned in time when larger military patrols were expected. According to my interlocutors, the Taliban were in that region not in actual danger of being caught.

People in this conversation explained at length how their families left the region. Some people even depicted how they fled at night to avoid being detected. They said that they had come to Mazar-e Sharif because it was the closest safe place for them. Repeatedly did informants stress their inability to afford further relocation elsewhere.

Regardless of destitution, unemployment and poorest housing, the advantages of living in the city were viewed as a "*gift of God*" (Abdullah) due to the availability of work, water, doctors, and state offices, even though these people found themselves in an endless struggle to gain access to these commodities and services.

The relationship with the neighbors in the region was reported to be quite good, as they provided work to the migrants, albeit badly paid. My interlocutors viewed this as an advantage as it spared them the costly travel all the way to the city where on top of everything they would have to compete with all the other day laborers. Abed added that although there are work opportunities in the city, there is generally not enough work for everyone from the group. In the course of the conversation, the working conditions were repeatedly discussed. The interlocutors were furious because they had to buy their food during work with the little money they earned. Comparisons drawn between working conditions in the rural and urban settings brought to the fore that in the countryside things had continuously worsened and workers had come to expect no fair treatment from their employers there.

Based on the remarks made by Abdullah and elderly Jamal Khan, we learned that bonded debt and bonded labor were a big problem. Going to town is not an option for those who have accrued debt from their landlord or employer. As Abdullah said: "And those of us who were free, those who had no debts, they made their way towards Mazar." Jamal Khan further explained that poor people in the countryside get into debt all too quickly as they earn very little money and their employers even demand payment for expenses they allegedly cause to the landlord, such as food and housing over their period of employment.

Bonded debt is a long-lasting problem in Afghanistan which exists up to this day. There are

⁵⁷ Jalalzai 2014

reports of debt labor and slavery, for example the exploitative work at brick kilns (ILO 2012), and there is the complex problem of bonded labor in the drug economy which includes illegal cultivation, harvesting, processing, drug smuggling, and at times also involves human trafficking. In the legal agriculture sector the bondage problem exists as well, but data on this phenomenon is difficult to procure.⁵⁸ Bondage results from inability to pay off one's debts. Farmers and workers get into debt for a variety of reasons, but ironically, even employment can cause debts to accrue, for example when the laborers earn less than the amount their employers force them to pay for alleged expenditures such as food and accommodation, as mentioned above. Illness of a family member and many other incalculables can lead to accruing more debt.⁵⁹ In the worst case, debts are even passed down to the next generation. For some speakers in this chapter, working conditions that may lead into bondage were enough of a reason for leaving their home region.

The role of the Kalāntar Abu Sharif, who as the representative of this community is trying to keep the former fellow villagers together, deserves further consideration. He visits all places where people from his area live and puts his knowledge and social contacts at the service of 'his' people, since no-one else advocated the cause of these migrants in their new area of settlement. As these migrants obviously did not have any advocates in the new settlement area, they were lucky to have the support of Kalāntar Abu Sharif, who for example helped them to find accommodation. For the recent migrants, it paid off to be in contact with him and other previous migrants. Abed vividly explained how chain migration functions. However, some problems such as finding accommodation could not be easily resolved even then: Many newcomers still had to live in crowded shared spaces and were still unable to find suitable work for themselves.

The case presented in this chapter sheds light on one aspect of mobility which is often neglected in scholarship: migration is a long-term process rather than a one-off event caused by a single easy-to-comprehend trigger. Many studies provide a snapshot account that makes conditions look like this: People have a good life in a certain place. Then some circumstances change, opportunities get lost, people decide to leave and their new life continues in another place. – The narrations of my interlocutors, however, show that most of them already had a life characterized by permanent relocations before their migration to the city. Lacking stable living conditions, they had been moving from one place to another in search of employment all the time. In the best case they would earn a decent salary and have free accommodation. Many of them, however, were rural migrant workers who, caused by drought and crop failure, lack of rain and thus harvest, lost their multilocal work opportunities. They did from the start not have 'one' particular place to be displaced from. Abed described himself and those who shared his fate as *"people always on the move."* Their migration to the city must be understood as the continuation of this mobile way of life. Mobility per se is nothing particularly new for these people; what may be different is the degree of force involved. Their surroundings are new, with conditions differing from those of the countryside with all the advantages and disadvantages described in this and the next chapters. Their most recent migration may also be a new experience since conditions in town are so different from life in the countryside whose advantages and disadvantages they knew before; mobility as a strategy to secure

⁵⁸ Samuel Hall Consulting 2013

⁵⁹ Grace & Pain 2004

one's livelihood, however, was already a well-established part of their way of living. They now experience conditions that differ from what they knew in the countryside.

How are things being told?

The way the participants of the case analyzed in this chapter represented the things they were talking about, and the ways how they communicated with each other and with me was informative and instructive for many reasons. The conversations contained overt and covert accusations and revealed more doubts than certainties. In that, they have not only informed my understanding of this particular case, but also proved to be helpful in other contexts studied in this book.

The two men who were applying for support by the DoRR office described in detail the serious problems they were facing for having accommodated other people in their homes. Reportedly, these new migrants were very poor and their recent situation appeared just precarious. Shahab first listened to the two applicants in passing and then tried to back away by reminding them of some legal formalities. As they were not IDPs themselves and did not observe the procedures to the government body in their region first, he altogether refused to listen to their concerns.

Desperate of not having been attended to anywhere else, let alone given support in their stressful situation, and finally again being turned down by Shahab as well, they reacted in various ways: they described their desperate situation again and again; they approached me and told me their story; they appealed to Shahab's solidarity in calling him "*brother*"; they underscored his religious duty to help by often adding "*In the name of God*" or mentioning that only Allah had seen people's plight so far. Shahab's rejecting of their pleas led to an escalation of the dispute. Shahab responded to their emotional outbursts with the argument that, from his point of view, the applicants were not entitled to any help anyway. He additionally threatened to send his team to examine every case thoroughly. Should any of the applicants lie about anything, the DoRR would instantly withdraw all support and drop their cases. potential assistance enabled by the DoRR would be jeopardized. Shahab reacted quite harshly. Yet, in his experience, problems brought up in the office might be exaggerated just to get his attention. Referring to other cases he and his colleagues had seen before, he remarked that "*in the end we did not find one person who was entitled to receive our support*". People were exaggerating things in order to get any attention. Indeed, the applicants seem to have been intimidated by his words. First, they repeatedly invited Shahab in a submissive way to inspect their region, and agreed on all his conditions. Then, they re-started the confrontation by asking: "*Do you need a survey to know that people need to eat?!*", and in the end resumed their complaints and asked for support again. Shahab did not respond to any of these pleas and reproaches but instead left the place more or less without saying anything.

The situation in Kud-o Barq was less confrontational but also contained elements noteworthy in terms of how mobility and the difficulties of daily life are represented. Again, people at length described their dire situation before, during, and after migration. In addition to the *kalāntar*, who is supposed to be the representative of his community, many other people spoke up as well. At one point it became obvious that Shahab was unhappy with the migrants' narrations about their dreadful lives. After Abed entered the room and started to talk about the terrible conditions, Shahab gruffly silenced him, making it clear that I was not going to provide any support. Hence, no pitiful stories

needed to be told: *"No need to tell these stories; he cannot deliver anything"*, he snapped at Abed twice. Later, when the *kalāntar* attacked Shahab for some cases in which people did not receive support from the DoRR office, Shahab defended himself and the office by stating that not everyone who wanted help was entitled to, and, furthermore, the office just could not help all needy people.

Trouble in the morning the repetitious pleas for support, and finally the accusations regarding the lack of support got on Shahab's nerves. From that point on, he actively interfered in the discussion and contradicted the interlocutors' narrations. For example, he openly disqualified their attitude towards work by telling that story about his lazy day laborers. With this humorous story he was clearly expressing an opinion. The men, on the one hand, enjoyed Shahab's story although at least one of them felt offended and tried to set things right about their own work ethic.

Twice that day Shahab would set the record straight about the situations we experienced together. After the dispute in the morning, he was quite agitated in the car. I assume that in front of me he did not want to appear heartless and unsupportive. Instead, he stressed his professionalism through expressions such as: *"We do not make decisions just like that."* or *"There are rules."* He was straightforward in expressing his disbelief regarding many of the stories about flight and displacement that were told during the meeting in Kud-o Barq. While conversation was still going on he was already convinced that these people's lives back in their home region were not all that dangerous as they would have us believe.

The conversations presented in this chapter again provide an example of how strategies and tactics are used in such situations. We can also clearly see how certain conversational conventions are linked to the places where the talks occur. Power structures also become obvious through the ways how speakers interact with one another in this communicative setting. The communication situations and the way speakers are linked to each other in their power structures also become obvious. Recall that tactics were conceptualized as 'weapons of the weak' used in contexts where somebody else has the power to define the rules and scope of action.

The encounter in the DoRR office provides a good example of this. Shahab had supreme authority in this office and was therefore in a position to set the rules for speaking. He did not really listen to his conversation partners, openly verbalized his disagreement, and threatened the applicants with a strict investigation. He rudely dismissed their pleas and left without saying goodbye. The applicants were also aware of their respective position. They tried to remain polite but nonetheless made desperate efforts to achieve their aim. Therefore, they behaved subserviently, stressed their neediness, claimed solidarity, and - purposefully or not - employed religious references. The way they switched between different behaviors, not knowing which one would prove helpful, clearly shows the tactical character of their behavior. When Shahab finally agreed to follow up on their case, they did not content themselves with that 'victory' but again attempted to get immediate support from the office. Their tactics may have been somewhat successful as Shahab was still quite upset afterwards. Perhaps the two applicants stirred his conscience; perhaps he felt stressed.

Shahab's behavior was much more subdued in Kud-o Barq, which may have been due to his status as a guest with an important function for the host community. As we recall, *"[t]he space of a*

tactic is the space of the other" (De Certeau 1984: 37). It was Shahab who used a tactic after being directly accused by the *kalāntar* of not delivering any help, and after having heard the same stories about the ongoing dangers and problems in the countryside. He was more seriously involved in the talk. Aside from his severe reproach of Abed to 'not tell his stories', he began to choose the wording of his statements more carefully. His tactic consisted mainly of joking and telling the supposedly funny story about the laborers' work ethic. This way, he expressed his opinion without directly attacking the others. The comments he later on made when we were in the car made it clear that he generally doubted the truthfulness of the migrants' narrations. As the car was a protected and almost private space, Shahab felt comfortable to openly express his opinion. It seemed to matter to him that I understood his point.

Conclusion

This chapter is about the interlocutors' struggle for having their voices heard and about conflicting versions of supposedly 'true' stories. We detect how places, situations, and power constellations influence the way people interact with each other in conversation and how the usage of linguistic and rhetorical elements in drawing up narratives become tactics to position oneself in verbal interaction. There aren't too many situations where one can express doubts as openly as Shahab did at the end of the day in the safe space of our car: "*Few dangers, many lies!*".

7. Chapter 6: "I Am Going to Translate for You." - Offering Narrations

I remember being shaken to the bones in the seat of Shahab's Corolla, driving through the busy streets of Mazar-e Sharif. "Do you like to talk to women?" Shahab asked me with a wink. First, I was a little bit confused; I did not know what to make of this question. So far, when he introduced me to people or took me to places, we had only met and talked to men. Of course, I agreed, it would be interesting for me to talk to women too, as long as he thought it would cause no problems. Some minutes later, Shahab maneuvered his car through the bumpy alleys of a neighborhood in the outskirts of Mazar-e Sharif. We were going to meet with a woman who was directing us by telephone.

This neighborhood is located about 4 kilometers away from the city center on the western outskirts of the town. It lies along the busy main road leading to nearby Balkh. This road is lined with shops, fruit and vegetable stalls, restaurants, trucking companies, fuel stations, car washes, waste yards, storehouses and timber markets. Since we were now off the highway, the streets were wide, straight, dusty and partly covered with waste. Not many people were in the streets at this hot time of the day. In these side streets there were only a few small grocery shops. This neighborhood is one of many marginal areas of this big and constantly growing city. Like almost everywhere else, courtyards here are enclosed by brick walls and most of the buildings are simple one-story, brick houses, but there are also a few luxurious newly-built villas there, several stories high, with large windows and rich decoration.

On one of the small side streets, almost impassable for Shahab's car because of the many piles of sand and bricks, we finally met Azita. She directed us towards a wide opening in a brick wall. Through this 'entrance gate' we drove into a spacious courtyard. Along one side of the plot, construction was underway on the shell of a building. A few workers were busy lifting buckets full of concrete up to the second story with a simple pulley. To the right there was a brick shed; to the left a makeshift structure made from an UNHRC plastic sheet stretched over some branches and slats fixed to the wall.

Old Hashema's Shack

Azita led us to a provisional tent on the far side of the courtyard. The cover sheltered some piles of cloth and plastic bags and a worn-out mattress made from reeds. Two goats were snoozing in the shade and an old woman stood in front of the shack. A black iron kettle was placed on a small fireplace. I greeted the woman from afar and addressed Azita.

Ch. [to Azita]: Does this woman live here alone?

Azita: Yes, yes, these men [pointing at the workers] are only working here.

Old Woman: Come into the shade. It is too hot.

Shahab: I am showing this boy around. He is from Germany and he wants to ask some questions. Talk to him for a while. He understands some Farsi.

Ch.: Hello. How are you? How is your health?

Azita [to the old woman]:

He understands some Farsi. [To me:] But she does not. She only speaks Uzbek.

I am going to translate for you.

We laughed about this situation and I greeted the old woman politely, introduced myself, and asked her about her name with some rudimentary Uzbek words. Her name was Hashema. Then I went on explain in Dari that I unfortunately spoke too little Uzbek to talk to her. Despite Azita's statement that the old woman spoke only Uzbek, she again talked to me in. The transcription that follows is a straight translation of what the old woman said in Dari.

- Hashema: I have no place. I have no tent. I have no tent.
- Ch. [to Azita]: So, what happened to make this woman come here?
- Azita: Nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing special happened. War happened. Killing happened. She left her house. She escaped. And she had nothing to eat there. No bread. She lived in very poor conditions there. She said to herself: 'I am so poor. If I do not find a way to survive I will die'. And then four, five families from there left and she also left. She came here. Do you understand?
- Ch.: You said that it has been two years that you yourself arrived here. Are there any differences between the time when you came and today, the time when people like this lady have come here?
- Azita: We came at the time of drought. One year the wheat grows well, another year it does not grow at all. That is the time of drought. We had no [agricultural] land over there and no place [to stay] anymore. After we left the area the Taliban showed up and did their dirty work. They took everything that belonged to us before. Everyone was in fear. A big commander took our land. The little piece of dry [rain-fed land] that was still left did not suffice. This is why we came here. We fled.
- Ch.: And you live next door?
- Azita: Yes, and when I saw this poor woman my heart was bleeding. She is so poor. She needs help. From whom will she get it? I really struggled hard to help her. If somebody needs help, I will give some help to that person.
- Shahab: But she also works to make a living.
- Hashema: I have no tent that I could put up here.
- Shahab [to Azita]:
And you live next door?
- Azita: Yes.
- Ch.: So how did this woman find this place?
- Azita: There is a neighbor. His heart was also bleeding. And so, she came and settled here. He said: 'A house is being built there. It is dusty but the poor can stay here for some time. She shall get four loaves of bread everyday'.
- Ch.: And who gives it to her? The bread?
- Azita: The workers do.
- Ch.: Do other families live here as well?
- Azita: Yes, some do. There are three families over there [pointing to the small hut on the other side of the courtyard] and another four, five families over there across

the wall.

Ch.: And you are all one *qaum*?

Azita: Yes, we are one *qaum*, we are *watandār*.⁶⁰

Ch.: Do any of your people still live in your home area?

Azita: Yes, yes. Some do.

Ch.: Who?

Azita: I wouldn't know who.

Shahab [to Azita]:

No, tell him who it is! Is it your brother? Is it your uncle?

Azita: It is my uncle and there are also some brothers. Some people are living there.

Hashema: I came here in times of war. I have no one over there.

Azita: So, she has no relatives there, I, myself, do have some. In my village.

Hashema: I have no one left there. Nobody. And there is nothing left there for me.

Azita: You know, she gave four of her sons as martyrs. Four of her sons died. [To the old woman:] They were in the Taliban, right?

Hashema: Yes, they were in the Taliban.

Azita: One boy remains. He has become a junkie. He is smoking. She does not know where he is. Maybe he is still in that area. He has turned crazy, that one son. His mind is bust.

Ch.: Oh, this is really bad. So how is your life here?

Azita: Our life here is good. You know, life just goes on. It is not too good and it is not too bad. So-so. What is very bad here is that there is only little work for males. My husband is very old, he is ill and he cannot work anymore. But all the women here know each other, help each other. Our days just go by. Not too bad.

Hashema: But our lives are also very poor and hard. It is only desert here. Only desert.

Azita: As you see, it is very hot in Mazar. This is also a problem at the moment.

Ch.: And what do you do in winter?

Azita: What do we do? We have to live here.

Hashema: I need support. Really. If no one helps me, gives support, if no one gives me a good tent, if no one builds a house for me, what shall I do?

Ch.: As I said I cannot deliver any help, I am not with any organization. I am here as a student and I am only gathering some information about the difficult life in Afghanistan. Hopefully one day, I am going to write a book.

Hashema: Yes, yes, I understood. I only want you to write that we need help. God willing people will read it and will come to our aid. Let's hope for the best.

Ch.: Thank you.

[Thoughtful silence.]

⁶⁰ *watandār* - fellow countryman; person(s) hailing from the same homeland or home village

So, whose goats are these?

Azita: Ours.

Ch.: How many do you have?

Azita: Two.

Ch.: What do you do with the milk? Do you drink it or sell it?

Azita: No, what milk? We had a hard time purchasing the cheapest ones. This is why they do not give milk.

Ch.: And what about the children here? Do they go to school?

