

Introduction: Deterritorialized Youth: Sahrawi and Afghan Refugees at the Margins of the Middle East

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Studies of refugee youth in the Middle East have largely focused on Palestinians, while the situation of Afghan and Sahrawi refugee youth at the margins of the Middle East has attracted little attention. The resilience of Palestinian youth has come to be a contemporary theme in numerous academic and practitioner studies (Barber 2001, 2008; Chatty and Hundt 2001, 2005; Hart 2007). Their 'right of return' to their original homeland continues to be hotly debated and discussed internationally. However, Israel, the government occupying their historic homeland, does not allow them back. Sahrawi and Afghan refugee youth, unlike their Palestinian contemporaries, are encouraged to return both by international agencies and the powers occupying their traditional homelands. Some Sahrawi and Afghan refugee youth do return, but largely they remain in transnational 'exile'. For Afghan refugees the reasons for not returning are numerous. In the early years they revolved around a fear that education might not be sustainable – especially for their daughters and sisters – once they return to Afghanistan. This position has now largely reversed itself with some Afghan refugees returning to Afghanistan because educational opportunities in Iran have been curtailed. For Sahrawi youth, education is seen as an important individual and national tool to prepare themselves for reintegration into their temporary 'nation state' in the refugee camps established by the United Nations near the border town of Tindouf in south-western Algeria.

This book is the outcome of three years of research among Afghan refugee youth in Tehran and Mashhad, Iran and Sahrawi refugee youth in Algeria and Spain. It emerged out of an earlier research programme on children and adolescents in prolonged armed conflict and forced migration. The earlier

study focused on Palestinian refugee youth in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Chatty and Hundt 2005). That research sought to examine what happened in older children's lives when they and the households they belonged to were uprooted and forced to move. It studied children and young people's lives in the context of the family group, the community and the wider social, economic and political arena, and also looked into the ways in which children and young people within households were changed by past and current episodes of forced migration. It considered the alterations to individual rites of passage from childhood to adult status, changes in informal, formal and non-formal education, and access to labour markets, and transformations in community cohesion and social institutions such as marriage, employment and care of the elderly. This focus on the individual in the context of the family and community, and of the specific contributory influence of the economic, social and political arena, was a direct response to what was regarded as a monopoly of two disciplinary approaches to the study of children and youth: developmental psychology and medicine that tended to pathologize situations of individual and community stress.

Research on children and adolescents, in general, was until very recently primarily based on Western models of childhood and child development (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1999; Boyden 1994; Chatty et al. 2005). Perhaps the most fundamental principle which grounded these models was the belief that all children throughout the world had the same basic needs, passed through the same developmental stages, reacted in a like manner to armed conflict and forced migration, employed similar coping strategies, and exhibited common resiliencies. What seemed to be overlooked with this predominantly Western model was that in many cultures, the category of adolescent was not recognized and individuals as young as twelve or thirteen were sometimes expected to take on the roles and responsibilities of adults – marrying, raising families, seeking gainful employment and caring for the elderly in the households. How individuals in such cultures reacted to and coped with forced migration was bound to be different from individuals in cultures where adolescence was recognized as a transitional category from childhood to adult responsibility. Only in recent years has research begun to show that our Western-based assumptions of child development are not universal and that children do not automatically progress through the same sequence of developmental states (Rogoff 2003; Dawes and Tredoux 1989). The work of the social psychologist, Rogoff, has been particularly important in bringing to the fore the cultural nature of much child development. However, research findings take time to become part of the practitioner's portfolio. Although the rhetoric is changing, many international aid agencies involved with refugee children and youth continue to implement programmes – relevant to such institutions as child labour, early marriage

and early school-leaving – best suited to the Western assumptions of child development. The effort to understand the cultural, social, political and economic contexts within which these phenomena occur does not find its way into the majority of pre-programming planning initiatives. In addition, many international agencies dealing with children and youth are obliged to work within the international legal understandings of these categories such as those of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which define ‘children’ as those under the age of eighteen.

Furthermore, much of the research undertaken on the effects of forced migration has been in the domain of psychology and psychiatry. These disciplines prioritize the trauma and coping strategies of the individual victim and survivor (Ahern and Athey 1991; El Bedour et al. 1993; Rousseau et al. 1998). This disciplinary approach raises two fundamental concerns. First, nearly all psychiatric and psychological research among forced migrants uses concepts that are based on Western ideas of illness and pathology. These concepts often do not correspond to local categories and definitions of illness (Young 1982; Ennis-McMillan 2001). In many cultures, illnesses are regarded as originating variously in the intervention of malevolent spirits, or *jinn*, the inappropriate ingestion of cold or hot foods or other natural or supernatural aetiologies. The use of Western diagnostic criteria and scales, developed using professional disease classification, may not, therefore, be appropriate to understanding local and indigenous classifications. Second, the methods used in much of this research focuses solely on the individual patient. This approach limits the extent to which mental health can be conceptualized in the surrounding culture and society. The egocentric focus of concerns common in much Western psychiatry is thus often at odds with the community-centric focus of the lives of many youth in other cultures. Although recent research in Western psychiatry is beginning to recognize the limitations of ‘Enlightenment preoccupations’ (Bracken, et al. 1995; Bracken and Thomas 2005) and is successfully beginning to problematize much of the trauma focus in the discipline of psychology and psychiatry, still more needs to be done. Within applied psychology an effort is clearly underway to incorporate qualitative methods in much of its research design (Ager 2002; MacMullin and Odeh 1999; Wessells 1998). In the case of the Palestinian refugee children, where the developmental psychology approach has held sway, our research effort was an attempt to effectively contextualize and thus validate research findings. This book has emerged as an effort to create a greater body of data and thus overcome the initial resistance we found among practitioner and policy-making circles when trying to generalize from our Palestinian material.

