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Dispossession and Displacement
Forced Migration in the Middle East
and North Africa

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2. The Transnational Turn in Migration Studies and the Afghan Social Networks

Alessandro Monsutti

TRANSNATIONALISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY: FROM THEORY TO THE FIELD

Migration studies have undergone considerable development since the 1980s, particularly in social anthropology, despite the fact that the subject has long been included in the field of social sciences.¹ This expansion has taken place alongside new thinking on the very subject and methods of the discipline which was proposed by the authors of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) in North America, among others. Many researchers have addressed the issue of the links between sociocultural groups and territory. According to them, anthropologists had, over many decades, defined their object of research as socially and linguistically homogenous territorial entities. By travelling from one location to another and from one culture to another, migrants challenged this vision of a world composed of a mosaic of discrete sociocultural groups. Therefore migration was understood as a time-bound process which terminated in the more or less successful integration of the migrant in his/her host society or returning to his/her society of origin. By contrast, an increasing number of recent studies no longer focus on the cultural and identity changes brought about by spatial movement, but rather on the complex trajectories of people who cross political and cultural borders including the multiplicity of links which they establish during their travels. The term 'transnationalism' has now become dominant to describe this

¹ See, for example, the seminal texts by Ravenstein (1885, 1889) as well as that by Fairchild (1925).

approach. Here we use the definition given by Steven Vertovec, who summarizes the debate as follows:

most social scientists working in the field may agree that 'transnationalism' broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec 1999: 447).

It has thus now been established that sociocultural groups can no longer be understood as discrete territorially defined entities. Increasingly, migration is no longer seen as mere passage from one location to another, but instead as a complex phenomenon characterized by recurrent and multidirectional movements during which a variety of links are woven. For example, the dispersal of family groups can be the result of a strategy aimed at diversifying resources and minimizing risks: it does not always lead to a weakening of social ties. By concentrating on the mobility of people between a number of nation states, the exchange of material and symbolic goods, the circulation of information, or even political, economic, or social investment by migrants across international borders, it is possible to construct an ethnography which is both global and detailed.²

A number of researchers have used the concept of a transnational network to study forced migrations (Marx 1990; Shami 1996; Al-Ali et al. 2001; Chateford 2002). Without denying the specificity of refugees with respect to legal status or the risks which they face, these researchers have been inspired by theoretical and methodological approaches which had originally been developed to discuss voluntary migrations. This is justified by a number of observations. First, people who are recognized as refugees are not mere victims of a fate beyond their control; they are actors who attempt to respond to difficult conditions by relying on the social and cultural resources which remain under their control. Next, the strategies they develop are often similar to those used by people consid-

² Issues around migration in a globalized context are also of concern to international organizations and to state authorities which increasingly concentrate on them, as is suggested by the establishment in 2003 in Geneva of the Global Commission on International Migration (2005). Its mandate was to propose a framework to provide a global and coherent response to migration problems. Its final report points out that there are structural reasons which explain that the number of migrants will continue to increase in coming years (demographic gaps, economic and political disparities, etc.). In the autumn of 2006, the sixty-first session of the United Nations opened with the first high-level dialogue on international migration and development. It demonstrates the importance given in the agenda of the international community to the need to understand and manage migrations globally, even if this community continues to be made up of sovereign states who supposedly maintain legitimate and exclusive control over disjunct territories.

ered to be migrant labourers. Finally, the borders between the different types of status (internally displaced people, refugees, migrant workers) are not airtight: by adapting to a constantly changing context and by manipulating labels, the same people may belong to different categories simultaneously or sequentially.

This essay is thus intended to illustrate the broad potential of the transnational approach by analysing one particular group, Afghan refugees and migrants, particularly the Hazaras who originate in the mountainous centre of Afghanistan. The conflict which Afghanistan has suffered after the communist coup in 1978 and the Soviet intervention of 1979 led to one of the largest population movements of the end of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the 1980s, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted over 6 million Afghan refugees, mostly distributed between Pakistan and Iran.³ They then formed the largest displaced population on the earth and nearly half the people under the responsibility and mandate of the UN agency.

