

Scattered Families

Transnational family life of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands
in the light of human rights-based protection of the family

Versplinterde families

Het transnationale familieleven van Afghaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland
in het licht van de mensenrechtelijke bescherming van de familie
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Beshnaw az naï (Listen to the naï¹)

Listen to the naï that complains about the separation:

*"I have been cut off from the reed bed and humans
complain about my sound*

*The one who is cut off from his roots
seeks throughout his life to recover them."*

Author: Mawlânâ Djalâl Od-Dîn Balkhi

Composer: Fazel Ahmad Naynawâz

Sung by the famous Afghan singer Mahwash on the CD Radio Kaboul (2003)

¹ Naï: this word means both reed and flute.

Acknowledgements

Shortly after the birth of my second son I started writing this preface. While I wrote down the first lines, my partner was taking care of our little one while his parents looked after the eldest during the weekend. Besides making a start with the thesis again, I was occupied with organizing the yearly reunion of my paternal family members, 23 persons in total, including my aunts and uncles, my cousins and their children. I was particularly looking forward to welcoming my aunt and uncle from the United States who would be present this time. This family gathering formed a nice opportunity to introduce our newborn to the people that were at the basis of my life, simply because they had been there from the start; in person, through long-distance communication, or in the stories that I heard. And once again I was aware of the pervasiveness and importance of family ties in my own life.

Unsurprisingly, the first contacts that I had as a child with refugees in the Netherlands were also through family members: through my mother who taught the Dutch language to newcomers in the Netherlands and through my father whose organization offered assistance to asylum seekers. I sometimes accompanied my parents to noisy and strangely smelling boarding houses and asylum seekers' centres where we were received hospitably in cramped rooms. A recurring ritual during these visits was being shown pictures of family members in far-away countries by people who often radiated an immense loneliness. These contacts, followed by study and research experiences on migration and refugee issues, have prevented me from taking family life for granted, and have finally resulted in this study on scattered refugee families.

There is almost nothing more private than talking about one's own family life, yet this is what I asked my respondents to do. My first and deep thanks go to the Afghan refugees who not only received me in their homes with generous hospitality but also shared part of their life stories with me. The resilience that many of these stories reflected never ceased to impress me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Fahrat's story

Fahrat lived with her husband and two sons in Kabul when the Taliban came to power there in 1996. They threatened her husband on several occasions because of his affiliations with the former regime, until the day came that they carried out their threats and tortured and killed him at their house. They also harassed Fahrat after which she fled over the wall to a neighbour's house and from there to an uncle, who helped her to flee to Pakistan. There she sold her jewellery and with the money arranged a flight to the Netherlands.

The first thing she inquired after she arrived at the 'camp' [the asylum reception centre] was concerning the whereabouts of her children. Iranian people at the centre translated for her and informed the personnel that she had lost her family. In the months thereafter she lost a lot of weight and her eyes were red because she was constantly in tears. With the help of VluchtelingenWerk [Refugee Aid] and the Red Cross she searched for her sons, but it took nine long months before she received a reply via her brother, who told her that the children were in Pakistan with her husband's uncle and that they were doing fine.

From then onwards Fahrat saved all the money she could from the pocket money she received in the asylum seekers' centre to call to Pakistan from time to time. She lived in asylum seekers' centres for three years after which she received a residence permit. Only then was she allowed to work, to find a place of her own, and to apply for family reunification with her children. Although she had not attended school in Afghanistan, she succeeded in finding several - formal and informal - jobs. During this period she only ate 'bread and jam' and spent all the money that she earned on communicating with Pakistan, furnishing the house for the arrival of her sons, and arranging the paperwork for the reunification. It took two years before everything was settled and her sons were invited to the Dutch consulate in Karachi to finalize the procedures.

However, the boys did not turn up for the appointment at the consulate. Fahrat was informed about their no-show and she then phoned the house of her husband's uncle, but no one answered. Finally, she managed to contact her brother, who informed her that her sons did not want to join her in the Netherlands. The family considered that her position as a woman on her own in the West was inappropriate and expected her to return. In response, Fahrat saved more money and went to Pakistan for a visit, and has been doing so since on a yearly basis. She also sends money regularly, not only to her children but also to her widowed sister with whom she feels deeply attached by fate.

Fahrat's story illustrates the tragedy of refugees when they are abruptly torn from what constitutes the foundation of their lives; the family. It shows the pain of the physical separation, the despair of having lost each other, and how legal obstacles stand in the way of a quick reunion. But Fahrat's situation also shows that finding each other and succeeding in clearing the hurdles of a restrictive immigration policy need not be the end of a complicated family situation. In this case hurdles of a socio-cultural nature arose that turned out to be even more difficult to break down than the practical and legal ones. Out of sheer necessity Fahrat continued to travel back and forth, and her life was organized around her engagements in the Netherlands and in Pakistan.

In this study I will explore the family life of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands within and across borders, in all its complexity, and thereby adopt an upstream human rights perspective (De Gaay Fortman, 2004b), starting from the actions and perceptions of these 'people at the grassroots'. By deepening our understanding of the vulnerability that refugees experience with regard to what is fundamental for them, namely their family life, I aim to contribute to the thinking about the protection of the family.

This chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, section 1.2 offers essential background information to contextualize this explorative and bottom-up study on the family within the international human rights framework and the national policy framework. At the end of this section I will formulate the research question. In section 1.3 that contains the theoretical framework I will introduce the main concepts that guided the study: the family, transnationalism, integration, and reciprocity. In the fourth section the research method is described and particular attention is paid to how I dealt with the distrust that was prevalent among the research population. In section 1.5 the profile of the respondent group is presented: I will describe the personal characteristics of the respondents, their family characteristics, the characteristics of their situation in the Netherlands, and of their former situation in Afghanistan. Finally, in section 1.6 I will present the outline of the book.

1.2 Human rights and the protection of the family

1.2.1 Protection of the family

Family life constitutes a foundation in the lives of human beings, while the disruption of the family by external causes has an enormous impact on the persons involved. In the case of refugees many external factors add up to seriously distort their family life, like the shocking experiences that they had before fleeing, the dispersal of family members over different

countries, and the often difficult living conditions in the host country. In a world in which 16 million refugees and asylum seekers are forcibly uprooted by conflict and persecution (UNHCR, 2009), the distortion of these families raises the question whether family life needs to be protected and in what way. Notably, the international venture for the realization of human rights also addresses the need for the protection of the family.

At the very heart of the human rights framework is the notion of human dignity. Human dignity refers to the inherent worth of each and every human being, simply as an innate consequence of human existence, whether or not an individual person is herself convinced of that (De Gaay Fortman, 2004a: 22). Indeed, the whole human rights idea starts from the conviction that every person has the right to exist and should be able to live a life in dignity, meaning a realization of fundamental freedoms¹ and basic entitlements as connected with human life as such.² It is held that all persons are equal in that respect. The next step in the human rights idea is that the protection of human dignity and equality is a responsibility of society at all its different layers and levels. This should generally limit and govern any use of power over human beings. The belief that society bears a responsibility for the human dignity of the people who form part of it found its inspiration in the Age of Enlightenment during which the rights of individuals within their communities were recognized³. Although such ideas about humanity and the role of society in its protection came into existence in the 18th century, what is relatively new is the international venture for the protection of human dignity through internationally accepted legal standards and generally accessible mechanisms for implementation. That mission received a major impetus with the founding of the United Nations [UN] in 1945 as a direct response to the atrocities of the Second World War. (De Gaay Fortman 2006: 260-261) An important aim of the UN was '[t]o achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion' (United Nations Charter 1945, Chapter 1, Art. 1 (3)). This objective was realized with the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Together with the two principal International Covenants (on civil political rights and on economic, social and cultural rights, both in force since 1976) they form the principal documents on which the international project for the realisation of human rights is based.

¹ The American President Roosevelt formulated four 'essential human freedoms' in a speech that he delivered on 6 January 1941: the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom to worship God in his own way, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear (www.americanrhetoric.com).

² The category of rights that protect fundamental freedoms - originally called the 'first generation of rights' - has been termed 'civil and political rights' while the cluster that protects basic entitlements has become known as 'economic, social, and cultural rights', the so-called 'second generation'. Obviously, the two are intertwined.

³ Instead of only focusing on their duties, as was common during the Middle Ages.

Various human rights instruments mention the notion of the family. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it is stated that 'the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State' (art. 16, para. 3)⁴ and that 'no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence [...]' (art. 12). The family is perceived to be 'a basic unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth' (art. 4 of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development), a 'fundamental unit of society' (art. 16 of the European Social Charter of 18 October 1961), and 'a basic unit of society' (art. 22 of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development). I conclude that from a human rights perspective the family is perceived as the cornerstone of society. From there it follows that the institution of the family needs to be respected, protected, assisted and supported, as is for instance stipulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its article 10, paragraph 10, which states that '[t]he widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children'.

In the UN-report entitled 'The Family in International and Regional Human Rights Instruments' (1999) protection mechanisms for the family are distinguished at three levels:

- a) protection of the family as a whole,
- b) protection of the individual rights of family members, and
- c) protection of the family in special circumstances.

The first level, the protection of the family as a whole, includes the right to respect for privacy and family life, the right to marry without restriction, to found a family and to decide on the number and spacing of children, and the right to well-being, security and social protection.

The second level - the protection of the individual rights of family members - is aimed at specific rights for women, children, and disabled persons. The third level, the protection of the family in special circumstances, refers particularly to migrant workers and their families, and to domestic violence. This enumeration shows that the protection of the family within the human rights framework includes different aspects. In the way in which 'the protection of the family' is interpreted in the human rights framework, the dialectical nature of the concept can be perceived. On the one hand, there is concern for the family as a whole - as an institution - and, on the other, there is concern for ways in which individual members within the collectivity of the family might suffer from its dysfunctioning.

The dialectical nature of the protection of the family is linked to the broader ongoing debate among human rights scholars about individual and collective rights, which culminates

⁴ In the same article 16, para 1, is stated that 'men and women of full age [...] have the right to marry and to found a family.'

in the question whether or not there should be a right to cultural identity. While many scholars agree that the right of people to live in accordance with their own culture is often being threatened or violated, there are also objections against the right to cultural identity as an answer to these problems. Several arguments are brought forward, like the view that cultural identity can be adequately protected on the basis of already established civil, political and cultural rights; the opinion that cultural identity seems to be linked to tendencies to particularize and exclude; the vagueness of the concept of cultural identity, and with that the risk that with the idea of a right to cultural identity a blind eye is turned to the elements of repression that many cultures contain (Burgers, 1990). In the history of human rights it has primarily been the individual and not the collective for whom protection has been sought. The reasoning is that 'human rights [...] are, literally, the rights that one has because one is human' (Donnelly, 2003: 7). And 'because only individual persons are human beings, it would seem that only individuals can have human rights' (Donnelly, 2003: 25). Obviously, this position corresponds to a world view that is more individualistic and egalitarian than collectivist and hierarchical in essence (see Hofstede, 1991).

1.2.2 Family unity

With regard to the situation of refugees whose family members are dispersed over several countries, the aspect of 'family unity' becomes particularly important. Although the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees does not incorporate the principle of family unity in the definition of the term refugees, it 'recommends Governments to take the necessary measures for the protection of the refugee's family, especially with a view to:

- 1) Ensuring that the unity of the refugee's family is maintained particularly in cases where the head of the family has fulfilled the necessary conditions for admission to a particular country.
- 2) The protection of refugees who are minors, in particular unaccompanied children and girls, with special reference to guardianship and adoption' (Ch.VI, para 182). With regard to who may benefit from the principle of family unity, 'the minimum requirement is the inclusion of the spouse and minor children. In practice, other dependants, such as aged parents of refugees, are normally considered if they are living in the same household' (Ch. VI, para 185). In the EU Council Directive on the right to family reunification of 2003 a special chapter on refugees is included, which among other things states that no income requirement can be held against them in case of family reunification if the application is submitted within a period of three months after the granting of the refugee status (art.12), and that '[...] a decision rejecting an application may not be based solely on the fact that documentary evidence is lacking' (art. 11, para 2). The minimum requirement of this Directive is also the inclusion of the spouse and minor children who 'must be below the age of majority set by the law of the Member State

concerned and must not be married' (art. 4, para 1d). Additionally, Member States are allowed to also include parents 'where they are dependent [on the applicant] and do not enjoy proper family support in the country of origin' (art. 4, para 2a) and adult unmarried children 'where they are objectively unable to provide for their own needs on account of their state of health' (art. 4, para 2b). Specifically concerning the position of children, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child is stated that 'States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will [...]' (art. 9, para 1) and 'applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner' (art 10, para 1). Another international protection mechanism that is of relevance for persons whose families have become dispersed is article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which is often succinctly referred to as 'the right to family life'. According to this article 'everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence'. The family life to be considered under the European Convention is not *de jure* family life, but *de facto* family life. Thereby '[t]he traditional European concept common to the member states of the council of Europe is not considered decisive; a family composed according to a different cultural pattern - e.g. a polygamous family - is equally entitled to protection' (Heringa & Zwaak, 2006: 690).

From the former we learn that international protection mechanisms exist, which conceive family ties rather broadly as kinship ties that are characterized by dependence and the sharing of a household. But these international rights of individuals are partly counterbalanced by the sovereignty of states: states have a prerogative to make decisions on the entry or stay of non-citizens (Jastram, 2003). Benhabib (2004) describes the tension between human rights principles, on the one hand, and states' sovereign claims to control their borders and to monitor the quality and quantity of admittees as 'the constitutive dilemma at the heart of liberal democracies' (p. 2). Of particular interest for this study is how the juggling between human rights and national interests has worked out for refugees and their families in the Netherlands.

In her book *'De asielcontroversie: argumenteren over mensenrechten en nationale belangen'* [The asylum controversy: arguing about human rights and national interests] Geuijen (2004) analyses how with regard to the problem of the increasing numbers of asylum-seekers in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s the debate became polarized, with advocates of a restrictive asylum policy winning the debate over the advocates of a liberal asylum policy. In 2006 *VluchtelingenWerk Nederland* [the Dutch Refugee Aid] published a Report entitled *'(Geen) eerbied voor gezinsleven'* [(No) respect for family life], in which was analysed how the policies on family reunification and family formation have become more stringent, which makes it more difficult for refugees to reunite with their families or to stay

together as a family unit. Thereby several aspects are mentioned that are specific for asylum seekers and refugees and that complicate their family situation, like the difficult and dangerous situation in the country of origin, which complicates the contact with and free movement of family-members who stayed behind; the negative impact of the asylum procedure on the integration in the Netherlands, which makes it more difficult to meet income requirements, legal dues etcetera; and the lack of documentation in many war-ridden countries.

The report '(No) respect for family life' (2006) by *VluchtelingenWerk Nederland* perfectly illustrates the argument that Van Walsum (2008) formulates in 'The Family and the Nation'. In the book she describes how in the case of the Netherlands the balancing between human rights principles and state sovereignty has resulted in rather restrictive policies, and she analyses the family norms that lie at the basis of this development. Her argument is that the apparently neutral way in which the family is currently perceived and defined in Dutch policies is in fact not neutral at all, and is even discriminatory in its functioning. Van Walsum describes how since the 1990s the continuing arrival of specific categories of newcomers, including a growing number of asylum seekers, was increasingly perceived as a threat to social cohesion. 'The newly declared mission of protecting the social cohesion of the nation now trumped the outmoded idea of preserving the unity of the nuclear family. [...] On the whole, transnational family bonds came to be viewed with more suspicion and less sympathy than before' (ibid.: 255). As a consequence, not only immigration policy but also naturalisation policy and integration policy were increasingly used as instruments of exclusion.⁵ Thus, for instance, the income requirements for having a spouse come to the Netherlands were raised, the control of family documents for certain countries was intensified, and new partners were obliged to first pass a civic integration test in the country of origin.

Of particular interest for this study is Van Walsum's (2008) analysis of the family norms that lie behind the restrictive Dutch policies. She mentions equality, individual liberty and tolerance as 'the new normative touchstones' that gradually replaced solidarity and altruism as the guiding principles in this respect. In Dutch law the family was increasingly seen as a matter of individual choice, disassociated from broader normative fields and local networks (p. 86). Marriage became de-institutionalised, the nuclear family became disaggregated and heterosexuality was abandoned. This development is reflected in the new definition of the family that the Dutch government formulated in 1994: any (primary) social unit in which children are cared for and raised. Van Walsum argues that this apparently

⁵ Certain categories of foreigners had a privileged position even compared to Dutch citizens, in the sense that they were exempt from certain requirements for their family members to come to and stay in the Netherlands. These were in particular EU citizens and highly skilled labourers.

neutral way of conceptualizing the family in practice resulted in those families that adhered to different cultural norms being labelled as atypical, suspect and even deviant, which in its turn led to policies that were discriminatory in their effects for ethnic minorities in general and Islamic minorities in particular. The latter 'increasingly were being portrayed in terms reminiscent both of the Dutch before their emancipation from the tutelage of the religious columns - devout, interdependent, the genders and generations hierarchically related, their sexuality contained by the limits of heterosexual marriage [...]' (2008: 253). From the former I derive that with regard to Afghan refugees in the Netherlands, a group that was indeed 'perceived as Islamic', behind the issue of to what extent their family life was respected and protected in the Netherlands there loomed another issue regarding the acceptance of their family culture.

1.2.3 Research question

In this study I have adopted an explorative and qualitative approach. I did not commence the research from legally defined rights and claims regarding family life or, in other words, from a downstream human rights perspective (De Gaay Fortman, 2004b). Instead, by studying the actions and perceptions of a group of persons 'at the grassroots' I approached the aspect of family life from an upstream human rights perspective: 'Here the whole course of action begins with people in the processes of self-identification as rights-holders. The challenge they are facing in their daily lives is to find protection against all abuse of power, and to acquire the fundamental freedoms and basic entitlements that follow from respect for everyone's human dignity. It is those at the grassroots themselves who know best what in their own context they are due' (ibid.: 12). A complicating factor that is inherent in the concept of the family is that families consist of hierarchical relationships in which every family member has his/her own position and interests. This inevitably leads to multidimensional and sometimes contradictory outcomes.

The research question that guided the study is the following: How do Afghan refugees in the Netherlands construct and experience their family life within and across borders, and in that respect how do they perceive the fundamental freedoms and basic entitlements that entail the protection they need?

I have chosen to study Afghans⁶, which form one of the newest refugee groups in the

⁶ I use the term Afghans in an encompassing way, also referring to persons of Afghan descent who have Dutch nationality.

Netherlands. Even though I do not use the refugee concept in a legal way⁷, the fact that Afghans in the Netherlands share a background of war and conflict followed by migration makes their family situation extremely precarious. The fact that they originate from a country that culturally diverges from the Netherlands in many respects (see Todd, 1985) further complicates their family situation after fleeing. Finally, the fact that so far relatively little attention has been paid - particularly within academia - to persons from Afghanistan in the Netherlands has contributed to the choice for studying this particular refugee group.

1.3 Theoretical framework

In order to analyse how Afghan refugees in the Netherlands construct and perceive their family life, within as well as across borders, I have made use of the following concepts: the family, transnationalism, integration, family transformation, and reciprocity and support. In the following I explain how I used these concepts and how they interrelate in the study.

1.3.1 The family

The central notion of this research, the family, has been studied extensively and a great deal of attention has been paid to its universal significance as well as its diverse manifestations. Harris (1975: 349), who used the term kinship instead of family⁸, distinguished 'two universally held cognitive principles that influence the organization of domestic life everywhere. The first of these is the principle of affinity, or of relationships through marriage. The second is the principle of descent, or parentage. All persons whose relationship to each other can be described in terms of affinity or descent or a combination of both are kin to each other.' Although these principles regarding kinship are universally applicable, enormous variations exist in the ways in which families function throughout the world. We can distinguish, for instance, between matrilineal and patrilineal family systems, between monogamous and polygamous marriage systems, and between nuclear and joint/extended family systems. Which system prevails in a certain region is largely culturally determined and defines to a great extent the functioning of and the hierarchy between family members.

In section 1.2.2 we have seen that nuclear family ties, dependency and co-residence in the same household are important aspects when determining 'family life' in a legal way. In

⁷ According to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees the term 'refugee' shall apply to any person 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 or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

⁸ In the study I use the concepts of family, relatives and kinship interchangeably.

this study I approached the family concept differently, taking into account more extended family relations and relations with non-coresiding family members as well. The reason for studying family relations in a wider sense was that from an upstream human rights perspective my starting point in the study was the actions and perceptions of the respondents; and for them these extended family contacts had played or still played a significant role in their lives. Thus, the family life that I studied was more encompassing than the family life that is for instance referred to in article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, succinctly 'the right to family life'.

1.3.2 A transnational perspective

A study on the family life of refugees that is scattered over two or more countries calls for a transnational perspective. This means that I paid attention to the fact that Afghan refugees in the Netherlands had contacts, activities, institutions and identities that cross borders and that influence their daily lives. Or, in other words, to the fact that they were simultaneously involved in two or more societies (Levitt & Schiller, 2004).

The concept of transnationalism first emerged in the 1990s as an alternative to the 1970s' and 1980s' focus in migration studies on the causes of migration and on the effects of migration on the receiving countries. Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc were among the first to theorize transnationalism, defining it as 'the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (1994). But as critical scholars like Van Amersfoort (2001) point out, transnationalism thus defined applies to all first-generation immigrants, not only in the present but also in the past, which casts doubts about the usefulness of the concept. Transnationalism scholars indeed acknowledge that the phenomenon of migrants being involved in two or more societies is not new, but they stress the impact of 'the rapid development of travel and communication technologies' (Vertovec 2001), which intensifies the relations with the societies of origin, and the challenge that it poses to nation-states: 'Transnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common - however virtual - arena of activity' (Vertovec, 1999). Thus defined, the transnationalism concept also forms an alternative perspective for the way in which globalization is usually studied from a macro-economic and international relations perspective (Mazzucato 2004b); it incites scholars to study the same phenomenon at the grassroots level of individual people who are directly and heavily influenced by globalization, namely international migrants.

The use of a transnational perspective has implications for studying a refugee population. As Wahlbeck (1999) and Horst (2003) state, refugee studies remained largely uninformed by the discussions on diasporas and transnationalism, being still very much policy-oriented work of a reactive nature. I concur with both scholars that the theoretical debates on transnationalism and diasporas can provide refugee studies with more adequate theories and clearly defined concepts, allowing researchers to study refugees in an increasingly interlinked world. A transnational perspective shifts the focus from the rigid distinction that was often made in this academic tradition between forced and voluntary migration, respectively between political and economic reasons to leave, to the connections that migrants⁹ have with their relatives and community members in the homeland and across the diaspora (Mazzucato, 2004b). The conceptual distinction between refugees and other migrants then becomes blurred, as the transnational connections of both groups include political, economic, cultural and social aspects. Moreover, refugees do not live in isolation from other migrants, but are often part of a wider diaspora¹⁰ network that includes migrants with a variety of statuses (ibid.). Even within family networks people often have different legal statuses. In order to capture the essence of this varied reality, I used the concept of refugees in an inclusive and non-legalistic way. With the term 'Afghan refugees in the Netherlands' I refer to all Afghans who have entered the Netherlands based on an asylum claim and their family members who have joined them later.¹¹ The reason nevertheless to use the refugee concept is that all respondents experienced the situation of conflict and war in Afghanistan; it acknowledges their 'refugee experience': 'The decision to flee one's country is fraught with pain, sadness, fear, and a host of other disturbing emotions' (Williams, 1990: 100). This experience partly determines how Afghans in the Netherlands construct and perceive their family life.

The specific focus on family connections is a relatively new and unexplored aspect in transnationalism studies, and is one of the key future areas in transnationalism studies (Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008). The focus has been mainly on the connections between migrants and migrant communities or networks in general and their countries of origin (see for instance Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2001; Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999; Al-Ali, Black & Koser, 2001; Engbersen et al., 2003). An important exception is formed by the work of British academics on South Asian diasporas. Charsley and Shaw (2006) mention in particular Roger Ballard as a

⁹ I broadly define migrants - in the sense of international migrants - as all people who live outside their country of birth. This definition includes refugees.

¹⁰ Both Van Amersfoort (2001) and Wahlbeck (2002) concur that the transnationalism approach largely corresponds with the notions of scholars who use the diaspora concept, even though they stress the political dimension of the diaspora concept compared to the transnational concept. In this study I use the concepts diaspora (network) and transnational network interchangeably.

¹¹ The basis on which all these persons eventually received a residence permit varied, from a refugee status, to a humanitarian status, to a derivative asylum status, to a regular status for instance via the general pardon, or a dependent regular status on the basis of family reunification or family formation.

scholar who has had a seminal influence on our understanding of transnational kinship and its interrelation with other aspects of transnational activity and community formation. Recently, transnational events or rituals have become the focus of studies (Gardner & Grillo, 2002; Mazzucato, Kabki & Smith, 2006; Olwig, 2002), as well as transnational care relations (Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding, 2006; Van Walsum, 2001); and the split-family situations of migrant-parents and their children (Parreñas, 2005; Mazzucato & Schans, 2008, Van Walsum, 2006). Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) defined transnational families as 'families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders' (p. 3). They state that 'transnational families [...] are constituted by relational ties that aim at welfare and mutual support' (ibid.: 7) and describe the fundamental reason for the very being of these ties as mutual welfare. However, they do not represent transnational families as harmonious wholes but also stress the inequality and potential conflicts between individual members because 'within transnational families, differences in access to mobility, resources, various types of capital and lifestyles emerge in striking ways' (ibid.: 7). They wonder why transnational families through their mobility are willing to expose themselves to the destabilizing risks of cultural clashes between genders, generations and individuals. Their answer is that it is the belief that family security, economic welfare, social opportunity and/or political freedom will be more fully realized elsewhere- (ibid.: 13). So the complexity when conducting research on transnational families is that these consist of individuals, united by affinity or descent but at the same time separated not only by geographical distance but also by economic and cultural distance. 'Family traditions and needs are weighed against the sheer physical practicalities of transnational families' temporal and spatial logistics. In sum, transnational families are not simply blood ties nor are they fixed entities. They are highly relative' (ibid.: 19).

1.3.3 Integration

Contradictory as it may seem, using a transnational perspective of migrant relations also calls for an interest in the integration process of these migrants at the national level.¹² Integration is the process of becoming part of the - in this case Dutch - society at large. Levitt (2004:1003) explains the relation between migrants' transnationalism and integration processes as follows: 'Once we rethink the boundaries of social life, it becomes clear that the integration of individuals into nation-states and the maintenance of transnational connections are not contradictory social processes. [...] Migrant integration into a new land and transnational

¹² Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) strongly criticize transnationalism scholars due to their omission to systematically analyze the relationship between immigrant transnationalism and receiving states (and civil society actors).

connections to a homeland or to dispersed networks of family, compatriots, or persons who share a religious or ethnic identity can occur at the same time and reinforce one another.' Mazzucato (2008) argues that from a transnational perspective it is important to understand how in migrants' lives the 'here' and 'there' are interrelated, whereby the situation 'here' is in other words their integration position. She states that by allowing migrants to be engaged in two or more countries at the same time, they are also able to integrate more effectively. Other studies on the causal relationship between transnationalism and integration show more indistinct or even ambivalent outcomes. (See for instance Engbersen et al., 2002; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Schans, 2007). The qualitative and interpretative nature of the research does not lend itself to drawing conclusions about the causality between integration and transnationalism, but I do pay attention to the related nature of both aspects in migrants' lives.

With regard to the aspect of integration two dimensions can be distinguished: structural and socio-cultural integration. Structural integration refers to the participation of migrants in institutions of the receiving society, like the educational system and the labour market. Socio-cultural integration refers to the (social and cultural) orientation in the host society (see Dagevos, 2001; Martens & Weijers, 2000). Migrants becoming part of a new society is a potentially tense process, especially if the structural and socio-cultural differences between the society of origin and the society of residence are as drastic as in the case of Afghanistan and the Netherlands. The literature shows that in migrant households many tensions can arise (see for instance Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Pels & Gruijter, 2005); gender differences and generational differences become more marked because of the different and sometimes conflicting value systems that families are confronted with by moving from one country to another. Hofstede (1999) sketches a sharp distinction between migrants' lives inside and outside the familial home. 'In their new surroundings all migrant families face standard-dilemmas. At work, in shops, in public buildings and usually also at school, migrants relate to autochthonous persons and are re-programmed according to the local values. At home they try to preserve the values and relationship patterns from the country of origin' (ibid: 275). Hofstede then observes that the effect of this 'life at the border of two worlds' is not the same for all family members' (ibid: 275); that there are significant differences in the way fathers, mothers, sons and daughters experience the juggling between the different and sometimes opposing values in both worlds. Therefore studies that focus on the dynamics within migrant families often focus on aspects of power and disempowerment, status and loss of status (see for instance Al-Ali, 2002; Charsley & Shaw, 2006; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005).

1.3.4 The transformation of family patterns

Migration does not only have an impact on intrafamilial relations as we saw in the former subsection; it also changes the functioning of families as a whole. Forming the basis of the literature on the transformation of family patterns through migration is the idea that there are fundamental differences between cultures, of which the difference between collectivism and individualism is an important dimension (Hofstede, 1999; Todd, 1985). Collectivism then refers to a type of society where the power of the group is prevalent, while individualism refers to a type of society where the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group. Kagitçibasi (1996) takes the distinction between collectivism and individualism as a starting point for an analysis of different types of family models. She distinguishes two prototypical family cultures as heuristic devices: the culture of relatedness and the culture of separateness. According to her, the culture of relatedness is the prototypical model of the functionally extended family, even though most households may be nuclear. This family model of relatedness and interdependence both at the societal and familial levels is commonly found in rural traditional societies with close-knit family relations, often characterized by patrilineal family structures. 'The family functions as if it were extended in carrying out such tasks as home production of goods, agricultural production or consumption, child care, and so on, jointly with kin. This is often made possible by the close proximity of immediate kin spanning different generations. [...] Thus the family is interdependent with kin (other families)' (p. 78-79). The culture of separateness is the prototypical model of the Western individualistic nuclear family in an industrial, urban or suburban middle-class society. It is the family model of separateness and independence of both the family from other families and of its elements (members) from one another (Kagitçibasi, 1996:82-83), as its unit is the individuated nucleated family.

Kagitçibasi (1996) criticizes the modernization theory prediction that there is a convergence of the diverse patterns in the world toward the Western prototypical pattern and thus whatever is different from this pattern will be modified in time to resemble it (p. 73).¹³ She proposes a third family model: the model of emotional interdependence. According to her, this model is typical in the more developed/urban areas of the Majority World with a collectivist culture base. These areas are characterized by social structural and economic change and development alongside cultural continuity. The changes tend to decrease material interdependencies, which are no longer necessary with changing lifestyles, especially with urbanization. However, they do not affect emotional interdependencies, because these latter continue to be adaptive and functional psychosocial mechanisms in the context of economic-

¹³ Kagitçibasi (1996) is not the only scholar to criticize this one-dimensional model. See for instance Bengtson (2008: 1) who states that '[f]amily relationships across several generations are becoming increasingly important in American society'.

industrial growth. The shift in family patterns is therefore toward emotional interdependence (entailing the autonomous-related self) (p. 94).

While Kagitçibasi (1996) contributes to the thinking about family transformation in a changing context from the angle of cross-cultural psychology, Sarkisian, Gerena and Gerstel (2006) focus from a sociological angle on the extended family relations of various ethnic groups and their level of family integration¹⁴ in the context of the United States. They define extended family integration as a multidimensional construct, including three major components: proximity to kin (living near each other or co-residing), contact with kin, and kin support (financial assistance, emotional support, instrumental help and child-care help). Using these variables, they state that when it comes to ethnic differences in kin ties, structure - especially aspects of social class position - matters far more than culture. According to them, the findings suggest that family integration is based primarily on a combination of ability and need and far less on cultural predispositions (ibid.: 341). 'This underscores the need to differentiate between familial practices and cultural beliefs when studying [...] family integration' (ibid.: 342).

A significant difference between Kagitçibasi's (1996) view on family transformation and that of Sarkisian et al. (2006) lies in how much weight they attribute to respectively cultural and structural factors. Kagitçibasi (1996) presents culture as a rather stable and influential factor: the collectivist culture base that people have causes emotional interdependence between them to persist, even when material interdependence has disappeared because of economic development. Sarkisian et al. (2006) ascribe more influence to structural factors in explaining the actual practices - as opposed to values or beliefs - between family members. These different viewpoints reflect the wider structure versus culture debate (see for instance Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Schans (2007) in her study on intergenerational solidarity mentions the importance of distinguishing family values from family practices. She found that while the cultural expectations for family sociability of several ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands were much higher than those of the native Dutch population, their family practices differed much less.

In this research I looked at the transformation of family patterns that Afghan refugees in the Netherlands experienced and thereby took into account both changing values and changing practices. While Kagitçibasi (ibid.) and Sarkisian et al. (ibid.) focus on family patterns in a national setting, I added a transnational perspective and also studied family patterns as they developed across borders.

¹⁴ The term family integration as used by Sarkisian et al. (2006) must be distinguished from the way in which I use the integration concept in this study, namely as the process of becoming part of the society at large (see 1.3.3).

1.3.5 Reciprocity and support

From the debates on family patterns in the former sub-section (1.3.4) we learn that all family relations are characterized by some form of reciprocity¹⁵, as it is the basic principle underlying all forms of social organization (Schans, 2007: 21). Staring (2001:14) states that '[k]inship ties are enduring ties. The assumption is that the more enduring relations are, the more of a basis there is for support. Kinship ties are an outstanding example of enduring relations, in which not only members of the nuclear family but also extended family members mostly grow up in each other's vicinity. The general presumption is that familial relations in comparison with other relations [like friends and compatriots] bring a high potential of support, also dependent on the degree of proximity.' According to Boissevain (1974) this high potential of support stems from the high mutual trust in these relationships.¹⁶

However, if we consider the fact that many Afghans in the Netherlands have experienced a dispersal of their families over different countries and continents, then the question arises how enduring these relations have remained at a distance and to what extent do they still form a 'high potential of support'. In my study I tried to answer this question and thereby compared the relations that respondents had with family members who live elsewhere in the West with the relations that they had with family members who live in structurally - and culturally - different circumstances in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. An aspect in these transnational family relations that has received a great deal of attention, particularly from academics and policymakers in the field of migration and development, is remittances; the money that is sent by migrants to their family members who have stayed behind¹⁷. This is mainly due to the spectacular numbers¹⁸, and the fact that it is a highly visible and measurable aspect of transnational family relations. But an exclusive focus on remittances creates the impression of these relations being a one-way phenomenon of a mainly economic nature, with migrants sending money and family members in the country of origin receiving money. This image does not do justice to reality, as Smith (2008) and Mazzucato (2009) for instance show in their studies on the relations between Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands and people in

¹⁵ Reciprocity is 'behaviour between two people or groups of people in which each gives or concedes a lot to the other' (Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, 1988).

¹⁶ Granovetter (1973) states that 'strong' ties (family members, friends, etc.) seem eminent in sustaining livelihood, because one has trust in family and friends and those with whom one has strong ties are more motivated to provide assistance. At other times, however, people benefit more from contacts with members of other networks (weak ties), because they traverse greater social distance and reach a larger number of people.

¹⁷ In the case of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands remittances were sent to family members in Afghanistan as well as family members in Pakistan and Iran.

¹⁸ For 2007, recorded remittance flows worldwide were estimated at \$318 billion, of which \$240 billion went to developing countries (these data were highlighted in a November 30, 2007 World Bank news release). These flows do not include informal channels, which would significantly increase the volume of remittances if they were recorded.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:21692926~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>

Ghana. They both show how persons in Ghana delivered services to migrants in the Netherlands, like arranging paperwork. So by taking into account different types of support we get a more encompassing insight into the exchange of support in both directions.

In studies on family support we find various ways of distinguishing types of support. Kağıtçibasi (1996) distinguishes the exchange of material support from the exchange of emotional support. Schans (2007) distinguishes practical support from giving counsel or advice. Sarkisian et al. (2006: 332), who compare several studies, find that family researchers examining kin support usually focus on three key types: emotional (also known as expressive or affective), financial (also known as material or tangible), and instrumental (also known as practical or physical). They state that, additionally, many studies have identified child-care help as an independent type of support as it has both instrumental and emotional components. However, the latter argument that child-care contains both instrumental and emotional components can also hold true for other kinds of support, for instance the act of giving money can also have emotional value for the receiver or the provider. In fact, there are overlaps between all these types of support and therefore I also use the term 'dimensions of support'.

I distinguish three dimensions of support that were exchanged between Afghans in the Netherlands and their family members: practical, social and cultural support. Social contact lies at the heart of all three forms of support; without social contact there would be no support at all. Practical support refers to the support that is aimed at solving material problems or arranging practical matters, for instance by giving someone a hand, sending goods or money, or providing information. Social support is aimed at improving psychosocial well-being by having social contact. By cultural support I mean support that is aimed at upholding culture and traditions, which usually takes the form of sharing cultural practices. Thus the concept of support is used in a broad sense of the word to encompass the exchange that I perceived in the family relations of our respondents concerning three interrelated aspects of life: the practical, the social, and the cultural. Support in these different aspects contributes to the mutual welfare that according to Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 7) is the fundamental *raison d'être* for transnational families.

Even though I did not focus on material or financial support only but instead used an all-encompassing definition, this does not necessarily mean that the support exchange between family members was equally balanced. Sahlins (1974) introduced the concept of 'generalized reciprocity' to describe the phenomenon of how in kinship networks 'the failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver to stop giving [...] for a very long time' (p. 194). Sahlins mainly associated generalized reciprocity with generosity and altruistic motives. In line with this reasoning Bahr and Bahr (2001) argue that the concepts of self-sacrifice and family love should be reinstated in family theories, 'because the absence of a language of love and sacrifice limits our ability to give voice to our understanding of the [family] processes [...].'

According to Staring (2001) the emphasis should be less on the altruism in family relations as an explanation of generalized reciprocity and more on the aspect of 'postponed payment'; the fact that in enduring (kin) relations it is possible to postpone paying back what you have received - but in the end this is still expected (p. 19). The empirical research by Schans (2007) on the 'intergenerational solidarity' between adult children and their parents shows that 'generalized reciprocity [...] is in fact the most exceptional pattern of all within the family' (p. 114). Instead, the reciprocity pattern where a low level of giving is paired with a low level of receiving is the most common.

The classical study by Finch (1989) on family obligations helps us to obtain a greater insight into how to deal with the support aspect of family relations. Finch states that 'the key defining characteristic of family ties, especially between close kin, is a sense of obligation. You feel 'duty bound' to help your family, and this gives kin support an inescapable quality' (ibid: 240-241). But the fact that kin support *is* reliable in the sense that you know that you can fall back on your relatives - especially your close kin - if all else fails, does not mean that this support is automatically determined on the basis of fixed rules. On the contrary, family members negotiate their relationships with one another and work out what to do in particular circumstances. Thereby several aspects play a role, like the frequency and intensity of the contact, individual characteristics like age, sex and material circumstances, and societal characteristics in terms of politics, religion, ethnicity and class. Family relationships 'develop and change over time; they get reaffirmed through reciprocal assistance; they help to establish an individual's personal reputation and social identity, which then in turn influences the course of future negotiations' (ibid.: 242). So, even though a morality of commitments and obligations lies at the basis of kin relations, the outcomes in terms of support are a result of negotiations in which even this morality itself can be questioned. From this we learn that analysing how persons negotiate their family commitments helps to explain the possible divides between family values and family practices that were mentioned in the former subsection. Finally, Finch (1989) based her findings on research that took place among the 'white majority' in Britain. One can imagine that studying the negotiations of commitments between family members in a transnational context adds an important extra transforming element.

1.4 Methods of data collection

1.4.1 Data sources

This research is of a qualitative and explorative nature. The contacts that I had with 37 Afghan refugees in the Netherlands formed the main data source. Because these contacts provided the empirical data on which I based the four chapters that form the main body of the

thesis, I will discuss this aspect in detail in the following sub-sections. Additionally, I gathered information in other ways to deepen my insight into the research population and the problem being studied. I attended several events in the Netherlands where Afghans from the diaspora came together; three conferences, three weddings, and an *Eid ul-Fitr* celebration. I studied the websites of the Afghan organizations in the Netherlands and the chat-sites on which Afghans in the diaspora discuss all kinds of matters regarding their daily lives. I read all the novels I could find which had been written by Afghans in the diaspora. I found it valuable to consult these sources of written information, because they provided a wider frame of reference for the data that I gathered among a limited and to some extent selective respondent group. Finally, in 2005 I went on a three-week visit to Afghanistan where I stayed with a befriended Afghan family in Kabul. There I met several Afghans who had transnational connections and I visited organizations that played a role in these transnational connections, like the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Dutch Embassy, and the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Still, the opportunities to move around in Kabul as a foreigner and as a woman were limited, which meant that I spent most of the time with my host family. This unique opportunity to experience family life in Afghanistan from the inside turned out to be the most informative aspect of the visit. All in all, these extra activities were not only a way of assessing my findings and gaining additional insights; they also gave new dimensions to the interview activities, for instance when I went to visit respondents with my photos from Afghanistan.

1.4.2 Fear and distrust

The empirical basis of the research is formed by over eighty open interviews, follow-up interviews and informal conversations that I had with 37 Afghan refugees in the Netherlands. Because of the qualitative and explorative nature of the study, the aim was not to produce a representative sample of the general population of Afghans in the Netherlands in statistical terms but to intensively study a limited but varied group of respondents, which would help to capture a range of experiences. The crucial aspect of the research was to establish a relationship based on sufficient trust to be able to discuss the relatively sensitive and private issue of family life in all its aspects. Overcoming fear and distrust and going beyond socially-desirable answers was one of the most challenging aspects of this research, as several informants - Afghans as well as non-Afghans - warned me at the beginning of the research.

Firstly, the research population have their origins in a country with a long history of conflict and violence, where people out of sheer necessity learnt to trust the in-group (the family, the village, the tribe) and to distrust outsiders. People were thereby raised with the idea of keeping their problems to themselves and within the family. During a visit to an

Afghan women's group where I introduced the research, a woman asked me if I was interested in general information about the Afghan culture and traditions or in their personal stories. When I said that I was interested in their personal experiences, she explained that Afghan people in the Netherlands have many problems at home but that it is "not in their culture" to talk about it.

The new context of the Netherlands added to the insecurity of potential respondents concerning whom to trust or distrust. Especially the anxious situation of awaiting the outcome of the asylum procedure, that many of them had experienced, generated an existential fear in general and a suspicion toward research and interviewing in particular (see also Ghorashi, 2007). Another woman at the women's group that I just mentioned said: "Thank you for coming and for your important question. But I am afraid of an interview, because I am still in the procedure and I am interviewed all the time." In fact, the anxiety concerning the asylum procedure was the main reason why I restricted the respondent group to Afghans who had a residence permit or Dutch nationality. For ethical considerations I did not want to exert extra pressure on asylum seekers by interviewing them once more and possibly asking for sensitive information about family relations¹⁹, nor did I want to give the wrong impression that I could help them with regard to their legal situation. Former research experiences among asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers and undocumented migrants had made me aware of the despair that people in this situation experience and how they cling on to every aspect of hope to improve their legal position. Instead, I asked persons who had a more secure legal position to also share their experiences about the time when they were still awaiting the outcome of their procedure. And occasionally I met family members, friends or acquaintances of respondents who were still waiting for the outcome of their asylum procedure or whose application had been rejected.

However, in the course of the research I noticed that for the respondents having a permanent residence permit or even Dutch nationality, this did not always mean that they felt secure about their legal position in the Netherlands. Several events like the murder of film director Theo van Gogh by a Moroccan-Dutch extremist followed by discussions on Islam and terrorism, and the commotion surrounding the Dutch citizenship of the Somali-Dutch feminist, writer and politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, made many people with a migrant or refugee background feel insecure about their position in Dutch society. This created a reluctance to make themselves visible through research, even when their anonymity was guaranteed. The unfamiliarity of many potential respondents with academic research in general and social scientific research in particular added to this reluctance. A respondent explained at the beginning of our first interview that beforehand she had been afraid that I would be an IND

¹⁹ Asylum seekers sometimes feel compelled to hide or twist information about their family connections in order to positively influence their procedure.

official who wanted to know why she had recently visited Afghanistan. An additional factor increased the feeling of insecurity among Afghans in particular. Since the end of the 1990s hundreds of Afghans had been denied a residence permit on the basis of article 1F of the 1951 Refugee Convention which states that 'the convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that he has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity [...]'. In Dutch practice this article was automatically applied to Afghans who were known to have had the rank of a non-commissioned officer or higher in the secret service or the army during the communist times. This made other Afghans with similar (professional) backgrounds or with other affiliations with the former communist regime careful not to expose details about themselves. For instance, a respondent who had been the mayor of an Afghan town did not want to participate in the research because he wanted to "keep a low profile".

Yet the distrust that I perceived among potential respondents was not only caused by and aimed at Dutch institutions and the political atmosphere in the Netherlands. The mutual distrust between the Afghans themselves also appeared to be an influential factor. An important characteristic of the Afghan population in the Netherlands is that it consists of different waves of refugees who were allied to different regimes that vehemently opposed each other. A respondent asked at the beginning of our first meeting if the interview would deal with political issues as well, because if so she would not participate. She and her husband felt rejected by other Afghans who lived nearby because of their communist background, and therefore avoided talking about politics. But not only political discrepancies were a source of distrust, the fear of social control was another. The fact that many Afghan families in the Netherlands have experienced problems and tensions made them feel vulnerable. For instance, in one city several potential respondents refused to participate in the research after a murder had been committed within an Afghan family. This event, which attracted a great deal of media attention, made other Afghans reluctant to discuss their own family matters with an outsider.

1.4.3 Finding respondents

Keeping the former aspects in mind, the method that I used to find respondents was to make use of intermediaries who were in a position of trust. I approached, among others, teachers who taught the Dutch language and integration courses to newcomers, people who worked for *VluchtelingenWerk* [Refugee Aid], my former colleagues in the field of refugees and health, my current colleagues in the field of human rights, and representatives of Afghan organizations. The 37 respondents who eventually participated in the research were all invited to do so by these intermediaries, while the written invitation that I sent out by e-mail and via intermediaries did not yield any response. Occasionally I heard of potential respondents who

did not want to participate, usually without giving an explanation or saying that they were too busy. One potential respondent, who had occupied a high position in the communist regime, seemed enthusiastic during our initial acquaintance but withdrew from the research after she had consulted her husband. Snowball sampling was another method that offered few results (compare with Staring, 2001; Van Liempt, 2007). Many respondents lived in a socially isolated position and/or felt reluctant to refer the researcher to other Afghans outside their own family circle. One respondent explicitly warned the researcher not to approach another Afghan family who lived nearby because according to him they were being 'negative'. Finding new respondents via referrals by old respondents only worked in the sense of representatives of Afghan organizations referring me and in the sense of respondents introducing me to their own family members.

So the help of intermediaries who were trusted by potential respondents was of crucial importance for the research. A disadvantage of this method is that respondents possibly participate against their will because of the obligation that they feel toward the intermediary. I clearly sensed that this was the case on two occasions when respondents anxiously inquired after an hour or so if the information that they had provided would suffice. Another disadvantage of finding respondents via intermediaries was the selective impact of this method on the composition of the respondent group, as it automatically excluded persons who did not have contact with the professionals and volunteers of Dutch organizations and who did not participate in Afghan organizations. By making use of a diverse group of intermediaries in different parts of the country I have tried to diminish this selection effect, without being able to completely annul it. Finally, I have made the choice not to include minors as respondents in the research. With regard to the sensitivity of the issue of family life and the vulnerability of the families that were the focus of our research, I restricted the respondent group to persons who had attained the age of majority and only incorporated the information of minors when obtained during the contact that I had with their elder family members.

1.4.4 Interview setting

From the end of 2004 to the end of 2005 and at the beginning of 2008 I had contact with 37 respondents from 28 families, with whom I conducted about 80 interviews in total. In 19 cases I interviewed one respondent per family, and in 9 cases I interviewed two respondents per family: in 7 cases it concerned a husband and wife, in 1 case a brother and sister, and in 1 case a mother and daughter. These 9 cases were situations in which I first contacted one family member and during the interviews met the second - co-residing - family member who also participated. In this section I call them 'respondent pairs' to distinguish them from the individual respondents. A total of 22 respondents (8 individual respondents and 7 respondent

pairs) were interviewed more than once, of whom 17 respondents (7 individual respondents and 5 respondent pairs) were interviewed on two to four occasions, while 5 respondents (1 individual respondent and 2 respondent-pairs) were interviewed more than six times. Particularly at the beginning of the interviewing phase I visited respondents on several occasions in order to establish a *rapport* and to broadly explore the issue of how people constructed and perceived their family lives. Although I made use of a topic list, every interview very much had its own dynamics starting from the specificities of the respondents and their family situation. For instance, the fact that respondents had just had a baby or had recently returned from a visit to Afghanistan were incentives for me to go and visit, starting the interview with questions about these life events. This method of working meant that I also had contact with the respondents in between the interviews and enquired after their well-being, while they sometimes contacted me via my mobile phone number. With three families I developed a relationship in which we saw each other regularly, which gave me the opportunity to learn about the perspectives of other family members as well. At a later stage of the research I contacted some more persons in order to further vary the respondent group concerning characteristics like sex and age. These respondents I interviewed once.

There were several ways in which I dealt with the distrust and reluctance that many respondents perceived regarding the research.

Firstly, I tried to be as clear as possible about the goal of the research and about the position of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights as an academic institution that operates independently from the government in general and the *Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst* (IND, Immigration and Naturalization Service) in particular. However, this appeared to be a difficult point, for several reasons. Not only were many respondents unfamiliar with the concept of academic research, and particularly social scientific research and what to expect - and not to expect - from it. I also had to deal with my own insecurity about the outcomes of the research, the utility of this research, and the long duration of the research process. In social science not doing any harm to the respondents and to the research population is a fundamental principle, and, for example, the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association²⁰ includes the obligations to 'avoid harm or wrong' and to 'respect well-being'. However laudable, these general guidelines provided little grip in a research context in which I was sometimes confronted with ideas and practices that strongly deviated from my own views. In these situations I have taken it as my task as a researcher to try and understand these ideas and practices and where they emanated from instead of judging them, as I think that this is what 'respect' for the research population implies.

²⁰ American Anthropological Association, June 1998, <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>

Another important aspect of the research was guaranteeing full anonymity. In the first place this meant that I made sure that respondents were not recognizable in the book. While one respondent declared that she did not mind if I would mention her full name, several others explicitly asked for their stories and statements not to be recognizable. All respondents are referred to by pseudonyms throughout the book. I also made use of the freedom to omit and sometimes change certain personal data that might have revealed the identity of the respondents, but in a way which did not alter the analysis as such. But guaranteeing anonymity also meant that I did not reveal any information about the other participants. Given the mistrust that existed among the research population, this aspect was as important as the first.

A third way of establishing trust with the respondents was to be open about my own personal and family situation. As Bourdieu (1999) states, social proximity and familiarity provide two of the conditions of 'non-violent' communication. Even though I could not change my own characteristics (being a native Dutch white woman in her thirties and highly educated) which made my presence more proximate and familiar to some than to others, with all respondents I shared the fact that we had family members and a family life. Sharing personal information soon proved to be crucial when I learnt that greeting a person in Afghanistan means enquiring after all of his or her significant others. The fact that I was pregnant twice during the research also stimulated the exchange of information about everything related to family life. In the course of the research I was confronted with the pitfall that for me, too, it was easier to contact respondents who felt 'proximate' and 'familiar' than to others. It took me some time to recognize this mechanism, after which I took it as a challenge of the research to also understand the position and the viewpoints of the respondents who were 'stranger' to me.

With regard to the aspect of language, during the start-up phase of the research I was warned by Afghans as well as others that making use of an Afghan interpreter or research assistant would make many respondents suspicious, especially if this person would belong to another ethnic group or tribe.²¹ This prediction was confirmed during the research when respondents in many ways expressed their restraint in talking about personal matters in the company of other Afghans. In fact, being an ignorant outsider often seemed to positively influence people's willingness to share their personal experiences, in spite of the language barrier. As I did not have the opportunity to learn Dari and/or Pashtu before I started the interviews and all respondents had lived in the Netherlands for a number of years and had attended Dutch classes, most interviews were conducted in Dutch. Some interviews were conducted in English and in a few cases a family member or friend translated from Dari or

²¹ With regard to the role of interpreters, Van Liempt (2007) mentions that many migrants had negative experiences with how their interviews with the IND were translated by compatriots.

Pashtu. The disadvantage of some respondents not being able to express themselves adequately, particularly those who were elderly or with a lower level of education, I partly - but not fully - overcame this by taking time for the visits and coming back for a follow-up interview if necessary.²²

The choice not to make use of an official interpreter was one of the ways in which I tried to create an informal interview setting²³ that put people at ease and created an atmosphere in which a rapport could be established. For the same reason I interviewed respondents at home, or at another location of their own choice. Most interviews took place in the homes of the respondents, and in some cases I interviewed respondents elsewhere: in public places like a railway station, a library or a restaurant; at their place of work; at the house of a Dutch friend; or at my own house. Particularly young and unmarried respondents who still lived with their parents preferred to meet outside their own house. With regard to interviewing people at home, besides creating an informal atmosphere it also enabled the researcher to see their living conditions and to observe the interaction between family members. During the interviews I took notes that I transcribed immediately afterwards. The length of the interviews varied from about one hour to almost five hours, but most interviews took between 1½ and 2 hours. The visits themselves usually took longer, for instance because I was invited to watch a video of a return visit or to enjoy a delicious Afghan meal.

The fact that I travelled around on my own as a woman to visit persons whom I had not previously met and to whom I was not related was perceived as a peculiar phenomenon, particularly in the eyes of the older and/or more traditional respondents. For instance, a male respondent whom I approached via my parents' church insisted that my father should accompany me during the first visit - which he did. Even though it was clear that several respondents initially perceived my coming as strange, there were advantages in visiting on my own. For instance, it gave me the opportunity to talk with women who would not have spoken or would not even have attended in the presence of an unknown man. In practice, when I met a female respondent I usually talked with the woman first, and after one or more meetings I also met the husband who gradually joined the conversation. In the case of male respondents, the wife was usually present, at least on the first occasion, and in some cases she gradually joined in the conversation. In the case of male respondents, being a woman gave me some more space to raise 'soft' and 'private' questions too, even though the men had generally geared themselves towards having a conversation about the political situation in Afghanistan. An obvious disadvantage of conducting interviews at the home is that family members exert

²² This is what Ghorashi (2007) also stresses, the importance of the factor of time: '[...] each interview should provide enough time to hear out the whole stories, even the moments that were not so easy to talk about.'

²³ As opposed to the formal interview setting that many respondents experienced during the asylum procedure (see also Van Liempt, 2007; Ghorashi, 2007).

social control on each other and influence each other's answers. On the other hand, the interaction between the respondents also revealed a great deal of information about their roles and relationships within the family, and the contributions of other family members to the interview provided additional information from various perspectives.

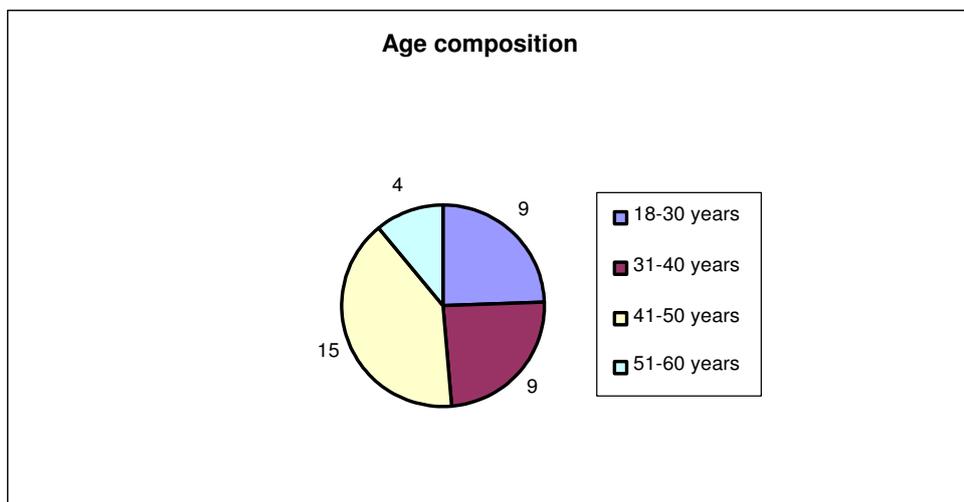
As I mentioned before, all interviews had their own dynamics, starting from the particular situation or activities of the respondents, and then discussing the issues on the topic list that had not yet been dealt with. An important point of departure was what respondents themselves considered relevant information for the research. For instance, a respondent came to the interview bringing all the paperwork relating to his wife and children who remained in another country and with whom he wanted to be reunited. Another respondent was engrossed in her first visit back to Afghanistan and the plans that she had for starting a development project there. Yet another interviewee talked extensively about his problems in finding a job in the Netherlands and how the Dutch incorporation policy failed with respect to highly educated Afghans. Naturally, the respondents had their own motives and expectations regarding the research and the contact with the researcher. My method of working was to give ample space to the respondents to ventilate their issues and opinions, and to meet requests for advice and support as much as possible. I did this not only to establish a level of reciprocity in my relationship with the respondents, but also because these interactions provided valuable additional information about the problems and insecurities that respondents faced in their daily lives and the strength and weaknesses of their own social networks. The support that I provided ranged from helping the children of a respondent to find a job on the side or a trainee post, to taking goods and presents to Afghanistan, to passing on information about vacancies, to establishing contact between respondents and the Dutch Embassy in Kabul, etcetera. The rapport that was thus established also created room to inquire into the remaining issues on the topic list.

Most conversations and contacts followed the same pattern. In the beginning respondents were cautious, but after a careful start there was a lot that they had to say and wanted to say. Many respondents had a rather isolated social position in the Netherlands and had few opportunities to share their experiences or to make their opinions heard. Respondents obviously enjoyed talking about their family life back in Afghanistan and found it important to explain the difficulties that they faced as refugees while establishing a new life in the Netherlands. But talking about their family lives inevitably also produced painful memories of loss and separation. This made it even more important to take time for the meetings, to show empathy (see also Ghorashi, 2007; Van Liempt, 2007), and to try and understand the position of the respondent (see also Bourdieu, 1999). Finally, the issue of family life also touched upon negative experiences and conflicts, and these were the topics concerning which most respondents were most reluctant to talk about. For instance, it was only after the third

interview when walking to the underground station that a respondent informed me that he had one more son who had run away from home. This was - again - a matter of taking time to build trust, and thereby using a flexible interview framework in which topics could be dealt with in a natural sequence. But, in accordance with Malkki (1995), it was also a matter of sometimes leaving some stones unturned. Still, in two cases respondents backed out halfway through the research. One respondent couple decided to quit because they feared what other Afghans might think of their statements²⁴. Another respondent no longer responded to attempts to contact him, without giving an explanation. Two respondents disappeared for reasons not related to the research: one moved with his wife to another place after a personal tragedy and one moved with his family to another European country for work purposes.

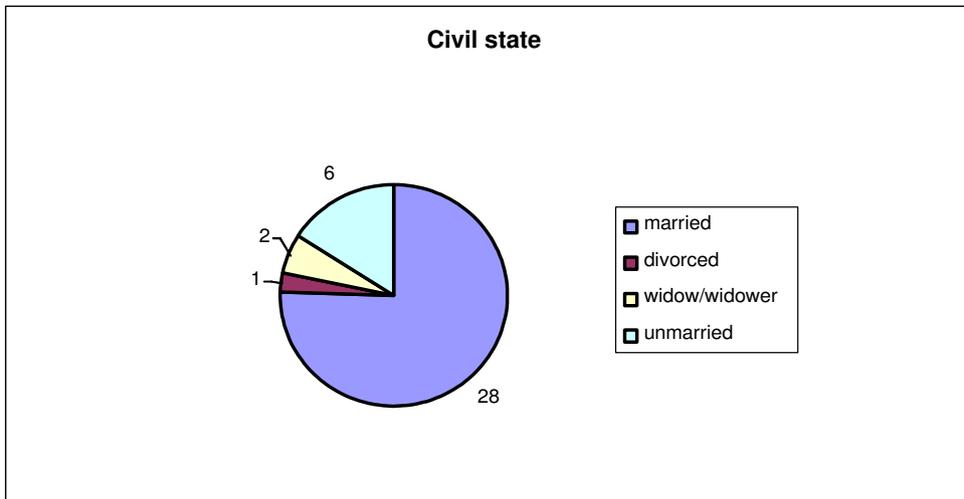
1.5 Profile of the respondent group

In this explorative and qualitative research the aim was to study a limited but varied group of respondents, and in this section I present their profile concerning a number of main characteristics. I thereby remark that during the period in which I had contact with the respondents and conducted the interviews, the situations of respondents sometimes changed: they moved, children were born, or they became married. In this section the characteristics of the respondent group are presented as I recorded them during the first interview that I had with each respondent, and additionally the changes that I encountered during the course of the research are presented.