Understanding how older children and young people managed their lives in the context of prolonged forced migration and armed conflict was the

principle aim of the research programme established at the Refugee Studies Centre in 1999. For the following three years, five research teams, headed by Palestinian researchers, collected anthropological data and engaged in participatory 'action-oriented' research with Palestinian refugee youth in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 2002, after it became clear that the Palestinian data and findings were being treated by policymakers and practitioners as exceptional and thus of little practical value or applicability to refugee youth in other parts of the world, we undertook to carry out a second study of refugee youth in the Middle East, in a search for a wider range of comparative material. This new study was launched in 2002 and focused on Sahrawi refugee youth in Algeria and Afghan youth in Iran.¹ The underlying assumption was that a degree of generalization, or 'lessons learned', would emerge about refugee youth, including Palestinian youth, from a broad regional study where some contextual elements were the same and others were different. The emerging similarities and trends across the seven field sites would then provide an important contribution to comparative studies of youth and their care-givers in forced migration, to the social sciences and to practice in general.

This chapter provides a brief historical background to both the Sahrawi and the Afghani refugee conditions in Algeria and Iran respectively. Both countries are largely off the international humanitarian aid 'radar'. Perhaps this lack of international involvement is because both states are Muslim nations where there is a strong tradition of providing refuge to those seeking asylum at a local and national level without much reliance on international assistance.² For this reason, as well as for the largely international political positioning of Iran as a 'socialist' and an Islamic state, refugee assistance in Iran is primarily dependent on state support, with some national non-government organization input, while assistance to Sahrawi refugees is also largely dependent on the Algerian state, with some provision by international and regional NGOs.

This chapter also describes, in some detail, the field research process in each field site which was purposively set up along similar lines to the earlier Palestinian study. The intention was to make it possible to draw out reliable and potentially comparative findings across the seven sites. This introductory chapter looks closely at the contrasting styles and approaches employed by the Sahrawi and Afghan team leaders to gain access to their respective localities, the way in which sites for data collection were identified, the selection, training and support of local researchers, and the interaction, or lack thereof, with humanitarian aid agencies. It also reviews the way in which participatory activities were taken up by the youth among the Sahrawi and the Afghan refugees. The approaches adopted by each of the team leaders were heavily influenced by previous research experience, as well as by the specific political contexts of their field sites.

The chapter closes with a brief discussion of the themes that emerged from the Sahrawi transnational field sites (chapters 1, 2, 3 [Chatty, Crivello and Fiddian, Crivello and Fiddian, and Cozza chapters]) as well as the Afghan field study (chapters 4, 5, 6 [Hoodfar, Kamal and Monsutti chapters]). It reviews the similarities and the differences that have emerged from the data in an attempt to understand how largely Muslim, young people in the Middle East have managed to live with the effects of prolonged forced migration. The objective is to identify the factors that have contributed to the resilience and agency of these young people as they forge new identities in transnational spaces and create in new places homelands, real and imagined, in which to strive to better their lives and the lives of their parents and caregivers.

Historical Context

The Palestinian, Afghan and Sahrawi refugee communities across the research field sites shared many basic features. They all represented protracted refugee communities of predominantly Muslim peoples.³ The Sahrawi and Afghan refugee youth shared a background of mobility, one coming largely from a society with a significant pastoral or agro-pastoral base, the other from a society with a long tradition of male (and occasionally family) migration as a ‘rite of passage’ to full adulthood (Monsutti 2005). All three of these societies were largely illiterate prior to their forced migration; however, other features were significantly distinct. The Palestinians were largely agrarian-based prior to their displacement and had the added difficulty of adjusting to urban life as refugees. Unlike the Afghans in the study who spoke one or more of the languages of Afghanistan, such as Pashto and Dari (Afghan Persian/Farsi), Palestinians and Sahrawis were Arabic speakers, albeit of different dialects. Legal status also varied between and within the groups; all of the Sahrawi camp residents had official refugee status, as determined by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and were receiving humanitarian aid and international protection. Palestinians were officially recognized as refugees by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), but did not enjoy international legal protection. The Afghan refugees were initially welcomed into Iran and encouraged to self-settle. Over time, however, the Iranian government became increasingly reluctant to grant newly arriving Afghans ‘official’ refugee documentation, or to renew the documentation of those Afghans already resident in Iran.

Sahrawi Refugees

Western Sahara is said to be the last remaining colony of Africa.⁴ By 1936, Spain and France had formed an alliance to establish Spanish hegemony in the Western Sahara. In 1966, the United Nations General Assembly called on Spain to organize a referendum in which Sahrawis would vote on self-determination. This was, however, ignored. In 1973, the Polisario (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia El-Hamra y Río de Oro), the armed forces of the Sahrawi liberation struggle, was formed by a group of Sahrawi students living in Rabat, Morocco.⁵ Two years later, in 1975, Spanish General Franco died and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) published its advisory opinion on Western Sahara, rejecting Morocco's and Mauritania's claims to the territory and maintaining the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination. Soon after the ICJ announced its position, the Moroccan king, Hassan II, assembled the Green March, where an estimated 350,000 Moroccan civilians crossed into the former Spanish Sahara to annex the northern two-thirds of the territory for Morocco. Makeshift camps sprung up inside the Western Sahara to temporarily shelter those who fled their homes but these were bombed soon after in a series of raids by the Moroccan air force. While young men generally stayed behind or eventually returned to fight, many of their family members sought refuge further away across the Algerian border where they remain to this day.

Between 150,000 and 200,000 refugees from the Western Sahara currently live in one of four remotely located camps set up in the harsh desert thirty kilometres from the western-most Algerian town of Tindouf.⁶ Some of those who settled in the camps had come from a tradition of nomadic pastoralism; others had fled from the larger urban centres of Western Sahara such as El-Ayoune, Dakhla, La Guera and Smara. They live in tents provided by the UNHCR, while most families have added on sand-brick buildings. Trucks bring water to the camps, as well as food, medicine and other basic supplies.