However, this exodus has not always had the traumatic dimension which humanitarian agencies and the media tend to attribute to it. A long-term historical perspective leads us to relativize its exceptional character (Hanifi 2000). Nomads who travel seasonally with their herds in search of better pasture but who use their movements to trade with settled people, mountain populations who travel to cities or to the lowlands to find seasonal work, pilgrims, escapees, or conquerors—Afghans have a long experience of mobility in all its forms. The migration of Afghans to Pakistan, Iran, and the countries of the Persian Gulf, as well as to Europe, North America, and Australia is not merely a response to insecurity and poverty. The war has been an opportunity for a deep redefinition of social organization rather than the cause of a massive but reversible exile. Groups are not structured by reference to a place of common residence but by links of solidarity and mutual assistance which cross international borders. Geographical dispersal and economic diversification are a consequence of these kinship links and allow people to spread risks: thus mobility is often a planned strategy. Afghans have established a 'circulatory territory', to adopt the expression of Alain Tarrus (1995). On the one hand, there are very few Afghan refugees who have never returned home after their initial departure; on the other, almost all family groups have at least one of their members abroad. Migration and exile are not followed

³ Approximately a further 1,500,000 people were internally displaced (Colville 1998).

by a process of integration in the host country or a definitive return to the country of origin: movement is continuous and a truly transnational community is ultimately created. In the light of the transnational networks established by the Afghans, two theses are suggested here. First, mobility is a structural feature of their way of life, it is not mere coercion or imposed by external circumstances. Second, the strategies they have developed blur the distinction between forced and voluntary migration.

NORTH AMERICAN CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: DIASPORAS, ETHNOSCAPES, AND TRANSMIGRANTS

The debate around migration studies and transnationalism has been particularly lively in North America as illustrated by the controversy surrounding the word 'diaspora', which was initiated by the creation of a journal in its name in 1991. The word's origin is the Greek word meaning 'dispersion' and it has historically been used to describe the dispersal of Jews within the Roman Empire.⁴ In a programmatic text published in the first issue of this journal, William Safran describes the concept as follows:

expatriate communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original 'center' to two or more 'peripheral', or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such relationship (Safran 1991: 83–4).

Although this definition retains some traces of the Jewish origin of the concept and its extension to certain specific communities (Armenians and Greeks), the word has been used to describe numerous migrant populations, ranging from the Turks in Germany to Indians and Pakistanis in

⁴ The complex history of the word 'diaspora' from its origins to date is recorded by Tölölyan (1996).

Great Britain, Chinese in south-east Asia, and Palestinians (for example, Bruneau 1994; Van Hear 1998; Centlivres 2000; Schnapper 2001).

According to James Clifford (1994), however, Safran's definition remains too formal and narrow to reflect the changing global conditions of the current period. He estimates that it is sterile to ossify the meaning of a word such as diaspora by referring to an 'ideal type' and then describing different groups as being more or less diasporic according to the number of characteristics of this ideal type which they manifest. He argues in favour of an anthropology which allows for an open rather than normative analysis of decolonization, migrations, global communications, transport, and all other phenomena connected with multi-locality and mobility. At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, in a rapidly changing world, diffused social links and transnational relations including the place of origin as one anchor among many are becoming more common. The existence of diasporic communities, like the Jewish one, reveals how misleading it is to conceive cultures as self-sufficient, internally focused, and rooted in a single location. Far from representing an epiphenomenon of the nation state or global capitalism, they are a basic characteristic component of the contemporary world.

Clifford's thoughts about diasporas are part of his efforts to redefine the conceptual tools and methods of anthropology (see also Clifford 1986, 1988, 1992, 1997). He recognizes that there have always been tendencies to challenge but, reflecting on Malinowski's heritage, he emphasizes the fact that fieldwork was conceived as a form of co-residence rather than a trip or a visit. This method found its source in a particular understanding of culture: an integrated and homogeneous⁵ unit defined in space. Clifford offers a different vision: culture as a journey—journey being understood not only in its literal sense but implying all kinds of more or less allegorical or imagined movements. Thus, the field is not defined here as the study of remote populations, of the essence of the Other, but as a decentring experience which is no longer conceptualized primarily in spatial terms. Besides, Clifford considers that anthropologists should seek inspiration in some travel-writing techniques to allow more room for personal perspective and feelings.

In a text originally published in 1990, Arjun Appadurai (1999) also wonders how anthropology can grasp the contemporary world. He seeks to go beyond a vision of words in dichotomous opposition: global/local,

⁵ For a critique which leads in the same direction, see Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 1997).