Azita: No, there is no school now.

Ch.: I know, there are holidays right now.

Azita: Come, we can go to our house. It is just too hot.

Hashema: We are burning in this heat. You are also burning.

Ch.: Yes, for me it is really hot. But let me ask one more question: what do you think, when life in your home region, around Maymana, gets better. Will you go back there?

Azita: We do not have a place there anymore. We do not have land. We do not have a *hawli* there. We do not have a livelihood there.

Hashema: I do not have a place there. Where should I go?

Azita: Those one or two pieces of land that fed us, we have sold them. We don't have them anymore. It is all over for us there. There is too little left to make a living there.

Ch.: I understand.

Azita: If we go there, we would have to rent a place. If we went there and rented a *hawli*, they would take 3000, 4000, 5000 from us. We cannot pay that money. We are forced to stay here. I lived in a tent too, before we came here. Then we have come to this place, we have moved into these two small rooms and now we are staying here.

Ch.: You said your husband is old. What kind of work are men doing here?

Azita: There is no work for our men here. They go to the *kārgarī*, sitting, waiting, they don't find work and then they come back.

Hashema: I do not have a husband anymore. Four of my sons died and one went crazy. There is no man.

Azita: She is a widow. Her husband has died.

Ch.: Yes, I understood that. This is really difficult for her. To whom does this land belong?

Azita: To someone else. It's private land.

Hashema: This land belongs to a *bāy*.

Ch.: And do you have to pay rent?

Hashema: No, I do not have to pay anything because that man lives abroad.

Ch.: But what will happen when the construction of the house is finished?

Azita: When the house is finished he will say: 'It is finished now. If you want to live here, you have to pay rent', that's what he will say.

Ch. [to Azita]: How many places have you lived in, here in Mazar?

Azita: Don't ask! I do not know. We have lived in so many places. Wherever we find a place, we will stay. I cannot remember in how many places we have stayed. We did not have a proper home all the time. When we first came here, we lived under a tarp. One month we stayed at one place, one month we stayed at another place. 'Go away', people would say. 'Go and find another place'. It is a big problem for poor people like us.

Ch.: But when you have to leave one place and have to look for another place, how do you do this? Do you have anybody who helps you or do you have to manage this on your own?

Azita: Nobody helps us. Who would do that? We are only poor *mohāḡerīn*.

Ch.: Do you sometimes go to your former home region? Do you go back to Maymana?

Old Woman: No, I do not go. What would I do there? I have no one there. I have no place there.

Azita: In the last two years I went there twice. Two relatives have died. An uncle died. And a son of an aunt died. If somebody dies, somebody of your family, you have to go there. So, I went back to Maymana twice; twice in two years.

Ch.: Is it expensive for you to make that journey?

Azita: We had some money for that.

Ch.: Here, in Mazar, is there any support for you here?

Azita: Once we got some help from the DoRR.

Hashema: Yes, that was in winter.

Azita: But that happened only once. And not for all of us, only for a few families. At the moment, there is no support.

Ch.: How did you get the materials to make this place? Where did you get the plastic sheet from?

Hashema: People gave it to me.

Ch.: People from an organization?

Hashema: No, people. Just normal people. They got it from an organization who gave support to those people. They got it but they did not need it so they gave it to me.

Ch.: Where do you get water from?

Azita: There is a tap over there. But the water is not good. When it's warm the water spoils. But we are forced to drink it. There is no other water here.

Ch.: What about the children? Do children have to work here?

Shahab: No, they are still young, aren't they?

Hashema: The children are young and they can do nothing else but eating their bread. That's it.

Azita: Look. What can we do? We are not rich. We have nothing. We have no place, no *hawli*. The only thing that remains for us is to die in the heat.

Hashema: There is no one to take care of us. God is the only one.

Ch.: Who took the decision to leave Maymana and come to Mazar?

Hashema: It was my husband. He was alive but we had lost everything. We had lost our sons. We had nothing. We had no help. When hunger runs rampant people cannot give you anything.

Azita: The people over there, in our home area, they do not give a single rupee. They do not even give you a piece of bread. Do you know, you will find a lot of hunger in Maymana. The area was hit hard by the drought.

Hashema: Here things are better. There, if people let you peel their potatoes, they would not even give you the peels. Here it is different. Here you get two or three potatoes. People care a little bit more.

Azita: Yes, over there they would not even give you the potato peels.

Hashema: That's not a lie. It is the truth.

Ch. [to a child, standing close by]:
And you, son, what do you do all day long?

Hashema: What can he do? Nothing reasonable. He is a kid. He runs around in the streets. All he can do is make himself dirty. That's what he does all day long.

Azita: Come on, let's go to our house. It is close, it is next door.

Hashema [to Shahab]:
Please, you know my life. The holy month of Ramadan is imminent. What shall I eat in the month of Ramadan? What shall be my meal for *eftār*⁶¹?
What can I do? What am I going to eat?

Shahab and I give some change to the old woman and follow Azita to her house.

Azita's hawlī

The one-storey house consisted of two small rooms made of brick and was located in one corner of a big yard. The small hut almost looked as if it had been pushed into that corner as most of the plot consisted of a big excavation pit for a new house. The remaining free space around the pit was packed with building materials. Workers were busily drilling a well with a big drill. Azita welcomed us into one of the two rooms. Her aged husband was lying on a *tōšak* and watching TV. He also welcomed us but did not get up.

Azita: This is my house. It is small and we are a crowd. It is not a good place. Right now, you can hear the construction work, they are building a new house. This makes a lot of dust and a lot of noise. As I said, our situation here is not good.

Ch.: Who lives in this house?

Azita: My husband and I, my elder daughter and her husband, and my two sons, one is big, he is working, and two more daughters. They are little. And my husband, he is old and ill and he cannot work anymore. Women also have to

⁶¹ *eftār* - evening meal after sunset with which Muslims break their daily fast during Ramadan.

work here a lot. Women have to feed their children. In many families the men are ill or addicted to drugs, or they have already died.

Ch.: What jobs are there for women to do?

Azita: We go and help others. In the kitchen, we do the cooking and washing-up, things like these, at times when there are celebrations and people have lots of guests.

Ch.: How do you find that work? How do you find people who will employ you?

Azita: We know them. They do not live here. They live in other places in town. We have found out. They were looking for someone to do some of their household chores. We go there, we work in their house for two or three days.

Shahab: What kind of work do you do there?

Azita: I do the cooking. I help in the kitchen. What can I do? Look at my husband. He is old. He cannot work. He is ill. He has problems with his stomach and liver. We even sent him to Pakistan for medical treatment. But it did not get any better. And he is old. How can he earn our bread?

Ch.: Yes, of course.

Shahab: Compared to him we are all very young [He laughs.].

Ch.: How long have you lived in this house?

Azita: For one year.

Ch.: And how much rent do you have to pay?

Azita: We do not pay rent because we built this house ourselves. We have built these brick rooms, therefore we do not have to pay any rent.

Ch.: But you cannot stay here for good, right?

Azita: Yes, we will have to move. We have to find another place. I do not know how to manage that. I have no idea where to go.

Ch.: You said that you have some relatives that are still in your former home area. If you talk to them on the telephone, what are the things you talk about?

Azita: We talk about this and that. 'How are you? What is the news? What is the latest gossip? What are people talking about? Do you have work? Is there work here in town? How is the situation there? Is everything okay? Will you come here? Did you travel somewhere?'

Ch.: And do people from there come here to visit you?

Azita: Yes. They come. I have an uncle, he comes here. Others also come when they have some business in the city. My brother also comes here once in a while.

Ch.: What do they do here in town? Why do they come to town?

Azita: My uncle has a shop. He sells things. Mainly groceries but also many other things. Here he goes to the bazar. He buys things, carries them home, resells them.

Ch.: And your brother? Is he also a shopkeeper?

Azita: No, he goes to Iran.

Ch.: For work?

Azita: Yes. He's been there several times.

Ch.: What is he doing here in town?

Azita: He is applying for a visa to Iran. It takes some time. He is also working. Here and there. He finds some work.

Ch.: What were the main problems for your family in your home area?

Azita: I already told you. The agriculture is very bad there. And the Taliban are there. They are a big problem there. They harass everyone who comes their way.

Ch.: Are the Taliban locals from there, from that region, or do they hail from somewhere else?

Azita: Some are from there, but others are from other regions.

Ch.: And there is no police, no state to fight them?

Azita: No, no one from the state is there. This is the main reason why people like us are afraid. This is why we come here.

Ch.: But here in town and around, the security situation is good, isn't it?

Azita: Yes, of course, here it is better. [Pause.] Come on, I can show you some more houses with *mohāġerīn*.

We left Azita's house and walked down the road.

In the car

We took a seat in Shahab's car. Azita came along with us and guided us through dusty and bumpy streets that all look more or less the same.

Azita: In this neighborhood there are many *mohāġerīn* families from Maymana. Seventy families.

Ch.: Seventy? And they all live in this area?

Azita: Yes, they are all here. One by one they are coming. They show each other places to stay.

Shahab: This is why they are close together.

Ch.: How do you know about all those *mohāġerīn* around here?

Azita: We know. We meet. We talk. People come to me. I go to them. Just like that. And once I also made a survey for the office.

Ch.: For the office of *mohāġerīn* [the DoRR]?

Azita: Yes, we know what is going on here. How can they know where to find people? They do not have the right information.

Shahab [interrupts]: This way? To the right?

Azita: Yes, there. It is there.

Shahab: Where?

Azita: Here. This way.

Shahab: Who are they? More people like you?

Azita: No, *mohāġerīn*. Poor people.

[To me:] In this small street, in this alley, we find people from all areas of our country. You find Turkmen, Pashtuns, Uzbeks. Not all of them are *mohāġerīn*, but all are very poor.

[To Shahab:] Here we are. Stop. No, go on. That way!

- Shahab: This street? What are you talking about? You gave us wrong directions. I knew from the beginning. Huh?
- Azita: This way. This alley.
- Shahab: Oh, this way, this way. You do not know the way. Is this the alley?
- Azita: Yes, here it is.
- Shahab: When did you last go there? Didn't you live there earlier? How can you not know the way? Was it a long time ago for you?
- Azita: I did not live there.
- Shahab: Where?
- Azita: Not in this alley. It was over there. At that street we lived under a tent.
- Shahab: That was over there? You do not know your area? Huh?
- Azita: The tent was close to the well.
- Shahab: This way? (He points in the opposite direction)
- Azita: No, not this way.
- Shahab: Where was the tent? Not over there?
- Azita: No, no.
- Shahab: That's wrong. Wrong. The tent was in that street.
- Azita: Mhh.
- Shahab: And other than these people, there is no one? It's a long way.
- Azita: There are some families.
- Shahab: Good, we can ask them, talk to them. What a bad road this is! How can I turn the car round? Where should we drop the car?
- Azita: There is some free space. Stop. I will get out.

First *hawli*

Azita got out of the car. She knocked on the door of a *hawli*. The door was opened and Azita went in. After some time, she came back and told us to follow her. We entered the yard. It was quite a big compound with a few trees, some vegetable patches, and some barracks. Parts of the building, which were just a number of single rooms in a row, might one day become a house, although for now the ensemble looked more like an abandoned construction site. We passed a plastic sheet that was spread out under one of the trees.

- Azita⁶²: Look, people even live under the tree here. And then there is a family here [pointing at a small brick building], and two others over there. And yet another family lives over there. Five families in one yard. They have no other place, they are forced to live like this.

⁶² Interview 07/08/2012

A woman shows up. After greeting us, she immediately starts talking:

We are four families here. We have no place. We live in three rooms here. We have to pay 3000 Afghani in rent every month. 3000! This *hawli* is not ours. It is rented. We do not have a *hawli* of our own.

Azita: This is Asal. One year ago, her husband died. Right here. In this *hawli*.

Asal: I have nobody apart from my three children. One is very young, one is twelve, one is thirteen. It has been one year since my husband died.

Ch.: That is bad. I really feel sorry for you. May I ask you some questions?

Asal: Yes, of course.

Ch.: How long ago did you come here?

Asal: Two years ago, brother. Two years ago, my husband died and we became homeless. We moved from here to there and back again. We have nowhere to go. And at this place we cannot stay either. We cannot afford the rent.

Azita: If they payed the rent, they would die of hunger because there would be no money left for food.

Ch.: But your rent is very expensive. How much do you pay?

Asal: 3000.

(Voices of indignation from the group.)

Shahab: This is a lot. Too much.

Ch.: 3000?

Azita: Yes, too much. Why is it so expensive? This is really a problem!

Asal: We have many problems here. He [the landlord] says that he renovated these rooms and for this reason he can demand a higher rental. And what can we do? We are very hungry and now it is very hot. My husband has died. I have nobody. The others here are also very poor and needy. They cannot help me. We have no water. We have no electricity. We cannot stay in this place. We are forced to move on. It is very hot at this time.

Azita: They will not be able to stay here. My heart really hurts when I see all this. You need something to eat and drink in this heat. If you do not eat, the heat will carry you off.

Asal: How can we manage? How can we find work? I would otherwise work for food, but we also have to pay the rental.

Azita: My heart really hurts.

Ch.: Are all these people here from your *qaum*?

Asal: Yes. We are all cousins.⁶³ It's packed here. When someone finds a place, the others come along and join him. We have no place of our own, so we have to live together. When we came here, when we were homeless and asked for a place to stay, an

⁶³ She says: the children of uncles and aunts.

uncle said: 'Come here, sister, find a place'. What shall we do? This is how our days pass by.

Ch.: What kind of work do you do here?

Asal: Any work that I can find. We walk around and everywhere we ask for work. One of us does this, one does that. Digging, carrying things, delivering things. But all these kinds of work, you do not get real money for it. You get 50 Afghani. What can you do with 50 Afghani? Even if you are homeless anyway you still need 100 Afghani for food, for your family. And on top of everything we need to pay the rental. And we are a widow-headed family. It has been two years now since my husband died.

Ch.: Do you know how long you will stay in this place?

Asal: You know, we'll go to a village and see if we can stay there. If we find work. If we find a place and some work the village will become our home. It has now been fifteen years that we live our life as people without a home. We do not have a *hawlī*. We went to one village, stayed there for some time, moved on to the next place. What can we do? Life is very hard if you do not have a place for yourself.

Ch.: So how did you lose your home?

Asal: We did not have much property. It was only a little plot [of land]. We lost it.

Ch.: What happened?

Asal slightly shrugs her shoulders.

Ch.: Where was your home?

Asal: It is on the way to Faizabad. We lost our *hawlī*. We lost our *hawlī*. We could not manage there. This is why we came here and now I have to work for 50 or 100 Afghani a day. That's how our lives go on.

Ch.: And who took the decision to move from there to here?

Asal: It was my husband when he was still alive. He said: We can go there. We can go to the city.

Ch.: What about the vegetable patch? Is it yours?

Asal: No, it is not ours. We are not allowed to take from it. It belongs to someone else [the landlord].

Shahab [to Azita]:

Okay, that's it. Let's go. That's enough.

Azita: Oh, let him ask some questions. Let's talk to some more neighbors.

Another woman joins us, carrying a baby in her arms. She introduces herself as Farzaneh.

Farzaneh: We are having a really bad time here. We live in the shade of the walls here. We look for any cool place. It is so hot and we only have a few places in the

shade. If I went into the house, my child would die from the heat. So, we move from the shade of the tree to the shade of the wall. We go from here to there; from there to here. This is how we spend our time. What can we do?

Ch.: How old is this baby?

Farzaneh: She is one month old. But she is not healthy because of the heat. This is not a place for a baby. It is unhealthy to spend so much time outside, under a tree.

Shahab: Okay, let's go.

Ch.: So, how long have you been here?

Farzaneh: It's now been one, two years that we've been homeless, since we came here. Everything took a bad turn in our area. Our area was poor. We had no land. We had no estate. We had no livestock. And so we got together, we poor people, and we moved to town. We took the decision to go. Many left their houses behind. We gave up our place to go to town and find work.

Ch.: Where did you come from?

Farzaneh: From the environs of Faizabad. All of us, all three, four families that live here together, we are all close kin.

Ch.: What are the problems there? What are the problems of the place where you are from?

Farzaneh: The problem is that everything is in scant supply there. The villages there are very poor. There are no cars there. And we had no property, no land. People like my husband worked as day laborers and it was at the time of drought. People earned almost nothing and the little money you get does not take you anywhere. And so the fruits of our labor did not stay in our hands.

Ch.: I see. And how did you find this place?

Farzaneh: We came here. We stayed for some time in one *hawli*, then we moved to another *hawli*. And for a really long time we lived in a tent. We lived in the tent and stayed in it. And then we found this place and since then we have lived here. So, it has been about one year since we came to this place.

Ch.: Do any of your people still live in the area of Faizabad?

Farzaneh: There are many. For those who are wealthy it is no problem to live there. Those who are poor do not have a home there. They leave and come here.

Ch.: But what about people of your family, of your *qaum*, do they still live there?

Farzaneh: Yes, some are there. But most of us are homeless and live in the city. They do poor people's work.

Shahab: Christoph, come on. Let's go.

I said goodbye and thanked the two women for their time and willingness to talk to me. I gave some money to the woman with the baby. Azita and Shahab were discussing something. Finally, it turned out that Azita had thought about visiting another place close by.