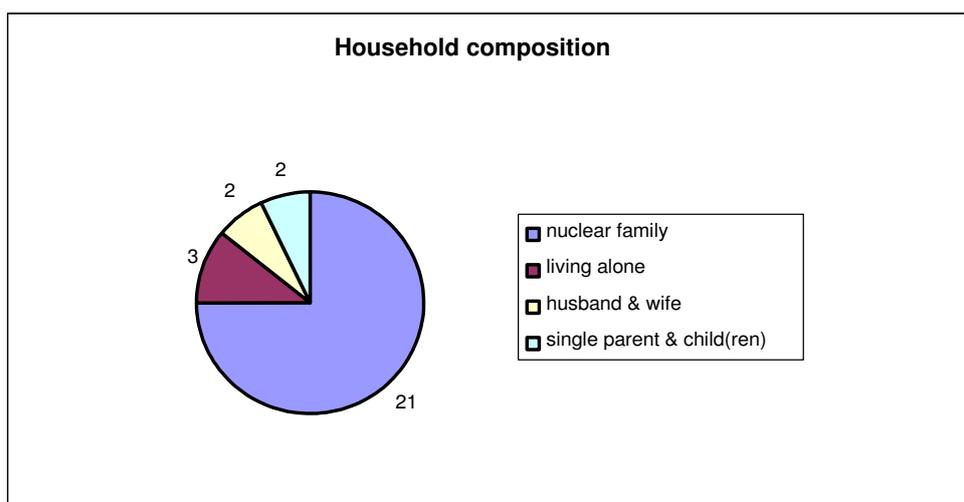


²⁴ In spite of my promise to guarantee their anonymity.

In total I interviewed 37 respondents, of whom 19 persons were individual respondents and 18 persons formed what I called respondent- pairs: 7 married couples, a brother and sister, and a mother and daughter. Among the 37 respondents were 19 women and 18 men. The age structure of the respondent group was the following: 9 respondents were between 18 and 30 years old, 9 between 31 and 40 years old, 14 between 41 and 50 years old, and 5 between 51 and 60 years old.



Of the 37 respondents 28 were married, although the spouse of one of them still remained in a third country. Of the other 9 persons 1 was divorced, 2 were widows, and 6 were unmarried, of whom 3 became engaged and married during the course of the research. Except for the 6 unmarried respondents, all the others had between 1 and 6 children. If I count the married couples as one, the average number of children per respondent was 2.7 - although during the research three more children were born. But not all children were with the respondents; in three cases children remained in another country, in one case children were missing, or had died, while one child died during the research.



Thus, on the household composition I can say that of the 28 respondents and respondent pairs, 21 lived as nuclear families²⁵, 3 respondents lived on their own, in 2 cases the husband and wife lived on their own (while their children lived elsewhere), and in 2 cases a single parent lived with her child or children.

All the respondents had arrived in the Netherlands between 1990 and 2004, of whom 9 respondents came in 1997, and the large majority (26 respondents) came between 1996 and 2001. Of the respondents, 18 already had Dutch nationality at the time of the first interview, while 4 received it in the course of the research and more respondents were in the process of applying for Dutch citizenship. I do not have this information concerning 1 respondent. Again counting the married couples as one, most of the 28 respondents and respondent pairs lived in the south of the Netherlands: in the provinces of Limburg (14) and Brabant (2). I also contacted 7 respondents in the province of Utrecht, in the middle of the Netherlands; and 5 in the western provinces. A total of 11 of these respondents and respondent pairs lived in one of the five biggest cities of the Netherlands, 10 lived in smaller cities and towns, and 7 lived in a village. Two respondents moved during the time that I had contact; one to another province and one to another country in Europe.

All of the respondents were born in Afghanistan and the vast majority stated that they came from Kabul. However, the picture was more complicated as several respondents lived in different places in the course of time, for instance because they travelled back and forth between the capital and the province or because they fled to other places before coming to the Netherlands. However, except for 6 respondents all respondents were Kabul-oriented in the sense that they had lived in Kabul for at least part of their life. With regard to their ethnic background, most respondents were reluctant to classify themselves in those terms as they

²⁵ A couple and their dependent children, regarded as a basic social unit (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2005).

saw these classifications as the cause of many internal problems in Afghanistan. 14 Respondents said that their first language was Pashtu, although they all knew Dari too.²⁶ For 17 respondents Dari was their first language. For 2 respondents Hazaragi was the first language. I do not have this information concerning three cases, however. With regard to the educational level of the respondents in Afghanistan, the five youngest respondents were in high school in Afghanistan or Pakistan before they came to the Netherlands except for one girl who had been taught at home instead. Of the other 32 respondents, 21 had studied at university level, 5 had followed intermediate vocational education, and 5 had only attended primary school or had not received any education at all - of whom 4 were women.

In the Netherlands, of the 37 respondents 13 were in some kind of educational establishment: 6 were following the integration course including Dutch language classes and 7 were following another type of education, ranging from intermediate vocational education to university. 9 respondents had a job, of whom 1 worked at a high level, 4 worked at a middle level, and 4 worked at a low level. 15 respondents were neither working nor following an educational course: 7 of them were unemployed, 2 were at home because they were sick, 4 were unfit for work, and 2 were housewives who were not looking for a job. During the research there were some changes, with 1 respondent finishing his education and becoming unemployed, another respondent finishing her education and finding a job, 1 respondent changing jobs, 2 respondents losing their job, and 1 respondent moving abroad in order to look for work in the UK.

1.6 Outline of the book

The book consists of seven chapters. In the introductory chapter I have set out the problem involved in the study and the research question, the human rights and policy framework, the theoretical framework; I have described the methods of data collection; and have presented a profile of the respondent group. The main body of the thesis consists of five chapters. Firstly, background information is provided on the situation in Afghanistan, on Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries and in the West, and on Afghan refugees in the Netherlands as well as on the policies that apply to them. The chapter illustrates that Afghan refugees in the Netherlands come from a heavily fragmented society where people seek the protection of the in-group against threats formed by outsiders. In the third chapter the focus switches from the societal level to the family level, and I show how the families of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands became fragmented because of conflict, war and the fact that they had to flee but

²⁶ Dari was the language that was used most in the capital Kabul and in government circles.

also because of their situation in the asylum system. In chapter four I zoom in on the level of the nuclear family life, as most respondents experienced a transformation from an extended family life in Afghanistan to living in a nuclear family setting or a partial nuclear family setting in the Netherlands. It was at this level that respondents were faced with the task of integrating into the new society, which led to intra-familial transformations, tensions and negotiations. In the fifth chapter I describe the family life that respondents maintained with non-coresiding family members in the West, which was characterized by comparable living conditions and a high level of trust. These relations mainly served as a source of mutual social and cultural support. In the sixth chapter the relations with family members who stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran - what I succinctly call 'the region of origin' - are considered, which were characterized by a structural inequality and tended to be more imbalanced at first sight. In the final and concluding chapter I summarize the findings, discuss the implications of these findings for the theoretical concepts that I used, and formulate the implications from an upstream human rights perspective for the protection of the family.

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Chapter 2: Coming from a fragmented society to the Netherlands

Let's mourn -

Orders come from abroad, like death itself;

The guns are free,

So are the bullets,

And this year is the year of dying young,

The year of departures,

The year of refugees.

Qahar Aushi, 1989²⁷

2.1 Introduction

So far the Afghans have been a relatively invisible group in Dutch society, apart from the media attention to the conflict situation in their country of origin and particularly for the political and military developments there. Still, in many cases the situation from which they fled was dramatic and the situation in which they found themselves in the Netherlands was also problematic. In order to understand how the respondents of this study acted and how they experienced their situation, it is important to have some knowledge of their background and of the population that they are part of. In this chapter I therefore present information on the situation in Afghanistan and on Afghans in the Netherlands, in order to provide a wider frame of reference for the findings among the limited respondent group, which is presented in the following four chapters.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First (in section 2.2), I pay attention to the situation in Afghanistan. I describe the long history of conflict and discord, give an overview of the variety of peoples, provide information on family life and its customs and traditions, describe the political situation from independence until now, look into the socio-economic situation, and describe the tragic refugee situation. Secondly (in section 2.3), I present the facts and figures that I found on the Afghan population in the Netherlands. I sketch their position among the Afghans in the West and among the ethnic groups in the Netherlands. Then an overview is provided of the policy measures aimed at Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands. After that I present the characteristics of the Afghan population

²⁷ From Pazira (2005: 5).

in the Netherlands in terms of demographic information, their socio-economic position as well as their socio-cultural position. Finally, in section 2.4 I reflect on the distrust and organizational splintering that were present among the Afghan population in the Netherlands and how these characteristics mirrored their national background of conflict and fragmentation.

2.2 Situation in Afghanistan

2.2.1 Map of Afghanistan



Source: <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/lcolor/afcolor.htm>

2.2.2 A history of conflict and discord

In his book '*Afghanistan: een geschiedenis*' [Afghanistan: a history] (2002) the historian Vogelsang raises the provocative question whether or not Afghanistan as a country actually exists. Of course Afghanistan is officially recognized as an independent state and its borders are marked on every world map. But what Vogelsang means is that Afghanistan is not a nation state in the true sense, because it lacks a national identity (see Smith, 1991).

It was mainly by external force that Afghanistan became a nation state - with its current borders - at the end of the 19th century. Up until then the region, characterized by impressive mountain chains and a harsh land climate, mainly functioned as a passageway for numerous peoples, armies and trade convoys travelling between Central Asia, the Near East, and the Indian subcontinent. Thus the population became a compilation of the descendants of all of these passers-by who decided to settle. For instance, after Alexander the Great conquered the whole territory in 330-329 BC thousands of Greeks and Macedonians came to stay (Vogelsang, 2002: 8). The Silk Route between the Mediterranean and China followed the valleys of what is now Afghanistan. Arabic armies brought the Islamic religion after Mohammed's death in 623 AC. Iranians brought their culture and language, as well as Turks, Timurids, Uzbeks and Pakistani Pashtun, amongst others. The famous conqueror Genghis Khan brought thousands of Mongols to Afghanistan in about 1200 AC, and their specific features are still recognizable in the current Hazara group. Because of the diversity of the inhabitants and the poverty and lack of productivity of the region, it never became an empire of its own. Officially the Kingdom of Afghanistan was established in 1747 by Ahmad Shah [King] Durrani, a member of the Pashtun ethnic group, and it existed for more than two centuries until 1973. But until the interference by the empires of Russia and Great Britain in the 19th century, the kingdom was characterized by internal strife and a lack of central power.

The 19th century is also called the century of the Great Game; the constant strategic conflict between the superpowers at the time, Great Britain and Tsarist Russia, concerning the hegemony of southern Central Asia. Afghanistan formed the buffer zone between both territories, and therefore the British supported the creation of Afghanistan as a buffer state. With military pressure and political strategy they tried to establish an Afghan regime that they could rely on to stave off the Russians. With British support, Afghanistan developed into a state with a certain degree of central governance, especially during the regime of Amir Abdur Rakhman Khan between 1880 and 1901. During his governance the definitive frontier lines of Afghanistan were determined, including the Wakhan corridor in the north-east which

connects Afghanistan to China and the Durand line²⁸ (Vogelsang, 2002: 15-16). The latter still results in problems because it cuts right through the residential area of the Pashtun population.

The relationship between the Pashtun rulers and their British advisors/oppressors remained a difficult one, until Amir Amanullah - one of the sons of Amir Abdul Rakhman - defeated the British in 1919 in what is called the Third Anglo-Afghan War. The Afghans still celebrate Independence Day on 19 August to celebrate the loss of British control over their foreign affairs. The Pashtun, who constitute the largest ethnic group, have not only played an important factor in Afghan history but are also responsible for the name of the country. Historically they called themselves Pashtun as well as Afghans, and because they provided the political leaders since the foundation of the kingdom in 1747 they called the country 'Afghanistan', which means 'country of the Afghans'.

2.2.3 The peoples of Afghanistan

As Dupree (1973) said in his famous standard book 'Afghanistan': 'Afghanistan's people rival the topography in ethnic, linguistic, and physical variety.' and he called the country 'a cultural as well as physical melting pot' (p. 55). I now present the main characteristics of the most important ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

The Pashtun not only played a dominant role in the history of Afghanistan; with 42 percent of the total population in 2007 (CIA, The World Factbook, Afghanistan) they also formed the largest ethnic group. The Pashtun mainly lived in the southern half of Afghanistan, from the western side around Herat to the eastern side around Djalalabad, with Kandahar at the centre. They were Sunni-Muslims and had their own language, Pashto, which to them was a very important identity marker. The Pashtun were divided into confederations that were in their turn sub-divided into tribes. Within these tribes there were clans and families. The two largest Pashtun confederations in Afghanistan were the Durrani and the Ghilzai. The Durrani, and particularly their Barakzai tribe and the Popolzai tribe, have traditionally produced the rulers of Afghanistan.²⁹ The Ghilzai, who mainly lived in the east with Ghazni as their central city, still had a strong nomadic tradition, not only in their search for pasturelands but also in searching for trade and work, mainly in the direction of the Indian subcontinent. There were also other Pashtun tribes who lived in the very isolated areas along the border with Pakistan. Because of this isolation they lived autonomously and according to their own centuries-old tribal traditions, called the Pashtunwali, in which the concepts of

²⁸ The frontier line in the east and south is called after the British-Indian Foreign Minister, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand.

²⁹ For instance, the current President Karzai is a Popolzai.

honour, hospitality and equality³⁰ play a crucial role. They did not recognize the Durand line of 1893 and maintained close contact with their fellow kinsmen on the other side of the border (Vogelsang, 2002).

The second ethnic group, consisting of 27 percent of the population (CIA Factbook, 2007) were the Tajiks, the descendents of the original Persian-speaking inhabitants of Afghanistan before the coming of the Pashtun, the Uzbeks and the Turkmenis. They were also Sunni Muslims and their variation of Persian, Dari, was the *lingua franca* of Afghanistan. The Tajiks lived throughout the whole country but mainly in the northeast of Afghanistan, where they maintained strong ties with the Tajiks in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In Afghanistan they did not refer to themselves as Tajiks but called themselves after the place where they came from, like the legendary resistance leader Massud who was a Tajik but called himself a Panjshiri after the Panjshir Valley from where he came. In the final years of the civil war, in which the ethnic component played an important role, the collective name of Tajiks came more into use for different peoples who spoke Dari.³¹

The third largest group (9%, CIA Factbook, update 24 Feb 2009) were the Hazaras. They were Shia Muslims and formed a religious minority in Afghanistan. They lived mainly in the high and isolated central mountains, in what was called Hazarajat (Vogelsang, 2002b). Until the late nineteenth century [...] Hazarajat was in practice an independent country. In the 1880s an intensive military campaign by the Afghan King Abdul Rakhman finally conquered them and incorporated them into Afghanistan. He gave much of their land to the Pashtun, made many of them slaves, and left them as the poorest of the four [main] ethnic groups in Afghanistan (Steward, 2006). The Hazaras could be recognized by their specific Mongol traits; according to them, they descended from the troops of the conqueror Genghis Khan. The Dari they spoke was punctuated with Turkish and Mongol words. Hazara women wore colourful clothes with jingling elements on them and did not cover themselves apart from a veil.

A group that was almost the same size as the Hazaras was formed by the Uzbeks (9%, CIA Factbook, update 24 Feb 2009), who were descended from Turkish speaking migrants. The Uzbeks were Sunni Muslims. They lived predominantly in the North and were related to the inhabitants of Uzbekistan. Their most important city was Mazar-i-Sharif, which was the capital of General Dostum. Another smaller Turkish-speaking group, the Turkmenis, lived in the northwest, close to the borders with Turkmenistan. They were Muslim Sunnites too.

³⁰ The idea of equality does not include women, though; they are perceived as subordinate to the men and are usually kept inside the house in purdah. Purdah is the isolation of women from all men except their near relatives (Dupree, 1973: 531).

³¹ According to Rais (1999: 2) ethnicity was never a very strong factor in Afghan politics before the Saur Revolution of 1978. 'An undemocratic and controlled system did not provide the opportunity for political expression of ethnicity; it remained confined to identity.'

Apart from the four most important ethnic groups, the Pashtun, the Tajiks, the Hazaras and the Uzbeks, many more small groups were present in Afghanistan, like the Aimaqs and the Farsiwan (Persian-speakers) who lived around the city of Herat, the Baluchis in the southwest who were related to the inhabitants of the Pakistan province of Baluchistan, and the Nuristanis in the mountainous area of east Afghanistan who were only converted to Islam at the end of the 19th century. What all these groups had in common, in spite of the significant differences in power, in language, in physical traits, in customs and traditions, was Islam (Vogelsang, 2002b). Even though Sunni Muslims (80%) could be distinguished from Shi'a Muslims (19%), they all shared the belief in Allah as the Almighty and Mohammed as His herald (Vogelsang, 2002, 55). Islam is what - if only temporarily - united Afghans of different ethnic and regional groups in their resistance against the Marxist regime in Kabul and the Soviet occupation.

2.2.4 Afghan family life³²

In the 1970s Dupree (1973: 248) called Afghanistan an 'inward-looking society'. According to him the 'peasant-tribal society' of Afghanistan was characterized by a high level of non-literacy, the fact that most of the people spent most of their time engaged in food-production, and a lack of mobility. By the latter Dupree not only referred to geographical aspects³³ but also to occupational, economic and social aspects. 'Occupationally, a man in a peasant-tribal society will probably follow the occupation of his father. Politically, a man will be a leader or a follower depending on the status of his family. And socially, a man usually marries within his tightly defined group; [...] a man's preferred mate is still his father's brother's daughter. In this kinship-oriented context, the village builds a 'mud curtain' around itself for protection against the outside world. For outsiders usually come to extract from, not bring anything into, the village' (p. 248). The past decades of war that affected almost the whole population of Afghanistan have further increased the suspicion toward outsiders (see also Stewart, 2004) and the orientation on kinship ties as a safe haven.

The Afghan family is patriarchal, patrilinear, and patrilocal. This means that, generally, authority is vested in male elders - and if they are not present, in male youngsters -, inheritance is through the male line, and the wife moves to her husband's place of residence upon marriage. Traditionally, families consist of three or even four generations living together, and polygamy is permitted. Within families there is a tendency toward respect for age, male or female, reverence for motherhood, eagerness for children, especially sons, and

³² This sub-section is based on U.S. Library of Congress, Country studies, Afghanistan, printed on 6 March 2009: <http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/57.htm>, unless indicated otherwise.

³³ 'Even nomads, although they may seasonally move, lack real mobility [...] Any deviation from their traditional routes would bring conflict with other groups until adjustments could be made' (Dupree, 1973: 249).

the avoidance of divorce. Rigorously honoured ideals emphasizing family cohesiveness through extended kinship networks endow the family with its primary function as a support system. The extended family, the major economic and social unit in society, replaces the government because of the absence of an adequate nation-wide service infrastructure.

The innate belief in male superiority provides an ideological basis for the acceptance of male control over families. Life crisis decisions on education, careers and marriage are therefore made by male family members. Embodied in the acceptance of the male right to control decisions on female behaviour is the dual concept of male prestige and family honour. Any evidence of independent female action is regarded as evidence of lost male control and can result in ostracism, which adversely affects the entire family's standing within the community. Community pressures thus make women dependent on men, even among modernized urban families. On the other hand, since the construction of family and male reputations depends upon the good behaviour of women, women derive a certain amount of leverage within family relationships from their ability to damage family prestige through subtle nonconformist behaviour, such as simply failing to provide adequate hospitality, or a lack of rectitude within the home.

Since the family is so central to the lives of men, women and children, and since women's roles are pivotal to family well-being, the selection of marriage partners is of prime concern. The preferred partner is a close relative, like a parallel cousin, or at least someone within a related lineage. In reality the process is far more complicated and involves a multiplicity of considerations, including strengthening group solidarity, sustaining social order, confirming social status, enhancing wealth and power or economic and political standing, increasing control over resources, resolving disputes, and compensating for injury and death. Although endogamous marriage is prevalent in all groups, marriages between ethnic groups have always occurred. Over the past few decades these have increased because large populations have settled outside their ancestral areas, communication networks have improved and industrial complexes have drawn workers from many areas.

Except in cases in which the institution of marriage is manipulated for political and economic purposes, female family members initiate the elaborate process of betrothal through their own women's networks. Men are generally not involved in the initial stages, although sometimes a son will elicit the support of his mother or sometimes a brother will bring about a match for his sister with one of his friends. Men enter the process in order to determine the financial agreements before the engagement is announced. These entail the transfer of money, property or livestock from the groom's family to the bride's family. Brides gain status according to the value set for them; too meagre sums devalue both father and bride in the eyes of their community. In many cases, however, the bride fails to receive her legitimate portion of the marriage settlement. This causes friction, and cases concerning inheritance are

frequently brought before the urban family courts, to which rural women seldom have access. In addition, because exorbitant sums are often demanded, many men are unable to marry until they are older. Young girls, therefore, are frequently married to much older men. As a result young widowhood is common, giving rise to the practice of levirate. Under normal circumstances, however, girls marry while in their teens to men in their mid-twenties.

The practice of taking more than one wife has become less and less prevalent over the past few decades. Few men could afford to do so. Barrenness and a failure to produce sons are common reasons for its continuation. Barrenness is a frightening social stigma, not only for wives but for her family as well. Most men feel obliged to rectify the situation, but because divorce is so repugnant the option of a second wife is preferred by all. In other cases, multiple wives are taken in order to fulfil familial obligations to provide unmarried kin or young widows with a home and security. The vulnerability of widows who are too young to have established a commanding status in the family hierarchy is more frequently addressed through the levirate at present than in pre-exodus Afghanistan.

2.2.5 From independence up until the present³⁴

After he gained the independence of Afghanistan from Great Britain in 1919, King Amanullah energetically set himself the task of changing Afghanistan into a modern nation state. The first step was the promulgation of a new written constitution, which was groundbreaking in several respects, for instance because all subjects, Muslims as well as non-Muslims, were declared equal. The king met with resistance from traditional leaders who felt that the constitution undermined their position of power, and he had to adapt his plans. However, after a journey across several countries Amanullah became inspired by the modernization that he saw in the Turkey of Kemal Ataturk and the Iran of Reza Shah and he decided to take the reforms a step further. He made proposals to install an elected Parliament and to oblige all children, boys as well as girls, to go to school, and even went so far as to propose a Western dress code for men and women. These attempts to modernize Afghanistan evoked so much protest that at the end of 1928 Amanullah had to resign and he then fled to Great Britain where he died in exile in 1960.

Between 1929 and 1973 Afghanistan was ruled by the Shah dynasty of Nadir Shah, who had been a general under Amanullah and was a distant relative, and of his son Zahir Shah. This period is characterized by the swift development of Afghanistan as a nation state, with an expansion of government institutions like the army, the educational system, the law courts, and the capital Kabul as the new centre of activities. Out of the new self-awareness that this created from the 1950s onward, particularly among the educated youngsters from the

³⁴ This sub-section is based on Vogelsang (2002a and 200b), unless indicated otherwise.

countryside who came to study in Kabul, two radical movements came to the fore: the Marxists and the Islamists. Their surge reflected the frustration and dissatisfaction among the newly-educated youngsters about the slow pace of change and development and the lack of professional opportunities and power for persons who did not belong to the traditional economic and political establishment. Although both movements strongly opposed each other, they also resembled one another in the sense that they rejected traditionalism, ethnicism and localism and instead embraced a 'pure doctrine' in which the state played a central role. In 1967 the Marxists disintegrated into two factions, the Khalq [Masses] under the guidance of Nur Mohammed Taraki, and the Parcham [Banner] under the guidance of Babrak Karmal. In 1973 Zahir Shah's cousin, Daoud Mohammed, removed the king and established the new Republic of Afghanistan. Thereby he made use of the communist factions to get rid of the Islamists, but he overplayed his hand and was killed during another coup d'état by their adherents in 1978, which brought the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power. In response to the internal quarrelling within the party³⁵ and the rising protests of large parts of the traditional Afghan population against the ruling of communist leaders, in 1979 the Soviet Union sent in their troops to strengthen the communist state of Afghanistan.

From 1979 to 1989 the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan and exerted control over the big cities and the main connecting roads - although they never succeeded in ruling the whole country and in particular the inaccessible and isolated countryside. At the beginning drastic measures were taken that provided for land reforms, education, nationalizations, and the emancipation of women. Part of the Afghans therefore perceived the communist time as a positive period in which there were many opportunities to study at a high level, in which the infrastructure improved considerably, in which opportunities were created for women to study and work, etcetera. Anecdotes that I often heard were that during this period there were female drivers on the trolley buses in Kabul and that women in the streets of Kabul wore mini skirts. But the majority of the population, especially in the countryside, considered these changes to be far too drastic and loathed the foreign presence. And the repression that the regime exerted on its opponents was harsh, with tens of thousands of Afghans being harassed, imprisoned, tortured, and often killed. The Pul-e-Charkhi prison on the outskirts of Kabul was notorious for these practices. From the beginning the occupiers and the communist Afghan government faced active resistance from a range of local and relatively independent groups of Islamic fighters who controlled most of the Afghan countryside and who came to be known collectively as the *Mujaheddin* [fighters in a *jihad*]. Pakistan formed a sanctuary where the

³⁵ In September 1979 the first Marxist president Taraki was overthrown and murdered by his rival Hafizullah Amin, who in his turn was killed by the KGB in December 1979, after which Karmal became the new president.

resistance fighters could re-organize and were provided for by financiers who opposed the Soviet regime.³⁶ Particularly the US used the Pakistani government as a conduit for arms supplies and other, supposedly humanitarian, resources (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 10). During ten long years fierce fighting took place between, on the one side, the Marxist government - subsequently under the guidance of Taraki, Amin, and Karmal - and the Soviet troops and, on the other side, the Mujaheddin, which resulted in more than six million refugees fleeing from Afghanistan and the deaths of over one million of the country's population (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 10).

In 1989 the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, after which Mohammed Najibullah³⁷ ruled the country until 1992 and tried to negotiate a peace agreement with the resistance, which failed. In the spring of 1992 Kabul was in the hands of several resistance movements of Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras from the North, who almost immediately engaged in a violent struggle for power that plunged large parts of Afghanistan back into war for three more years. During this period of time Kabul was bombed almost daily and the city was largely destroyed. In the meantime in the Pashtun territories in the south and the east of the country young local commanders, who had only learnt how to fight and who still had their arms, terrorized the region. The eastern region of Herat, under the Tajik Ismail Khan, and the region of Mazar-i-Sharif, under the Uzbek General Dostum, were relatively calm and safe.

At the end of 1994 a movement called the Taliban seemingly emerged 'out of the blue' in the south of Afghanistan where they conquered the city of Kandahar and established their headquarters. In reality this movement was heavily sponsored by Pakistan that needed a stable Afghanistan in order to safeguard their trade with the Central-Asian countries. With the money and arms that they received, the Taliban were able to quickly expand their number of followers and bit by bit they conquered the country. In September 1996 they occupied Kabul but it was only in 1998 that they drove General Dostum away from the North, while the Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud kept offering resistance in the Panjshir Valley. The Taliban movement predominantly consisted of refugees of Pashtun origin, who were *talibs* [religious students] in the *madrassas* [Quran schools] in Pakistan. Under the leadership of *mullah* [religious teacher] Mohammed Omar they established a regime that was characterized by its fundamentalist Islamic ruling, including measures like prohibiting women from going out in public without a male escort, a ban on all music except for religious singing, and the obligation for men to grow beards. With the rise of the Taliban, many Western countries hoped that this new regime would bring peace and order to Afghanistan. But at the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998 the seriousness of the situation could no longer be ignored:

³⁶ Millions, and later billions, of dollars, arms, and other support was offered (Jazayery, 2002).

³⁷ Najibullah had been the chief of the widely feared and hated Afghan secret service KhAD and in 1986 was appointed as the new President of Afghanistan by the Soviets after they had forced President Karmal to resign.

the violations of human rights in general and the rights of women in particular, the enormous increase in the poppy production for the export of opium and heroin, and the fact that the Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden organised his *jihad* [holy war] against the US from Afghanistan, led the US and the UN to condemn the Taliban regime and to forbid all transactions with Afghanistan.

In March 2001 the Taliban publicly showed their contempt for the Western world by blowing up the enormous Buddha statues in the Bamyán Valley that were UNESCO-monuments. The turnaround came after the suicide attacks by Al-Qaeda terrorists against the United States on 11 September of the same year. The Taliban's refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al-Qaeda who had devised these attacks, resulted in the United States launching the Enduring Freedom Operation in October 2001 and invading Afghanistan in order to capture Bin Laden and to depose the Taliban regime. The United States and its ally Great Britain thereby supported the Afghan opposition in the North, under the leadership of Massoud³⁸, called the Northern Alliance or the United Front. In November 2001 this occasional formation had conquered three quarters of the country, and the cradle of the Taliban-movement Kandahar fell on 7 December 2001.

On 22 December of the same year a preliminary government under the guidance of Hamid Karzai was installed, under the auspices of the UN.³⁹ In the presidential elections of 2004 Karzai was elected President, after which in 2005 the parliamentary elections took place. Former warlords and their followers gained the majority of the seats in both the lower house and the provincial council (which elects the members of the upper house). Up until the present it remains questionable how far Karzai's power reaches outside of Kabul, as the provinces are controlled by regional strongmen and warlords who are often linked to the narcotics economy (De Bree, 2008: 5). Although the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been present since 2002 in order to control security, the Taliban and other groups remain active and are responsible for an increasing number of attacks, suicide bombings and kidnappings. According to the UNHCR in 2008 growing insecurity and food crises dominated developments in the region: 'Anti-government attacks rose sharply in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, while nationals, refugees and returnees alike all suffered from the rising prices of food and fuel' (p. 1). The fact that the Taliban have recently intensified their activities in Pakistan has put the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan under further pressure. So what we see is that the efforts since 2001 to democratise and reconstruct Afghanistan have had little effect and that the situation in the region has become, in the words of US President Obama, 'increasingly perilous'. It remains to be seen what the result will be of the

³⁸ Massoud was assassinated on 9 September 2001 by suspected Al-Qaeda agents.

³⁹ In 2002 the former king, Zahir Shah, returned from exile in Italy and was given the ceremonial title 'Father of the Nation'. He thus served as a non-political symbol of national unity until his death in 2007.

Afghanistan-Pakistan plan that Obama announced in March 2009, and that implies a more regional strategy to the war in Afghanistan, a revitalization of the hunt for Bin Laden, and the deployment of thousands of additional US troops and civilian aid workers.⁴⁰

2.2.6 Socio-economic situation

Afghanistan is not only a war-ravaged country; it is also one of the poorest countries in the world. The UNDP measured that the Human Development Index (HDI)⁴¹ for Afghanistan in 2007 stood at 0.345, which placed the country 174th out of 178 countries (Afghanistan Human Development Report, 2007: 3). With regard to most of the development indicators Afghanistan had one of the most negative scores in the world. For instance, the life expectancy at birth was estimated at 44.2 years in 2008 (CIA, World Factbook Afghanistan, update 24Feb09); the child mortality rate was 135 deaths to every 1000 live births in 2007 (HDR, 2007); and the maternal mortality rate was estimated at 1600 per 100,000 live births in 2007 (ibid.). With regard to education, out of the population aged 15 years and older only 23.5% could read, with an estimate of only 12.6% of women being literate compared to 32.4% of the men (ibid.). Although in 2007 the UNDP recorded 'an impressive rate of economic growth' (see World Bank: 13.5% GDP growth in 2007, 9.2% GDP per capita growth in 2007)⁴² they found that this growth failed to significantly reduce extreme poverty and hunger in the country; 6.6 million out of the in total 32.7 million persons (CIA, World Factbook Afghanistan) could not meet their minimum food requirements in 2008.

It is thereby important to realise that the large majority of the Afghan population of 32.7 million in 2008 (CIA, World Factbook Afghanistan) lived in the countryside. An estimated 80% of the labour force was working in agriculture (ibid.). A combination of harsh natural conditions⁴³ and a poor infrastructure contributed to the poor and isolated position of the rural population. In total merely twelve percent of the land is cultivable, with or without irrigation (Vogelsang, 2002: 48). An important factor adding to this low figure is the enormous level of erosion in Afghanistan. For centuries the trees have been felled and used for construction and for heating and cooking purposes. During the civil war the last vast forests in the east were largely felled and the wood was sold to Pakistan (Vogelsang, 2002: 63). Subsequently, the cattle herds of the nomadic population, called the *kuchi's*, grazed the vegetation that was left and thus turned the landscape into a dry and rocky desert. A nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle has always been prominent in Afghanistan, because of the shortage of arable land. An estimated 46 percent of the land consists of permanent pastures

⁴⁰ http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/afghanistan_pakistan_white_paper_final.pdf

⁴¹ The HDI is a composite indicator that measures education, longevity, and economic performance.

⁴² World Development Indicator database, World Bank, revised 17 October 2008

⁴³ The inaccessibility of the mountainous and desert-like landscapes, the extreme temperatures with cold winters and hot summers, the droughts, and the winds.

(Vogelsang, 2002: 74). The sedentary rural population generally consists of farmers who live in hanlets or small towns and support themselves by small-scale agriculture and stockbreeding. Generally, they are dependent on others for land and water usage, seeds and fertilizers, tools, etcetera (Vogelsang, 2000: 39). Because they have to render these services with parts of their crops, the profits they make are very small. This partly explains why since the beginning of the civil war the cultivation of poppies has become a significant source of income for many Afghan farmers. Poppy plants grow well in arid and rocky soils, and the income earned by opium production by far exceeds what people earn from other crops. In 2000, during the Taliban regime, Afghanistan became the world's largest opium producer (Vogelsang, 2002: 54) and has remained so since (UNOCD, 2009).

With regard to the infrastructure, in this vast country of 674,500 square kilometres (CIA, The World Factbook Afghanistan) in 2008 there were just a few paved roads, connecting the main cities of Jalabad, Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat with each other and connecting Afghanistan with its neighbouring countries. During the civil war these roads were hardly maintained and therefore ended up in very poor condition. Only recently have some roads been repaired.⁴⁴ Still today, many places in Afghanistan can only be reached by horse or by foot. Moreover, large parts of the countryside are dangerous to enter because they are still covered with landmines.⁴⁵

Potentially, Afghanistan is a rich country because of the presence of a variety of natural resources, like gas fields, copper and iron ore, petroleum, coal, and precious and semi-precious stones. The problem, though, is that investments and infrastructure are needed in order to exploit these resources. In 2008 industry mainly consisted of the small-scale production of textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, etcetera, and employed only 10% of the labour force, while 10% worked in services (CIA, The World Factbook Afghanistan). But the sad truth is that the main sources of income in Afghanistan today consist of foreign aid and remittances.

Afghanistan has a long tradition of foreign aid - and with that foreign interference. During the whole of the 20th century Afghanistan received foreign aid from both the US and the former USSR and learnt to play the two superpowers against each other (Jazayeri, 2002: 235). Therefore Jazayeri (2002) states that a lack of funding has never been Afghanistan's problem; instead serious abuses of funds by all those involved in their contribution have

⁴⁴ In her book *Slagveld Afghanistan* [The-Afghanistan Battlefield] the former Dutch MP Farah Karimi (2006) describes the arbitrariness of these reconstruction efforts: only the roads that are militarily and strategically important for the mobility and effectiveness of foreign forces are being repaired, while quiet and trouble-free regions like Bamyan province can only be reached with the greatest of difficulty.

⁴⁵ The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) calculated that 7,097 Afghans were killed or injured by landmines between 1998 and 2003. Estimates put the number of disabled people at around four percent of the population - approximately 1 million people (National Human Development Report 2004: 5).

minimized their effects. The intensification of the conflict in the 1990s caused the destruction of much of the industry and economic infrastructure that had developed during the previous decades. The main sources of income then became the support for political factions, drugs, the illegal trade in duty-free goods and antiquities, remittances and international aid (ibid.). Also after 2001 the national economy has remained highly dependent on foreign aid. Since 2002 the international community has pledged over \$57 billion at three donors' conferences (CIA, The World Factbook Afghanistan) and international organizations flooded Kabul with money and plans for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Because of the inaccessibility and continuing security risks in the countryside, a relatively large part of this money landed in the Afghan cities, and especially in Kabul, which amounted to a boost for the local economy in the form of jobs, educational facilities, health care facilities, etc. However, this input did not compensate for the enormous increase in the population because of millions of refugees returning from the neighbouring countries Iran and Pakistan (Afghan Refugees in Iran, 2004: 5). Also, the international community did not live up to their promises and paid less money than promised, and an estimated 40 percent of the money spent has returned to rich donor countries through corporate profits, consultant salaries and other costs (Oxfam, 20 March 2008).⁴⁶

The exact amounts that are transferred by Afghans who live across borders in the form of remittances are unknown, partly due to the fact that a lot of money is transferred via informal banking systems. However, the UN estimates that Afghans in Iran send home more than 500 million dollars annually (which is equivalent to 6 per cent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP))⁴⁷ and that in 2006 Afghanistan received almost 2.5 billion dollars (29.6% GDP) from its expatriate community (UN International Fund for Agricultural Development). These estimates are an indication of the significance that Afghan refugees still have for their country of origin.

2.2.7 Refugees

According to Kronenfeld (2008: 47) it is likely that well over a third of all Afghans have been displaced from their homes at one time or another during their lives, which prompted the UN to declare Afghanistan *the major site of human displacement in the world* (National Human Development Report 2004 Afghanistan). Respectively the coming to power of the PDPA in 1978, the arrival of the Soviet army in 1979, the outbreak of conflict between rival *mujaheddin* factions in 1992, the coming to power of the Taliban from 1994 onwards, and the US bombing campaign in late 2001 produced waves of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees who fled mainly to Pakistan and Iran. The refugees in Pakistan were mostly

⁴⁶ http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/2008/pr080325_donors_failing_afghanistan (accessed 27 July 2009)

⁴⁷ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=29218&Cr=afghan&Cr1=> (accessed 27 July 2009)

ethnic Pashtun - a characteristic which they shared with the Pakistanis along the Afghan border - and the refugees in Iran were mostly ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras (Turton & Marsden, 2002). Although both countries never accorded the Afghans the status of refugees on the basis of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol⁴⁸, they perceived it as their humanitarian and religious duty to provide them with hospitality. Both countries have been praised for their tolerance of millions of Afghans on their territories, although their policies were very different at the beginning. In Pakistan refugees were mainly housed in camps along the length of the border⁴⁹ and received support from foreign NGOs, international organizations and the UNHCR. The Islamic fundamentalist government of Iran did not seek, at least initially, international assistance in dealing with the influx of Afghan refugees. Iran provided the Afghans with access to free education, health services and to subsidies for basic essentials (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 11). The Afghans were permitted to work in one of sixteen designated menial occupations (ibid.) and for the most part they were responsible for finding their own accommodation, which tended to be in the poorer neighbourhoods of the major cities. In both countries the policies toward the Afghan population within their borders gradually hardened, as is described by Turton and Marsden (2002):

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan slipped from the agenda of Western foreign policy concerns, and donor governments began to lose interest in supporting a large population of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. A voluntary repatriation programme was launched in 1990, based upon the 'encashment' of refugee ration books, and by 1995 all food rations to refugee camps (or 'refugee villages') in Pakistan had been stopped. At the same time the continuing armed conflict between the *mujaheddin* political parties was producing a significant population movement, in the opposite direction, particularly from Kabul that was being heavily bombed which led to an exodus of more than 65,000 people to Pakistan and to other parts of Afghanistan. Also the conquering of several big cities by the Taliban from 1995 until 2000 displaced tens of thousands of people. The effects of the fighting on both cross-border and internal displacement were exacerbated by the worst drought in living memory that lasted from 1999 up until 2004 (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 13). The governments of Pakistan and Iran, meanwhile, began to harden their attitudes to the continued presence of Afghans in their countries. They increasingly considered the Afghans as economic migrants to whom they did not have religious or - in the case of Pakistan and the Pashtun - cultural obligations anymore.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on New York and Washington and the US bombing campaign in Afghanistan that followed put the country back into the international

⁴⁸ The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1967)

⁴⁹ Which in the course of time were transformed into 'refugee villages' when refugees built their own mud houses instead of tents (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 11)

limelight. With the fall of the Taliban and the establishment of the Afghanistan interim authority in December 2001, a spontaneous return movement began among Afghans living in neighbouring countries. UNHCR's assisted repatriation programme began in March 2002 for those returning from Pakistan, and in April for those returning from Iran, with a planned target of 400,000 returnees from each country (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 1). According to the UNHCR the numbers of returnees largely exceeded the planned target, and in 2007 more than 5 million refugees had returned from Iran and Pakistan.⁵⁰

The hardening measures of the Iranian and Pakistani governments, with Pakistan closing down major refugee camps and Iran establishing 'no go areas' for Afghan refugees (De Bree, 2008: 6), went hand in hand with a growing dissatisfaction among their own populations about the presence of millions of Afghans on their territories. In Iran [as well as Pakistan] the broad sentiment is that the Afghan refugees pose a significant burden and that it is time for them to go back to Afghanistan. In Iran, this attitude is reflected in significant levels of unemployment, as well as concern over increasing drug smuggling and violence at the border (Afghan Refugees in Iran, 2004: 3). There are accusations that the Afghans are competing for jobs and education, health and other services (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 31). In Pakistan, the Taliban and Al-Qaida activities have an increasing effect on the growing hostility against Afghans⁵¹ and the authorities fear the Pashtunistan issue. At the same time, the willingness of Afghans to work in menial occupations for much lower wages has encouraged entrepreneurs in the host countries to employ Afghan labour, which has allowed Afghans to enter the country illegally (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 31). These illegal migrants are particularly vulnerable; they constantly run the risk of having their documentation checked and being deported.

Although there are no hard figures available, it is clear that the migration from Afghanistan to its neighbouring countries continues on a large scale, by single wage earners as well as families. Turton & Marsden (2002: 4) state that the Afghan refugee 'crisis' of the past 20 years has been compounded by a history of economic migration: [...] The importance of economic migration as a survival strategy for Afghans is probably greater now than it has ever been, because of population increase and the effects on the agricultural base of 23 years

⁵⁰ Kronenfeld (2008) explains why these high figures present a misrepresentation of reality and determines that the way in which refugees are conceptualized is the main problem behind this misrepresentation. According to him, at least part of the confusion is inherent in the international legal conception of refugees as victims of conflict who cross an international border twice at most. Kronenfeld points to the inextricable mixture of economic, environmental and political factors that for centuries motivated Afghans to migrate back and forth between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. Although the number affected by the Soviet invasion was unprecedented, the fact that Afghan seasonal and labour migrants had preceded these refugees paved their way and formed a first reception (see, for instance, *Afghan Refugees in Iran*, 2004: 2).

⁵¹ Meanwhile many Afghan refugees themselves also live under a threat now that the Taliban rules certain parts of Pakistan and commits acts of violence in other parts.

of war and four years of drought. We must therefore assume that a significant number of Afghans will seek to remain in both countries, [...] and that they will find increasingly inventive methods to circumvent any attempts at stricter border controls and police scrutiny inside the country.

The millions of refugees who indeed returned to Afghanistan often decided to do so because of the pressure that the host society exerted on them to leave in combination with the great expectations that international organizations raised about the level of assistance that returnees would receive. It was those who were having the most difficulty in surviving in the country of asylum that would have been most likely to put their trust in the 'encouraging messages' they were receiving from the international community (Turton & Marsden, 2002: 33) and who were subsequently often rather disappointed. Turton & Marsden (2002: 29) describe how they met many returnees who complained bitterly about the lack of assistance that they had received, including housing, irrigation and, especially, employment. As the drought [...] had affected employment and production in the agricultural sector, many returnees moved to the cities, particularly Kabul, which has an international security force, the highest wage levels in the country and a large number of aid organizations. There were persons who were able to take advantage of new economic opportunities, especially if they still had houses and land. But Kabul also has probably the highest price levels in the country, as well as a pressing shortage of housing, jobs, electricity, clean water, etcetera (Afghan Refugees in Iran, 2004: 4-5). Thus, for most returnees the daily struggle to survive continued as before in the host country.

2.3 The Afghan population in the Netherlands

2.3.1 Afghans in the West

On a small scale contacts between Afghans and the West date back decades and even centuries. During the Shah dynasty from 1929 until 1973 there were, for instance, members of the elite who went to study and work in Germany or France, but their numbers were limited. This changed when conflict and war broke out in the 1970s, with King Zahir Shah being one of the first Afghans to go into exile, in Italy, where he lived with most of his family after the coup by his cousin Daoud in 1973. While the vast majority of Afghan refugees ended up in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran, during the 1990s the number of Afghan asylum seekers spreading outside the immediate region climbed dramatically, until they became the largest group arriving in Europe - and industrialized countries in general - in 2001. As conditions in Afghanistan spiralled downwards, the millions of refugees in

neighbouring countries lost hope of ever being able to return home.⁵² At the same time they felt increasingly insecure in their first countries of asylum. In all, during 2001, Afghans applied for asylum in at least 77 countries across the world, including countries as diverse as Iceland, Chile, and Singapore (UNHCR, 2005).

Accurate figures for Afghan refugees in these non-neighbouring countries are difficult to find. In countries such as Russia, the Central Asian Republics, and India there is a difference between official and actual figures, i.e. between registered and illegal entrants. There are no figures for Afghans in the Gulf States, but given the difficulty of entering these countries, they probably lie in the thousands (Jazayery, 2002). Estimates of the number of Afghan-Americans⁵³ ranged between 80,000 (^a USA Today, 'Little Kabul' immigrants apprehensive (2001))⁵⁴ and 300,000 in 2009; according to the Canada 2006 Census there were almost 50,000 Canadians with their ancestry in Afghanistan, and according to the 2006 Australian census there were more than 33,000 persons with Afghan ancestry⁵⁵. In Europe, Germany was the largest recipient of Afghan asylum seekers with 50,000 between 1994 and 2004.⁵⁶ The Netherlands received 36,000 Afghan asylum seekers in the same period, the UK 34,000, Austria 13,500, and Denmark 11,500. (UNHCR, 2005) These figures show that given its relatively small size, the Netherlands received a considerable number of refugees from Afghanistan.

2.3.2 Afghans in the Netherlands; a new refugee group

In the Netherlands the Afghans form a relatively new ethnic group that has quickly grown to a number of more than 37,000 in 2008 (CBS StatLine⁵⁷).⁵⁸ This means that after the four large

⁵² Relatively small numbers of Afghan refugees went to other neighbouring countries than Pakistan and Iran, like Tajikistan (2,500), Uzbekistan (2,300), Turkmenistan (1,200), and Kyrgyzstan (650). (UNHCR, 4 November 2004: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&id=418a39a34&page=news>)

⁵³ An American with his/her heritage or origins in Afghanistan.

⁵⁴ <http://usatoday.com/news/nation/2001/09/20/kabul.htm>

⁵⁵ ^a ^b

"20680-Ancestry (full classification list) by Sex - Australia" (Microsoft Excel download). 2006 Census. Australian Bureau of Statistics . [http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ViewData?breadcrumb=POLTD&method=Place%20of%20Usual%20Residence&subaction=1&issue=2006&producttype=Census%20Tables&documentproductno=0&textversion=false&documenttype=Details&collection=Census&javascript=true&topic=Ancestry&action=404&productlabel=Ancestry%20\(full%20classification%20list\)%20by%20Sex&order=1&period=2006&tabname=Details&area code=0&navmapdisplayed=true&](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ViewData?breadcrumb=POLTD&method=Place%20of%20Usual%20Residence&subaction=1&issue=2006&producttype=Census%20Tables&documentproductno=0&textversion=false&documenttype=Details&collection=Census&javascript=true&topic=Ancestry&action=404&productlabel=Ancestry%20(full%20classification%20list)%20by%20Sex&order=1&period=2006&tabname=Details&area code=0&navmapdisplayed=true&) Retrieved on 2008-06-02.

Total responses: 25,451,383 for total count of persons: 19,855,288.

⁵⁶ The number of asylum seekers does not correspond to the total number of Afghans in a country. On the one hand, not all asylum requests were granted. On the other hand, the influx of asylum seekers was followed by an influx of family members and brides and grooms. Also, children born in the host country to parents of Afghan descent are included in the total number of the Afghan population.

⁵⁷ <http://statline.cbs.nl> (accessed 7 May 2008)

ethnic groups in the Netherlands (i.e. the Turks, the Moroccans, the Surinamese, and the Antilleans/Arubans) and after the Chinese and the Iraqis they constitute the seventh largest ethnic group of non-Western descent in the Netherlands, numbering more than the Iranians. Particularly between 1996 and 2004 the number of Afghans in the Netherlands increased considerably from almost 5,000 to more than 34,000 persons (ibid.). With an average length of stay of about 5 years in 2004 the Afghans remained for the shortest time in the Netherlands compared to the other groups just mentioned (*Jaarrapport Integratie 2005*: 17) [Year Report on Integration 2005]. Afghans in the Netherlands are referred to as a 'refugee group' (see, for instance, *Jaarrapport Integratie 2005*: 12) that comes from an 'asylum seekers' country' (Nicolaas, Sprangers, & Witvliet, 2003: 13) and rightly so: by far the most Afghans received a residence permit based on an asylum claim or based on family reunification with those who had entered on grounds of asylum. A third form of access that has gained importance over the years - while the possibilities for Afghans to obtain asylum in the Netherlands lessened after 2001 - was family formation, or in other words coming to the Netherlands via a marriage. Only a few Afghans received a residence permit based on other grounds like work or study (CBS StatLine⁵⁹).

2.3.3 From categorial policy to return policy

An important reason for the fact that a relatively large portion of the Afghans who fled to industrialized countries came to the Netherlands was how they were received policy-wise. In 1994 the Netherlands promulgated a policy of categorial protection for Afghan asylum seekers, which meant that the situation in Afghanistan was considered alarming in terms of safety and human rights and therefore protection was granted to all asylum seekers from that region. Asylum requests were still individually assessed and those asylum seekers who did not receive asylum on individual grounds received temporary protection⁶⁰, although they then did not qualify for family reunification⁶¹.⁶² After having received temporary protection for three years, they were entitled to have a permanent residence permit.

The policy of categorial protection for Afghans was continued under the new Aliens Act of 1 April 2001 until 15 September 2002. The turbulent developments in Afghanistan after 11 September 2001 led the Dutch government to promulgate, on 14 December 2001, a moratorium on decisions, which meant that all asylum requests by Afghans could be kept on

⁵⁸ Of those, in 2008 a total of almost 10,000 persons had Dutch nationality (CBS Statline, accessed 18 November 2008)

⁵⁹ <http://statline.cbs.nl> (accessed 24 February 2009)

⁶⁰ Unless counter-indications existed, like criminal behaviour. (www.regering.nl/Begrippenlijst/C/Categoriaal_beschermingsbeleid)

⁶¹ In contrast to persons who had been granted an A status (refugee status) or a C status (humanitarian status) which entitled them to apply for family reunification.

⁶² Additionally, the Netherlands invited a number of Afghan refugees via the UNHCR resettlement programme and they received an asylum status upon arrival.

hold for a maximum of one year (Afghanen in Nederland, 2003). Between April 2001 and September 2002 also Afghans who had received temporary protection were entitled to apply for family reunification, which led to a boom in applications. In February 2002 the political decision was made that Afghan asylum seekers whose claim had been rejected continued to receive relief for the time being.

The turnaround came in 2002 when the UNHCR declared that Afghanistan was safe enough to return to. The Dutch country report on Afghanistan of August 2002 largely followed this decision, which led to the ending of the moratorium and the categorial protection policy and to the recommencement of the individual assessments of Afghan asylum claims in September 2002. Thus Afghans who had entered the Netherlands until a maximum of three years before this date and who had not been granted asylum, found themselves in an insecure situation as their temporary protection status was no longer being converted into a permanent residence permit - while many of them had already been subject to family reunification. Instead the family now ran the risk of their claim being rejected, although the Netherlands did not immediately start deporting persons to Afghanistan. Although in subsequent country reports the situation in Afghanistan was described as disquieting and certain groups were designated as being particularly vulnerable, for instance persons who belonged to a religious or ethnic minority and single women, this did not result in a new proclamation of categorial protection.

In January 2003 a letter was sent to all Afghan asylum seekers which stated that they should prepare for their return to Afghanistan (Afghanen in Nederland, 2003). In March of the same year the Dutch government signed a memorandum of understanding with Afghanistan which regulated the voluntary return of Afghan nationals with the standard REAN arrangement of the IOM (International Organization for Migration) or with a special REAN-plus arrangement for Afghans who had applied for asylum before 16 September 2002 (the end date of the categorial protection policy).⁶³ From 2004 onwards the deportation of rejected Afghan asylum seekers also started. According to a spokeswoman from the Ministry of Justice, between 2007 and September 2008 55 Afghans were expelled, of whom a large number were sent to a EU country where they had previously applied for asylum⁶⁴.⁶⁵ During the same period more than 50 Afghans returned to Afghanistan voluntarily (ibid.) via the IOM. De Bree (2008) however warns that those returnees who were monitored as 'voluntary'

⁶³ The standard return facilities consist of transportation, reception at the airport, temporary accommodation, a financial contribution and possible transportation to the countryside. The 'plus' facilities consisted of 'reintegration support': on the job training, vocational training, referrals, support in setting up a small business, and extra financial support. (source: notes visit to the IOM office in Kabul, 8 August 2005)

⁶⁴ The so called Dublin-claimants.

⁶⁵ <http://www.europa-nu.nl/9353000/1/j9vvh6nf08temv0/vhy8rcf3qlxk?ctx=vhwbd70rfstu> (accessed on 28 July 2009)

did not necessarily have the full desire to return. In fact, many were pressurized by the authorities which left them with no other option than to leave (p. 1). For some of the rejected Afghan asylum seekers the general pardon regulation⁶⁶ that came about in 2007 amounted to their last opportunity for obtaining a residence permit, while the ones who did not meet its criteria were left empty handed.

A frequently used ground for rejecting asylum requests by Afghan asylum seekers was the 1F regulation⁶⁷. From 1992 onwards it gradually became clear that among the large numbers of Afghan asylum seekers persons had entered who had held high positions during the communist regime and who were possibly responsible for atrocities committed by that same regime. Particularly Afghans who had worked for the notorious secret service KhAD were suspected of having committed crimes against humanity. In 1998 the NOVO- team (the National Team to Trace War Crimes) was established and from then onwards in many cases an investigation was commenced into potential war crimes which had been committed by Afghan asylum seekers in the past. Up to 2009 this initiative has resulted in only two Afghans being sentenced at first instance and on appeal (VN, 22-2-1997; VK, 27-9-05), while a third Afghan was acquitted because of a lack of evidence (Trouw, 5-12-1997). Meanwhile, up until 2008 the IND has rejected 700 asylum claims on the basis of 1F. In the case of Afghans - who constituted the vast majority of all asylum seekers who were subject to article 1F - the fact that someone had had the rank of a non-commissioned officer in the secret service or the army was enough to make him a suspect ('Ik heb recht op mijn rechten', 2008). According to article 1F the family members of those suspected of war crimes were not entitled to protection either. However, in 2008 family members were given the right to apply for an independent residence status after ten years. Meanwhile, by September 2008 of the 700 persons in the 1-F category 120 had been deported and about 250 had disappeared.⁶⁸ In 2009 the remainder were still in the Netherlands, of whom about 100 were still awaiting the outcome of their request for a residence permit, 250 would have to leave the country, and about 40 could not be expelled to Afghanistan because that would be a violation of article 3 of the ECHR, the non-refoulement principle^{69, 70}.

⁶⁶ Through the general pardon that was promulgated in 2007 almost 30,000 rejected asylum seekers who had come to the Netherlands before 1 April 2001 and who had been waiting with a great deal of uncertainty for years still received a residence permit.

⁶⁷ According to article 1F of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees '[t]he provisions of this Convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that: a) He has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity [...].'

⁶⁸ <http://www.vwoverijssel.nl/nl/nieuws/bericht/5054> (accessed on 13 January 2009)

⁶⁹ According to article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) '[n]o one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'.

Besides the policies aimed at Afghan asylum seekers, some programmes were established that were aimed at Afghans who already had Dutch nationality. Firstly, in June 2005 a special EU programme for return to Afghanistan started that was widely known among Afghans in the Netherlands: the Return- programme for Highly Qualified Afghan Nationals (EU RQA).⁷¹ The programme was aimed at highly-educated Afghans in the European diaspora 'who wished to return to their home country to work in the public and private sector'. Some 51 Afghans with Dutch nationality made use of this possibility to work in Afghanistan on a temporary basis.⁷² There they received an employment contract of six months or a year, which was in some cases prolonged, and they usually worked for the Afghan government. The programme ended in June 2005⁷³, to the disillusionment of many, but was followed up in 2006 with a national pilot project called Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN)⁷⁴ which in 2009 was prolonged for three more years.⁷⁵ So far, several dozens Afghans in the Netherlands have made use of the IOM facilities to return temporarily for professional purposes.

2.3.4 The position of Afghans in Dutch society

Among the 37,400 Afghans in the Netherlands (Jaarrapport Integratie 2008: 33) men are slightly overrepresented compared to women. In 2008 41.4% were between 0 and 19 years old, 56.2% were between 20 and 64 years old, and only 2.4% were older than 64 years (Jaarrapport Integratie 2008, Bijlagen: 4). Because of their relatively young age structure in combination with a relatively high birth rate of 3.5 to 4 children per Afghan woman in 2005⁷⁶ (Jaarrapport Integratie 2005: 25-26), the second generation has grown relatively quickly from 1,600 in 2000 to 6,400 in 2008 (ibid.: 36).

With regard to the household structure, on 1 January 2007 51% were couples, 10% were single parents, 36% were single persons, and the remaining category was 4% (Jaarrapport Integratie 2008, Bijlagen: 7). Other figures took into account all Afghans in the Netherlands, including children, and these figures showed that on 1 January 2002 83% lived in some sort of family structure: 43% consisted of children living at the parental home, 30% consisted of persons who were married or who lived together, 7% consisted of 'remaining

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http://www.wereldjournalisten.nl/artikel/2008/06/09/kinderen_van_oorlogsmisdadigers_krijgen_kans_in_n/ (accessed on 2 August 2009)

⁷¹ The programme was executed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and participants received transport costs, accommodation expenses, and a local salary plus €300 per month.

⁷² Having Dutch nationality guaranteed that they could return to the Netherlands at any time.

⁷³ <http://iom.fi/content/view/127/8> (accessed on 30 July 2009)

⁷⁴ Besides Afghanistan, the other target countries were Bosnia Herzegovina, Sierra Leone and Sudan.

⁷⁵ http://www.iom-nederland.nl/Programma_s/Migratie_Ontwikkeling/Projecten_Migratie_Ontwikkeling/Temporary_Return_of_Qualified_Nationals_TRQN_II (accessed on 2 August 2009)

⁷⁶ Compared to 1.71 children for autochthonous women (Jaarrapport Integratie 2008, Bijlagen: 8).

members of the household', and 3% were parents in a one-parent household. The remaining Afghans lived alone (16%) or in an institution (1%) (Hessels, 2004: 2).

By far the most Afghans lived in the west of the Netherlands, slightly more Afghans lived in the south than in the east, and the fewest lived in the north (CBS Statline, 24 February 2009). Generally, asylum migrants lived more spread out over the country than the traditional migrant groups. This has to do with the fact that they usually settled first in one of the smaller municipalities, where most of the asylum seekers' centres are located. Many Afghans moved from these smaller municipalities to municipalities with 100,000 inhabitants or more (Nicolaas, Sprangers & Witvliet, 2003), which gradually led to a concentration in the four largest cities.