Despite the remoteness and isolation of the refugee camps, many of the residents maintain transnational networks that link them to families and institutions abroad. Educational networks are particularly necessary in order for students to continue their education, as agreements have been established with ministries of education in such countries as Algeria, Cuba and Libya to enable Sahrawi youth to complete university degree programmes.

The *Vacaciones en Paz* (Vacations in Peace Programme) is also an important channel that links Sahrawi youth to Spain and is organized by the Asociación Amigos de Pueblo Saharaui (registered in 1986 as a national Spanish NGO). *Vacaciones en Paz* is an annual holiday programme that enables between 7,000 and 10,000 Sahrawi children between the ages of eight and thirteen to be hosted by Spanish families in their homes for a two-

month period during the summer. During their stay, the children receive medical examinations and treatment, as well as gifts of clothes, toys and money which they take back with them to the camps. The relationships established during the programme often endure beyond the summer months, as proto-familial relationships form between the children and their Spanish host-families, and return trips reinforce these cross-border bonds.

Afghan Refugees in Iran

The presence of Afghan refugees in Iran was seen initially as temporary, and the government, in a gesture of Muslim fraternity, generally welcomed them. The majority of these refugees arrived in Iran during the period of the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan in the 1980s and up till 1992. Many were afforded substantial benefits, including food subsidies, health care, and free primary and secondary-level education for their children (BAAG 1996:8). In 1998, the Ministry of Interior's Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) estimated Afghan refugees in Iran at 1.4 million. Other estimates suggested that the numbers were closer to 2 million (HAMI Association for Refugee Women in Iran). Only 22,000 were believed to live in camps near the Iran-Afghanistan border, or less than 1.6 per cent. Instead most Afghans in Iran were self-settled and scattered throughout the country's villages and cities.

The British Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG 1996:5) identified the major flows of Afghans into Iran and grouped them as follows: those who were working in Iran as economic migrants prior to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; those who fled the Soviet invasion during the 1980s;⁷ Hazaras who fled in 1991 as a result of massive flooding of their lands; Heratis who fled the Taliban takeover of their land in 1995; Kabulis who went to Iran as a result of economic hardship following the Taliban takeover of the capital; and economic migrants who have entered since 1979.

Those who arrived prior to 1992 were issued 'green cards' which afforded them legal recognition and entitled them to subsidies on health, education, transport and provisions upon repatriation to Afghanistan (BAAG 1996:5). Temporary cardholders and undocumented refugees had little or no legal access to jobs and social services. A number of Afghans who had at one time held proper documentation lost their status after they decided to repatriate. When they again sought refuge in Iran as conditions in Afghanistan worsened, they found themselves undocumented and at risk of being arrested and deported. Currently, those who do not hold proper refugee documentation do not have access to health care nor education for their children.

Education has emerged as an important priority among Afghan families living in Iran. However, the Iranian government has banned Afghan

children from Iranian schools in an effort to encourage their families to repatriate to Afghanistan. In response, Afghans have adopted different strategies to overcome the barriers to their children's education; some borrowed the identity cards of Iranians or of Afghans who had legal rights to education. Others mobilized to create informal, self-directed and self-funded schools for their children. During the course of the present study, most of the contact and interaction with the youth took place within these informal schools. Most Afghan refugee male and female children attended schools – either formal Iranian schools or the informal Afghan schools – for some years. Older children and male youth tended to drop out as pressure to earn a wage to support their families increased. Those in the informal Afghan school system were constantly under threat of forced closure by the government.

Setting up the Research: Negotiating the Start of Fieldwork

At the close of our study of Palestinian refugee youth we conducted numerous seminars and round tables in Europe and the United States with policymakers and practitioners to draw conclusions from our work and to extract 'lessons learned' or 'good practice' guides for dealing with refugee youth. We were surprised to hear from some of our audiences that our findings were being labelled as 'exceptional' or 'ungeneralisable' (see Dumper 2003 for a discussion of the perceived exceptionalism of the Palestinian refugee case). That is, as one policymaker in Washington put it, 'the Palestinian case is *sui generis*, you cannot draw any conclusions from it that would have a value in other refugee situations'. Thus, this Sahrawi and Afghan refugee youth study may be regarded as an effort to overcome the narrow policy perceptions which we recognize exist because of limited case studies on refugee youth in the wider Middle East region.⁸ Our underlying assumption has been that a degree of generalization, or 'lessons learned' would emerge from this second study where some contextual elements are the same, which would then be applicable to the Middle East region and perhaps more broadly to refugee youth elsewhere.

Here we have refugee youth in, by and large, Muslim countries. We also have situations of prolonged conflict extending back two, if not three, generations. The hope is that the two studies taken together, with their holistic, anthropological approach and action-oriented, participatory methods, would contribute to an alternative understanding of the lives of children and young people that moves beyond the Western model elaborated by developmental psychology. Our aim is to provide deeper insights into the way in which the experiences of refugee youth are mediated through the various social, cultural, political and economic contexts of their

lives. The focus of the Sahrawi and Afghan study is then to develop a grasp of the coping mechanism which these young people develop to confront a variety of hardships in their respective host communities – the refugee camps in the Tindouf region of Algeria and the urban refugee quarters of two of Iran's major cities, Tehran and Mashhad.