Second *hawli*

We walked down the street and Azita knocked on a door. Some children answered and we entered the *hawli*. The courtyard was quite spacious. In one corner of the dusty plot there was a very small

house no more than nine square meters in size, and a worn-out tent. We met Zargul there and she invited us in. I introduced myself and explained my research interest. Then I started to ask some questions:

- Ch.⁶⁴: Where are you from?
Zargul: We are from Maymana.
Ch.: And how long have you lived here?
Zargul: It's been one or two years now that we've lived in this place. We also have an old grandpa. He has gone to work. He is at the *kārgarī* now. My sister has gone somewhere else. We live in this one-room house. Quite a number of people have gone to that office [the DoRR], but there they did not give us anything. I brought them my picture, I brought them pictures of my kids, like they said. I filled in all the papers. I got everything ready, like they said. To other people they gave [something]. To me, they did not give [anything]. Some people protested. They gave [something] to other people. To me, they did not give [anything].
- Shahab: What do you mean?
Zargul: All I can say is that, for example, the *kalāntar* got [something]. Grandfather knows him and he saw that the *kalāntar* got [something]. All the people got [something]. As for us, we are really poor. Look at our place. To us, they did not give [anything]. All I can say is that I went there [to the DoRR office] and they gave me nothing.
- Shahab: Do you have a *card*?⁶⁵
Zargul: No, but I brought everything they asked for. All the papers.
Shahab: When?
Zargul: Three months ago.
Shahab: It can take some time.
Zargul: But time for what? They only have to register me and then they give some oil and food.
Shahab: It takes time.
Azita: They have small kids here. They have many kids. There are two families here. Many kids, many boys. One woman is a widow, one has a husband. They are very weak, especially the widows. They try to work and beg for alms in town. I saw them moving along the street. The man works as a day laborer in town. He goes there on foot. He leaves very early in the morning. He sits on the curbstones there, waiting for employment. He works in construction. A man comes and says go there for work, go there. And he asked all the people, those people he worked for, if they knew a place where he and his family could stay.
This is a big problem for the people. They can work and earn some money and either buy some food, or they use the money to make a house but then they stay

⁶⁴ Interview 18.07.2012

⁶⁵ *card* - official IDP registration document that entitles card holders to ascertain amount of basic food provisions

hungry and thirsty for some days. If you take the decision to build a house on your own, it may happen that you cannot stay in that place then. This is the worst thing for these people: when you build a house and then you have to leave. These people are really very poor. How much money can they make with their work? They make 100 Afghani. And what can you get for 100 Afghani? You cannot pay your rental. Even in a place like this it is a problem. You cannot build a home. You cannot build three or four rooms because the house will afterwards stay with the landlord. If you build a house, three or four rooms, the landlord will say: 'Give me rent for this house', even if you built the house with your own hands. People are forced to live in these crowded places, hungry, thirsty. The problems here are really big and 100 Afghani would be a big help for these people.

- Ch.: And how much is the rent here?
Zargul: It is 5,000. Sometimes it is 10,000.
Ch.: For this place?
Azita: No. The rent for a big *hawli* is very expensive here. This is why they made this hut by themselves.
Ch.: You built this house?
Zargul: Yes, my husband did.
Ch.: All alone?
Zargul: All alone. He found some people to help him. People from here, from this area.
Ch.: From this area? Neighbors?
Zargul: Yes.
Ch.: Were these people *hamwatanhā*⁶⁶?
Zargul: Yes, they were also people from Maymana.
Ch.: Do people help each other out?
Zargul: Sometimes.
Azita: As long as it is not about food or money.
Shahab: Look at the cat. Do you have cats in Germany?
Ch.: Yes, you also find them in Germany. People like them very much.
Shahab: People here also like them very much.
Ch.: So, tell me. How was your life in Maymana?
Zargul: Maymana was good but it turned bad. All the people left from Maymana and went to Mazar.
Ch.: Why?
Azita: It was the time of the Taliban. It was the time of war. Many people had nothing.
Zargul: My father died. Others died too. One of my brothers died. My second brother went to Mazar, settled here. We also came here but, as I said, we received no help here.
Shahab: Okay, let's go.

⁶⁶ *hamwatan* - compatriot, meaning someone from the same region, area, and/or country

Third *hawli*

Together with Azita, we approached another *hawli*. A woman who saw us passing by started screaming, "I am a poor widow. I am a poor widow. I had to leave my village. Brother. I am homeless." We passed her without paying too much attention to her and entered another *hawli*. The plot resembled the places we had visited before. It was a dusty compound, enclosed by brick walls. The building was made of brick. The wooden window frames were paned with plastic sheets instead of glass. A place for cooking and a toilet were made out of wooden slats and plastic tarps. We entered the house. Two women (Mehrvash & Nahal) were there together with many small kids. After exchanging greetings and briefly introducing ourselves, Mehrvash started to describe their situation.

Mehrvash⁶⁷: Our life here is the life of day laborers. We work as day laborers. We are all doing this kind of work. We start early in the morning and work till night. Morning till night we work. That's the life of day laborers. This life gives us what we need.

Ch.: Where is your family from?

Mehrvash: We are from Maymana.

Ch.: And why did you decide to move from there to here?

Mehrvash: It was the time of famine. At that time there was nothing. And we are a big family, kids need to eat. There was no food, so we came here. Otherwise we would not have come.

Ch.: And for how long have you been in this place?

Mehrvash: I do not know the year. We came before all the others. It might have been ten years ago, five years.

Azita: They went to every village, every street.

Ch.: But are any of your people still there?

Mehrvash: No, they have all moved away. They did not stay there.

Nahal: Our people, our *qaum*, we stay in one place for two months, three months and then we move on, we go to a new place and settle there for a while.

Azita: As they are *mohāġerīn*, all of them, you almost never find this [that someone stays on at one place for a long time]. Every household has moved many times. If they settle in one street and the owner of the place comes and wants to build a house on that plot, people have to leave for another place on another street and after that they have to move on to another street, and then to yet another street. They hardly ever stay [at one place] for a longer time. The only work these people can find are day laborers' jobs. One of these women is a widow. Her husband died in an accident. And she is alone with all these problems and many kids. That's how it is.

Ch.: This is very bad. I can imagine it is difficult for her. But do all these children belong to these two women?

⁶⁷ Interview 07/18/2012

Mehrvash: No, some people have gone out for work. We have to look after [the children].
People work, the children are here.

Ch.: Like a kindergarten?

Mehrvash: Yes.

Ch.: What kind of work do you find here?

Mehrvash: Ever since we came here we have worked as day laborers. We do all kinds of work.

Azita: And if they do not find work they go to the state and say, "Give [us some support]." [Azita laughs.] Or they say, "Find work for us." [She laughed again.]
These people do whatever work they can get. But there is no work here.

Ch.: Is your life better here compared to when you lived in Maymana?

Mehrvash: Here it is better. Here you can find work if you want to. It is not easy, the life of
the homeless in town, but you can manage. In Maymana there simply was no
work, not a single opportunity there. Nothing. [Pause.] There was nothing in
the village.

Ch.: How did you find this place?

Azita: A friend of our family lived here. Then he found another place and he said
to the family, "Come here, there is a place where you can stay."

Ch.: Who said this?

Azita: One of their *qaum*.

Nahal: The people who lived here before were looking for another place. The rental was
too expensive for them. They had to find another place, a cheaper one.

Azita: And these people, they were also searching (for a place to stay) all the time.
They were searching and searching until finally they found something.

Nahal: ... and then they moved there and these four walls were available and we
moved in. Before we stayed in one place for four months. Now it has been
three months since we moved here.

Azita: In one year they moved three or four times. The landlord would show up and
say, "Pay the rent," or, "Pay more rent." And people had to leave. If they could
not pay, the landlord would say, "Pay the rent or go to another place. Find a
cheaper place." It is like this for all of us. If it gets cheaper, it is okay. If it gets
more expensive, it is a problem.

Ch.: But how do you find the money for all these things? For rent, for food, for
everything else?

Nahal: This is the problem. If you find work but only for three hours, this will not pay
for what you need. It will pay for one meal. And there is too little work and
we have to walk there. All the way [to a *kārgarī*]. The men set out for work in
the middle of the night.

Mehrvash: We are a family of eight hungry people. How can we manage? How shall we
make do?

Nahal: We are forced to live like this.

Azita: In the name of God. Do you know, these poor, they have new babies every day.

Shahab: They are unemployed. Got it? [He laughs.]

- Azita: At the moment, they are unemployed and have nothing to do, so they ‘get close to their girls.’ [Azita laughs] This is why they have so many children.
- Shahab: You see, those people in Afghanistan who are unemployed, what do they do? They make a lot of babies. [Laughs]
- Azita: Take a look. It’s a real kindergarten here. Everyone here has at least five children. And this is also a lot of work. Everything in life is work. Isn’t that so? And they grow up. All these children. If all their legs get longer, there will be no space for them all to stand in this room. What do people think? And then they do not have five hundred rupees to see a doctor, what if one of them gets ill?
- Ch.: I see. All families that live in this neighborhood and hail from the same area, do they help each other out?
- Mehrvash: No, there is not much help.
- Azita: Everyone has their own lot to bear.
- Ch.: But do you see each other? Do you meet? I mean, do you meet each other? All you women from this area, do you sit together and talk?
- Azita: Of course, people meet. They meet and talk all the time. “What have you been up to? Where did you go? Do you know about any work? Have you found a place?” They talk but they do not help each other. Even though they do not help each other, the people stick together because they do not have much else to do.
- Ch.: I understand. But information can also be of help. For example: Somebody has information about work. He knows that he can tell the others to go to a certain place to find work, too. Does that happen?
- Azita: No, that’s not how it works. People are hungry and thirsty and then, of course, they only think about themselves first. They have to find everything by themselves: find work by themselves, live on their own. They are poor and there is not so much work available. They even fight about who can go and work. Sometimes they argue with each other that somebody took the work of someone else and that now the kids of that other person stay hungry. “My kids are also hungry,” the other one will answer. The poor people have to think of themselves first.
- Ch.: Okay. Did any people recently come from Maymana to Mazar?
- Azita: Yes, there is some coming and going. They built a good new road one or two years ago. This is why people can easily come. Come and go. Sometimes somebody comes, just has a look and then gets tired and goes back. Some people go back and forth. My brother for example: He spends some time here, some time in Iran, some time in Maymana.

Then the women started to speak in Uzbek. After some more chatting we said goodbye and left the *hawli*. We went back to the car. I thanked Azita for making all these encounters possible. Azita came up with a suggestion:

Azita: Feel free to come back again. We can visit many people here. I know other places with many *mohāğērīn*. We can go there.

Shahab: No, no. Why? It is all the same.

Ch.: I would like to come.

Shahab: We will see.

After we left, I talked to Shahab in the car.

Ch.: Why can't we go back to see this woman again? She knows many people and can introduce me to many families.

Shahab: Why do you want to see more people? You have already seen a lot. It is all the same story. No need to see more people.

 [Pause.]

 Do not go there alone, okay?

Ch.: What?

Shahab: Do not go and visit her alone.

Ch.: Why not? It is easy. I can go there on my own. You do not have to travel with me. It is also good for you. You have time for your own work then.

Shahab: You cannot go there alone. You know in Afghanistan it can become a problem if a man and a woman are seen meeting alone. This can become a problem. It is dangerous for you.

What is being told?

The conversations presented here center around the precarious living conditions and impending danger of displacement within the city. Some encounters left a deep impression on me, for example, hearing about Hashema's losing all her sons, or the young mother's search for shade for her newborn baby. Being in such dire need that children are seen as useless hands and hungry mouths, and living in conditions where it makes a big difference if somebody allows you to grab their potato peels, are definitely stories that "*tell their own significance to a sensitive reader*" (Andrews et al. 2000: 4).

The cases presented in this chapter do not supply a whole lot of new factual content, but since it is women who are the protagonists of this chapter, the cases can serve to introduce their perspectives and specific problems. Otherwise these talks once again stress the massive problem of finding a place in town and hint at chain migration and cooperation among the migrants even though the main speaker in this chapter, Azita, chooses to highlight the absence of mutual support among poor people rather than people's readiness to help each other out.

The meetings presented here bear some similarities: In all cases I spoke with poor migrant women who hailed from the province of Maymana. These women identify as Uzbeks and speak Uzbek with each other. All the talks happened more or less unannounced and in most cases they were short, as they took place in the open and the days were very hot. Some occurred only in

passing, mostly because Shahab was pressing us to end the conversation.

In all interviews the women reported difficulties of finding places to live and complained about the high rental they could hardly afford with the income they and/or their men generated. The high prices for accommodation had often led to further displacement when someone was no longer able to pay their rental. It is typical for these people's way of life to move frequently yet hardly anytime by their own choice. As many of the respondents explained, they only found places with the help of relatives and acquaintances. In order to lower their expenses, they had to share their homes, mostly they did so with other family members or other people from their home area or at least members of their own ethno-linguistic group.

The accounts show that many of these families are powerless in the face of the demands of landlords. Landowners will ask for prices that sound truly outrageous. The story we heard in the second *hawli* is a typical case: The landlord had undertaken some construction to allegedly improve the place. This, in turn, entitled him to demand a higher rental. People find themselves forced to decide how to spend the little money they have: *"If they paid the rent, they would die of hunger"*, as Azita said. Unjustifiably expensive rents occur quite often since people have little or no knowledge of laws and policies. Such exploitative behavior on the part of the landlords and property owners is common in urban settlements all over the country.⁶⁸

Those who are not able to pay rent at all, like Hashema, are in a particularly precarious position. Hashema had to put up her makeshift tent on a construction site, knowing full well that soon she will have to find another place. She reported that she got some support from her landlord, which is not unusual but comes with conditions of its own. In Afghanistan, legal claims to land are often highly disputed as a result of long periods of war and population shift and several changes in authorities that deal with property affairs. It is not uncommon to find several legal documents that prove the ownership of one particular piece of property for a number of different people.⁶⁹ Therefore, the best guarantee to keep claims to a plot valid is to inhabit it or at least have someone who is living and/or working there, hence keeping the land occupied and protected.⁷⁰ In our case, old Hashema got some food in return for her 'service' of preventing the land from being grabbed by anyone else in the meantime. I witnessed other cases where landowners accommodated people, who, like Hashema in this chapter, lived for free on an undeveloped piece of real estate but along with this would show up before religious holidays to remind their landlord of his duty to make charitable donations to the poor – in those cases, the poor who were squatting on his property to safeguard it from alien occupancy.

Of course, these temporary relationships between owners and poor tenants do not mean any security for the dwellers. Instead, their relationship is characterized by a high dependency on the goodwill of the landowner, even if this arrangement is indeed beneficial to him. If a house is constructed on the plot, as seen in these examples, the poor dwellers will be forced to find new places. I heard similar stories told by poor migrant families, especially in those parts of the city

⁶⁸ www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/2019-IDMC-GRID-spotlight-afghanistan.pdf (last seen on 04/20/2023)

⁶⁹ Foley 2008

⁷⁰ www.internal-displacement.org/expert-opinion/stuck-in-the-mud-urban-displacement-and-tenure-security-in-kabuls-informal. (last seen on 04/20/2023)

where much building activity was going on. Informal settlement of internal migrants, who faced similar eviction threats and lack of tenure agreements, have been reported from other big cities in Afghanistan as well.⁷¹ Widows and women who live alone suffer greatly under such conditions.⁷² In my interviews, the tenants sometimes expressed some hope that the landlord might feel responsible for them and at least help them find a new place.

Zargul's description (in the second *hawli*) reveals another interesting aspect of the housing issue. Her family had all by themselves built the small hut on the plot they inhabit. They did so because they had no money to rent rooms or a house. Before that, they had been living in a tent. Purchasing the building materials reportedly caused financial trouble for the family as they then had even less money for food in their budget. When the shelter was completed they feared that the landlord might demand an additional rental fee for this small house.

Azita also reported that it was her family who built the house they were inhabiting. Their rent has been lower or they may even stay there for free, but of course the house will remain on the plot whenever they leave. The person who builds an edifice on a rented plot has to come to an agreement with the landlord or the subsequent tenant about some compensation, as constructing a two-room building of this kind, like in Azita's case, is a major investment and requires a lot of work. In any case it became clear during the interviews that Azita's family due to their construction activities were in a better economic position than many other families in the neighborhood. But they will nevertheless have to find a new place, just like many other families.

With regard to employment issues, in these interviews a new aspect is introduced. For the first time, we see that women also contribute significantly to their family's income by doing all kinds of work including begging. Either the income of their husbands is too small, or they are the sole breadwinner due to spousal illness, death, or drug addiction. We learn that some of these women work in wealthier households to make (extra) money. To cope with their difficult situation, the women try to be well connected: "[A]ll the women here know each other, help each other," as Azita explained.

If we look into the migration stories of these people we find a parallel to Chapter 5: Several of the respondents here also report that they had lived restless and mobile lives as poor migrant rural workers before their migration to town; for them those were times in which "[t]hey had been to every village, every street," as Azita described it.

The situation in Azita's family seemed to differ from that of the other women we meet in this chapter. Azita remained vague about her own migration story or at least about their immediate reasons for moving. We learn that her family is well-connected and still has good and regular ties to the home region where her uncle has a shop. Between town and the former home of the family there seems to exist an active exchange. We also learn that they bought two goats for *namāz rūza*⁷³ they had the means to build a small two-room house, they had sold land in the home area, and they

⁷¹ For similar cases in Kabul: www.internal-displacement.org/expert-opinion/stuck-in-the-mud-urban-displacement-and-tenure-security-in-kabul-informal (last seen on 04/20/2023); This report mentions that even the state is protecting land by keeping it occupied by IDPs in Kabul; www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR372-Addressing-Land-Conflict-in-Afghanistan.pdf (last seen on 04/20/2023)

⁷² A report focusing on the role of women in informal settlements in Afghanistan: <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/strengthening-displaced-womens-housing-land-and-property-rights-in-afghanistan.pdf> (last seen on 04/20/2023)

⁷³ *namāz rūza* - religious feast that marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, and the Feast of the Sacrifice. People wear new clothes, visit family, friends and graves of relatives, and give presents.

were able to send her aged husband to Pakistan for medical treatment, which is all very expensive. It is obvious that the family is economically much better off than many others.

Azita had in the past made a side job of identifying needy IDPs in her area. Registered IDPs get an IDP Card that entitles them to a certain amount of basic provisions. This work is actually not her responsibility but that of Shahab and colleagues. We do not know if they delegated the task to Azita because of her in-depth knowledge of the local circumstances, or if she took action on her own initiative as a result of state officials' laziness or inability. The DoRR, as a state institution, in this case seems to use the services of someone who is not officially a public servant but has close links to those who should (or should not) benefit from state support.