North/South, etc. He suggests five conceptual categories to organize the anthropology of culture and of global economies: *ethnoscapes* produced by movements of people (refugees and migrants of course, but also seasonal labourers and tourists); *technoscapes* created by the circulation of technologies; *finanscapes* linked to capital flows and stock exchanges; *mediascapes* made by the circulation of information and images produced by television, radio, newspapers, cinema, and other media; and, finally, *ideoscapes* resulting from political ideologies whether state or otherwise (liberty, public goods, rights, sovereignty, etc.). Far from homogenizing the world culturally, these five types of flow produce new differences and feelings of belonging. Appadurai reviews these distinctions in a text which was published shortly after the first one:

As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic 'project', the ethno in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality . . . groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous (Appadurai 1991: 191).

The fact that societies, cultures, and nations appear to be distinct entities arises from a specific understanding of space, whereas people's mobility is, according to Appadurai, a basic characteristic of the contemporary world. He argues for a 'cosmopolitan ethnography' based on new research strategies allowing one to understand the deterritorialized world in which we live. This new ethnography must not limit itself to studying real movements but must also address imagination and representations.

Theories of transnationalism are an extension of these general theoretical efforts to the field of migration studies. Indeed, their promoters do not consider their subject of study to be closed units of analysis or localized communities: they show how migrants and refugees question the connection between culture and territory. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1992, 1995) have specialized in transnationalism which they define as a social process through which migrants establish relations which cross geographic, political, and cultural borders and link their country of origin with their country of settlement. They call 'transmigrants' those who develop and maintain multiple types of relations—be they family, economic, social, religious, or political—which cross state, cultural, and geographic borders. In other words, they are people whose identity and practices are linked to networks extending simultaneously across a number of nation states. According to Glick Schiller and her colleagues, globalization is characterized at the world level by an intensi-

fication of relations between distant locations, in such a way that a local situation is influenced by events which take place very far away. Rather than study isolated phenomena, anthropologists should focus on flows of people, commodities, capital, images, and information. The subject of anthropology shifts from communities which are—or are supposed to be—territorialized within a nation state to a series of separate locations where nations are a mere component and no longer the frame of reference.

The work of Liisa Malkki (1992, 1995, 1997) focuses more specifically on refugees, but it is part of the same project to rethink the general framework of the migration problematic. She addresses the rooting metaphor which has metaphysical connotations as it naturalizes links between people and territory. According to Malkki, the notion of point of origin becomes difficult to use because more and more people identify with deterritorialized categories. The study of people in motion demands a new theoretical sensitivity which gives priority to borders and their crossing. This change of paradigm allows us to examine critically the impact which the national reference framework can have on researching refugees and other displaced people.

Migrations are seen as an anomaly not only by certain social scientists for whom societies and cultures are rooted in a territory—which implies that numerous studies address the issues through a medical and psychologizing perspective—but this approach is also a consequence of the political organization of the world, since it is divided into nation states (Zolberg 1981: 6). The usual understanding of the concept of culture tends 'towards rooting rather than travel', writes Malkki (1992: 33), referring to Clifford. Alongside Glick Schiller and her colleagues as well as many others, she deplores the fact that preconceptions of sedentariness are echoed in xenophobia and anti-immigrant discourses. The 'order of things' to which she refers is that of the natural division of the world into a number of sovereign states.

Malkki summarizes her argument in four points: 1) the world of nations tends to be conceptualized as an enclosed space of separate territories; 2) the relationship of people with space tends to be naturalized through botanical metaphors; 3) the concept of culture has many common characteristics with that of nation as both imply the idea of rooting in specific locations, thus revealing a 'metaphysical sedentariness' or a 'metaphysics of sedentariness'; 4) the naturalization of links between populations and locations implies that movement is an anomaly, an idea expressed through the metaphor of 'uprootedness'.

This rapid survey⁶ allows us to see that transnational studies are characterized by at least three features: the phenomena concerned cross the borders of autonomous political entities; links are established over significant distances; a variety of cultural indicators and forms are implied. To go beyond the vision of a world made up of a mosaic of disjointed socio-cultural units and to underline that these social relations are more decisive than the locations, Hannerz thus proposes the expression 'global Ecumene'⁷ and underlines the contribution of anthropology to the study of the contemporary transnational processes in a variety of research fields: 'translocalities', 'border studies', 'migration', 'diasporas', 'transnational corporations and occupations', 'tourism', 'cyberspace', 'media', and 'commodities' (Hannerz 1998: 237).

A MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY

In order to study the multiplicity of links that connect people living in locations distant from one another, the transnational approach requires a renewed field methodology, which takes its inspiration from the 'multi-sited ethnography' proposed by George Marcus (1995). He suggests different strategies to implement his programme: these include following and reconstructing the circulation of people, things, metaphors (particularly in the media), stories and allegories (as in the structural analysis of myths undertaken by Levi-Strauss), life stories, and conflicts. Ethnographic inquiry carried out in a single location does not allow mapping of the circulation of goods and the life itineraries of mobile people; it is instead necessary to place the research theme in a world system. This delocalization of ethnographic practice is not an academic trick, but corresponds to the conditions of the daily life of an increasing

⁶ Among the vast body of literature on transnationalism, see also Portes et al. (1999), Olwig (2003), Levitt et al. (2003), Levitt and Nyberg-Sorensen (2004), Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), and Brettell (2008). My aim here is to illustrate the potential of this approach through the study of Afghan migratory networks. Elsewhere I have commented on the excesses of this literature which tends to exaggerate the novelty of human mobility and to oversimplify the theoretical and methodological sensitivities of earlier anthropologists (Monsutti 2005). More generally, for a critique of postmodernist North American anthropology, see Brightman (1995), Darnell (1995), Lindholm (1997), Sahlin (1999), Anselme (2000), and Friedman (2000).
⁷ 'Ecumene', transcription of a word used by the Ancient Greeks to describe the totality of the inhabited world (Hannerz 1992: 37).

number of people. Within this framework, the contrast between local and global is weakened and concern is with relations between different places.

This approach to understanding migratory movements partially rehabilitates, both as a framework for observation and as a subject of study, a methodological tool which was considered outdated: social networks. Network analysis developed from the 1950s onwards but mainly flourished during the following two decades before running progressively out of steam. The principal reasons for the bad reputation it developed at that time are an undifferentiated understanding of social relations (to understand the behaviour of people, research focused on the structure of social networks and the frequency of interaction rather than the contents of exchanges and of individual relations), formalism, the difficulties involved in gathering empirical data which could be integrated in the theoretical framework, and relatively marginal themes. However, networks remain a useful methodological tool to understand the situations of mobility which characterize contemporary societies. In the old but still famous study of a Norwegian parish, John A. Barnes provides a definition of the concept of 'network'. It remains useful to this day, due to its very simplicity:

The image I have is of a set of points some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or sometimes groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other. We can of course think of the whole of social life as generating a network of this kind (Barnes 1954: 43).

In other words, starting from a person or a group of people, social relations are to be reconstructed. Society is no longer understood within the functionalist paradigm as a series of integrated and distinct communities but as a set of social relations ramifying from each individual. They are not linked to a specific territory and have neither spatial nor social specific borders. Links between two distant people can be intense, while those between certain neighbours can be very loose. Networks can be understood as the web of effective or potential social relations which are mobilized in specific situations.

Used with care and cleansed of certain formalist and individualist extremes characteristic of the network analysis of the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of social networks can be very useful. The work of Hannerz (1967, 1986, 1992, 1996) is indicative of this evolution. In his most recent writings, he reduces the egocentric dimension of networks and gives them a broader scope, thus enabling the concept to include not only individual strategies but also those of broader groups, such as households, lineages,

neighbouring groups, even tribal segments. By its flexibility, the methodological tool of networks allows us to study the cultural complexity of the contemporary world which can be seen as a 'network of networks', also allowing us to understand how the local level is articulated within the global system and to put into perspective the links people settled in places distant from one another maintain with each other.

This research programme can be implemented by avoiding focus on clearly defined village communities. On the contrary, the researcher is guided by the relations which have emerged over time, in order to extract from them the strategies of what starts off as a small group of interlocutors and, from this, to gradually reconstitute their networks and build a living and precise image of the links which unite the dispersed members of social groups whose limits are not determined in advance. How do people move? What are the stages of their migratory journeys? Where do they live? Who do they contact when seeking employment, residence permits, visas, identity cards, or passports? How do they send money and goods from one country to another? How do they retain contact with each other despite the weak technical means at their disposal? What solidarity links can they rely on? In addressing these questions, we can illustrate the sociocultural resources which, for example, Afghan migrants mobilize and the strategies which they use to react to the destruction brought about by war and exile, and not just the motives which push them to migrate or the causes of their exile.