As with our earlier study of Palestinian youth, the broad aim of the Sahrawi and Afghan refugee youth study was to investigate the direct and indirect effects of forced migration on children. Although we were searching for an understanding of the local social construction of the category of child and youth, we needed to set out a frame of reference for our sampling and interviewing. Our original Palestinian study team had agreed to broadly seek out families with children or youth living at home ranging in age of between about eight to eighteen years. This was an administrative decision for analytical simplicity. We did not seek out legal proof of age from our informants, nor did we use the ages eight or eighteen as a rigid cut-off mark. We all assumed that somewhere in this broad range of chronological age would lie the socially defined 'youth'. We did not intend to be rigid in our child and youth category nor did we accept that this broad sampling guide would be viewed as a tacit reinforcement of Western norms regarding the ages of childhood.

The preliminary findings of the Palestinian study suggested a number of concerns among young refugee people and their caregivers. These included: their multiple, and at times contested, identity as Palestinians, as refugees and as camp residents; their complicated relationship with the occupying state; gender discrimination, particularly expressed by young women; education and the lack of history lessons in the school curriculum regarding their homeland; high levels of unemployment; and the different kinds of violence they witness and experience in their everyday lives (Chatty and Hundt 2001, 2005). Of particular interest to us were the open acknowledgement of multiple identities among refugee youth, the groundedness in the refugee camps in their deterritorialized existence, and the vividness of their 'memory' of the real or imagined homeland of their parents and grandparents. Such contestation of places and spaces was assumed, by many, to be unique to Palestinian refugees. In order to test whether or not this was actually the case, it was important to pursue further comparable studies based on the same fundamental questions and methods in order to facilitate comparison. With these concerns in mind, we set out to examine, among Sahrawi and Afghan youth, the same general set of concerns which had emerged as important for Palestinian youth. Exploring these matters, we hoped, would allow for some analytical comparisons across the seven field sites.

We knew that the past experiences of forced migration amongst the older generations had impacted significantly on Palestinian children and youth.

We wondered whether we would find the same among the Sahrawi and Afghan youth. Knowing how different were the experiences of Palestinian girls from those of boys in terms of exposure, opportunities, constraints and responsibilities within the household and the community, we wondered whether we would find the same to be true in the Sahrawi and Afghan study. Given the Palestinian youth's high profile in political activism, we wondered whether this was also the case among the Afghan and Sahrawi refugee youth. And finally, given the agrarian roots of most of the Palestinian refugees in our study, we wondered whether the tradition of mobility among the Sahrawi in the past would result in findings which suggested a different experience of integrating the reality of forced migration into their current circumstances.

Seville Start-up Workshop

In order to maintain the holistic, anthropological approach to the study of refugee youth, and at the same time develop methods for field research which would permit some comparability between the Sahrawi and Afghan research sites, the project opened with a methodology workshop in Seville, Spain for both teams. The team leaders of each field site, as well as their assistants, were invited to present their research strategies regarding data collection as well as to develop a preliminary timetable for the set of methods to be used in each site. The opportunity was also taken to introduce the school classroom psycho-social 'worry questionnaire' developed by Dr Colin MacMullin, a psychologist at Flinders University, as a potential participatory tool with which to commence fieldwork (MacMullin and Odeh 1999). This 'worry questionnaire', much like the recently revived interest in Q methodology, sought to take into account, clarify and illuminate the perspectives of marginalized and powerless individuals (Brown 1996). MacMullin had applied his 'worry questionnaire' to Palestinian children in Gaza, asking them to identify what they most feared or worried about in their daily lives. The group-centred responses, rather than the usual, Western egocentric ones, were then resubmitted to the children in further 'tests' and games in order to identify priorities and create statistically malleable findings. We found that the first steps of a modified and adapted version of this 'worry questionnaire' in our Palestinian study was particularly useful in identifying youth concerns. But more, it was an ideal tool to draw youth into the study in a participatory fashion. Both the Sahrawi and Afghan teams agreed to try to use aspects of the 'worry questionnaire' in the early stages of their fieldwork when they would be working with local schools to identify potential participants in the study.⁹ The later dimensions of the MacMullin study, concerned with creating psycho-social childhood priorities and relevant statistical measures were not taken up by either of the teams. It was

also agreed by both teams that basic socio-economic data on each household being interviewed would be coded so that it might be possible to make some associations or comparisons among household variables (for example, youth who were from households with little or no education, who had little or no experience of the homeland, were active in an informal economy).

The team leader for the Sahrawi study was Dr Randa Farah, a Palestinian anthropologist based at the University of Western Ontario in Canada. Dr Farah had previously served as the team leader for the Jordanian field site in the Palestinian study, so she was particularly well placed to implement the same field methods and tools to collect the necessary data from Sahrawi youth. She had also carried out her doctoral research in the same Jordanian field site, and so was very much at home there and was well known and well respected by the Palestinian refugee community. Furthermore, during the late 1970s and 1980s she had been active in the Palestinian cause in Lebanon. Through that experience she had developed personal contacts with some members of the Sahrawi Polisario. The latter were to be very useful to her in facilitating the official permissions she would need in order to set up the Sahrawi field study and in order to appoint her field assistant or manager.

The team leader for the Afghan youth study was Dr Homa Hoodfar, an anthropologist of Iranian origin based at Concordia University in Canada. Dr Hoodfar had already been engaged in extensive research on Afghan refugee women and children in Iran during the previous decades. She was also well connected with the few NGOs working with refugee women and youth in Iran. Official permission was not a requirement for her as an Iranian. Thus her entry into the field had already been established through her previous and ongoing fieldwork and her research teams were well practised in interviewing. However, her field assistant cum local manager, a Chinese Iranian postgraduate student in Comparative Media Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), was new to such research.

During the Seville workshop, both team leaders and their field assistants agreed to meet the goal of fifty in-depth interviews and narratives on the impact of forced migration on the lives of the refugee youth and their families. It was also agreed that although youth was to be regarded as a social category, we would need to maintain some consistency with the Palestinian study sample and thus we agreed that each household selected for in-depth interviewing would have children living in it between the age band of approximately eight and eighteen. No effort would be made to confirm these chronologically-stated ages.