The socio-economic situation of Afghans in the Netherlands was quite problematic in several respects. With regard to the educational level, they were more lowly educated than the Dutch native population - but higher than the (non-refugee) migrant groups in the Netherlands.⁷⁷ A divide could thereby be perceived: the percentages of persons with the highest (more than 20% in 2003) or the lowest (more than 40% in 2003) level of education were notably larger than the persons with an intermediate educational level (less than 40%) (ibid.: 46). Gender as well as the length of stay were factors that were related to the educational level. The Afghan women were on average less educated than the men, with an illiterate rate of 21% compared to 7% among the men (Jaarrapportage Integratie 2005: 169). And the Afghans who had lived in the Netherlands for more than five years on average had a higher level of education than their compatriots who arrived later (ibid.: 52). One explanatory factor is that after the downfall of the communist regime in 1992 among the first Afghan refugees who came to the Netherlands there were many persons from the political and societal elite who were relatively well educated.

The unemployment rate among the Afghans was 37% in 2003-2004 (ibid.:85), considerably higher than the unemployment rate among the native Dutch population (5%) and also among the other large ethnic groups except for the Iraqis. The difference between men and women was also significant, respectively 34% and 50% (Jennissen & Oudhof, 2007: 85), and particularly among Afghans older than 45 years the unemployment rate was high: 59% (Jaarrapport Integratie 2005: 88). When we look at the net participation of Afghans, we see that in 2003-2004 only 27% participated in the labour market; 38% of the men and 10% of the women (ibid.: 83). The relatively low participation rate could partly be explained by the fact that many Afghans were newcomers who were still in educational training and by cultural

⁷⁷ About a quarter of the Afghans had their diplomas evaluated in the Netherlands: 59% of the diplomas were evaluated as being lower than in the country of origin, 37% were considered equal, and 4% were not recognized (Jaarrapport Integratie 2004: 41).

notions about the position of women. The Afghans who did work were mainly represented at the elementary and lower level of the labour market (70% in 2003) (ibid.: 90), which was in many cases not in accordance with their educational level. This decline in professional status was perceived as being particularly frustrating (Hessels, 2004).

Among Afghan youngsters, we see that at the primary school level they lagged behind compared to autochthonous children, but during high school this gap had been partly closed as their marks were in between those of traditional migrant groups, on the one hand, and autochthonous children, on the other, with 3% following PrO/LWOO (special needs education), 63% following VMBO (lower secondary professional education), 21% following HAVO (higher general secondary education) and 13% following VWO (pre-university education) (Jaarrapport Integratie 2004: 46). Technical studies, economic studies, and medical studies were relatively popular among schoolgoing Afghans in the Netherlands (ibid.: 48).

The limited figures that are available on the socio-cultural position of the Afghans in the Netherlands show that they diverged from the native population in several aspects. They were generally more religious: 86% called themselves religious⁷⁸ while 20% indicated that they visited religious gatherings several times per month (Jaarrapport Integratie 2004: 74-75). Their attitudes with regard to issues like relations between men and women, sexuality, and relations within the family were generally more traditional than those of the native population (ibid., 75-76). At the same time the Afghans were one of the ethnic groups who perceived the least discrimination against their own group (28%) as well as personally (20%) (Jaarrapport Integratie 2005: 200). The figures with regard to the informal contacts that Afghans had with the native Dutch population were somewhat ambivalent. The majority had native Dutch friends (74% of the men and 66% of the women) (ibid.: 105), which was remarkable given that 41% of the men and 53% of the women had difficulties with the Dutch language (ibid.: 102). More Afghans would like to have native Dutch friends, respectively 87% and 81% (ibid.: 105). But if we look at the number of marriages with native Dutch persons as an important indicator of the mixture between both groups, we see that in 2003 only 2.2% of the marriages of Afghan men were with native Dutch women, and that only 0.8% of the marriages of Afghan women were with native Dutch men (Jennissen & Oudhof, 2007: 104), while 61.7% of the Afghan grooms and 17.4% of the Afghan brides had their new spouse come over from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran (ibid: 106).

⁷⁸ Mainly Muslims.

2.4 Afghans in the Netherlands and the legacy of conflict

From the former we learn that Afghans in the Netherlands were still in the midst of the laborious process of finding their way in the new and in many respects strange Dutch society. Particularly first-generation Afghans faced severe difficulties with regard to learning the language and finding employment at the level to which they aspired, while their socio-cultural values differed significantly from those of the native population. Yet, the fact that they had these characteristics of socio-economic deprivation and socio-cultural divergence in common did not automatically bring them together as an ethnic *community*. On the contrary, the Afghans in the Netherlands were also characterized by their splintering along ethnic, political and social lines. The heterogeneous background of the Afghans in the Netherlands was reflected in the way in which they were organized in about 50 (Afghanen in Nederland, 2003) to more than 150 associations⁷⁹ that were partly clustered⁸⁰ and operated partly independently. And although during the research many respondents complained about the lack of cooperation among their compatriots and consequently the lack of any collective power to achieve things, there were no indications that this would change in the short term.

The organizational splintering of the Afghans in the Netherlands reflected the historical process of fragmentation in Afghanistan that I sketched in section 2.2. For centuries this region was characterized by internal strife between different ethnic groups and by a lack of central power, and it was mainly by external force that Afghanistan became a nation state. Even though under the rule of respectively Amanullah, Nadir Shah and Zahir Shah attempts were made to develop and unite the country, large parts of the population remained unaffected by these measures and continued their traditional self-supporting lifestyle while protecting themselves against 'the outside world'. However, when conflict and war broke out in the 1970s onwards it proved increasingly difficult to hide and almost the whole Afghan population was somehow affected by the violence and uprooting that resulted from this. Thus, also the Afghans who fled to the Netherlands brought with them a century-long history of conflict and their own personal and familial experiences with its negative consequences. This and the fact that several 'waves' of Afghan refugees, with different ethnic backgrounds and allied to different political regimes, found their way to the Netherlands made them very cautious toward each other. As De Bree (2008: 16) puts it: 'Distrust is most likely the legacy of a (post-)conflict society.'

Finally, as I have also described in this chapter, the situation in Afghanistan at present

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http://www.wereldjournalisten.nl/artikel/2008/04/09/afghaanse_organisaties_in_nederland_nemen_vlu_cht/ (accessed on 2 August 2009)

⁸⁰ The two largest umbrella organizations were the FAVON (Federation of Afghan Refugees in the Netherlands) and the UvAViN (Union of Afghan Associations in the Netherlands).

is anything but 'post-conflict'. Although the internal conflict temporarily subsided after 2001, it never truly ended; in fact it recently flared up again and even extended toward neighbouring Pakistan. This provides new fuel to the old reflex of caution, especially among those who are still somehow involved in the country of origin. In the following chapters I will show how transnational family life has played a significant role in keeping the commitment of Afghans in the Netherlands concerning the situation in their country of origin very much alive.

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Chapter 3: Fragmentation because of conflict, war and the necessity to flee

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Stone and Sand

*In my country, far from here
there was a house full of joy
On the wall next to the front door
was engraved 'family Hamidi'*

*Day after day I saw this engraved sentence
Here between these walls we felt safe and secure
as if the motionless stone of the wall would never shatter*

*Unfortunately, this stone turned into sand
sand that blew with the wind to the west
or went with the sea to the south
to everywhere and nowhere*

Back in my country, I did not see my family's name anymore

*I only saw a stone
that stood on my mother's grave*

Nasrin Hamidi⁸¹

3.1 Introduction

"It's like with birds - they all sit together, but if you throw a stone at them they flutter in all directions." (Naseer, 56)

In this chapter I describe the transformation of the family structure that most respondents experienced before, during and shortly after fleeing, from an extended family life to a family life that was mainly focused on the nuclear family or what was left of it. I show that changes

⁸¹ Translated from Dutch

in the family structure of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands began to occur during the pre-migration conditions, and not solely as a result of the migration itself. Some changes in the family structure which the respondents had experienced even dated back to decades before they themselves fled Afghanistan. In this chapter I also determine which external factors lay at the basis of the transformation of family structure that I found. I thereby concur with Williams (1990) that the 'refugee experience' (see also Bek-Pedersen & Montgomery, 2006: 96) was characterized as an experience of grief and loss, including a loss of control and autonomy. I analyse the gradual shift from internal to external control that the respondents experienced regarding their family life under the influence of conflict and war, fleeing and the asylum system. The unintended result was the individualization and nuclearization of the family, which formed the starting point for how Afghans in the Netherlands reconstructed and experienced a family life within and across borders as will be discussed in the following three empirical chapters.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, firstly, I will present the memories which respondents had of their family life in the 'good old days', by which they meant the periods before or in between the time when conflict and war uprooted their personal lives. In section three I describe how conflict and war had a fragmentizing effect on families, even though family members showed their loyalty by helping each other under difficult circumstances. In the fourth section I discuss the factors that made refugees lose control over the process of fleeing, which intensified the fragmentation process. In section five I identify the causes of family fragmentation that refugees experienced in the asylum-system in the Netherlands. Finally, in section 3.6 I reflect upon the transformation of family structure that I perceived, and conclude that it resulted from a dramatic loss of internal control that respondents experienced before, during and particularly after migration.

3.2 Family life in 'the good old days'

'The Baghlan - Mazar-e-Sherif highway is a road of great beauty, and we are not in a hurry. We stop from time to time to buy fruit from farmers stands at the side of the road, to take pictures of sheep grazing in the valleys and to fill our flasks with cold water from a stream. Our caravan of four families is driving north for a three-day holiday. Uncle Sultani is leading the way in his long black Chevrolet. We are following him in our orange Passat, behind us is Uncle Hatiq in his pale blue Beetle, and the last car is Uncle Bokhtari's navy blue hatchback.'

From 'A Bed of Red Flowers' by Nelofer Pazira (2005)

When respondents were invited to recall their family life in the past back in Afghanistan, they

usually became enthusiastic and presented happy memories of an extended family life. "The recollections of my life back then are beautiful; we lived together with the whole family in one house, my parents, my two single brothers and my sister, my married brother and his wife. We slept with five persons to a room. We all ate together." (Hussain, 28) Although these presentations run the risk of being romanticized, the narratives show that the family life of most respondents was intense in terms of proximity, contact and the exchange of support.

Regarding the proximity factor, the importance for family members to live near each other was stressed. Thereby the distinction between co-residing and living in each other's vicinity was a gradual one. It was common for children to live with their parents and siblings until they married. After marriage, sons usually remained at the parental home where they were given a separate room in the house or a separate housing block on the familial compound, while daughters usually moved to the house of their parents-in-law. But the practice of arranging marriages, preferably within the family, had as a consequence that many married women remained relatively close to their own parents and siblings as well. A reason for married couples to move out of the parental home was that they had children of their own and at a certain moment wished to have more space and privacy. The tensions that sometimes arose between female members of the extended family and particularly between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law were also mentioned as a reason for couples to move out. Some newly-weds with a double income were able to afford a place of their own immediately; this was seen as a modern phenomenon. "During the last 30 or 40 years people have received more education, and then families want to live apart in their own houses", a respondent told me. However, this nuclearization tendency did not automatically end the practice of the extended family life. The married children who moved to a place of their own usually remained close to the husband's parental home. This meant that they remained in the same city and, if possible, in the same part of town, which enabled them to retain a high degree of contact and to exchange support.

It was common practice to move between different familial houses, from the city to the countryside and vice versa. "We lived in the warmest province, in Lachman. Therefore we moved to Kabul during the summer, when we children had a three-month holiday. There we stayed at my grandfather's house. My father also had four brothers in Kabul, who had their own houses. They came to our place in wintertime." (Farzana, 38) The two reasons that were mentioned for living far away from their family members were study- and work- purposes. In the families of many respondents some members had studied abroad, in Western countries or in the former Soviet Union. They usually returned to their families once they had finished their studies. Several respondents had the experience of their families being posted elsewhere in the country because the head of the household had been appointed to a government job there.

Regarding the contact factor, for most respondents spending time with family members was their most important social activity. The combination of having big families and family members living with or near each other facilitated this practice. The daily contact between family members who co-resided was usually intense, for several reasons. In the houses the notion of privacy was almost absent. People were used to sharing rooms with each other, which meant eating together, sitting together and sleeping together. Women who did not work outdoors were used to spending most of their days together inside the house or compound. And also those who worked were used to spending their spare time together. "Everybody used to be home at 4 or 5 o'clock. And in the weekends⁸² everybody was there. We used to share the whole day together, everybody was at home, everybody got together." (Omar, 29) In this setting, co-residing family members were well informed about each other's whereabouts and, for instance, knew each other's friends because they had been introduced at the house.

However, contacts with family members nearby were also described as intense. This is illustrated by a respondent who lived alone with his wife and children: "Contact in Afghanistan was closer. Every Friday we saw each other, and on New Year's Day and other holidays. It was a different contact. Every two days I saw my brothers, every Friday we visited my wife's parents. We were used to sleeping with other relatives in one room. [...] For instance, when my brother and his wife came to visit us, they stayed for two or three days. We were used to receiving lots of visitors, many people, which is much more fun than living apart." (Fahrud, 44) These intensive contacts with family members nearby centred in the first place on relations with parents and siblings. Particularly the sons were expected to visit their parents often and to inquire into their well-being. If closely-related family members lived in another city, contact was maintained via postal mail and phone. Visits back and forth were always spent in the houses of family members. "When I was a child, we lived in Kabul while the families of my father and mother lived in Herat. In spite of the distance, my father's family visited us a few times per year. And we went to see them once or twice per year. And once or twice per month we sent a letter, because the telephone connections did not function well. In those letters we asked how they were and discussed problems together." (Jamila, 45)

The former quotation shows that relationships with aunts, uncles and cousins (in other words, the parents' siblings and their children) were important too. And because of the large sizes of the families the number of contacts soon added up: "My paternal family consists of one uncle and two aunts. With their families they are about 45 persons. My mother has five brothers and five sisters who have five children on average. Together those are about one hundred persons who are 'first family'. And if their children marry and they have children,

⁸² Which in Afghanistan is the Friday and for many people also Thursday afternoon.

too, they are also family. So when I was 40 years old I had about 200 persons who were 'close family'. And then there is still the 'second degree family'. Like the families of my aunt's sister-in-law or my uncle's brother-in-law." (Jamila, 45) A respondent told how she called her mother's cousins 'aunts' and 'uncles' too, while they considered her to be their niece, which enlarged her 'close family' even further. Another respondent cited his father who said to his children: "You don't have any cousins, you only have brothers and sisters", by which he meant that his brother's children should be as close and dear to his children as their own siblings were. There were also cases in which respondents or their spouses had a father who had married two wives, which extended their family circle with a whole range of half-brothers and -sisters and their families.

Important occasions on which also further-related family members met (besides the occasional meetings when they lived in the same surroundings) were holidays like *Naw ruz* [New Year] and the *Eids* and life events like the birth of a child, and particularly weddings and funerals. For the latter two it was common to invite hundreds of guests and most of them were somehow kin-related to each other. These were important occasions to meet family members from other places, to exchange information about everybody's well-being, and - last but not least - to initiate future engagements and marriages.

Regarding the factor of the exchange of support, according to Boissevain (1974) the fact that family members grew up in each other's vicinity created ties of an enduring nature, which resulted in these kinship ties having a high potential for support. This is illustrated by the former situation of the respondents, whose daily lives were full of examples of familial exchange. Especially co-residing parents and adult children seemed to function in accordance with the prototypical model of the functionally extended family as Kagitçibasi (1996) presented it. I have already mentioned the practice of providing housing for married sons. In return sons and their families took care of the parents in their old age. Many co-residing family members also shared financial resources, with all working family members contributing and the eldest man being in charge of the distribution. Thus it was common for the father or siblings to pay for the study or the wedding of a child, respectively a younger brother or sister. And in case women worked outdoors, their children were usually taken care of by the grandmother with the help of other female members of the family. In accordance with Granovetter (1973) these 'strong ties' played an important role in sustaining people's livelihoods.

But also between non co-residing family members a lot of support exchange took place. For instance, people in the city provided housing for family members from the countryside who came for purposes of study or work. Arranging a job for family members who were unemployed was also a common practice. More in general, using connections to

help family members was a daily practice. Family members also helped each other out with life events like death, illness, and weddings, financially as well as practically. Not only did parents and siblings do so, but also more extended relatives.⁸³ As Granovetter (1973) showed these 'weaker ties' are significant in the sense that people benefit from contacts with members of other networks because they traverse greater social distance than strong ties and reach a larger number of people.

The fact that the families of many respondents were economically well off or had political power increased the possibilities to support each other regarding housing, money, jobs, etcetera. And at a later stage, at the height of the conflict, it enabled them to help their family members to flee to far-off safe and secure places like the Netherlands.

In sum, when describing their family life in the past in Afghanistan respondents mainly narrated happy memories of an intensive and extended family life. Family members did not always live together or even near each other. But separations for purposes of study or work were perceived as a temporary situation, regular contact was kept with family members at a distance, and the familial support - in its different capacities as a mixture of strong and weak ties - was a certainty of life.

3.3 Fragmentation because of conflict and war

'On one late afternoon in September 1978 our family driver took me to the detention centre in Baghlan, where my father was imprisoned. My purple velvety trousers were brushing the dust from the unpaved road as we walked to the compound. I was holding the driver's hand, forcing him to go faster. I wanted to see my father. For a child, whose world consisted of family - parents, a younger brother and a baby sister - not seeing my father for three days was a great deal of missing.'

From A Bed of Red Flowers by Nelofer Pazira (2005)

All respondents recognized the impact of war and conflict on their family life and the transformation it caused, from a relatively carefree and happy situation to family life as a source of concern, grief and loss. Some experienced this transformation as a gradual process, others as a sudden turnabout. When respondents described the impact of conflict and war, in their narratives the emphasis shifted from a more extended family life to family relations with

⁸³ Some respondents also mentioned the exchange of contact and support with non-kin-related persons like neighbours, friends, classmates and colleagues, but these relations did not fall within the ambit of this research.

the spouse and children, the parents and siblings. In the following I describe how conflict and war in many cases isolated respondents from the extensive network of family ties and made them focus on their closest family ties.

The falling apart of families already started around 1980, with family members being arrested and sometimes killed, and others leaving for the West in order to escape the same fate.

"I can still remember the departure of my relatives to the West, because I was the eldest of four children. [...] When my last uncle left, my mother's mother came to live with us. In the second year of the communist government, in the summer of 1979, people started to disappear [i.e. 'went missing']. There was an enormous fear. When my uncles left, I was not permitted to tell that to my friends in the street. I was not allowed to tell that my parents listened to the BBC radio-neither, because this could have huge consequences. The father of some children we knew had already disappeared." (Ghazal, 37)

Relatives who fled to the West did this in great secrecy and sometimes even without saying goodbye, because any mention of their departure would endanger all persons involved. The sudden leaving of loved ones to an unknown destination was experienced as a shock by the stay-behinds. A respondent said: "One moment you live very close together, the next moment you do not know where the others are. That is an experience that many Afghans have still not got over." This is in accordance with the findings of Van Liempt and Doomernik (2006) that those who went to seek asylum were reluctant to talk about their plans to escape, as they were afraid of being betrayed, and that the difficulty for those remaining in the home country was that they often did not know what had happened to the persons who had left. If the majority of the relatives succeeded in making the leap to the West, the ones who stayed in Afghanistan could start feeling quite isolated. Ghazal said: "My parents felt the loneliness and felt the need to have family around. They saw the warmth of other families. And during the *Eids* they did not have many people to go to."

For most respondents, coming to the Netherlands was not their first experience of having to flee. During the decades of conflict and war, many Afghans had to flee on several occasions, internally or to the neighbouring countries of Iran or Pakistan. Often these were chaotic mass movements in which persons were focused on bringing their own spouse and children - and possibly their parents - in safety, in the meantime easily losing sight of other relatives. Sometimes it was not even possible to keep the nuclear family together.

"I went to the mountains, and fought against the Russians for six years. When the Russian army left Afghanistan, the Muslim fundamentalists came in 1991. When the Taliban came to the mountains, I fled to Pakistan. [...] My wife came after me with the children; it was dangerous for her as well. When I went to the Netherlands, she went to Pakistan. Our

children were damaged because of this too. They did not go to school, two went missing in Pakistan. Pakistan is not a good country either." (Abdullah, 49)

At a certain point in time, after the Mujaheddin started to fight each other in Kabul in the early 90s, it became very dangerous to go out on the streets there. And as there were no other means of communication available, family members who lived apart could not contact each other and lived in constant trepidation as to each other's well being. It was during this period that many people in the capital were killed by ad hoc violence and bombings.

"I lost my mother, my brother of 15 and my sister of 35 because of the bombings. [...] I lived in another quarter [of Kabul], with my husband and two sons. After the bombings I wanted to go to my family, but my husband - who already knew what had happened - didn't want me to go. And nobody from the family came to see me. Until an uncle arrived, who told me what had happened. I cried constantly, first because of the insecurity and then because of the bad news." (Farhat, 36)

At the same time the rulers of the former communist regime, their allies and family members, but also others who had worked as professionals during this period were actively persecuted. The combination of general and personal danger brought many respondents to their decision to flee the country.

For some respondents, the take-over by the Taliban (1994-2000) amounted to the final trigger that made them decide to flee. Especially the female respondents mentioned how the new regime prohibited them from attending school or working. The fact that they were not even allowed to walk in the streets on their own further restricted their lives and isolated them from all contacts outside their own home. Several respondents were harassed in their homes because of their supposed links to former regimes, or because of their supposedly decadent or Western lifestyle. Some were able to place their property in trust, others sold it - but for very low prices because of the enormous supply - and some had to leave in a rush and could hardly take any possessions. In several cases houses were confiscated, looted or destroyed.

"When my father was already in prison, creepy men with beards entered our house at 1:30 a.m. [...] They had already been in my parents' living quarters, and then barged into my quarters. It seemed as if they were looking for things that had to do with our communist past. But they did not answer my question about what they were looking for, and destroyed everything: photos, videos, everything. The classical record collection that my father had from the time when he studied in the UK. [...] It was a nightmare, and humiliating that they touched all our things. The next morning we left the house, without taking anything." (Suraya, 35)

Several respondents experienced how family members could not get away in time and were imprisoned, raped or murdered by the Taliban. There were cases in which the women came to the Netherlands on their own or with their children, after their husbands were put in jail or

killed.

Finally, in the literature I found one more fragmentising element that was not mentioned by any of the respondents. Political and ideological conflict could also create separations within families, when family members adhered to fundamentally opposing fractions. In the book 'Behind the burqa' by Hala and Sulima (2004) it is described how a woman is almost killed by her own brothers because she is a communist and her struggle for the rights of women has damaged the honour of the family. On the other hand, other literature suggests that family loyalty was upheld in spite of political discord:

'Every family has stories no one talks about, to be whispered when cars pull out of the driveway, because of the wars and ideologies that divide families. Our family was no different. [...] How could my cousin Naim have fought for the mujahideen and yet his own cousin Naheed [...] be aligned to the other side? They were on opposite sides of a war that divided the world. But these divisions were rarely a cause for total excommunication. [...] Blood ties run deeper than ideology; the rest was gone with the sweep of history. And I suppose no side won that war. We were all losers.'

From The Sleeping Buddha, by Hamida Ghafour (2007:141)

Summarizing, I conclude that conflict and war fragmented the family life of respondents in several ways. Conflict and war had a direct impact on the composition of the family when family members joined the fighters, were killed, were imprisoned or went missing. It also limited the possibilities for family members to keep in touch, for instance because it was dangerous to go out on the streets and because the infrastructure was destroyed. And it drove family members apart, when they fled in different directions or in some cases when they found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict. In other words, the dangerous and difficult situation made people focus first on the safety and well-being of themselves and their closest kin and limited the possibilities to live the extended family life that they were used to.

The fact that families fragmented did not mean, though, that the familial exchange of support came to a complete end. During the years of conflict it was common practice to offer hospitality to family members in need.

"During the war the economic situation in Herat became bad. First my father's family members came [to Kabul], then my mother's sisters. They were given food and drink, and help with finding work. That is normal for a family, it is expected. [...] All these family members came to live in our family, and we made room for them. At a certain moment I gave up my own room, and put my stuff in boxes. [...] A family with nine persons already has its own problems, but now we were with 14 persons. This meant, among other things, that we had less

food." (Jamila, 45)

Hospitality was not only offered in case of economic need, but also to protect family members from persecution. Respondents told how family members who were being chased by the authorities constantly moved from one relative's house to the other in order to hide.

"When the Mujaheddin came, we had to keep quiet. Therefore we went from Kabul to my husband's sister in Kunduz. There lived the sister with her husband and her mother in some houses with a high wall around them. [...] If you are in trouble in Afghanistan, you can always count on your family." (Zahra, 37)

Parents often played a crucial role in helping their adult children to get out of the country, by urging them to leave and by selling their houses and properties to help pay for the flight. For many respondents the support of other family members was also crucial in order to escape to the West. Respondents for instance received help from influential and wealthy family members to get out of prison or to get out of the country. It was the family members who were most at risk who were sent away first, like known adversaries of the current regime and young boys who ran the risk of being used as soldiers. If the whole family fled abroad, it was not uncommon for an elder relative to stay behind in order to guard the house that they left.

"My father said to me that we had to leave. 'We are old, but you are still young', he said. I suggested that we should go to Iran or Pakistan, but he wanted me to go to a non-Muslim country. We also received support from my husband's uncle to get out of Afghanistan. First we stayed in another province for one month, then we came to the Netherlands." (Saima, 34)

Literature confirms the importance of family ties when organizing a flight to the West. Koser (1997a) as well as Van Liempt & Doomernik (2006) show that most refugees had no choice but to make use of a smuggler or 'travel agent' when coming to the Netherlands. Van Liempt & Doomernik (ibid.) explain that the migrants' financial situation is crucial, because the more money they have the more Western countries are attainable to them⁸⁴ and the better the quality of the smugglers that they can choose. According to Koser (1997b) many refugees borrowed money from their relatives in order to pay for the high expenses of their journey, and in the former we saw the important role of Afghan parents in this respect. Additionally, according to Liempt & Doomernik (2006) it was more often the 'weak ties' that provided useful contacts for getting in touch with smugglers than direct family, as these ties traverse greater social distance and reach a larger number of people. Thus we see that strong as well as weak family ties played a role in people's preparations to flee to the West.

"I was crying all the time, had very high blood pressure. I remained in a little town between

⁸⁴ For instance, respondents recounted how they had chosen to flee to a European country because it was cheaper than fleeing to the United States or Canada.

Peshawar and Islamabad. There were my husband's sister and brother as well, but they were mainly busy with their own families. They offered protection, because I was a woman on my own with three little girls. But I was afraid that somebody would come during the night."

(Rona, 42)

Another form of family support relating to fleeing the country that was mentioned on several occasions was that the wife and children stayed with family members, in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, who offered them protection while the husband fled to the West first. This was thought to be by far the most socially acceptable, convenient and safe way for a woman to live while her husband was absent. These situations could last for years, while the husband waited in the Netherlands for the outcome of his asylum procedure and then applied for family reunification.

The former practices show that although war and conflict had a fragmentizing effect on families, in emergency situations family members helped each other, even though everybody was in a difficult and dangerous situation and their means of support were limited. We now turn our attention to how the fragmentation of family life intensified during and shortly after fleeing to the West. As a respondent put it: "When I fled, it was as if my family's warmth froze up. [...] What happened to my family is like a glass that fell on the ground; it breaks and shatters and you cannot mend it." (Omar, 29)

3.4 Fleeing and dispersal

'Bashir walks toward me. He looks at me. He is still crying, but he does not wipe away his tears. He does not even blink.

He holds out his hand.

I hold out my hand too.

We have never shaken hands this way before, at least not in this way.

We let go and Bashir turns around.

When he is on the garden path my grandmother empties the bowl with water behind him on the paving. "*Khoda jaret*", she says, "that you may have a good journey. *Inshallah*, that you may return in good health."

She pulls petals from the roses, and when Uncle Aaron and Noorahmed close the garden gate behind Bashir she strews those on the ground too.'

From De Gelukvinder by Van de Vendel & Elman (2008), translated from Dutch

Now let us first look at how the families of respondents 'scattered' or - in the words of a

respondent - 'exploded' over the world. We have seen how parents stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, while they sent their children to the West or how the family members who were most at risk were sent ahead. Among respondents there was an enormous variety in how well their families were represented in the West. The situation could be thought of as a continuum, with at the one pole respondents of whom most relatives remained in the West and at the other pole respondents who were the sole representatives of their family in a Western country. Or, as a respondent put it: "We are the only ones of the family in Europe, the only ones between Bulgaria and Iceland". (Karim, 38)

There were several interrelating factors that explained the difference, but the most important one seemed to be the political and economic power that families possessed in the past. As we have seen in chapter 2, the history of Afghanistan is marked by brutal regime changes. People who held political power one day, were persecuted the next and the same held true for everybody who was somehow related to them. A difference between the former rulers and the millions of other Afghans who were persecuted and threatened as well, for instance because they belonged to an ethnic minority group or simply because a military faction crossed their path, was that the former elite had the capability and the contacts to flee further than a neighbouring country.

Fleeing from Afghanistan to a Western country was a costly affair, for which travel agents asked thousands of dollars per person. According to Afghan standards these were huge amounts, which only a small part of the population could afford. Families sold property, like their houses, businesses, land, or gold, in order to accumulate enough money to bring one or more family members into safety. Not only did the elite have the economic means to flee further than their compatriots, many also had contacts or experiences abroad. Several respondents mentioned how they themselves or their relatives had studied in the West. Among the first Afghans in the Netherlands were persons who came to study and were then unable to return after the Soviet army invaded their country. Other respondents studied or worked abroad during the Russian time, and were therefore mainly focussed on Russia and the Russian language. Some fled directly from Russia to Western countries when the attitude of the Russians towards their former Afghan comrades changed after the forced withdrawal of Russia from Afghanistan in 1989. And most respondents knew people who had fled to the West before they decided to go there themselves; not only family members but also neighbours, classmates and colleagues. Directly or via others the stay-behinds learned about the experiences of Afghans in the West. These findings are in accordance with what Massey et al. (1993: 460) explain using network theory, namely that 'once someone has migrated internationally, he or she is very likely to do so again' (see also Kronenfeld, 2008), and that 'the probability of international migration should be greater for individuals who are related to someone who has prior international experience [...] or for individuals connected to someone

who is actually living abroad.' The reason behind this is that people become familiar with the idea of migration, and that the cost and risk of migration decreases if migrants have people to help them. Thereby Massey et al. (ibid.) point to the importance of the sort of tie: 'the likelihood of movement should increase with the closeness of the relationship [...]; and it should also rise with the quality of the social capital embodied in the relationship'. This is confirmed by Herman (2006: 203) who states that there is a strong correlation between the strength of ties and the amount of help provided.

In the research I did not extensively inquire into the motives and details of how the respondents had fled to the Netherlands, as this was a sensitive issue alongside the focus on the family life of Afghan refugees who already remained in the Netherlands. However, several respondents spontaneously talked about the process of fleeing, and in this section I put their experiences within the broader context of complementary literature because it helps us to explain the process of family fragmentation. According to these respondents, family members in the West offered several types of support to help them flee, like sending money to pay a travel agent, arranging a visa, arranging sponsorship, or providing information. This is in accordance with what Koser (2000) found among Iranian asylum seekers in the Netherlands: that social networks in the West served in the decision-making process as sources of information and as providers of money in order to meet the costs of travel agents. However, also in accordance with Koser's (ibid.) findings, I found few tendencies of chain migration among the respondents apart from cases of family reunification with spouses and unmarried children. There were some respondents who came to the Netherlands in order to join parents and siblings who had come earlier, or whose parents and siblings had followed after them, as one would expect in accordance with network theory. But other respondents stressed how chance and coincidence had largely determined where they ended up in the West - even if they found out afterwards that they had been brought to the same country as, for instance, their adult siblings.

"At Schiphol Airport we were in the transit area when the man who brought us [i.e. the smuggler] told us that he was going to get something to drink. We have not seen him since - and we have now lived here for eight years. We were waiting and waiting, thinking that we would continue our journey. The police then told us that we were in the Netherlands."
(Naheed, 24)

This experience corresponds with Koser's (2000) findings on the lack of control that asylum seekers have concerning their specific destination when they make use of a travel agent.⁸⁵

Koser (ibid.) thereby points to the fact that it is ultimately asylum policies that are to blame

⁸⁵ Even though Van Liempt and Doomernik (2006: 186) stress the migrant's agency in the smuggling process, they mention the unequal power relationships between migrants and smugglers, making the migrant's position extremely vulnerable, with migrants ending up somewhere else than promised as a result.

for the restricted mobility and the vulnerability of asylum seekers during their flight to the West. Among the respondents there were those who came to the Netherlands after their request for asylum had been turned down in another European country. The relatively lenient asylum policy concerning Afghans in the Netherlands was also mentioned as a reason for coming here, as well as the positive image of the Netherlands as a free and democratic country. Koser's (1997b) finding among Iranian asylum seekers that their country of destination was largely defined by the restricted options that the travel agents offered and the chances that the refugees perceived for receiving a status and for integrating well in the Netherlands, also seemed to apply to several of the respondents. According to Koser (1997a) this decision-making process led to an 'unusual'⁸⁶ spatial dissociation' of asylum seekers from their social networks. There were respondents who first fled to a transit country like Iran, Pakistan or even India and there filled in UNHCR forms or sent letters to apply for asylum in Western countries. They usually went to the first country that responded positively and invited them to resettle, which in the case of two respondents was the Netherlands. This arrangement led to an 'unusual spatial dissociation' from their social networks as well.

There was one more factor that fragmented families: the chaos in which many respondents tried to get out and away largely threw them back upon themselves and their next-of-kin (see also section 3.3). In these circumstances family members had to take decisions quickly and they lost sight of each other, which is illustrated by the following quotation:

"When we left in the nineties the whole city was under fire. We could hardly say goodbye. In the chaos everybody fled in different directions. My parents went to Pakistan, and from there they appeared to have gone to the Netherlands as well. My husband and I remained in Afghanistan and came from there directly to the Netherlands. After twenty days we met each other once again in the Netherlands. An uncle in the UK brought about the contact. [...] My eldest brother is two years younger [than I am]. In the chaos of the nineties he went to Iran and from there to the US." (Ghazal, 37)

I have previously shown that families played an important role in facilitating respondents to flee, mainly in the sense of providing the necessary means, contacts and information. Thus the extent to which family members were able to flee to a safe and secure place in the West partly depended on the resources that their families had available. However, we also saw that these same social networks did not really determine the actual destination⁸⁷. This was due to a combination of the haste with which the refugees often had to depart, the fact that they handed over control to a travel agent, and the migration policies in the potential destination

⁸⁶ Compared with labour migrants.

⁸⁷ Nor the duration, length, or ease of the journey (Herman, 2006).

countries. This often resulted in a spatial dislocation of refugees from their social networks. In the next section I describe how the fragmentation of their families further intensified once the respondents found themselves in the Dutch asylum system.

3.5 Fragmentation through the asylum system

"What?" I say. "What's up?"

"Nothing."

"Yes there is, tell me."

Bashir tries to hide his face from me. He says: "I have to leave. I come here. I build up a life. Then you come. We build up a life. And then you have to leave again. They take away everything from us."

I get scared. I let go of the toilet door.

Bashir slams it, and closes the lock with a loud tap. "And I'm not going back", I still hear him say. "I'm never ever going back anymore."

From De Gelukvinder by De Vendel & Elman (2008)

We have seen in the former two sections how the families of the respondents were fragmentized and dispersed because of conflict, war and the necessity to flee. We have also seen how the pattern of dispersal varied, from respondents who were the only ones of their family in the West to respondents who had hardly any stay-behinds in their region of origin. But even being in the same relatively small country of the Netherlands did not automatically bring back the extended family life of the past. Respondents particularly mentioned the functioning of the asylum system as a factor that caused Afghan families in the Netherlands to fragmentize further after arrival.⁸⁸

"I arrived at Schiphol, in the Netherlands - I didn't even know where that was. My last 400 dollars and my passport I lost to people who supposedly wanted to help me change money. I walked through the streets, crying, until someone took me to the aliens police. There they arranged a telephone interpreter who explained that they would bring me to a 'camp'. I asked for my children immediately." (Farhat, 36)

What this quote illustrates is the emotional distress and turbulence with which most respondents arrived in the Netherlands, and the worries that many of them had about loved ones who they had left behind or lost sight of. The asylum system provided particularly little

⁸⁸ Respondents who came to the Netherlands as invited refugees received an asylum status upon arrival and were soon allocated a house of their own.

space to act upon these concerns, which was contrary to the need that respondents felt upon their arrival to be with people that were familiar in the unfamiliar situation they found themselves in. "I was looking for my family members like a bird looking for its nest." (Omar, 29) Some respondents were advised by their travel agent not to directly contact family members who stayed behind because it would endanger all concerned. But most respondents started to search for their lost loved ones soon after they arrived. Usually their prime concern was to re-establish contact with family members in the first and second degree, so the spouse and children, parents and siblings, thereby making use of contacts with other family members and compatriots. The yearly *Vluchtelingendag* [Refugee Day] in Apeldoorn, which *VluchtelingenWerk* [Refugee Aid] used to organize, was a popular event to look for familiar faces and to make inquiries. Another - official - route, which several respondents mentioned, was to hand in a tracing request at the Red Cross. Respondents also sent letters and made phone calls to acquaintances in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran in order to find lost relatives. However, the asylum system limited the agency of the respondents in several respects.

Firstly, there was the practical aspect of how the asylum system was organized. Respondents were accommodated in asylum-seekers' centres throughout the country, often at remote and isolated locations. This, added to the fact that they received little money⁸⁹ and were expected to report at the centre regularly, limited their opportunities to look for family members, to communicate with them, or to visit them elsewhere in the Netherlands. Additionally, the fact that most asylum seekers did not have a passport limited their possibilities to cross borders⁹⁰ in order to visit or to search for family members in another country.⁹¹ In sum, while we saw in the former section that the social networks of the respondents largely spread over different countries, respondents' practical, economic and legal means of contacting these networks - leave alone to exchange support - were minimal. What the asylum system did provide for was the possibility for asylum seekers to be housed outside the centres with family members in the Netherlands, via the ZZA arrangement⁹² and later via 'administrative placement' with a first-degree relative or the spouse who had come to the Netherlands earlier and had a residence permit and appropriate accommodation, which required having family members with a certain status and sufficient means. There were also

⁸⁹ On the other hand, Van Liempt and Doomernik (2006) state that the conditions in the Dutch reception centers were relatively luxurious compared to other European countries of destination (shelter, a weekly allowance, a one-off clothing allowance, recreational and educational facilities, access to primary and secondary education for minors, free medical care, and third party insurance) and that this added to the attractiveness of the Netherlands for asylum seekers.

⁹⁰ Asylum seekers needed a *laissez passer* and a return visa when they wanted to visit family members across borders, which were only granted in cases of humanitarian necessity, like a grave illness, death or the marriage of a first- or second-degree relative. (Visiting the country of origin was not allowed under any circumstances.) (Vluchtweb, juli 2009)

⁹¹ Which does not mean that this did not sometimes occur in secret.

⁹² Until 2002 it was possible for asylum seekers to arrange their own accommodation for which they received a modest allowance. In 2002 this arrangement ended for new applicants.

some exceptional cases in which asylum seekers were transferred to another centre because they had relatives there. Apart from these possibilities to be housed together, the opportunities to get together with family members in the Netherlands - let alone elsewhere - were limited.

Another fragmentizing effect of the asylum system was of a psychosocial nature: even if respondents had the possibility to communicate with family members elsewhere, there was the problem of what there was to say and to share. Particularly compared to stay-behinds, the respondents were in a relatively safe and secure position, in the sense that they did not fear for their lives and were being accommodated. But they still had their own problems. Respondents mentioned feeling homesick, having difficulties with living in an asylum-seekers' centre with many different cultures and customs, feeling threatened as a woman on her own in the centre, being moved constantly from one place to the next, and worrying about the outcome of the asylum procedure. But it was not easy to share these matters with the persons who remained in the unsafe and insecure situation that they themselves had escaped from. A respondent told about an Afghan friend in Germany: "She does not have a residence permit and never knows what will happen after three months. [...] The brother of this woman is in Iran and wants to come to Germany as well, but she does not want that. Every day she has to wait what will happen to her. She does not want that for her brother, his wife, and their five children. Every time she answers him: 'Stay there, it is a hundred times better [than coming to Germany]'." (Jamila, 45) In this case, the brother did not understand or accept his sister's advice and persisted that she should help him come to Germany too. The result was that the sister felt misunderstood and lonely in her difficult situation as an asylum seeker with a pending case.

In fourteen cases the respondents or their partner had arrived in the Netherlands while the spouse and (some of) the children remained behind in another country. While their asylum requests were being processed they were not entitled to family reunification⁹³, which postponed the reunion from less than a year up to seven years. Meanwhile they could not do more than keep in touch and send some money, while their stay-behinds were confronted with the general problems of refugees in the region of origin like a lack of security, a lack of employment, a lack of educational opportunities, and a lack of good and affordable health care. A respondent experienced how his son went missing in Pakistan while he was waiting for the outcome of his procedure, another respondent experienced how his daughter in Pakistan had died of an illness during this period of waiting. But also less dramatic situations were perceived as painful, like children not attending school and estranging from the parent in the Netherlands. The impossibility for respondents to act upon their concerns about stay-

⁹³ Between April 2001 and September 2002 also those Afghans who had received temporary protection were entitled to apply for family reunification, which led to a boom in applications.

behinds combined with an undetermined period of waiting was perceived as a very difficult situation to be in. A respondent said: "The insecurity in the [asylum-seekers'] camps is higher than in our own country. Because there what you expect from the government is zero, while here the expectancies are high and you do not get anything." There were examples of Afghan asylum seekers who decided not to wait any longer and returned.

But even if family members fled to the Netherlands together or at about the same time, this by no means meant that they would stay together.⁹⁴ Family members who were considered 'independent', like for instance adult children who were married, adult siblings who had earned their own living, and older parents who had lived on their own, had their own asylum procedure to contend with which in practice meant that they could receive a different outcome. This resulted in grief and tensions within several families. "My husband and my father arrived [in the Netherlands] in 2002, after the collapse of the Taliban regime. They had been in a Taliban prison until that moment. [...] My husband received a refugee status after their arrival. My father, who has gone through the same, did not. I think that is unfair." (Suraya, 35) Another respondent was no longer on speaking terms with his brother; his brother envied him for having a refugee status while he, his wife and children were threatened with expulsion from the Netherlands.

"My world has collapsed and I did not expect that after ten years in the Netherlands. That my father would be picked up just like that in order to be expelled." (Arita, in: 'Ik heb recht op mijn eigen rechten' [I am entitled to my own rights], 2008)

The asylum system also had a fragmentizing and individualizing effect on families that were confronted with a 1F-objection. In chapter 2 (section 2.3.3) we saw that in the first instance a residence permit was denied to all members of the nuclear family when during the asylum procedure serious suspicions had risen that the main applicant, who was in all cases the father, had committed war crimes in the country of origin. This changed in 2008, when the possibility was created for the wives and children of these suspected war criminals to apply for an independent residence status after ten years. The respondents who expressed their indignation about this arrangement particularly stressed that they believed that the accused heads of the households were innocent persons who had only worked for the government and should therefore be granted a residence permit together with their wife and children. "They were little fish, not big fish. They worked, for instance, for the administration of the secret service or the police, because they were poor and had to feed their children. The big fish got an A-status and Dutch nationality. How can it be that my friend [...] is a danger to public security?" (Sohail, 49)

⁹⁴ Only the partner and minor children were entitled to a refugee status together with the person who had been granted asylum.

A last fragmentizing aspect of the asylum system that was mentioned was the housing policy when respondents were entitled to a place of their own once they received a residence permit. In order to spread the 'burden' of accommodating refugees fairly over the country, the persons who had not found accommodation of their own - which was most of them - were distributed over all Dutch municipalities according to a quota system. They could thereby indicate a well-motivated preference for a certain region, and having family members in the first or second degree⁹⁵ was considered to be a legitimate motivation. But most asylum seekers did not want to wait much longer once they received a residence-permit, and were allocated to a municipality according to the quota system. The distribution system had a long-term effect because many persons became used to and remained entrenched in the place where they started their new life in the Netherlands and they lacked the economic means and professional opportunities to find a place elsewhere. "The policy in Holland is that refugees are widespread. There are Afghan families who live as the only Afghans in little villages. Sometimes the women are illiterate, and don't speak the [Dutch] language. They experience homesickness, stress and depression. I have a sister in Rotterdam, and my husband has a brother in Rotterdam. That's far [from Limburg]." (Mitra, 44)

To conclude, the asylum system in which Afghan refugees landed after their arrival in the Netherlands intensified the fragmentation process of their families that they experienced before and during fleeing from the country. The juridical set-up of the system was such that the focus was largely on the individual and the nuclear family members who came along, i.e. the spouse and dependent children. Family reunification was not allowed during the asylum procedure (except for those Afghans who had received temporary protection between April 2001 and September 2002). The organizational set-up of the system in terms of sober economic and housing facilities in combination with restrictions on the movement of asylum seekers (the duty to report, limitations on border-crossing) limited their opportunities to trace family members, to communicate with them, to be with them, let alone to provide them with support.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the alterations in the family structure that respondents experienced under the influence of conflict, war and fleeing the country. I have shown that a process of fragmentation took place, from respondents having intensive extended family

⁹⁵ The criterion of having second-degree relatives for indicating a preference for a certain region was abolished in 2003 (Vluchtweb, 2008, Introductie - uitplaatsing en woningweigerings).

contacts before war and conflict uprooted their lives to respondents finding themselves alone or as a nuclear family or a partial nuclear family in a Dutch asylum seekers' centre. The findings are in accordance with Williams (1990: 101) who states that the family life of refugees begins to be dramatically altered during pre-migration periods, and will continue to be exposed to multiple stressors after migration, which might further alter the structure and the roles of the family members. I will pay attention to the changing structure and roles of respondents' family life in the Netherlands in chapter 4. At this point we turn our attention to the aspect of control.

According to Williams (*ibid.*: 100) 'in addition to other multiple losses, the [refugee] family experiences a major power shift from internal to external control over future life decisions', or in other words a 'continued and/or heightened loss of autonomy and control'. A gradual loss of control is indeed what we saw reflected in the transformation process that the respondents sketched. First we saw how conflict and war had a fragmentizing impact on the extended family life that people used to experience. An example of an external factor that fragmentized families were the bombings of Kabul in the early nineties. Family members were wounded and killed, family members lost their homes and fled, and family members were unable to reach each other because the infrastructure had been destroyed and it was too dangerous to go out on the streets. However, people did not fully lose their agency; respondents also gave examples of the ways in which family members continued to help each other survive, including helping each other to escape. One could say that deciding to escape and organizing an escape is an act of regaining control. However, one could hardly speak of a choice when refugees felt compelled, for practical or financial reasons, to leave their loved ones behind when fleeing the country. We also saw that during the process of fleeing the country refugees were compelled to hand over control to the professionals or 'travel agents' who arranged the journey, and who in their turn were dependent on the migration policies in the different countries of destination. This resulted in many cases in an 'unusual spatial dissociation' (Koser, 1997) of refugees from their social networks. But the aspect of losing control was mentioned most explicitly in the situation of being an asylum seeker in the Netherlands. This is in accordance with what Ghorashi (2005) stated, namely that 'Dutch asylum policies that went into effect in the 1990s influenced newly arriving asylum seekers by preventing them from participating in society'. In the situation of frugality and dependency in which they found themselves, asylum seekers had few opportunities to maintain family relations due to the organizational and juridical set-up of the system. Thus, in accordance with Koser (2000: 99), I found 'a gradual isolation of the respondents from supportive social networks as they moved through the migration cycle from [Afghanistan] to the Netherlands'.

An assumption has been made in the literature that the separation of family members is always seen as a negative factor. This need not be the case, for instance family separation

may actually increase women's coping skills with regard to economic survival (Al-Ali, 2002). But in the case of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands the fragmentation and consequently the individualization and nuclearization of their family life was a process that was largely imposed upon them through negative experiences in a relatively short time. This is a very different process from the gradual emergence of the 'modern' nuclear family form in the West following the Industrial Revolution, whereby the structure changed from an extended to a nuclear one, and its primary function changed from social-institutional to emotional-supportive (Bengtson, 2001: 1). It is important to keep the violent and ad-hoc history of the transformation of their family structure in mind when in the next three chapters I explore the way in which Afghans in the Netherlands constructed and perceived a family life across borders. For now it suffices to say that the respondents sensed that their family life had changed fundamentally and that this could not be reversed. "We have exploded all over the world. Maybe it is - eventually - for the better. The future will tell." (Halima, 38)

Chapter 4: Family life in the household - Integration, negotiation and transformation

*I don't blame you
that the years kept us apart
One day we were lucky birds
Now we suffer from the same sorrow
I don't blame you
that life has confused us so
and that we are both lonely
I don't blame you
that once we could fly in the clouds
and now we are lost upon our journey
I don't blame you
that our guardian angel could not save us
and that we grew so far apart
(...)*

Nasrin Hamidi (2003)⁹⁶

4.1 Introduction

In the former chapter I described the transformation of the family structure that Afghan refugees experienced before, during and shortly after fleeing from their country to the Netherlands; from an extended family life to a family life that was mainly narrowed down to the nuclear family or what was left of it - which in several cases meant that respondents found themselves on their own. We saw how the asylum system limited refugees' capabilities to re-establish and maintain family relations in several ways. Therefore getting a residence permit for them meant regaining control over their own life, including their family life. A respondent described this as follows: "Only if you receive a residence permit is that a success you want to share. Until that time [you do] not [want to share]: then you are in a refugee camp, in a poor room, you cannot work, or you work illegally. [...] But at the moment you receive a residence permit everything is forgotten. You start calling your brother, your sister, to tell everybody

⁹⁶ Translated from Dutch.

that you have been successful." (Jamila, 45)

In this chapter I pay attention to the situation of the respondents once they had been given a residence permit and thus regained some of their agency regarding family life, but also found themselves as newcomers in a strange country. I thereby zoom in on the integration process of Afghans in the Netherlands and its impact at the household level in particular. Integration literally means 'the making into the whole' (The Concise English Dictionary, 1968) and I stick closely to this meaning by defining integration as the process of becoming part of the - in this case Dutch - society at large. In most studies that make use of the integration concept, a distinction is made between structural and cultural integration. Structural integration then refers to the participation of migrants in institutions of the receiving society, and particularly the institutions of education, the labour market, the social security system, and the housing market (Martens & Weijers, 2000; Davegos, 2001). Cultural integration refers to the orientation of migrants in the receiving society (Oomen, Driessen & Scheepers, 2003), or - more neutrally - their cultural orientation in general, whereby Davegos (2001: 13) distinguishes three aspects: the extent to which migrants have informal contacts with the native population and with their own group; the extent to which a group distinguishes itself regarding language, customs, norms and values; and identification with one's own group. Following Davegos (*ibid.*) I use the term socio-cultural integration in order to stress that I focus on both the social and the cultural orientation of the respondents. In this chapter I have operationalized the socio-cultural integration concept by distinguishing the following five themes: informal contacts and language; relationships between men and women; raising the children; marriages; and religion. The two main dimensions of integration, the structural and the socio-cultural dimension, are thought to interrelate (Oomen, Driessen & Scheepers, 2003: 293).

From the literature we learn that in migrant households particularly between genders and generations many tensions can arise because of the different ways in which family members integrate (see, for instance, Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Hofstede, 1991; Pels & Gruijter, 2005). The household is defined as 'a co-resident group of persons, who share most aspects of consumption, drawing on and allocating a common pool of resources (including labour) to ensure their material reproduction' (Schmink, 1984: 89). As we have seen in section 1.5 (Profile of the respondent group) 21 of the 28 respondents and respondent pairs lived in the setting of a nuclear family - which is defined as 'a couple and their dependent children'⁹⁷, regarded as a basic social unit' (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2005). Of the remaining seven respondents and respondent pairs, in two cases the husband and wife lived on their own while their children lived elsewhere, in two cases a single parent lived with her child or

⁹⁷ I interpret 'dependent children' broadly and also include unmarried children who have reached the age of majority and who still live at the parental home.

children, and three respondents lived on their own. In this chapter I refer to all respondents who co-resided as 'nuclear family members', in order to stress the fact that their households merely contained parents and their children - even though they did not in all cases constitute complete nuclear families according to the definition. Because of the intensity of the relations that co-residing family members had, it was in the first place within the household that the impact was felt of the fact that family members integrated into the new society in divergent ways; at this level fundamental transformations took place and corresponding tensions were perceived. Understanding these intra-household processes is essential for also understanding the wider picture of respondents' family lives. From a transnational perspective it is important to understand how in the respondents' lives the 'here', the integration process in the Netherlands, was interrelated with the 'there' (Mazzucato, 2008) - in this research the involvement with family members elsewhere in the West as well as in the region of origin. Therefore, before exploring these transnational relations in chapters 5 and 6, I now first pay attention to the household level.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. In section 4.2 I describe the structural integration of the respondents and their nuclear family members in the Netherlands concerning three aspects: education, work and housing. I also describe the tensions that arose because of the generational and gender differences in integration patterns. In section 4.3 attention is then paid to the socio-structural integration of the respondents and their nuclear family members with regard to five aspects that were mentioned as a cause of tensions within families: informal contacts and language, relationships between men and women, raising the children, marriages, and religion. In section 4.4 I analyse how Afghan households have coped with the transformations and tensions that they experienced. In section 4.5 I conclude with the implications that the findings regarding nuclear family relations have for the main research question. I particularly address the interface of the structural and socio-cultural integration and how this process resulted in gradual changes 'from within'.

4.2 Structural integration processes

In this section I focus on the participation of Afghans in institutions in the Netherlands, which is referred to as the structural dimension of integration. I pay attention to their educational position, their position on the labour market, their income (from labour and social security) and their housing situation. Generally, first-generation respondents perceived their own lack of structural participation in Dutch society as the most problematic aspect of their current lives and as the main cause of many other problems that they encountered. They particularly

mentioned problems with learning the language and with finding a job at their own level. Differences could thereby be perceived between men and women that were related to the educational level and socio-cultural roles. But particularly striking was the difference between the first generation and their children - the one-and-a-half and second generation -, who made great strides in terms of structural integration compared to their parents.

Because of the significant contrast between parents and their children regarding their educational and professional position, I start by discussing the position of the parents regarding education and work (4.2.1) and then discuss the structural integration of the children (4.2.2). In sub-section 4.2.3 the housing position of the families as a whole is then discussed. In the last sub-section (4.2.4) I analyse the impact of the different structural integration patterns on the relationships between, respectively, husbands and wives and parents and children.

4.2.1 Structural integration of the parents

4.2.1.1 Education

Baba loved the *idea* of America.

It was living in America that gave him an ulcer. [...]

For two years, I tried to get Baba to enrol in ESL classes to improve his broken English. But he scoffed at the idea. 'Maybe I'll spell 'cat' and the teacher will give me a glittery little star so I can run home and show it off to you', he'd grumble.

From The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini (2003: 125-127)

Most parents perceived learning the Dutch language as the most significant obstacle to finding a decent job in the Netherlands. Particularly the ones who had had a higher education often stated that they felt paralysed by this requirement which forced them to postpone their entrance on to the labour market: "My question to the Social Service was: 'What is my situation? What can I do here?' Their answer is: 'No, you first need to learn the language', up to level 2 or 3. But that is difficult for me. I forget the words. At 46 I am the eldest of the class. It's hard work." (Laila, 46) It also forced them to accept work beyond their own level, which caused indignation. "My husband feels deeply humiliated because he has to do work far below his level. The CWI [Centre for Work and Income] puts a lot of pressure on him, he constantly clashes with them. As a matter of fact, he clashes with everybody. Now they have offered him a job in the kitchen of an old people's home. He has told them that he prefers jumping from the eighth floor to working there." (Suraya, 35)

Another obstacle to finding a job at their own level was that it was difficult for

respondents to have their diplomas recognized. This could be because they had not brought the necessary papers or because the schools they had attended had closed down or changed names, or because their Afghan diploma was considered to be of a lower level by the Dutch authorities. "I studied pharmacy in Kabul. In the Netherlands I have tried to enrol in a study in that direction, but it was difficult to enter directly in the third year. Therefore I made inquiries about the training for a pharmacist's assistant, which is intermediate vocational education. I proposed to follow this training for one year, but I was obliged to do all three years. Therefore I gave up my plans for studying." (Mujib, 48) For adult respondents who had financial responsibilities for a nuclear family or for family members elsewhere it was difficult to invest money and time in a study instead of in making money. For instance, a respondent who had worked as a doctor in Kabul became a medical assistant in the Netherlands. He gave up the idea of partly restudying medicine because he had to pay for a mortgage, to provide for his three teenage children, and to send remittances to his family members in Afghanistan. Finally, there were working experiences which appeared to have little value in the Dutch context, like for instance knowing the Russian language or being an expert in Persian literature.

4.2.1.2 Work and income

My father answered an advert for a delivery boy in the Toronto Star and on his first day he held the pizza box tucked under his arm like a book. The toppings fell off. 'It took me an hour to find the house after asking police for directions and all sorts of people. The customers called the pizza store twenty times.' He didn't keep the job, needless to say. 'You aren't qualified for this', the manager told him.

From The Sleeping Buddha by Hamida Ghafour (2006: 102)

In line with the figures as presented in section 2.3.4 (The position of the Afghans in Dutch society), many first generation respondents did not succeed in finding a job at the level they envisioned, which meant that they received relatively low salaries or social benefits. For instance, a former politician worked as a security guard, a former political advisor did voluntary work for a small NGO, and a former jeweller worked in greenhouses. Some did not resign themselves to this situation and kept protesting, like a female respondent who had been a university lecturer: "Every week I have to go to [X], a municipal agency that positions people on the labour market. In my opinion it's no use going there every week, because every time I tell them the same thing. I need more Dutch classes so that I can deploy my capacities, which are many. But instead of that they offer me cleaning jobs." (Jamila, 45) Others tried to accept the situation, like a male respondent who had been a high school teacher in Afghanistan: "Our diplomas are not recognized, my experience as a teacher is not recognized.

That is normal, we are strangers here. I worked in a waste-processing firm. Again, that is normal when you are a stranger. But still" (Fahrid, 44) This man had great difficulties with learning Dutch, he did not reach the third level and was refused extra lessons. "I am now looking for a job, going to the municipality, the employment office, writing letters, it costs a lot of time. For myself I would be content with a benefit, but for my children I have to find work." All this goes to show the uneasiness and embarrassment that particularly the male respondents experienced about their situation. Another male respondent, who worked as a mechanical engineer in Afghanistan, said that he was content that his contract as a technician in a home for the elderly had been prolonged, "because at least I work in something technical". Others did not adhere to this criterion and readjusted their perspective completely. For instance, the respondent who had been a pharmacist in Afghanistan started running a market stall and a respondent who had studied economics became a systems manager. There were also respondents who seemed to have given up the perspectives of learning the Dutch language and finding a job altogether, which could bring them into trouble with the Dutch authorities. A female respondent who suffered from depressions used the interviews as an excuse to skip her Dutch classes and she admitted that she often invented excuses not to go, while her level declined.

It was also striking how several respondents had failed in the jobs that they had, for reasons that were not always clear to them. "I worked for the province. I'm a project planner. [...] But after two periods of six months the job stopped. And what can you do then? They told me that I was overqualified. But I just want to work, I don't get it. The province is not a company but it's the government: they can arrange a job, can't they?" (Asad, 50) It is difficult to put the finger on what went wrong when respondents were fired after having worked in a job for a period of time. Cultural differences might also have played a role, as was pointed out by one respondent: "Afghanistan has never been a colony. That stubbornness is an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time. It is difficult for Afghans to work under a Dutch employer. They are polite and friendly, but that can turn when they feel that they are treated in a lowly manner. They have their pride." (Nargis, 20)

In at least one case psychological problems added to a respondent being fired. These were often a mixture of adaptation problems and traumatic experiences that they had before, during and after they fled. This is illustrated by the situation of a respondent couple who waited eight long and anxious years before they received a residence permit via the general pardon. By that time they had both developed serious physical and mental problems and were declared unfit for work. The woman stated: "During the last year [before we received the permit] I hardly slept. I only worried about our situation and the municipality and the police. [...] Our life in Afghanistan was gloomy, and now our life in the Netherlands was gloomy too. The only thing I did was sit by the window site and stare outside." And when they finally

received their residence permit, memories from the past that had faded suddenly resurfaced: "Everyone has those memories. And they come to the surface when you are in a quiet situation, for instance when you sleep. Like the time that a mortar shell killed the people who were waiting in line for the water pump in front of our block of flats. Their flesh was all over the walls and the windows and the ground. That is something you never forget."