Travelling between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran and then Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand to follow the migratory network of what was initially a very small group of people creates a serious risk of dispersal of work and loss of ethnographic depth. However, the population or the phenomenon which are the subject of the research can retain a smaller scale. Rather than narrow data collection to a single location, the aim is to reconstitute the links woven by a migrant population between the different settlement locations which form a coherent social field despite their spatial dispersal. Fieldwork has not been multi-sited merely in the sense of having different locations of inquiry but also, and even more so, through the will to understand the structural links which connect these different locations.

By following this approach, are we missing important issues? Edwards (1994) expressed the concerns of an anthropologist working in Afghanistan who had to give up his original project of working within a defined community, be it a mountain village or a nomadic tribal group.

Forced by circumstances, he had to carry out his fieldwork in a variety of locations—in Peshawar, in refugee camps, by travelling inside Afghanistan but also working with Afghans in Washington and carrying out a survey of internet users. Beyond his worries, Edwards demonstrated a new way of carrying out fieldwork, simultaneously multi-locally (from Peshawar to Washington) and delocalized (internet). My experience among the Hazaras is comparable. The explosion of locations where members of the group under study live has led to a diversification of locations of study. A population living in a multiplicity of locations means that the study also has to be multi-local.

THE AFGHAN TRANSNATIONAL SYSTEM

Afghanistan

Modern Afghanistan emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century through military action by Pashtun tribes at a time when the large regional empires—Safavid in Iran, Moghul in India, Shaibani in central Asia—were in decline. During the last two and half centuries, the country has known hardly any periods of peace. The conflict which emerged after the Communist coup in April 1978 did, however, result in an unprecedented level of violence. Using ancient migratory routes, millions of Afghans sought refuge in neighbouring countries. After the withdrawal of the Red Army in 1989 and the fall of the pro-Soviet regime in 1992, the country sank into an endless internal war between the different factions of the earlier resistance. The US intervention which followed the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington brought about the defeat of the Taliban and the installation in Kabul of a government supported by the international community and legitimized by a democratic process. But any hopes of achieving normality rapidly vanished. Rampant corruption at all levels of the administration has reduced the state's credibility, while the Taliban have reorganized in their southern bastions by capitalizing on the discontent of large segments of the population. International and non-governmental institutions appear to be incapable of taking effective measures and contribute to the confusion which currently prevails in Afghanistan.

However, insecurity and the lack of the rule of law are not the only factors which explain ongoing Afghan migration—despite a massive

wave of returns.⁸ According to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) the population of Afghanistan will treble by 2050, increasing from 32.3 million to 97.3 million. With an average population increase of 3.5 per cent per annum between 2005 and 2010, the country has one of the highest levels of demographic growth in the world.⁹ Demographic pressure is thus enormous and will continue to increase in the coming years and decades. According to a UN report, the population density of the Behsud area, in the Hazarajat (a region which covers the mountainous centre of the country), is sixty-one inhabitants per square km. However, once recalculated on the basis of cultivable land, it is 1,210 inhabitants per square km, higher than that of Bangladesh (Johnson 2000: 46). It is thus not surprising that the low-rainfall highland and plateau regions are unable to feed their populations.

Hazarajat society is composed mainly of sedentary smallholder farmers. The local economy is essentially based on modest agriculture and supplementary livestock herding. It is strongly dependent on the financial contribution of migrants who travel and seek opportunities in urban centres or abroad. In such a context, migration is not merely a response to violence and poverty. It is normal for young men to travel for the first time before their marriage. This is to enable them to acquire some experience by living apart from their families, and thus demonstrate their capacity to survive as well as to save the capital needed to get married and start a family. These trips abroad are thus an integral part of their life cycle.¹⁰

The geographical dispersal of the members of a household or an extended kin group as well as the resulting economic diversification enables such groups to spread risks and this dispersion is often a planned strategy. Thus, it is really a principle of life which translates itself in the transnational networks which Hazaras, as well as other Afghans, have established on a global scale.