The teams agreed that a detailed coding system for socio-economic household data derived from the fifty in-depth interviews in each field site would be developed at Oxford and sent out to each team to be used in the course of their interviewing. It was also agreed that a software package to

analyse qualitative information would be utilized to assist in comparisons across the field sites. Several packages were considered, but NVIVO was considered the most sophisticated and flexible and thus the most suitable for this project. We wanted to be able to set our socio-economic variables up against thematic findings in our data. We also wanted to have the opportunity of searching for comparable variables between the two field sites, if our data suggested that such analysis would be of interest.

As with the earlier Palestinian study, it was also agreed that first contact with the communities would be through participatory methods and focused group discussions in order to draw the youth and their families into the study as partners. Thus, although the families to be interviewed were assumed to be representative, the sample was purposive, with youth and their families opting in or out of the study. Such a participatory focus meant that generalizations at the end of the study were going to be harder to come by. Such potential loss, however, we hoped would be compensated by a richness and depth of qualitative material. As well as collecting in-depth interviews, each team was also meant to be conducting participant observation, the notes of which would enrich and help contextualize some of the material to emerge from the narratives of forced migration.

At the end of the workshop it was clear that the two very different contexts of the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria and those of the Afghan refugees in Iran would make it difficult to keep parallel methods and data recording. It might also undermine our efforts to generalize results at the close of the study. Thus it was felt important to make a concerted effort at transparency among all the team members throughout the course of the project. This concern has been translated into a detailed description of both the administrative features of the field methodology as well as the particular cultural and social context within which each team leader had to work in setting up her team and field site.

Setting up the Research: Getting Started in the Field

For the Iranian team, previous studies undertaken in the same locations with trained research assistants and translators meant that work could start almost immediately. Official permission would not have to be sought as the work could be viewed as a continuation of early research. Dr Hoodfar could maintain the role of supervisor over her new field assistant, backed up by experienced Iranian interviewers who had worked with her in the past on the related topic of women refugees in Iran. This made it possible for Dr Hoodfar to come in and out of the country for short periods regularly throughout the year without having to spend long periods in the field. Sarah Kamal, Dr Hoodfar's field assistant, was also hired as a field researcher and

local research team manager to keep an eye on the research teams and to conduct participant observation among the Afghan youth.

For the Sahrawi team, the task at hand was more challenging. Up until the early 2000s very few, if any, long-term studies had been conducted in the Sahrawi camps that were not part of the action plan of the numerous IGOs and NGOs working with the Polisario near Tindouf. Official permission would clearly have to be sought, if only in order to get a visa permitting entry into the field. Gaining permission from the Polisario to undertake independent 'theoretical' rather than 'action-oriented' work was going to be difficult because of its unusual, if not unique, character in the camps. For, although the Polisario relied on an army of NGO/IGO activity in the camps, they had rarely, if ever, agreed to permit an academic study to be conducted among the refugee 'citizens' of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in exile near the border town of Tindouf in Algeria. In addition, there was the worrying constraint of the limited window of opportunity as far as climate was concerned to conduct such a study once permissions had been gained. Dr Farah, a new staff member at the University of Western Ontario, had a full teaching schedule and so was only available for a few weeks in the winter and spring as well as the long summer break. The latter, however, was the most inhospitable time to be working in south-western Algeria. Dr Farah had to find a way of working with her team during the very high summer temperatures (in the high 40s and 50s C°). Training of the team interviewers and translators was going to have to be conducted during her winter and spring breaks. The summer months, which are so often the main period of data collection for academics not released from general teaching, were largely impractical because of the high temperature. Later we would discover that many camp dwellers also left the camps in the summer. Those who could afford it left for the Canary Islands, Mauritania or simply hired air-conditioned apartments in Tindouf itself.

As both teams began settling into their field sites and initiating participatory activities, a surprising theme began to emerge in both sites from the initial field reports. This theme was not political activism, as had been the case among Palestinian youth, nor was it religious or ethnic identity, as we might have imagined. Rather, it was the theme of food and its relationship to the refugee culture. With two diametrically opposed situations regarding access to and choice of food, it seemed an ideal opportunity to examine the relationship of food to culture and hence, development of identity in exile. Among the Sahrawi youth, there was a total reliance on food-aid – in the form of flour, cooking oil, sugar and other basics donated by the international community – in their bleak and sterile refugee camps in the desert sands several dozen miles away from the border town of Tindouf in Algeria. For the Afghan youth, although there was greater choice with all the markets of Tehran and Mashhad available to

them, the desire to replicate the foods of home was striking.

A short complementary study was set up half-way into the project to examine the way in which food mediated the construction of social identities among youth in refugee contexts. The sense of belonging to a group, as well as the need to mark off the group as an entity, was regarded as both an organic and non-essentialist trait as well as an important element of social discourse among refugee youth (Back 1996; Barth 1969; MacClancy 1993). Exploring the way in which food and access and non-access to food associated with parental culture impacted on the development of social identity was felt to be particularly significant in these two extreme cases of food access. In the Sahrawi case, the fieldwork was carried out by Dr Nicola Cozza, while Dr Alessandro Monsutti carried out a parallel study among Afghans in Iran. Professor Jeya Henry of Oxford Brookes University contributed to the design of the food-intake questionnaires and the theoretical framework for studying food among refugee populations. Both researchers benefited from the support system set into place by each of the research teams, but their fieldwork time-frame was relatively short – about six weeks – and their substantive concerns were strongly focused around food-intake, diet and general ideas of identity expressed in what youth ate or sought to eat. Such a specific focus and short period of fieldwork meant that the two ‘food’ chapters written by these researchers are of a different nature and structure from the rest of the chapters in this book.