4.2.2 Structural integration of the children

I would enroll in junior college classes in the fall, I told Baba the day after graduation. (..)
'I think I will major in English', I said. I winced inside, waiting for his reply.
'English?'
'Creative writing.'
He considered this. Sipped his tea. 'Stories, you mean. You'll make up stories.' I looked down at my feet. 'They pay for that, making up stories?'
'If you're good,' I said. 'And if you get discovered.'
'How likely is that, getting discovered?'
'It happens', I said.
He nodded. 'And what will you do while you wait to get good and get discovered? How will you earn your money? If you marry, how will you support your *khanum*?'
I couldn't lift my eyes to meet his. 'I'll ... find a job.'
'Oh', he said. '*Wah wah!* So if I understand, you'll study several years to earn a degree, then you'll get a *chatti* job like mine, one you could just as easily land today, on the small chance that your degree might someday help you get ... discovered.' He took a deep breath and sipped his tea. Grunted something about medical school, law and 'real work'.
From The Kite Flyer by Khaled Hosseini (2003: 134)

The Afghan parents who struggled to find their position in Dutch society put high hopes on the educational and professional achievements of their children. And in fact many children succeeded in largely clearing the structural arrears that their parents sustained, which meant that they moved beyond the structural support and control that their parents were able to provide. The following statement by a father illustrates this process: "When my wife and sons arrived, I had bought a dictionary Farsi-Dutch for them. [...] During the first weeks my sons asked me all the time: 'What does this word mean, what does that word mean?' Chair, table, etcetera. [...] But soon they became too much for me." (Asif, 58) This was the experience of many Afghan parents, that their children quickly outgrew them regarding their command of the Dutch language as soon as they entered the educational system.

However, the older the children were when they arrived in the Netherlands, the more

problems they had with learning the Dutch language. An additional reason why some children had problems with learning in general was that they had not recently attended school, for reasons of economics, politics, safety, culture or a combination of those factors⁹⁸. Although the children first went to an intermediate class or school where they learned Dutch intensively, several of them indicated that their limited knowledge of the Dutch language remained an obstacle in the school for years thereafter. In a sense these older children had the same problem as their parents: they had considerable educational arrears compared with their peers in the Netherlands that were difficult to erase. The consequence was that they had to opt for a lower level than they aspired to or had to make an educational detour. Still, the resilience with which many children quickly worked their educational way up was impressive, like two teenage daughters who passed through all four levels of the Dutch language classes within the first year after their arrival and then continued with *VWO* [pre-university education].

Within the structural limitations that the parents perceived, they encouraged their children to do their best at school and to achieve good results. They tried to create the circumstances that would enable their children to perform successfully, like paying for the schoolbooks also if that meant not having the money to go on a return visit, planning visits and weddings around the school agendas of the children, and seeking contact with teachers if their children suffered from nightmares and depressions because of traumatic experiences in Afghanistan. Some parents said that they adopted a strict attitude when it came to school matters. A mother said: "I am not easy with school, they have to learn." Another mother checked her children's friends as to their qualities related to school performance: "The only thing I pay attention to is if my children's friends have a certain level, if they are smart. I don't care if they are Dutch or Moroccan, as long as they are not lazy and not only want to play all day."

However, the parental encouragement regarding school results easily turned into compulsion, especially when children were unable to live up to their parents' expectations. A young respondent said that many children kept their experiences at school to themselves and sometimes lied to their parents about their performances, because they became stressed and irritated by their parents' interference. Parents used their own educational experiences in Afghanistan as a frame of reference, which meant that university studies like medicine, engineering and law had a lot of prestige. It was difficult for parents who had a university background to accept that their children performed at a lower level or chose a type of schooling that was unknown to them. A young respondent stated: "My parents always wanted their children to go to university. But that was not *our* choice. And we fled at an age in which it was difficult to catch up with our [Dutch] classmates. [...] But every time my parents see

⁹⁸ The reasons of politics, safety and culture applied to girls in particular.

that another person has a son who studies medicine at university, they still have this feeling of regret." (Naheed, 24)

Regarding the gender aspect, among the respondents the fact that their children achieved a high educational level was deemed important for girls as well as boys. According to a young respondent who had many contacts with compatriots, in the Netherlands there were some parents, and particularly mothers, who did not see the value of their daughters going to school 'because they will marry anyway', but most parents reasoned differently. This reflects the fact that the Afghans who made their way to the Netherlands formed a relatively well-educated and modern segment of the Afghan population who further developed their own norms and values in the new context. Another example of the development of these diasporic norms and values was the fact that the children, also the girls, were allowed or even encouraged to take jobs on the side. Economic necessity was an important motive. For instance, the son of respondents who lived on social security worked part time as a waiter, which gave him the opportunity to go on holiday to Spain with his friends. A female respondent took her eldest daughters to several stores to find a job for them, because she and her husband needed the extra money to pay off the computer that they bought for the children. A young female respondent had three jobs on the side beside her studies, with which she paid for the remittances that her parents could not afford to send. However, the opportunities for Afghan girls to find work were limited by the fact that many jobs were considered inappropriate for them: for instance, jobs in places of entertainment like in bars or restaurants, jobs in the open air like delivering post or gardening, and also jobs in health care like nursing were mentioned.

Finally, when it came to finding a job after having finished their education, the children were largely on their own. This formed a huge contrast with the situation in Afghanistan in which it was very common to find a job via family members. A young respondent sketched her father's frustration about not being able to offer this kind of help to his children. "My sister started a flower shop. Getting a loan, starting a business, she did it all by herself, together with a friend. My father offered to do the bookkeeping and wanted to train himself in how the Dutch system works, but my sister didn't want him to. She didn't want him to be liable in case anything would go wrong, also because her friend was involved too. [...] Once my father became really angry and shouted: 'What do I still mean to you in this bloody country?'" (Nargis, 20)

4.2.3 Housing situation

[My brother] Bashir smoked much more than he used to do. There was a bitter smell around

his mouth, and only after a big row with Madar did he acquire the habit of lighting his cigarettes on the balcony. He only took evening and night shifts, and if he had some time off he went out. [...]

In fact we all acted a bit strange. For months we tried to fit into the small apartment the best we could. We puzzled, we shifted mattresses and machines. Roya and Navid slept in Padar and Madar's room, and Bashir used the couch.

From 'De Gelukvinder' by Van de Vendel & Elman (2008: 292)

The type of housing in which respondents lived was defined by their work and income situation in combination with the fact that they had arrived through the asylum system. At the end of the asylum procedure the respondent families were allocated a house (section 3.5), and considering the fact that they usually had a minimum income at that moment they then fell into the cheapest housing category. Most respondents have since moved but the options to find a better house were limited because of the low income that most of them had. They usually lived in rented flats or houses in disadvantaged areas. In the respondent group buying a house was an exceptional step that only three respondents had taken.

Regarding their housing situation, respondents addressed two problematic issues: the size of their houses and the ethnic composition of the neighbourhoods in which they resided. Regarding the first aspect, several respondents complained about their houses being too small for them to live in, let alone to receive guests.⁹⁹ This was evidently the case for a family with three teenage children who lived in an apartment of about 50 meters² with two small bedrooms. While the daughters shared a bedroom, the son slept on the couch in the living room. Especially respondents who had teenage children mentioned problems with the size of their house. A female respondent whose five children between 8 and 19 years old shared one bedroom told: "The children used to be very sweet with each other. Now it is more difficult, with the five of them in one bedroom, very difficult. One wants to listen to music, another wants to work on the computer, the third wants to sleep, the next has to do homework. The house is really too small." (Rona, 42) A young female respondent who lived with a family of five persons in a one bedroom apartment went to the public library daily to study there. The size and structure of houses in the Netherlands also strengthened the tendency that already existed among 'modern' people in Afghanistan that children moved out of the parental home when they married. In three cases unmarried sons had already moved out of the parental home.

Regarding the aspect of the ethnic composition of their neighbourhoods, several

⁹⁹ This often had to do with the fact that the holders of a residence permit were accommodated in a municipality according to the quota system before their family reunification had been realized, and therefore were allocated a house that was unsuitable for a whole family.

respondents had difficulties with the fact that they lived mainly among migrants, whom they classified as more traditional, less educated or less 'active', in the sense of being less willing to make an effort to learn the language and to find work. These respondents feared that they would be pulled down to the low status that their neighbours had in Dutch society and that their presence would have a negative effect on their children. For instance, a female respondent always kept her children inside the house because she did not want them to play with the Moroccan neighbour's children. And a male respondent said that he considered the type of neighbourhood they were living in as unworthy for him and his family.

In sum, most Afghan respondents lived in the lower ranks of the housing market and this could make them feel uncomfortable because of corresponding practical and social disadvantages and because they felt that they did not belong there - as refugees, as educated people, as 'modern' people, as former members of the upper class. At the same time these were the direct surroundings in which they lived their daily lives, in which the children went to school, etcetera. Especially for those who did not work and who had very limited economic means, these surroundings had an impact on their lives: they could be a source of contact and support as well as a source of isolation and frustration (see also section 4.3.1).

4.2.4 Structural integration and power shifts

4.2.4.1 Husbands and wives

I spoke to the doctor who had been so helpful to me.
'What is your husband's training? His profession?'
'He didn't manage to finish college,' I answered. 'In Afghanistan he worked as a clerk in court.'
'Has he learned any German yet?'
I shook my head. 'Not much'. By now I was almost fluent, although my grammar and sentence structure remained highly unconventional and colleagues at the lab were always correcting me. But at least I could make myself understood. 'He has had no time,' I explained. 'He has been taking care of our daughter. Now that I've arranged day care, he can start to get adjusted.'
'*Ach ja*. I will see how I can be helpful.'
A few days later, he had found work for Ibrahim in the loading department of the pharmaceutical company, moving boxes of medications from the factory to the trucks. (...)
From 'Behind the Burqa' by Hala and Sulima (2002: 117)

The former sub-sections provided several examples of Afghan adults - particularly men, but

also highly educated women - suffering structural status decline. Having to learn a new language from scratch, diplomas and former working experience not being recognized, being offered work beyond their old professional level, living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood; these were experiences that led to feelings of frustration and powerlessness, not only because of the relative material and professional loss that they suffered compared to their former situation in Afghanistan, but with that also the loss of power they suffered at the nuclear family level. The privileged and important position which they had occupied in Afghanistan, as educated and professional persons, as breadwinners, or as men, was largely erased in the new structure in the Netherlands. This undermined their ability to offer protection and provisions and with it their control over the situation. The children and sometimes also the wife grabbed the opportunities that the new structure offered them to advance, and thus they surpassed the men in terms of education, career, and income.

Generally, female respondents seemed to suffer less from structural discontinuity than the men, even when they were highly educated. An explanation for this can be found in the continuity of their social and caring role within the family, as is illustrated by the statement of a female engineer: "[My husband] is dissatisfied with the Dutch language course. He is also highly educated, a steel construction engineer, but there is little demand for that. 'This is no life', he says. I am usually satisfied. [...] I don't have as much money [as in Afghanistan], no house of my own, not what I had there, but I do have two beautiful children, work, my parents nearby, and social contacts." (Suraya, 35) This woman, who had a university background, had followed an administrative training course in the Netherlands and then started working as an administrator. Another woman, also trained at university level, worked as a volunteer at an old people's home which after a few months was changed into a paid job. Both women were aware of the lower level at which they worked now but also expressed their satisfaction with having a paid job and having amicable colleagues. These findings are in accordance with what 'has been widely demonstrated in numerous case studies, [that] women tend to be less conscious of status deprivation because of their responsibility for maintaining household routines' (Buijs, 1993).

The structural context of the Netherlands provided women with the opportunity to gain social and economic independence from their husbands and families that they could not have had in Afghanistan. This was for instance the case for lower-educated women from traditional families who were obliged by the Dutch authorities to attend language classes and who made new social contacts there. The same was true for women who were stimulated to follow an educational course and to find a job. Particularly the situation in which the woman achieved a better economic position than the husband could be a source of marital tensions and at the same time it offered women more room to negotiate, for instance to seriously consider divorcing. A respondent who talked about the high number of divorces that he

perceived among his compatriots in the Netherlands explained this phenomenon as follows: "In all cases the problem is economic. For instance: the woman reproaches the man with the fact that he sends money to his brother but not to her family. In Afghanistan the woman has no income and therefore no power. Here, for instance, the man as well as the woman is entitled to social security. Therefore the woman has freedom, and thinks: 'Why should I stay with this man?'" (Zahir, 19)

4.2.4.2 Parents and children

While for many parents the educational system amounted to a tough hurdle to clear in order to position themselves on the labour market, the same system was perceived as the most important provider of opportunities for their children. Parents projected their hopes and expectations on the educational achievements of their children, as is illustrated by the following statement by a highly educated mother: "The most important thing to me is education. I want that for my children as well, that they have a good education. [...] We have lost everything, and the only thing my children can achieve is through education." (Zahra, 37) The emphasis that the parents placed on the importance of education amounted to, on the one hand, encouragement and, on the other, pressure on the lives of the children. And the parents themselves had the paradoxical experience that they felt proud if the children succeeded but at the same time feared the loss of a close connection with and control over their children's lives.

This paradoxical experience started with the rapidity with which the children absorbed the Dutch language. A consequence of the fact that most children mastered the Dutch language much quicker and better than their parents was that a transformation of roles took place within the nuclear family. This is demonstrated by what happened during an interview with an older male respondent who had had an important position in Afghanistan. Because he felt unable to converse in Dutch, his son translated for him. But after a few questions the son took over and started to answer the questions himself. Back in Afghanistan the same son had only been allowed to sit back and listen when his father received guests and discussed politics with them. So, on the one hand, their knowledge of the Dutch language empowered the children in relation to their parents, like in the case of the son just mentioned who obtained a crucial role in the political network that his father maintained in the diaspora. On the other hand, it meant that they were given responsibilities that could weigh heavily on them. For instance, the eldest daughter of a female respondent always translated for her parents when they went to see their lawyer. Thus she was fully aware of the difficulties that her parents experienced in allowing their eldest son to come to the Netherlands. This daughter also helped her parents with the paperwork: "Yesterday we were working on the papers for more than three hours. M. [the daughter] was completely exhausted afterwards. She already had bags under her eyes because it was her exam week." (Saima, 34)

Because of the structural leap that most children took compared to their parents, the latter perceived a loss of control regarding the schools and studies that their children attended. Although some of them were highly educated themselves, it was difficult to get a grasp on the educational system that their children were in with its many directions. The fact that several respondents asked the researcher about the quality of certain schools or universities illustrates that they were interested in knowing but did not have the necessary means and contacts to find out. Several parents did not know which group level or type of high school their children were at. When asked which study his son was following in Amsterdam, a male respondent shrugged: "All these forms of trainings are too complicated for me." (Asif, 58) He then showed his son's visiting card which revealed that the son studied film- and television science. When the researcher asked why a female respondent did not join her eldest daughter on the open day of her new school, she answered reluctantly that she wanted to but that the daughter preferred to go with a girlfriend. "[A]nd my daughter speaks Dutch much better than I do. She has to enrol this week. But we don't even know how long this schooling will take." (Rona, 42) The other side of the coin was that the children had to find out many things for themselves. Thus, the daughter of a respondent planned to go to a certain ROC [regional educational centre], until she discovered that this was impossible because the school was located outside the city where her family lived and she was not allowed to travel on her own.

4.3 Socio-cultural tensions within the household

We now focus on the socio-cultural integration of Afghans in the Netherlands, defined as their orientation within Dutch society or - more neutrally - their socio-cultural orientation in general. According to Levitt (1998) migrants who participate more fully in society are more actively confronted with new things. To put it in other words, migrants who are more integrated are confronted more with the different practices and ideas of the host society. In these situations some migrants readjust their frames of reference in a pragmatic way while others, the 'purposeful innovators', creatively add and combine new practices and ideas in order to 'expand and extend their cultural repertoire' (Levitt 1998: 931). In both cases they bring home new practices and ideas. This can cause tensions in relations with nuclear family members who remain at a distance from the host society and therefore have not readjusted to new practices and ideas. In this section I present five socio-cultural themes around which intrafamilial tensions arose and negotiations took place: informal contacts, relationships between men and women, raising the children, marriages, and religion.

4.3.1 Informal contacts and language

A trickle of acquaintances arrived from Kabul [in Toronto] and my parents became friends with them quickly. On Saturday nights the men put on their suits, the women their makeup and stockings, and the children our best party clothes. They put on lavish buffets and listened to the music of Ahmad Zahir.

From 'The Sleeping Buddha' by Hamida Ghafour (2007: 103)

The aspect of which informal contacts Afghans in the Netherlands had was partly related to the structural aspects of education, work and income, and the housing situation. Formal contacts in school, at work or in the neighbourhood could lead to informal contacts; people first needed to get in contact with each other in order to choose whether or not to establish more friendly relations. Knowledge of the Dutch language and knowledge of the Afghan languages thereby defined to what extent Afghan parents and children were able to communicate with respectively non-compatriots and compatriots in the Netherlands.

4.3.1.1 Parents

We have seen in the section on structural integration (section 4.2) how the Afghans who came to the Netherlands as adults experienced difficulties in learning the Dutch language and finding a job, particularly at their former level. We also saw that most respondents lived in underprivileged areas. These factors diminished their opportunities to get in contact with native Dutch persons. At the same time many respondents expressed how they felt themselves to be different from other newcomers, which diminished the desire to build up friendly relations with people from other ethnic groups who were in the same classroom, the same workplace or the same neighbourhood.

Respondents who wanted to establish contacts with non-compatriots had to be willing and able to overcome several practical and cultural hurdles, like language differences, prejudices from both sides, and actual cultural differences. These differences could be trivial things. For instance, a female respondent said: "The neighbour's children always run in with their shoes on, and then I have to remind them that they have to take them off." (Saima, 34) They could also be more fundamental issues. A male respondent stated: "This [native Dutch] man asked me if I would drink a beer with him. He said: 'Two cups of coffee is fine, but then I long for a beer.' And he didn't like to drink alone." (Asif, 58) Asif was a practising Muslim who did not drink alcohol and he broke off contact with this man. Several respondents developed friendly relations with non-compatriots whom they first met in their professional status, like a lawyer, workers from *VluchtelingenWerk* [Refugee Aid], teachers of Dutch courses, social workers, nurses, etcetera. These were usually people who were familiar with

cultural variety.

However, respondents were also faced with rejections in their attempts to establish friendly relations with non-compatriots. Several respondents tried in vain to befriend their native Dutch neighbours and thereby sometimes received overtly hostile reactions: "My neighbours don't like foreigners. They never return our greetings and try to scare [our daughter] L." (Hussain, 28) An unemployed female respondent said: "I have a [native Dutch] neighbour who works. She leaves in the morning and returns at night. She doesn't seem to need any contact or help. She doesn't seem to need me. Then I don't need her either." (Jamila, 45) A highly educated female respondent who had travelled a great deal in the West said: "When I came here, I didn't have a problem with other cultures. [But] the deeper I get into this society, the more distance I feel. It is difficult for allochthonous persons to build up a friendship with autochthonous persons." (Zahra, 37)

In practice most informal contacts that Afghan parents had were with compatriots, which could be family members - nearby or further away - or non-relatives. But establishing contacts with non-related compatriots was also perceived as a tricky business. In chapter 5 the relationships between Afghans in the Netherlands and their family members and compatriots in the West are dealt with extensively. For now it suffices to say that when contemplating the contacts of Afghan parents in the Netherlands with their 'own group' as it is formulated in the cultural integration indicators of Dagevos (2001), I observed that respondents did not automatically perceive all compatriots as members of their own group. Instead they sharply distinguished between persons who they did and did not trust; between family members and non-family members, between people they knew and people they did not know, and between people of different political, social and ethnical backgrounds with whom they felt more or less connected. Contacts with compatriots thereby easily crossed national borders, even all the way back to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

4.3.1.2 Children

Children took part in the social life of their parents, and therefore also established relationships with family members and other Afghans nearby and further away. They joined their parents during visits, weddings and cultural events, not only in the Netherlands but also across borders. However, there were differences compared to parents concerning the form and intensity with which the children gave shape to contacts with compatriots. Parents indicated that because of the nuclearization of the family in the Netherlands, their children were not longer used to the practices of an intensive family life, like for instance having visitors all the time. There were also practical obstacles, like the fact that children needed space and solitude to do their homework. But children also had fewer opportunities to build up ties with relatives who lived far away because families did not have the economic or practical means to

communicate extensively at a distance. Most children mainly focused on a life in the Netherlands and mainly communicated with family members and compatriots who lived in the same surroundings. The language factor added to this development. Paradoxically, for the parents a lack of knowledge of the Dutch language formed an obstacle to having informal contacts with non-Afghans, while for many Afghan children a lack of knowledge of the Afghan language(s) of their parents formed a limitation for having informal contacts with compatriots.

The children who arrived in the Netherlands at a young age or who had been born there tended to speak Dutch better than 'Afghan'. There were parents who encouraged their children to speak Dutch at home. A highly educated female respondent who was fluent in Dutch spoke Dutch to her baby. Another highly educated female respondent said: "We don't have a satellite dish [for receiving Afghan channels], because my children badly need their Dutch." (Suraya, 35) Yet most parents perceived the fact that their children had difficulties with the Afghan language(s) as problematic, for two reasons. Firstly, it complicated their own communication with the children. Many parents felt forced to speak (partly) in Dutch with their small children while they felt awkward and incapable when doing so. Secondly, parents worried that their children would lose connection with other Afghans and with Afghanistan. Some respondents explicitly mentioned the option of a return to Afghanistan, and that the children had to be prepared for that. At several places in the Netherlands language classes in Dari and Pashtu were organized for children of Afghan descent. Still, in practice most children only learnt to speak an Afghan language, not to read and write it. This particularly influenced their opportunities to communicate with relatives who stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, because it meant that they could only have written contact (including Internet contact) with people who knew the Latin script and could write the language phonetically or who knew English. The Internet was also a popular means of communication among Afghan peers in the West. But it was more often the case that webcams were used and that different languages were combined - for instance that cousins communicated in Dari with the use of some words and expressions in English.

So what we see is that knowledge of an Afghan language was perceived as important for family contacts, especially with family members abroad, but that it was not essential for keeping in touch with Afghan peers in the West. Hybrid forms of communication came into existence, in which the Internet played an important role. On forums like [Afghan.nl](#) and [Afghansonline.com](#) divergent topics that were of interest to Afghan youngsters were discussed - in Dutch, English or a phonetic Afghan language. The Internet made it possible even for girls who mainly stayed at home to communicate relatively freely with their peers. This is an example of what Levitt (1998) calls 'new practices' that come into existence because migrants are incorporated within the structure of the host society. Another example of

hybridisation is that Afghan youngsters were looking for new ways to meet each other face-to-face besides the traditional occasions like weddings and cultural events, for instance by founding a youth association for Afghan boys and girls together. Thus the wish to get together with peers of the in-group took a gender-mixed form. I found this phenomenon particularly among youngsters who followed higher vocational education or a university study; in almost every Dutch university city there was an Afghan student association that did not only organize cultural events and charity activities but also leisure activities like sports and camping in which male and female students participated.

Besides the more or less intense forms of contact that the children had with compatriots, they also had an extensive social life outside their 'own group' because of the institutions of school and work in which they participated. This was the aspect that parents worried about most, because they did not have much overview of these contacts. Some parents expressed their concern about the contacts that their children had with children of other ethnic groups and seemed to be more in favour of them having contacts with native Dutch children. Two arguments were mentioned: having contacts with Dutch children would help them to learn the Dutch language, and parents did not want their children to become tarnished with the same poor status that they ascribed to children of some other ethnic groups. A respondent's sister said: "I don't want my daughters to go to after-school child care. Too many differences are not good. At my daughters' school there are only a few Dutch children. The others are Turkish, Moroccan, Yugoslav, African etcetera. Therefore I let them come home straight after school and I do a lot with them myself." Whether the peers that the children met at school and at work were mainly allochthonous or autochthonous children depended on the neighbourhood they lived in and during their high school years also on the type of school they attended. For instance, children who lived in small villages or who attended higher school types like *HAVO* [higher general secondary education] and *VWO* [pre-university education] had more contact with autochthonous children than children who lived in the cities or who attended *VMBO* [lower secondary professional education] and *ROC's* [regional educational centres]. For instance, an 11-year boy in a village joined the local scouting group where he was the only allochthonous child. And an 8-year old boy in a city who echoed his parents' negative perceptions of Moroccans proudly told about his best friend in primary school, who also appeared to be a Dutch Moroccan.

For Afghan children, establishing contacts with children of other ethnic groups was sometimes more appealing than relating to autochthonous Dutch children because they had more in common in terms of culture, religion, and their socio-economic situation. A young respondent indicated that she did not feel at ease with her native Dutch fellow students at university. She felt that they were only interested in going out and having relationships, which she perceived as superficial behaviour. She also felt discriminated against because of the

remarks they made about Muslims. Therefore she sought alliances with the few allochthonous fellow students following the same study, who were mainly Dutch Moroccans. The son of a respondent explained why he felt more at ease with a friend from Bosnia than with other youngsters: "The others don't understand that I sometimes feel bad. They don't understand when I tell them that I have seen people with their limbs torn off or that I had to hide for the bombings." According to a young respondent, for some children their parents prohibiting them from relating with children from other ethnic groups was in itself a reason to act rebelliously and to establish these friendships on purpose.

Parents had more influence on the relationships that their children maintained after school and work hours. Many girls were expected to be at home if they did not have school or work to go to. Most girls were not allowed to go out at night at all, and if they did they were expected to come home early. Generally, boys had more freedom to go their own way, for instance to play outside, to go into town with friends, to go out at night, to go on holidays. To illustrate this: A female respondent did not want her daughters to attend the children's programme at the community centre during the holidays, because it involved dancing and because she did not want them to mix with girls from other ethnic groups, mainly Moroccans. Her son, however, was allowed to join a football club which also mainly consisted of Moroccan-Dutch children. But even though boys had more opportunities to meet different people and even to have relationships with the opposite sex, at the end of the day most parents wanted their daughters, as well as their sons, to marry a respectable compatriot (see section 4.3.4).

4.3.2 Relations between men and women

Yasin came to visit us the following Saturday, together with Helga and the children. The brutal cold of winter was behind us and we were savouring the warm April sunshine. We were sitting outdoors on the grass. Ibrahim and Yasin were sipping from bottles of beer and talking in low voices while Helga and I were playing with the children.

Suddenly Yasin's voice was loud and sharp. 'We know who the real man in your family is.' He took another swallow of beer and pointed to me. 'She does everything. She talks German. She works in a university. She finds you a job. She is smart. You' - he pointed at Ibrahim - 'you are nothing but a *zancha*. Still the *bachay nana*. Fortunately, in the household, I am the man. My wife is not smart. She is stupid. She does not go out of the house to work at fancy university. She cleans and cooks, which is all she's good for.'

From 'Behind the Burqa' (2002: 117) by Sulima and Hala

The relationships between men and women within families changed drastically after coming

to the Netherlands. An important transformation was that the dispersal and nuclearization of the family forced husbands and wives to fall back on each other more than they were used to in Afghanistan. This was illustrated by the situation of Asif (58) who used to live in Kandahar in a large house with his wife and sons, his parents, his brothers and their wives and children. The women and children used to live and chat together in the big kitchen while the men used to sit and chat in the dining room. And during the day Asif would be on the go at the service station that he ran with his brothers. But in the Netherlands he and his wife lived alone in a flat; their sons had moved out and lived on their own. They did not have any relatives or friends nearby and did not have money to visit family members who lived further away. At a certain moment their telephone was cut off because they could not pay the bill. This limited their possibilities to communicate even further. As Asif felt that he and his wife were too old to go to Dutch classes and they did not have a job, they usually stayed at home where they quarrelled constantly.

However, not all couples found it difficult to be detached from the former extended family life, in which the women's world existed largely separate from the men's world. Particularly for women, living apart from their mother-in-law was often perceived as a form of liberation, as mothers-in-law were said to heavily influence their sons and their sons' marriages.¹⁰⁰ There were also men who enjoyed the lack of interference in their nuclear family life and whose family role gradually changed in the Netherlands. For instance, they did more in the household than would have been usual in Afghanistan; they spent more time with the children, helped their wives with the shopping, and sometimes cooked or cleaned. A combination of factors procured this transformation: men spending more time at home, wives having more activities outdoors, not having other female family members - or servants - around, and the fact that it was more accepted in the Netherlands that men did these chores too.

However, many men experienced difficulties with the transformation of roles that took place in their families. The fact that their role as the protector and provider was seriously affected in the Netherlands also brought into question their traditional right to take final decisions. For instance, Saima's husband had great difficulties with learning the Dutch language. After completing two internships he was not able to find a paid job. Although Saima had had fewer classes, her knowledge of the Dutch language was better than that of her husband. She actively practised with her children and made an effort to talk to other villagers even though she knew she made mistakes. This resulted in her taking the lead in contacts with the outside world, like the doctor, her children's teachers, the municipality, and the

¹⁰⁰ The other side of the coin was that the social position of elder women, who traditionally held an influential and esteemed position in the extended family, often declined after coming to the West because of the dispersal of their children.

neighbours. Meanwhile she resented the fact that her husband behaved passively and did not help her at all. He spent his days at home, sleeping late, listening to the news, watching TV, and he fled the house when the children came home from school because he could not stand the noise they made. This example illustrates that not being able to provide for the family financially had a huge impact on the self-esteem of male respondents. Saima's husband responded to this situation by withdrawing into himself. Another response was that men tried to restore their position of power by oppressing their wife, as we saw Ibrahim's brother Yasin do in the fragment above. Men then became irritable and sometimes behaved in an aggressive fashion. This aggression could be enhanced by traumatic experiences in the past; for instance, a respondent's brother-in-law who had been imprisoned by the Russians started being haunted by memories years later to such an extent that he was no longer able to work and 'exploded' at home from time to time. Another respondent described how her husband had become very fundamentalist after coming to the Netherlands and intimidated her and the children. She explained that it was a combination of the Taliban influences that he had been under when he was imprisoned in Afghanistan and the lack of control and dignity that he perceived in his living situation in the Netherlands. A third reaction was that men gradually accepted the transformation of roles, as in the case of Mujib (48) who partly took over the role of caretaker from his wife who was following her last internship on the way to becoming a doctor: "[My wife] was very insecure, but I stimulated her. I said to her that the training in Afghanistan hadn't been easy either; you have to take many exams there so you must be talented. I was prepared to stay at home and take care of the children when they came home from school, so that she could study."

Not only the role of the man as the provider was undermined in the Dutch context, transformations also took place in their role as a protector. In Afghanistan it was common that women needed male protection, a *mahram* [a close male relative] to go out in public; during the Taliban regime this was even official government policy. In the Netherlands this was different; female respondents moved around more freely. Even the more traditional women went out on their own to do the shopping, to pick up the children from school, to go to Dutch classes, or simply to get some fresh air. But the limitations on their freedom were still formed by their own and their compatriots' perception of what was honourable behaviour for an Afghan woman. If an Afghan woman had behaved in a way that was perceived as dishonourable, for instance if she had been in the company of a strange man without supervision, and this conduct came out, the male family members had failed in their role of defenders and shame was brought upon the whole family. Usually these situations were resolved by negotiations between the families concerned, which, for instance, resulted in the girl marrying the boy with whom she had been seen. But a satisfactory solution was not

always found, and there were cases in which women were banished from the family or were even killed. This is what happened to Farda Omar and her mother Letiva in Ruurlo who were murdered by Farda's husband Ahmad Q. in 2003 because she ran away from home to escape domestic violence (see Van der Zee, 2006). However, the Dutch judicial system condemned these forms of taking the law into one's own hands, and offered protection to victims while perpetrators run the risk of being prosecuted and sentenced.

The combination of Afghan men partly losing their role as protectors and providers and the Dutch Government partly replacing these roles by offering economic security and protection against violence gave women the possibility to at least consider the option of a divorce and a life on their own. "My husband is being negative all day. It makes me tired and crazy. A while ago I had decided to get a divorce; it seemed like the only way out. [...] Now I want to set him a deadline by which to change." (Ghazal, 37) This example shows the tensions within families and the empowerment of women: women complained that their husbands behaved in a domineering way towards them, while men lamented the fact that women had too many rights in the Netherlands. For instance, an important difference with the situation in Afghanistan was that in case of a divorce the children were usually assigned to the mother.¹⁰¹ However, the consequences for women - and their children - of pushing through a divorce were harsh. It often meant social exclusion, because by their act they had shamed their husband, their family, and Afghan culture. And for their children it meant that the possibility of finding a suitable marriage partner decreased significantly. While among divorced men it was common practice to re-marry, in many cases with a young relative from their region of origin, divorced women in most cases remained alone with the children. A female respondent explained that she had been through so many hardships in her marriage that she did not dare to remarry. "I feel too vulnerable." (Farzana, 38)

4.3.3 Raising the children

My brother Omar is one of those people everybody looks up to. On his very first day at an American high school, a girl left him a note with her phone number and the message 'Call me' under the windshield wiper of his car. 'This girl left me a note. What should I do?' Omar asked my dad. 'Come back to Afghanistan over summer break,' my father answered immediately. (It was more of an order than a suggestion.)

From 'Come Back to Afghanistan' by Said Hyder Akbar (2005:14)

¹⁰¹ Under Islamic law, provisions on parental authority determine that fathers are the natural guardians of their children. In the case of divorce, mothers are usually granted physical – but not legal – custody of the children until they reach the age of custodial transfer. At that time, children are returned to the physical custody of the father or the father's family. (<http://genderindex.org/country/afghanistan>)

Although Afghan parents cherished the educational and professional opportunities that their children had in the Netherlands, most of them had difficulties with the norms and values that their children encountered in the same context. Particularly the lack of respect, especially toward older people, and the freedom that children had, in particular regarding relationships and sexuality, were mentioned as negative aspects of Dutch culture. The cultural contrast was so great that even those parents who had been rather progressive parents in Afghanistan (in the sense of giving their children a say and encouraging their daughters to develop intellectually and professionally) used a rather conservative educational style as seen from a Dutch perspective.

Several respondents stressed the importance of their children being respectful and obedient toward older people in general and their parents in particular. During the fieldwork visits most children indeed behaved obediently and respectfully: they sat still and kept quiet when their parents talked, they only answered when they were asked a question, they did not interrupt the conversation, or they withdrew to another room. However, some young children who had been born in the Netherlands - or just before arrival - behaved more curiously and were outspoken and playful toward the interviewer. A male respondent said half ashamedly and half proudly about his four-year-old daughter: "She says everything to everybody." (Karim, 38) Several respondents distinguished between children who were raised in Afghanistan and children who were raised in the West: they thought that the former were stronger and more mature because of their experiences in Afghanistan. A young respondent said: "War, work, prison, fleeing. Then you grow up more quickly than Dutch children - they are more naive. [...] The problem starts with the [Afghan] children who have been raised here." (Zahir, 19) With 'the problem' he meant behaviour like smoking, using soft drugs, and living according to a free sexual morality.

Some parents indicated that they felt frustrated by what they perceived as a lack of respect that their children showed toward them. A mother said: "Here my children say: 'I am 18, so I am entitled to ...' When I was 18, I didn't use such words. I *still* feel a child of my mother! And therefore I will never use such words. But my youngest son says to me: 'You want this but I don't want that.' The education is very different here. [...] In Afghanistan the parents are always right, here they aren't." (Mitra, 44) So, although Afghan children would not argue with their parents in public or when they had guests, behind closed doors discussions and disagreements between children and parents took place that were unheard of in Afghanistan. Not all children started a discussion with their parents; an opposite strategy was to avoid questions by the parents as much as possible and to go their own way. Sons sometimes moved out to create the space to do their own things without parental interference. For daughters this was hardly ever an option. An older female respondent stated: "Here in the Netherlands daughters are better! Here the sons just go away. The daughters stay with their

mother and are nice to her." (Nuria, 55) Parents attributed their children's rebellious behaviour to the egalitarian atmosphere in the Netherlands and the fact that the children had much more knowledge in the Netherlands, also concerning their rights.

Parents who had daughters experienced specific concerns. The Afghan notions of how girls should behave and particularly the notion of retaining honour seemed to clash with the liberal and sexualised Dutch context. During an interview the researcher was discussing with the parents where they preferred to live, in Pakistan or in the Netherlands, while their two teenage daughters silently listened to the conversation. When the researcher asked the girls how they felt about the issue, the father answered for them: "Afghan girls always do as their parents tell them." (Abdullah, 49) Indeed, daughters were expected not only to do their best in school but also to behave in a modest way, to listen to their parents, and to help their mother. They were also expected to behave in a honourable way; they were expected not to have any relationships before marrying and to behave in a way that would not even give rise to any suspicions in that direction. Most parents protected their daughters' honour by exercising strict supervision over their lives. But not all parents agreed on how far they should go to protect the honour of their daughters. A female respondent said: "My husband has become stricter. For instance, he did not want our daughter to go to school camp. I had to fight to let her go. In Afghanistan I have devoted myself to the cause of women, and now [in the Netherlands] I had to do the same thing for my own daughter!" (Suraya, 35)

Tensions could also arise between sisters and their brothers regarding the position of the girls, for two reasons. Firstly, some girls perceived it as unfair that they had less freedom and more household tasks than their brothers. During a research visit a young female respondent proudly pointed to her brother who was taking the dirty dishes to the kitchen and said: "In Iran he never did this. There he remained seated and asked me for a glass of water. [...] He has changed because I tackle him as to his conduct every day." Secondly, brothers had the task of protecting their sisters or, in other words, checking on them. For example, a young female respondent who went to a public lecture at her university one evening was called several times by her brothers to check on where she was, with whom she was, and at what time she would come home. But sisters did not always accept their brothers' interference in their lives, and this could lead to arguments. In 2002 this led to a case in which an 18-year old Afghan boy in Spijkenisse repeatedly stabbed his 15-year old sister with a potato peeler. According to the police the two argued about the girl's lifestyle (NRC, 29 September 2003).

In spite of the protection and control that was exerted on their lives, some girls succeeded in having a relationship without their parents' knowledge. They evaded the social control of their relatives and benefited from the fact that they knew their way around in Dutch society better than their parents. For instance, they communicated over the Internet or by mobile phone and met their loved ones in another city. Yet, they were very careful not to

expose their affair. More in general, there were young women who - in a careful way - were pushing the limits of what their compatriots thought to be decent behaviour for an Afghan girl. The following example illustrates the balancing between new freedoms and old values. At a conference on the situation in Afghanistan a young woman drew much attention by dominating the discussion that was mainly attended by older men. However, she did not allow the conference photographer to take a picture of her "surrounded by strange men" because such a photo would provide fuel for gossiping.

Even though Afghan boys were usually allowed more freedom than girls, some parents also worried about losing grip on their sons' lives. Their fear was not related to losing honour like in the case of the girls, but to their sons going astray and doing 'bad things' like playing truant, smoking, using alcohol or drugs, or even committing criminal acts. A young female respondent stated: "My youngest brother has a very open attitude; he doesn't care a lot about school. He doesn't listen very well to my parents. If my mother says that he can't leave the house, he sneaks out anyway. [...] For my parents it is difficult sometimes, the Dutch freedom. In Afghanistan they only needed to raise an eyebrow and the children would listen." (Naheed, 24) In practice this young woman mainly took over the education of her younger brothers from her parents; she was the one who negotiated with them concerning what time they would come home and who checked if they had not drunk too much and had not smoked. The fact that she had knowledge of the Dutch society in which she went to school, worked in several jobs and went out, gave her the capacity to guide her younger siblings while her parents could not. The incapacity that some parents perceived in adjusting their children's behaviour led to tensions and also to violence in families. How difficult the home situation could become was illustrated by the case of the son of a respondent who left his parents' home after many arguments and maintained a difficult relationship with them thereafter, until at a certain moment he took his own life in the hallway of the block of flats where his parents lived.

4.3.4 Marriage

When Diwa turns sixteen, her parents announce that she will marry her cousin. He is fourteen years older and she has never met him before. She is completely dumbfounded. As a child of highly educated Afghan refugees in the Netherlands she has had a relatively free rein. And now her parents suddenly come up with marriage plans.

Diwa refuses because she does not know the man. She thinks he is too old and does not want to get married. She wants to study. Her parents offer a younger cousin as an alternative. She again refuses, but her parents do not accept this. They exert more pressure on her and make

her world increasingly smaller.

She used to be able to go out with male and female friends, but now that is suddenly forbidden. They take away her mobile phone, because she was said to call boys. She is not longer allowed to decide which clothes to wear. If she wants some exercise, her ten-year old brother must accompany her. After a torrent of abuse by her father, who wrongly accuses her of lying about her work schedule, she cannot endure the situation any longer and runs away from home (Van der Zee, NRC, 28/29 October 2006).

Parents saw it as an important task to find good marriage partners for their children. They at least expected that their opinion about the suitability of a potential spouse was taken seriously and that they played a formal role in the decision making process. Potential marriage partners were judged according to a combination of familial and personal characteristics. Education and profession, behaviour and looks were taken into account, as well as the status of the family. The formal role that parents had in the arrangements differed depending on whether a daughter or son was concerned: the parents of a son were supposed to assume an active role and approach the parents of a suitable girl with a proposal, while the parents of a daughter were expected to await the proposal and consider it.

For most parents it was unthinkable that their children would marry a non-Afghan.¹⁰² A female respondent said: "My daughter has to stick to her culture. Other mothers at school tell me about problems with mixed relationships, for example a Dutch boy and a Moroccan girl. Therefore I want my daughter to marry an Afghan." (Halima, 38) Marriages between Afghan children and partners from other ethnic groups, including native Dutch persons, did occur but were very rare, especially for Afghan girls.¹⁰³ This meant that children had to resort to the widely dispersed Afghan diaspora to find a marriage partner or to their compatriots who stayed behind. Many parents worried as to whether they would find suitable marriage candidates for their children, because they had lost their former circle of acquaintances when they fled. In the new circumstances it was more difficult to value the family background of potential marriage partners. A female respondent told me: "For my daughter N. there have been proposals. A family from [this city] has come by. But we didn't know them and therefore I've said 'no'. They say they are from Kabul, but I couldn't place them. I also inquired via others, but no one knew them." (Rona, 42) Therefore arranging the marriage of their children with family members in the West was an attractive option for the parents, who in many cases had married a cousin or second cousin themselves. This is what Charsley (2007) described as

¹⁰² Although a partner from a culturally related country like Iran, Pakistan or India was also acceptable in some circles.

¹⁰³ In the case of young Afghan men, it was expected that the bride would embrace the Islamic religion. In the case of young Afghan women, marrying a non-Muslim was perceived as disloyalty towards their religion and culture.

the risk management of transnational families via cousins marrying. A young female respondent who was engaged to her cousin in Germany concisely formulated the advantage of this arrangement as follows: "We already know each other." (Zarmeena, 20) While parents were happy with the possibility of arranging a marriage within the family, the children sometimes felt differently. The daughter of a respondent said: "I can't even think of marrying a cousin. With them I really have the feeling of them being my brothers. No, it doesn't appeal to me at all."¹⁰⁴

The extent to which the parents determined or influenced their children's choice of partner varied a great deal. In some cases children were confronted with a *fait accompli* regarding with whom they would marry; sometimes these arrangements were settled before they were even born. In most cases children had a say though; sons indicated which girls they liked, and girls indicated what they thought about the candidates that came along. The Internet has given children more autonomy in finding a partner of their own choice; more and more Afghan youngsters in the diaspora have met via Afghan chat and dating sites, after which they asked their parents to arrange the commitment formally. However, in many cases parents still had the final say and children who deliberately went against their parents' wishes ran the risk of being banished from the family, and sometimes even worse. This was illustrated by the case of the 16-year old Afghan girl Sudobe who was engaged to an Iranian boy but started a relationship with a Moroccan boy and ran away from home. This - and the fact that it came out in the open - finally led to her death when her father strangled her in the presence of her mother (Van der Zee, 2006).

So the question was usually not if the children would marry an Afghan - or culturally related - partner, but from which family and when. For girls the age between 18 and about 25 was seen as a good marriageable age, while it was perceived as positive if the boy was a few years older so that he would be better able to "take care of his responsibility". Most children lived under their parents' roof until they married, because "18 years of age is not important in Afghanistan. Children are children until they marry." (Asad, 50) But among sons it was becoming more habitual to find a place of their own. There could be quite some time, up to several years, between the engagement and the marriage. A reason often mentioned was that the fiancés first had to finish their studies "so that they can secure their future". Another reason was that money first needed to be saved for the wedding.¹⁰⁵ These two reasons - getting a diploma and saving money - coincided if the parents had limited economic means, because then the children had to work and save money for the event themselves.

Marriage was perceived to have the most impact on the girl, for several reasons.

¹⁰⁴ The argument of seeing cousins as their brothers was raised by several young women as a way of politely brushing off unwanted marriage proposals from within the family.

¹⁰⁵ An Afghan wedding in the Netherlands easily costs a few thousand euros.

Firstly, girls were expected to move to their husband's home after the wedding, which could be at his parents' home and in another country.¹⁰⁶ Secondly, women were expected to adjust themselves to their husband's wishes and to the new situation. A young woman said: "If I marry, I cannot remain myself anymore. I will have to change a lot, to adapt a lot, and I'm prepared to do so." (Zarmeena, 20) Lastly, it was uncommon to postpone having children after the wedding - and women usually had the primary responsibility for raising the children. In other words, the general notion was that the life of girls would change drastically after the wedding and that the needs and wishes of the husband and children would have a prominent role in their lives. Therefore some young women tried to postpone marriage until they had realized other plans, like following an internship in Afghanistan or setting up a development project.

Several respondents pointed to discrepancies between Afghan boys and girls in their expectations about marriage. A female respondent showed a photo of her four beautiful nieces in Germany, dressed in evening gowns, and said: "None of them are married. And they are about 25 years old. It's difficult to find a good husband in Germany. One who doesn't leave all the work to his wife and does not beat her. And the clothes that the girls are wearing are normal here in the West. But Afghan men in Germany prefer a girl without make-up in traditional clothes who obeys them." (Rona, 42) Another respondent pointed to the fact that many men did not like their wife to be more highly educated than themselves. A strategy of Afghan men in the West to find a more traditional wife was that they looked for a girl in Afghanistan or Pakistan, for instance via their parents or when they went on a return visit. The parents of young Afghan women who went on a return visit with their family were usually also showered with marriage proposals by relatives. But girls seemed less keen to relate themselves to a husband from Afghanistan. "When I saw the men in Afghanistan, I thought that the [Afghan] men here weren't that bad after all. The men there were much worse!", said a young female respondent. Apart from the practical barriers like sorting the paperwork and meeting the income criteria¹⁰⁷ that were set by the immigration policy, other concerns that women mentioned were the fundamentalist attitude of many men in Afghanistan and women's fear of only being used as a means to enter Europe. However, if women had passed the age of 24 or 25 without being married, their chances of finding a spouse in the diaspora diminished and marrying a man from the region of origin became an option. The fact that these older women had usually completed a good education enabled them to meet the immigration

¹⁰⁶ Therefore the girl's departure from her parental home was a symbolic and tearful moment in the sequence of wedding rituals.

¹⁰⁷ They had to earn an income from employment which was at least equal to the social security level for couples, and in 2004 this was increased to 120% of the minimum wage. Before 2000 an income from certain allowances was also accepted. (The requirement of adequate housing was abolished in 2000.)

requirements for a groom to enter the country.

4.3.5 Religion

"My religious views have also evolved and changed over the years. I have stopped covering my hair. Religion has become something deeply personal. It is so embedded in my soul that I no longer feel a need to show everyone that I'm a Muslim by wearing a particular kind of clothing. Islam is what lives in my heart, not what I wear on my head."

From 'Behind the Burqa' (2002) by Sulima and Hala

In Afghanistan religion was an inextricable part of daily life. Even though the extent to which people practised Islam differed - starting with a gender difference between the women who did not have a public role regarding religious matters and the men who did -, life was absorbed with religious elements, like the rituals during weddings and funerals, the celebration of several Islamic public holidays, the dress code for women, the schooling of the children, the *sharia* family law system, etcetera.. Although the way in which people practised religion differed enormously, from Sufism to orthodoxy, and religious differences formed one of the causes of violent conflict, religious elements were present to some extent in everybody's lives and thus formed part of what people perceived as the Afghan culture.

The naturalness of Islamic religion in daily life disappeared when Afghans came to the Netherlands, and therefore they had to reconsider the role of Islam and Islamic practices in their lives. The way in which Afghan respondents experienced and dealt with their Islamic background was diverse, even within families. For some it meant that they took the space to dissociate themselves from Islam (even more). There were respondents who had rejected religion completely, because they did not believe in God or because they saw Islam as an instrument to oppress women. At the other end of the spectrum there were respondents with a traditional background who retained most of their religious customs, like the women wearing a veil and the men going to the mosque¹⁰⁸.

Most respondents chose to preserve some Islamic elements in their lives while leaving out others. They had what they called a 'liberal' or 'moderate' attitude and consciously dissociated themselves from what they called the 'fundamentalists'. Many had bad memories related to Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan, because their families had suffered from harassment or violence from the side of the Mujaheddin factions or the Taliban. At the same time they cherished religious elements that they saw as part of the Afghan culture, like the fasting and praying during the Ramadan, the festivities of the *Eid ul-Fitr*, and the religious

¹⁰⁸ Which is usually not an Afghan mosque as there are only a few Afghan mosques in the Netherlands.

aspects during weddings and funerals. These were aspects that parents wanted to pass on to their children, while there was also certain behaviour that they wanted their children *not* to adopt, like drinking alcohol and eating pork, being rude to their parents, or daughters being 'improperly' dressed in clothes that are considered too tight or revealing. Though these aspects were related to their Islamic background, they were generally framed and discussed in cultural terms. For instance, a female respondent did not argue that the tight clothes that her daughter was wearing were the wrong choice because they were un-Islamic but because they were "against Afghan culture". And another female respondent mentioned the discussions that she had had with her sisters-in-law about whether or not Afghan women were required by their culture to wear a veil.

4.4 Coping mechanisms

From the former sections (4.2 and 4.3) I conclude that Afghan households experienced tensions because of the changes they went through because of the divergent integration processes of individual family members in the Netherlands. The internal power shifts that households experienced combined with the different ways in which the members integrated socio-culturally put nuclear family relations under stress. I described that particularly the differences between genders and generations were significant. How did Afghan households cope with these transformations and tensions?

A common response was to put coping mechanisms into action that had been effective in the context of Afghanistan. Isolation, control, and punishment were mechanisms that served 'to preserve the values and relationship patterns from the country of origin' (Hofstede 1991: 275). This is in accordance with how Kagitçibasi (1996) describes family interaction in the interdependent family model: as characterized by control, rather than autonomy. She explains how this type of family interaction is functional or, in other words, 'highly adaptive to survival' (ibid.: 79) in rural/agrarian traditional societies. However, we saw that the effectiveness of these mechanisms was less in the new context - because of the different structural and socio-cultural setting of the host country. Additionally, extensive family networks were smaller, at a further distance, or even completely absent, which largely threw nuclear family members back on themselves regarding how to deal with internal transformations and tensions. In sub-sections 4.4.1 to 4.4.3 I describe the partial corrosion of the mechanisms of isolation, control and punishment in the Dutch context. In the last sub-section (4.4.4) I analyze two cases of conflict between family members and show how the negotiation process has been given a new turn in the Dutch context.

4.4.1 Isolation

I find out where she lives. Third floor, blue corridor, second door. I pass as often as possible. A few times I see her slipping in or running out. She almost looks like a girl who is enacted, accelerated: she flies past me. This way I can never tell her who I am and why I am always thinking of her."

From 'De Gelukvinder' by Van de Vendel and Elman (2008: 190)

What we see throughout the former sections on integration (4.2 and 4.3) is that isolation was used as a mechanism to shield family members, and particularly women, from the host society. By isolation I here mean the conscious act of closing someone or oneself off from the outside world, and not the structural conditions that lead to a socially isolated position. In the most extreme cases the practice of isolation resembled the *purdah* as it is practised in some regions of Afghanistan; the practice of preventing men from seeing women by physically segregating women and covering their bodies when they go out in public. An example was an older male respondent who forbade his wife to go to Dutch classes and locked her inside the house while he kept the key, indicating that he held traditional notions about the role of women being in the private domain only. Particularly the older and more traditional Afghan women were used to living their lives largely inside their own compound, and also in the Netherlands they mainly stayed at home. For instance, an older and lowly-educated female respondent explained: "I have a very sweet neighbour but I cannot talk to her. And I am afraid to go outside, because I forget things very quickly and then I am afraid that I will not find my way back home." (Nuria, 55)

Many parents tended to keep their children, and particularly their daughters, at home in their spare time. They had to come home immediately after school, were not allowed to play or hang around outside, to join clubs or - at an older age - to go out at night. In this way the children were kept away from the ideas and practices of non-Afghan children that might clash with those of their parents. Actually, parents also tried to keep their children away from the children of compatriots who they thought would negatively influence their behaviour and views, like children from families that in their perception adhered to deviant ideas or had a lower status. Family contacts were considered the safest and best contacts for their children, but not everybody had these contacts at their disposal.

Several cracks could be perceived in the mechanism of isolation as a way of protecting the family from undesired transformations. Firstly, the Dutch system does not recognize the legitimacy of women staying at home at all times. Women as well as men are expected to attend integration classes in order to learn the Dutch language and to obtain a basic

knowledge of Dutch society. Learning the language is also a must in order to attain Dutch citizenship. A Dutch passport was desired for practical as well as symbolic reasons; it provided the opportunity to travel freely and it was perceived as strong protection against expulsion. Further, households were expected to be economically self-supporting as much as possible. In case the husband could not sufficiently provide for the family, the woman was expected and compelled to (partly) take over the role of provider. This meant that she then had to follow an educational course and/or to find a job.

Regarding the situation of the children; from the moment they were of school age it was impossible to shield them from other ideas and practices, as they entered schools where Afghan children formed a minority group and where the teachers were non-Afghans. For school the children also needed to use the computer and they then had access to the Internet, which gave them access to different worlds and provided them with the opportunity to communicate extensively. Like in the case of women who were compelled to find a job, also in the case of the children many Afghan nuclear families simply could not afford to keep the children or the girls at home after school. The meagre economic situation that they found themselves in made sons as well as daughters look for jobs on the side, and made them find ways of subsistence after finishing their studies. In case the children were married off to a partner from abroad - and particularly from outside the EU -, they had to find a steady and well-paid job in order to meet the immigration criteria, also in the case of daughters who married a groom from abroad. This is in accordance with what Charsley and Shaw (2006: 336) state: in transnational marriages conventional residence patterns are often reconfigured.

4.4.2 Control

When we lived in Virginia, I ran away with an Afghan man. I was eighteen at the time ... rebellious ... stupid, and ... he was into drugs ... We lived together for almost a month. All the Afghans in Virginia were talking about it. *Padar* [Father] eventually found us. He showed up at the door and ... made me come home. I was hysterical. Yelling. Screaming. Saying I hated him.

From The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini (2003:164)

From the section on isolation (4.4.1) it became clear that this coping mechanism had its limitations in the Dutch context. Another coping mechanism was to control the contacts that family members had with the host society. This could take several forms, like the father on his bike who accompanied his daughters who, in their turn, went to work by bus, in order to ensure that they arrived safely. Or the mother who called her daughter on her mobile phone if she was half an hour late after school. Control was not only meant to find out what other

family members were doing and with whom, but mainly served to prevent them from doing 'wrong' things with the 'wrong' persons. In that sense exerting control over the women and girls of the family also expressed that they were good husbands, good parents and good brothers; that they cared for their female family members and for the family as a whole, because deviant behaviour would have repercussions for the woman and her whole family if it was discovered.

However, the chances that deviant behaviour would be discovered were much smaller in the Dutch context than in Afghanistan. For a start, many parents could not form a clear idea of the surroundings in which their children moved and the people they met, like in school, at work or during nightlife, nor did they have contacts that they could address to make inquiries. In Afghanistan the extended family and the other contacts they had usually formed an extensive network that exerted social control, or in the words of a respondent: "In Afghanistan everyone has a protective circle." Generally in the Netherlands this network was less extensive, less influential and therefore less effective. For instance, while in Afghanistan parents knew their children's classmates and the families they came from; in the Netherlands they often had no image of the family backgrounds of their children's peers. The norms and values that the children internalised through these contacts were in many cases different from those of their parents - for instance, their views on relationships, love and marriage. This meant that they also developed a different sense of self-control and judged their own behaviour differently from their parents. This is illustrated by the behaviour of a young female respondent who accepted a lift from a male Moroccan acquaintance but asked him to drop her at a quiet spot one street before her place of destination. The reason was that she did not want to be seen by any Afghans in the company of a strange man because they would probably disapprove and inform her parents as well as other compatriots. She did not see any harm in her own behaviour, but was very conscious of how her parents might suffer from her action. Her solution was therefore to go her own way, but to do it out of sight. Instruments like the Internet and mobile phones increased children's opportunity to go their own way.

An effective way for Afghan young men to avoid parental control was to find a place of their own. This gave them more space to experiment with practices that were not allowed at the parental home. The parents as well as the young men themselves perceived it as a temporary phase until they would get married and would resume the lifestyle that their parents expected of them by 'taking responsibility'.

4.4.3 Punishment

I was sobbing on the street corner when a police car pulled up.
'Is there an emergency, ma'am? Someone just called 911 from this address.'
'But I hung up the phone', I said foolishly.
'We have ways of tracing a call, even when the person hangs up. We always come to investigate. What happened to you?'
'N-nothing.'
He looked as though he did not believe me. My face was streaked with tears. My baby's foot was bandaged. I was shaking, and Mohabat was clinging to me. 'Well, I'll take a look around anyway, just to be sure.' Ibrahim was inside.
'Police! Open the door!'
From Behind the Burqa by Sulima and Hala (2002, 134-135)

Control as a coping mechanism would not function if the discovery of deviant behaviour would not have any consequences. In earlier parts of this chapter we have seen some cases of severe forms of punishment that took place among family members. A sensitive topic like domestic violence tends to be underrepresented in research, and this research probably forms no exception. The tendency to keep domestic problems within the family further adds to the fact that the data I gathered on this topic were limited. Still, some tendencies can be indicated.

From the sections on integration (4.2 and 4.3) I infer that parents enforced many dos and don'ts on their children, regarding whom to relate to, how to behave etcetera. If children did not obey, punishments like house arrest and forbidding them to communicate with (certain) others were used. Slapping was also said to be quite common as a means to correct disobedient children - or in some cases to correct disobedient sisters. The line between physical punishment and domestic violence is a blurred one. In any case, the attitude of many Afghan men toward their wives and children was described by a respondent as hard.

Banishment formed a specific form of punishment in Afghan families. A respondent told about a great-nephew in the United States who secretly had an Afghan girlfriend. When his father went on a return visit to Afghanistan, he arranged for his son to be married to his brother's daughter. When his son refused to marry this cousin, his father threatened to "abandon paternity" over him. The son then gave in and married the cousin from Afghanistan. This example shows that the threat of being banished from the family remained a forceful one for people who had been ingrained with the notion that family life and family status formed the fundamental basis of their existence.

Even though a subject like punishment was a very private affair that was to a large extent kept

within the family, the situation in the Netherlands was somewhat different than it was in Afghanistan. In the new context people who had contacts with non-compatriots, for instance in school or in the neighbourhood, were confronted with different views on how family members should treat each other. A female respondent said: "In the past I thought that the position of women and girls was sad but normal; it was the same for all of us. Until I came here, then I didn't think it was normal anymore." (Zarmeena, 20)

An additional factor that made the mechanism of punishment less effective in the Dutch context was the availability of state protection. The possibility to call in the police, the existence of women's shelters, and the fact that perpetrators of violence run the risk of being punished themselves, had an impact on family interaction. A respondent stated: "Parents don't beat their children as easily here. Because there is the risk that children will tell others. And here in X. it has happened many times that Afghan parents all of a sudden had police officers on their doorstep." (Zahir, 19) According to this respondent, in the Netherlands it was important for parents to be as open as possible with their children, so that the children would have the confidence to talk about "everything" with their parents - or with another relative - and thus would not feel the need to share their problems with the "wrong people"¹⁰⁹. However, many parents did not succeed in making this switch. Then what you saw was that the children distanced themselves from their parents, by keeping their life outdoors to themselves as much as possible and in some cases literally by running away. The latter indicates that in the Netherlands they had places and people to run to, also outside the family circle.