⁸ The UNHCR considers that over 4 million Afghans have returned home with its support between 2002 and 2007; to this must be added 1.2 million who returned spontaneously (UNHCR 2007: iv). In fact, the number of returnees dropped after 2005. Moreover, very early on, these figures were challenged due to the probably high proportion of people 'recycling' their movements, returning to Pakistan or Iran after having received the assistance available to returnees (Turton and Marsden 2002: 1, 20-1).

⁹ See www.unfpa.org/emergencies/afghanistan/factsheet.htm.

¹⁰ In this respect, migration is a rite of passage to adulthood during which young men assert their masculinity through the toughness of the trials they have to endure (Monsutti 2007).

Pakistan and Iran

The first Hazaras went to the Indian subcontinent to seek work during the time of the British Raj or to escape from Amir Abdur Rahman's subjugation of Hazarajat between 1891 and 1893. From 1879 onwards, some of them participated in the construction of the Bolan Pass railway, which links the plains of Sind to the highlands of Baluchistan and beyond that to the Afghan border. Others joined the British Army, specifically the 106th Hazara Pioneers. This military unit, which existed from 1904 to 1933 and which participated in the battle of Ypres during the First World War, gave Hazaras who left Afghanistan a number of opportunities for self-improvement beyond those which they could hope for in their country of origin: a career, social recognition, and economic success.

Their migration was effectively continuous after that period and Hazaras now form one of the main communities in Quetta, the capital of Pakistani Baluchistan (Collective for Social Science Research 2006). Indeed, the dreadful famine which struck many parts of Afghanistan in the early 1970s, the communist coup of 1978, then the Soviet intervention of the following year increased migratory movements. But this flow is not unidirectional. Despite variations in intensity, there is a migratory continuum between Hazarajat and Quetta. Few Hazaras have settled in refugee camps in Pakistan. They immediately preferred to take their chances in an urban environment where they could rely on a host community and in fact have hardly ever needed to rely on humanitarian aid aimed at refugees. Many farmers from southern Hazarajat migrate seasonally; each winter they go to work in the coal mines of the Quetta region, before returning to Afghanistan in early spring to carry on their agricultural activities. Thanks to the relationships they have established in local society, migrants coming from Afghanistan can obtain a Pakistani identity card, even a passport. The city acts as a migration and trade hub as well as a refuge. In case of expulsion from Iran or conflict in Afghanistan, people can always rely on being received in Quetta by a relative or a friend. However, the capital of Pakistani Baluchistan offers few economic opportunities other than coal mining and trade for those who have some start-up capital.

Hazaras fleeing the conquest of Abdur Rahman also went to Iran during the Qajar period. Concentrated around Mashhad where they are known as Berberi, descendants of these migrants have maintained very few relationships with their region of origin. By comparison with Pakistan, Iran thus presents a clear contrast. In Iran, Afghans have faced

a xenophobic atmosphere and are restricted to manual labour (Adelkhal and Olszewska 2007). Even the Shia Hazaras do not really have access to a host group. However, families always seem to have one of their members there to ensure a financial income. The determining factor in this context is the hiring networks. Workers group around certain entrepreneurial and competent individuals to form temporary work teams. They move from one building site to the next according to the availability of work; information on their location is passed on by word of mouth. Hazaras who travel to the Islamic Republic are thus fairly likely to find work through the intermediary of a relative or neighbour. They stay there for long periods, rarely less than a year, often far longer. Older men who have family responsibilities are reluctant to leave for such long periods and prefer to stay closer to their wives and children in the village of origin and therefore they go to Quetta which offers the possibility of temporary migration, while also providing a more favourable hosting environment.

Since the 1970s oil boom started, many young Hazaras have sought employment in Iran and often stay there for many years. There, although it is easy to find fairly well paid employment by activating family and tribal networks, many activities are prohibited to Afghans. They are mainly employed in Iranian enterprises as bricklayers, agricultural labourers, or guards. There is a constant risk of expulsion, and police harassment and violence are regular features of their life. Afghans have a very precarious status and it is difficult for them to settle in a stable manner, whether with or without their families.