Afghan Refugee Youth in Iran (Tehran and Mashhad)

Each team was invited to bring two researchers or other field assistants with them to the opening project workshop at Seville. Dr Hoodar brought with her Sarah Kamal, her field assistant and local team manager as well as Natalie Haghverdian, who would translate the final report of the project document into English. During the workshop they refined their team research strategy, keeping an eye on the way the Sahrawi team was progressing. The emphasis on interactive and participatory methods, particularly at the start of the project work, was a challenge for the Afghan team. Aware of the sensitivity in Iran regarding Afghan refugees – at this point in our research, the Iranian government was actively seeking to shut down Afghan informal schools and deport as many Afghan refugees as they could locate – the team wondered how they could best arrange to have regular access to refugee youth. Why would Afghan youth want to talk to them? The team suggested that the setting up of youth clubs might serve as a central structure for the research effort. It was felt that these clubs could help to develop a relationship with the youth that would be sustainable and long-term, and help the team to establish a presence in the Afghan

community that would allow youth and their parents to trust the research team and see them as a support network. It was important, the team felt, that they were not seen as representatives of the Iranian government nor seen as acting in their own interests.

As Iran had no youth organizations or recreational halls that Afghan refugee youth attended regularly, the team felt that the informal Afghan schools would be their best point of contact with youth between the ages of eight and eighteen. They determined to rent rooms in the informal Afghan schools which had sprung up over the last decade, and convert them into youth club offices to give the team a way to develop a relationship with youth and involve them in the study. Because the experiences of Afghan refugees in Iran are quite different in one part of the country from another, the team decided to have two study sites: one in the Afghan suburb of Tehran and the other in an Afghan quarter of the city of Mashhad.

At the close of the Seville workshop, Dr Hoodfar drafted an open-ended questionnaire based on her previous research with Afghan youth. She travelled to Iran the following month to begin organizing the local Afghan research team and to decide definitively on the field sites. While Afghan refugees in Iran did not live in camps, they did tend to cluster in low-income neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the cities. Dr Hoodfar chose one informal school in such an Afghan colony. Choosing a school in Mashhad was more problematic because local government officials were far more rigid about dealing with the informal Afghan schools.

The month of February 2003 was spent selecting research assistants for the team. Dr Hoodfar was determined to find someone who both the Afghan youth and the informal school could trust. Informal schools in Iran were under great pressure from the Iranian government to close down; thus the team research assistants would have to be trustworthy and acceptable to the school administration. Dr Hoodfar also wanted them to be Afghans and female – otherwise she would have lost access to female respondents. During this trip she identified a number of prospective candidates.

Her third major task during this trip was to find a way of managing some kind of governmental protection. Although she did not need official government permission to conduct the research, she felt she needed some kind of semi-official support. She decided to approach HAMI, a semi-governmental Iranian organization which worked with refugee women and children and had branches in both Tehran and Mashhad. Having organized this affiliation, Dr Hoodfar and Sarah Kamal, her research assistant and field manager, finalized their topics for the in-depth interviewing, and decided on a management system for generally tracking her progress, conducting, translating and transcribing interviews, and inputting the household socio-economic data on Excel spreadsheets.

In May 2003 Dr Hoodfar returned to Iran to commence fieldwork. She

established her Tehran research centre at Sarollah, an informal and self-funded Afghan-run school. They negotiated a twelve-month lease for a room at the school and planned to do something similar in Mashhad. Fieldwork commenced with an adapted form of the 'worry questionnaire' which had been introduced to both teams by Colin MacMullin at the Seville workshop. This participatory tool/instrument provided an entry into the community and the school and provided the research team with a sense of the anxieties of youth given the pressure on schools to close down.

The results of the community canvassing of the 'worry questionnaire' in Mashhad were good and many youths raised issues that were bothering them. They found the questionnaire a good way of letting others know their feelings and ideas. Consequently, Dr Hoodfar decided to set up the project research centre in the heart of the community and she proceeded to negotiate a seven-month lease in the home of Shocria, an Afghan female writer who had worked with her in the past, instead of at a school as these had been recently closed down by the Iranian government.

During this period Dr Hoodfar also finalized the composition of her research team. In Mashhad she hired Shocria Rezapakhsh and her sister Malakeh Batour, as well as Massoumeh Ahmadi, a female Afghan teacher at one of the closed informal Afghan schools. In Tehran she hired Fouzieh Sharifi, a female Afghan teacher at the Sarollah School, as well as Zohreh Hosseini, a female Afghan researcher. She explained the goals of the research and the job requirements and gave training in the use of the computers and digital cameras. Sarah Kamal conducted a series of technical training sessions with the research team over the next few months. Both offices in Mashhad and Tehran were then equipped with desks, computers, chairs, stationery and printers. In Tehran this also meant cleaning out the small dark room she had hired at the informal school and placing a door at the entrance to the room. By the end of the month the basic foundation for the fieldwork was in place. Sarah Kamal remained in Iran to train the team interviewers and also to commence her own participant observation fieldwork.

Dr Hoodfar returned to Iran in September and December for two further field trips. The next phase of the project was to develop youth clubs at both field sites so as to gain trust and also to give something back to the refugee youth. The youth had very little reason to trust either Dr Hoodfar or Sarah Kamal as both were Iranian and hence represented the government and the society that was so unkind to them. In Sarollah School a large youth club and a boys' football team were organized, with 100 participants. In Mashhad a smaller newsletter club and a girls' volleyball team were set up for twenty youths. These 120 refugee youths eventually comprised most of the in-depth interview sample.