Finally, we have seen before that married Afghan women in the Netherlands also had the opportunity to distance themselves from excessive punishment and violence by way of getting a divorce. While in Afghanistan a common way to deal with an unhappy marriage was for the man to take a second wife, the Dutch context provided women with the opportunity to choose for a life alone with the children. A respondent recalled her friend who had obtained a divorce: "She decided that she had suffered long enough" (Farzana, 38), which expresses how the friend took control over her own situation.

4.4.4 Renegotiating family relations

In the former subsections (4.4.1 to 4.4.3) we have seen that several traditional ways to cope with conflicts of interests within Afghan nuclear families were not as effective in the Dutch context as they had been in Afghanistan. We have seen several examples of how holding on to these mechanisms could lead to opposite effects, to the detachment of family relations instead of cohesion. In this subsection I analyse two cases of internal conflict and see that family members used the ambivalences they perceived in the new structural and socio-cultural

¹⁰⁹ By 'wrong people' he meant non-relatives who had a wrong influence on the children, for instance by inciting them to stand up to their parents.

context to delicately balance their own interests and those of other family members. A renegotiation of family relations took place that resulted in 'changes from within'.

"The problem is my fiancée in Germany. I'm afraid he will not leave me with any room to do my own things, like founding my own women's organization. We have been engaged for almost two years now. He already wanted to marry me last year. But I asked for a delay because of my studies. And then I stalled him again. Since then he hasn't asked me anymore. Last year was also the last time we saw each other. Now we communicate by phone and the Internet. First he called a lot, almost every day, for almost an hour. I thought that was too much, and now we call less. The last time we spoke was two weeks ago. I must admit I have discouraged him, because I was too afraid that he would convince me to get married and come to Germany. I don't want to go to Germany. I want to finish my law study, which will take at least another two years. And I want to stay near my family. He doesn't have anyone in Germany except for one married sister who lives in another city. But the Afghans he associates with are ignorant people; they are fundamentalists who will probably tell him that he will be faced with defeat when he comes to the Netherlands because my family are more liberal. He is the son of my father's cousin, who is still in Iran. But that cousin has had less education than my father and he is very conservative. My fiancée has not had much education either and now works full time in a sandwich bar at the airport. We often argue over the phone because we disagree on practically everything.

If my father hears that my fiancée has said something stupid again, he gets angry and says that he will go to him and to his cousin, and that he will tell them that the wedding is off. But my father is so occupied with his heart problems that I don't want to bother him too much. Therefore I have asked my brother to help me. I have asked him to convince my fiancée to come to the Netherlands.

I don't want to cause any troubles for my family, nor for my father. And when I start something, I keep my promises. I don't want people to speak badly of my family or me. As long as my fiancée comes to the Netherlands there is no problem, and I will change as much as it takes to be a good wife to him."

For Afghan young women who get married it is quite common to join their husbands, wherever they live. However, the young woman in this example called this custom into question. Her position within the Netherlands provided her with two main arguments: the fact that in the Netherlands she was surrounded by family members while her fiancée in Germany was not - so why should she give up her most important social contacts while he had nothing to lose in that respect? And the fact that she first wanted to finish her law studies, which was considered a legitimate argument among most Afghans in the Netherlands. The fact that her

fiancée did not have much education and worked in a low-skilled job further strengthened her argument.¹¹⁰

The attitude of the father in this situation was ambivalent. On the one hand, he was the one who had arranged the deal with his cousin in spite of the fact that he knew this cousin was less educated and more fundamentalist than him. On the other hand, he became angry when he heard the conservative remarks that the future groom made over the phone, and threatened to confront him. But, in reality, he never did this - according to his daughter because he was too occupied with his own medical problems, but one can also assume that he feared the detrimental effects on the relationship with his cousin and the rest of the family if he would seriously reconsider the arrangement. However, his daughter showed an understanding for him being too occupied to act and explicitly added that she did not want to damage her father's reputation, and with it her own reputation and that of the whole family. Taking that into account, she did not see a way out of the arranged marriage but was prepared to fight for two conditions for going through with it: staying close to her own family and being able to finish her law studies. The fact that she obeyed her father's wishes gave her the opportunity to ask her brother for help; otherwise the brother would possibly have felt obliged to correct or even punish her.

"N. and I met each other seven years ago, at the *ISK* [international bridge class]. I was 16 years old and he was 18 and we were in the same form. I immediately fell for him, because he was so cheerful and good-looking. But the problem was that my parents and his family were opposed to our relationship. My parents are royalists, and his parents served under Najibullah. And in recent years his brothers had become rather fundamentalist. When his father died last year, his mother and sisters started wearing the veil. But I don't, and he doesn't want me to. I'm also rather outspoken, and his mother doesn't like that in a girl. During the past years many candidates presented themselves who wanted to marry me, also from important royalist families. My father always asked me what I thought, and every time I said: 'No, no, no'. I even threatened to run away, not because I wanted to hurt my father but because I intended to marry N. And I knew that my father would not marry me off against my wishes. After four long years my parents finally asked me if I wanted to marry N., and I answered that it was up to them to decide. This is the polite way for an Afghan girl to show her approval. Then we finally got engaged and we married last spring. I never said to my parents that I was looking forward to marrying N., because it would have been disrespectful. As soon as I found a job as a pharmacist we bought our own house in the same city where his

¹¹⁰ While from his side it probably increased his fear of being faced with defeat if he would join her and her family in the Netherlands.

mother and siblings live, but at the other side of town. They all live in the same neighbourhood, but we chose a quieter place. We turned down his mother's offer to come and live with her, because we thought the apartment would be too crowded as N.'s younger brother and sister are also living there. In turn I offered her to come and live with us. I did this out of love and respect for my husband, because he is very close to his mother. But she refused, and it caused quite a row.

This respondent took a major risk by having a secret relationship for years. If the secret would have come out, it would have damaged her own reputation and that of her family, and it would have diminished her possibility of finding an Afghan marriage partner. On the other hand, the consequences were hardly as bad as they would have been in Afghanistan. This was illustrated by the story of her 15-year old cousin in Herat, who had had 'relations' with a boy. The father and the eldest brother therefore planned to kill her by throwing her into a nearby river. In the Netherlands, the chances that an Afghan girl having a secret relationship would result in such drastic consequences were much smaller than in Afghanistan, partly because society would not show any understanding whatsoever for such a violent response and the possibility that the perpetrators would be severely punished would be very high. Moreover, the Dutch context increased the opportunities for Afghan youngsters to have a secret relationship in the first place. The respondent made use of her school and work activities to meet her boyfriend, preferably in places that were not frequented by compatriots. She shared her secret with non-Afghan friends, so that she would not have to worry about compatriots being informed about it. Still, she was more vulnerable in this situation than her boyfriend, because it was her honour and the honour of her family that was at stake. This meant that once they started the relationship, it was almost impossible for her to back out without grave personal and familial implications.

The respondent and her father were in a power struggle for four years, in which they both tried to impose their will and spare the other's feelings at the same time. This made her father consider many other candidates from befriended families, but never without asking for her opinion. And this made the respondent threaten to run away, but without actually realising her threats. One could say that she finally won the battle but at the same time tried to save her parents' feelings by being careful not to gloat over her victory. The fact that she had proven to be a responsible daughter in other respects, by finishing her pharmacy studies, finding a well-paid job and helping out her parents financially, may have helped to convince her father to give in.

She also won another battle; the one with her mother-in-law about where to live. Traditionally, it would have been normal for a young couple to live with the husband's parents, at least until they had children and had saved money to rent or buy a place of their

own. But in the situation in the Netherlands the respondent and her husband (who was also a pharmacist) had more money to spend than their parents - which gave them the economic power to choose where to live. The respondent then did the culturally right thing and invited her mother-in-law to come and live with them, thus protecting herself from problems with her husband and from criticisms from family members and other Afghans. But the mother-in-law sensed that her position would be weakened if she would move into a house that was partly paid for by her outspoken daughter-in-law and angrily refused.

Marriage was a potential source of tension between Afghan parents and their children in Afghanistan as well as in the diaspora. In this section I have analysed how the Dutch context influenced the course of the negotiations and the outcomes with regard to marriage formation. In both cases the relatively strong structural positions that the young women created for themselves - compared to the relatively weak structural position of the parents - strengthened their arguments. The second woman had the economic opportunity to buy her own house instead of moving in with her mother-in-law. And the first woman contended that her university study should have priority over her fiancée's low-skilled job in deciding where to live.

Additional to these structural advantages, however, they were both very aware of the thoughts and feelings of the others involved in the conflict and of the Afghan community in general. The ambivalence that their awareness brought along, in the sense of them trying to meet their own, their family's, and the community's contradictory demands and expectations (Connidis & McMullin, 2002: 565) in fact helped them to find solutions that were acceptable to all concerned. This was the case for the first woman, who resigned herself to the fact that she would marry her second cousin, but then involved her brother to arrange the marriage on her own terms. And this was the case for the second woman, who resisted her parents' wishes to marry someone of their choice but saved their face by letting them take the initiative to arrange the marriage that she had in mind. I conclude that the relatively strong structural-economic position of these young women, in combination with the strategic way in which they dealt with the ambivalences that they experienced, led to different outcomes of the negotiation process than would have probably been the case in Afghanistan. This indicates that changes were taking place in what Afghans in the Netherlands perceived as acceptable practices and values.

4.5 Conclusion

In this section I conclude with the implications that the findings regarding family relations at

the household level have for how Afghans in the Netherlands constructed and perceived their family life, thereby particularly focusing on differences between genders and generations.

I firstly observed the way in which nuclear family members structurally integrated into the Dutch society; how they participated in the institutions of education, the labour market and the housing market. Most parents experienced grave difficulties in finding their place in terms of learning the Dutch language and finding a job - let alone finding a job that they found satisfying. I thereby perceived a gradual difference between men and women; the men, who were generally more highly educated than the women, suffered greater structural losses while particularly some more lowly educated women took the opportunity to improve their educational and professional level in the Netherlands. More in general, the skill of adaptability with which women were raised was advantageous in the new situation. Meanwhile, the children took great strides compared to their parents in terms of their knowledge of the Dutch language and their achievements in the Dutch educational system.¹¹¹

These structural transformations led to a partial reversal of roles between nuclear family members. Many parents became partly dependent on their children's help in terms of translation and communication in the Dutch language, and some were also in need of their children's financial support. Children, on the other hand, had to resolve many practical matters largely by themselves and with the help of outsiders, for instance regarding their educational and professional career. Because of the limited financial means that most parents had at their disposal, many children had jobs on the side - so as to contribute to the family income or to pay for their own expenses. The roles between husbands and wives in many cases changed too, with men losing their function as the sole or main provider of income, and in some cases women becoming the breadwinner instead.

However, the intra-household shifts in structural and material terms were influenced and partly counterbalanced by how the socio-cultural integration process of the family members took shape. Two cultural notions were thereby particularly important. Firstly, it was the duty of the parents to arrange a marriage for their children with a partner from a 'good Afghan family'. And, secondly, all nuclear family members bore responsibility for protecting the reputation of their family by behaving as 'good Afghans'. These notions were generally used by the respondents and formed a strong incentive for keeping Afghan norms and values alive and vital. However, these norms and values, or in other words the interpretations of what a 'good Afghan family' was, were by no means an absolute given but instead a point of constant negotiations. This had been the case in Afghanistan, where different regimes proclaimed their own version of true Afghanness, with for instance one regime stressing

¹¹¹ In the respondent group by far the most children of the one-and-a-half generation were still following an education and therefore I cannot say anything about their professional achievements at this point.

'modernity' and the importance of women's education and the other stressing Islam and the *pardah*. The Dutch context gave a new dimension to these negotiations, for two reasons. Firstly, it provided a completely different cultural frame of reference, which forced people to reassess their cultural stance. For instance, a woman who had been persecuted in Afghanistan because of her dedication to women's rights in the Netherlands worried about her daughter behaving too freely. Secondly, the new context provided the opportunity to step out of the cultural framework of one's 'own group'. For instance, I met an Afghan woman who had married a Dutchman, who only had contact with native Dutch persons, and raised her children 'the Dutch way'. The estrangement between her and other Afghans - which was partly her own choice and partly because she was not accepted by the others - prevented a confrontation between her progressive ideas about the position of women and the different ideas of compatriots.

Although there were gradual differences in the respondents' notions of good Afghan behaviour, these notions generally seemed to moderate the structural changes within nuclear families because of their patriarchal and hierarchical nature. Ideas about having respect for older people in general and parents in particular, about the virtue of daughters being obedient and obliging, about men bearing responsibility for the chastity of their female relatives, formed a moral basis on which most respondents acted. I saw several examples of the way in which this moral basis counterbalanced structural transformations in families: for instance, even though the female friend of a respondent had the economic opportunity to divorce her violent husband, she decided not to go through with it because of the detrimental effect that her decision would have on the options of her children to find good marriage partners. Another example: a daughter who did very well at school finally opted for higher vocational training instead of a university study because otherwise she would have to move out of her parents' house and go and live in another city. In the Western media these types of dilemmas are often presented as the free will of the individual being suppressed by family pressure and outmoded tradition (Shaw, 2000). This image is strengthened by the media attention that exists for extreme cases of family conflict that results in coercion, violence, or even murder.

However, the ways in which respondents presented intrafamilial clashes of interests and conflicts were more nuanced and were mainly characterized by ambivalence. Firstly, it was true that the Dutch context had an empowering influence on some and a disempowering influence on others. For instance, the institutional protection against domestic violence that exists in the Netherlands actually made a difference in families. And the economic structure and social security system enabled women and also unmarried adult children to live on their own. But it would be a mistake to portray intrafamilial transformations and tensions as a one-dimensional matter of conflicting interests between older people, men and parents trying to maintain the cultural status quo and young people and women trying to 'break free' from the

oppressive family. Instead, keeping the reputation of the family intact was in the interest of *all* members, because the family and the wider Afghan community remained for most respondents their most important source of support and recognition. Therefore the notion of 'good Afghanness' was a familiar thread through the intrafamilial negotiations that were provoked and enhanced by external structural and cultural influences. The result was gradual 'changes from within' that were born out of the ambivalences that family members experienced when weighing the different interests involved. To conclude, I illustrate this transformation process with a case:

A respondent was deeply worried about the fact that his teenage children had said that they did not want their parents to interfere with whom they were going to marry. The children said that they wanted to make their own choice and that they did not mind about the ethnic origin of their partner: "An Afghan girl, a Dutch girl, we don't mind." At the same time the respondent said: "These children [in the Netherlands], they know about the planets, they know how the computer works." Thus he recognized that the children had made structural progress in the Netherlands and had changed, which also changed the relationship with their parents. Then he showed his own ambivalence concerning the situation by stating: "I [personally] would prefer to see my children study first, then see the whole world, and then get married. That's what I would like, but our culture does not allow it. And we have to abide by our culture, don't we?" This father sketched his own background as a relatively modern one. The marriage between him and his wife had been arranged by the fathers who were best friends, but he and his fiancée had been allowed to meet and go out before they got married. Now, in their new situation in the Netherlands he felt that it was in the best interest of his children and the family as a whole to preserve the Afghan cultural notion of the children marrying a compatriot. His strategy was that he encouraged his children to communicate and meet with the children of his brothers and sisters who lived elsewhere in Europe in the hope that the contact would result in cousins marrying. But "[y]ou cannot force them; children have big mouths these days." (Fahriddin, 44)

Chapter 5: Family life in the West - A matter of trust

*My son does not understand my language,
with my father I do not pray together in one mosque.
My father goes his way and I go mine.
My son considers our ways to be
abolished,
crooked ways
and seeks for himself a new different way.
Those are the habits and customs of our lives.
We know well the art of switching tracks,
but we are not used to switching ourselves.
Therefore for all our lives
we are on our way.
We do not reach
our destination.*

Sediq Kawoon Toofani, December 1994, Germany¹¹²

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shift our attention from family relations at the household level to the relations that the respondents had with family members with whom they did not co-reside but who lived elsewhere in the West, ranging from the same neighbourhood to another continent. These relations were characterized by the fact that family members had comparable experiences as newcomers in the West and lived in comparable socio-economic conditions¹¹³.

In the literature on the social networks of migrants and refugees in the West, an important role is ascribed to family relations. In their research into Mexican migrants in the United States Massey et al. (1987) distinguish three types of network relationships, based on kinship, on friendship and on 'paisanaje', which means being from the same place. They state that kinship forms one of the most important bases of migrant social organization, and that family connections are the most secure bonds within the networks (Massey et al: 140-141).

¹¹² Translated from Dutch (Osmose, 2003/2008: 114)

¹¹³ Even though there were gradual differences between different Western countries, for instance in how they organized their social security system.

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But the question is to what extent these kin relations still form a 'high potential of support' (Staring, 2001) in the case of family members being dispersed over different Western countries. Did transnational families come into existence that - in the words of Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 7) - 'are constituted by relational ties that aim at welfare and mutual support and provide a source of identity'? What influence did geographical distance and national borders have on these relations?

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Not only were many Afghan families dispersed, other Afghans in the Netherlands had few family contacts in the West because few relatives fled in this direction or because they lost sight of them. Another question that then arose is to what extent relations with non-related compatriots nearby, which could be friends, people from the same locality, or other Afghans, compensated for the lack of enduring and support-providing kinship ties nearby. Was there enough mutual trust in these relationships to become equivalent sources of support? Or was there something special about family ties that made them irreplaceable? In order to answer these questions I explored the ties that respondents had with their non-co-residing family members in the West and with their non-related compatriots nearby, and thereby focused on the aspects of proximity, contact, and support (see also Sarkisian et al., 2006).

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The chapter is structured as follows. In section 5.2 the exchange of support between Afghans in the Netherlands and their extended family members in the West is described. Thereby I distinguish practical, social and cultural support, and I conclude the section with an example of intensive support exchange between family members in the West: intrafamilial marriages. In section 5.3 attention is paid to how the respondents perceived their family life in the West. In section 5.4 I answer the question of to what extent relationships with compatriots nearby substituted an eventual lack of kin relations nearby. I discuss the aspect of differences and distrust between compatriots, and again distinguish between the practical, social and cultural support that was exchanged. Finally, in section 5.5 I conclude on the significance of family relations in the West for the Afghans in the Netherlands.

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5.2 Family relations as a potential for support

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Three years ago, in 2003, Rona (42) with her four children joined her husband in the Netherlands. Since then they have lived in an apartment building in Amsterdam with two bedrooms, one for the parents and one for the children ranging from 7 to 18 years of age. Rona's days are filled with the intensive language course she attends, the appointments she

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has with agencies like the Social Services and the Refugee Aid Council, her doctor's appointments because of several health problems, and taking care of her husband and children.

Although there are quite a few Afghans living in Amsterdam, Rona and her husband do not have any family members nearby. They have most contact with her husband's sister who lives in Rotterdam with her husband and three sons. They call each other a few times per week, to talk about the people they know, about daily life, and to exchange advice on practical things like their children's school matters and their own medical problems. About twice a year Rona and her husband and children go to Rotterdam. They love to go there, but because they do not have a car they are dependent on the eldest son of Rona's sister-in-law to come and pick them up, and they do not all fit into one car. So it is easier if the family come from Rotterdam to visit them, but this does not happen very often, as everyone is so busy with school and work. The eldest son sometimes sends them the latest Bollywood DVDs.

Apart from the family in Rotterdam, Rona also has a sister and a half-brother (the son of her father's second wife) in the UK. She has not seen her sister for fourteen years, but they call each other on a weekly basis. Rona is planning to go and visit by bus, which is the cheapest form of transport, as her sister cannot come to her because she only has a temporary residence permit. But every school holidays Rona and her husband decide to postpone the trip and to wait for a financially more suitable moment.

Recently her half-brother from the UK, who works there as a doctor, visited her for the first time in seventeen years; they talked a lot, went on walks, and went to the shopping centre together. Now he has gone to the US with his wife and daughters to attend the wedding of the son of one of his sisters there. Rona feels sad that she and her husband and children cannot go because the trip is too expensive for them. They are anxiously waiting to receive a DVD of the wedding.

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5.2.1 Practical support

I defined practical support as support that is aimed at solving practical problems or arranging practical matters. Practical support could take the form of personal care, material support, but also exchanging information and advice. I found that the exchange of practical support between respondents and family members in the West was limited, and mainly took the form of exchanging practical information. However, there were also situations in which intensive support relations existed, which were characterized by geographical proximity.

In the few cases in which adult children and their parents lived nearby, i.e. in the same provincial region or in the same city, the exchange of practical support was intense. The parents looked after the grandchildren and provided support in the household, which gave their children the opportunity to study or work and thus to establish a career. The other way

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around, older parents also received substantial support from their children; for instance the children translated for them, provided transport, explained paperwork, and arranged matters concerning housing and medical treatment. If the parents became ill the children - and in the first place the daughters or the daughters-in-law - provided care. These practices are in accordance with what Baldassar (2007) shows, that co-presence is a *sine qua non* for practical support like personal hands-on care. A respondent moved with her husband and children to the other side of the country in order to live closer to her parents for these purposes.

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Another situation that I came across in which intensive practical support was provided was in the case of parents or siblings remaining in an asylum-seekers' centre and awaiting the outcome of their asylum request. Respondents provided translation, found a lawyer, kept in contact with authorities like the lawyer's office, the *IND* [Immigration and Naturalization Service], and *VluchtelingenWerk* [Refugee Aid], they helped to gather data, they provided transport, etcetera. In these situations the provision of support was largely a one-way thing; the insecurity with regard to their legal status and the frugal living conditions of the family members in the centre made them depend on next-of-kin nearby who were fortunate enough to have a refugee status. Particularly in the case of family members receiving a negative outcome after which more procedures followed, respondents perceived their responsibility as a heavy burden, more so because the asylum system was perceived as being an incomprehensible system that could hardly be adjusted.

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Besides these situations of intensive exchange, there were cases in which practical support was exchanged on a more occasional basis. These occasional exchanges could also take place over longer distances and across national borders, as well as between family members who were more distantly related. Some examples that I came across were an uncle arranging a summer job for his nephew in a greenhouse, a cousin sending the newest CD by a famous Afghan-American singer, a sister organizing the engagement party of her brother, an aunt inviting her nephew to come and sing with his band at an Afghan party, a brother giving a second-hand car to his sister. The last three examples concerned transnational relations between family members in the Netherlands and Germany. On the one hand, these examples indicated that national borders did not necessarily limit the exchange of support; on the other hand, borders did have implications sometimes. For instance, in the case of the brother in Germany who gave a car to his sister in the Netherlands, she had to pay so much import duty that she almost regretted that she had accepted this gift.

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Practical support was not only exchanged between family members who lived relatively nearby. A form of practical support that was exchanged between family members who lived at a distance as well, but that was mentioned only sporadically, was lending or giving money. There were cases of adult children who occasionally received money from their parents elsewhere. A respondent received money from her brother so that she and her

son could come and visit him in the United States. The fact that the exchange of money between family members in the West was limited did not mean that there were no financial needs. On the contrary, the limitations were mainly that most family members lived in similar frugal conditions and therefore were not in a position to help each other. A respondent stated: "Now that I am going to marry, I have to borrow money from the bank, because my brother and sister [in Germany] do not have anything to lend me." (Omar, 29) Instead, his siblings put money together to pay the airline ticket for their mother in the US so that she could attend the wedding. The respondent explained that this was the utmost that they could afford as they were unemployed and had their own families to provide for. An additional limitation was formed by the financial obligations that respondents and their family members in the West had toward stay-behinds. An indirect form of financial support was that the ones who sent remittances unburdened other family members in the West. The same respondent said: "I send a monthly sum to my sister in Afghanistan. She has five or six children and is in a very difficult situation. My eldest sister [in the Netherlands] has reserved the house in Kabul for her. And if the situation becomes very tough, my sister in Canada also helps." Unsurprisingly, those family members who earned an income and who did not have a nuclear family of their own were the first in line to send remittances to parents and siblings who stayed behind.

The practical support that was mostly exchanged between family members - also between the ones who lived at a distance and who were related in the third and fourth degree - consisted of information and advice on all kinds of practical matters. This type of exchange made up a natural part of the social contact that family members had with each other, for instance when they called to wish each other a Happy New Year. According to a respondent, there is an Afghan saying to the effect that 'If you are alone, then put your hat on the table and talk to it', meaning that it is always important to share your problems and talk about them. So family members nearby as well as far away discussed matters like 'Which education shall I choose?' and 'How much money shall I send to Afghanistan?'. Advice was exchanged on medical issues and on the possibilities for a return visit or to find a more permanent way of returning. However, the different situations in the host countries limited the possibilities to exchange advice regarding daily issues and problems. For instance, a respondent explained how the lack of a social security system in the US resulted in Afghans in that country being more focused on building up their own businesses and making money, while in Europe first-generation Afghans were more dependent on social security and perceived education as the way for their children to raise their socio-economic status. Obviously this situation of dependence on the social security system that many first-generation Afghans in the Netherlands found themselves in limited their possibilities to provide family members with advice on how to improve their own socio-economic situation.

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5.2.2 Social support

I defined social support as support aimed at improving psychosocial well-being by having social contact. It can take the form of explicit advice and support regarding social matters as well as simply communicating and being together. The exchange of social support constituted a significant aspect of the contact that respondents had with family members in the West.

Whether family members lived nearby or at a distance, respondents spent time and money on having social exchange with them by making visits and by long-distance communication. I thereby perceived a gradual difference between the social exchange with family members nearby, including aunts, uncles and cousins, and the social exchange with family members at a long distance, who were usually family members in the first and second degree¹¹⁴.

For family members who lived near each other providing intensive practical and social support went hand in hand. For instance, older parents who needed help with translations and transport were also in need of encouragement and reassurance: "My mother used to be a strict and strong woman; she was a maths teacher and I was very proud of her.

Now it is as if I have to support my mother. [...] I often comfort her: 'Don't worry, everything will be alright'." (Ghazal, 37) Not only did this respondent visit her mother at least once a week; she also called her almost daily in the meantime. Intensive social support was also provided to family members nearby who were in the stressful situation of a long asylum procedure: "Once every fortnight I go and pick up as many family members [at the asylum seekers' centre] as fit in the car. My nephew and niece come by bus, because they have a public transport card. I invite my mother more regularly, because she is so depressed. When I

do this she feels slightly better." (Suraya, 35) This mother stayed at her daughter's house almost every weekend and was additionally picked up for visits during the week. But also without these problematic situations, contact with family members nearby was usually of a high intensity, particularly between married children and their parents. For instance, an adult son came to eat at his parents' home every evening.¹¹⁵ A male respondent and his family

received his single brother who lived right across the border in Germany every weekend. A female respondent visited her aunt and cousins in the same neighbourhood several times a week. She explained how the frequent contact with her maternal aunt and cousins functioned as a substitute for the fact that her own mother and siblings remained in the Ukraine¹¹⁶.

There was a gradual but important difference between having family members nearby, in the sense of living in the same city or the same provincial region, and having them in the Netherlands. Having family members in the Netherlands by no means guaranteed that

¹¹⁴ One respondent maintained frequent contact with her father's first wife and her half-brothers and half-sisters in Canada. (Her own mother had been his second wife, but she had died a long time ago.)

¹¹⁵ This was also a form of practical support from the side of the parents, because it meant that he did not have to do the shopping and cook for himself after work as his wife was still in Afghanistan.

¹¹⁶ With them she maintained intensive long-distance communication.

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family members were able to resume their relationships with the intensity that they wished.

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Two factors were mentioned that limited their capabilities to do so, namely their socio-economic situation and the influence of Dutch culture. Regarding the first factor, for people who lived on social security or a minimum wage, the costs of transport formed a considerable hurdle to visit relatives. For instance, among our respondents having a driving license and a car was not very common because of the expenses involved. In the case of Rona, the distance from Amsterdam to their relatives in Rotterdam was difficult to bridge because she and her husband did not have a car - and even if they were able to afford one it could still not carry a family of six persons. Concerning the second factor, several respondents complained that they did not have time to visit relatives, because of the intensity of the school curriculum of the children and of their own language and integration courses, and because of the pressure of life in general in the Netherlands. The traditional Afghan holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Naw Ruz* [New Year], which used to be suitable occasions to visit each other, were ordinary working days in the Netherlands.¹¹⁷ Respondents acknowledged that they themselves had also changed in the Netherlands - they started adapting to the Dutch culture, and for instance they became used to making appointments for family visits instead of dropping by spontaneously. A young respondent said: "My sister has a mother-in-law and a sister-in-law who get together a lot. And if you invite them, they always come together and stay for the night too. I would find that very difficult." (Zarmeena, 20). This cultural change applied especially to the children who were born or raised in the Netherlands, and therefore were not familiar with the intensive family life that their parents grew up with.

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In spite of the limitations just mentioned, for most respondents family contacts in the West still constituted a relatively important part of their lives. Although it varied how much time and money respondents and their nuclear families could spend on leisure activities, generally most of this time was spent on and filled up by family contacts and visits, nearby and further away. For instance, in the case of Rona, the only outings she had with her husband and children were the visits to their family members in Rotterdam about twice a year. Another respondent referred to the weekends as 'family time', and many respondents regarded the school holidays as family time too. During the family visits relatives spent most time at home, talking, watching TV, cooking, and eating together. It was very common to stay one or more nights, especially when the visitors had had a long travelling time. During the research I observed on several occasions how respondents skilfully housed and fed their guests in the modest flats and houses in which they lived.

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¹¹⁷ Instead, some respondents and their relatives got together to celebrate birthdays, a phenomenon that is not so familiar in Afghanistan.

Visits to family members who lived relatively nearby¹¹⁸ were not restricted to kin in the first and second degree but extended to aunts, uncles and cousins as well. "Last summer we visited my wife's aunt in Denmark. She lives there with her son [...] while her daughter is in Canada. She is alone and sad, and wanted to see our children. We drove there in our little Peugeot. Yes, everything fitted in, the three children and the luggage." (Mujib, 48). Another respondent recalled how her maternal aunts from the UK and Germany came over after the birth of her baby, which she considered normal given the 'short distance' between them. Concerning family visits to places that were further away (and thus more expensive and time-consuming), and in particular to Canada, the US and certainly Australia, these were in the first place intended for first-degree (parents, children) and second-degree (siblings, grandparents, grandchildren) relatives. During these visits family members temporarily shared daily life once again, for good or for worse. Family members particularly felt the desire to get together at important life events, which could be happy occasions like the birth of a child, an engagement, or a marriage, or sad occasions like sickness and death. If it was not possible for family members to attend, they often received photos or a DVD afterwards. But especially in sad circumstances like illness and death this offered little consolation.

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Additional to the economic restrictions I also observed legal obstacles to family members visiting each other across borders. This was the case when family members did not yet have a residence permit; as we saw in the case of Rona's sister in the UK this restricted the possibilities to leave the host country. For some countries a visa was required, which could also cause problems: "My youngest son is almost seven and my mother [in Moscow] has never seen him. To go to Russia, I need an invitation to get a visa. Two-and-a-half years ago I applied for Dutch nationality. They always call, but there's still no decision, we just have to wait. My mother sent me an invitation, but still the Russian consulate in The Hague didn't give me a visa because I only have a travel permit. This travel permit is only valid in European countries." (Wafa, 38). This respondent had not seen her mother and her siblings in Russia for seven years. They kept in contact by telephone, and called several times per week.

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Respondents mainly used communication by phone and the Internet in addition to or as a - weak - replacement for direct contact when meeting family members in the West. A respondent informed me: "I call my sister [in Canada] daily, just to ask 'How was your day?' [...] We give each other advice on all kinds of things. The telephone charges are 3 cents per minute, or you can buy a phone card." (Farzana, 38). The frequency with which respondents contacted their closely-related family members like parents and siblings was usually high, like every day or every week. They explained how they found cheap ways to communicate, via certain providers, via the Internet, sometimes making use of a webcam. A respondent told

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¹¹⁸ Being 'near' depends on a combination of geographical distance and the availability of money, time and transport.

how she received a bunch of roses from her brother-in-law in Canada for her birthday, which he had arranged via the Net. Another respondent created a website with pictures of his daughter on it, so that his brother and sister in Canada could see her. More in general, several respondents stressed the importance of their children getting to know their family members who lived far away, and communication by phone, webcam or chatline was a useful tool for that. However, language problems could stand in the way, especially in the case of young children. And although the communication costs between Western countries were generally much lower than the communication costs with stay-behinds, these could still become a financial burden for respondents with limited means of income.

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"Several months after my arrival [in the Netherlands] I discovered that my sister was in Switzerland. After one year my mother in Afghanistan died. [...] My mother meant everything to me. [...] Since then I have written to my sister daily, and we call once or twice per month." (Zahra, 37). Particularly the social exchange between sisters was often mentioned as a source of support, and more generally it was the women who communicated most with family members elsewhere.¹¹⁹ Sharing experiences and feelings was an important function of the communication, face-to-face or at a distance, between family members in the West. They all shared memories of a common past. They shared experiences of being uprooted, of loss and grief, and of homesickness. Many also shared a common responsibility for family members who stayed behind. What could differ were the circumstances in which they lived in now and how these circumstances had changed their perception of the world. The friend of a respondent stated: "My brother [who lives in the US] said about the American bombs on Afghanistan that in this way at least the fundamentalists would be chased away. I was shocked [...]." Still, personal issues like marital conflict, a miscarriage, or deviant behaviour by the children were preferably discussed with the next-of-kin in the West, who could understand their situation and would keep the information to themselves. Additionally, concrete support was sometimes offered even over large distances. For instance, a wife who quarrelled with her husband was invited by her sister in the US to come and stay for a while in order to sort things out. And in the case of another quarrelling couple, the husband's paternal uncle came over from Austria to negotiate between them. These cases also show how marriages are perceived as a family affair and how the reputation of the family is at stake when things go wrong (see chapter 4).

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5.2.3 Cultural support

I defined cultural support as support that is aimed at upholding culture and traditions, which usually takes the form of sharing cultural practices. Although in all social contact the aspect

¹¹⁹ While the women did most of the talking, in several cases it was the man who decided how much money was to be spent on communication and who oversaw that the amount was not exceeded.

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of culture is inherently present, for instance in manners, in food, in language, in this subsection I focus on the more explicit cultural activities. With regard to family relations in the West I distinguished two main activities: the celebration of Afghan holidays and getting together for weddings and funerals. Both formed an occasion for respondents to also establish or re-establish contact with family members who were more distantly related and who lived further away.

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The two most important holidays in Afghanistan that were also celebrated by most Afghans in the Netherlands were *Naw Ruz* (on 21 March) and *Eid al-Fitr* (at the end of the Ramadan period). I have described in section 3.2 how in Afghanistan these days were mainly celebrated at a family level. The way in which Afghans in the Netherlands celebrated these events differed drastically from what they were used to in the past, if only because the Dutch school and work schedules did not take these holidays into consideration. Still, relatives who lived nearby usually visited each other around these days, although they would probably move the visit to the nearest weekend. A respondent described how she celebrated *Naw Ruz* with her nuclear family and her parents:

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"I try to keep the children awake. Every time I try to start dinner at six o'clock but I never manage. There is so much to cook. We pray before dinner for a new year without war and illness. My father leads in prayer, the others say 'amen'. That is enough. We wear new clothes. My children wear Afghan clothes sometimes. I decorate my hands with little flowers of henna. We film and take pictures, play games, dance, talk, laugh. At twelve o'clock there is supposed to be fireworks. But in Afghanistan there were no fireworks because of the war, and in the Netherlands you can only set off fireworks during the Dutch New Year." (Halima, 38)

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This quotation illustrates how family members got together in order to celebrate a cultural tradition and to pass it on to the next generation. It also shows that people adapted their cultural practices in the new context, like not having fireworks, and making a film and pictures of the event that could be sent to family members elsewhere.

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For many respondents, on these holidays it was the custom to call family members that they were not able to personally meet, even relatives in the West with whom they had little contact. But particularly for closely-related family members phone calls formed a poor substitute for the 'real thing' of getting together: "I called my mother who lives with her handicapped daughter in Germany. When we congratulated her with *Eid al-Fitr* she cried: 'Nobody is coming at all'" (Asad, 50)

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"[My grandmother in the Netherlands] had cancer. Because one could see the end drawing near, all the children planned their tickets in advance. Within three or four days they came, from the UK and from the US. One uncle from Germany was already at her bedside. It was

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also a kind of family reunion. Especially my uncles from the US I had not seen in years." (Ghazal, 37)

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Funerals and weddings served as reunions, for which family members from nearby and far away spent their money and time to get together. These meetings were in the first place about sharing feelings of grief or happiness. They also formed an occasion for the organizers to uphold the good name of the family by being excellent hosts¹²⁰ and for the attendants to meet relatives, friends and acquaintances from the past and to get to know new people. In terms of Olwig (2002: 1) '[w]eddings and funerals are of crucial importance in migratory family networks because they constitute events where scattered relatives can meet and validate their shared kinship and common origins.' In other words, these events also served to strengthen social contacts and to reaffirm feelings of familial connection and Afghan identity. The fact that Afghan family reunions had an important function as marriage markets made this aspect very concrete.

The wedding took place at a Turkish party centre in the industrial area of Beverwijk and started on a Friday night after six o'clock so that it would not interfere with school or working days. About 250 guests had come, from the Netherlands where the family of the bride lived and from Germany where the family of the groom lived. The bride and groom were in their early twenties and still lived with their parents. The marriage was arranged by the mothers, who were cousins, and during the evening it became clear that this was actually their party, their moment of pride and glory. They paraded up and down in beautiful outfits (they even changed clothes halfway through the evening) and welcomed their guests, while the bride and groom were sitting quietly on an illuminated stage. Meanwhile other mothers with marriageable children were busy as well: the mothers who had sons checked out the girls who were present and who were mainly sitting with their parents and female relatives, while the boys grouped together at their own tables.

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Because of the wide range of particularly family members who joined funerals and weddings, they formed good occasions for extended family members to meet. Contacts during these events usually did not go very deep - if only because of the loud music at weddings. Language could also be a problem: "I went to the wedding of a cousin of mine in the US. That was a truly international gathering, with family from the US, from Germany, from the UK, from the Netherlands. And then it can happen that a grandmother hears that her grandchildren are communicating with each other in languages that she does not understand." (Nargis, 20) But in spite of these differences, by celebrating or mourning together attendants affirmed their familial and cultural bond, and new family connections might emerge in the form of new marriages.

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¹²⁰ Which often led to people incurring debts because they wanted to impress their guests but did not have enough money to pay for the expensive catering, renting the hall, etcetera.

5.2.4 Intrafamilial marriages

In chapter 4 (section 4.3.4) I described how parents felt and were held responsible for finding a good marriage partner for their children. Two important criteria were that the partner had to be Afghan and from a respectable family. A marriage between cousins or second cousins was perceived as an advantageous arrangement in many respects and formed one of the most intensive forms of support exchange between family members in the West that I came across. In this sub-section I explain why most respondents perceived this type of arrangement as beneficial, practically, socially, and culturally.

Firstly, in 4.3.4 I described how in the new context of the Netherlands it could be problematic to assess the characteristics of a potential marriage partner and the status of his or her family. This problem was avoided in the case of an intrafamilial marriage. When I asked a female respondent if her nephew and the future husband of her daughter was a good man, she answered: "Yes, he is family, we know him." In terms of Shaw (2000) these marriages have a symbolic function as a public representation of the trust between kin. The fact that family members knew each other well not only enabled them to assess each other's status but also the individual characteristics of the potential spouse. Usually the children had a say in which of the cousins they liked best, and in some cases the bride and groom knew each other well because they had lived together in the same extended family household during infancy.

However, this nearness had ended before or because of having to flee when the families were dispersed, and it is Charsley (2007) who points to the fact that physical distance can render cousins more acceptable as marriage partners in the perception of youngsters who have been born or raised in the West, where they are exposed to conflicting ideas about the suitability of cousins as spouses. 'Within networks of kin [...] it seems that some distance is needed to create space for a marital relationship' (ibid: 1125).¹²¹

At a practical level, it was easier to arrange the wedding conditions with relatives than with other compatriots. The negotiations with regard to weddings often led to disagreements between the family of the bride and the family of a groom. Occasionally, weddings were even cancelled because of these disputes, which concerned cost aspects like the number of wedding guests and the prestige of the location, but also aspects like how long the engagement period would take, if the fiancées were allowed to be together during that period, and if the girl was allowed to finish her studies before the wedding¹²². By arranging a marriage within the family these discussions could partly be circumvented. For instance, a respondent who arranged for her daughter to be married to the son of her sister in the UK

¹²¹ This was different from the situation in Afghanistan, where it was common that cousins who grew up together - even within the same compound - became married.

¹²² As it was generally expected that the couple would not postpone having children after the wedding.

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agreed with the groom's family about having a small engagement party, at home, with just a few presents and no guests apart from the nuclear family members. Instead of the bride's family paying for the engagement party and the groom's family paying for the wedding, they decided to save money for the wedding together "as my sister's family does not have much money either". Thus, collectively they were able to make a good impression on the Afghan community by organizing a beautiful wedding and inviting many guests - which also increased the marriage opportunities for their other children.

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Arranging an intrafamilial marriage in the West also served as a way to skirt around marriage proposals from family members who had stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. In chapter 4 (section 4.3.4) I described that marriages between Afghans in the Netherlands and stay-behinds were not unusual. On the one hand, these arrangements arose from kinship obligations; they formed a migration strategy to bring stay-behinds to the West too. On the other hand, these arrangements formed an extra or a more desirable marriage opportunity for Afghans in the West, for instance for divorced men. However, there were many respondents who worried about the negative economic or social consequences of marriages between Afghans in the diaspora and a spouse from the region of origin. For instance, the restrictive Dutch immigration policy burdened the partner in the Netherlands with the responsibility of meeting the income criteria¹²³.¹²⁴ Apart from the pressure that the requirements put on the marriage, respondents also worried about socio-cultural difficulties in these 'mixed' marriages. A mother for instance expressed her fear about a man from Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Iran being too traditional or even oppressive for her Westernized daughters, while another mother was afraid that a bride from that region would change after she joined her son in the Netherlands and would then become demanding and lazy. Instead, in case of a marriage between cousins in the diaspora the spouses knew better what to expect of each other, while the family setting encouraged the couple to respect what were perceived as 'Afghan values'.

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Finally, an intrafamilial marriage provided more opportunities to steer the marriage clear in case problems would arise between the spouses.¹²⁵ For instance, in the case of marital problems between two young cousins, the fathers of the bride and groom - who were brothers - contacted each other and agreed to exert pressure on the groom to change his violent behaviour. In terms of Charsley (2007) endogamy thus forms a form of risk management, but she also points to the other side of the coin: that difficulties within a marriage can spread to

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¹²³ In 2004 the income norm for family formation was raised from 100% of the supplementary benefit level to 120% of the minimum wage.

¹²⁴ The restrictive immigration policy sometimes also formed an obstacle for marriage formation in the West, especially if one or both partners did not (yet) have an EU nationality.

¹²⁵ Respondents were aware that marriages were vulnerable in the new context, because of the socio-economic and socio-cultural transformations and tensions at the household level (see chapter 4) and the high divorce rate in the Netherlands.

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the wider kin group. In the case just mentioned, the uncle threatened his nephew with a divorce as a strategy to improve the groom's behaviour - but it would be almost impossible for the father to act on this threat without putting his relationship with his brother at risk, and with that the harmony of the whole extended family.

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5.3 The perception of family life in the West

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"In Afghanistan my cousins and I were very close to each other. Now they live in the UK and the US, and have not seen each other since. The distances are larger now, and therefore my family life has become more Dutch. It now consists of my parents and my sisters. We have automatically adapted to the situation. By phone the contacts remain, but we do not see each other." (Nargis, 20)

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In this section I focus on the way respondents perceived the familial exchange of support and describe the divergence that I found between their values and practices in this respect.

Respondents stressed how it was culturally important for them to be together with their family members. "In our culture the family is very close together. We cannot do without these

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contacts. European governments think that refugees are happy, but we are not. [...] Until the end of our lives we cannot have this [intensive family contact], and therefore we cannot be

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happy." (Mitra, 44) Indeed, getting together with other family members in the West could be a very happy experience, as the friend of a respondent said: "I love not having responsibility

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during my one month per year in the US. I am the youngest of the sisters there and am treated like a princess; I don't have to do a thing." However, in many cases contact with family

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members in the West also amounted to being confronted with the problematic situations that everybody faced and the restrictions on helping each other. For instance, a respondent who

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visited her brother who remained in the Ukraine illegally perceived this visit as difficult

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because she was confronted with problems regarding his illegal status and was unable to do anything about it.

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Several respondents expressed the fact that, paradoxically, having contact with family members in the West was at the same time being confronted with the family life that they had

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lost. Even in the case of happy gatherings with family members who were doing well, people perceived the limitations of their contact due to restrictions in terms of geographical distance

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and the limited money and time that they had available. Or the contacts confronted family members with the fact that they had grown apart, for instance in the case of them having

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different economic levels or different political views or the children speaking different

languages. Or they were confronted with mutual needs that could not be fulfilled, as we see in the following quotation:

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"Everyone is very busy. It's because of the busy life in Europe. Now I go home at night alone, and wonder for whom, why. The warmth in our hearts has remained the same, but the practice has become colder. In the past [in Afghanistan] everybody was home at about 4 or 5 p.m. [...] Now my brother and sister live an hour's drive away, and economically I cannot afford to visit them often, and neither can they. [...] Now my brothers and sisters depend on social security. They would love to do something, but because of the language they do not have access the right positions. They feel weak and stupid. [...] Sometimes we get together. Then we contact our mother [in the US] by MSN; we see each other on the webcam. Then she cries, and we, her children, cry too. The little kids see it and do not understand. 'Do you miss each other?' They do not feel it." (Omar, 29)

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This quotation illustrates the impact of limited economic means on the intensity of family contact, even between relatives who live in the same country. But having a weak socio-economic position had another effect too. It made closely-related family members feel bad about themselves and feel sorry for each other, because they had lost their vitality and security as a family. This respondent recounted how family life in Afghanistan had been natural and easy, with plenty of economic resources available: "Our generation, we have had everything, and now we have to start from zero again." The situation of socio-economic decline that family members experienced seriously limited the extent to which they could exchange support: "The support we can give each other is only moral. We dare not ask each other for [financial] assistance. The request for assistance freezes on our lips." Respondents perceived the transition from interdependence between family members in Afghanistan to a one-sided dependence on the social security system of the host country to be painful. In a way this situation deprived family members of the possibility to show the caring feelings which they had for each other, as was expressed in the sentence 'The warmth in our hearts remained the same, but the practice has become colder'. This finding is in accordance with what Stewart et al. (2008: 142) found among Somali refugees in Canada: 'Influenced by norms of family connectedness and a deep sense of obligation to kin, Somali refugees continued to hold the same expectations for support that they did in the homeland, but circumstances forced them to rely on formal institutions.'

The impossibility to act was perceived as being particularly painful in the case of adult children and the love, care, and responsibility that they felt towards their older parents. Respondents reported how their older parents were in a particularly vulnerable position in the host countries in the West, because they had the most difficulties in adapting to their new environment, they experienced isolation, and often suffered from health problems. At a

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distance it was difficult to do anything for them and therefore the desire to be together was strong. But especially elderly people often heavily depended on 'the system', including the medical system. For instance, a female respondent complained that she lived so far apart from her mother and sister who lived in Germany. "But my mother is ill and goes to the hospital every fortnight, [...] that is why she can't come to the Netherlands." (Mitra, 44). And the other way around, she explained: "We don't want to go to Germany. We are almost integrated here, the children wouldn't want to leave." The fact that both the mother and sister in Germany and the respondent and her husband received social security made it even less likely that they would be able to move in each other's direction. The situation illustrates the fact that many respondents had been 'engulfed' in the national welfare system, which diminished their possibilities to reunite with family members elsewhere.¹²⁶

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Finally, the above quotation made mention of the aspect of cultural change, in particular among very young children. These children, who were born or at least raised in the Netherlands, often did not know the family members who lived at a distance, sometimes had difficulties with the Afghan languages, did not always feel comfortable with the intensive family life that their parents longed for, and in some cases showed a plain disinterest in or even a dislike for family contacts. Some parents actively tried to keep their children's commitment to the family alive, for instance by frequently visiting family members, by encouraging them to phone and chat with family members elsewhere, by teaching them the Afghan languages, by showing them pictures and DVDs, etcetera. Others accepted that for their children family contacts would have a different significance than they had for themselves. However, they expressed their regrets concerning this in two ways. Firstly, they felt that their children had lost a precious social circle of protection by becoming detached from the safety net that the family had been for themselves. And, secondly, they felt that by becoming detached from their family the children would become detached from Afghan culture as well. "The children have lost their own country, their culture, their traditions, and - for some - their faith. In short, they have lost everything." (Zahir, 19).

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Respondents referred extensively to the changes that they perceived among the second generation, but their own needs regarding family life had also changed. Several respondents mentioned that in the Netherlands they had become used to making appointments for family visits. Some said that they would not be able to return to the intense family life of the past with its many social obligations. Particularly for women who enjoyed the freedom they had, it would be difficult to go back to the old situation in which they had the primary

¹²⁶ The other side of the coin was that this situation could also be perceived as advantageous when family members did *not* wish to be together, like in the case of a young man whose family did not succeed in having his bride come over from the UK because of the immigration criteria, which gave him more room to continue the secret relationship which he had with his girlfriend.

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responsibility for taking good care of guests.¹²⁷ Another difficulty of living too close together was interference in each other's lives. For instance, a young mother complained about her mother-in-law, who lived around the corner, meddling in the upbringing of her children, and she even tried to persuade her husband to move further away. Examples were given of family members who had become completely 'Westernized' and had largely distanced themselves from their family members. A respondent told how she felt torn between the needs of her nuclear family and those of her brother in the Ukraine: "If we work hard, we also need rest, without worries, without problems. I work, my husband works, the children go to school. Then we also need time to be together, without hearing about my brother's concerns." (Jamila, 45). She described her own ambivalence concerning the situation: "My husband and children do not want us to go on holidays to my brother every time. They want to go to Spain or Italy. So we went there, but I could not help feeling guilty all the time." This quotation confirms the need that Sarkisian, Gerena and Gerstel (2006: 342) underscore to differentiate between familial practices and cultural beliefs. The discomfort that respondents expressed regarding their family life in the West mainly stemmed from exactly this divide that they perceived between the strong family values with which they were raised and the relatively cold family practice in which they lived (and had become used to) and that in their perception had partly overcome them in the new context of the Netherlands (see also Schans, 2007).

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5.4 Support between compatriots nearby

5.4.1 Differences and distrust

In the introduction we saw that Massey et al. (1987) distinguish between three types of network relationships, based on kinship, on friendship, and on '*paisanaje*'. In the former two sections (5.2 and 5.3) I explored the exchange of support between Afghans in the Netherlands and their family members in the West, nearby and at a distance. In this section I focus on network relationships nearby based on friendship and 'coming from the same place'. Massey et al. (1987: 141-142) show how friendship-based relations can resemble family relations: "The closest bonds outside the family are those formed between people as they grow up together. These are typically friendships between people of roughly the same age who lived near one another and joined together in play and shared formative experiences in church, school, or organized sports." Regarding relations based on *paisanaje* Massey et al. (1987: 143) state that origin from the same locality only has a meaning when people meet each other

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¹²⁷ A respondent pointed to the fact that Afghan women who had many family members nearby in the Netherlands might be even busier here than they had been in Afghanistan, because many of them had a job too. (And contrary to the former situation of many respondents in Afghanistan, in the Netherlands they did not have their own domestic servants.)

outside their home community. 'Then the strength of the *paisanaje* tie depends on the strangeness of the environment and the nature of their prior relationships in the community.' In this chapter I use the more encompassing concept of compatriot instead of the Mexican-oriented *paisanaje* concept to refer to all persons who come from the 'place' Afghanistan. The definitions by Massey et al. (1987) make clear that the three types of network relationships overlaps and that the differences are rather gradual than absolute; strong friendships can resemble family ties, while people from the same locality can be acquaintances from the past. So in this section I focus on the extent to which compatriots nearby have substituted an eventual lack of kin relations nearby in terms of support.¹²⁸ Compatriots could be close friends from the past, people they met only recently, and everything in between. They could be informal contacts as well as contacts within the framework of an organization.

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We have seen in chapter 2 how the Afghan population in the Netherlands were immensely divided by differences regarding political background, language, ethnic background and religious persuasion. This caused respondents to approach their compatriots with caution and to first try to 'place' them. Or to put it in Massey et al.'s (1987) terms: they first tried to figure out what the nature of their prior relationship had been, which depended on the collectivities they had belonged to in Afghanistan and the activities they had had there. Family names often revealed a lot of information. Respondents made comments on last names like 'Oh, then he is from an important family', 'That is a communist family', 'They are related to the King', etcetera. Which language the person spoke was also very meaningful; particularly the animosity between Dari- and Pashtu-speaking persons was said to be high.

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The city from where a person came was not only the place of origin, but also revealed information about people's ethnic background, for instance people from Kandahar are usually descended from one of the Pashtun tribes. And there were many more ways in which Afghans in the Netherlands tried to 'read' each other's past and position, like by the way people talked about the past. For instance, when they referred to the ruler Najibullah in positive terms they were perceived by others as being (former) communists, or if they fasted during the Ramadan they were perceived as potential fundamentalists, or if women wore no veil and had short hair they were perceived as being (former) women's rights activists.

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The new life in the Netherlands also gave Afghans the opportunity to change and manipulate facts about their past, and respondents were aware of the possibility that there were people with a hidden past among their compatriots. "It is so difficult here in the Netherlands to know someone's background. No one knows each other in the Netherlands and if you ask someone what his or her function was in Afghanistan or the function of their parents, they tell you immediately: 'Oh, doctor, professor, general, I don't know, all these high

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¹²⁸ What remains largely outside the scope of this research are the relations that Afghans in the Netherlands had with friends at a distance.

positions, but in Afghanistan it was very easy to get information about someone's background." (Naheed, 24) There were also Afghans who had changed names when they came to the Netherlands. This could be for several reasons, for instance because they were still scared of being found by their enemies, or because they had previously applied for asylum in another country, but it could also be because they had committed war crimes and were afraid of the legal consequences when this would come out. One can imagine the tensions within the Afghan population with victims fearing that they would meet their former oppressors, and former oppressors fearing that their former victims would expose them. Threats, for instance in the form of damage to one's property or receiving anonymous phone calls, were therefore not uncommon.

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The perceived differences and conflicts had a huge impact on how Afghans in the Netherlands related to each other, and as we have seen in section 5.1 social contact is the basis for providing support. Several respondents said that they knew other Afghans in their surroundings but tried to limit contacts with them as much as possible, because they were afraid of ending up in arguments about politics or religion or because they were afraid of becoming victims of gossip. Others chose not to relate to compatriots from certain subgroups; a respondent for instance refused to socialize with (former) communists "because I do not want to sit at the same table with my brothers' killers". Another respondent did not want to cooperate with a specific Afghan organization "because they are all male fundamentalists". There were also respondents who did have contacts with compatriots from opposing groups but then consciously avoided addressing certain sensitive issues.

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A reason why respondents socialized with compatriots with whom they probably would not have established any contact in Afghanistan lay in the first aspect that Massey et al. (1987: 143) mentioned regarding the relationship with people from the same place: the strangeness of the environment. For many arriving Afghans the Netherlands was a strange society in many ways, language-wise, culture-wise, the way in which the asylum system, the job market, the educational system functioned, etcetera. In this strange context the need to find someone 'familiar' who might also function as a bridge towards the new society - in the sense of Granovetter's (1973) weak ties - was an important reason for many Afghans to establish contacts with Afghans nearby. But these contacts were established with caution.

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5.4.2 Practical support

Practical support, the support that is aimed at solving practical problems and arranging practical matters, between Afghans in the Netherlands was mainly aimed at help and information concerning life in the new country and concerning transnational relations with Afghanistan. These were the aspects that most Afghans in the Netherlands - in spite of their differences - had in common: they stood before the challenge of recreating a new life in a

strange society and they had transnational connections with family members who stayed behind. The practical support that was exchanged was not as intense as some examples that I saw among family members, but it was quite diverse.

An important function of the contacts that respondents had with other Afghans in the Netherlands was that these contacts helped them track down family members and acquaintances from Afghanistan. Paradoxically, the desire to track down the people they knew compelled respondents to establish contacts with unfamiliar compatriots first. "There is always a go-between. In the third week that I was in the Netherlands I went to a woman from *VluchtelingenWerk* [Refugee Aid]: 'Do you know if any Afghans or Iranians assemble here?' I was looking for people of my generation. This woman gave me a list. On that list was the name of a former colleague. Someone from twenty years ago, with whom I worked when I still retained my maiden name. I was careful: is it the same name, the same man? I met him with much more knowledge than I had in the past. And from there [the search] begins." (Jamila, 45) So the continual search for people from the past was an important motivation for Afghans in the Netherlands to get in touch with each other and to exchange information about the people they knew in the present. Besides these informal contacts there also existed Afghan organizations that served as platforms to exchange information.¹²⁹

Further, respondents exchanged practical help and information concerning daily life in the Netherlands. This started directly in the asylum procedure, where Afghans who knew English translated for compatriots, where information on the living conditions and procedure was provided to newcomers, and where people were advised what to tell the Dutch authorities. The other side of the coin was that people were put under pressure to keep silent about certain facts because this could be disadvantageous to others. Regarding compatriots whose asylum claim had been rejected, respondents felt powerless. "I know two families in asylum seekers' centres whose asylum claims have been denied and who ask me: 'What can we do?' But we cannot do anything for them." (Karim, 38)

Once they received refugee status, support was exchanged with regard to integration in the Netherlands, like accompanying someone to an appointment at the town hall, translating letters from the Dutch authorities, giving advice on how to obtain rented accommodation in a certain locality, sharing experiences with respect to the educational system, and phoning the IND to find out more about a request for family reunification. Also at the level of Afghan associations attention was paid to issues concerning integration. For example, the chairman of an Afghan cultural association negotiated with the municipality about organizing extra Dutch classes for Afghans who needed to intensify their knowledge of the Dutch language. Actually, facilitating the integration of Afghans in the Netherlands was

¹²⁹ Afghan magazines and newspapers that were published in the West also provided information about Afghans in the diaspora.

an important aim of several national and local organizations; a common aim that united a group that was diverse in many other respects. Two problems were mentioned regarding the support that Afghans exchanged concerning integration: compatriots did not always have the capabilities to provide this type of support, for instance because their Dutch was limited; and compatriots did not always have time, for instance because they had a job and were busy with their own family problems.¹³⁰

A specific form of practical support among Afghans in the Netherlands that was often mentioned was the exchange of help and advice on how to save money. Most Afghans have limited economic means and informed each other about where to find cheap shops, second-hand shops, goods on the black market, the cheapest Internet and phone providers, the cheapest travel companies, etcetera. A respondent was taking driving lessons for a special price at the driving school of an Afghan friend. Friends also sometimes lent each other money, for instance to send remittances to Afghanistan. A respondent who did not have a car was given a lift by an Afghan friend when his daughter had to go to the hospital and when he bought a TV that needed to be brought home. This type of support was very much tied to the locality and even the neighbourhood in which people lived.

Support was also provided regarding relations with stay-behinds and with Afghanistan in general. Afghans who actually went on a return visit were asked to take with them letters, goods and money for the stay-behinds of compatriots in the Netherlands who could not go there themselves. "I often waited for [Afghan] people at Schiphol. The question then was if they did not have too much money to take, no more than 800 or 1000 euros." (Wahid, 56) Afghans who went to Afghanistan could also be asked to look out for stay-behinds who had gone missing. The same respondent, who did not know where his brothers in Afghanistan were, said: "When someone goes in that direction I provide them with a picture of myself. My friends think that it's a good idea. Then they can make inquiries if by any chance they meet someone of my family." Information on possibilities to return on a paid basis was also exchanged, like the options of the IOM return programmes for highly qualified nationals (see 2.3.3). For Afghans whose job it had been to keep up with the situation in Afghanistan, like journalists and politicians, information from people who went on a return visit formed an essential source of information - even if the possibilities to continue their work were limited in the context of the Netherlands.