What is problematic here is that 'the state' delegates an important task without being able to crosscheck the information in the appropriate way as described by Shahab in Chapter 5. In that chapter, during the trouble in his own office, Shahab refused to even as much as listen to the two applicants because they did not fulfill the requirements. Azita in her turn did not only take on a task on behalf of the state without any formal skills, but she also assumed a lot of responsibility, given how needy some of the families are. A few bags of rice or wheat make a big if not vital difference for these poor migrants. The way Azita often directed the course of conversation might indicate that she knows which story brings the best chances of being registered, and possibly she even knows how to bypass regulations and requirements. We would not know if the fact that her family is better off is also linked in any way to the task she has taken on. It may be possible that she receives compensation or even asks others for her share in cases where her assistance helped to secure someone some state support. After all, she holds this crucial knowledge of where to go and what to say.

From a theoretical perspective, Azita's involvement her knowledge, and/or her influence on decisions concerning who is in need in her area and who is not, is a good example of Migdal's "state in society" approach (2001). By taking on this state service, Azita becomes the link between the state, here represented by the DoRR, and the society, namely the poor migrants, at the lowest interpersonal level.

How are things being told?

The data I gathered during the meetings analyzed in Chapter 5 all came about thanks to the intermediation of Azita, who on the other hand also exerted considerable influence on the course and content of the talks. Three points are noteworthy about Azita's role regarding how things are told here. Firstly, Azita acted as a gatekeeper. She showed us *her* neighborhood and *her* people, and told *her* story. She has knowledge about this specific 'narrative environment' and definitely holds 'narrative control'. Secondly, she remained vague regarding the details of her own migration story as well as her current economic situation. Thirdly, her communication with, and relation to Shahab should be analyzed on two different levels: a professional level, as she represents other migrant families in her area to the institution he is standing for, and on a personal level, since this interaction reveals social rules of how women and men can interact in public.

Not only in “real life”, but also in my research Azita played the typical role of a gatekeeper⁷⁴. She knew about my research interests and in her community had the kind of influence that would open many gates for me. As many gatekeepers do, she often bypassed or even overruled other women who would have been source persons, and seized the opportunity to speak herself instead of letting other migrants narrate their own stories. This is most striking in the example of Hashema. By rightaway telling that Hashema could not speak Dari, she devaluated her as a conversational partner for me. Azita did a job for me which she called 'translating'. But instead of actually translating the questions I wanted to ask Hashema, Azita often directly answered my questions regarding this woman without involving her in our conversation at all, except for when I asked how many sons the old woman had lost. As for Hashema’s heartbreaking fate, Azita just summerized it like that: “*Nothing special happened. War happened,*” seemingly describing insecurity as something normal for those people.

In the other interviews, Azita also answered many questions herself rather than having others talk, and often directly influenced the topics discussed. For example, in the second *hawli*, where Zargul did not make any reference to insecurity caused by the Taliban, Azita brought this topic up and only then did Zargul start to talk about all the threats and about the sacrifices her family had had to make.

As I mentioned above, Azita remained unclear about her own migration story. She talked about problems of insecurity and drought and that living in her home area was impossible. At the same time, it becomes obvious that her family is still well-connected to their kin in the home region and is in a better economic position than many other migrant families in this neighborhood. She has apparently interwoven her own family’s story and living conditions with those of the others, who had seemingly been dealt a much harder blow by fate. The way she gave some answers did not make it clear whether she was speaking about herself or about other poor families. By adding general descriptions of internal migration and displacement, she displayed her situation as more precarious than it might have actually been. As if telling her own story, she drew from the common narrative about the fate of the masses of IDPs in Afghanistan and examples in her neighborhood.

Additionally, Azita also emphasized her desire and ability to help. She explains that she helped elderly Hashema to find a place to live and adds "If somebody needs help, I help them." By this she clearly and consciously dissociates herself from the other informants presented here, as those, in Azita's opinion, would not help each other, as she repeatedly clarified, since they were all caught in despair themselves.

If we look at Azita's role in the community and her relation to Shahab, we should start with a brief incident that happened between the talks. A woman started screaming in the street shortly before we entered the third *hawli*. This short event aptly displays people's neediness but, much more than that, it is a good example of the screaming woman’s perceptions and expectations. She probably knew Azita, as many of the women in the neighborhood did, and she was informed about her role in helping others to get support. Seeing Azita arrive in the company of two men, a state official and another one who might be a foreigner, made her expect that right then she could seize her chance to draw attention to herself and loudly ask for help. She had not heard me explain that

⁷⁴ Latchem-Hastings 2019

my work had nothing to do with the distribution of relief. Azita and Hashema in their turn had understood that there was nothing to gain from me. The awkward silence in the conversation with Hashema reveals that quite unmistakably.

The talk in the second *hawli* immediately started with the question of who got support and who did not. Zargul seized the opportunity that Azita had brought someone from the DoRR into her small house to complain about the fact that some people got relief while others did not, and that no IDP registration card was issued to her. Shahab simply answered by saying that these things might take time. After this, Azita started to give general descriptions of the hard life of migrant families in town, again, without really honoring Zargul's situation. Shahab in the meantime was preoccupied with the family's cat and shortly afterwards ended the talk abruptly.

Azita's role in the interplay between the poor migrant community of her neighborhood and the DoRR seems to be ambivalent. She sought to advocate for the needy by explaining their dire situations at length and repeatedly, sometimes even in more detail than the people themselves. She told these stories to me because I wanted to hear them, but also to Shahab in order to emphasize the tremendous need for help among the migrant families. Additionally, by standing up for her poor compatriots in their presence, Azita probably reinforced and strengthened her position as a spokeswoman of the neighborhood.

Azita not only adopted these two positions as a supporter and advocate for the poor migrants; she also openly criticized her peers for their careless reproductive behavior and for constantly begging for aid from the state, *"And if they do not find work they go to the state and say, 'Give [us some support]. Or they say, 'Find work for us.'"* By laughing while saying this, she was possibly trying to give her accusations an ironic touch. Yet, she quickly backtracked by adding, *"These people will do any work they can get. But there is no work"*.

Azita's involvement with the DoRR brought her into contact with Shahab and during the talks we see how the two cherish quite a special relationship. Of course, in Afghanistan contacts between men and unrelated women are usually prohibited. Shahab obviously enjoys contact with women and his work gives him opportunities like these to chat with women in a casual atmosphere. Therefore, visits like these seemed to be fun for him because he could joke around with Azita. During the talks he mostly stayed in the background and did not seem to be very interested in what the women were saying. For example, at the interview in the third *hawli*, he only joined the conversation when the topic of the unemployed as having children as if that were their favorite pastime came up. Besides this, he repeatedly devalued the women's comments as being the same stuff all the time. In some situations, he even pushed Azita and me to end the talks without indicating the reason, which was quite impolite in the respective situations.

Azita tried to tolerate Shahab's behavior even though he repeatedly teased her in a childish way, like for example in the car when he purposely mixed up the directions to annoy her. She stayed calm and did not lose her temper. Even though Azita also joked around with Shahab on some occasions, she always kept in mind her goal to represent her community in the best way possible. Thus, she made sure to underscore the extreme destitution of her compatriots and emphasize that these people should all be recognized as IDPs because they had all fled from insecurity in their home areas. If Azita wants to achieve this goal, she must neither give up nor bore her conversation

partner, as Shahab was not interested in spending much time listening to that kind of stories.

Azita is in a difficult position. Even though women and men were granted equal rights under the Afghan constitution passed in 2004, in practice this is not the case. Women are underprivileged in many ways⁷⁵ and one reason why Shahab treated her like he did might be grounded in this disadvantaged position women are allotted in Afghan society. She is dependent on Shahab and his office if she wants to continue her activities in supporting the people around her. She showed remarkable courage and perseverance in pursuing her goals. At the end of our encounter, Azita suggested that I come and see her again to visit more migrant families together, an offer which Shahab rejected vehemently. Later in the car he warned me to not accept her proposal because it might be dangerous for me to meet with a woman alone. To me it rather occurred that he was not in favor of this conversation going on, or was even afraid that I would snoop around in his professional affairs while he was not around.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on poor migrants' difficult working and living conditions and their ongoing displacement in the city, with a particular focus on women's views and experiences. We learn how they, of course, also have to struggle very hard and often as sole breadwinners to secure their families' everyday life after migration to town. The chapter also gives more detail on the difficult landlord-tenant relationship with underprivileged migrants involved.

Azita played a very important role as my gatekeeper and a supporter and advocate for the poor migrant families, most of whom hail from the same area as Azita herself. She combined narrating with a steadfast commitment to stand up for her people, even against obstacles such as Shahab's repeated attempts to talk her down and make her sound less than credible. Azita influenced the course and the content of the talks and was quite outspoken in her recounts and opinions. On the other hand, she remained vague regarding her own migration story, interweaving the narration about her own life with narrations about others.

Azita's story as a female migrant is connected to those of the other female migrants presented in this chapter. At times she includes herself in this narrative while distancing herself in some matters. While it remains unclear how her own story goes, she writes herself into the stories of the other women by acting as a narrator.

⁷⁵ For more information on women's rights in Afghanistan, see: <https://medicamondiale.org/en/where-we-empower-women/afghanistan> (last seen on 04/20/2023)

8. Chapter 7: “There Is More than One Side to the Story.” - Mirwais’ Undecidedness

I remember sitting in a student dorm room in Mazar-e Sharif. It was the room of Mirwais, a young student from Faryab. He hailed from a remote part of the province which was in those days experiencing severe security problems. Even staying in contact with his parents was not easy. His home area had no telephone coverage. Calls had to be arranged in advance via an uncle or one of his brothers who lived in Maymana, the provincial capital. They would pass on the information to his father that a call would come in. Mirwais’ father then had to search for a place with telephone signal to answer his son’s call. For quite a long time Mirwais had not gone home. He was yearning for his mother and he suffered from the fact that he could hardly ever talk to her on the telephone.

Mirwais was at the same time studying at the State University of Mazar-e Sharif and a private Tajik institute. The focus of the private institute was English language instruction, international law and political studies. In town he behaved in a very ‘modern’ way. Unlike other boys he wore traditional Afghan clothes only on holidays. The rest of the time he could be seen in jeans and a shirt or in his worn-out sport clothes. He cared a lot about his hairstyle and his outward appearance was inspired by posters of international soccer players.

Mirwais shared the dorm room with some other boys. For some time, I also was his roommate. He stored his few clothes in two bags, and some belongings of his were locked away in a built-in wardrobe. Important things like worn-out copies of classwork manuscripts and loose papers for his studies were kept under his mattress.

On the day of this talk, Mirwais was wearing a worn-out black Cristiano Ronaldo football strip. After having shaved, he oiled his hair in front of a small piece of broken mirror that stood on the dusty window sill.

- Ch.: Mirwais, tell me about life in your home region at this moment.⁷⁶
- Mirwais: Life there is very difficult. At the moment, there is a commander, Commander Salari. He is one of the commanders from the war a few years ago. He has great power there. He has power and he fights against the Taliban. These commanders fight against the Taliban and the [normal] people become homeless and have to suffer. Do you understand, Christoph, this causes many problems for the people. The Taliban really torment the people and bring a lot of suffering upon them. But at the same time, people also like the Taliban. The Taliban who are there, in my area, do not bother the people that much: they do not beat them up or give them much trouble. They take care of security in the villages at night. This is why the people somehow like them. But for example, I used to go to school but then I could not go there anymore and I had to stay in our house because if they had laid hand on me, they would have killed me. So, this is why the Taliban are really bad. On the one hand. On the other hand, they are not. There is more than one side to the story.

⁷⁶ Interview 08/18/2012

- Ch.: So how is everyday life for ordinary people?
- Mirwais: It is very bad. Very bad because every day it is like this: one day the Taliban come and trouble them, then afterwards the state comes and fights back at the Taliban. And they retreat again. And then, only a day later, the Taliban come back, then they fight again and so on. Life for the people there is very bad. It is a big village. Around 5000 houses are in the area. Everyone is suffering.
- Ch.: So, what do people do? Do they flee?
- Mirwais: Yes. They leave. In this direction. In that direction.
- Ch.: Do you know people who have fled from the Taliban?
- Mirwais: Yes, many people from my area have fled. Many people leave for the city. They go to Maymana. They are afraid of the Taliban. The Taliban tell the people, “Buy some weapons for us,” “Buy us a motorcycle,” or, “Give us one of your sons to fight for us.” And this is the reason why people are forced to leave. They have no choice. They do not have the money to buy weapons and ammunition for the Taliban. They do not have money to buy a motorcycle. And they love their sons, of course, this is why they don’t want them to join the Taliban. This is why they have to flee from the area.
- Ch.: You told me that your brothers do not live in your village either. You said that they are in Maymana. What are they doing there?
- Mirwais: They study there and are also afraid to go home. For example, only once a year, if the security in our area is good, in times when the Taliban cannot reach it, we go [to our parent’s village]. Nonetheless, we are afraid that on the way to our home some Taliban will hijack us and say, “This is the son of a certain man. This is a son of a commander. We should kidnap this boy.” They would scold me. They would beat me. They would kill me. They would say, “We should keep him, beat him and so on, because he goes to school.” For this reason, my brothers and I go to see our parents only once or twice a year. And at that short time, when we are in the secured house, our father will not sleep at night. He is on the lookout; he is afraid that the Taliban will come and kidnap or kill us. This is how it is.
- Ch.: What work does your father do there?
- Mirwais: He has no work. In the past he was one of Masud’s⁷⁷ commanders. Today he is out of work.
- Ch.: And as a former *moğāhed* it’s no problem for him to live in that area?
- Mirwais: What kind of problem would it be? What do you mean? A problem for whom?
- Ch.: I mean that, as a former *moğāhed*, he probably has many problems with the Taliban.
- Mirwais: No. The Taliban cannot come close to our house. Sometimes they try but there are also *ārbakī* in our area. Because of their presence the Taliban cannot come. They only show up, fight, and then disappear again. They make some trouble

⁷⁷ Ahmad Shah Masud was an Afghan politician and one of the most well-known military commanders of the *moğāhedin* who fought against the Soviet occupation and later, against the Taliban. He was assassinated in 2001.

and then flee again.

Ch.: The other day you told me about a Taliban fighter that everybody loved. What was his name again?

Mirwais: Aziz. Aziz Qahraman. He was really loved by the people ...

Ch.: But why? I don't understand.

Mirwais: They loved him more than they their own children. Even the women. Mainly because he did not trouble the people. He did not torment them. For example, I went to school. And he said, "If this boy goes to school, this is none of my business. He shall go to his school." And when a boy ran away from home or was kidnapped, he always found him and brought him back to his father. He handed him over to his father. And he did not make trouble for the people. He always said, "I fight the foreigners. I am only the enemy of the foreigners. I am not the enemy of the Afghans." And for this reason, the people liked him. He once said, "If you don't mingle in my affairs, I'm not mingling in yours."

Ch.: Okay, but then, why was he a member of the Taliban, if all those things like school and so on were no problem for him?

Mirwais: No, he said that foreigners occupy Afghanistan and that they are infidels. This is what Aziz said. For this reason, they liked him; because he fought against the foreigners. He always said, "I do not fight against Afghans." This is why people really liked him.

Ch.: Is he from your area?

Mirwais: Yes, he is from my area.

Ch.: And he is not alive anymore?

Mirwais: No, he was killed by the foreigners.

Ch.: What happened?

Mirwais: He was fighting and he was killed in action. He was a fearless fighter. And he fought as if he were not afraid of death. He was such a good fighter that he took a police-post single-handed. His hand was hurt. It was hurt by six bullets from a Kalashnikov but he still seized the post. The police, the police officers, they were all in the building, and he just captured the post. He took their Kalashnikov rifles and he took their weapons. And he was the only one who was hurt.

Ch.: Only him?

Mirwais: Only him. Aziz. Only one man. He took over the post and then he detained the policemen. But he did not kill them. "Hand over your weapons," he said, "and then leave the post or I'll kill you." And then the head of the post left. The policemen, they escaped as fast as possible. They did not even raise their weapons against Aziz because they were so afraid of him.

In our area there is a very busy road. The caravans pass there. An American convoy, a foreign convoy was passing by having just come down from the mountains. It was a supply convoy. Many cars. When they were in the village, there was an ambush. In front of them there were two fighters, one was Aziz. They blocked the road. The convoy's way to the front was blocked, their way

back was also blocked because there were too many cars and the street was too narrow. All vehicles had to stop and there was no escape. And then all cars were evacuated. The police, who were escorting the convoy, were also blocked, and they knew they would be beaten. They fled in all directions. There were ten cars left. Two people captured ten cars. Such a man he was. He was a really fearless man.

Ch.: And this song on your telephone is also about him?

Mirwais: Yes.

From his telephone Mirwais blasted the song in praise of Aziz. The sound had a very strong echo and I did not understand much from listening to it for the first time. The song started with the following lines that were repeated several times and also formed the refrain of the song:

Oh Creator of time, in Faryab you wafted away.

Refrain: Your name is Azizullah, you became famous as a hero.

You uprooted the enemy in your country.

Strong as a typhoon, you showed eagerness and achieved success.

Refrain ...

In every poem you were a precious friend, oh hero.

You beat the infidels and became successful.

Refrain ...

Oh you red-and-white flower, martyrdom was your desire.

Today you made your sacrifice and now you are one of the martyrs.

Refrain ...

You beat the *ārbakī* and the defectors and spies.

You demonstrated your Afghanhood, you sacrificed yourself.

Refrain ...

Sincere in *ǧehād*, with a firm intention. What a hero you were.

You were like a martyr. You became an Imam.

Refrain ...

Ch.: What does it say?