Australia

The first Afghans arrived on the Australian continent during the last decades of the nineteenth century as camel drivers.¹¹ More recently, in the 1980s but mainly in the first half of the 1990s, middle- and upper-class urban Afghans arrived in Australia—often after having resided in India—and have settled mostly in Sydney and Melbourne. A third migratory wave was composed of people escaping from the Taliban regime between 1998 and 2001. They were mostly Hazaras. Many of them travelled on—sometimes forged—Pakistani passports acquired in Quetta and giving them the right to travel to Malaysia or Indonesia without a visa. They then continued their journey to Australian territories nearest to

¹¹ Their caravans supplied the workers who laboured in the isolated mines and quarries of the desert as well as those who participated in the construction of railways (Stevens 1989).

the great archipelago (Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef, in particular) on precarious Indonesian boats. About 9,000 boat people arrived in Australia during this period¹² (in addition to Afghans there were also many Iraqis).

Australia's receiving policy in response to this flow of migrants landing illegally became increasingly restrictive and the government proposed the Pacific Solution, a set of strict measures aimed at preventing the illegal arrival of people by sea.¹³ This involved first the exclusion from the Australian migratory zone of the places most easily accessible from Indonesia, thus making it impossible to put a request for asylum for those who reached these places. As a parallel measure the Navy strengthened its efforts to intercept and send back Indonesian boats transporting migrants before they were able to reach Australian territory. Finally, the Canberra government gave itself the means to deport many hundreds of asylum seekers to certain small islands in the Pacific, Manus in particular, north of Papua New Guinea, and Nauru. This policy was complementary to the use of different detention camps.¹⁴

Such drastic measures effectively closed this migration route. Many migrants who arrived between 1998 and 2001 were interned, sometimes for two or three years. With the support of some human-rights associations, most of them finally managed to obtain residence permits, often after having brought their cases to the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) which in many cases took decisions contradicting the—initially negative—ones of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. After having been freed from detention centres at Curtin (former Australian air force base, near Derby in the north of Western Australia) or Port Hedland (a former mining centre, also in the north of Western Australia), for example, many Hazaras then moved to the Perth region in south-west Australia. Some of them found work in industrial abattoirs or vineyards (in Mount Barker, Albany, Bunbury, and Margaret River). Elsewhere they became labourers on building sites. In many cities which faced economic difficulties, groups mobilized to support Afghan requests to the authorities

¹² The 2001 census counts 12,410 people born in Afghanistan. See www.censusdata.abs.gov.au.

¹³ Set up by the Conservative government of John Howard in late 2001, it was abandoned after the electoral victory of the Labour party in November 2007.

¹⁴ For example, Woomera (in the southern Australian desert). Administered by a private American company specializing in prison management, it is said to have received up to 1,500 asylum seekers. It is infamous for the many cases of abuse committed there between its opening in 1999 and its closure in 2003.

for regularization of their status, in particular Albany (WA), Murray Bridge (SA), or Young (NSW). Having sorted out their legal status, many Hazaras then sought opportunities in Melbourne, Sydney, or even Adelaide. There they developed their own mutual assistance networks and contributed to the expansion of the vast Afghan diaspora in the world.

North America

The Afghan community consists of many thousands in North America. Mostly members of the urban middle and upper classes (Oeppen forthcoming), Afghans are well represented in the San Francisco Bay area (Fremont in particular) as well as in Washington DC (and the neighbouring states of Virginia and Maryland), but also in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver.

As in Australia, rural Hazaras arrived only recently as a result of the territorial expansion of the community's migratory networks beyond the Middle East. However, given the geographical position of the North American continent, it is almost impossible to arrive there illegally. In Canada, for example, migrants must be sponsored¹⁵ publicly (by the federal state or a province) or privately (generally through a charitable or community association). As for the USA, one of the immigration mechanisms used is the visa lottery organized by the authorities which issues annually about 50,000 green cards for permanent residence. This procedure is open to nationals of a list of countries which changes each year and which is intended to maintain a degree of diversity within the immigrant population. After five years of residence, people having a green card are able to request naturalization.

A few Hazaras have successfully arrived through this route in the second half of the 1990s, most often with Pakistani papers. They formed the initial nucleus of a small community established in New York which today numbers between 150 and 200 people. It has gradually grown through family reunion or through marriage, as first arrivals brought wives from Afghanistan or Pakistan. These transnational marriages often allow successful migrants to upgrade their social status: many beneficiaries of a green card and others with US passports have managed to marry women from families of higher social status than themselves, who

¹⁵ Supported by their community associations many Hazaras who successfully travel to Canada are Ismailis (Guilbert 1999; Monsutti 2006).