Afghans in the Netherlands also needed each other's support when starting reconstruction and development projects or other activities, like business or politics, in Afghanistan. In the first place they needed information on the political, economic and safety situation, which was provided by compatriots who had been there. Additional to these

¹³⁰ Therefore some respondents also turned to non-Afghan persons for help. In the research I did not systematically study this aspect.

informal contacts, Afghan organizations also arranged formal events to exchange information on the situation in Afghanistan, for instance in the form of a conference. Secondly, money was needed to realize activities in Afghanistan, which stimulated Afghans to form foundations, often in co-operation with native Dutch persons. Money for development projects, mainly aimed at the place or region of the initiator's birth, was collected among compatriots, but because of their limited financial capacity additional Dutch funding was necessary. For instance, an Afghan-Dutch organization organised a benefit evening during which more than two thousand euros were raised to build schools in Afghanistan. The money was not only provided by the more than one hundred persons who were present, mostly Afghans. Money was also provided by Afghans in the rest of the Netherlands and in Germany who were approached beforehand and who responded by phone to the call made on the Afghan satellite channel Ariana. The Dutch foundation *Wilde Ganzen* had approved of the initiative and increased the total sum by thirty percent, so that the event finally yielded more than three thousand euros.¹³¹

A last aspect for which Afghans in the Netherlands united in order to achieve a common goal was to shake a defiant fist at the Dutch government and other political actors. During the American and British invasion in Afghanistan in 2001 Afghan refugees in the Netherlands - and Europe - jointly protested against the violence that was used against the civilian population in Afghanistan. When Afghanistan was declared safe enough to return to, a protest was organized in cooperation with *VluchtelingenWerk* [Refugee Aid]. In 2006 Westernized female Afghan asylum seekers formed an action committee against expulsion, also in cooperation with *VluchtelingenWerk*, claiming that they did not have a future in Afghanistan, let alone their daughters. In 2007 Afghan refugees protested against the amnesty regulation for war criminals that President Karzai was preparing, by handing over a petition to Dutch politicians. And in 2008 on several protests were organized against the fact that hundreds of Afghans were being denied a residence permit according to the 1F regulation (section 2.3.3). Particularly the last two examples, respectively a protest against war criminals and a protest to protect persons who were suspected of being war criminals, again shows the political divide among the Afghan population in the Netherlands, which was reflected in the existence of organizations with different political affiliations that often had a transnational character.

5.4.3 Social support

I defined social support as the support aimed at improving psychosocial well-being by having social contact. We saw that social support among family members formed the principal part

¹³¹ A rough estimate of the cost of a new school in Afghanistan is between € 50,000 and 90,000.

of these contacts. This type of support appeared the most difficult to replace by alternative contacts nearby, which was related to the aspects of vulnerability and trust that are involved in sharing memories, experiences and problems. The high level of trust required for sharing these matters in Afghan culture and society was not easily established in alternative relationships.

Among the respondents I noticed a tendency to intensify contacts with old friends who lived nearby in the absence of family members.¹³² This corresponds with Massey et al.'s (1987) observations that friendship-based relations can resemble family relations and that the closest bonds outside the family are those which have formed between people as they grow up together (141-142). Several respondents who explicitly distanced themselves from the Afghan community in general and who had few or no relatives around, only associated with a few good friends that they knew from the past, for instance because they went to school together or lived in the same neighbourhood. During the research respondents quite systematically distinguished friends they knew back in Afghanistan from compatriots they befriended after fleeing. The fact that they knew each other - and each other's families - from the past meant that there was a certain degree of trust present.

Trust could also grow between compatriots who established a friendship after fleeing to the Netherlands. This often happened on the basis of people living under similar physical or social conditions, for instance being in the same asylum seekers' centre, women living on their own without a man, or Afghans living in the same neighbourhood. In some cases these contacts developed into a family-like type of relationship in which people visited each other frequently and shared their problems and celebrations. More often these contacts remained on the surface with people paying each other a visit from time to time, in particular on special occasions like Afghan holidays, or for instance in the case of the birth of a child or a bereavement in the family. Thus, these newly-established friendships partly took over the symbolic function of family contacts, but without the naturalness and trust that lay at the basis of relations within the family. A respondent stated: "I do have contacts with other Afghans in the sense of 'How are you?', or if someone falls ill I call to ask if they need help. But I do not spontaneously visit other Afghans." (Farzana, 38) Respondents repeatedly said that the contacts with compatriots were not the same as family contacts, and there was particularly the fear of gossip and exposure within the Afghan community. It was striking how several female respondents explicitly mentioned this factor of social control among compatriots as a reason why they had chosen to establish friendships with non-Afghan women instead. "I know many Afghan women, but in all those years I have met no one with whom I wanted to share my

¹³² There were also old friends and neighbours who lived at a distance and who came to visit for several days, but I did not systematically study these non-familial long-distance relationships.

problems. That is why I have many Dutch friends, then at least I know that what I tell them does not come out."¹³³ (Wafa, 38)

The factor of social control influenced larger social gatherings as well, like weddings and conferences. Again, the fact that people came together did not automatically mean that they also shared memories, feelings and problems. Actually, several respondents mentioned how they did not feel happy during these social events because of their exceptional social circumstances, like a woman at a female-only *Eid al-Fitr* party who confided to the researcher that she felt so alone as a rejected asylum seeker between all the others who had a residence permit. A female respondent said: "Once I shared problems with a friend, but she passed them on to other [Afghan] women. If I went to a party, everyone stared at me because they knew my problems. People for instance talk behind your back about the fact that you have had male friends." (Farzana, 38) Respondents who were involved in organizing an Afghan women's group told how most participants had problems at home but did not talk about them during the gatherings. They nevertheless kept coming because they had few other opportunities to go outside and meet others. An attempt to make people share their daily problems was made by organizing courses or lectures around certain themes, like 'What to do about depression?'

There were several respondents who presented themselves as persons of trust in the Afghan community. They said that people came to them with personal problems, mainly in the domestic sphere, and that they gave advice and - most importantly - did not pass confidential information on to others. It was noticeable that these persons were well integrated in terms of their knowledge of the Dutch language and culture, and had a relatively good educational or professional level in the Netherlands. However, the fact that they were persons of trust for other Afghans did not automatically imply that they themselves shared confidentialities with compatriots. I also observed that women who were in a social position that was not acceptable in the eyes of many compatriots, for instance because they were divorced or married to a non-Afghan, sometimes avoided big events organized by compatriots and established intensive friendships with women in comparable situations - from Afghan as well as non-Afghan origin.

5.4.4 Cultural support

I defined cultural support as the support that is aimed at upholding culture and traditions, which usually takes the form of sharing cultural practices. As we saw in the former subsection (5.4.3), events like weddings, funerals and Afghan holidays were important occasions for non-related compatriots - as well as for family members - to come together, on a personal basis as well as on an organizational level. Besides the obvious social aspect of these

¹³³ Afghan men did not mention this viewpoint, and did not report these types of intensive friendships with native Dutch men.

gatherings there were also cultural aspects involved. The music, the food, the traditions and customs that accompanied these events were communal factors that even united compatriots that were different in other respects, like political and ethnic background and class.

On a personal level particularly the Afghan holidays of *Naw Ruz* and *Eid al Fitr* were events during which respondents visited or were visited by Afghan friends and acquaintances who lived nearby. Preparing and sharing special dishes was an important element of these visits. Thus, people tried to keep the common denominators of their own culture alive and to pass them on to the next generation.¹³⁴ While *Naw Ruz* and *Eid al Fitr* were festive days for almost all respondents¹³⁵, other special days caused more controversy. For instance, the International Women's Day on 8 March was elaborately celebrated by some, particularly by people who were involved in women's rights, while for others this day did not have any special significance. The same was true of 9 September on which some commemorated the death of the famous anti-Soviet resistance commander Ahmad Shah Massoud while others considered him to be nothing more than a war criminal. The different attitudes toward the many Afghan holidays that exist again reflected differences in terms of political and religious background. Weddings and funerals were other occasions on which compatriots who lived nearby were usually invited. Even if they had little contact besides these occasions, most respondents felt it was their duty to attend these types of events.

At the organizational level many Afghan associations had the explicit goal of providing cultural support for their members. Especially the organizations at a local level focused on the cultural aspect, and for instance called themselves a cultural association. Again, several cultural aspects were the elements that connected compatriots who differed in many other respects. Sharing these common features and passing them on to the children who were born or raised in the Netherlands were the main reasons for attending the cultural events that were organized. Music, food, dance, traditional costumes and poetry were important aspects during these gatherings. The focus on celebrating their 'Afghanness' in the Netherlands temporarily created a feeling of collectiveness and distracted from mutual contrasts. For many respondents these cultural events formed the rare, if not the only, occasions during which they met compatriots other than their family members.¹³⁶ Therefore these cultural occasions also served the goal of teaching the children about their Afghan background. A father explained: "[The children] are entitled to learn their mother tongue and to be introduced to their parents' religion. These two aspects are not in the curriculum of

¹³⁴ Some respondents also invited non-compatriots in order to introduce them to their own cultural background.

¹³⁵ Although one respondent rejected *Eid al Fitr* as a religious and therefore pointless event

¹³⁶ This does not mean that all respondents joined the Afghan cultural events that were organized. While some did not feel the need to indulge in activities with compatriots, for instance because they did not have time or preferred to invest in other social contacts, others kept their distance because they feared confrontation with compatriots as we also saw in the former sub-section (5.4.3).

Dutch schools." (Asad, 50) Some associations organized weekly Afghan language classes for children. Finally, the desired factor of Afghan children marrying compatriots was another motivation for joining cultural events with compatriots, as a way of meeting youngsters of a marriageable age and their parents.¹³⁷ Still, within the settings of Afghan associations cultural differences also created tensions, for instance regarding the language(s) that should be used, whether or not there should be prayer during the event, and whether or not men and women should celebrate together or separately.

At the organizational level, there were also activities in which the cultural differences and difficulties of Afghans in the Netherlands were explicitly discussed. Organizations for instance arranged meetings about parenting in the Netherlands, or aging in the Netherlands. The persons who organized these events - in cooperation with Dutch professionals - stressed that it was not easy to make their compatriots exchange experiences of such a personal kind. Even though the participants had similar experiences, they were reluctant to talk about them because they were not used to discussing these matters outside the family and feared and gossiping. This was somewhat different for the younger Afghans who were born or raised in the Netherlands. For the student organizations that we came across during the research, the issue of their Afghan identity within the context of the Netherlands was an important aspect that was openly discussed. Topics like relationships between men and women, marriage and religion were explicitly talked about, not only face to face but also via the Internet. However, also between youngsters the factors that divided their parents could still play a role. A young respondent for instance noticed that the hostility between Dari- and Pashtu-speaking youngsters in Western Europe was on the increase.

5.4.5 Familial support only partially replaceable

In this sub-section I analyse to what extent relations with compatriots nearby substituted for an eventual lack of kin support. We have seen in sub-section 5.4.1 that practical support was relatively easily exchanged between compatriots nearby, except for the support of a high intensity. In the new environment of the Netherlands people needed information and help, and as people from the same country they felt familiar because they had many characteristics and experiences in common. These communal factors on the one hand defined their ability to help, because they were in the same situation and understood each other's needs, and on the other hand defined their limitations, because they lacked certain knowledge and certain contacts¹³⁸. During the research we came across a few examples of intensive support between non-related compatriots, like an older respondent who received help regarding his

¹³⁷ For Afghan youngsters in the diaspora another - increasingly popular - way to find a marriage partner was Internet dating, as I mentioned in chapter 4. This method increased the autonomy of youngsters with regard to finding a marriage partner.

¹³⁸ As we have also seen in the case of family members (sub-section 5.2.1)

complicated and time-consuming family reunification procedure from an acquaintance who lived in the same city, and a sick single woman who received care from a female friend. But respondents repeatedly stressed that compatriots all had their own problems and that they were occupied with their own families in the first place. This placed people who were in need of intensive support and did not have relatives around in a vulnerable position.

The exchange of social support appeared to be the most problematic form of support to be replaced by non-related compatriots nearby. This concerned not so much the aspect of having contact: friends and acquaintances (from the past and new ones) visited each other, called each other, and met at weddings and funerals and at other organized events. The difficulty was the lack of trust that people felt in sharing problems, and particularly problems of a socio-cultural nature. This resulted in some respondents experiencing contact with compatriots more as a burden than as a form of support. There were even respondents who for this reason avoided having contacts with compatriots altogether. However, we also saw that some respondents who were in a socially aberrant situation established intensive friendships with compatriots in comparable situations.

The exchange of cultural support also brought compatriots together at a personal and an organizational basis. The desire to keep up at least some aspects of Afghan culture and to pass them on to the next generation united compatriots. This desire also made compatriots dependent on each other, because the most important cultural events like Afghan holidays, weddings and funerals were meant to be celebrated together with many people. These cultural events, moreover, formed relatively 'safe' occasions to meet; occasions that stressed the communal factors between compatriots more than their differences¹³⁹. Therefore the Afghan culture and identity was used as a common denominator to gather compatriots who had little else in common, at the local level, in the form of cultural associations. However, the aspect of explicitly discussing cultural differences and difficulties that Afghans experienced in Dutch society could cause discomfort when it touched upon personal and familial problems.

When focussing on the Afghan organizations, I make a gradual distinction between the more socio-cultural type of associations and the organizations that had an explicit political or societal aim - although most organizations combined both aspects to some extent; for instance, the student associations combined social, cultural and political activities with charity projects aimed at Afghanistan. The first types of associations were partly founded in order to substitute for the loss of the network of family members and friends that most Afghans in the Netherlands had to deal with. As a respondent said: "Everybody has his or her family far away and it's important to get together on holidays or to mourn together. It's good to get together, to follow developments together. Only through an association can you solve certain

¹³⁹ Although there were also differences in, for instance, the way in which Pashtuns or Tadjiks celebrated a wedding, or in the way in which modernists or traditionalists held a funeral.

problems, maybe also with the integration process." (Asad, 50) This statement reflects how Afghan organizations had the function of alleviating the loneliness that many members perceived and to help them cope with daily life - although we saw in the former sections that this only worked to a limited extent, and not for everybody. Organizations with explicit political or societal aims at first sight did not fulfil this substitutive role. Their members focused on political or societal change (in Afghanistan, in the Netherlands, or internationally), by means of organizing political action or development projects. Some organizations, for instance some political organizations and women's organizations, formed a continuation or reactivation of collectives that had already existed in Afghanistan and that obtained a transnational dimension once part of their members had fled abroad. Other organizations only came into existence in the new context, like initiatives aimed at changing Dutch asylum policies or creating development projects in Afghanistan. What all these collectives had in common was that they served as platforms to get into contact with like-minded compatriots. This created a basis from which the exchange of practical, cultural, and to a lesser extent social support could possibly and quite naturally follow.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I studied the relations that the respondents had with their family members in the West, in a way that closely resembles the way in which Sarkisian, Gerena and Gerstel (2006) analyse extended family relations - using the family integration concept and the factors of proximity to kin, contact with kin and the provision of support. The difference is that while they focus on the family situation of ethnic groups within the context of one (large) country, the United States, my starting point is the family contacts that Afghans in the Netherlands maintain throughout the Western world - which brings in the transnational factor.

The exchange pattern with regard to the extended family relations in the West of Afghans in the Netherlands was the following. There were several examples of intensive practical support that was primarily exchanged between parents and their adult children who lived nearby¹⁴⁰ and of intensive practical support that was provided to parents and siblings who lived nearby in an asylum seekers' centre. Apart from these situations and relations, the practical support that was exchanged was rather ad hoc and limited, also in financial terms. The only form of support that was exchanged on a large scale and notwithstanding geographical distance was

¹⁴⁰ This finding is not significantly different from the intensive intergenerational exchange that Schans (2007: 117) perceives within Dutch families; a finding that is contrary to arguments on the decline of family commitments in the Western world.

advice, on all kinds of practical matters, although the possibility was somewhat limited by the different national contexts in which family members lived.

The major part of the exchange of support that took place between Afghans in the Netherlands and family members in the West consisted of social and cultural support. Whether family members lived nearby or at a distance, they spent time and money on indulging in social exchange by making visits and by long-distance communication. Concerning the exchange of social support, or in other words the sharing of experiences and feelings and of social advice; the larger the geographical distance between family members, the more contacts focused on first and second-degree relatives. I also found that the larger the distance, the less frequent the visits were, although their nature was usually intense with family members staying with each other, sometimes for several weeks or even months. The importance that respondents attached to this dimension of exchange, face to face as well as by communication at a distance, confirms Kagitçibasi's (1996) idea that 'the shift in family/human patterns [...] is toward emotional interdependence' (p. 94).

The contact that respondents had with family members in the West on special occasions, like during Afghan national holidays but also during life events like weddings and funerals, had besides a social function also a cultural function. Getting in touch during these days reaffirmed feelings of family connection and Afghan identity, and provided an opportunity to pass on cultural aspects to the children. Particularly weddings and funerals - whether nearby or far away, for whoever could afford the journey - offered an opportunity to establish or re-establish ties with extended family members as well, and new family connections might follow from these gatherings in the form of new marriages. In sub-section 5.2.4 I described the phenomenon of cousin marriages as one of the most intensive practices of support exchange between family members in the West that I came across. In addition to Kagitçibasi's (1996) idea of emotional interdependence, I therefore state that a cultural interdependence could also be perceived between Afghans in the Netherlands and their family members in the West.

In chapter 3 (section 3.4 Flight and dispersal) we saw that the extent to which respondents had family members in the West varied enormously, ranging from respondents of whom almost their entire families (including adult siblings, aunts and uncles) remained in the West to respondents who were the only representatives of their families in a Western country. But even having most of their relatives in the West did not automatically mean that respondents were able to establish the family life that they desired.

Only those respondents who had their next of kin nearby in the same city or the same provincial region had established a family life that was intensive in all three respects, including the exchange of personal care. But most respondents, out of necessity, had become

used to a less intensive family practice as they faced different types of obstacles. Firstly, there were legal obstacles to getting together in the form of immigration regulations and visa requirements. Practical and cultural obstacles in the host country were also mentioned, like busy school and work schedules and different national holidays. However, a combination of geographical distance and a lack of economic means were mentioned most frequently as an obstacle. In that sense distance was a relative concept that was most problematic for those persons who did not have the money, good health and/or knowledge to travel and communicate over long distances. The divide between the family values with which they were raised and their former experiences with regard to familial support, on the one hand, and the limitations that they faced in the new context, on the other, was generally perceived as a painful reality. Even when family members were capable of communicating and getting together, they were in many cases confronted with the problems that they all faced as newcomers and the limited abilities to help each other in that respect. Particularly in financial and practical terms the contrast with the former situation of strong material interdependence within the family was great. Even though the role of providing for these material needs was partly taken over by the host states, many respondents perceived this drop in intrafamilial exchange as a loss. Particularly respondents of the first generation were used to showing their 'family love' (Bahr & Bahr, 2001) or 'sense of family obligation' (Finch, 1989) (also) via practical exchange, and now that this aspect had diminished they felt that their family ties were under threat.

In this chapter I posed the question whether contacts with compatriots compensated for a lack of kinship-ties nearby. I studied the exchange of support between compatriots nearby and thereby distinguished contacts at an informal level and contacts at an organizational level. Trust appeared to be an important issue in the contacts between compatriots that varied from high levels of trust between old friends from the past to low levels of trust between acquaintances from different backgrounds that had recently met. With regard to the Afghan organizations that I studied, in spite of the gradual difference between the more socio-cultural type of associations and the organizations that had an explicit political or developmental aim, more or less explicitly they all served (also) as platforms for the exchange of support. However, not all forms of support were exchanged with the same ease. Practical information and advice, for instance about life in the Netherlands, was easily shared, and cultural exchanges took place regularly. Social courtesies were also exchanged on a large scale, but most respondents found it difficult to share experiences and problems of a personal kind in their contacts with non-related compatriots. As I described in chapter 4, most Afghan nuclear families in the Netherlands struggled with the internal transformations and tensions that resulted from the integration process. However, discussing these problems with persons

outside the family was risky because it would not only jeopardize the reputation of the individual family member but of the whole family if the information would come out. Therefore, next of kin in the West formed an important soundboard for discussing social matters, because they struggled with similar issues and could be trusted. Again, respondents indicated that there was a contrast with the former situation in Afghanistan: these widespread family contacts no longer automatically formed the 'protective social circle' that they had been in the past, which was perceived by some as a positive development¹⁴¹. Also, the distance between family members limited the possibilities to offer concrete help, for instance in the form of keeping an eye on the children or negotiating in case of marital conflict. In spite of these limitations respondents indicated the importance of sharing their experiences with their next of kin, and particularly with siblings. Consequently, the problem of feeling isolated was more often mentioned by respondents who did not have their next of kin in the West with whom they could discuss their personal matters.¹⁴² Finally, I found that persons who were in need of intensive practical support and did not have family members around them were in a vulnerable position too, because their compatriots all had their own concerns and were occupied with their own families in the first place.

¹⁴¹ Because protection also meant control and interference.

¹⁴² In the thesis I do not address the issue of relations that Afghans in the Netherlands had with non-Afghans.

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Chapter 6: Family life with stay-behinds - Between remittances and return

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*I fled to the West
to feel freedom
but now I have become a prisoner
of homesickness
and loneliness.*

Nasrin Hamidi (2005)¹⁴³

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the relationship between Afghans in the Netherlands and their family members who stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, to whom I succinctly refer to as 'stay-behinds'. Contrary to the transnational family relations that we discussed in chapter 5, the relations with stay-behinds were not only characterized by geographical distance, but also by a divide in terms of safety and security, economic circumstances, and the cultural context. The question then rises what impact these differences had on the transnational relations that the respondents had with their stay-behinds.

In chapter 1 (section 1.3.5) we already saw that the more enduring relations are, the more of a basis there is for support (Staring, 2001: 14). According to Staring (ibid.) '[k]inship ties are an outstanding example of enduring relations, in which not only members of the nuclear family but also extended family members mostly grow up in each other's vicinity. The general presumption is that familial relations in comparison with other relations bring a high potential of support, also dependent on the degree of proximity'. According to Boissevain (1974) this high potential of support stems from the high mutual trust in these relationships. But in the case of familial relations between Afghans in the Netherlands and their stay-behinds, the question was how enduring these relations remained with such a long geographical distance between such different structural and cultural contexts, and to what extent they still formed a 'high potential for support'. When studying the relationships that respondents maintained with their stay-behinds with regard to the exchange of support, I

¹⁴³ Translated from Dutch.

found six aspects that were prevalent in these relations: bringing stay-behinds to the West, sending remittances, long-distance communication, visiting, return, and development. The inequality between the structural living conditions of Afghans in the Netherlands and those of their stay-behinds particularly raised the issue of reciprocity, the extent to which an exchange of support took place back and forth.

Not all respondents established relations with their stay-behinds with the same versatility and intensity. O'Flaherty et al. (2007) documented inequalities between migrants in Australia in their capacities for a home visit due to differences in assimilation¹⁴⁴. This is in line with Portes' (2003: 887) statement that 'it is not the case that assimilation and transnationalism are at odds since it is often the better established and more secure immigrants who engage in these [transnational] activities'. The qualitative and interpretative nature of the study does not lend itself to drawing conclusions about the causality between integration and transnationalism, but in this chapter I do pay attention to the interrelatedness of both aspects in the respondents' lives.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the next section I first provide information on the living situation of family members in the region of origin, because the way in which the respondents perceived the situation of their stay-behinds partly determined their transnational activities. In section 6.3 to 6.6 I describe six aspects that were prevalent in the relations that respondents had with their stay-behinds: bringing stay-behinds to the West, sending remittances, long-distance communication and visiting, and return and development. Thereby also bringing stay-behinds to the West (section 6.3) was perceived as the ideal situation to aim for, but the opportunities to realize this were limited. Therefore sending remittances (section 6.4) and long-distance communication and visiting (section 6.5) formed the main aspects of the relations with stay-behinds. With regard to the aspects of return and development (section 6.6), the relations with stay-behinds paradoxically functioned as an incentive as well as an obstacle to realizing these options. In the concluding section I first analyse the exchange of practical, social and cultural support in the relations between respondents and stay-behinds and answer the question of to what extent these relations still formed a potential for support (6.7.1). I then deal with the issue of reciprocity and describe the combination of mechanisms that help explain the continuity of the relationships between respondents and stay-behinds (6.7.2). At the end of the chapter I analyse the interrelatedness between the transnational activities of the respondents, their transnational commitment, and their integration in the Netherlands (6.7.3).

¹⁴⁴ O'Flaherty et al. (2007) use the concepts of (economic and cultural) assimilation; in this study I make use of the term (structural and socio-cultural) integration instead.

6.2 The situation of stay-behinds

When respondents talked about the situation of family members who had stayed behind, they mainly focused on the situation of the spouse, children, parents, and siblings and their families. If asked, they would say that there were more family members back in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, like their aunts, uncles and cousins. But the priority was with the persons whom they felt and were held responsible for in the first place. Parents formed a particular source of concern, because of their advanced age and accompanying health problems, which could be worsened by war experiences. One respondent stated: "My mother was everything to me. Six of her children fled abroad, and because of the grief she had three heart attacks in one month time. She died of grief." (Zahra, 37)

"My parents stayed behind in their own house in Kandahar. My father still lives there. My brothers live in Iran now; they do not live together anymore but separately. [...] For Afghans it's difficult in Iran. They are not allowed to work as the Iranians, they can only set up their own businesses. And there is no social security like here, not at all. You have to do it all by yourself.

My father now lives alone in Kandahar, and that is difficult for him. [...] He has visited Iran twice, and one time he had a heart attack there. I think it happened because of the difficult situation of his family being scattered." (Asif, 58)

The living conditions of stay-behinds, as respondents described them, varied in many respects, but generally they were characterized by a lack of safety or security. Many stay-behinds still remained in the western part of Pakistan or in the eastern part of Iran. Although it became possible to travel back and forth to Afghanistan after 9/11, they were reluctant to return there permanently. The lack of affordable housing and the lack of employment in Afghanistan, and also the general poverty were mentioned as reasons not to return to Afghanistan (yet). In the meantime these people had built a life in Pakistan and Iran; for instance, they had found a place to live and a job, and the children went to school. They feared what life in Afghanistan would bring them, particularly because they perceived the political situation in Afghanistan as far from stable.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, their status in Pakistan and Iran did not provide them with security either, as these countries refused to recognize the refugees from Afghanistan, which turned them into illegal residents. Respondents mentioned several negative consequences of this illegal status: stay-behinds could not have regular jobs, did not qualify for social provisions like free education for the

¹⁴⁵ '[W]hen many Afghans [in Pakistan] speak of conditions in Afghanistan, they are speaking from personal experience: they have crossed over and taken a look' (Kronenfeld, 2008: 56).

children, were harassed by corrupt officials who asked for their identity papers, and ran the risk of being rounded up and expelled to Afghanistan.

Most stay-behinds who did return to Afghanistan or who had never left the country stayed in the cities, predominantly in Kabul. The ones who were still in possession of a house or a rural estate were in an advantageous position compared to the ones who had lost their property. The latter had to buy or rent a new place to live, which was expensive because of the high numbers of refugees who returned to the cities or came to live there; the continuing influx raised prices enormously. Unemployment was another big issue; it was very difficult to find a regular job and the salaries were generally low. A lack of safety also remained a constant worry for stay-behinds in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶ They could become a specific target, for instance because they were relatively wealthy; or because they were women and their way of dressing and behaving was perceived as being too liberal; or because they had a political or militant background that was perceived as deviant. They also ran the risk of becoming a victim of random violence, for instance by the bombings or suicide attacks in the streets. An aspect that was of particular concern to the respondents was the health situation of their next of kin stay-behinds. "My poor sister in Afghanistan suffers from her knees. I sent medicines, but they did not help. If she was in the Netherlands, I would go to see some specialists with her." (Omar, 29) This statement illustrates the powerlessness that respondents felt when stay-behinds became ill or were injured; the chances of stay-behinds receiving adequate treatment were minimal unless they were taken abroad.¹⁴⁷

According to the respondents, not all stay-behinds found themselves in a disadvantageous situation. Some had a good job or business, possessed a beautiful house, and sent their children to good schools. Some had even set up their own development projects in Afghanistan. Quite a number of stay-behinds worked for foreign organizations, which were known to pay well.¹⁴⁸ Others occupied prestigious professions, like a pharmacist, a doctor, a TV host, an economist, and a politician. And the fact that stay-behinds had their next of kin in the West was a reason in itself why their position was better than that of the average Afghan population, because it assured them of financial and other support from the West. But when respondents considered the living situation of stay-behinds, they often made comparisons with the life that the family led before conflict and war took their toll. Usually they had memories of a comfortable house - or several houses -, important jobs, and money to spend. And

¹⁴⁶ One respondent specifically stressed the lack of safety in Pakistan due to political activists and fighters. His male relatives in Pakistan had to keep a low profile there, for instance they could not work, because of their political and militant activities in Afghanistan.

¹⁴⁷ Respondents mentioned stay-behinds going to Pakistan or even India for health treatment. Another option was to come to a Western country for treatment, but this was difficult because of the immigration criteria.

¹⁴⁸ The other side of the coin was that the work involved risks, because foreign organizations were often the target of attacks by extremists.

compared to those memories they perceived the reality in which stay-behinds lived now as frugal, even when their circumstances were better than those of the average Afghan population. "My sister [in Kabul] is a modern woman, a doctor, and she married a doctor when she was already 28. [...] I suggested that they should employ a housemaid. But she earns 2000 afghani (100 dollars), he earns 4000 afghani (200 dollars), and they have to pay the rent and transport to work, and therefore they have no money for domestic help."¹⁴⁹ (Farzana, 38)

Another factor added to the fact that most respondents perceived the living situation of stay-behinds as distressing. Even if stay-behinds were well to do, their situation remained fragile because of the general instability in Afghanistan. Most respondents meticulously kept up with the developments in Afghanistan by following the news and checking their findings with the stay-behinds. Therefore they were very aware of the impact that general events could have on the lives of their next of kin. "I called my brother after the attack on the Americans in the streets [of Kabul]. His wife works in a kindergarten. The children could leave the kindergarten only from one side; the other side was too dangerous. And she herself could only go home in the late afternoon, after 5 p.m." (Rona, 42) This respondent was so worried about the safety of her brothers and their families in Kabul, that she made her daughters call to enquire into their well-being when she was too anxious to call them herself. Generally, the developments in Afghanistan were viewed by the respondents with feelings ranging from slight optimism to deep pessimism. Even the most optimistic respondents acknowledged that the situation could easily deteriorate.

6.3 Bringing stay-behinds to the West

"I feel good when I can give my mother a cup of tea". (Jamila, 45)

Thus a respondent explained why she wanted her elderly and widowed mother in Afghanistan to join her in the Netherlands. Her mother coming to the Netherlands would enable the respondent to actively care for her instead of worrying about her situation at a distance. In chapter 5 (sub-section 5.2.1) I already pointed to the fact that co-presence is a *sine qua non* for practical support like personal hands-on care (Baldassar, 2007). The respondent also expected that her mother coming to the Netherlands would diminish her own feeling of loneliness in the new country. However, pursuing this desire to be reunited with stay-behinds automatically confronted respondents with Dutch immigration policy.

¹⁴⁹ This respondent particularly mentioned the difficult social situation of women in Afghanistan because of the double workload and the lack of respect from which many of them suffered.

"In 1998 I came to the Netherlands and asked for asylum. I waited for years before I was given asylum status. In 2001 my wife and five children sought asylum in Frankfurt. The reason for that was that a payment had been made to get them out of Afghanistan, and they were brought to Frankfurt. At that time I did not have asylum status yet, so there was no reason for them to come to the Netherlands. So they asked for asylum in Germany. After five years I finally received this status. My wife and children in Germany haven't been given such a status yet; they have a kind of temporary status that they have to renew every few months. My wife and I have a problem with this situation: the fact that our family is spread over two different countries. The children do not understand." (Haider, 59)

The desire to be together was most often and explicitly mentioned concerning the spouse and children who had stayed behind. In chapter 3 (section 3.5) I described how receiving a residence permit was an important condition for family reunification.¹⁵⁰ For those respondents who came to the Netherlands without their spouse and/or one or more children, the first priority after receiving a residence status was to be reunited with them in the Netherlands. Several respondents described how the process of family reunification went rather smoothly and how their stay-behinds were able to join them within a year or less. Still, waiting for family reunification was generally perceived as a stressful time, as a respondent described: "The most difficult thing was that I did not know whether the family reunification would succeed or not. I felt a lot of tension, stress, I could not sleep. But I did not expect that it would be arranged so quickly. I thought it would take several years." (Mitra, 44)

For others it was more difficult to meet the criteria for family reunification. Especially the income limit, which was applicable to the situation of several respondents,¹⁵¹ appeared to be a difficult hurdle to take. "My little son in Pakistan said he loved chocolate spread. So I bought two pots of chocolate spread in anticipation of his arrival. But after two years of waiting the use-by date had expired and I had to throw them away." (Haider, 59) During the conversations with respondents, several apologised for their poor level of Dutch and explained how they had broken off their Dutch language classes in order to work and earn an income in order to meet the requirements for family reunification. These respondents described the legal procedures as a fuzzy and endless bureaucratic process during which they

¹⁵⁰ Except for the period between April 2001 and September 2002 when Afghans who received temporary protection were also entitled to apply for family reunification (see section 2.3.3).

¹⁵¹ Persons who were granted asylum had to apply for family reunification within three months after having received their status. If they failed to do so, their application fell under the regular family-reunification policy, which meant that the income criterion was applicable: they then had to earn an income from work which was at least equal to the social security level for couples/families. Persons who received a regular residence status (for instance, in the case of a general pardon) fell automatically under the regular family-reunification policy. Before 2000 an income from certain allowances was also accepted, and additionally there was a requirement of adequate housing.

were dependent on others, like lawyers, employees from *VluchtelingenWerk* [Refugee Aid], the aliens department, the *IND* [Immigration and Naturalization Services], and judges, who were not always capable or concerned. Still, the respondents tried to influence the process as much as possible: "Three days per week I went to VVN [*VluchtelingenWerk*] to make inquiries about my application. They became accustomed to my appearance there." (Karim, 38)

Underneath these perceptions of the bureaucratic process there was incomprehension as to why they were not allowed to be together with their spouse and children. A respondent whose request for family reunification with his wife and children had been rejected said: "The children do not understand [the situation]. During the Russians we had a difficult time, but at least we could share the problems with the family. Now we live separately, a very difficult time, more difficult than ever before." (Haider, 59) This man tried to exert political influence on his situation by writing a letter to the Ombudsman. Another respondent in a similar situation wrote a letter to the Queen. Examples were given of Afghans in the Netherlands who could no longer stand the waiting and decided to return to their spouse and children in their region of origin. A respondent talked about his brother-in-law: "He had been in the Netherlands for five years and had finished his vocational training. Now he has returned and lives there [in Kabul]. The reason is that he did not succeed in getting his wife over, because of the rules of [minister] Verdonk. Therefore he was very mixed up, because he could not call her everyday."

An experience mentioned by several respondents was that access to the Netherlands for family reunification was denied to their children who had reached the age of majority.¹⁵² An important policy condition for family reunification with adult children was that they were still 'dependent', which excluded children who had moved out of the parental home or who were married. But as we have seen in chapter 3, children and particularly sons getting married in Afghanistan by no means meant that they became independent from the parents. On the contrary, the interdependence between the parents and their married sons and daughters-in-law, who usually lived nearby or in the same compound, was intense. But also the contact between parents and their married daughters often remained intensive, especially if the latter had married a relative and lived nearby. Therefore a refusal of family reunification for their adult children was perceived by the respondents as harmful to both the children and their parents in the Netherlands. A respondent recalled the situation of an Afghan friend who returned to her eldest son in Afghanistan after he was not allowed to join her in the Netherlands. The choice to give up her residence permit and return to the unsafety and

¹⁵² Even though under the Aliens Act 2000 the adult children of asylum seekers who received asylum status were incorporated as being entitled to family reunification and a derived asylum status, this was only possible subject to the condition that they were still 'dependent'.

insecurity of Afghanistan reflected the despair that people felt because they were kept separated from their beloved.

"It was tradition and culture to live together always. My family lived in Kabul. Two of my sisters were married and naturally lived elsewhere. But the others lived together. [...] The children only left to study abroad, but afterwards they came back to their own country. [...] We hoped that we would never leave our country. We found warmth and support with each other, it was not even material, it was just heaven. We were so close and befriended." (Omar, 29)

Respondents stressed their cultural background as a factor that increased their wish to be together with stay-behinds, particularly concerning the parents. In their perception Dutch family ties were rather loose, and some respondents perceived a lack of respect, particularly from children towards their parents. They contrasted the - in their view detached - Dutch attitude with the Afghan culture, in which parents must always be treated with respect and the bond between parents and children was perceived as unbreakable. This perception of family life was in contradiction with the policies on family reunification, which offered limited opportunities for reunification between adult children and their older parents¹⁵³ - which formed a mirror image of the problematic situation of adult married children that I sketched above. Several respondents expressed that their needs - and the needs of their parents - were being affected by these strict rules. A respondent stated: "Only husbands, wives and children can be invited. Parents [can]not, as far as I know. The reason is that they are grown-ups. But the bond does not have anything to do with age. You are always a child. You are always a mother." (Jamila, 45) In this line of thought the limitations of the family reunification policy were perceived as unnatural for them and, in a sense, inhumane (compare with Van Walsum, 2001). The fact that many elderly parents suffered from health problems and that the medical facilities in the region of origin were poor further added to this perception.¹⁵⁴

Respondents used the cultural factor more in general to explain what they missed in the Netherlands regarding family life. They described how family life back in Afghanistan was more intense. But they did not conclude that they should be entitled to reunification with all family members who had stayed behind. A respondent made the suggestion to allow family reunification for brothers and sisters, because "[i]n our culture the family is very close

¹⁵³ Bringing a parent over to the Netherlands was only possible if many conditions were met: he or she had to be older than 65, alone, with most of the children in the Netherlands and no children in the country of origin, and in poor living conditions.

¹⁵⁴ In this respect the policy condition of the parent being older than 65 and alone was already problematic in a country in which people married and had children at a young age, and the life expectancy at birth was 44.2 years in 2008 (CIA, World Factbook Afghanistan).

together. We cannot [live] without these relations." (Mitra, 44) But only one respondent explicitly stated that he wanted to go back to the old family life in which he shared a house with his parents, his brothers and their wives and children. Regarding the other respondents, their statements about the desire to be together with stay-behinds in general were dialectical. On the one hand, they missed the naturalness of their former family life; how they visited each other without first having to make appointments, how they always received guests or visited on Fridays and special holidays, how relatives could stay over as long as they wished. On the other hand, they indicated that they longed for a past that could not be retrieved, because they had changed themselves and would no longer be able to return to this life.

"When I left [Afghanistan] and arrived in the Netherlands it was nice, it was quiet and there was safety. I wish that for everybody, to be here." (Hussain, 28)

Even when respondents did not aspire to resume the intensive family life from the past, they had another important motive to bring their stay-behinds to the West. Generally, they enjoyed the safety and security that they had found in the Netherlands, and these were the aspects that they wanted for their loved ones as well. If they had next of kin who remained behind in a dangerous and difficult situation, this was a constant source of concern and guilt. The relatively privileged position of the respondents in a tranquil Western country made them responsible, in the eyes of the stay-behinds as well as their own. This responsibility weighed even heavier for the men in general and elder sons and brothers in particular, because traditionally the family expected a great deal from them. Bringing the stay-behinds into the same favourable situation as they were in would partly unburden them.

"Look, this is a picture of my aunt [in Kabul]. She is 25 years old. I have taken those pictures because I want her to marry a good Iranian man of about 32 years old that I know here in the Netherlands. [...] He wants to marry an Afghan woman. [...] And I want to get my aunt away from there." (Naheed, 24)

This quotation refers to another route that was used to bring family members to the West, namely marrying a stay-behind - or in this example having an acquaintance marrying a stay-behind. In sub-section 2.3.2 I mentioned that marriages between Afghans in the Netherlands and compatriots from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran were on the increase, but this opportunity was only reserved for couples who were able to meet the immigration requirements¹⁵⁵ and to

¹⁵⁵ They had to earn an income from work which was at least equal to the social security level for couples, and in 2004 this was increased to 120% of the minimum wage. In 2004 the minimum age of marriage partners was also increased from 18 to 21 years.

afford the costs of legal dues, passports, etc. In many cases the marriage partners were kin-related, for instance marriages between first or second cousins were common. Respondents told how parents in the region of origin were very interested in arranging marriages for their children with a partner in the West, because this would enable their children to support the family from a distance. But it would be giving a false impression to assume that family formation with stay-behinds was only altruistically motivated. Afghan men in the Netherlands, including many divorced men, used this route to find a young and traditional wife, while for Afghan women whose chances of finding a suitable spouse in the diaspora had diminished,¹⁵⁶ marrying a stay-behind formed an alternative option. Thereby, like in the case of intrafamilial marriages in the Western diaspora, kin marriages formed a method of risk management (Charsley, 2007) because they 'provide trust based on moral obligations and similarity between kin; they provide networks among which marriages can be negotiated; and they provide group sanctions to hold a transgressing spouse to account' (ibid.: p. 1122).

"I have been in the Netherlands for 7 years now, and my youngest brother in Pakistan does not have enough money to come here. I do not have the chance to invite him. I would like my brother to come here with his family. [...]

The problem for my brother and my sister in Pakistan is that Pakistan does not accept them as refugees. Neither does the Netherlands accept them. [...] If my brother would come [to the Netherlands], I would have to pay everything, and I can do that for a couple of months but not forever. And he would be allowed to stay only briefly. [...] While if he would collect money to come illegally and would ask for asylum in the Netherlands, he would be accepted in the procedure. Therefore many people come illegally, also criminal people." (Asad, 50)

Another way in which Afghans in the Netherlands helped stay-behinds to come to the West was by providing them with the information and financial means to go there on their own. Several respondents regretted that in the Netherlands there was no possibility to invite stay-behinds through sponsorship. They compared the Dutch situation with the situation in the US and Canada where the possibility of inviting family members via sponsorship existed and where there were also more opportunities to work and earn money in order to be able to afford a sponsorship. An indirect way of helping stay-behinds to come to the West was therefore to financially support family members, often siblings, in the US or Canada who arranged sponsorship for them. But if this possibility did not exist, in some cases respondents facilitated stay-behinds to come to the West by themselves and ask for asylum independently. This is in accordance with Koser's (1997) findings on Iranian asylum seekers in the

¹⁵⁶ For instance, because they had previously had relationships with men.

Netherlands and the important role that relatives in the West played regarding the decision to migrate by providing information and money. However, he also showed how the social network - and the refugees themselves - had far less influence on their destination country. In the case of the Afghans, requesting asylum independently became a risky strategy when the possibilities of getting a residence permit diminished at the end of the 90s. Several respondents had relatives in the Netherlands or in other European countries whose asylum claims had been rejected and who ran the risk of being expelled to Afghanistan, which resulted in worries for all concerned. Without a legal basis, the insecurity - and the responsibility of the relatives who had asylum status - remained.

Finally, in order to be complete: not all stay-behinds *wanted* to join their family members in the West. Particularly older parents were not keen to leave the surroundings they were familiar with, even when this endangered their safety or health. This, in turn, could compel one of their children to also stay in order to take care of the parents. Also, stay-behinds did not always understand the respondents' decision to flee. In some cases respondents were blamed for having deserted their family and their country. In one case stay-behinds kept the wife and children of a respondent in the country in order to compel him, the eldest son, to return. Another respondent, who had been fighting in a resistance movement for years, said: "My family is angry with me because I fled to the West. They would have preferred to see me being killed. But I don't want to fight anymore, I don't want to kill anymore." (Abdullah, 49)

However, no matter if family members stayed behind by choice, or against their will, or something somewhere in between: the fact that they remained in a relatively unsafe and insecure place appealed to the respondents' sense of responsibility. And if they could not support the stay-behinds by bringing them to the West, the alternative was to support them from a distance.

6.4 Sending remittances

"My sister lives in a quiet town near Peshawar. She works in a hospital, but earns only one hundred dollars per month. Her husband cannot work, because he is still in danger. Every month we send them money. Sometimes via the bank, sometimes via someone who goes in that direction. For instance, next Sunday someone is going to Pakistan and we will give him the money to take. Thus we save twenty to thirty euros on banking costs." (Abdullah, 49)

I now turn my attention to a significant aspect of the transnational relations that Afghans in the Netherlands had with their region of origin: remittances being sent to stay-behinds. Most

of the respondents who had next of kin stay-behinds supported them financially.¹⁵⁷ Besides money, sometimes goods like medicines and clothing were sent. Respondents preferably sent their money and goods via acquaintances who travelled to the region of origin, because it was free of charge and relatively safe. However, not everybody knew persons who travelled to Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, and the people who went there usually had a lot of luggage and money to take themselves. Therefore, respondents also made use of regular banks and informal banking systems to transfer their money.

In two cases respondents only stayed in touch with their stay-behinds but did not send them money or goods. In the first case the respondents had only recently received a residence permit after a long period of residing semi-illegally in the Netherlands during which they could hardly afford a phone card costing five euros per month to call their daughter in Kabul. In the other case the respondent eventually found his younger brother in Afghanistan after eighteen years of searching. Since then he called him every two months but explained to the researcher that he was unable to help his brother financially because his own nuclear family in the Netherlands with two teenage children had only 900 euros per month to spend. In fact most respondents lived in comparably frugal circumstances, and therefore it was remarkable that almost all of them *did* send remittances to their stay-behinds, on a monthly basis and/or on an ad hoc basis.

The amounts that were sent monthly varied from 100 to 500 dollars, and these were meant to pay for expenses like rent, food, school fees for the children, and clothing. The receivers were generally parents, brothers and sisters and their families. Sometimes family members who were further related, like aunts and uncles and cousins, received money too, for instance for a special occasion like the New Year, but normally it was family members in the first and second degree who benefited in the first place. A respondent said: "We [Afghans] always check if someone has sons or daughters in the West. If so, then this person is looked after." (Zahir, 19) To be more precise: money was often sent to older parents and the siblings who lived with them and looked after them; to brothers and their families; and to unmarried or widowed sisters and their children. Married sisters were mentioned less frequently, which was consistent with a cultural tradition in which women fell under the responsibility of the family they married into. But unmarried women were very vulnerable in Afghan society, even more so in wartime, and were therefore in constant need of financial support. Remittances were also sent on an ad hoc basis, for instance in cases of emergencies. Illnesses were often mentioned as a reason to send money to stay-behinds. But helping stay-behinds to make their way to the

¹⁵⁷ There were also some examples of respondents who financially supported non-relatives, like a respondent who sent a monthly allowance to his best friend's widow. This was not a common practice, however.

West was also a reason for financial support, as we have seen in the former section (6.3). Hundreds of euros could be involved in these cases.

Respondents who could share the burden of sending remittances with other family members in the West, usually siblings, were in a favourable position compared to respondents who tended to bear the responsibility for stay-behinds on their own. Gender and the level of education and income also played a role in how responsibilities were perceived. Generally, Afghan men in the Netherlands were said to feel more cultural pressure to send remittances than the women. But this did not mean that Afghan women in the Netherlands were less willing to send remittances to their own family. The wish of both men and women to send remittances to their stay-behinds could lead to conflicting interests and tensions within Afghan nuclear families in the Netherlands. Women who had had an education and gained their own income in the Netherlands were in a stronger position to allow their own next of kin stay-behinds to benefit from the remittances than women who did not have such economic power. On the other hand, stay-behinds also expected more of women who had studied and who earned their own wages.

All respondents who sent remittances to stay-behinds agreed that it was difficult to do so concerning their own economic situation in the Netherlands. Most respondents received some kind of social security payment or worked in low-qualified jobs that did not pay well. At the beginning of their stay in the Netherlands several respondents were so focused on earning money in order to help their stay-behinds that they ended their Dutch classes prematurely and started working in jobs beneath their educational level, for instance in factories or greenhouses. For all respondents who sent remittances it meant that they lived frugally, because they tried to save money on the modest income they had. It also meant that they put aside their own personal dreams, ambitions or pleasures, like going on a holiday, embarking on a follow-up study, or spending money on their own luxuries. Respondents sometimes borrowed money from Afghan friends to be able to help their stay-behinds. The duty of sending remittances was usually perceived as a heavy burden, especially when there was no improvement in the situation of the stay-behinds in sight. A respondent stated: "If my sister is ill and needs 500 euros, then I'm prepared not to go on holiday in order to give her that money. But next year my brother becomes ill. And then my sister again. The system repeats itself." (Jamila, 45) For some respondents it was a constant battle to live up to the silent expectations and open requests for support from stay-behinds. "My husband phones [his family in Kabul]; that has become easier. He is a Pashtun and the eldest son and the only one in the West. The family has expectations towards him and he tries to live up to them. And if he doesn't call there will be complaints." (Ghazal, 37) The fact that many stay-behinds could not imagine the difficulties that the respondents faced in the Netherlands, added to the

pressure. "People there all think that in the West there is plenty of money. But I cannot even afford a new TV! All my money goes there." (Abdullah, 49) Respondents gave examples of compatriots who ran into debts or who had broken off all contact with stay-behinds because they could not fulfil their needs. On the other hand, respondents who were able to help their loved ones did get a great deal of satisfaction from being able to help in this way - particularly if the situation of the stay-behinds improved noticeably, for instance because they were able to get away too. "During a time in which I earned very little, and lived alone with my son, I transferred 400 dollars per month to my sister so that she could live in a decent house with her four daughters. Now my family adores me for it. I could not have done otherwise: if you don't do that, you're nobody. But sometimes I could not sleep because of all the worries." (Farzana, 38)

A factor that made it somewhat easier for respondents to live up to their stay-behinds' needs and expectations was their children growing up and reaching the age at which they could supplement the family income by having a job on the side or even a regular job. One young respondent explained that she was the one who sent remittances to their stay-behinds because her parents, who received social benefits, could not afford to do so: "I work like crazy in order to send money to my family. Besides my study and an internship I have three jobs. Per month I send €250 to my family. My uncle and aunt distribute the money among several relatives. [...] For me this is very normal. They have given me a lot, lots of love. Now that I've grown up I can value what they did and respond to it." (Naheed, 24) However, it happened only rarely that youngsters of the one-and-a-half or second generation directly sent remittances to stay-behinds. The financial support that they provided was more often indirect, via their parents. For instance, in another case four teenage daughters, with the help of their mother, found small jobs alongside their studies. They handed over their earnings to the father who sent part of the money to his brother and sister in Pakistan. But also the fact that children obtained a study grant or a regular job and became financially independent gave their parents some more room to save money in order to send it in the form of remittances.

Concluding, I would state that the responsibility that Afghans in the Netherlands felt towards their stay-behinds, and particularly their next of kin stay-behinds like their spouse and children, parents, and siblings, determined their lives to a great extent. The essential difference with providing stay-behinds with safety and security in the West was that the transfer of remittances and goods to stay-behinds could not guarantee their safety and that the difficulty and instability of the living conditions of stay-behinds made their need for support recurring or continuous. Although, according to respondents, almost all Afghans had responsibilities toward stay-behinds, it seemed that they kept the heavy burden of their task largely to themselves and within their own family. Sometimes they could share the financial

burden with other family members in the diaspora. And Afghan friends in the diaspora could be of help by sharing information, providing loans, or taking money and goods with them on a return trip. But the responsibility of providing next of kin stay-behinds with safety and security, or at least supporting them in their everyday lives, was a burden which was felt and dealt with by most respondents on a daily basis and this was invisible to outsiders.

6.5 Keeping in touch

6.5.1 Communication before and after 9/11

In the period before 11 September 2001 the possibilities to communicate with stay-behinds who lived in Afghanistan were severely restricted. During the Russian and communist times there was the fear of telephone lines being tapped and letters being intercepted, which could endanger stay-behinds. During the Mujaheddin and Taliban regimes the infrastructure was largely destroyed and postal and telephone services as well as bank operations were not functioning properly. If respondents knew where their stay-behinds were located, they sometimes tried to send them letters or money via persons who made the risky journey of going there, often via Pakistan or Iran. The lack of direct possibilities to communicate caused a lot of concern among Afghans in the Netherlands as to the well-being of the stay-behinds. On the other hand, at that time they were not confronted with the occurrences in Afghanistan through the media on a daily basis. This factor, combined with the lack of opportunities to communicate directly, gave them some space to focus on their new life in the Netherlands. In the meantime, it was much easier to keep in touch with stay-behinds in Pakistan and Iran, who sometimes acted as intermediaries with stay-behinds in Afghanistan as well. The communication took place mainly by phone, via persons who travelled back and forth, and sometimes visits took place.

The events after 9/11 meant a drastic turning point in the relationships between Afghans in the Netherlands and stay-behinds in Afghanistan. When the Taliban regime collapsed and a democratic regime was put in place, the fear of communicating diminished and the opportunities to keep in touch increased immensely: within a couple of years the usage of mobile phones and the Internet had become widespread - although regions remained that were difficult to reach by any modern form of communication.¹⁵⁸ The intensification of the communication with Afghanistan often confronted Afghans in the Netherlands with the hard facts. They were for instance confronted with the fact that people had died during their absence. They were informed about the hardships that the stay-behinds went through and

¹⁵⁸ Still, using these means of communication was a relatively costly affair that was certainly not accessible to the whole population.

about the difficult situations they now found themselves in. They learnt about the fate of stay-behinds who had disappeared or had been imprisoned. The opening up of the country also increased their possibilities to go and look for those who were still missing. In sum, the intensified communication almost automatically increased involvement in the lives of the stay-behinds.

6.5.2 Long-distance communication

"Around noon we arrived at the hospital, and ten minutes later the baby was born. One hour later we were already waiting for a car to bring us home. [...] Directly after we came home, we called my mother by webcam. We lied that my wife had made some clothes for our daughter and that she wanted to show them. My mother immediately called my brother and sister into the room: "The baby is born!" With the camera we focused directly on our newborn son. My mother swiftly informed my wife's mother. Three hours later we called her ourselves." (Karim, 38)

Most respondents who had stay-behinds in Afghanistan, Iran or Pakistan spent part of their income on communicating with them. The costs could add up to a significant amount per month, especially for people who had little money to spend. A respondent said: "I ate poorly in order to save as much money as possible to call. I sold the silver and gold I still had in order to obtain money." (Nuria, 55) The postal service was also used, particularly to announce important news, like the message that a mother in Afghanistan had died or that a son in Pakistan was going to get married. By post, not only letters were sent but also photos, videotapes, medicines and presents. A cheap and reliable alternative was to find a person who was going there and send the goods with them. But for a more direct and frequent contact, people turned to communication by phone and the Internet.

"Two or three times a week I contact my sister [in Kabul] by MSN with the webcam. We really talk with each other then; it is modernized contact." (Jamila, 45) Most respondents had a computer and an Internet connection at home. But this could only be a means of communication if the stay-behinds had access to the Internet as well and were able to use it. This was mainly reserved for stay-behinds who were professionals or students in the cities and their family members. All respondents, except one, had a telephone - mobile or landline. The reachability of the stay-behinds varied; most families possessed one or more mobile phones, but some stay-behinds had to use other people's phones, and one respondent stated that her mother had to travel from her village to the city to make a phone call.

Stay-behinds who took the initiative to ring often made a quick call to state how they could be reached, after which they were called back. But usually it was the respondents who

initiated the calls to Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, using phone cards. Wilding (2006) calls phone cards 'a useful means of budgeting calls', which is in accordance with the finding that many respondents carefully planned how much money they would spend on communication. Still, in practice it was not always easy to restrict these costs, as a male respondent explained: "We buy cards costing ten euros for the satellite phone. I can call two or three times with that, but if the women are on the phone a card only lasts one call. Because then the girls ask if they can speak with their brother too and that takes an hour at least." (Abdullah, 49) Another factor that complicated respondents' efforts to limit their communication costs was the anticipations of the stay-behinds. For instance, a respondent recalled how she was afraid to open her phone bill because she had called extensively with her stay-behinds for *Eid-al-Fitr* "because they expect you to do so" (Farzana, 38). Another respondent said: "[T]here are so many people with whom we have to call, like my mother's brothers and my brother's wife. And everybody asks the same, and you have to talk with everybody. That takes a long time and costs a lot of money. That's why I let the others call." (Zarmeena, 20)

Besides these practical restrictions of limited economic means and time, respondents also mentioned reasons of a non-practical nature for limiting their communication with stay-behinds:

"Recently the son-in-law of my father's sister, or in other words my aunt's son-in-law, traced me by MSN. I noticed the difference in emotion. First, I received several lines of text in which he explained how happy he was to have found me. I could only reply in one sentence that I was happy too and curious to know how he was doing. After that we communicated and he repeated constantly how great it would be to tell his wife that he had 'talked' to me, while it really wasn't such a big deal to me. It was only my aunt's son-in-law ... " (Jamila, 45)

This respondent was very aware of the fact that her emotions towards her family members who stayed behind had changed. To be precise, she had narrowed down her focus to her parents and siblings, with whom she communicated intently, while her desire to communicate with more extended relatives had diminished. She attributed this to the process of individualization that she and her nuclear family in the Netherlands had undergone and the fact that the contact with her parents and siblings already cost her a great deal of money and energy.

Respondents not only restricted their communication with stay-behinds to a limited number of persons, but also experienced limitations in the contents of what they communicated about. A respondent explained his reluctance to talk about his situation in the Netherlands with stay-behinds as follows: "The family in Afghanistan and Pakistan cannot imagine how it is. They have the idea that everybody in the West is doing fine. They cannot understand that you can be unhappy here as well." (Hussain, 24)

The physical distance also provided the opportunity to conceal certain aspects.

"On Sunday I called my mother and I also talked with my sister who was visiting her. She was very sad [...] because her husband was constantly criticizing her." (Farzana, 38)

For instance, this respondent who was concerned about the relationship of her sister in Kabul was struggling with an unhappy relationship herself. Still she decided not to inform her mother and sisters in Afghanistan about this, because it would only distress her mother and her sisters might disapprove of her behaviour. Here we see the phenomenon that for the respondents it was easier to comprehend the situation and difficulties of their stay-behinds than the other way around, because stay-behinds were not familiar with their material and cultural context. On the one hand, this one-way communication could contribute to a feeling of loneliness; on the other, it gave them some space to manoeuvre. "Imagine if my sister from Kabul would be visiting us, then I would have to excuse my daughter every five minutes for not being present [to help in the household] because she was doing her homework. In Afghan eyes this is a bad thing." (Suraya, 35)

However, the distance gave stay-behinds the space to manoeuvre as well.

Respondents gave several examples of situations in which they were not informed about painful events in order to protect them from distress. "The one-year-old son of my brother in Kabul burnt his arm in a pan full of special tea. It happened yesterday. He is in so much pain that he fainted twice. [...] My brother didn't call me directly, because of my high blood pressure." (Rona, 42) (This respondent had still been informed about the accident indirectly, by her sister in the UK). But there were also less altruistic motives to conceal information from family members in the Netherlands: "There are situations in which family members in Afghanistan silently have their cake and eat it. For example, they have built a beautiful house with the money they received. While the family member in the Netherlands, Canada or elsewhere [in the West] has worked very hard for it." (Mujib, 48) The former examples show that the possibilities for respondents to be fully engaged in the lives of stay-behinds by long-distance communication were limited - and more so vice versa - not only because of practical and financial restrictions but also because of socio-economic and cultural differences.

Even though I separately discussed the aspect of remittances (section 6.4) and the aspect of long-distance communication, at the end of this section I want to emphasize their interconnectedness. Because it was the need for support that the stay-behinds perceived and the demands for help that they made that put pressure on the long-distance communication between respondents and their family members in the region of origin. "My husband calls his family [in Kabul]; calling has become easier. [...] It is difficult for them; there is often a sense of reproach in their tone of voice, which is difficult for him to deal with. [...] He wants to help his family; he wants to show them that he cares." (Ghazal, 37) Wilding (2006: 138) puts it as follows: 'Communication is essential for reproducing the social field in which family

members [...] feel sufficiently connected to enable them to call on other members of the network for support. It is also essential in order to feel a need to provide support. [...] ICTs [Information and Communication Technology] reduce the impact of distance and migration on the exchange of support and care at a distance [...] at the same time, the increased capacity for communication generates new expectations of communication and support.' In the case of the respondents this meant that they largely paid the costs of the communication as well as the - direct and indirect - requests for support that resulted from it, which put the contact under further pressure. A respondent described her own weariness every time she heard the telephone: "When the phone rings, we know it's not just to say 'Hello' but to say 'There is a problem!'" (Jamila, 45)

6.5.3 Visiting

"More than forty relatives had come [to the airport], even aunties from Jelalabad. The reunion was even lovelier than I had expected beforehand. On the plane I had already told my parents that I did not want anyone to cry. But the only person who was crying and screaming was I. I cried so much upon arrival that I was drained out afterwards, I still am."
(Naheed, 24)

Respondents did not only keep in touch via long-distance communication; for the majority, visits back and forth formed another aspect of their relationship with stay-behinds. Like long-distance communication, visiting also plays an important role in the maintenance of transnational social fields (O'Flaherty et al., 2007) that form the basis for the exchange of support.