The youth club in Sarollah was set up via an open meeting in which the school's youth were invited to sign up for one of seven different committees

with up to ten members each. The sign-up sheets for these committees were full within the first few days. A set of introductory meetings were then organized to explain to the youth how these meetings should run and be managed (chairperson, secretary, meeting minutes and agendas). Very quickly the youth learned how to run and manage their own meetings with some light support from the research team, and the club ran successfully for the next six months. Besides the Research Committee, which was deeply involved in the research effort, there was a Committee to Solve Community Problems. When, for example, issues emerged from the 'worry questionnaire', the Research Committee got together with the Committee to Solve Community Problems and set out to improve the condition of the school – a major issue derived from the 'worry questionnaire'. Working together, the youth bought and installed a fan to combat the sweltering conditions in the classroom, they cleaned and made minor renovations to the bathroom, they installed and maintained a large water cooler and they painted the class benches and tables in bright colours. They were clearly very proud of their club. The main youth activity at these clubs was the production of newsletters, the content of which the youth themselves decided. Typically the issues addressed youth concerns such as differences between boys and girls' lives, the life story of an Afghan woman, a seminar on the Afghan constitution, and the reproduction of a great deal of poetry written by the youth and others.

Although the team was not able to create exactly the same kind of structure for the youth club in Mashhad as they had in Tehran, they were still able to develop a strong relationship with the members and to create a participatory research partnership, particularly in the production of the club newsletters. These skills were then also applied to the data collection phase of the research project. They were given training in interviewing and note-taking and were later asked to launch the in-depth interviewing process by conducting introductory interviews with a predetermined list of Afghan youth in Mashhad.

Setting up these clubs was time-consuming and required a great deal of energy on the part of the local research team manager. It is possible that youth club membership may have influenced the kind of data which was gathered from them for this study. However, it does seem that it was the only strategy to take in order to develop and maintain links with the youth at a very unstable time in their lives. Not only were they Afghans under pressure from the Iranian government, but the Iranian state was also under internal pressure with the threat of an attempted overthrow of the Islamic regime very real.

Data collection began with the youth 'worry questionnaire' and then took on a variety of forms. The questionnaire gave the team a quick sense of Afghan youth concerns and helped them to revise their subsequent research tools, such as the Afghan youth essay competition and in-depth interview questionnaire. The main concerns to emerge from this questionnaire revolved

around the high cost of school and the dire economic situation at home; not having any documentation, and the subsequent lack of rights; prejudice against Afghans, having no future and the lack of support from the UNHCR. The research team held a number of small, participatory research exercises so that the youth would understand what the research was about. Then after several months of conducting short interviews amongst each other and with their families, the members of the Youth Club Research Committee were sent out to interview each other and their friends, armed with tape-recorders. This process gave them a good sense of the in-depth interview process which the research team was about to embark on.

The team conducted fifty-one in-depth interviews with Afghan youth, seventeen in Mashhad and thirty-eight in Tehran over a period of a few months. These were, shortly thereafter, translated into English and coded according to the topics which had been identified at the Seville workshop. A further fifty-one corresponding in-depth interviews of parents or guardians were also conducted. Every effort was made to sample more or less evenly from the different age groups and by gender. However, the final tally showed a slight skewing towards females and the higher age bracket. The average age of those youth interviewed was 14.8 years.

Table 0.1: Age and Gender of Afghan Interviewees

Age	Tally	%	Gender	Tally	%
8	1	2	Male	21	41
9			Female	30	59
10	2	4	Total	51	100
11	2	4			
12	4	8			
13	5	10			
14	7	14			
15	7	14			
16	8	16			
17	9	18			
18	6	12			
Total	51	100			

As the scheduled end of the research drew near in December 2003, the team began to plan an end ceremony or celebration. However, the youth pressed hard for an extension of the life of the youth clubs beyond the data gathering stage. Dr Hoodfar agreed to continue with modest financial support

for a further four months so that they could continue their activities a little longer. The final farewells were made in a large amphitheatre in May 2004 and each youth received an official youth club certificate for their efforts over the past year.

Sahrawi Youth in Algeria and Spain

Dr Randa Farah set about re-establishing her earlier contacts with the Polisario. She was able to locate a former Sahrawi colleague whom she had met when he had worked for the Polisario office in Washington DC in the 1980s. This was Radhi-Saghaiar Bachir, a high-ranking member of the Polisario who was also attached to the office of the President of the Polisario governing body, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). After carefully considering the aims of the project, he agreed to work with Dr Farah as her field manager and research associate. The first step was to arrange the obligatory, and as it turned out unusual, permission from the Polisario governing body for this research project to go ahead.

Dr Farah met with representatives of the Polisario in London, in order to acquire an invitation from the SADR (a condition for entering) to visit the refugee camps. While waiting for this permission to come through, she travelled to Spain and started identifying the various NGOs working in the Sahrawi refugee camps. She met with a number of these NGOs and explained the purposes of the research effort in the hope of creating a collaborative environment for herself and her team. These included Solidaridad Internacional; Movimiento por la Paz; Paz y Tercer Mundo; and the Asociación de Amigos del Pueblo Sahraui. While in Spain, she learned that her visa to the Sahrawi refugee camps had been approved and she travelled directly to the camps in Algeria from Spain as an official guest of the SADR.

There she met up with Radhi-Saghaiar Bachir and together they began the process of gaining permission from the Polisario/SADR government-in-exile for this long-term academic study to take place. She met with numerous SADR government officials and informed them of the project. At the same time she canvassed for potential local research assistants and interviewers. As few Sahrawi refugees had travel documents, the pool of possible assistants able to take part in our project workshop in Seville was going to be limited. This exploratory, initial trip confirmed for Dr Farah that there had been no previous academic research on children and adolescents, only policy-driven, short IGO/NGO studies and reports relating to the improvement of service provision. Most of the services provided by NGOs focused on responding to immediate needs, mainly food, shelter and health. The study of the coping strategies of older children and youth, which our

project was promoting, was unique among the Sahrawi.