Mirwais: It is not sung by himself. It was made after he died. It is about him. It was sung about him. It says: 'Aziz, you hero, you are this and this and this ...' On the day he died, Christoph, they sang this to honor him. All the people in the village, all together, they were crying: women, men, children, young people. Everyone was crying. They said, "Aziz is dead." Everyone cried because they really loved him so much.

Ch.: But how did he become such an important figure?

Mirwais: Firstly, he was the head of the village. He was with the state.

Ch.: What time was this?

Mirwais: 1387/1388.⁷⁸ At that time he was the state representative for the village. Aziz was a young guy at that time. He was only twenty-something years old. At that time, when he was with the state, the Taliban could not win out there. But there was one person in the village who had a problem with Aziz. He did not like his success. He killed some people and put the blame on Aziz. He said that Aziz had killed those people. And afterwards the state said to Aziz, “We want to give you supplies, things you can distribute to the people. Please come to town so that we can give you these things.” And then, the moment that he reached town, they arrested him. They put him in jail and said he wouldn’t get out alive. But he was very rich. He was extremely wealthy. He payed 40 *Lak*⁷⁹ Afghani ransom and then he was free. And this time, when he was released, what did he do? He went home. And because the state had treated him with such injustice, he became a Talib. And when he became a Talib the whole area, everyone, all together, became Taliban. Because of this treachery, he took over the area from the state quite easily as everyone sided with him.

Ch.: Okay, but who are the Taliban today? Are they also all from the area, or do they hail from other places or even from foreign countries?

Mirwais: Today only a few Taliban are left because many of them have been killed. They killed about twenty Taliban members. After Aziz’s death, many of them were killed. Furthermore, there are Taliban who come from other places, start a fight, and then withdraw very fast. There was a boy in the area. He was killed by the Taliban because he was going to school. That was a turning point. The father of this boy then took to the weapon and sided with the state. He is fighting against the Taliban. And then many people revolted against the Taliban. The whole area then fought against them.

Ch.: So, people know, in case something like this happens, who is with the Taliban and who is responsible for a crime?

Mirwais: Yes, of course they do. People know if someone is a member of the Taliban. They know, they say, he is one of the Taliban, he was involved in killing that person.

Ch.: Do people know who killed that schoolboy?

Mirwais: Yes, it is known. People know it very well. And the Talib who killed that pupil was from the area and everybody was well informed. He [the Talib] said, “You go and attend the classes. You are a spy. You gave the information to the state about where the Taliban are.” Well, he, the Talib, was also murdered afterwards.

Ch.: And Aziz? How has he been killed?

Mirwais: Aziz was killed by the foreigners. In a fight some of his men were captured by the state. Aziz went to help his people. He went alone to help them. But then from above an airplane came. And the airplane was shooting at Aziz and he

⁷⁸ (2009/2010)

⁷⁹ 40 Lak Afghani = 4 Million Afghani, about 80.000 US Dollar at the time of my research.

was even fighting the airplane. He was fighting, but he was hit and fell off the motorcycle. Lying on the ground, he was about to pass away. People said that the foreigners came to collect his weapons. When they approached him, they were standing around him, together. Then he pulled the pin of a grenade and they were all killed. The foreigners were killed, he was killed, all were killed.

This interview with Mirwais is special because at first glance he is not a typical internal refugee. At least he is not a typical IDP if we compare him, as a university student, with the other migrants I have introduced so far. Nonetheless, the talk with him in many things parallels the other interviews. In terms of content, it is similar in that it includes descriptions of people's suffering in their home region, and explanations on the ways they cope with the situation of insecurity.

What is being told?

From this conversation we learn that migration from Mirwais' remote home area in Faryab is a common strategy especially for young men, who are at a great risk of being recruited by the Taliban, either through persuasion or by force. Mirwais' family tried to find safe places for their sons. The boys moved to different cities and used their time in town for education. They found a space of refuge there and their migration, at first glance, can be regarded as educational migration. Many young people come from remote areas to study in bigger cities where there are schools and universities. But as we learn, along with the desire for higher education, insecurity is also a major reason for sons to move.

As reported in the interview, the boys were quite cautious about going home because of many dangers. I did not find out about the source of income of Mirwais' father, a former *moğāhedīn* fighter, now 'unemployed'. But given the fact that several of his sons were studying, and even partly at private institutions in the case of Mirwais, indicates that the family must have had enough resources.

Mirwais talked about how people in the villages suffered from exploitation and cruel treatment at the hands of the Taliban, yet he does not give very detailed descriptions of their atrocities. Like some other respondents in this book, Mirwais describes how the local population was seriously afflicted as they were often caught in-between when fights took place between the state and its international backers, and the insurgents. Against this background many people prefer stability over ongoing skirmishes and therefore appreciate the kind of security provided by the Taliban. "They take care of security in the villages at night. This is why the people also like them," as Mirwais said. Similar arguments were often used to justify why some Afghans warmly welcomed the first Taliban when they emerged in the mid-1990s (e.g. Schetter 2007:131). Back then, the Taliban developed into a major force and brought some change to the unending, confusing, and cruel Afghan civil war. If nothing else, they brought some stability, a claim that is often made about the beginning of that period of Taliban rule. Without question, it is the later period marked by cruel reign, suppression, and draconian punishments, which is much more present in people's minds, especially in the North of Afghanistan (Baldauf 2008). It was surprising to me that Mirwais was so enthusiastic about the local Taliban leader Aziz. During much of the interview, Mirwais expressed admiration for the supposedly famous fighter from his area while recounting Aziz's heroic deeds.

How are things being told?

The extensive narrations about the charismatic Taliban fighter Aziz are to my understanding the most striking aspect of the accounts by which Mirwais represented the collective experience of his fellow countrymen. I knew how much Mirwais' family suffered from insecurity and uncertainty due to the Taliban's presence in his home area and how much his education and lifestyle in town contradicted the Taliban's ideas of a 'proper' way of life. How did these things go together?

The descriptions clearly show Mirwais' ambivalent relationship towards "the Taliban". He was fascinated by Aziz and expressed his fascination in the way he talked about his smartness and fighting strength. He tried to explain his ambivalent attitude to me by first offering a more differentiated picture of Taliban rule in general. He endeavored to bring up various facets, emphasizing that there was not just one perspective, nor only 'good' or 'bad'. He did so by describing perspectives of the people from his area, for example citing the argument that the Taliban "ensured security" in particular areas at times when no one else was able to do so.

Mirwais' own family is affected by the Taliban threat, while on the other hand he fosters a great respect for one famous Talib. Along with all regular problems the Taliban caused for people, Mirwais' family was particularly exposed due to his father's past as a *moğāhedīn* commander. This can be seen when Mirwais expressed his fear while imagining what would happen if he were caught by the Taliban: "This is the son of a certain man. This is a son of a commander." Additionally, the fact that the family was siding with state education is generally seen as opposing Taliban policies, as Mirwais mentioned repeatedly. By adding the story of the killed school boy, he further underlined the dangers he and his family were exposed to.

Moreover, Mirwais' inner conflict becomes evident when he talks about the Talib Aziz. As I spent quite some time with Mirwais, I realized one day that he played that song about Aziz quite often: when we were walking through the streets, at night while sitting together and eating and chatting, or when commuting by taxi or rickshaw. The fact that he was not shy about playing the song everywhere, surprised me when I finally understood that it was a song worshipping a famous Taliban fighter.

While similar songs about outstanding local or widely-famous fighters are sung in many areas of Afghanistan, some of these lyrics are specific for an anti-government mindset, such as those lines describing how Aziz fought the enemies of the country and how he beat *ārbakī* or heretics. The performance style of the song with the unaccompanied singer, the echo, and the numerous repetitions is also similar to other so called *tarāna* songs as described by Pelevin & Weinreich (2012) or Johnson & Ahmad Waheed (2011) which were mostly sung in the Pashto language and were much more present in the south western part of the country. An outsider like me, who does not share the cultural background of adolescents from North Afghanistan of those days, may find it difficult to understand in passing that the song is dedicated to a Talib. Nor can I say with certainty if Mirwais' love of this particular song can be seen as a kind of public statement on masculine heroism, or merely as an example of adolescent provocation favoring a Talib against his own positionality, or again something else.

What is obvious is Mirwais' admiration for Aziz. All those stories about his heroism and valor, whether told by Mirwais or in the song, depict a kind of folkloric aesthetic. However, what counts

here is the enthusiasm and admiration conveyed by Mirwais in his narrations. Mirwais' narrations mirror his inner conflict: he drifts between descriptions of his admiration and affection for Aziz and the threats his family suffers from the Taliban.

Apparently, Aziz became famous as a Taliban fighter, although he seems to have steered clear of many things otherwise associated with the Taliban. In his narrations, Mirwais did not mention anything connected to Aziz's religious faith nor his position towards the strict rules arising from the Taliban's interpretation of Islam. Instead, Mirwais presented him in a laissez-faire 'You do your business, I do mine' mode. Aziz, as described here, did not care about other people's affairs as long as they did not mingle with his. Not only did Mirwais focus on Aziz's fighting strength and craftiness, but he also stressed that Aziz was opposing the state for a good reason, namely because some followers of state rule had tormented him. Mirwais chose to paint Aziz in a favorable light, perhaps even having regard for my supposed feelings: downplaying anything religious while focusing on his good manly qualities.

What are the reasons for Mirwais' admiration for Aziz? He pictures Aziz as a brave hero, just and fearless, standing up for the Afghan people. Maybe Mirwais' enthusiasm runs deeper since he himself originates from a family in which war and fighting were prominent due to his father's *moğāhed* past. There is, however, yet another aspect I want to stress here.

Aziz and his heroic deeds, as part of Mirwais' narrations, are connected to a strong feeling of belonging and home. Mirwais seemed to be proud that someone from his area was so extraordinarily brave, just, and rich. The fact that this hero fearlessly led the fight against a much more powerful opponent, namely the state and its international backers, and launched his actions from a very remote area draws a certain picture of this region and its residents. Mirwais repeatedly described how all the people supported Aziz, how they all sided with him, how everyone loved him more than their own kids, and how at last they all grieved for him. Mirwais effectively constructed a close connection between the population of his home region and their hero. Aziz was one of theirs. Furthermore, Mirwais forged, through his narrations, a strong link between himself and the home region that he deeply missed. Through talking about Aziz and listening to the song about him, the hero became Mirwais' connection to home. For him, talking about Talib Aziz did not mean to talk about the 'foreign' (Baldauf 2008) or the 'other', but just the contrary, it meant talking about home.

In order to not make his admiration for Aziz sound like supporting the Taliban in general, Mirwais carefully concentrated on Aziz's heroic deeds and dissociated him from any atrocities ascribed to the Taliban. His adoration for Aziz as an individual outweighed the fact that he was a Talib, at least during part of his political career. Mirwais dissociated him from the 'usual' Taliban movement by mentioning that he was not a Talib all the time and switched sides for good reasons. He focused on Aziz' exploits, courage, and nobleness, and mentioned that everything got worse after Aziz's death. To demonstrate this, Mirwais used the image of parents' love for their children. In the beginning of our talk, however, Mirwais had made a statement which contradicts this stance - he said that no one wants their children to become a Talib, because they love them too much and that is why they make them leave the area.

All of Mirwais' narrations reveal an ongoing inner conflict and can be understood as examples of internal discursive struggles, i.e. struggles taking place within the self which become obvious while discussing a controversial topic.

Conclusion

The talk with Mirwais is special because his escape from insecurity is combined with a good and expensive education in Mazar-e Sharif. Mirwais explained how the Taliban, which by many are put forward as the reason for their migration, can also provide security in an area, at least as long as people respect their rules. As a result, he drew a more differentiated image of Taliban rule regardless of the constant menace the Taliban brought to his family. Nevertheless, Mirwais did not present himself as just a victim. Nor did he portray himself as a *mohāġer* or IDP. His relation to the Taliban became multifaceted with his description of Talib Aziz. Even a narration about a Talib, when recounted by someone otherwise unrelated to the movement, can create bonds to a home region or foster links to a place which is physically inaccessible. Mirwais' narrations and his listening to his favorite song reveal a mixture of fear and admiration for an outstanding fellow countryman, and his longing for home and family. This ambiguity shows that there is more than one perspective on the Taliban and their activities and most of all, it shows how deeply rooted people are in their homeland and how closely connected they feel to fellow countrymen regardless of possible ideological dissent.

9. Chapter 8: "I have built my shack from that desert and poverty" - Tell your own story

I remember walking through the dusty side streets of the neighborhood where I had some days before been together with Shahab. I had bought some dates and wanted to bring them to Hashema, the old widow we had been talking to with Azita (Chapter 6). Dates are eaten for *eftār* and at our previous meeting Hashema had complained a lot about the poor conditions she had to endure during Ramadan. Against Shahab's advice, I went to see Azita again and ask if she could help me to meet some more migrant families.

That day I took a three-wheeled rickshaw taxi. These shared taxis provide transport along the main roads of Mazar. I got off at a spot I remembered as being close to Azita's house and Hashema's place. Thanks to unique and prominent decorations on some houses I remembered, I was able to find my way to Hashema's place. She was not there. Some workers were busy in the yard and did not know where she was. I decided to have a look in the *hawli* next door where Azita and her family lived. Azita's aged husband was sitting next to the door in the shadows and watching the construction work going on in his yard. He saw me and beckoned me over, and I sat down next to him. He was in a much better condition than at our first meeting and, apparently, he was happy to see me again. After exchanging greetings, he told me that his name was Mortaza.⁸⁰

- Ch.: Mortaza, how are you doing today? What did you do today?
- Mortaza: Why do you ask? I did nothing. I was sleeping here. That is what I do. This is how my life is.
- Ch.: I wanted to visit Hashema, your old neighbor. The widow who lives next door. She is not there. Do you know where she is?
- Mortaza: She has gone out. She goes around trying to find some bread, to find some money. She's out every day. She has to go out. She is begging. For bread. For money. She has no one, you know?
- Ch.: Yes, I know. Do you know her well?
- Mortaza: We have known [each other] for some months. One day, two days, she eats with us. You know, she is very poor. She has no one. Sometimes she eats with us. And when we are all busy, when we have to run our errands, she sometimes looks after the small children.
- Ch.: Today you are alone. No one from your family is here.
- Mortaza: My son and my son-in-law have gone to town for work. My wife is in the office. The children are playing outside.
- Ch.: Which office did your wife go to?
- Mortaza: To the office for *mohāḡerīn* [the DoRR].
- Ch.: Why?
- Mortaza: Some new people have arrived. They need some help, they are poor. They want to show themselves to the office.

⁸⁰ Interview 07/15/2012

Ch.: Why do they ask your wife to come along with them?

Mortaza: Someone told them that she can help. You know, many people know her and she knows many people.

Ch.: So, these new people came here and asked if she could go to the office with them?

Mortaza.: Yes, some women came here and asked. My wife said, "Okay, let's go."

Ch.: What kind of help do they get there?

Mortaza: No help. Nothing. You know. There is no support coming from our state.

Ch.: But why do they go there, the women?

Mortaza: These people have just arrived here. They go there. They write down their names. They say that they are poor.

Ch.: And they do not get any support from there?

Mortaza: People who are new in town, people who are *mohāġerīn*, they register and then they get some oil, some rice, some wheat. But only when you are new. Once you are here, you are just poor. You have to see where else you'll find bread for your children.

Ch.: Last week your wife said that you have to move. You have to find a new place because they are building this new house.

Mortaza: Yes, we have to move. We already have a new place. Soon we will move.

Ch.: Did you already find a new place? You are lucky. Where is it?

Mortaza: It is close by. Two, three streets in that direction.

Ch.: Is it a good place?

Mortaza: Yes. It is good. It is big. It is a house with two rooms. No construction work going on. That is better.

Ch.: How did you find that new place?

Mortaza: The engineer who is building this house here. He said that we could go to that other place.

Ch.: Did he ask for rent?

Mortaza: Yes. But he gave a good price.

Ch.: How much do you have to pay?

Mortaza: It is a good price.

Ch.: All these things you have here, like the shelves, the carpets, the mattresses, the television, did you bring all these things from your previous place in Faryab?

Mortaza: No, we bought it here in town.

Ch.: Did you know someone when you came here?

Mortaza: No, we did not know anyone.

Ch.: How long have you been here in town?

Mortaza: It must be about five or six years now. It was not easy. We had to find a place. We have moved around a lot. We worked a lot. But I became ill. I had problems with my foot. It really hurts. And my eyes are weak. I had problems with my stomach and my liver. I cannot work.

Ch.: Your wife said you went to Pakistan because of your illness.

Mortaza: Yes, once I went there to see a doctor.
Ch.: Where did you go?
Mortaza: To Peshawar.⁸¹
Ch.: How was it? How is life in Pakistan?
Mortaza: I have not seen much of it. I was quite ill. You know, I did not see much.
Ch.: Why didn't you go to Usbekistan? It is closer from here.
Mortaza: We have some people there [in Pakistan]. We got some help. Some help with the passport.
Ch.: But it is expensive to go there, isn't it?
Mortaza: Yes, of course it is expensive.
Ch.: Where did you get the money from?

Mortaza laughs.

Ch.: What does your son do for work?
Mortaza: He works in a warehouse. He delivers goods to shops. He even has a rickshaw.
Ch.: Does he earn good money?
Mortaza: No, it is not good money. But compared to other *mohāğērīn* we are fortunate. He brings home 300 Afghani or 400 Afghani a day. And he works every day. He is not unemployed. But what can you buy for 300 Afghani? You can buy a kilo of rice, a kilo of meat, oil, and some loaves of bread. But you cannot relax for a single day. We are eight people here.
Ch.: What does your son-in-law do for work?
Mortaza: He works in the same place.
Ch.: So, you have two breadwinners in your family?
Mortaza: Yes.
Ch.: And your wife also works, she said.
Mortaza: Yes. She goes to many places. She knows many people. She finds work here and there. She finds some money.
Ch.: Okay. Thank you. I want to see Hashema, the old widow next door. Would you like to join me?
Mortaza: Yes. Let's go.