There were some cases in which stay-behinds came to visit their relatives in the West, when their work or business or other activities brought them there. For instance, the cousin of a respondent who worked for a German NGO in Kabul followed a three-week training course in Germany during which he came by to visit the respondent in the Netherlands and to bring her a bag of famous Afghan mulberries. But in the case of stay-behinds coming to the West, it was usually the respondents who had to invite them officially for a visit. They reported many difficulties when trying to meet the immigration terms. "For my birthday last year I tried to invite my grandmother and uncle. But they could not stand surety, and my income was also too low to stand surety for them, because I earn the minimum wage, just like my parents. That's why [my plan] didn't succeed." (Naheed, 24) In another case, respondents tried to invite their aunt from Afghanistan, who had been diagnosed with cancer, to have medical treatment in the Netherlands. Because they did not meet the income requirements to stand surety for her

visit themselves, they asked the researcher if she was willing to act as a guarantor. This situation illustrates how the social capital that respondents had at their disposal for such emergencies was limited as well, which led to feelings of utter impotence, frustration and grief when it concerned next of kin who had become seriously ill.

Among our respondents the situation of stay-behinds paying a visit to the West was rather exceptional. Most visits headed in the other direction, from the Netherlands toward Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran, usually for several weeks or even months. While for most respondents meeting family members and friends was the main reason for visiting, additional reasons were also mentioned like claiming back the house or other property, looking for missing relatives, obtaining diplomas and other important papers, and curiosity about the current situation. For example, the son of a respondent used a visit to his stay-behinds in Iran as an opportunity to also explore the possibilities to make a film there as he was a film director. Having Dutch nationality was an important prerequisite for respondents, because it entitled them to the protection of the Dutch embassy and government in the case of trouble.¹⁵⁹ This is in accordance with what Muggeridge and Doná (2006) call refugees' risk assessment: refugees waited until their status allowed them to return without jeopardizing their legal position in the host country and putting themselves in a precarious position where they may be forced to seek asylum once again. Some of our respondents visited their region of origin before they had a legal status that allowed them to do so, but in these cases they observed absolute secrecy. A female respondent for instance visited Afghanistan hidden under a burqa and entered the country over land via Pakistan.

Also in accordance with Muggeridge and Doná's (ibid.) findings among refugees in the United Kingdom, our respondents generally described improvements in the conditions in the home country as a crucial factor in their decision to go on a return visit. And the other way round, respondents mentioned the lack of safety in Afghanistan - which had made them leave in the first place - as a troublesome issue that hampered their decision to go on a return visit, and that actually stopped several respondents from going. "I don't want to go there. I don't know whom I can trust anymore, I cannot trust anybody. And if I get into trouble there, it will be difficult to come back as well." (Fahríd, 44) This respondent was very firm in his opinion; he felt that with his Marxist background it was perilous to visit the present Afghanistan. On the other hand, this was also one of the respondents who could 'afford' not to go on a return visit because he did not have next of kin who had stayed behind. The argument of the perilous situation in Afghanistan sometimes also seemed to serve as a justification or even a consolation for respondents who were unable to visit, mainly because of financial reasons. For instance, when I visited a family one day before my own departure to Kabul, the husband

¹⁵⁹ Persons who had a residence permit based on asylum were not allowed to visit their country of origin.

strongly advised me not to go because the situation was unsafe and listed a number of recent incidents to prove his point. When I made it clear that I would go there anyway, the conversation shifted to the good things Kabul had to offer, like the tasty watermelons and the generous hospitality. At the end of the visit the man offered his services as an interpreter and said that he would love to join in if the university would pay for his travel expenses.

With the former anecdote I do not want to suggest that respondents' worries about the safety situation in Afghanistan were not genuine. In fact, most respondents felt anxious before their first return visit, and during my trip to Afghanistan I saw passengers who were still terrified when they landed at Kabul Airport. The point I want to make is that besides the realistic obstacle of the chaotic and dangerous situation that existed particularly in Afghanistan (more than in Pakistan and Iran), the high costs of a return visit formed another obstacle. These costs easily added up to over 1000 euros per person. Practically the only way to go there was by plane, and the flight tickets were perceived to be expensive. Additionally money had to be paid to arrange the necessary documents, like a passport and a visa. And, lastly, they were expected not to arrive empty-handed, but with presents, money and other goods to offer.¹⁶⁰

The majority of our respondents had visited their region of origin at least once, and most of the respondents who had not yet been on a return visit were at least considering the option. The few respondents who said that they were *not* considering making a return visit did not have next of kin stay-behinds in the region of origin.¹⁶¹ The considerations of respondents who had next of kin stay-behinds varied from expressing rather vague intentions to making concrete calculations of the costs. An important motivation to realize or at least to seriously consider a return visit seemed to be having parents or children in the region of origin. One respondent, for example, immediately returned when his father became seriously ill. In more cases respondents mentioned the wish to see their elderly parents before they would die as the main reason to visit. An older female respondent who suffered from several health problems went to visit her brothers and sisters and their families "now that she was still able to do so". Although I cannot make generalizations on the basis of my sample, the difference that I perceived between respondents with next of kin stay-behinds who went on a return visit and those who did not (yet) go was mainly the duration of their period of settlement. Respondents who had recently received a residence permit or who had recently realised family reunification had not been on a return visit yet. They were usually in the process of applying for Dutch citizenship for themselves or for their newly arrived family members, which - as we

¹⁶⁰ The costs after arrival were usually limited because respondents stayed with family members.

¹⁶¹ This does not mean that all respondents who had no next of kin stay-behinds in the region of origin did not go on a return visit. However, in the research I focused specifically on the aspect of family relations.

have seen - was a crucial step in preparing for a return. They were also in the first stages of settling down in the Netherlands, going to Dutch language and integration classes or looking for a job. However, their economic situation was not so different from the situation of the respondents who were somewhat further in the settlement process and who did actualize return visits. Actually, what I found striking was that several respondents went on a return visit in spite of the severely disadvantaged economic position that they found themselves in. For instance, an older and unemployed couple went to Afghanistan with their two teenage children during the summer holidays in order to visit both his and her family for the first time since they fled. A frugal lifestyle during several years enabled them to pay for the trip with the money that they received from social security. The temporary reunion with their brothers and sisters, as well as with the food and the climate, only intensified their desire to visit Afghanistan and to be with their family members more often. They estimated that it would take them at least two years of intensive saving to repeat the visit.

Like in the case of sending remittances, having children in the Netherlands could be a facilitating as well as a restricting factor with regard to the realisation of a return visit. Once parents decided that they wanted to pay a return visit, they liked to take their children so that they could meet their family and vice versa. However, for every child travel expenses had to be paid. Therefore, young children sometimes stayed in the Netherlands with one parent while the other went on a visit. Older children sometimes stayed in the Netherlands on their own or under the surveillance of a family member or a friend. Leaving teenage children in the Netherlands was not only a financial matter; some children explicitly stated that they did not want to go to the region of origin, because of the traumatic memories that they had or because they no longer felt any connection with their parents' homeland. The other side of the coin was that once their children were economically active, parents hoped or expected that they would help them financially to realise a return visit. "We are orienting ourselves on the possibilities of a visit [to our daughter in Kabul]. It is not a plan yet, it is still a dream. It is expensive, but if our sons soon have a job ... " (Nuria, 55) Even though the majority of the respondents visited their region of origin at least once and almost all of those who went expressed a desire to repeat the visit, I cannot speak of a 'process of the normalization of return' (Muggeridge & Doná, 2006: 424). The safety conditions in Afghanistan were too unstable for that: respondents who planned to go on a visit constantly had to reassess the risks and possibly to postpone their visit. For instance, a respondent who travelled to his native region Paktia was unable to go there a year later because of the resurgence of the Taliban movement.

Respondents who actually went on a return visit described it as a memorable event. Especially the first reunion with loved ones after years of separation was an intense experience that stirred all kinds of thoughts and feelings. "Once we arrived in Kabul, I did not know what

happened to me. I was afraid of everything and everybody. I did not know how to handle the situation. Should I cover myself up? Should I wear a scarf? Should I wear a long coat? [...]

Outside the airport I saw my relatives; my father, sister and brother. Once I joined them, everything was fine. In the arms of my father I found all the peace in the world." (Farzana, 38) Several respondents mentioned the importance of finally being able to touch and hold their stay-behinds. "I embraced my uncle. And then another uncle embraced me. He had tears in his eyestoo. Then I kissed and embraced everybody, even all my male cousins, even the little ones." (Naheed, 24) Muggeridge and Doná (2006) described the main function of refugees' first visit back to their country of origin as that of a catalyst: 'it put an end to waiting, to worry about family, and to wondering about 'back home'; it created the setting for an assessment of progress (or lack of) in life and a verification of identity; most importantly, it enabled [refugees] to move on [...].'

In the following I illustrate how the confrontation with stay-behinds led to a verification of the respondents' identity, a reassessment of their family relations, and more in general contemplation as to the future.

Respondents enjoyed the hospitality with which they were welcomed by their stay-behinds. It is deeply rooted in Afghan culture to treat your guests well. But for stay-behinds receiving their family members from the Netherlands also offered an opportunity to give something back to the people who sent remittances and who brought presents, goods and money on arrival. "My uncle had several modern things installed in his house especially for us: a toilet, a shower. Every day I used the (cold) shower four or five times." (Naheed, 24)

The stay-behinds provided their guests with accommodation and food, they took them out, protected them, gave them information, and helped them to arrange things, like for instance claiming back property or finding a marriage partner. Respondents described how their return visits meant that they took a leap back into the family life that they had left behind when they fled. They participated in family events like funerals, weddings and birthday parties¹⁶². The stay-behinds organized welcome-home parties for them, prepared special dishes, and took them on festive trips, like going to the Continental Hotel or having a picnic at the riverside. The respondents were expected to pay their condolences to all relatives who had lost loved ones in the years since they had fled. Thus the respondents were automatically drawn back into the - extended - family life and generally enjoyed the warm environment they landed into. "[The return visit] was very special. It was so lively, compared to the Netherlands. The mountains around the city made me feel very small. And the family were so enthusiastic. In fact, every day felt like a party." (Zahir, 19)

The visit revived relations with family members whom they often had not seen in a long time. A respondent said: "My sisters were still very young when I left, and I have not

¹⁶² Traditionally, birthdays are not celebrated in Afghanistan, but the modernized Afghans with contacts in the West sometimes have birthday parties.

seen them for fifteen years. When I met them again in Pakistan for the first time, they had become grown-up women with their own opinions and advice. The first time I did not like them; I thought that they were ugly, that they did not talk eloquently, and they gave me advice all the time. But when I got used to them and talked to them, I discovered different people. And now I know them better than when I was little." (Farzana, 38) Since this respondent went on a return visit, she also started calling her newly 'discovered' sisters besides phone calls to her mother. She also started to send remittances to her sisters occasionally. And the respondent's son befriended a male cousin in Pakistan during their visit. The cousin worked with foreigners and liked to practise his English with him. After the visit they continued to email regularly. This case shows that visiting can indeed contribute to the maintenance of transnational social fields that formed the basis for the exchange of support (Wilding, 2006).

However, being immersed in the family life in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran also confronted respondents with the differences between them and their stay-behinds in terms of customs, living conditions, and norms and values. It was for instance remarkable to see on in photographs and videos of return visits how male respondents were dressed in Western suits while the male stay-behinds who surrounded them wore traditional Afghan clothing. A respondent said: "I stayed in the house of my family. This house has a stone floor and mud walls. It struck me how beautiful it was from the inside, more beautiful than my own house!" (Mujib, 48) Regarding the aspect of norms and values, respondents particularly gave examples of differences with regard to the social roles of men and women. A young woman who was thrilled to meet the family members of her father who had died when she was a child and who established a cheerful friendship with her cousins, concealed the fact that she had a boyfriend back home because she was afraid that they would reject her because of this. Another young woman was shocked by the conservatism of her own family members: "There everybody listens to my father's eldest brother. He is very fundamentalist and his daughters are very religious. They have to get up really early; they have to pray all the time, etcetera. [...] I tried to talk [about the position of women] with the women and girls of my family. The women immediately became angry, and most girls are fundamentalist too. It's OK if you come there, as long as you don't say anything." (Zarameena, 20) Another respondent expressed how she as a single woman felt suffocated among her own stay-behinds: "I am used to some freedom by now, while there they ask all kinds of questions: 'What do you do? Why are you so late?' Both my brother and my father ask these questions." (Fahrat, 36) This was one of the reasons why she decided not to return to her family in Pakistan, even though they exerted a great deal of pressure on her to do so.

The former example illustrates my final point, that return visits to stay-behinds inevitably gave a new impulse to the process of weighing the pros and cons of life back in Afghanistan. The dream of return that many respondents cherished at a distance, turned into a

more realistic mental process of making up the balance when confronted with daily life in Afghanistan, as we will see in the next section.

6.6 Return and development

"I would love to return to Afghanistan, and I talked with my sons about it. They said that they first want to finish their studies, and work here for a couple of years. I have said: 'But then I'm ten years older, then I'm dead'. I keep thinking so much, maybe that's why I've had a heart attack twice. [...] And I won't survive a third one. My wife wants to return as well, but she doesn't want to leave her sons. But there [in Kandahar] is the family, and here we are only with the two of us." (Abdullah, 49)

The last two aspects that I discuss, return¹⁶³ and development, are of a different nature than the former three aspects. The main concern is not the relationship with stay-behinds but the situation in Afghanistan more generally. By return I mean a return to the country of origin in order to live and possibly work there, on a temporary or a more permanent basis.¹⁶⁴ An important motivation behind this was that people wanted to give meaning to their lives and perceived Afghanistan as the most suitable place for them to do so. Still, the relationships that people had with stay-behinds influenced how they thought and acted regarding the aspect of return. Thereby I do not only refer to these ties as being a 'prerequisite for return' as Faist (2000: 122) says; family ties could also be a reason *not* to return, in two ways, as I will demonstrate.

According to Wahlbeck (1999: 179) the wish to return is one of the characteristics of a diaspora. Return was always in the back of the minds of respondents of the first generation. They talked about growing old and being buried in their own country. Some respondents had taken out insurance to cover the costs of being buried in Afghanistan. Other practical measures that indicated a desire to return was the fact that parents taught the children one or two Afghan languages or sent them to Afghan language classes.¹⁶⁵ Regarding the studies of their children, parents took into account which studies would be useful - and prestigious - in Afghanistan. After the regime change in Afghanistan in 2001 more and more Afghans in the Netherlands went on a visit there, to meet family members and friends in the first place. The return visits confronted respondents with the current situation in their country of birth.

¹⁶³ By this concept I do *not* mean the forced return of rejected asylum seekers.

¹⁶⁴ I make a distinction between return and the (return) visits that I discussed in the former section (6.5).

¹⁶⁵ Another reason to teach children an Afghan language was that they could directly communicate with their relatives in other countries.

"Finally we left [Kabul Airport] to go home. On the way I saw destroyed streets and houses. At first sight all the people seemed to be ill. On their faces I read the stories of war, poverty, and powerlessness. Their faces told me everything" (Farzana, 38). And it was a confrontation with how they themselves had changed in the meantime. A very direct and physical confrontation was the fact that most respondents became ill during their visit, because their systems were no longer accustomed to the Afghan food and climate. In the streets they were recognized as Afghans from the West because of their looks, clothing, posture, or accent. Particularly young female respondents mentioned how they did not feel comfortable going out on the streets, because of the attitude of men towards women in public. Youngsters were generally very aware of the differences between their life in the Netherlands and the situation in Afghanistan. For many it was the first time that they had (consciously) seen the people and places that they had heard their parents talk about.

These return visits, and the stories and images (photos and videos) of the visits that were exchanged among Afghans in the Netherlands, confronted respondents with return as an option instead of a dream. With some important obstacles out of the way, like the Taliban regime and a lack of means of communication and travel, they started reconsidering the pros and cons of returning. Some respondents were very resolute in their rejection of the option of a return. "My husband is rational, not emotional: he does not talk about Afghanistan. That attitude is good for him. He has done everything in his power for Afghanistan, but there was no place for him there. Now he is here and focuses on his family and the children." (Jamila, 45) The drastic decision not to talk about Afghanistan, let alone to return there, was also the result of a consideration process. Several respondents felt that there was no place for them in Afghanistan under Karzai because of their own divergent political past and background. "There I fall outside the community." (Suraya, 35) One could imagine that their viewpoint may change in the case of a regime change. The same applied to respondents who rejected the idea of a return because of safety reasons: as long as the situation in Afghanistan did not stabilize, their consideration process would not come to an end.

"While I was in Kabul I looked around for possibilities there. Also because in January I finish my training in software engineering, and I still don't know if I want to look for work in the Netherlands, internationally, or in Afghanistan. [...] On the one hand, there are possibilities there. Real companies and factories need to be set up. And I have talked with organizations that are active in Afghanistan. And the director of the anti-mining programme has visited us [read: my family in Kabul]. But there are still few companies. [...] My doubts have mainly to do with the safety situation. For me it doesn't matter, but it matters for my children. Imagine that the situation worsens next year, and that we have to move back to the Netherlands

The outcome of considering the pros and cons of a return to Afghanistan was that a high majority of respondents decided not to settle there, for various reasons. Generally, the youngsters were least tempted to settle in Afghanistan, although some young idealistic respondents were determined to start their own development projects in Afghanistan. But most youngsters were focused on a future in the Netherlands, and experienced an eventual return visit as an adventurous - and sometimes uncomfortable - holiday or as a journey back to one's roots. A young respondent stated: "I would go on a return visit the first thing tomorrow if I could. But I would not want to live there. You don't have the freedom there to do what you like. Only if you are very rich, then it is possible. Then you can buy a beautiful house where you can do your own things." (Naheed, 24) The prevalence of nepotism and corruption and the general inefficiency in Afghanistan were some of the negative aspects that were mentioned not only by the youngsters but also by older respondents as factors that deterred them from a possible return. But for the youngsters there was also an important incentive to return which was lacking. Most of them had their parents and siblings with them in the Netherlands, while they barely knew their family members in the region of origin; a situation that was increased by linguistic problems and cultural differences.

For most older Afghans, on the other hand, it seemed tempting to return, as they had suffered significant social losses when coming to the Netherlands. They usually experienced great difficulties learning the Dutch language, which put them in an isolated position in the Netherlands. And even if one or more of their children were in the Netherlands too, their social situation was different from what it had been in Afghanistan. They often missed the extensive household in which they were constantly surrounded by relatives and where older people had a privileged position. And even if they lived with one of their children, they often felt lonely because the children and grandchildren were occupied with their own education and work. Still, two factors in particular kept most older Afghans from returning: they were dependent on where their children had chosen to settle and they were dependent on the medical system. However, the mother of a respondent decided to return to Afghanistan after having lived in the Netherlands for five years. She moved from her daughter in Amsterdam to her son in Kabul. The fact that he was a well-to-do doctor facilitated her choice. And the fact that three of her children lived in Western Europe and regularly sent remittances added to her security there.

Regarding the women, the ones who went on a return visit generally enjoyed the company of their (female) relatives in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Especially those women who lived rather isolated lives in the Netherlands, where they stayed at home with the children and had few social contacts, became rejuvenated when they were back in their

former social surroundings. The women who were more outgoing in the Netherlands and had a job indicated that they had more difficulty with the lack of freedom for women in Afghanistan, particularly in the public sphere, but in some cases also within their own families. In spite of the different perceptions, the female respondents all concluded that for the sake of their children it would be best to remain in the Netherlands in order for them to have a good education and to find a proper job. They also worried about the continuing instability in Afghanistan, and how that would affect the children if they would return. Some activist women made plans to go and participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan as soon as their children were old enough to be left on their own or with other carers in the Netherlands. But even they acknowledged that the space for women to manoeuvre in Afghanistan was limited.

The men had a somewhat different consideration of the pros and cons of a return to Afghanistan. Usually they had lost a lot by coming to the Netherlands, in terms of position and prestige. The privileges of being a male in Afghan society disappeared after their arrival in the Netherlands. In the eyes of one respondent: "The Netherlands is a women's society." (Sohail, 49) The fact that many Afghan male respondents had difficulties in finding a job at their old level added to the undermining of their former position. For them a return visit also meant a temporary return to their traditional role as a male member of the family. The recognition that they received in this position made it tempting to think about restating their role as a male member of Afghan society as well. In some cases stay-behinds explicitly asked male respondents to return. A male respondent chose to ignore the pressure that the family exerted upon him as the eldest son to return, as he preferred to live with his nuclear family in the Netherlands.¹⁶⁶ Conversely, another respondent liked the idea of his nuclear family joining his parents in Kabul, and during the first return visit actively oriented himself towards the possibilities of working in Afghanistan: "My family say: 'There are all these Westerners here, and you as an Afghan are abroad'." (Iqbal, 24) While their diplomas and work experience were often not recognized in the Netherlands, in Afghanistan the respondents were relatively well educated compared to the general population. In addition, they brought their experiences from abroad, like knowledge of the English language, of the democratic system, and of modern organizations.¹⁶⁷ Therefore many male respondents were interested in opportunities to work in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, there were few Afghans in the Netherlands who actually returned to live and work there. As impediments the male respondents also mentioned the education of their children and the fact that they did not want to live separately from their wives and children. But what was mentioned most often was the fact that they were

¹⁶⁶ The other side of the coin of having a privileged position in the family was that the men, and especially the eldest men, had responsibility for the well-being of the extended family, which could be a heavy burden.

¹⁶⁷ Their position as 'Westerners' brought them, on the one hand, esteem - and envy - and, on the other, contempt.

financially responsible for stay-behinds, and could only meet their obligations to send remittances by remaining in the Netherlands. The opportunities to work for Western organizations in Afghanistan were very limited, and the salaries in Afghan organizations were much lower. Afghans in the Netherlands who wanted to work in Afghanistan ran the risk of losing their income or social security by going there. Respondents stated that, paradoxically, in order to support stay-behinds in Afghanistan they were forced to remain in the Netherlands. "I know that many people want to return, under good conditions. In my family there are several doctors, but financially it is impossible. They reason that they can do more to support the family from here, while there they can do only little." (Nargis, 20)

However, there were forms of support that could not be provided from a distance, like providing practical care to older or sick family members (see also section 6.3). A respondent said: "My aunt [in Kabul] was doing very poorly. Until her son with his family returned from Australia and she moved in with them. That son married an Afghan woman who was born and raised in Australia, and who wanted an Afghan husband. She chose him from several candidates. It is a woman with a good education, and very concerned with Afghanistan. She didn't want to leave her husband's mother alone. The mother is doing much better since then." (Rashida, 23) In this case Afghans in the West chose to return and provide direct care over sending financial support from a distance, which was presented as the right thing to do for an Afghan son and for an Afghan daughter-in-law. But usually the decision worked the other way, leaving respondents with a feeling of failure regarding their filial duties.

"My brother is leaving for Kabul tomorrow at 8 a.m. He is going for six months, via the IOM. He is going to work as an advisor for the minister. He was invited by the minister, who is a member of his party and who sent him an invitation. He is going for six months now, and after that for a longer period of time." (Zahir, 19)

A limited number of Afghans, mainly men, succeeded in returning to Afghanistan on a temporary or a permanent basis. Before they took this step, they usually orientated themselves towards such possibilities during one or more return visits. During the orientation phase, stay-behinds often played an important role in informing the respondents about the situation, contacting key persons for them, showing them around, and protecting them. This is in line with Faist (2000:122) who states that 'the social and symbolic ties of migrants and refugees are not ruptured immediately after arrival in the country of destination. In addition to the legal possibilities and, in the case of refugees, freedom from persecution in the country of origin, these ties are a prerequisite for return.' In most cases the return was of a temporary nature and took place within the framework of a paid job, and arrangements were made so that they would not lose the security of the job or allowance that they had in the Netherlands. The

temporary nature of these return visits was also clear from the fact that in most cases the spouse and children remained in the Netherlands. The returnees worked for the Afghan government, Dutch NGOs, UN organizations, or the Dutch army, which were influential positions from an Afghan perspective. Beside the job, they could also be involved in political activities and in setting up development projects. Some returnees prolonged their stay after the term ended, or looked for other opportunities to stay. Respondents referred to examples of Afghans from the diaspora who decided to bring over their family and stay in Afghanistan more permanently. Other returnees came back disappointed and frustrated because of the difficulties they faced while working and living in Afghanistan.

"In August I returned to Afghanistan for the first time in ten years. I flew to Peshawar, where I have a brother and a sister. [...] From there I went to my native village in Paktia. My parents are buried there. I stayed with relatives. [...] Everybody was so happy that I had come from so far, and that I wanted to help the village of my birth. The reason I want to help them [to build a school] is that the people who stayed behind suffered a lot. And it's also in my own interest: then my children can also return to the village later when they are doctors. It is my dream to die on my native soil." (Mujib, 48)

Returning was not the only way in which Afghans in the Netherlands realized their desire to do something for their country of origin. Alternatively, transnational activities were established; in some cases businesses were started, but setting up a development project was the most prevalent. The projects were usually aimed at Kabul or at the region of the initiators' birth, and consisted of activities like setting up or supporting schools - often schools for girls - and orphanages, training nurses or midwives, and economic projects to make women self-supporting. The forms that these projects took partly depended on the possibilities that existed to receive funding. Besides the general motivation to support the people who had stayed behind and suffered, respondents also had various personal motives. In the case above, the respondent was driven by the desire to return someday, and the visits that he made in order to monitor the progress were also a welcome opportunity to be in the place and with the people he loved. In another case the motivation to help the people in the region of origin partly seemed to stem from the respondent's feeling of guilt about *not* wanting to return. Respondents who tried to set up their own development project were confronted with many hurdles in the Netherlands as well as in Afghanistan. Therefore they needed one or more key persons on site who understood the local situation, who kept an eye on the matter, who informed the respondent, and who could be trusted. Besides prominent representatives of the local community like a headmaster or an imam, stay-behind family members also had this role. In the case above a learned local elder supervised the building of a school on the site,

while a well-to-do brother of the respondent in Kabul served as a contact person between this elder and the respondent in the Netherlands. But most stay-behinds had their own concerns too, which put the respondents under pressure to meet their direct financial needs as well. So, paradoxically, visiting stay-behinds on the one hand motivated respondents to support the wider local community but the intensification of these family contacts also made them more aware of and responsible for the personal needs of these family members. For instance, a young respondent who got to know his cousin during a return visit to Kabul appointed him as the contact person for his initiative to support a school and then started to pay for his education as well.

However, for most respondents either working in Afghanistan or setting up a development project from a distance was not within the bounds of their possibilities. A return to Afghanistan for a longer period of time was hardly ever realised, and the underlying motivation to make a difference for Afghanistan was - out of sheer necessity - largely limited to sending remittances to stay-behinds.¹⁶⁸

6.7 Conclusion

6.7.1 Potential for support?

In the beginning of this chapter I posed the question of to what extent the relations between Afghans in the Netherlands and their family members who stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran still formed a 'high potential for support' (Boissevain, 1974), in spite of the geographical, structural and cultural distance between them. In order to answer this question I distinguished and described six activities that were prevalent in these relations: bringing stay-behinds to the West, sending remittances, long-distance communication, visiting, returning, and development. I analysed these aspects in terms of the exchanges of support that they contained and have concluded the following:

Although I found elements of all three types of support (practical, social and cultural) in the relationships with stay-behinds, they did not present themselves to the same extent. Practical support, the support that is aimed at solving practical problems or arranging practical matters, was most prevalent and mainly took the form of remittances being sent from Afghans in the Netherlands to their stay-behinds. Thereby the focus was on the next of kin, or, in other words, spouses and children, parents, and siblings and their families, although occasionally other family members received financial support too. Making legal arrangements or providing

¹⁶⁸ Several respondents also made donations to Afghan charity organizations like the Bayat Foundation.

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information in order to bring stay-behinds to the West were other forms of practical support that Afghans in the Netherlands provided for their stay-behinds, although the opportunities to realize this option were limited, with the spouse and unmarried children as the main beneficiaries. There were some examples of practical support that stay-behinds provided from a distance to Afghans in the Netherlands, like retrieving important documents for them and informing them about the current situation in Afghanistan. Also in the case of setting up a development project, stay-behinds often served as a contact person. But the occasions when stay-behinds provided most practical support was when respondents visited or actually returned to their region of origin and then received protection, a place to stay, etcetera.

The costs of maintaining contact, via long-distance communication and visits, were predominantly paid by Afghans in the Netherlands. Social contact lay at the heart of providing social support; support aimed at improving psychosocial well-being by having a social exchange. This type of support was also mainly aimed at next of kin stay-behinds, not only for financial reasons, but also because in the individualized context of the West not all respondents felt the need to keep in touch with the often wide range of extended family members. I found that the social support that was exchanged at a distance was predominantly of a unidirectional nature: the situation and problems of the stay-behinds were more often discussed than the situation and problems of the respondents in the West. Both the fact that the situation of stay-behinds was perceived as unsafe and insecure and the fact that it was almost impossible for stay-behinds to imagine the situation and problems of their family members in the West, let alone help them, contributed to this. In other words, it was easier for respondents in the Netherlands to empathize with and give advice and support concerning matters that their stay-behinds struggled with than the other way around. However, respondents made mention of the social support that they received during visits to their region of origin: how they were welcomed and held by the stay-behinds and received hospitality not only from their next of kin but also from more extended family members.

The exchange of cultural support, the support that is aimed at upholding culture and traditions, was the aspect I found least in the relations between respondents and their stay-behinds. At a distance, photos and videos/DVDs of life events like weddings, funerals and other celebrations were sent back and forth - *if* people on both sides had the means to do so. Although these gestures firstly had the social function of sharing important moments, they also reinforced a common cultural identity. But respondents mentioned culture not only as a factor that connected them with stay-behinds, but also as a source of difference or even conflict. This was particularly the case for youngsters and also for some of the women. While, at a distance, it was easier for respondents to conceal or disguise certain aspects of their lives in order to circumvent potential conflicts with stay-behinds, during visits the confrontation was more direct. Respondents reported how they, on the one hand, enjoyed the many events

of which the extended family life in Afghanistan consisted and, on the other, were confronted with its intensity and pressure and their own otherness.

Recapitulating, what I found was an imbalance in the relations between respondents and their next of kin family members in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, in the sense that more practical and social support went from the respondents to the stay-behinds than vice versa. This imbalance was temporarily and partially lifted during visits to the region of origin.

6.7.2 Reciprocity

This imbalance that I just described brings to the fore the aspect of reciprocity: the idea that giving prompts receiving, which is the basic principle underlying all forms of social organization (Schans, 2007: 21). It was a combination of mechanisms that helped explain the continuity of the relationships between respondents and their stay-behinds and that relativized the idea that these relations were characterized by a lack of reciprocity.

In the literature the term 'generalized reciprocity' (Sahlins, 1974) is used to describe how in kinship networks 'the failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver to stop giving [...] for a very long period' (p. 194). The aspects of generosity and altruism that Sahlins (ibid.) stressed in his conceptualisation of 'generalized reciprocity' were certainly present in the relations with stay-behinds. Respondents perceived the situation of stay-behinds as unsafe and insecure compared to their own situation, and wanted to help their loved ones. Bahr and Bahr (2001) also mention love and self-sacrifice as characteristics of family relations. But the desire to help did not restrict itself to family members only; many respondents made mention of the distress of other compatriots that they were confronted with in the media and through stay-behinds, like in cases of famine, drought and violence by fighting factions. While their means to support non-related stay-behinds were limited, the continuous confrontation with the in many ways poor situation in Afghanistan formed a motivation to at least help their own stay-behinds.

The desire to help their loved ones was strengthened by a culture of collectiveness and thus of strong family obligations. As we have seen in chapter 2 (sub-section 2.2.4), in Afghanistan a patrilineal family model of interdependence was prevalent, which implied that family members depended heavily on each other in their daily functioning and that the men, and particularly the eldest men and eldest sons, carried the main responsibility of providing for their family members. In this chapter we saw that even though family relations had lost the characteristic of a close proximity with respondents coming to the Netherlands while other family members stayed behind, the beliefs and values of being responsible for each other's well-being remained largely intact. Particularly male respondents felt and were held responsible for the well-being of their stay-behinds, even more so if they were the eldest of

their brothers or the only ones in the West. But also female respondents felt this responsibility, especially if they earned their own income.

The stay-behinds also reciprocated, as we saw in sections 6.4 to 6.6. They mainly provided information and services from a distance, and offered hospitality, practical help and protection when respondents went on a return visit. But I found that as important as the support that they offered in the present was the fact that they had provided support in the past and were expected to provide support in the future. With regard to the first situation: several respondents presented the support that they gave to their stay-behinds as a way of paying back for the good things that they had received in the past. Thereby, they referred to the more general aspects of familial support, like having a good upbringing, opportunities to study, and love. But they also referred to the specific fact that they themselves - contrary to other family members - had had the possibility to leave the country, often with the help of stay-behinds. The fact that they had been given the opportunity to find safety and security in the West and to create a better future for their children meant that they had an obligation towards their family members who, for various reasons, had missed out on this opportunity.

With regard to the second situation, the expectation of being repaid in the future; this relates to the concept of postponed payment introduced by Staring (2001), by which he means that in familial relations the return of favours can be postponed - even for a long or indefinite time. For respondents, even when the support that they gave to the stay-behinds was not reciprocated in the short term, it kept the door open for an eventual return in the future. Family contacts in Afghanistan were essential for respondents who hoped to go on a return visit, to set up a business or a project in Afghanistan, to go and live there, or even to be buried there. Thus, the support that respondents provided for their stay-behinds also had a symbolic function; it kept their own diasporic dream of return alive.

6.7.3 Transnationalism, integration and commitment

All respondents who had next of kin stay-behinds maintained transnational relations to some extent, even if they lived in severely disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. Actually, most of our respondents lived in relatively difficult socio-economic circumstances compared to the general population. Still, all respondents with next of kin stay-behinds maintained long-distance communication, all but two also sent remittances, and the majority went on one or more return visits. Even respondents who barely had any money to spare found ways to pay for their transnational activities, for instance by living very frugally and by borrowing money from compatriots.

Even though all respondents with next of kin stay-behinds were transnationally active, there were differences between them in how they gave shape to their transnational relationships. To be more precise, there were variations in the forms and the intensity of the

support that was exchanged. Although on the basis of my qualitative and explorative study I cannot draw any conclusions on the causality between transnationalism and integration, I perceived tendencies to the effect that the better established and more secure respondents displayed more transnational activities and a wider range of activities; they, for instance, went on return visits on a regular basis or even started a business or development project in Afghanistan. This finding is in accordance with what Portes et al. (2002) found among Latin American entrepreneurs in the US, namely that transnational entrepreneurs were part of the elite in their respective communities in terms of education and legal standing (p. 293). It is also in accordance with O'Flaherty et al. (2007) who found differences between migrants in their capacities to visit home due to differences in assimilation. The most important difference that I found between respondents with next of kin stay-behinds who went on a return visit compared to the ones who did not was that they and their nuclear family members qualified for Dutch nationality – and a passport. Additionally, respondents - or their children - having a paid job meant that they could go on a return visit. Consequently, I also perceived tendencies to the effect that better established respondents displayed activities aimed at a wider familial circle, including family members who were more distant relatives or whom they had not even previously met. Especially regular visits to Afghanistan contributed to the extension of family contacts.

Paradoxically, the relationships with stay-behinds were, on the one hand, an important stepping-stone towards concretizing the commitment that many respondents still felt with their home country; on the other hand, it was these same relationships that withheld respondents from realizing other transnational activities than the ones directly aimed at the well-being of the stay-behinds. The reason was that long-distance communication with stay-behinds as well as visits to stay-behinds 'reproduced the social fields in which family members [...] feel sufficiently connected to enable them to call on other members of the network for support' (Wilding, 2006). In other words, the communication - at a distance and face to face - with stay-behinds stimulated the exchange of support, which in its turn restricted the respondents' capabilities to establish alternative transnational activities.

I conclude that for most respondents the relations that they maintained with their next of kin stay-behinds formed a continuous confrontation with the distance and the differences that separated them. The fact that stay-behinds remained in a relatively unsafe and insecure situation combined with the limited possibilities that existed to bring them to the West lay at the heart of how respondents perceived these transnational relations. Generally, respondents felt a deep involvement or commitment toward their next of kin stay-behinds, in the sense of feeling responsible for the well-being of these stay-behinds. The commitment that I perceived was different from the way in which Snel et al. (2006) defined transnational involvement,

thereby distinguishing transnational activities and transnational identifications. By 'identification' they mean the extent to which people feel related to a particular ethnic group and orient themselves towards the norms and values of that group. What I found was that respondents indeed felt blood ties with their stay-behinds, even though they did not necessarily share the same norms and values. Some respondents were very aware of the cultural differences that had grown between them and their stay-behinds because of the divergent cultural contexts in which they lived, but this did not keep them from feeling responsible for their well-being. With regard to the aspect of transnational activities, what I found was that a lack of these activities did not automatically mean that there was a lack of transnational commitment. On the contrary, the lives of respondents who displayed few transnational activities could still be completely focussed on their relations with stay-behinds. For instance, there were respondents who went to great lengths, by relinquishing all luxuries and incurring debts, to send some modest remittances to stay-behinds. In these cases the transnational commitment that the respondents perceived constantly clashed with the limitations that they encountered.

7.1 Introduction

In this study I explored the family life of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands, within and across borders. Family life constitutes a foundation in the lives of human beings, while the disruption of the family by external causes has an enormous impact on the persons involved. Refugees are particularly vulnerable in this respect; they often face a combination of external factors that add up to seriously distort their family life, like shocking experiences before fleeing, the dispersal of family members while fleeing, and difficult living conditions after fleeing. In order to deepen our understanding of the vulnerability of refugees with regard to what is so fundamental to them, I studied how Afghans in the Netherlands constructed and experienced their family life.

Because family life is perceived as the cornerstone of society, the international venture for the realization of human rights addresses the need to protect the family in order to guarantee human dignity. For refugees whose family members are dispersed over several countries, the aspect of 'family unity', as addressed in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, is of particular importance. Another important international protection mechanism is article 8 of the ECHR, often briefly referred to as 'the right to family life'. These protection mechanisms and the way in which they are incorporated in national policy - where they are balanced against state interests - form a significant part of the context in which refugees live and act. In this study I adopted an upstream human rights perspective (De Gaay Fortman, 2004b); I conducted an explorative qualitative research in order to find out how Afghan refugees in the Netherlands perceived the fundamental freedoms and basic entitlements that entailed the protection they needed with regard to their family life. Thus I aimed to also contribute to the thinking about the protection of the family.

Using a bottom-up approach meant that I did not define concepts like refugees, the family or protection mechanisms in a legal way, but started from the perceptions and actions of the 'people at the grassroots'. The more than eighty interviews and informal conversations that I had with 37 Afghans in the Netherlands formed the main data source.¹⁶⁹ Afghans form one of the newest refugee groups in the Netherlands, and the fact that they share a background of war and conflict followed by migration and that they originate from a country that culturally diverges from the Netherlands in many respects (see, for instance, Todd, 1985) makes their family situation precarious. In this chapter I first present the main empirical

¹⁶⁹ Additionally I attended several social events, checked relevant websites, read the work of Afghans in the diaspora, and visited Afghanistan.

findings on how Afghan refugees in the Netherlands constructed and experienced their family life (7.2), then discuss the implications for the theoretical concepts that I used (7.3), and, finally, from an upstream human rights perspective I reflect on the implications for the protection of the family (7.4).

7.2 Main empirical findings

7.2.1 The refugee experience of fragmentation

In order to understand the actions and perceptions of people it is important to know their background. Afghans in the Netherlands come from a country with a long history of conflict, violence and fragmentation. Afghanistan has always been internally divided by a harsh climate, an inaccessible surface, and the fact that it hosted a variety of peoples with different languages, looks and customs. Apart from a relatively stable period during the Shah dynasty (1929-1973) the modern history of Afghanistan also reflects this division, with subsequent regimes of communists, Mujaheddin and Taliban coming to power while fighting and oppressing their opponents.

In a country in which the state is perceived by many as being weak, hostile, or indeed non-existent, other institutions like the village and the family play a main role in structuring everyday life. Traditionally, families in Afghanistan are extended and consist of three or even four generations that are characterized by residential unity, be it in a valley, a village or a single compound. These multigenerational units practice close economic cooperation and come together on all life-crisis occasions.¹⁷⁰ Kagitçibasi (1996) calls this family type the family model of relatedness and interdependence. Persons who grow up in such a system are used to having an extensive and intense family life, in which they spend a lot of time with family members, have many family members around, and collaborate with them on all kinds of practical and social issues. I found that in the case of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands their experiences of conflict, war and fleeing as well as the confrontation with the asylum system resulted in a fragmentation of the family. To be more precise, it accumulated in a significant loss of control over their family life (see also Williams, 1990) and a largely imposed transformation from an intensive extended family in Afghanistan to persons finding themselves alone or as (partial) nuclear families in the Netherlands. In the following I discuss the subsequent causes of this transformation.

Firstly, the impact of conflict and war in Afghanistan on the family relations of the respondents was twofold. On the one hand, the situation of non-safety and insecurity

¹⁷⁰ U.S. Library of Congress, Countrystudies, Afghanistan (<http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/57.htm>) (accessed on 6 March 2009)

increased intrafamilial interdependence: family members provided each other with food, shelter, protection and the means and contacts to get away. On the other hand, it fragmented families: family members disappeared, were wounded, became traumatized, were killed, or secretly escaped without leaving a trace. Armed militias, secret police, bombings, mines, random violence made it dangerous to go outside and contact family members elsewhere, which was further hampered by a damaged, badly functioning infrastructure. The chaotic mass movements that repeatedly occurred as a consequence of acts of war made people focus on their next of kin, while losing sight of other family members. Finally, ideological discord and political disagreement could also result in a rift between family members.

Fleeing was characterized by respondents experiencing a gradual loss of control over their family life. It was usually at the family level that decisions were made about who was to be sent abroad to safety and that the money was collected to pay for the departure. But these decisions were often made in great haste and under pressure, and at the moment a 'travel agent' was called in to take family members out of the country or to the West, control over the process was then largely handed over. Travel agents did not only determine the course of the journey but they also influenced or even determined the country of destination, which often resulted in an 'unusual spatial dislocation' of refugees from their social networks (Koser, 1997).

However, respondents experienced a greater lack of control with regard to their family life in the asylum system. Legally, asylum seekers were, for instance, not entitled to family reunification¹⁷¹, they were only allowed to visit family members across borders in cases of 'humanitarian necessity'¹⁷², and family members sometimes received different outcomes to their asylum procedures, which could lead to expulsion and separation. Asylum seekers were housed in centres that were spread all over the Netherlands and had few financial means to keep in contact (transport, communication) with family members elsewhere, while they had to report to the centre on a regular basis. Psychosocially, asylum seekers often felt uncomfortable in the contact they had with family members who stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran as they had nothing to offer and could not share their own difficulties.

From the above I conclude that it is important for understanding how Afghans in the Netherlands constructed and perceived their family life to take into account their 'refugee experience' (Williams, 1990; Bek-Pedersen & Montgomery, 2006:96) in the sense of them sharing specific experiences of conflict, war and fleeing and the confrontation with the asylum system which resulted in a significant loss of control. The lack of agency that

¹⁷¹ Between April 2001 and September 2002 also Afghans who had received temporary protection were entitled to apply for family reunification, which led to an application boom.

¹⁷² Like in the case of grave illness, death or the marriage of a first or second-degree relative.

respondents perceived with regard to the drastic transformation of their family life added to many of them experiencing their start in the Netherlands as difficult and rather lonely.

The process of fragmentation had dramatic consequences for the respondents: they lost part and sometimes most of their family ties and experienced other family members being scattered over various places, countries and continents. But the scattering did not automatically put an end to these family relations. Although at first sight the family life of the respondents was largely brought back to the nuclear-family level¹⁷³, they all had contacts with family members elsewhere. In the study I distinguished between three dimensions of family life. The relations at the household¹⁷⁴ level or the nuclear-family level were characterized by the confrontation of its members with the new society and the tensions and transformations that resulted from it. The relations with non-co-residing family members in the West mainly formed a revitalization of the extended family life of the past, and particularly of its socio-cultural aspects. And the relations with family members who stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran were characterized by a structural inequality and tended to be imbalanced at first sight with more practical and social support going from here to there than vice versa.

7.2.2 Tensions and transformations at the household level

After the loss of control that Afghan refugees experienced with regard to their family life, during and after fleeing, obtaining a residence permit in the Netherlands meant regaining control over their life as they were now allowed - and expected - to 'integrate', or in other words to become part of society at large. As a consequence of the fragmentation of their families it was mainly as (partial) nuclear families or as individuals that they were confronted with the task of building up a new life in a new country. Therefore I called the household level the nuclear-family level, in order to stress that all respondents that co-resided were parents and their children - even though they did not always constitute complete nuclear families. It was especially at this level that, according to the literature, many tensions could arise, particularly between genders and generations, because of the different ways in which family members had integrated (see for instance Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Hofstede, 1991; Pels & Gruijter, 2005).

In the literature on integration usually a distinction is made between structural and cultural or socio-cultural integration. Structural integration refers to the participation of migrants in institutions of the receiving society (Martens & Weijers, 2000; Dagevos, 2001).

¹⁷³ A nuclear family consists of a couple and their dependent children (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2005).

¹⁷⁴ A household consists of a co-resident group of persons, who share most aspects of consumption, drawing on and allocating a common pool of resources (including labour) to ensure their material reproduction (Schmink, 1984: 89).

Cultural integration refers to the orientation of migrants towards the receiving society (Oomen, Driessen & Scheepers, 2003), or - more neutrally - to their cultural orientation in general. Using the same dichotomy between structural and socio-cultural integration, I found that with regard to structural integration there were significant differences between parents and children, and to a lesser extent between husbands and wives, in the way in which they participated in the 'institutions' in the Netherlands, particularly with regard to education and the labour market. While parents faced severe problems with learning the Dutch language, having their qualifications and professional experience recognized, and finding a job - particularly at the level at which they had functioned in Afghanistan - , the children found their way rather quickly in the Dutch language and in the schooling system. And while most men and also higher educated women suffered a structural status decline, some lower educated women benefited from the educational and professional opportunities that the Dutch context offered them to advance. These divergent integration patterns inevitably caused transformations and tensions at the nuclear-family level. While parents became partially dependent on their children with regard to the language and the functioning of Dutch society, children had to figure out many practical aspects by themselves. The roles of husbands and wives changed too, with the man losing his function as the sole or main provider of income, and in some cases the wife becoming the breadwinner instead.

With regard to the socio-cultural integration process of nuclear-family members I perceived gradual differences between generations and to a lesser extent between genders. Compared to the parents, the children were more exposed and more susceptible to the norms and values of the host society, for instance with regard to issues like relationships and marriage. Also some women developed different ideas about the position of men and women than they had before coming to the Netherlands, or became more outspoken in this respect. However, intrafamilial socio-cultural differences and discrepancies were partly counterbalanced by the fact that the nuclear-family members shared a common interest in protecting the status of the family by behaving as 'good Afghans'. This collective exemplary behaviour was important in order to be respected by their compatriots in the diaspora and in order to create good marriage opportunities for the children in particular. Even though the definition of good Afghan behaviour was by no means an absolute given - for instance, within several families fierce discussions took place about the desirability of the children marrying an compatriot-, its patriarchal and hierarchical notion had a moderating influence on transformations that were elicited by the Dutch context. So, on the one hand, the Dutch context empowered some nuclear-family members and disempowered others; I particularly analysed how three defence mechanisms of the traditional status quo, namely isolation, control, and punishment, were weakened in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the importance of maintaining the reputation of the family was usually not called into question.

The negotiations that followed on what 'good Afghanness' meant were characterized by the ambivalences that most family members perceived in this respect,¹⁷⁵ which created space for gradual changes from within.

7.2.3 Family relations in the West and socio-cultural orientation

In the relations between the respondents and non-co-residing family members in the West, all three dimensions of support exchange were present: practical support¹⁷⁶, social support¹⁷⁷ and cultural support¹⁷⁸. The exchange of support in combination with the factors of proximity to kin and contact with kin (Sarkisian, Gerena & Gerstel, 2006) showed the following pattern. Apart from some situations of intensive support between closely-related family members (parents, siblings) nearby, the practical support that was exchanged was rather ad hoc and limited, also in financial terms, except for the exchange of advice. I found that the major part of the exchange of support consisted of social and cultural support. With regard to social support, the larger the geographic distance, the more the contacts focussed on first and second-degree family members. But also at a distance, these contacts were often intense, with family members communicating regularly and visits from time to time that could take up several months. Thereby the aspects of sharing memories and sharing daily life, including the personal problems that formed part of this daily life¹⁷⁹, constituted important elements. Having contact and getting together at events like holidays, weddings and funerals did not only serve to exchange social support but also had the function of reaffirming a common identity in a culturally-strange environment and transferring it to the next generation. At these events also contacts with extended family members were re-established or renewed and sometimes old family connections were intensified or new family connections were created via the arrangement of marriages. So in line with Kagitçibasi (1996) I found that the material dependence between family members in the West diminished, while what she called the 'emotional interdependence' was maintained. Additionally, I distinguished a cultural interdependence between family members that was of particular importance in the culturally-strange environment of the Western host countries.

Starting from Massey et al.'s (1987) distinction between three types of network relationships, based on kinship, friendship, and *paisanaje* (being from the same place), I explored to what extent contacts with other Afghans in the Netherlands compensated for an eventual lack of family members nearby in terms of support. I found that these relations were

¹⁷⁵ In the sense of them trying to meet their own, their family's, and the community's contradictory demands and expectations (Connidis & McMullin, 2002: 565).

¹⁷⁶ Practical support is aimed at solving material problems or arranging practical matters.

¹⁷⁷ Social support is aimed at improving psychosocial well-being by having social contact.

¹⁷⁸ Cultural support is aimed at upholding culture and traditions.

¹⁷⁹ A specific problem that family members in the West shared was concerns about and financial responsibilities for family members who had stayed behind.

largely characterized by a lack of trust, especially between compatriots who did not share a common background, which limited the exchange of support. While some respondents chose not to relate with any compatriots, or only with some old friends from the past, the ones who did relate with other Afghans, individually or in the setting of an organization, usually did so with caution. While I perceived an exchange of practical and cultural support between compatriots nearby, the dimensions of support that appeared to be most difficult to replace were intensive practical support (e.g., personal care) and social support. The cultural notion of keeping personal matters to oneself and within the family in combination with the fear of social control and gossip by their compatriots kept respondents from sharing their memories and personal experiences and problems in this context.

The former helps to explain why for most respondents family contacts in the West constituted a relatively important part of their lives. Although it varied how much time and money respondents could spend on leisure activities, generally most money was spent on and filled up by family contacts and visits, both nearby and further away. Thus it was at this level that respondents recreated a family life that sometimes partly and temporarily resembled the intensive extended family life of the past. Respondents stressed how much they liked to get together and spend time together with family members elsewhere. Yet at the same time these contacts confronted the respondents with the changes that had taken place after they had fled and with the limitations that they faced with regard to their family life. These were not only legal, economic and practical factors that formed obstacles to communicating with each other and visiting each other, like visa requirements, transport costs, and busy work schedules. Respondents also found it difficult to be confronted with each other's problems as migrants in the West, while not being able to help each other, for instance in financial terms. On the one hand, there was indeed 'a decrease of material interdependence' (Kagitçibasi, 1996), which partly stemmed from the fact that family members in the West became dependent on government support instead. On the other hand, it was also a matter of family members losing their capability to *provide* each other with material support, because of their own marginal situation in the host country in combination with the material responsibility for family members who had stayed behind. I concur with Sarkisian, Gerena and Gerstel (2006) and Schans (2007) that it is important to differentiate between familial practices and cultural beliefs because it was the divide between the family values with which the respondents were raised and the family practice that they lived in the West that resulted in grief. Respondents specifically mentioned the limitations in getting together face to face and in helping each other materially as causes of frustration. Still, the social and cultural significance that these relations had in the lives of most respondents meant that they formed an important frame of reference and a touchstone, particularly for the socio-cultural orientation of the respondents.

The often occurring phenomenon of intrafamilial marriages in the diaspora, mainly between cousins or second-cousins, further strengthened the intensity of family relations in the West.

7.2.4 Family relations with stay-behinds and structural integration

While the exchange of support between family members in the West was mainly of a social and a cultural nature, the exchange between the respondents and their family members who had stayed behind in Afghanistan, Iran or Pakistan had an important material dimension. To be more precise, the relationship was largely characterized by a material dependence of the stay-behinds on their next of kin family members in the West; their spouses, children, parents and siblings.

I distinguished six aspects concerning support exchange that were prevalent in the relations of the respondents with family members who had stayed behind: bringing stay-behinds to the West, sending remittances, long-distance communication and visiting, and return and development. Bringing next of kin stay-behinds to the West was in many cases seen as the most desirable situation, in order to bring them to safety and security and in order to be together. But the possibilities to realize this situation were limited by the restrictive immigration policies of the Netherlands and of other potential Western host countries. In the Netherlands the opportunities to reunite with family members were largely limited to the spouse and unmarried children. Alternatively, respondents sometimes helped stay-behinds financially to go to the West via sponsorship by family members in the US or Canada or as independent asylum-seekers. The latter option was risky, however, because as long as family members did not get a residence status, the respondents felt worried about them and responsible for them in their insecure situation. Marriage was another route by which to bring stay-behinds to the West, that is for the ones who were able to meet the income requirements and to afford the additional costs of legal dues, paperwork, etc. The practice of arranging intrafamilial marriages with stay-behinds functioned as a way of helping the bride or groom and her or his family to obtain a foothold in the West while containing the hazards of migration and marriage at the same time (see Charsley, 2007).

With regard to sending remittances, almost all respondents who had first or second-degree stay-behinds supported them financially, ranging from occasional gifts to monthly sums of up to 500 dollars. It was not easy for them to do so, because of their own meagre economic situation in the Netherlands. It meant that they lived frugally in order to save money from the modest income that they had, and partially set aside their own dreams and ambitions. But in spite of their efforts, the transfer of remittances and goods could not guarantee the safety of stay-behinds, and the difficult and unstable living conditions in which many stay-behinds lived made their need for support recurring or continuous.

Respondents used different means to communicate with their next of kin stay-behinds, like phone calls, the webcam, and the postal service, depending on the means that were available on both sides. They usually restricted their communication to a limited number of persons, not only in order to control the direct communication costs but also in order to control the indirect costs of the - open or covert - requests for support that often resulted from these contacts. As O'Flaherty et al. (2007) say: 'The maintenance of transnational social fields forms the basis for the exchange of support.' In the maintenance of these transnational social fields with stay-behinds return visits also played an important role; for most respondents, meeting family members and friends was the main reason to go on a visit. Especially having elderly parents in the region of origin was an important motivation to realize or at least to seriously consider a return visit 'before it was too late'. I found it striking that several respondents went on a return visit in spite of the severely disadvantaged economic position that they found themselves in, for instance because they were unfit to work. More than the economic position of the respondents, having a Dutch passport was a decisive factor in whether or not respondents who had next of kin stay-behinds went on a return visit. The return visits revived and - whether or not temporarily - expanded relations with family members who had stayed behind, but in some cases it also led to culture clashes - particularly among youngsters and Westernized women. Finally, return visits gave a new impulse to the process of weighing the pros and cons of a life back in Afghanistan.

The aspects of return and development were of a different nature than the former aspects: hereby the main concern was not the situation of the stay-behinds but the situation in Afghanistan more in general. By return I mean a return to the country of origin in order to live and possibly work there, on a temporary or a more permanent basis. Visits to family members as well as information from stay-behinds, compatriots and the media were sources that respondents used to consider the pros and cons of a return - after which by far the most respondents relinquished the idea, at least for the moment. Generally, the youngsters were least tempted to settle in Afghanistan, as they were structurally and socio-culturally mostly focused on life in the Netherlands. Conversely, many older respondents dreamt of returning as they had suffered great losses by coming to the Netherlands, but their dependence on their children in the West and on facilities like the medical system usually kept them here. Many men also felt that they had something to gain by returning to Afghanistan, where there would be more recognition and professional opportunities for them in society. But the fact that they had a financial responsibility for stay-behinds tied them to the money that they earned in the Netherlands from work or social security, and with that to a life here. Alternatively, there were Afghans in the Netherlands - also youngsters and women - who had set up or participated in development projects in Afghanistan that were usually aimed at Kabul or the region of birth of the initiators. Thereby family members on the spot often played the role of

informants, supervisors and contact persons, which made respondents in the Netherlands more aware of and responsible for the situation and needs of these specific relatives too.

When analysing these six aspects with regard to the support that was exchanged between respondents and their stay-behinds, I found the following pattern:

Practical support was most prevalent and mainly took the form of remittances being sent from Afghans in the Netherlands to their next of kin stay-behinds. Another form of practical support was making legal arrangements and providing information and means in order to bring stay-behinds to the West, with the spouse and unmarried children as the main beneficiaries. The costs of long-distance communication and of visiting were also predominantly paid by the respondents. The other way around, during return visits and other return activities (business, temporary jobs) the respondents received protection, a place to stay, gifts, etcetera from the stay-behinds. Additionally, stay-behinds helped respondents with establishing and controlling development projects and activities.

Social support mainly went from the respondents to their next of kin stay-behinds. The reason for this imbalance was that while respondents were concerned about the unsafe or insecure situation of their stay-behinds, it was almost impossible for stay-behinds to imagine the situation and the problems of the respondents in the West. Again, it was mainly during return visits that social support was also provided the other way around, with respondents being welcomed and receiving hospitality from stay-behinds, not only from their next of kin but also from more extended family members.

The exchange of cultural support was the aspect that I found least in the relations between respondents and their stay-behinds. In some cases photos and DVDs of important life events were sent back and forth, which besides the social function of sharing these moments also had the cultural function of showing customs and traditions to the children. But culture was also mentioned as a source of conflict, particularly during return visits when family members were confronted with the differences that had grown between them.

What struck my attention were the paradoxes and tensions that characterized the relations between respondents and their stay-behinds. How contacts with stay-behinds, on the one hand, invigorated the commitment that the respondents felt toward their country of origin, but how, on the other hand, the personal needs of the stay-behinds in combination with the marginal economic situation of the respondents diminished their opportunities to act concerning this commitment. (Muller, 2009). And how there was tension between providing material support to stay-behinds and the exchange of social and cultural support, as respondents for instance tried to save money by limiting communication costs and even grew weary of hearing the phone ring because they expected it to be another request for financial support.

With regard to the interrelatedness between the relations with stay-behinds and the socio-economic or structural position of the respondents in the Netherlands, I found the following. Also the respondents who were in a marginal socio-economic position sent remittances, kept in touch, and even went to visit stay-behinds. The commitment that the respondents felt toward the stay-behinds often translated itself into a frugal lifestyle: respondents tried to save money by lowering the heating, by living in cheap and sometimes cramped housing conditions, by not having a car, by only buying second-hand clothing and furniture, etcetera. The need to make money also resulted in some respondents immediately deciding to start working in lower-qualified jobs instead of first following an education. On the other hand, the need to have a Dutch passport in order to be able to visit the stay-behinds was an incentive for respondents to learn the Dutch language up until the required level. For most first-generation respondents their children having jobs on the side provided some financial relief, and their children having a good education and finding a good job was their hope for expanding their transnational activities in the near future. Thus, the daily lives of the respondents were to a large extent marked by the financial impact that the maintenance of relations with their stay-behinds - and with that of the relations with the country of origin - had.

7.2.5 Transnational family life: a continuous confrontation with borders

At the end of this section I conclude that for many respondents establishing family relations across borders meant a constant confrontation with these same borders and with the legal, economic, and cultural distance that they represented. The respondents experienced that their family relations changed fundamentally when their families became scattered. In the case of relations with stay-behinds, the emphasis lay on the material responsibility that the respondents had for them. Relations with family members elsewhere in the West were more balanced, but they were affected by the relatively marginal socio-economic position of many family members in the host countries. Thus, in both cases establishing and maintaining transnational family ties frequently reminded the respondents of the fragmentation of their families, of the limitations in the exchange of support that resulted from this, and of the bygone family life that was now lost forever.