2. Transnationalism and the Afghan Social Networks

would probably have been inaccessible in their home country. Very soon after their arrival, a few Hazaras with connections to other Middle Eastern migrants who had been settled in the megalopolis for longer managed to achieve professional status in the catering business. They acquired pushcarts for the sale of coffee and pastries. This socio-economic niche is difficult to penetrate. The problem is not getting a permit from the municipality (which costs a few hundred dollars per year), but rather negotiating with a largely self-managed group to acquire the right of usage of a pitch. The most desirable spots (on the corners of certain street in Manhattan, near underground stations, etc.) can cost many thousands of dollars which must be paid to the previous user.

This is both a social and an economic investment. People who achieve success gradually get closer to the most central locations while reselling at a profit their previous pitch to a younger member of the community. They introduce these newcomers into the profession by acting as mentor and thus strengthen their own social capital. Migration here seems to open new possibilities and to contribute to a redefinition of hierarchies and social status.

A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON AFGHAN MIGRATORY NETWORKS

It is clear, from the description of the means used to establish themselves in each of the locations which form part of their vast circulatory territory, that the Hazaras are not mere victims of forces beyond their control. They are actors who adapt to the world system by relying on the cultural and social resources at their disposal. They have created migratory networks which form a truly transnational system. Scattered between the Middle East, Western Europe,¹⁶ North America, Australia, and New Zealand, the Hazaras, like other Afghans, have retained and even developed their mechanisms of solidarity and mutual support.

Escape from violence is not necessarily incompatible with a real migratory strategy. The geographical dispersion and the resulting economic diversification can become an asset. Afghan refugees and migrants have known how to adapt to each context. People with similar identity and sociological profile have defined themselves differently according to

¹⁶ With respect to Europe, see Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont (2000) and Tarrus (2007).

their migratory trajectory and their final destination. We have focused our attention on rural Hazaras. In Pakistan, they have relied on a host community which was created by population movements caused by earlier conflicts, and they have not sought official recognition as refugees or taken advantage of the presence of the numerous humanitarian organizations aiding Afghans. In Iran they have forged a place for themselves in the national labour market by ensuring that local employers appreciate their work without hoping for long-term integration in the society of the host country. A small kernel of entrepreneurial individuals arrived officially in the USA with Pakistani papers after having obtained a residence permit through the lottery. Their *alter ego*, however, travelled illegally to Australia where they benefited from the active support of numerous human-rights groups which fought the government's hard line.

The ethnographic description of the strategies used by Afghans throughout their movements thus blurs the distinction between voluntary and forced migration. Depending on the context and the choices made, the same individuals can be labelled as refugees or as economic migrants. In fact, refugees and other types of migrants share numerous social characteristics, and whether a person belongs to this category or that is rarely straightforward.

While the international regime for the management of refugees is based on the assumption that movement must end, mobility as well as dispersion can sometimes be considered social, economic, and political capital (Monsutti 2008). In the course of their global travels, Hazaras have not merely adapted to context. They retain links with their land of origin, links which are concretized through the transfer of important amounts of money, through political activities focused on Afghanistan, or even investment in reconstruction projects and the rehabilitation of a family home in Kabul or elsewhere. In addition they have created transversal links between the different places where they settle, materialized through internet fora, numerous trips between Sweden and the UK, between Germany and the USA, as well as through the circulation of male and female marriage partners.¹⁷ By being sensitive to the fact that migration is not a unilinear process, a transnational perspective implemented through a mobile ethnography leads to a better understanding of these many

¹⁷ Afghans use transnational networks to find women of marriageable age—identifying women in Afghanistan as brides for Afghan men living in Iran, and identifying Afghan women living in Iran as brides for Afghan men living in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia (Abbasi-Shavazi and Glazebrook 2006: 5).

practices and links beyond the opposition between refugees and labour migrants.

Note. This text has been translated from the French by Helen Lackner. It is based on data collected during different field visits from 1993 onwards to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran and, more recently, in Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, in particular within the framework of a research project entitled 'Beyond the Boundaries: Hazara Migratory Networks from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran toward Western Countries' financed by the MacArthur Foundation (Chicago) between 2004 and 2006.

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