Mortaza and I went to Hashema's yard. She had just arrived. After exchanging greetings I asked her:

Ch.: Where have you been? What did you do?
Hashema: I went to some places. I found a piece of bread and some other things. If you are hungry you cannot sit around. There is no choice.

⁸¹ Peshawar is a city in the West of Pakistan. It is close to the Afghan border and easily accessible via Kabul. Many Afghan refugees settled in and around Peshawar in the 1980s and '90s, and the city was the seat of several Afghan *moğāhedīn* groups in exile. Until today it remains a common destination for Afghans, for example to get better medical treatment than in their home country.

Hashema was carrying two big plastic bags of stale bread. I was wondering.

Ch.: What are you doing with all this bread? Who is going to eat it?

Hashema: We cannot eat it. It is old.

Ch.: Is it for the goats?

Mortaza: A little bit of it is for our goats. She is going to sell it to other people who have more livestock. People buy it and she gets some money.

Ch.: And where did you get all this bread?

Hashema: I go to the restaurants. One shop after the other. I go and ask. I ask, "Do you have any old bread? Can I have the old bread? Please help me. This will be of help to me." Then I go. I carry it here. Later I will try to sell it. I have no choice. I have to do this. I get some money for this.

Ch.: I understand. Last week, when I was here, you told me a lot about your life here. I found this very interesting and I learned a lot from what you told me. But please, can you tell me a little bit more about your life in Faryab.

Hashema: Life, life. This was no life, my son, no life. It was just poverty.

Mortaza: But what about life in the old days?

Hashema: In the old days, we said, my son, that we had a good life. I was young. We had some land. Just a little plot of land but it gave bread to my family. But then came the revolution,⁸² the Russians came, there was a lot of fighting, my husband had to leave, he was in the mountains during the war, fighting against the Russians. I was at home. Alone. We had the children and I was alone. I was afraid. Everyone was afraid in those days. Many people left in those days. To Iran, to Pakistan, to the city. Many people left. Afterwards the time of the Taliban came. My sons joined them. They went and fought all over Afghanistan. Here, there, to Mazar, to Jalalabad, to Kabul, to the South. My husband became ill. He was very ill. We had no money. We lost everything. Four of my sons died. I lost everything. Everything was gone. There was nothing left for me. In the old days, life was good. Yes, we had something, but now - nothing - I don't have a place, I don't have anything to eat.

Ch.: My heart is aching when I hear you say these things. You have had a very hard life. I hope your life will be better one day. If it is God's will.

Mortaza: If it is God's will.

Hashema: If it is God's will.

I point to her belongings:

Did you bring all these things along from Faryab?

⁸² The communist coup in 1978 that led to the Soviet invasion of 1979.

Hashema: No, they were donations.

Ch.: From whom?

Hashema: By ... say ... by the office. We got them in winter. We brought nothing with us from Faryab.

Mortaza: Yes, and we are thankful that a state provided this help and food supply.

Ch.: So, there was a foreign state that offered help to the *mohāġerīn*?

Mortaza: Yes. It was an organization from another country.

Hashema: Yes. Thank you to you. May God bless you. In winter, I was living under the tent. But I was at another place. But then the owner of that *hawlī* came and said I had to leave. That his place is no place for poor *mohāġerīn* and then I moved here.

Mortaza: Afghanistan. This is Afghanistan. So many poor and homeless people.

Hashema: Yes, you are right. Tomorrow, my son, the blessed month of Ramadan begins. And look at the place where I live. I live in the dust. It is our duty to fast in the month of Ramadan. But here? How can I fast here? I ask myself. Yes, I will fast. We have no choice. I am forced to. There is the land owner. He is a rich man. But even during Ramadan he will not give donations. They do not give any support to people like us. I sit here in the holy month of Ramadan. I fast during the day. I fast at night. But when you fast at night how can you survive the day? What shall be my *eftār*-meal? I am here in the dust. I have nothing to eat. Maybe some bread that someone gave to me. I sit here and I talk to the goats.

Mortaza laughs.

Ch.: What will you do with the goats?

Mortaza: The goats are ours.

Ch.: Yes, I know.

Hashema: Because there is no room over there, they tied them here.

Mortaza: There is no room there.

Ch.: Yes, I know. Will you sell them one day?

Mortaza: I will not give them away. No, we only bought them two or three weeks ago. They are for *namāz rūza*. We want to eat them at *namāz rūza*.

Ch.: Oh, now I understand. Thank you. There is one thing I do not understand. You are both from Faryab. Did you know each other before, or did you just come into contact here in town?

Mortaza: Here. Here we became neighbors. My wife helped her. She arranged that this woman was allowed to stay here.

Hashema: After I became a *mohāġer* I was in one place. Then I was in another place. I was in many bad places. I have lived in many bad places. It was always like that: I stayed at a certain place until someone asked for rent. When I had to pay rent at that place I couldn't stay on. I did not have much. I did not have much. Poor. I was poor. I am

- poor now. Poor people cannot go and choose a place to stay. Poor people just move.
- Mortaza: We are not in a position to pay much rent. We cannot reach this condition. The condition of not being able to pay much rent is why we are here. This is why we are living like this.
- Hashema: There is no money. There is no rent. That's it.
- Mortaza: There is no money so that we could pay some rent.
- Hashema: I have lived in many places. I went to many places. I asked for help. I came back. My hands were empty. And then, after that, I made this hut. The state - I gave four sons as martyrs - the state does not even give me a biscuit. They do not recognize that they are also responsible for the way it turned out for me. Once they offered some help. But now, what do they do? They do nothing. And then also the foreigners offered a little bit of help. They do something for us people. They do what our home country, our state, is not doing for us.
- Ch.: So, in your opinion, the work of all these foreign countries in Afghanistan is good?
- Hashema: It is good. It is good. It is very good. It is very good because without all this help there would be no Afghanistan anymore. Afghanistan would be gone. Our time is over. In this time people like us just vanish. We have no money, no possessions. If there wasn't at least this small assistance from foreigners, we would die. It is like this, my son, desert and poverty, desert and poverty, and I have built my shack from that desert and poverty. They did not offer me any support whatsoever for this construction. I carried these four pieces of wooden trusses. Giving security: our state does not do that. Building houses: they do not do. Like you, you come to meet the people. We talk to each other. You want to know what our life is like. But this is also not possible if there is no security. We die, that's it. Finished. I have slept here for many days, not one rich man has come and asked, "Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Is your health ok?" Not one man from the state came and asked, "Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Is your health ok?" No, they do not do this.
- Mortaza: They ask, "Why do you sleep here?"
- Hashema: "Why do you sleep here", they say, "What are you doing here?" They don't say, "You have no place to go, stay here. You do not have any money to go to another place." They do not talk in this manner. Afterwards, they laugh at you. What do you do? No, no, no, son.
- Mortaza: Yes, it is like this in Afghanistan.

What is being told?

We get to know that Hashema earned her money by begging for donations and asking for bread from restaurants along the nearby main road. It is quite common to give people begging at restaurants a small amount of money or a piece of the bread that comes with every meal. Also, the restaurants give away the leftover bread. Hashema would collect the stale bread and sell it as animal fodder. Additionally, she would get some support from Azita and her family who occasionally

provided her with some food. She returned their kindness by keeping an eye on the smaller children when the rest of the family was busy.

Azita accompanied another new family to the DoRR. Newcomers to town get some support so it is beneficial to register there. According to the descriptions of Mortaza and Hashema in this chapter and the reports of the migrants in the other chapters, the support that came from the office afterwards was not enough. Those newcomers found Azita because they had heard from someone in the neighborhood that she could be helpful if they wanted to register with the DoRR. This further proves how central her role was to the community of Uzbek migrants from Faryab province who lived in her neighborhood. Additionally, Azita's family managed to find a new and better place elsewhere. Once again, the family's good connections to several people apparently played a role. They received some assistance from others when looking for a new place, as they did when Mortaza needed medical treatment in Pakistan in the past.

As I already stated in Chapter 6, Azita's family's economic position was better than their fellow migrants' from the same home area. This is confirmed in the actual chapter: The family had some notable commodities in their small house. Mortaza reported that their main source of income is the regular work of the family's son and son-in-law at a warehouse as transport rickshaw drivers. They held an advantage as they could also use the vehicles for their own commuting in the city or as a source of extra income as a taxi. Along with these two bread-earners, Azita also contributed to the family income. Nonetheless, Mortaza remained vague regarding certain financial topics like the rent for the new place.

Hashema talked about the war, how she had lived alone at home with her children in the 1980s while her *moğāhed* husband was fighting in the mountains against the Soviet Army. This was the time when many Afghans left their home country to find refuge in neighboring countries. She recounted how, during the following period when the Taliban captured Afghanistan, all five of her sons joined as fighters. Four of her sons were killed at that time. She made no statement with regard to Taliban rule. At no point did she complain about their cruelty. She focused on the tragic loss of four of her sons who were fighting for them. Even though she lost everything due to these fightings, she did not blame a particular faction of the conflict. Later on, she even demanded support from the state because she had given her sons as martyrs.

Hashema continuously criticized the Afghan state and her fellow citizens for not seeing her need and despair. In her opinion it was not her fault that she is in the current situation and she should therefore receive aid from the state. She even underscored this claim with the statement that her sons died as martyrs, even though they were fighting for the Taliban and against the Afghan state at the time of the interview.

How are things being told?

Both of my conversational partners were much more talkative than the first time we met. Mortaza did not seem as weak and ill as he was during my first visit and he talked a lot. Hashema, who was belittled by Azita during our first visit for not being able to speak Dari, spoke quite a lot as well. Both speakers seized the opportunity to tell their story. This supports the observation in Chapter 6 that Azita was influencing if not manipulating the talks with her presence and her claim to explain things and comment on everything. Even though the content of the talks in Chapter 6 and here does

not differ greatly, we now hear Hashema's story as told by herself rather than Azita's recounting of the old woman's experiences. Hashema's observations and comments show that she did not need an advocate - at least not while telling me about her life. She told her own memories, observations, and opinions, and was more than aptly expressing these. In her complaints, Hashema placed all those who do not help her in the same category: landlords, property developers, rich people, and 'the state'. All these people were summed up as 'they', i.e. those who do not come to her aid in that desperate situation. Finally, these talks reveal Hashema's sense of shame for having to live through the holy month of Ramadan in such a miserable situation.

Conclusion

This chapter gives us further clues on Azita's influential situation among the migrant people in her neighborhood and on her family's better economic situation. It also becomes evident how much she dominated conversations, as - in her absence - the two interview partners were much more self-confident and self-determined. Not surprisingly, what is told and how things are told depend on who is around and who is not. Not in every situation does everyone have a chance to tell her or his own story.

10. Chapter 9: "Why did we come here?" - One fate - two narrations?

I remember following Azita through a narrow alley in her neighborhood. I had rejected Shahab's advice not to come back by myself in order to get some deeper insights into the migrant community at place. Azita now wanted to introduce me to some other families. She knocked on an iron gate. Someone opened and Azita entered. After a few seconds I was allowed to enter. A man, who later introduced himself as Khaled Beg, told me to follow him. We crossed a dusty yard and entered a small house. A woman called Gulchin was sitting in one of the two rooms next to Azita. A few children lay on the tōšak. After exchanging greetings, I asked the couple straightaway to tell me their migration story.⁸³

- Ch.: Where are you from?
Khaled Beg: We used to live in Faryab province before we came here.
Ch.: When did you come here?
Khaled Beg: It was around one year ago.
Ch.: So tell me, what made you decide to come to town?
Gulchin: Why did we come here? There is war there! War!
Khaled Beg: It did not work out there. Our life. It just didn't. It is all desert there. There is no work. There is nothing else, just desert.
Gulchin: The Taliban came to the place where we were living. There was war. Killing. Killing all the time. Besides that, there was nothing.
Khaled Beg: We came here for work. But we still cannot find work here. One day there is work, the next there isn't. I find employment only for one or two days a week. In Afghanistan we are all unemployed. Do you understand? You cannot find work. And in my family we can also do tailoring.
Ch.: Is this what the women do for work?
Khaled Beg: Yes.
Ch.: Is this to keep or to sell?
Khaled Beg: It is for selling. Someone brings material and my wife sews clothes from it. After some time a person comes and takes the finished clothes.
Gulchin: I make clothes for children. For each dress, I get 20 or 30 Afghani.
Khaled Beg: What is left is little - little. Less; it keeps getting less. Cheap, cheap, they are saying all the time. This way we manage to live, but we earn only little money like this.
Ch.: Where do you go for work?
Khaled Beg: I go into town. I work as a day laborer. Sometimes there is work. Sometimes there is not. I never know. I do whatever work I can find. I spend 20 Afghani to get into town and I pay 20 Afghani to go back home again. Even if I get a job, what is left over is not even enough for bread and oil. There is a man from Faryab. He builds houses. When he needs some men, he asks me. He calls me and asks me if I have

⁸³ Interview 07/08/2012 - Parts of this interview were cited in an Article published in ASIEN: Wenzel 2013b

time to work for him. This is better because he is a good man, he is a *hamwatan* (fellow countryman) He always pays his people. There are employers who do not pay the wages. Two or three times I went somewhere, worked all day and then, in the evening the employer was gone or he was unsatisfied with the work and therefore lowered the wage or refused to pay altogether.

- Ch.: What can you do if you are not getting money for your work?
- Khaled Beg: I can't do anything. This is how our life is. There is also a problem with the sewing machine. The machine is not ours. We rent it. So, we have to pay for the machine. Without the machine, you cannot work. But when the finished clothes are picked up, we get less money because we also have to pay the rent for the machine. In the end, what stays in our hands is almost nothing.
- Ch.: How did you find this work? Who rents the sewing machine to you?
- Khaled Beg: A rich family from the neighborhood. The husband has a shop in the bazar and his women find workers here in the neighborhood and in other places.
- Ch.: Is he also from Faryab?
- Azita: No, he is from somewhere else. I also know him. He gives work to the poor people. He helps the poor people.
- Ch.: But if he asks for so much rent for the sewing machine, the poor people stay poor. It does not help.
- Azita: Bad work for little pay is better than no work and no pay.
- Gulchin: That's right. We have no choice. I am also going to other houses [for work]. I go to other families. I help with cooking or cleaning.
- Khaled Beg: One [of the kids] is working. Our eldest son is working. The big one.
- Gulchin: He is not big. He is small.
- Khaled Beg: One neighbor has a chocolate machine. A machine that makes chocolate. He is a rich man.
- Gulchin: The poor boys are working for this rich man. What else can they do? They just have to.
- Khaled Beg: He gets 50 Afghani a day. That makes 1,500 a month. We get the money once a month. Then we buy everything we need. But it is not much.
- Ch.: How old is your son?
- Khaled Beg: He is eleven.
- Ch.: How many hours is he working?
- Gulchin: He starts in the morning. 8 hours. 10 hours.
- Ch.: That's a long time for a boy.
- Gulchin: You are right. But we have no choice.
- Khaled Beg: There is no work. The state should really help us.
- Azita: The state should give work to men and women.
- Gulchin: Not for women! We know how to spend our time. There is already a lot of work for us to do.
- Azita: Right. Us women, we are working. We make bread. We cook food.
- Gulchin: No, any kind of work we - men and women - can find, we will do. Of course,

we do.

Ch.: How did you find this job for your son?

Azita: We went there together. I knew that these people were suffering so I took the father of the boy [Khaled Beg] to the neighbor [who owns the chocolate machine].

Khaled Beg: Yes, we went there.

Ch.: Do you have a *card*?

Azita: Yes, they have.

Ch.: Did you go to the office with them?

Azita: Yes.

Gulchin: We went there together.

Ch.: Does this house belong to you?

Khaled Beg: [Laughs] Noooo, if this were our house, we would live like kings.

Gulchin: If we had a house of our own, we would not stand here like this.

Khaled Beg: It belongs to a rich man from Maymana. He wanted 5,000 Afghani for rent. "Make it less", I said, "5,000 is far too much. Help us a little bit". We sat down; we were in Maymana, in front of him, the landlord. "Take a smaller rent from us," we said.

Gulchin: It is one thousand. 500 for every family. It belongs to somebody from our region.

Khaled Beg: He could take more for this house. 2,000 or 3,000.

Gulchin: We sat there and said, "Please, lower the price."

Ch.: So how many families live in this place?

Khaled Beg: There are two families living here.

Ch.: Is the other family also from Faryab?

Khaled Beg: Yes, they are *hamwatanhā*. Many people in this area are from Faryab. This is good. It is a safe and good place.

Ch.: Do you still know people living in Faryab?

Khaled Beg: My brother - he is in Faryab. He is in Gurziwan; it is a place in the mountains. The Taliban are also there. He is living there, but in different places, moving around. You cannot find work there either. Life is hard there.

Gulchin: There is nothing else to do but harvesting wheat, threshing it, and taking it to the market on the back of the donkey. That is the [only] kind of work you have over there. When there was no rain, there was no wheat. But food was distributed [only] to the poor and landless in the city. There was a place where the state built a school; people got money, wheat, and oil. With the arrival of the Taliban, all this work was stopped. Once they even burned down a hospital. The poor people packed their belongings and left for Mazar.

A few days later, I sat in Azita's new home. We talked about the new house, which was much bigger than the old one. They had also got a better deal on the rent, according to Azita. According to her, this was mainly the result of her good negotiation skills. After some time, I asked Azita about her

husband, Mortaza.⁸⁴

- Ch.: Where is your husband?
Azita: He stayed.
Ch.: Where did he stay?
Azita: He stayed in our old house. In the other *hawli*.
Ch.: How come?
Azita: He stayed there because new people moved in. A widow with two daughters.
Ch.: I don't understand.
Azita: The woman who moved in, she is a widow. She has no husband. She has no son, no guardian. She cannot stay there alone.
Ch.: Are these people from your family?
Azita: No, they are *hamwatanhā*.
Ch.: Are they also from Faryab?
Azita: Yes, they are.
Ch.: Did you know these people from your home region? Had you met them before?
Azita: No. Somebody called me and asked me if I could find a solution. So, we decided that my husband should stay there. You know the wall is destroyed. A woman cannot stay there alone.
Ch.: But the old house will be torn down. When will the workers do this?
Azita: I don't know. In two or three weeks. Some workers who are working on the construction site have also moved in.
Ch.: Into the second room?
Azita: Yes.