7.3 Discussion

7.3.1 The extended perception of the family

In this study the concept of the family was a central one. Because of its universal significance as well as its diverse manifestations, the family has been studied in many different ways. My

approach was to start from the memories that respondents had of their family life in the past, and I thus learnt that most respondents had grown up in the context of an extended family. By that I mean that respondents - whether or not they were co-residing - in their daily functioning were interdependent with kin in their close proximity (Kagitçibasi, 1996: 78-79), materially as well as socially. So, in practice, respondents had often grown up and lived together with or nearby their grandparents and their parents, their brothers and their families, their unmarried sisters, their aunts, uncles and cousins - and in the case of married women they had lived together with or nearby their husband's family - while also further related kin like second-aunts, uncles, and cousins formed a substantial part of the social context in which people lived. The closeness that family members felt in this situation was for instance expressed by a respondent referring to her cousins as 'brothers' and 'sisters', and another respondent referring to his paternal uncle as 'father'.

In order for me to understand how respondents perceived their current family life, it was essential to have an insight into their - maybe somewhat romanticized - memories of the extended family life that they had had in the past. Several scholars have shown that the contrast between the nuclear family system in urban, industrialized societies and the collective family system in traditional, rural societies is not as extreme as assumed, and that in the West an interdependence exists between family members beyond the nuclear unit as well (see for instance Bengtson, 2001; Finch & Mason, 1993; Schans, 2007). Still, from my findings I derived that there was at least a gradual difference of intensity between family life in the Netherlands and family life back in Afghanistan due to a combination of the large size of most families and the high level of interdependence between family members that was common there - not only between next of kin but to a lesser extent also between further-related kin. In this study, taking into account the significance that respondents attributed to their extended family ties was necessary in order to fully understand the social loss that they suffered by coming to the Netherlands and to assess how they reconstructed their family life within and across borders.

7.3.2 Transnational family life and its multiple engagements

Studying the family life of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands calls for a transnational perspective; all respondents experienced their family members being scattered across the world and all maintained family relations across borders. Following Mazzucato's (2005, 2008) terminology, I not only found a 'double engagement' among the respondents, but in many cases even a multiple engagement: They were engaged in the region of origin (in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) where they had family members who had stayed behind, they were engaged in the family diaspora network that they had in the West, and they were engaged in Dutch society where they had the task of building a new life.

Within transnational studies the specific focus on family relations is relatively new, except for the work of British academics on the South Asian diasporas (Charsley & Shaw, 2006) that took place from the 1970s onwards (see for instance Ballard & Ballard, 1977). Recently, several scholars have focused on transnational next of kin relations between the host country and the country of origin. Studies were conducted on transnational care relations between adult children and their ageing parents (for instance Baldassar, Baldock & Wilding, 2006) and on the split-family situations of migrant parents and their children (for instance Parreñas, 2005; Van Walsum, 2006). Both situations were of relevance to this study as well, with respondents trying to maintain 'familyhood'¹⁸⁰ (Brysecon & Vuorela, 2002: 3) with their children or parents who had stayed behind in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. But in most cases respondents remained in the Netherlands with their nuclear family complete, and in several cases also their parents remained in the West. Taking into account relations with other stay-behinds as well, ranging from intense long-distance contacts with siblings to occasional encounters with third and fourth-degree family members during return visits, helped to explain the engagements with the country of origin that most respondents still had - or even re-established, for instance via a marriage with a stay-behind.

Additionally, in this study I looked at the relations between the respondents and their family members in the Western diaspora, which added two insights about the empirical reality of the multiple engagements that the respondents had. Firstly, it made visible that respondents often shared the responsibility for the welfare of the stay-behinds with family members elsewhere in the West. And secondly, it made clear that also within the West respondents were confronted with national borders and the obstacles that these created to constructing the family life they wished for.

7.3.3. Reciprocity as a necessity for family life

For respondents the opportunities and limitations for getting together and being together with family members who lived across borders constituted an important aspect of their family life, but not the only one. Another significant aspect of the transnational relations with family members was the reciprocity between them. The significance of the exchange of support in social relations is common knowledge in anthropology and sociology. Finch and Mason (1993) studied the support exchange in family relations and showed the specific importance of these ties; not in the sense of kin support being unconditional and infinite but in the sense of it being reliable: 'you know that you can fall back on your relatives - especially your close kin - if all else fails' (Finch, 1989: 240). But with regard to the situation of refugees the question arises what happens to the familial reciprocity after families become scattered.

¹⁸⁰ Familyhood is 'a feeling of collective welfare and unity' (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002: 3).

I found that for the respondents the exchange of support remained an important aspect of their family relations, even though its dimensions changed after fleeing. With regard to the transnational relations that respondents had with family members in the West, the major part of the exchange of support that took place was of a social and a cultural nature. In these relations I perceived a shift toward emotional interdependence (see Kagitçibasi, 1996) and cultural interdependence, while the material interdependence between family members who lived in the West decreased (see section 7.2.3). As most respondents had been in the Netherlands for a relatively short period of less than ten years, it was difficult to tell how the passage of time would eventually affect their family relations in the West. However, there were no indications that the trust between next of kin diminished once they lived in different Western countries. On the contrary, in the new and in many respects strange context in which the respondents lived, the confidence and familiarity that they felt toward their next of kin in the diaspora - who came from the same background and now lived in similar circumstances as newcomers in the West - provided an important grip on reality. The role of (transnational) kinship ties as a safe haven was further strengthened by the distrust that was often present among non-related Afghans in the diaspora. The intrafamilial marriages that were frequently arranged in the diaspora intensified the exchange of all dimensions of support across borders - also among the new generations.

In the relations between respondents and family members who had stayed behind the exchange of support constituted a significant aspect too, but the reciprocity pattern took a different form; these relations were characterized by an inequality in terms of safety and security and by more practical and social support going from the respondents toward the stay-behinds than vice-versa. In the literature the term 'generalized reciprocity' (Sahlins, 1974) is used to describe how in kinship networks 'the failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver to stop giving [...] for a very long period' (p. 194). I perceived several mechanisms that helped explain the continuation of the apparently imbalanced exchange of support. The altruism that Sahlins (ibid.) stressed as an important aspect in kin relations, or in other terms the self-sacrifice and love that characterize family relations (Bahr & Bahr, 2001) played an important role, which was strengthened by a culture of collectiveness and thus of strong family obligations. Also, there were ways in which stay-behinds *did* reciprocate towards the respondents in the Netherlands, from a distance and during return visits, as I described in subsection 7.2.4. Additionally, respondents stressed how it was now their turn to pay back for everything they had received from their family in the past - often including the chance to escape. On the other hand, the contacts that they had with stay-behinds kept the door open for a return, including the opportunity to be buried in one's country of origin. The latter two arguments confirm the importance of respectively 'postponed payment' (Staring, 2001) and 'delayed payment' as mechanisms that help explain the reciprocity pattern between

respondents and their stay-behinds. From the former we learn that the relations between respondents and stay-behinds were not as one-dimensional as one might think at first glance, and that it is important to consider the reciprocity pattern between kin as the outcome of a lifelong process.

7.3.4 Integration and transnational ability

Though all respondents maintained family relations across borders and the exchange of support formed an inextricable part thereof, I found substantial differences in the extent to which they were transnationally active. These differences were partly due to the different ways in which their families became dispersed - ranging from respondents being the only one of their family in the West to respondents whose entire family had fled to the West - but they were also due to the different abilities that respondents had at their disposal. These abilities were largely related to the integration process of the respondents, which brings us to the scholarly discussion on the relation between transnationalism and integration.

As I mentioned in sub-section 1.3.3, the outcomes of studies on the relationship between transnationalism and integration are often rather indistinct or even ambivalent (see for instance Engbersen et al., 2002; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Schans, 2007). On the basis of my qualitative and explorative study I cannot draw any conclusions about the causality between these concepts, but I found that the two were narrowly interrelated. For instance, some respondents were quick to find a job in the Netherlands or had even left education prematurely in order to earn money to support their stay-behinds. And the other way around, some respondents oriented themselves towards opportunities in the Netherlands like useful contacts, organizations and funds in order to set up a development project in their place of birth.

I perceived tendencies that the better established and more secure respondents displayed more transnational activities and a wider range of activities, which is in line with what Portes et al. (2002) found among Latin American immigrants in the US. I also found indications that the better established respondents displayed activities aimed at a wider familial circle, including family members that they were further related to or had not even met before. In that sense I concur with O'Flaherty et al. (2007) that transnationalism does not represent 'an all encompassing equalizing force' (p. 839) but that there are indeed major group-differences in migrants' capacity to establish contacts across borders. But what I found particularly striking was that respondents who were in a marginal position in the Netherlands developed transnational activities too. For instance, even when respondents were still in the asylum system where they had few economic means at their disposal and felt legally insecure, they at least tried to locate and contact their next of kin elsewhere. And when respondents at a

later stage had a low income, they still succeeded in saving money for communication costs, remittances, or visits to next of kin elsewhere by living frugally.

With these observations I must make the remark that the differences between the respondents in terms of their economic situation were not that great; they all lived in a relatively difficult socio-economic situation and the respondents who had next of kin stay-behinds all experienced the pressure concerning their needs and expectations to some extent. But the relatively better established respondents - particularly those who had Dutch citizenship and a job - had some more ability to act according these needs and expectations, to enjoy the gratification that resulted from it, and to harvest the fruits of their efforts, for instance when they went on a return visit and were hospitably received by the stay-behinds that they had supported.¹⁸¹ The more insecure the legal and economic situation of the respondents, the more difficult it was to live up to the needs and expectations of stay-behinds. These respondents also had less ability to enjoy the benefits of having transnational family ties, like going on a return visit, or attending a wedding in the diaspora. Paradoxically, the lives of respondents who displayed few transnational activities could still be completely focussed on relations with family members elsewhere, for instance because they lived frugally in order to save money for remittances. Still, the engagement that they perceived towards their loved ones across borders constantly clashed with the limitations that they encountered in act thereon, which resulted in feelings of frustration and despair.

To conclude, a multiple engagement was the reality for Afghan refugees in the Netherlands who have next of kin living across borders. For them, balancing between integration in the host country and their engagement with loved ones elsewhere was an inextricable part of their lives. I therefore concur with Mazzucato (2008) that a policy towards migration and integration should be based on the reality that migrants have multiple engagements and aim to create room for juggling between their multiple loyalties (p. 213). In the case of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands an important aspect for both their integration and their transnational activities was enabling them to participate in the Dutch labour market, as I elaborate upon in the final section (7.4).

7.4 Implications from an upstream human rights perspective

At the end of this study let us review the freedoms and entitlements relating to family life that Afghan refugees in the Netherlands considered vital. In this respect it is important to realize that the human rights on which these freedoms and entitlements are founded 'play their part

¹⁸¹ However, these return visits often also resulted in an extension of family contacts and with that an extension of requests for support.

not merely as legal resources (implying a reliance on functioning legal systems) but also as political instruments in the sense of internationally enacted standards of legitimacy that are meant to govern any use of power' (De Gaay Fortman, 2006: 263-264). In this section I mainly consider human rights in the second, political sense and reflect on the policy implications of my findings in the Dutch context. Thereby the aspect of human rights as a transformational instrument (ibid.) is also discussed.

Firstly, on the basis of my findings I formulated five aspects that together constituted what family life generally meant to the respondents:

1. living together
2. contacting family members and spending time together
3. getting together on special occasions
4. caring and being cared for
5. maintaining the reputation of the family

ad 1) Living alone was not considered a desirable situation by any of the respondents. It was at most perceived as a temporary stage of life for young men before they take on the responsibilities of marriage. Respondents who lived alone in the Netherlands while their spouse and possibly their children lived elsewhere did everything in their power to bring here. While most respondents who arrived on their own were able to arrange family reunification with their spouse and unmarried children rather quickly, it proved to be much more difficult to bring over other family members. Respondents mentioned in particular the situation of elderly parents and adult children: the fact that in many cases the Dutch authorities did not allow them to reunite with these family members was perceived as harsh and incomprehensible. The same incomprehension and grief was felt when their next of kin received a different outcome at the end of their asylum procedure and were not allowed to stay. Respondents perceived the negative decision and the (imminent) expulsion and separation that resulted from it as painful. Another agonizing situation arose when Afghan men and sometimes also women wanted to bring respectively a bride or a groom from abroad¹⁸² but did not meet the criteria for family formation, like the income requirement. These were all situations in which family members who wanted to live together were prevented from doing so.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Who was in many cases family-related.

¹⁸³ On the other hand, I came across a few cases in which respondents felt protected by the restrictive immigration policy, for instance in the case of a woman who felt relieved that her mother-in-law was not allowed to join her family in the Netherlands, and in the case of a young man who was happy that his arranged marriage had to be postponed because the bride was not allowed to enter the country.

So I found a controversy between respondents' desire to live together with their next of kin family members, including their adult children and elderly parents, and the restrictions set by policies. From an upstream human rights perspective the question then arises whether the room for family reunification and family formation could not be stretched somewhat so as to more accommodate people's basic need to live together as a family according to their own perception of which members constitute this family. This would not only be in the interest of many refugees and their family members. One can also imagine that widening the possibilities for refugees to live with their loved ones would diminish the concern about and the responsibility for family members elsewhere, and thus would give them more means, time and energy to participate in Dutch society.

ad 2+3) For the respondents family life was not only about living together with next of kin but also about communicating and getting together with family members elsewhere, on a regular basis or occasionally - particularly during holidays and life events like weddings and funerals. Having contact with family members and spending time with them were important aspects in the lives of most respondents, but the fact that their families were usually scattered over different countries posed several obstacles in this respect. These were most obvious in the contact with family members who stayed behind. A combination of practical limitations to communicating at a distance (for instance, not having a telephone or Internet connection), legal limitations on visiting back and forth (for instance, for respondents: not having a Dutch passport, for stay-behinds: not getting a visa for the Netherlands), and economic limitations (the high costs of long-distance communication, of plane tickets, of paperwork, of presents upon arrival) were mentioned. Also the structural and cultural divide that had grown between the respondents in the Netherlands and their stay-behinds was sometimes mentioned as having a negative impact on contact; respondents related that stay-behinds simply could not imagine life in the West and the problems that refugees encountered here and had high expectations of the support that family members in the West could provide. Contact with family members in the West was generally somewhat easier, because the communication and travel costs were lower, border-crossing was easier, particularly if family members had a Western passport, and the comparable socio-economic and socio-cultural situation of family members in the West meant that they exchanged experiences on an equal footing. Still, the difficult socio-economic situation in which many respondents found themselves and the way in which they were often heavily dependent on the national system, like the health system and the social security system, severely limited their possibilities to get together as much as they would like. Many respondents indicated that they felt somewhat isolated and missed their extensive social

These examples show how Afghan families consist of hierarchical relationships in which every family member has his or her own position and interests that sometimes oppose each other.

network of the past - in which family contacts played a crucial role. But respondents also mentioned that when they *did* get together, it confronted them with the difficulties that they all faced as newcomers and with the limited opportunities to help each other in that respect.

When I contemplate the preceding paragraph, from an upstream human rights perspective two aspects in particular come to the fore. Firstly, immigration and naturalisation policies limited the possibilities of getting together, particularly in the contact between respondents and their stay-behinds. For instance, the strict criteria concerning stay-behinds visiting the Netherlands made it almost impossible to realize such a visit. And respondents in their turn needed to apply for a Dutch passport to visit Afghanistan, which was only possible after having been a resident for at least five years. However, the aspect that was stressed most by the respondents as an obstacle for having the family contact that they desired was the impediments that they faced in fully participating in Dutch society and the lack of financial means that resulted therefrom. This leads me to the conclusion that improving the socio-economic situation of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands would be essential for the protection of their family life. The respondents themselves thereby particularly stressed the importance of having opportunities to work, preferably in jobs in which they could make use of their former education and professional experiences. Hence, it is their social, economic and cultural rights whose implementation has become no less urgent than the realization of their political and civil rights.

ad 4) According to the respondents family life was more than living together, visiting each other and communicating at a distance. For them a crucial aspect was caring and being cared for, or in other words exchanging support. In the former sub-section it was already mentioned that the possibilities for respondents and their family members in the West to help each other were limited because of their often relatively weak structural position as newcomers. The gradual differences between Western states, for instance with regard to immigration policies and social security arrangements, further limited their possibilities to exchange practical advice. A shift took place from a situation of familial interdependence in the past to a one-sided dependence on the states they now lived in. The situation of the respondents and their stay-behinds was very different in this respect. The socio-economic divide between respondents and stay-behinds but also the divide in terms of safety and security put a heavy responsibility on the family members in the West. A form of support that in many cases was perceived as most desirable was bringing next of kin stay-behinds to the West: it would bring these persons into the same situation of safety and security and would thus considerably lighten the responsibility of family members in the West. But this point brings us back to what was already mentioned in sub-section 1: the possibilities for family reunification (and formation) were limited, and alternative possibilities to bring family members to the West, for

instance via sponsorship, were few. Also the criteria for inviting family members temporarily, for instance for medical treatment, were difficult to meet. Therefore in many cases the only option left was to support stay-behinds from a distance by sending money or goods. I found that almost all respondents who had next of kin stay-behinds in the region of origin sent remittances to them, regularly or occasionally. As the situation in the region of origin remained worrisome, the respondents perceived a recurring or continuous pressure to send remittances which had a heavy impact on their lives including their possibilities to establish alternative transnational activities, like starting a business or a development project in Afghanistan.

Viewed from an upstream human rights perspective the respondents would be helped by lowering the criteria for temporary visits and by creating more possibilities to bring family members to the Netherlands, for instance in the form of sponsorship. Obviously there is tension between widening these opportunities for stay-behinds to come to the Netherlands and the current political tendency to minimize the influx of third-country nationals. The other aspect that comes to the fore once again is the importance of enabling Afghan refugees to fully participate in Dutch society and particularly on the Dutch labour market, and thus enabling them to (better) support their own family members elsewhere. This aim seems to be more attainable in the short run than the third aspect: significantly improving the general situation in Afghanistan so that stay-behinds live in a safe and secure situation. However, for the family life of the respondents that would be the most desirable situation because it would bring more balance in the relationship with stay-behinds.

ad 5) The fifth aspect of their family life that most respondents found important was a socio-cultural one: maintaining the reputation of the family. With the wider familial setting of support and control having dispersed and vanished, Afghan refugees in the Netherlands were set the task of integrating into a society that was different in many respects. This resulted in tensions and in transformations of roles within nuclear families, particularly between parents and children and to a lesser extent between husbands and wives. Many respondents perceived these tensions and changes in their family as threatening its cohesion and status. So, paradoxically, their coming to the Netherlands, on the one hand, had provided family members with safety and security but, on the other, it put their family culture under pressure. Especially the individualism - and also the egalitarianism - that respondents observed in Dutch society were mentioned as aspects that formed a threat to the family life in which they wished to live. Practices like unmarried children living apart from their parents, children talking back to their parents, and the high divorce rate in the Netherlands were mentioned as illustrations of a culture that deviated significantly from 'their own'. Additionally, some governmental and societal mechanisms that existed to protect individuals were mentioned

because they complicated the family life of the respondents, like the possibility for children to report corporal punishment by their parents and the existence of shelters for girls who had run away from home. Parents and in some cases husbands or brothers felt powerless now that their task of controlling and correcting the behaviour of their family members was being called into question by the existence of these facilities. This situation could endanger the reputation of the family and with that the social status of all family members. Therefore some of the respondents perceived the mechanisms that served to protect the individual as being threatening to the collective of the family and more in general to what they perceived as the Afghan culture. These perceptions were not only expressed by respondents who had suffered a structural status decline in the Dutch context like older people, men and parents, but also by respondents who had gained power like youngsters and women, which reflects the fact that they shared the interest of having a 'good family name'. Ballard (2008) explains that according to persons who are brought up in 'more corporately oriented systems' [...] 'every possible effort should be made to ensure that those who might otherwise go astray are firmly reincorporated into the networks of familial reciprocity, within which their prospects for personal security would be far greater than if they were to drop out into a world of chaotic individualism' (p. 68).

From an upstream human rights perspective this observation brings us back into the middle of the discussion about collective rights versus individual rights, and the question whether or not a right to cultural identity should exist (see also sub-section 1.2.2). The former shows that the reasoning to the effect that the right to cultural identity is already covered by the existence of individual social, economic and cultural rights is not in accordance with the perception of persons who have been brought up with a collective world view. At the same time it shows that the risk as mentioned by many human rights scholars that a protection of the collective can put individual freedom at risk (Burgers in Berting et al., 1990) is indeed real. There is no easy way out of the dilemma between protecting a cultural identity that is hierarchical and patriarchal in nature and protecting the individual members that rebel against these cultural norms. De Gaay Fortman (2006: 263) mentions the transformative power of human rights that drives processes of emancipation. But the question then is what kind of transformation is intended and who defines that, which at the end of the day is a normative matter that is determined by political powers. The latter is convincingly shown by Van Walsum (2008) who argues that the apparently neutral 'normative touchstones' of equality, individual liberty and tolerance upon which the current Dutch policies with regard to the family are based (p. 86) in practice resulted in a negative labelling of ethnic minorities in general and Islamic minorities in particular. In such a political setting it is paradoxically the individual human rights discourse itself that forms a threat to the family.

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"Wat er met mijn familie is gebeurd is als een glas dat op de grond valt; het breekt in stukken en je kunt het niet meer maken." (Omar, 29)

Inleiding

Familieleven vormt de basis van het menselijke bestaan. Wanneer mensen moeten vluchten, komt deze basis onder grote druk te staan en vallen families vaak uiteen. Binnen de mensenrechten is er oog voor het belang van de familie en de noodzaak om deze te beschermen. Ook de specifieke kwetsbaarheid van migranten en vluchtelingen met betrekking tot hun familieleven wordt weerspiegeld in de formulering en uitwerking van verschillende mensenrechtelijke verdragen, zoals de aanbevelingen voor de bescherming van vluchtelinggezinnen in het Vluchtelingenverdrag en de beschermende werking van artikel 8, ook wel kortweg het recht op familieleven genoemd, van het Europees Verdrag voor de Rechten van de Mens. In deze studie worden niet de internationale verdragen als uitgangspunt genomen, maar wordt vanuit een *upstream perspective* (De Gaay Fortman, 2004b) bekeken in hoeverre vluchtelingen zich ook daadwerkelijk beschermd en erkend voelen met betrekking tot hun familieleven.

Om dit te onderzoeken is gebruik gemaakt van een kwalitatieve en explorerende methode. De belangrijkste databron vormden de contacten met 37 Afghaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland, aangevuld met participerende observatie tijdens verschillende evenementen als bruiloften en conferenties, de kennisname van literatuur en internetfora van Afghanen in de diaspora, en een bezoek aan Afghanistan. De onderzoeksvraag die aan de studie ten grondslag ligt luidt: Hoe construeren en ervaren Afghaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland hun familieleven binnen de grens en over grenzen heen, en hoe percipiëren zij de vrijheden en aanspraken die zij in dat opzicht hebben? De reden om Afghanen in Nederland als onderzoekspopulatie te nemen was drieërlei. Ten eerste vormen Afghanen in Nederland een 'vluchtelingengroep', waarbij niet zozeer wordt gedoeld op de juridische betekenis van het woord vluchteling maar op het feit dat zij allen een geschiedenis delen van conflict en oorlog, gevolgd door migratie. Ten tweede zijn zij afkomstig uit een land dat qua familiecultuur sterk afwijkt van de familiecultuur in Nederland (zie Todd, 1985), wat de familiesituatie na de vlucht verder compliceert. En ten derde vormen zij een relatief nieuwe etnische groep in Nederland waarover nog weinig bekend is.

Het doen van onderzoek naar het versplinterde familieleven van vluchtelingen vraagt om een transnationaal perspectief; in deze studie wordt aandacht besteed aan het feit dat Afghaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland contacten, activiteiten, instituties en identiteiten

hebben die letterlijk grensoverschrijdend zijn. Met andere woorden, er wordt aandacht besteed aan het feit dat zij gelijktijdig betrokken zijn bij twee of meer samenlevingen (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Daarbij is de specifieke focus op familiecontacten een relatief nieuw aspect binnen het veld van de transnationalismestudies (Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008), terwijl het transnationale perspectief nog relatief weinig gebruikt wordt bij de bestudering van vluchtelingenpopulaties (Horst, 2003; Wahlbeck, 1999). Paradoxaal genoeg vraagt een transnationaal perspectief ook om aandacht voor het integratieaspect, oftewel het deel gaan uitmaken van de - in dit geval Nederlandse - samenleving. Want in de levens van migranten zijn 'hier' en 'daar' onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden, zoals Mazzucato (2008) overtuigend laat zien.

De belangrijkste conclusie van het onderzoek is dat de pijn van een versplinterd familieleven verder reikt dan de obstakels die het restrictieve immigratiebeleid opwerpt om samen te komen of samen te leven. Deze obstakels zijn reëel en voelbaar, maar daarnaast lopen Afghaanse vluchtelingen ook tegen economische en culturele obstakels aan wanneer zij na de vlucht hun familieleven opnieuw proberen vorm te geven. De lijn van de studie volgend, wordt in deze samenvatting eerst ingegaan op de erfenis van conflict die Afghanen in Nederland met zich meedragen. Vervolgens wordt besproken hoe conflict, oorlog en vlucht hebben geleid tot de versplintering van hun families. Daarna wordt het familieleven van Afghaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland geanalyseerd op drie niveaus: Integratie en transformatie op het niveau van het huishouden; Familieleven in het Westen - een kwestie van vertrouwen; en Familieleven met achterblijvers - van overmakingen tot terugkeer. In de laatste paragraaf worden de belangrijkste theoretische bevindingen en mensenrechtelijke implicaties van de studie gepresenteerd.

Een erfenis van conflict

Afghanen zijn afkomstig uit een land met een eeuwenlange geschiedenis van conflict. Dit moeilijk toegankelijke en weinig vruchtbare gebied met zijn hoge bergen, zijn harde landklimaat en zijn uitgestrekte woestijnen was lange tijd vooral een doorgangsroute voor allerlei volken, legers en handelskonvooien die hier nazaten achterlieten. Zo kwamen er via Alexander de Grote duizenden Grieken en Macedoniërs in het gebied terecht, en liet Dzjengis Khan er duizenden Mongolen achter. Tot op heden is dit verleden zichtbaar in de grote diversiteit aan etnische groepen in Afghanistan, zoals de Pashtun, de Tadzjiken, de Hazara's, de Oezbeken, en tientallen kleinere groepen. Wat zij ondanks de verschillen in uiterlijk, taal, maatschappelijke positie, gewoonten en gebruiken gemeen hebben is het islamitische geloof. Hoewel officieel in 1747 een Afghaans koninkrijk werd gesticht onder leiding van de Pashtunse heerser Durrani, werd dit vooral gekenmerkt door interne twisten en een gebrek aan centraal gezag. Het was pas aan het einde van de 19^{de} eeuw, de eeuw van de *Great Game*

oftewel de machtsstrijd tussen grootmachten Groot-Brittannië en Rusland over de hegemonie van Centraal-Azië, dat Afghanistan door Britse bemoeienis een natiestaat werd met een zekere mate van centraal bestuur.

Nadat de Afghanen onder leiding van koning Amanullah in 1919 hun onafhankelijkheid op de Engelsen hadden bevochten, ontwikkelde Afghanistan zich gedurende enkele decennia verder in de richting van een centrale staat. Echter, de opkomst van de communisten gevolgd door de inval van de Sovjet-Unie in 1979 vormde het begin van een diepe terugval in conflict en oorlog. De communisten werden uiteindelijk in 1992 verslagen door een aantal losjes georganiseerde verzetsgroepen die bekend stonden als de Moedjahedien. Deze raakten vrijwel onmiddellijk verzeild in een onderlinge strijd die al snel in een burgeroorlog uitmondde. Daaraan werd vanaf 1995 een eind gemaakt door de Taliban, een beweging van Afghaanse religieuze studenten die veelal waren opgeleid in Koranscholen in Pakistan. Zij ontpopten zich echter al snel tot een radicaal en fundamenteel-islamitisch schrikbewind. Toen de Taliban bescherming bleken te bieden aan het brein achter de aanslagen van 11 september 2001 in de Verenigde Staten, Osama Bin-Laden, maakten Moedjahedien-leiders uit noordelijk Afghanistan met de steun van de VS en Groot-Brittannië een einde aan hun regime. De decennia van geweld lieten in Afghanistan diepe sporen van verwoesting, armoede en onderontwikkeling achter. Spoedig kwam grootschalige internationale hulp op gang en werd een democratiseringsproces in gang gezet waarbij president Karzai werd aangesteld. Echter, men slaagde er ook met een grote internationale troepenmacht niet in om de Taliban-beweging definitief uit te schakelen en recentelijk is deze, onder meer vanuit Pakistan, weer zeer actief.

Een van de dramatische gevolgen van jarenlange oorlog en burgeroorlog was dat enorme vluchtelingenstromen op gang kwamen, in zulke getale dat de Verenigde Naties Afghanistan uitriepen tot de plek met de meeste ontheemden ter wereld. Op de vlucht voor het aanhoudende geweld kwamen miljoenen Afghanen in de buurlanden Pakistan en Iran terecht. Een veel kleiner deel van de Afghaanse vluchtelingen zocht zijn toevlucht in geïndustrialiseerd landen, waar zij in 2001 de grootste groep asielzoekers vormden. In Europa was Nederland na Duitsland het land waar de meeste Afghanen naartoe kwamen; in 2008 verbleven 37.000 van hen in Nederland. Een oorzaak voor dit relatief grote aantal was het categoriale beschermingsbeleid voor Afghaanse asielzoekers dat hier van 1994 tot 2002 werd gehanteerd. Dit hield in dat de situatie in Afghanistan als zo zorgwekkend werd beschouwd dat ook asielzoekers van wie het verzoek werd afgewezen tijdelijke bescherming kregen, die na drie jaar kon worden omgezet in een permanente verblijfsvergunning.

Tussen 1996 en 2004 steeg het aantal Afghanen in Nederland het sterkst, van 5.000 tot bijna 34.000 personen. (CBS Statline) Het feit dat zij zo kort in Nederland zijn verklaart ten dele de moeilijke sociaal-economische situatie waarin vele van hen verkeren. Hoewel hun

gemiddelde opleidingsniveau hoger is dan dat van de klassieke migrantengroepen, is het werkloosheidscijfer met 37% in 2003-2004 eveneens hoger. Het verschil tussen de arbeidsparticipatie van 38% bij de mannen en slechts 10% bij de vrouwen wordt niet alleen verklaard door verschillen in opleidingsniveau, maar ook door culturele noties over de sociale rollen van mannen en vrouwen. De schoolresultaten van de kinderen (anderhalve en tweede generatie) laten zien dat deze met een inhaalslag bezig zijn.

De geschiedenis van verdeeldheid en conflict die Afghaanse vluchtelingen meedragen wordt weerspiegeld in de versplintering van de Afghaanse gemeenschap in Nederland langs etnische, politieke en sociale lijnen. Er bestaan tientallen Afghaanse organisaties, en een veelgehoorde klacht is dat onderlinge samenwerking nauwelijks mogelijk is. Deze situatie is in overeenstemming met de uitspraak van De Bree (2008: 16) dat wantrouwen de erfenis is van een (post-)conflicteuze samenleving. Het feit dat de Afghaanse samenleving nog volop in conflict is vormt nieuwe brandstof voor de oude reflex van wantrouwen die mensen vanwege hun geschiedenis met zich meedragen.

De versplintering van families

De herinneringen die de meeste respondenten hadden aan het familieleven vroeger in Afghanistan waren die van een intensief familieleven in de setting van de grootfamilie. Veel mannelijke respondenten woonden samen met hun ouders en vaak ook met volwassen broers en hun eventuele gezinnen en met ongetrouwde zussen bijeen, terwijl de vrouwen wanneer zij trouwden vaak bij hun schoonfamilie introkken. Maar ook indien respondenten met de partner en eventuele kinderen een eigen woning hadden, woonden zij veelal in de buurt van hun (schoon)familie met wie zij veelvuldig contact onderhielden en hulp uitwisselden. Zo paste de oma bijvoorbeeld op de kleinkinderen, of runden broers gezamenlijk een bedrijf. Naast deze 'sterke banden' (Granovetter, 1973) waren ook de familiebanden met verder-verwante familieleden van belang, zowel in het alledaagse contact, als wat betreft het uitwisselen van hulp, als bij het vieren van speciale gebeurtenissen. Maar onder invloed van oorlog en vlucht vond een versplintering plaats van deze *extended* familiebanden en werden respondenten grotendeels teruggeworpen op het gezin, of wat daar nog van over was. Deze versplintering vond schoksgewijs plaats en nam vaak al lang voor de vlucht naar het Westen een aanvang. (zie ook Williams, 1990)

De uitwerking van oorlog en conflict op de zojuist beschreven familiebanden was tweërlei. Enerzijds had het als effect dat families beschadigd raakten en uiteen vielen. Familieleden werden gearresteerd, gevangen gezet, raakten vermist, raakten gewond of werden gedood. Mannen sloten zich aan bij het leger of een militiegroep om te vechten. En al rond 1980 begonnen in sommige families de eerste familieleden te verdwijnen die in alle stilte hun toevlucht zochten tot het Westen. In sommige perioden was het gevaarlijk of zelfs

onmogelijk om de straat op te gaan en elkaar te bereiken, terwijl de infrastructuur tijdens de burgeroorlog grotendeels vernietigd werd. Veel Afghanen waren genoodzaakt om meerdere keren te vluchten, vaak halsoverkop, wat ertoe kon leiden dat familieleden elkaar uit het oog verloren. Tenslotte kon ook politieke onenigheid tussen familieleden onderling een reden zijn voor verwijdering, wanneer zij in het conflict tegenover elkaar kwamen te staan. Anderzijds boden familieleden in tijden van oorlog en conflict juist ook cruciale hulp aan elkaar om noodsituaties het hoofd te bieden. Deze hulp kon variëren van het bieden van onderdak of een schuilplaats tot het regelen van een reisagent om weg te komen.

Volgens Williams (1990: 100) wordt de 'vluchtelingenervaring' onder andere gekenmerkt door verlies en een verschuiving van interne naar externe controle. Dit laatste was duidelijk waarneembaar tijdens de fase van de vlucht. In de meeste gevallen was het besluit om naar het Westen te vluchten een familieaangelegenheid, waarbij gezamenlijk werd besloten wie zou(den) vertrekken en de benodigde middelen en contacten werden geregeld. Een vlucht naar het Westen was een kostbare zaak, en het was deels afhankelijk van de welvaart van families wie zij langs deze weg in veiligheid konden brengen. Maar vanaf het moment van vertrek verloren vluchtelingen een groot deel van hun *agency* aan de reisagent, die de manier van reizen, de duur van reizen, en in veel gevallen zelfs het bestemmingsland bepaalde. Dit laatste leidt in de woorden van Koser (1997) tot een 'ongewone ruimtelijke dislocatie' van vluchtelingen van hun sociale netwerken. Met andere woorden, vluchtelingen komen vaak in andere landen terecht dan familieleden die voor of na hen zijn gevlucht, wat leidt tot een verdere versplintering.

Het sterkst ervaren respondenten een gebrek aan controle na aankomst in het Nederlandse asielsysteem. (zie ook Ghorashi, 1995) In de meeste gevallen arriveerde eerst één gezinslid of een deel van het gezin, terwijl de andere leden in de herkomstregio achterbleven. De plaatsing in vaak nogal geïsoleerd gelegen asielzoekerscentra waar zij in onzekerheid moesten wachten op de uitslag van hun procedure en weinig financiële middelen tot hun beschikking hadden, beperkte de mogelijkheden om familiecontacten te herstellen. Vooral het feit dat hereniging met achtergebleven partners en kinderen in deze periode niet was toegestaan, terwijl zij als asielzoekers nauwelijks geld hadden om hen op afstand te ondersteunen werd als pijnlijk ervaren. Meer in het algemeen voelden respondenten zich in deze fase machteloos in het contact met familieleden die waren achtergebleven in de gevaarlijke en onzekere situatie die zij zelf ontvlucht waren. Het was vaak al moeilijk om achterblijvers op te sporen, laat staan om hen structureel te helpen - terwijl zij hun eigen problemen en onzekerheden als asielzoeker nauwelijks met de achterblijvers konden delen. Tenslotte droeg het huisvestingsbeleid voor statushouders, gericht op een eerlijke spreiding van de 'vluchtelingendruk' over alle gemeenten, bij aan het feit dat familieleden ook binnen Nederland vaak ver uiteen kwamen te wonen.

Integratie en transformatie op het niveau van huishoudens

In het voorgaande zagen we dat de vluchtelingenervaring wordt gekenmerkt door controleverlies. Op het moment dat Afghaanse asielzoekers een verblijfsvergunning kregen, betekende dat dat zij de controle terugkregen over hun leven en ook weer meer ruimte kregen om hun familieleven vorm te geven. Door de transformatie die zij hadden ondergaan van een intensief en extended familieleven naar het worden teruggeworpen op zichzelf en eventueel (een deel van) het gezin, was het in de eerste plaats op dit niveau dat de impact werd gevoeld van de taak om te integreren in de Nederlandse samenleving. Het integratieproces leidde tot veranderingen en spanningen binnen deze kerngezinnen, waarbij met name de verschillen tussen de seksen en generaties een rol speelden.

Wat betreft de structurele integratie, oftewel de participatie in de instituties van de ontvangende samenleving en met name onderwijs, de arbeidsmarkt en huisvesting; vooral voor de ouders leverde het leren van de Nederlandse taal en het vinden van werk grote problemen op. Zeker de hoger opgeleide respondenten klaagden over het gebrek aan mogelijkheden om de taal goed te leren en om een baan te vinden op hun oude niveau. Tegelijkertijd zagen zij onderwijs als de belangrijkste weg voor hun kinderen om te slagen, en werden deze gestimuleerd en soms ook onder druk gezet om hun best te doen op school. Het gevolg van deze integratieverschillen was dat er machtsverschuivingen optraden in gezinnen, zowel tussen de echtgenoten als tussen ouders en kinderen. Gemiddeld waren de mannelijke respondenten hoger opgeleid dan de vrouwen, en hun professionele statusverlies was daarmee gewoonlijk groter dan dat van de vrouwen. Daarbij kwam dat vrouwen, ook de hoogopgeleide, zich makkelijker leken aan te passen aan de nieuwe situatie, omdat hun sociale en verzorgende rol binnen het gezin en de familie intact bleef (zie ook Buijs, 1993) en zij van kleins af aan waren getraind in het zich aanpassen aan nieuwe omstandigheden¹⁸⁴. Sommige lager opgeleide vrouwen profiteerden van de mogelijkheden die de Nederlandse samenleving bood om een opleiding te volgen en een baan te zoeken, en in enkele gevallen werd de vrouw kostwinner. Kinderen streefden hun ouders vaak binnen korte tijd voorbij wat betreft hun kennis van de Nederlandse taal, ook wanneer zij op een later moment naar Nederland waren gekomen. Het gevolg was dat veel ouders afhankelijk werden van hun kinderen om te vertalen, in het omgaan met Nederlandse instanties en met de Nederlandse samenleving in het algemeen. Andersom waren kinderen vaak genoodzaakt om zelfstandig of met de hulp van buitenstaanders zoals leraren en vrienden praktische zaken uit te zoeken en te regelen.

¹⁸⁴ Zo werden meisjes voorbereid op het feit dat zij na het huwelijk bij de familie van hun echtgenoot zouden gaan wonen.

Met betrekking tot de sociaal-culturele integratie, oftewel de sociaal-culturele oriëntatie op de Nederlandse samenleving, werden vijf thema's genoemd waaromtrent binnen Afghaanse gezinnen regelmatig spanningen ontstonden en onderhandelingen plaatsvonden: informele contacten, relaties tussen mannen en vrouwen, de opvoeding van de kinderen, huwelijken, en religie. Daarbij speelden enkele culturele uitgangspunten een rol. Zo was het van belang om de familiereputatie te beschermen, wat betekende dat alle gezinsleden zich als goede Afghanen behoorden te gedragen. Een goede familiereputatie was onder meer belangrijk voor de taak die de ouders droegen om hun kinderen te helpen bij het vinden van een goede huwelijkspartner, en liefst een landgenoot. Met name op het gedrag van de meisjes en vrouwen werd gelet, waarbij aan de ouders en mannelijke familieleden een grote verantwoordelijkheid werd toegekend voor de gedragingen van hun vrouwelijke familieleden. Echter, in de nieuwe context voelden degenen die de zwaarste verantwoordelijkheid ervoeren zich vaak beperkt. Hun onbekendheid met de nieuwe samenleving, daarmee samenhangend het ontbreken van een beschermende sociale kring, en de grotere bescherming van het individu in Nederland bewerkstelligden dit. Zo was het voor Afghaanse kinderen in Nederland makkelijker om zich aan de controle van hun ouders te onttrekken, en bestond voor vrouwen de mogelijkheid om te scheiden en een economisch en sociaal zelfstandig bestaan op te bouwen.

Echter, de wijze waarop de respondenten deze intrafamiliale spanningen presenteerden was anders dan het beeld dat de media vaak schetst van de vrije wil van het individu die wordt onderdrukt door traditionele familieleden met achterhaalde ideeën (Shaw, 2000). Respondenten, en ook degenen wiens positie in de Nederlandse context juist sterker was geworden, benadrukten de ambivalentie die zij zelf ervoeren in deze situaties van - al dan niet openlijk - conflict omdat het hooghouden van de familiereputatie ook in hun eigen belang was. De notie van 'goed Afghaans gedrag' vormde een rode draad door de intrafamiliale onderhandelingen die gevoerd werden en die vaak resulteerden in voorzichtige veranderingen van binnenuit.

Familieleven in het Westen - een kwestie van vertrouwen

De relaties die de respondenten hadden met familieleden elders in het Westen werden gekenmerkt door het feit dat zij soortgelijke ervaringen hadden als nieuwkomers, en in vergelijkbare omstandigheden leefden. De mate waarin respondenten familieleden in het Westen hadden varieerde van respondenten van wie bijna de gehele familie in Westerse landen verbleef tot respondenten die als enigen buiten de herkomstregio verbleven. In de literatuur worden de familierelaties van migranten beschreven als een belangrijke en zekere basis voor hun sociale organisatie - meer dan vrienden en landgenoten (Massey et al., 1987), met een hoog potentieel voor ondersteuning (Staring, 2001). Maar welke invloed hebben

geografische afstand en nationale grenzen hierop? En in welke mate kunnen relaties met landgenoten in de buurt het gemis van nabije familieleden compenseren?

Bij de beantwoording van de eerste vraag, naar de impact van afstand en grenzen op familierelaties in het Westen, werden drie soorten steun onderscheiden die familieleden uitwisselden. Praktische steun is de hulp die gericht is op het oplossen van praktische problemen en het regelen van praktische zaken. Deze werd met name uitgewisseld tussen nauwverwante familieleden die dicht bij elkaar woonden, bijvoorbeeld in de vorm van het bieden van kinderopvang of vervoer. Familieleden op afstand wisselden vooral praktische adviezen uit, bijvoorbeeld over de opleidingen van de kinderen of de mogelijkheden om geld over te maken naar Afghanistan. Het grootste deel van de steun die werd uitgewisseld was van sociale en culturele aard. Sociale steun is de steun gericht op het psychosociale welzijn. Respondenten spendeerden relatief veel geld en (vrije) tijd om samen te komen met familieleden, waarbij de contacten op afstand zich voornamelijk richtten op eerste- en tweedegraads verwanten. Culturele steun is de steun die gericht is op het instandhouden van de eigen cultuur en tradities. De contacten ter gelegenheid van speciale gelegenheden als Nieuwjaar, de offerfeesten, bruiloften en begrafenissen boden de gelegenheid om uiting te geven aan een gezamenlijke culturele identiteit en deze door te geven aan de volgende generatie. Met name de grootschalige bruiloften en begrafenissen boden daarnaast de gelegenheid tot ontmoeting met verder-verwante familieleden, en de mogelijkheid tot het intensiveren of uitbreiden van familierelaties via de arrangering van huwelijken.

Alleen familieleden die dicht bij elkaar woonden in dezelfde plaats of provincie kenden een intensieve uitwisseling van alledrie de vormen van steun. Bij de andere familierelaties in de diaspora was veeleer sprake van een 'verschuiving van familiepatronen in de richting van emotionele afhankelijkheid' (Kagitçibasi, 1996) maar ook in de richting van culturele afhankelijkheid. Echter, de meeste respondenten gaven tegelijk aan dat zij bij het vormgeven aan een familieleven in de diaspora tegen obstakels aanliepen. In de eerste plaats noemden zij beleidsmatige obstakels, zoals immigratiecriteria en visavereisten. Daarnaast speelden praktische en culturele obstakels in het gastland een rol, zoals school- en werkdruk en het aanhouden van andere feestdagen. Echter, een combinatie van geografische afstand en geldgebrek vormde de grootste belemmering. En als familieleden wel de kans hadden om te communiceren en samen te komen, werden zij geconfronteerd met de problemen die zij als nieuwkomers tegenkwamen en de beperkte mogelijkheden om elkaar in dat opzicht te helpen. De kloof was groot tussen het grotendeels autonome intrafamiliale ondersteuningsnetwerk waarin zij waren opgegroeid en de huidige 'koude' werkelijkheid waarin veel familieleden eenzijdig afhankelijk waren geworden van instanties in het gastland.

Wat betreft de vraag in hoeverre contacten met Afghanen in de buurt een gebrek aan familierelaties in de naaste omgeving konden vervangen, bleek het wantrouwen tussen

landgenoten onderling een belangrijke factor. Niet alleen de diversiteit in politieke, etnische en sociale achtergronden van de populatie Afghanen in Nederland was hier debet aan. Ook het belang van familiereputaties en de onderlinge sociale controle die hieruit voortkwam, creëerden een terughoudendheid. Praktische informatie, sociale beleefdheden en culturele activiteiten werden wel op grote schaal uitgewisseld, hoewel sommige respondenten zich ook daaraan heel bewust onttrokken. Maar het bespreken van problemen en het uitwisselen van sociale steun was voornamelijk voorbehouden aan familiecontacten in het Westen. Hoewel bij deze contacten vanwege de afstand minder dan in Afghanistan de mogelijkheid bestond om concrete bescherming en hulp te geven, zoals bemiddeling bij huiselijke conflicten, boden zij wel een setting van vertrouwen en begrip die nodig was om persoonlijke problemen bespreekbaar te maken. Respondenten die geen naaste verwanten in het Westen hadden of weinig mogelijkheden hadden om deze te contacteren, ervoeren dit dan ook als een gemis.

Familielevens met achterblijvers - van overmakingen tot terugkeer

De relaties die de respondenten hadden met familieleden die waren achtergebleven, in de studie kortweg 'achterblijvers' genoemd, werden niet alleen gekenmerkt door de geografische afstand maar ook door de kloof tussen Nederland en de herkomstregio wat betreft veiligheid en zekerheid, economische situatie en culturele context. Zoals we in de vorige paragraaf hebben gezien, worden familierelaties gekenmerkt door een groot potentieel voor ondersteuning, vanwege het grote wederzijdse vertrouwen binnen deze relaties (Boissevain, 1974). Dat vertrouwen zorgt ervoor dat het mechanisme van reciprociteit, het mechanisme van 'voor wat hoort wat' dat aan sociale relaties ten grondslag ligt, binnen familierelaties een speciale invulling krijgt. Daarbij benadrukt Sahlins (1974) het aspect van altruïsme binnen familierelaties waardoor een tegengebaar voor onbepaalde tijd kan uitblijven, terwijl Staring (2001) juist benadrukt dat ook binnen familierelaties het uitstellen van terugbetaling geen afstel betekent. Met betrekking tot de familierelaties die Afgaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland hebben met achterblijvers is de vraag welke impact de afstand en verschillen in leefomstandigheden hebben op deze relaties, en met name op de uitwisseling van praktische, sociale en culturele steun.

Respondenten beschreven de situatie van achterblijvers overwegend in termen van onveiligheid en bestaansonzekerheid. Zelfs wanneer achterblijvers in een relatief goede situatie verkeerden, was er de angst dat dit elk moment kon omslaan vanwege de onstabiele politieke situatie. Het was onder meer om deze reden dat het naar het Westen halen van nauwverwante achterblijvers (met name de partner, eerstegraads en tweedegraads familieleden) als een aantrekkelijke optie werd gezien voor beide partijen: het zou de achterblijvers meer veiligheid, zekerheid en toekomstperspectief bieden en de verantwoordelijkheid die de respondenten droegen voor het welzijn van deze familieleden

verlichten. Daarnaast wilden veel respondenten hun nauwverwante familieleden dichter bij zich hebben. Dit gold naast de partner en minderjarige kinderen ook voor meerderjarige kinderen en voor ouders, zeker wanneer zij hulpbehoevend waren; immers, fysieke aanwezigheid is een voorwaarde voor het bieden van dagelijkse zorg (Baldassar, 2007). Respondenten ervoeren het vanuit hun achtergrond van het leven in de grootfamilie als pijnlijk dat het laten overkomen van ouders en meerderjarige kinderen aan strenge criteria was gebonden en daarom in de praktijk vaak niet mogelijk bleek.

De meest voorkomende vorm van praktische steun aan achterblijvers was het overmaken van geld en het sturen van goederen. Daarbij waren de partner en kinderen, de ouders, en broers en zussen de belangrijkste en meest regelmatige ontvangers, hoewel andere familieleden in geval van nood of bij bijzondere gelegenheden ook wel financiële hulp ontvingen. Ook sociale steun werd vooral geboden aan nauwverwante familieleden, middels communicatie op afstand of door het afleggen van een terugkeerbezoek, waarbij de respondenten in Nederland het leeuwendeel van de kosten op zich namen. Tijdens deze contacten werden vooral de leefsituatie en problemen van de achterblijvers besproken; terwijl het andersom voor achterblijvers nauwelijks mogelijk was om zich te situeren van familieleden in Nederland voor te stellen. De uitwisseling van culturele steun tussen respondenten en achterblijvers kwam het minst vaak voor, al wisselde men soms wel beeldmateriaal en informatie uit over belangrijke gebeurtenissen als verlovings, bruiloften en begrafenissen. Maar naast verbindingsfactor kon cultuur juist ook een bron van conflict vormen, met name wanneer familieleden tijdens terugkeerbezoeken rechtstreeks en langdurig met elkaar werden geconfronteerd en zich bewust werden van de ontstane verschillen.

Hoewel er meer praktische en sociale steun van de respondenten naar de achterblijvers ging dan omgekeerd, kunnen we niet spreken van eenrichtingsverkeer, of een gebrek aan reciprociteit. Achterblijvers boden op afstand informatie en diensten aan respondenten; zo hielpen zij bijvoorbeeld bij het regelen van documenten of het opzetten van een ontwikkelingsproject ter plaatse. Maar het was vooral tijdens terugkeerbezoeken dat zij hulp boden in de vorm van gastvrijheid en bescherming. Daarnaast hadden de contacten met achterblijvers voor de respondenten een symbolische functie; het feit dat zij nog familieleden in het herkomstland hadden concretiseerde de mogelijkheid om ooit terug te keren, al was het maar om begraven te worden.

Conclusie

In het veld van transnationalismestudies is de focus op familierelaties relatief nieuw, afgezien van het werk van Britse academici naar de Zuidaziatische diasporas in het Verenigd Koninkrijk (zie Ballard & Ballard, 1977). Recentelijk zijn er studies verricht naar de transnationale relaties tussen migranten en hun bejaarde ouders in het herkomstland (zie

Baldassar, Baldock & Wilding, 2006) en naar de gespleten gezinssituaties van migrantenouders en hun kinderen in het herkomstland (zie Parreñas, 2005; Van Walsum, 2006). Beide situaties waren ook van toepassing op het familieleven van Afghaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland. Maar in de meeste gevallen verbleven respondenten met het gehele gezin in Nederland, en in een aantal gevallen verbleven ook de ouders in de Westerse diaspora. Toch hadden deze respondenten een *double engagement* (Mazzucato, 2005, 2008), oftewel een betrokkenheid bij zowel het gastland als het herkomstland. In de meeste gevallen hadden zij zelfs een meervoudige betrokkenheid, in de verschillende landen - zowel in de herkomstregio als de Westerse diaspora - waar familieleden verbleven. Door het vroegere intensieve en *extended* familieleven van de respondenten in Afghanistan als startpunt te nemen, werd zicht verkregen op het sociale verlies dat zij leden door de vlucht naar Nederland en op de mate waarin zij erin slaagden om deze banden te herstellen. Zo werd bijvoorbeeld gekeken naar de intensieve langeafstandscontacten die respondenten hadden met broers en zussen in het herkomstland, en naar hun incidentele contacten met verwanten in de derde en vierde graad tijdens terugkeerbezoeken - waaruit wel weer nieuwe intensieve familiebanden konden voortkomen via huwelijken met achterblijvers. In het onderzoek werden tevens de transnationale familiebanden binnen de Westerse diaspora onder de loep genomen, wat zichtbaar maakte dat ook in deze context respondenten geconfronteerd werden met obstakels om hun familieleven naar eigen wens vorm te geven.

In familierelaties is reciprociteit, oftewel de uitwisseling van steun, een belangrijk aspect. Finch formuleert de specificiteit van familiebanden als volgt: 'Je weet dat je op je familieleden kan terugvallen als alles misgaat - vooral op je naaste familieleden.' (1989: 240) Het onderzoek toont aan dat ook na de versplintering van families door oorlog en vlucht reciprociteit een belangrijk aspect blijft in de transnationale relaties die dan ontstaan. In de relaties binnen de Westerse diaspora zien we wel een verschuiving in de richting van met name emotionele en culturele afhankelijkheid. En de relaties met achterblijvers worden gekenmerkt door een schijnbare onbalans, daar meer praktische en sociale steun van de respondenten richting de achterblijvers gaat dan vice versa. Echter, op het tweede gezicht kunnen een aantal mechanismen worden onderscheiden die de continuïteit van deze relaties helpen verklaren. Ten eerste speelt het aspect van altruïsme (Sahlins, 1974) en familieliefde (Bahr & Bahr, 2001) jegens achterblijvers een rol, wat wordt versterkt door een cultuur van sterke familiewaarden. Daarnaast bieden achterblijvers wel degelijk ook steun aan respondenten, met name tijdens terugkeerbezoeken - zoals beschreven in de vorige paragraaf. Echter, er is in deze relaties ook sprake van uitgestelde betaling (Staring, 2001) in twee betekenissen van het woord. Zo gaven een aantal respondenten aan in het krijt te staan bij achterblijvers, vanwege steun die zij in het verleden ontvingen, variërend van een liefdevolle

opvoeding tot financiële hulp om weg te komen. En andersom verwachtten respondenten dat de hulp die zij naar achterblijvers sturen de deur naar terugkeer symbolisch op een kier houdt.

Hoewel alle respondenten in zekere mate transnationale familiebanden onderhielden, waren er verschillen in de mate waarin zij transnationaal actief waren. Deze verschillen werden niet alleen veroorzaakt door de verschillende spreidingspatronen van families; zij kwamen ook voort uit de verschillende mogelijkheden die tot hun beschikking stonden als resultaat van hun integratieproces. Studies naar de relatie tussen transnationalisme en integratie leiden meestal niet tot eenduidige uitkomsten (zie bijvoorbeeld Engbersen et al., 2002; Itizgsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Schans, 2007) en op basis van deze kwalitatieve en explorerende studie kunnen geen causale uitspraken worden gedaan. Wel waren er tendensen dat de respondenten die beter geïntegreerd waren en in een zekerder positie verkeerden (omdat zij over een Nederlands paspoort beschikten) meer en bredere transnationale activiteiten ontwikkelden, wat overeenkomt met de bevindingen van Portes et al. (2002) onder Latijns Amerikaanse immigranten in de Verenigde Staten. Ook waren er aanwijzingen dat hun transnationale activiteiten gericht waren op een bredere familiekring. Maar een frappante bevinding was dat juist ook de respondenten die in een zeer marginale situatie verkeerden, bijvoorbeeld omdat zij lange tijd in een asielprocedure of zelfs in de illegaliteit hadden verbleven, transnationale activiteiten ontwikkelden in de zin dat zij nauwverwante familieleden elders probeerden te lokaliseren en contacteren. De paradox was dat ook al waren de transnationale activiteiten van deze respondenten beperkt, hun leven geheel in het teken stond van de betrokkenheid bij familieleden elders, bijvoorbeeld doordat zij uiterste spaarzaamheid betrachtten.

Aan het einde van de studie keren we terug naar het aspect van de vrijheden en aanspraken die Afghaanse vluchtelingen in Nederland van belang achtten voor de bescherming van hun familieleden. Het is daarbij essentieel om mensenrechten niet slechts als juridische instrumenten te beschouwen maar ook als politieke instrumenten (De Gaay Fortman, 2006: 263-264). Op basis van de empirische bevindingen van de studie waren vijf hoofdaspecten te onderscheiden in het familieleden van de respondenten: samenleven, contact hebben en samen tijd doorbrengen, samenkomen voor speciale gelegenheden, voor elkaar zorgen, en de familiereputatie hooghouden. Wat betreft het eerste aspect liepen respondenten tegen verschillende situaties aan waarin het restrictieve Nederlandse immigratiebeleid een obstakel vormde om (in Nederland) met dierbaren samen te leven. Vanuit een *upstream human rights perspective* (De Gaay Fortman, 2004b) rijst dan de vraag of het beleid voor gezinshereniging en gezinsvorming opgerecht kan worden om recht te doen aan de familiebeleving van deze vluchtelingen. Wat betreft het tweede en het derde aspect, het contact hebben en samenkomen - al dan niet ter ere van speciale gelegenheden -, kwamen met name twee obstakels naar

voren. Ten eerste liepen respondenten er tegenaan dat het immigratie- en naturalisatiebeleid hen belemmerde in de mogelijkheden om samen te komen met familieleden, vooral wanneer één of beide partijen niet over een Westers paspoort beschikten. Echter, wat respondenten vooral benadrukten was dat zij belemmeringen ervoeren om volledig te participeren in de Nederlandse samenleving waardoor zij over onvoldoende middelen beschikten om hun transnationale familielevens naar wens vorm te geven. Dit laatste relateert aan het vierde aspect, het voor elkaar zorgen. Respondenten benadrukten dat familielevens meer behelsde dan samenkomen en samenzijn; het elkaar kunnen helpen was voor hen een fundamenteel aspect. Om andere familieleden hulp te kunnen bieden was het opnieuw cruciaal dat zij de mogelijkheid kregen om te participeren in de Nederlandse samenleving, en met name op de Nederlandse arbeidsmarkt. Specifiek met betrekking tot nauwverwante achterblijvers werd een komst naar het Westen vaak als de meest effectieve vorm van hulp gezien, omdat de situatie in Afghanistan gevaarlijk en onveilig bleef. Uitbreiding van de mogelijkheden om hen te laten overkomen, voorgoed of in het geval van medische behandeling ook tijdelijk, werd daarom als wenselijk gezien. Echter, de meest wenselijke situatie was een structurele verbetering van de situatie in Afghanistan, die de verantwoordelijkheid van de respondenten voor de achterblijvers zou verlichten en meer balans zou brengen in de relatie. Wat betreft het laatste aspect, het hooghouden van de familiereputatie, was er sprake van een spanning tussen de bescherming van een familiecultuur die patriarchaal en hiërarchisch van aard is en de bescherming van individuen die tegen deze culturele normen rebelleren. De vraag rijst of er een recht op culturele identiteit zou moeten bestaan. Tegelijkertijd wordt aan de mensenrechten een transformerende kracht toegekend die emancipatieprocessen in gang zet. Maar welke transformatie men daarmee voor ogen heeft is uiteindelijk een politieke kwestie. Dit toont Van Walsum (2008) aan wanneer zij analyseert hoe de schijnbaar neutrale normatieve criteria van gelijkheid, individuele vrijheid en tolerantie waarop het Nederlandse beleid met betrekking tot de familie is gebaseerd in de praktijk stigmatiserend uitwerkt voor etnische minderheden in het algemeen en islamitische minderheden in het bijzonder.

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