Her oldest son came in. He was accompanied by another man whom I had not seen before. It was Azita's brother who normally lived in Maymana and had gone to Iran for work on repeated occasions for several months. He was in Mazar-e Sharif to apply for a new Iranian visa. This reportedly could take some weeks. In the meantime, he occasionally worked as a day laborer. We talked about his work in Iran and in Mazar. Azita left and, after a while, brought some food and joined the discussion. Later on, Gulchin, whom I had met together with Khaled Beg on that earlier day, came in and greeted everybody.

- Azita: Do you remember her? This is the woman with many children. The mother of six.

Gulchin grinned shyly.

- Ch.: Yes, I know. I remember her.

⁸⁴ Interview 07/18/2012

Azita: She is a mother of six who has no place for her children and who does not know how to feed them.

Nobody said anything.

Azita: The women of Afghanistan, they have many children.

Pause.

Azita: She works here. She does the cleaning. After we visited her place together my heart was aching. "Come to my house," I said, "if you need money so badly. Come to my house." Like a mother I said this. Like a mother I gave her my hand [to help her]. Now she says the money I want to give her is too little. She has washed a carpet. As big as this one. [She points to the big carpet on the floor.] What do you think? How many meters is this?

Ch.: It is big. Maybe four by three meters.

Azita: I gave her 30 Afghani.

Gulchin: Why so little?

Azita: That is not so little. This is what you get for a carpet of this size.

Gulchin: No, you get 30 Afghani for a carpet that is much smaller.

Azita: That is the price. Every woman would do this for that amount of money.

Gulchin: No, this is too little money for a carpet this size. Why so little? Only 30.

Azita's son: Take the money. Don't worry. 30, 40 there is not a big difference.

Gulchin: There is a difference. For people like you, there is no difference. For me there is a difference and it is the pay for this work.

Azita's son: If other people pay you more money then go and work for those.

Azita: Take the money. Don't take the money. Your decision. I think you have to take it. I gave you this work because I felt pity for you and your family.

Gulchin: This is little. Too little. Give me the money. What else can I say?

Pause. Azita felt obliged to explain the situation once again to me.

Azita: See, she did this work and now she says the wage is too little. She says she would have got more money at other places, that the carpet is too big for the wage.

Gulchin started to defend herself at the same time. Both women spoke loudly and passionately at the same time. During this quarrel, Azita's son and brother left the room. The women eventually calmed down.

Gulchin: It should not be like this. Working for money should be a man's task. Women's work is in the home. Men's work is outside. But as you see, our life is so bad

that we have to do any kind of work we can find. And even if you find a job it is very hard to feed a family.

Azita started to set the tablecloth, while Gulchin went on talking to me.

Gulchin: You know, people here always say to [foreigners like] you: bring us food, bring us water, bring us oil, bring us clothes. All this talking. People abroad are also working from childhood till old age. They are getting by. They all have one or two kids at home. And here? How is it here? Unemployment is very high. A man works. But look - in his house there are sick people, in his house there are children, in his house there are blind people. What should he do? If he works five hours a day, how can he get by? The people in foreign countries, their number of kids is lower and their lives are better. But the people in Afghanistan, they are just like chicken breeding machines. They say: God is generous. Less offspring, your life is better. My mother gave birth to twelve children, by the name of God. Nine girls and three boys, till the earth took her. They say, the world belongs to the young ones. But in this world [here]: what are they doing, the young ones?!

Ch.: It is only work that awaits you here.

Gulchin lowered her voice.

Gulchin: Yes, work and problems. I work all day long. My son works all day long. My husband, what does he do? See, he leaves in the morning. He is far from my eyes. I cannot see what kind of business he is doing, who is there. Hashish smokers. Junkies. What doesn't he do? I do not know. It has been sixteen years now. We have been to the hospital. Two months he was in hospital for. *Powder*,⁸⁵ he was taking *powder*. He stopped that. Now it has been six months since he started taking *naswār*.⁸⁶ He is taking *naswār* again and again, and other things like that became obvious. Yesterday he went again to a place to work. He came back, his eyes were red, burning. "Where have you been?" - "Nowhere." I understood. He turned away, but I said nothing. He slept. He needs to be controlled twenty-four hours a day. That's the kind of man he is. When we got married, he was not a human being at all. With respect, he did not smell like a human, he did not talk like a human. They cheated me. That's what happened. After that, I said that I will protect our honor, so that no one should say that this husband is taking powder, is smoking hashish. People talk a lot. They say: is he in hospital? We wish him a quick recovery.

⁸⁵ "*powder*" is used here as a neologism for a drug in powder form. This might be opium or cocaine. Both drugs are available in Afghanistan, but the use of opium is far more widespread.

⁸⁶ *naswār* - a mixture of green tobacco, quicklime, spices, and other intoxicating materials that is widely consumed in north Afghanistan, sometimes as a substitute for heavier drugs.

- Ch.: So, this is a very hard burden for you.
- Gulchin: An Arab *hāḡḡī*⁸⁷ said: the man is the honor of his wife and the woman is the honor of her husband. When the man is not in a good condition, it is my honor [that is also affected]. It is my honor. Or as somebody else put it: the wife is a burden for the man and the husband is a burden for the woman. You bring the donkey to the load or the load to the donkey. There is no choice. I have to carry the load.

This case is special as in the first conversation, the couple sat together and spoke to me. The wife and husband both shared their views and opinions, which differed greatly. When they spoke, they did so on equal terms. The second talk, while there were no males around, revealed important information that placed in context everything that was said before, and also explained the behavior of both speakers in the first conversation. Additionally, we got some more information about Azita's family.

What is being told?

The talk began with an answer to my question about why the family had moved to Mazar-e Sharif. The reasons they gave for this migration to town came as a surprise. Khaled Beg emphasized reasons for moving that differed from those given by his wife. Like many other rural areas in Afghanistan, their home region was without question hit by a drought that resulted in economic poverty at the time of the research.⁸⁸ Additionally, parts of the Faryab Province came under the increasing power of the Taliban, leading to unrest and civil war-like conditions.⁸⁹ During conversation, two different narrations about the family's decision to move are being offered. The ways these were told will be analyzed later.

Like many other men in the previous chapters, Khaled Beg described at length the high competition at the *kārgarī*. The later accounts from his wife about his drug addiction further explained why for him it was even harder to make a living in this difficult situation. Drug consumption is a huge problem in Afghanistan⁹⁰ and this example shows how it affects the welfare of a whole family. As Gulchin narrated in the second conversation, Khaled Beg was already addicted when they got married. As she did not know this before the wedding, she felt she had been cheated by the husband's family. Khaled Beg was already consuming drugs before the family's migration to town. Life in the city was not the actual reason for his addiction but the big city fosters his dependency as it gives him more opportunities under the pretext of looking for work. As Gulchin impressively described, she accepted this fate and struggled hard to ensure the family's livelihood and to keep up their good reputation at the same time, as she did not want people to talk badly about her, her husband, or her family. To cater to their daily needs, Gulchin and the eldest son of the family had to contribute to the household income. Gulchin made children's clothes, using a rented

⁸⁷ *hāḡḡī* - a title for a person who completed the *hāḡḡ*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is also used as a respectful way to address elders or other respected people.

⁸⁸ <https://fews.net/asia/afghanistan> (last seen on 04/20/2023)

⁸⁹ www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/insurgents-and-factions-waves-of-insecurity-rising-in-faryab/ (last seen on 04/20/2023)

⁹⁰ Overview: www.unodc.org/afghanistan/index.html (last seen on 04/20/2023)

sewing machine in an almost exploitative work agreement as the money she made barely covered the rent for the machine. During my fieldwork, I came across similar exploitation in the cottage industry such as weaving carpets or folding and filling cartons. These jobs were often paid very badly, and in some cases entire families would earn less than 150 Afghani for one day's work. The danger of getting trapped in such exploitative work conditions is high for migrants and displaced people in Afghanistan, as the sparse research on this topic indicates.⁹¹ Due to their greater needs, lack of support and savings, and fewer social contacts, people who migrate or are forced to migrate often have no choice but to rely on such jobs. The bonded labor in construction work described in Chapter 5 was presented as a reason for leaving Maymana and other rural areas. Now we are told that badly paid and possibly debt- bonded labor exists in the cities as well.

However, as this example shows, many migrant families are forced to undertake this exploitive work because it is their only chance to earn some monetary income at all, to supplement other insecure income sources, or because it allows women and children to contribute, too. Gulchin tried to help out in better-off households but was also faced with unfair working conditions there, as the incident in Azita's house illustrated. Gulchin stood her ground in asking for better payment but in the end, she had to accept the low wage even though, in her opinion, it was not enough. In her precarious situation, she had to follow Azita's dictum "*Bad work for little pay is better than no work and no pay.*" A survey on bonded labour in Afghanistan found that at least one fourth of the interviewed people regard exploitative work as acceptable for the poor,⁹² which affirms Azita's argument. Gulchin's family's dependency on every possible kind of income was also shown in the case of her 11-year old son: working full-time for as little as 50 Afghani a day. The family also relied on relief distributed through the DoRR. As they had a 'card' (the official IDP registration document), they could get some basic food provisions.

This passage provides another good opportunity to reflect on the importance of social relations and networks to the migrants who live in town. As there is much competition in finding work and accommodation, having good contacts pays off, as has already been described in other passages of this book. In this chapter, several of the vital work agreements and support through the DoRR had been come by as a result of Azita's assistance to Gulchin's family. She put them in contact with possible employers and helped the family to acquire their IDP status. But this chapter also reveals a problematic aspect of social networks as witnessed in the dispute about Gulchin's salary at Azita's home. Gulchin knew that her pay was too low and tried to negotiate a higher salary. Yet, she also kept in mind the influence Azita could take on many of her sources of income. Since Gulchin felt dependent on Azita's continuous support, she finally had to accept the bad payment. We learn from this example that social networks provide advantages and security on the one hand, but they can increase dependency and in fact do foster exploitation on the other.

Another interesting part of this chapter is the short talk about Mortaza's whereabouts. He stayed in the old place because the new tenant was a widow with two adolescent daughters from the same home region as Azita's family. They could not live there without a male custodian, especially since the wall of the *hawli* had been partly torn down due to ongoing construction work. This would have

⁹¹ Samuel Hall Consulting 2013

⁹² Samuel Hall Consulting 2013: 16

left the widow and her daughters unprotected. Again, it was Azita who was asked to find a solution to this problem. Mortaza as an old man seemed to be in the right age to act as some kind of guardian, protecting the honor of these women, although they were not members of his family. Here we see that networks of people from the same home region enable otherwise unrelated persons to share accommodation in situations of financial distress.

In this chapter, we also get some further information about Azita's family. Her brother, who was in town, would regularly go to Iran for work. Unlike most of the other people featured in this book, he can afford to make such journeys. As we learned in Chapter 2, working in Iran without official documents puts migrants at a considerable risk of being arrested or expelled. The high costs for visa and work permit can be seen as an investment since wages were much higher in Iran than in Afghanistan. In the case of Azita's extended family, this investment definitely appears to have paid off. We are further on provided with a small glimpse into migration networks that, following Massey (1998), we can understand as being *"sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community of origin"* (Massey 1998:42).

How are things being told?

In the first conversation, speakers Gulchin and Khaled Beg were trying to tell their story on equal ground. We see that their assessment differed in quite a few important issues that concerned their lives. Talking about their little son's employment, Khaled Beg highlighted how much the boy earned whereas Gulchin stressed that he was actually too young to work this hard, but unfortunately the family had no other choice. What is most striking in this regard is the fact that both talked about the main cause of the family's migration to town. While they were in agreement about insecurity and economic hardships as their reasons for migrating, at other points of our talk and more or less in passing both tried to give their relocation story a distinct tinge, which ultimately led to two different narrations. These were told separately from one another but were intertwined nonetheless. To avoid confusion in this seemingly antagonistic dynamic, we have to be clear about the nature of narration: *"Past experience is always remembered and interpreted in the light of the present, as well as by the way that the future is imagined. What is remembered and told is also situational, shaped not least through the contingencies of the encounter between narrator and listener and the power relationship between them. [...] Thus, stories cannot be seen as simply reflecting life as lived, but should be seen as creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present"* (Eastmond 2007: 249f).

As we have learnt throughout this study, material support is given only to legitimate IDPs in Mazar-e Sharif who for that reason need to register with local authorities. Of course, one could argue that the narrations of how (would-be) IDPs left their homes are strategic self-depictions, aiming to negotiate situations determined by the well-known expectations of donors. That being said, contradictions in narration may help us to get a deeper and more adequate understanding of the protagonists' view of their situation and how they negotiate it; in this regard, we can again cite Eastmond: *"As representation, rather than documentation of reality, narratives become methodologically more complex, but also open up theoretically more interesting possibilities:*

[...] they make room for a more dynamic view of the individual as subject, acting in the world and reflecting on that action" (Eastmond 2007: 250).

Here we observe how Gulchin acts and reflects upon her situation. As was the case in all other interviews, I clarified in the beginning that no support was to be expected from me. Since Khaled Beg and his wife had no experience with foreign researchers, they nonetheless associated me with the international donor community and the numerous offices of development organizations. Their assumptions may have been even more natural as Azita, who was known for her good connection to the DoRR office, introduced me to their family. With this in mind, Khaled Beg foregrounded the family's poverty back home and in the city, and lamented the absence of support from the state and other possible donors. Perhaps he hoped to thus get some support in this precarious situation. His wife, however, focussing on the Taliban and their atrocities evoked a different picture of her family's fate. She gave the politically-motivated violence more prominence in her narration than her husband did. As we already know, Azita was in close contact with the DoRR at that time and regularly accompanied women from the neighborhood to the DoRR office to help them apply for support or pick up food provisions. In conversation with Azita Gulchin may have learned what kind of narrations prove more successful in the acquisition of outside support. Similar claims had been raised by Azita during our tour through another *hawli* in the neighborhood (Chapter 6). The argument that a given family was forced to flee out of fear of violence would make them eligible for IDP status, which may have inspired Gulchin to emphasize this aspect more strongly. The fact that she had to compensate for her drug-addicted husband's inability to secure a reasonable income and ensure the family's survival would make it even more understandable that she resorted to this tactic.

We observed a similar strategy in Chapter 4, in which the representative of the community which was suffering due to ongoing chain migration that brought more and more movers to their place, was emphasizing the forced character of the migration of in the new arrivals. In his understanding, this would improve their prospects of getting support. Thus, he intended to help those who were hosting new migrants although they were already struggling for their own survival. In these two chapters, we can see very well how talking becomes part of people's livelihood struggles. They rely on certain narratives which are not outright false, but they place more emphasis on particular aspects of their difficult lives which they deem appropriate for their purpose. Administrative definitions and categories of persons entitled to support might not correspond to the actual conditions on the ground, as we have seen in Chapter 4 (see also Bakewell 2011), thus forcing people to tailor their narrations to the conditions outlined by the authorities (Wenzel 2013a).

We also observe in this chapter how network ties are strengthened through narrations. Azita emphasized her compassionate support for people from her home region. She repeatedly mentioned this in my presence but also in front of those receiving her support. At first glance, this looks like solidarity, but it also stresses her influential position. Azita herself also benefited from the structures she had established around herself, as comes clear from the dispute about the cleaning of the carpet. Again, solidarity among people from the same home region was emphasized by all speakers in that situation. Khaled Beg highlighted that his neighborhood was safe and a good place to live, with so many compatriots around. He also preferred people from the same region as potential employers.

When working for someone from Faryab Province, he claimed, he could be sure that he would get paid. Ironically, his belief that people from the same area do not cheat each other was somewhat disproved by the way Azita took advantage of his wife's labor.

Another interesting point regarding representation is how Gulchin lamented her fate. She complained about being bound to her husband, citing problems she had faced ever since the beginning of their marriage. Separations or divorces are uncommon in Afghanistan and in most cases lead to stigmatization and discrimination of divorced women, regardless of the reasons for the split. For Gulchin, leaving her husband did not seem to be an option. She complained about the difficult situation but seemed to fight for their common reputation and honor. I do not know Gulchin's feelings. But the way she represented her dilemma in our personal conversation showed that at least in her narration, she found a way to accept her fate. She used proverbs to underline her obligation to fight for her husband's reputation and she affirmed that she had to bear this burden. In that we find evidence of her internal discursive struggles. Gulchin explained how she suffers under the current situation but she also presented those proverbs that seem to have helped her to come to terms with her fate.

Conclusion

This chapter turns our attention to a migrant couple living, like many others, in a precarious situation in Mazar-e Sharif. Their difficult condition was further complicated by the husband's drug addiction. The family's livelihood was based on various sources of income, including exploitative cottage-industry work and child labor. Here we see that social networks, which are often presented as thoroughly beneficial for migrants, can also reinforce structures of dependency. The new insights into Azita's family show how fluid household constellations can be in situations that force migrants to constantly adapt to changing surroundings. Obviously due to solidarity obligations as *hamwatanhā*, Azita had 'ceded' Mortaza to a widow who needed protection. This is a tactical reaction in surroundings of insecurity where people are forced to build their solidarity on minimal common grounds. We do not know if Azita also gained from this 'generous' act. At the same time, she upholds family solidarity: Close relatives can count on her support when they come to town for business or other important tasks.

Finally, we observe in this chapter how Gulchin was fighting to make ends meet. Narration made to measure was one of the "weapons" she employs in her struggle for subsistence.

11. Talking about Internal Migration, Displacement, and Getting by in the City of Mazar-e Sharif

After having heard so many reports from different migrants to Mazar-e Sharif, often described as the big, vibrant, and safe city in the North of Afghanistan, what conclusions can we reach? What have these people told us about leaving their former living environment, about the role of coercion in their decision to migrate, and about arriving and getting by in the city? What stands out in their narrations? What features of mobility are represented and what can this tell us about social life in this special setting - an Afghan city that has attracted so many movers?

The people I interviewed, who were all migrants living in this city, were very diverse. We see men of all ages from quite different places in the North of the country in Chapter 1; families brutally expelled from Iran and 'dumped' in their 'home country' without aid of any kind in Chapter 2; farmers and agricultural workers driven to town due to economic hardship and political instability, in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. We hear the accounts of women in Chapters 6, 8, and 9; the narration of a displaced better-off student, who was an admirer of a famous Taliban fighter from his area, in Chapter 7; and that of a civil servant of the DoRR, who lacked the resources to give adequate assistance to people in need, in Chapters 3 and 5. All these people gave insights into their lives and revealed their views through their remarks, casual utterances, and purposeful narrations; they also demonstrated how diverse, contradictory, and conflictive talking about migration can be.

While this book refers to all those who were interviewed as 'migrants to the city', this should not simplify the fact that migration means many different things to different people. In several cases, people did not refer to themselves as having moved to the city for good, but they rather upheld the imagination of only having come to support their families back in their home area. They would spend some time in town but did not feel at home there. Some people migrated to escape poverty and violence in their home region and did not know if or when they would be able to go back to their home areas. Others persevered in town with nowhere else to go, like the families expelled from Iran (Chapter 2). Migration, then, in many of these cases is not a "*definitive resettlement or irreversible move*" (Droz & Sottas 1997) but often has translocal traits. These cases show that migration should be understood as "*... a multidirectional (sometimes circular) relocation which changes place of residence but not always the places where time is actually spent, the intensity of social relations but not systematically their structure. It is therefore a complex social phenomenon involving much more than flight or attraction towards prosperous lands*" (Droz & Sottas 1997: 70). We have seen several examples of this. Mirwais (Chapter 7) studied in Mazar-e Sharif, but longed for his home and family. Barat Ali (Chapter 1) still felt he had been cast out of Bamiyan as a *mohāġer*, even after 20 years. The expelled Pashtuns in Chapter 2 were - at least in their 'master narrative' - yearning for their much more comfortable past life in Iran. Elderly Alem in Chapter 1 used every free minute to call his family at home to ask about their well-being.

Two observations can be made from these examples. Firstly, we find situations of multilocal livelihoods and ongoing migration movements. If we look for example to Azita's household, it is hard to identify the number of household members as different people stayed with them at different times. This was then further complicated when her husband, Mortaza, stayed behind in their old home while the family moved to a new place and lived separately.

Secondly, regardless of the physical movements in geographical space, close connections to other places can nevertheless be maintained. Just because someone migrates to the city does not necessarily mean this should be understood as rural-urban migration. Perhaps it takes a long time for them to feel 'at home' in their new surroundings, or maybe the city is just one stop on their onward journey. Instead, missing friends and family, or longing for fresh air and blooming hill slopes, or reminiscing about a better life, help to create close bonds to places and therefore prevent the subject from settling in their new place. Moreover, the multidirectional character of the situations of the migrants can be seen in the movement of earnings from the *kārgarī* to their home regions. Connections established and kept through the transfer of funds, presents, visitors, or constant traveling back and forth, reinforce links between migrants and their home regions. An example of this is again Azita's family, who maintained close ties to their former home area. The family's home had become an entry point to the city of Mazar-e Sharif for their kin.

As these examples show us, we should understand migration as "*momentous results of interactive processes among people and between them and their surroundings*" (Hahn & Klute 2007: 15). Freitag & von Oppen describe these kinds of movements as translocality: "*the sum of phenomena which result from a multitude of circulations and transfers. Translocality also designates the outcome of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural and political*" (Freitag & von Oppen 2010: 5).

As I began my research, I decided to focus on forced migration as I had seen indications of rising numbers of displaced people. It soon became obvious that there was no way for me to define purely forced migration processes per se. The cases in this book confirm what Monsutti (2010: 46f) has also observed: migrants and refugees take the same routes and employ the same strategies. For example, two workers standing next to each other at the *kārgarī* may have very different reasons for being there: one fled to the city because he was blackmailed by the Taliban, the other one needs to earn money for his wedding. In town, they rely on the same jobs and stay in similar places. If a researcher were to ask them why they have come to town, they may even narrate the same story, as seen in Chapter 1 when it became obvious only after quite some time how much Alem was threatened by violence in his home region. Furthermore, we learn that violence and economic hardships coexist in the rural areas of Afghanistan, bringing great problems to the poor. By relying on people's oral accounts, I was able to document how they portrayed their migration as a forced one, and what they would identify as coercion in their narratives. Analyzing not only the content of these talks but also the 'narrative surroundings', I was able to infer why people said certain things but kept silence about others, why they used particular words, and how they would tell specific stories.

Many of the people I spoke with would use the term *mohāḡer*. Those who defined themselves as *mohāḡerīn* often reported violence which threatened their lives at the old locale and made them leave that place. But we also heard from people identifying as *mohāḡer* who had migrated a long time ago, like Barat Ali in Chapter 1 and Azita in Chapter 6, who remained very vague about their own migration story and the term *mohāḡer*. We also see Mirwais, the happy-go-lucky student in Chapter 7, who was endangered by violence in his village but did not refer to himself as a *mohāḡer* at all. Perhaps more surprisingly (given the historical meaning of the term), people who reportedly

fled from drought and lack of economic prospects in the countryside also described themselves as *mohāḡerīn*, as we observed in Chapter 4. This proves that economic constraints such as poor harvests and enduring unemployment are represented as extreme pressure, hopeless and dangerous enough to earn their victims the denotation of a *mohāḡer*. Accounts of forced migration from a poverty and/or violence-stricken home region often include phrases such as ‘it was by force’, ‘we were forced’, or ‘it is not within your power’, stressing the absence of viable alternatives.

In Chapters 4 and 9, we found conflicting narrations about the reasons for migrating; in Chapter 5 Shahab even openly doubted that the people we had interviewed had really run away from violence. Their desperate situation caused some of my respondents, for example the community representative Mohammad Musa in Chapter 4 or Gulchin in Chapter 9, to foreground the Taliban threat in hope of better chances for state support or help from international NGOs. Azita certainly was also aware of this but was too smart to share that view with me. At the time of my fieldwork, movers assumed that dropping the term *mohāḡer* and referencing Taliban atrocities would underscore their entitlement to relief. In doing so, the migrants place themselves within an international legal discourse that was reaching out to Afghanistan and affected state and international measures taken against. In international law, a refugee has the right to protection. On a state level, IDPs have the right to protection and government assistance, according to the National Policy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on Internal Displacement.⁹³ Stressing aspects of violence, intimidation, and political pressure in one's individual migration story is a way for people to legitimize their claims to protection and assistance. As we see in Chapters 2 and 5, it is difficult for those in need to even find someone who will listen to their story, and Chapter 3 shows that the Afghan state, represented locally by the DoRR office, is not equipped to cope with this task. The shortage of relief and strict criteria for securing aid underline the importance for people in need of support of acting the 'right' way and saying the 'right' things when someone is there who is ready to listen.

Configurations of local actions and international discourses, which come into being through the migrants' portrayals of their fates, show how global influences are shaping social realities on the ground. Describing and defining their own fate in their narrations in accordance with their perception of international and state discourses can be understood as a tactic employed by migrants to get by in a situation of insecurity and economic hardship. Through this, new social categories are formed by migrants in response to state and international projects which give humanitarian aid. Self-expression is not limited to the term *mohāḡer*, but it can be useful to take recourse to that term in certain situations, for example when there is a possibility of support depending on a refugee status. We have witnessed this tactic being applied in situations of great need and poverty, for example when people suffered from the lack of public assistance, high unemployment and a very competitive labor market, and in addition were burdened with illness or drug addiction of family members.

Even cooperation and solidarity among migrants can lead to problems. Having family, kin, acquaintances, former neighbors and even just *hamwatanhā* around can be beneficial when one

⁹³ www.internal-displacement.org/sites/law-and-policy/files/afghanistan/Afghanistan_national_policy_English_2013.pdf (last seen on 04/20/2023)

needs work and housing, even if some of the purported solidarity may be idealized beyond the point of recognition, as in the case of the *kalāntar* in Chapter 5 who said “We try to find a place to stay for everyone in our *qaum*, as if they were my own brother, as if they were my own uncle”. In any event expectations are high, which places further strain to those who are expected to help although they are needy themselves; as highlighted by Mohammad Musa in Chapter 4 who said, “We can only say, put up a tent here, span a tarp. We cannot do much more.” Supporting others, who migrated later and now knock on earlier migrants’ door, can be a huge burden.

And there is also a dark side to “benefactor-beneficiary networks”, as we observed in Chapter 9: Gulchin was exploited by Azita in return for her previous support in registering with the DoRR and receiving some assistance. Social network ties can not only benefit migrants, but they also foster structures of dependency. Still, Gulchin's husband assured us that working for an employer from the same region would be more secure and in many more talks, my interview partners established common ground like this, referring to the terms *watan* and *qaum*. Many of the respondents described relations based on kinship or common regional origin as important and useful as they often constituted the most important part of their social network in the city.

Shared identity is open to interpretation, as for example in the narrations of Khaled Beg in Chapter 9; it nonetheless becomes very important in everyday life. Due to poverty, people have to move together and share spaces and other resources. Situations that are unpleasant and difficult anyway and leave people vulnerable from the start, are aggravated by the high relevance given to family honor and privacy in Afghan society. Sharing a place with a *hamwatan* offers minimal security and hence, seems to render honor, shame and reputation less important. This was demonstrated in the case of Mortaza, Azita's elderly husband, who did not move to the new house together with his family, but instead stayed behind to guarantee the safety of women from the same home area, females with whom under “normal” conditions he would not be allowed any social interaction.

A similar kind of closeness is established through recourse to the notion of *qaum*.⁹⁴ *Qaum* is as flexible and situation-dependent as *hamwatan*. The smallest commonality that links people of one *qaum* is shared ancestry. This is why *qaum* mostly refers to the extended family or people related to someone by blood. But if need be, it can be used in a much wider sense as I heard many people using it to designate those belonging to the same ethno-linguistic group, mostly for Uzbeks in the Azita’s neighborhood, where this link was the basis for much cooperation (cf. Chapters 6, 8 and 9). *Qaum*-relations are not only invoked in accounts as part of a discourse on solidarity, but they really play an important role in everyday life. I have repeatedly witnessed such cooperation when visiting people's places or observing them in practical life.

The terms *watan* and *qaum* gain meaning by people’s ways of saying things. Khaled Beg (Chapter 9), like many others, explained that someone from your *watan* or *qaum* would be the right person to approach for a favor, and the best landlord, tenant, worker or employer. People like Azita or the *kalāntar* in Chapter 5 acknowledged their duty, and expressed their desire to help precisely these people. Of course, these common grounds are idealized, cannot be taken for granted and in some cases might even be more wishful thinking than anything else, but they also often pay out, as

⁹⁴ Rzehak 2011, Orywal 1986

we observed in examples of cooperation and in Azita's family helping the widow who moved into their old house. All these ties, symbolic in nature, are not fully apparent in narrations, but they may be strengthened through repeated emphasis. In the context of insecurity, absence of rule of law and a reliable state, and rapid change, migrants have only very few things to rely on. Constructing ties based on hailing from the same village, town, area, or province, i.e. a fixed point on earth, or based on factual or imagined kinship, which locates and grounds one in a temporal continuum, creates a certain minimum level of trust that can be beneficial.

Narrations are influenced by social relationships. Some people view themselves as benefactors and strive to support those in need – at times, however, in turn benefitting from their 'clients'. They are ready to react positively when addressed for help but they also seem to expect to be, if nothing else, spoken of in favorable terms. Failure on the part of the 'beneficiaries' to comply with such expectations can lead to conflict, just like failure to 'deliver' will decrease a would-be patron's reputation and may even result in being slandered by disappointed persons. All in all, relations like these prove to be a double-edged sword. Chapter 4 demonstrates another relation that cuts both ways. It is about the immense pressure emerging from chain migration. Movers who had migrated earlier and found themselves coerced to support others who arrived later felt unable to cope with this situation, while some newcomers felt misrepresented by the community's spokesman, Mohammad Musa. Wassem, who challenged and contradicted Mohammad Musa's 'master narrative', might not have understood that Mohammad Musa intentionally presented their story with a view to improving their chances of getting state support. The 'advanced migrant' perhaps did so not only to fulfill obligations that come with a social relationship like theirs, but also to lighten the economic burden of supporting newcomers that weighed heavy on his own group.

Finally, the interviews featured in this book show different 'narrative environments' involving speakers endowed with different capacities to exercise 'narrative control.' The rules on how to speak and what to say vary depending on the setting and situation. The 'narrative environments' are determined by general rules about speaking in public, as observed in Chapter 1 when I tried to speak to young Jawad but much older Alem answered all questions for him. The 'narrative environment' may also be characterized by anger and aggression as a result of despair, disappointment and grudge, as in Chapter 2. During several other interviews, the 'narrative environment' may have been influenced by Shahab's presence: after all, as a representative of the DoRR he had an important say on who received support. No doubt this powerful position affected the ways the speakers acted, even though Shahab himself behaved quite withdrawn in most talks, which not necessarily meant that he was indifferent to social relations or other aspects which could affect his decisions. A similar situation arose whenever Azita was present in a meeting, due to her similarly powerful though unofficial status among the migrants, and her determination to hold 'narrative control'. Only Gulchin once tried to contradict Azita's dictum, but she backed down after some discussion. Moreover, chapters 4, 5 and 9 show the different struggles of speakers in situations where they did not hold 'narrative control'. People used various tactics to seize an opportunity to add their perspectives, bring in opinions or at least make remarks to the talks, in order to lead the conversation in another direction.

To summarize, the talks about internal migration, displacement, and getting by which have been analyzed in this study display a large variety of narrations from different settings, actors, and

power structures, all of which influence what is being told and how things are narrated. The talks presented here show how narrations become an important asset in the livelihood struggles of poor migrants in a big Afghan city.

12. Epilogue: "The Fish and the Lion" - How I Talked about Migration

I remember sitting in the cozy library of my dear host. We were talking about Afghans, especially young ones, who leave Afghanistan in search of better prospects elsewhere. On this occasion, I learned the following Afghan proverb: *"A lion is a lion only in the jungle, and a fish is a fish only in the water."* By saying this, my friend was expressing his sorrow about the fact that so many young people left Afghanistan in those days. In my friend's understanding, it is best to live 'at home' where everything is familiar and one is well-adapted to one's surroundings. This implies that people have a firm understanding of what their familiar surroundings are, can communicate with or without words, and know whom they have to approach if need be. In familiar surroundings, people know what to expect. A fish cannot survive out of the water. Nothing is certain when you are far away from home. I found this proverb very fitting as I was often asked by people about migrating to the West. I remember that I always felt uncomfortable and overwhelmed in such situations for three reasons.

Firstly, I was and still am convinced that it will not help the situation in Afghanistan if so many young people leave the country. This had nothing to do with denial of asylum for Afghans at risk as, of course, the country was clearly not safe in those days. Anyhow, I shared this view with my conversation partners and relayed some knowledge I had on the topic, telling them that the journey to the West is dangerous and illegal, that many people get stuck somewhere along the way, that very often young boys would not see their families for a long time and, if they did manage to arrive at their desired destination, the asylum procedure in Western countries could take a long time and might even end in rejection and deportation.

Secondly, I did not have any knowledge on the best ways to get to Europe and I had only little information about applying for asylum in Germany. Yet, both topics were of great interest to many people I spoke with.

Thirdly, I found myself in the uncomfortable situation of being confronted, face-to-face, with global inequality in terms of wealth and poverty as well as security and insecurity. I inescapably felt the unfairness regarding life prospects and mobility opportunities. For me, it was easy to jet around the world to get a glimpse on lives that were so different from my own. For me, traveling to Afghanistan was a trip, maybe even an adventure, while for some of the youngsters I met a trip to the West may also have had some adventurous character but for most people it was not at all possible because they could barely get by in Afghanistan, nor would the 'adventure' be safe and advantageous.

Therefore, I used this proverb to get my point through, applying a tactic similar to those I have described in this book. In situations where I was pressed for advice, or otherwise felt ashamed about how privileged I was in being free to move and travel anywhere, I would take recourse to that proverb. Initially I was proud of interspersing an Afghan saying into the conversation, hoping that I might thus demonstrate some knowledge about language and life in Afghanistan, and potentially increase my credibility in the eyes of my respondents when mentioning that I had learned it from an Afghan friend. But little by little, I came to realize that this was just an excuse and pretext of mine to avoid having a bad conscience by just saying something trivial like: "That's just how it is."

Of course, someone was quick to outsmart me! One day when we were chatting with a young man on the street, drinking lemon juice with a lot of ice, I threw in this saying, mentioning that I had learned this as an Afghan saying. "Yes," answered the young man, *"but what does the lion do if there are no more trees in the jungle? Or the fish, if there is no more water in the lake? All creatures have their living space, but there they need to find something to eat and drink. If this cannot be found, they cannot live there anymore. Maybe the lion and fish would have to look for a new place if their home was like Afghanistan. Just like the fish finds no water in a dried-up lake, I cannot see how young people can find a future here."* What a convincing response. The young man developed the image further in a comprehensive and reasonable way. Of course, the fish had no chance to survive without water and since people have feet to move much more freely than a fish, why should they not try to find a better place elsewhere? The people presented in this book did just that: they used whatever resources were at their disposal, to move out of their dire circumstances in the hope of getting somewhere in a better place.

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