In the past the only ‘foreign’ activities approved by the Polisario were primarily humanitarian and development projects. Purely ‘research’ projects tended not to be approved. Academics given access to the camps for a period longer than a week or two were generally already associated with NGOs and were from countries such as Spain and Italy where there was a wide network of support from civil society as well as deep historical links. Whereas the Afghan research team were able to quietly enter the country and commence their work directly with Afghan refugee youth, Dr Farah had no choice but to devote a great deal of time and energy in the early phases of the project to presenting the project to the Polisario leadership, translating the document, and returning to discussions concerning each element of the study in order to secure permission to proceed. This process took a year before the formal commencement of the study. Even with the approval from the highest level which Dr Farah succeeded in obtaining, the research project still faced many unexpected difficulties in being set up; some of these problems were related to the potential for bias – commonly found in tight state-control over research processes – and team employment.

Dr Farah attended the January 2003 Seville start-up workshop with her project manager, Radhi-Saghair Bachir, and a female researcher, Fatima Mohammed Salem. The team presented to the workshop what they saw as the peculiarities and hardships of working in a desert environment, and the problems of being entirely removed from any urban or even suburban context. It was clear from their presentations that this study was going to have to walk a very narrow path between being connected to the government – otherwise it would not be possible to work in the camps – and being sufficiently separate from government so as to enjoy an intellectual independence in the eyes of those being researched. The tight overview by the Polisario over the team’s movement, access and facilities threw up important ethical concerns regarding the freedom of voice, participation and agency among the Sahrawi youth and their families. Dr Farah had a very clear sense of these difficulties which in other circumstances it might have been possible to mitigate over the long term, had she been able to remain in residence in the camps over a period of months rather than weeks. Instead, she was only able to spend a few weeks at a time, three or four times a year, working with a largely untested research team unfamiliar with the qualitative and participatory tools which had been agreed upon for this project. Furthermore, here in the Sahrawi camps, she was entering into one of the most inhospitable places on earth, where summer temperatures in the 50s C° – for nearly four to five months of the year – brought activity and movement in the daytime to a near halt.

The immediate issue regarding the Sahrawi study was how to turn the formal permission from the Polisario for this project into a community-wide

activity. The team needed to gain widespread support beyond that provided by officialdom. Using mechanisms of SADR state control to the benefit of the project, Dr Farah and her team decided to seek consent from the community by first setting up radio interviews in the camps to discuss the potential benefits of the project to the community. These radio shows, they felt, would be far more effective than any written letters, as oral transmission of information remained important in the formerly partially-nomadic community.

In the Sahrawi team's presentation of their provisional research strategy at the close of the Seville workshop, it was agreed that the fieldwork effort would start in the Sahrawi schools. The team agreed that they would select several classes and ask for permission to conduct a modified form of the Colin McMullin 'worry questionnaire'. This exercise would be conducted by the teams without the support of the class teacher. This modified 'worry questionnaire' exercise would give the team an opportunity to gain an understanding of the concerns of Sahrawi youth and perhaps to modify the topics that would form part of the later in-depth interviewing. It was also hoped that this participatory exercise might help identify youth who would be interested in taking part in this detailed and extensive interviewing.

In the following month, Dr Farah travelled out to the Sahrawi camps where she interviewed potential research assistants. Most of these candidates either had jobs with the various Ministries of the SADR or were heavily committed to volunteer work in the camps. During this same visit, Radhi-Saghair Bachir was able to arrange permission from the SADR Ministry of Education to conduct the 'worry questionnaire'. This was administered immediately by Dr Farah to a class of girls and boys between the ages of eleven and fifteen at the 9th of June School. As the 'worry questionnaire' had been originally set up to be administered in school classroom settings, and was so conducted in our Palestinian study, we were not particularly concerned with any particularly methodological issues. Dr Farah did, however, express some concern with the rigid and controlling manner in which the Sahrawi schoolteachers managed their charges. The results of the questionnaire which Dr Farah administered – as with the Palestinian 'worry questionnaires' – focused on community and group issues rather than individual fears. From their responses, the research team was able to derive a general idea of the concerns of youth: worry about the continuing occupation of Western Sahara; fear of failure at school; concern about leaving their families to study abroad; concern about their physical environment; and interest in the community becoming better off. These responses helped Dr Farah and her team to reshape their interview topics. It also gave her some guidance for planning future participatory activity with youth on her next field trip.

In the summer of 2003, Dr Farah returned to the Sahrawi camps in order

to complete her selection of researchers and interviewers. She extended her team to include, in addition to Radhi-Saghair Bachir and Fatima Mohammed Salem, Abdati Breica Ibrahim, Mohammed Ali, Noueha and Mohammed el Mokhtar Bouh. With these six university graduates, Dr Farah hoped she had found a way around the problems of setting up a research team in this extremely harsh and inhospitable environment. There was the problem of long-distance travel, among a community where travel for extended periods was not unusual. There was the problem of finding those with time to work for her, as all university graduates are obliged to work for the SADR or Polisario upon completion of their education. By spreading out the research load among all six researchers, Dr Farah hoped they would be able to conduct the interviews for her in their spare time. Thus, they could keep their SADR government jobs and at the same time benefit by having this additional employment. Our earlier Palestinian study had relied on a number of researchers who held day-jobs with UNRWA so we did not see this SADR government 'employment' as an insurmountable conflict of interest.

In December 2003, both Dr Farah and I visited the camps for several weeks and met with the extended research team. We spent several days reviewing research methodology and, in particular, the importance of qualitative interviewing. It was clear from these discussions that the team had a strong preference for 'hard' data and were genuinely sceptical of the potential for quantitative research. All of Dr Farah's interviewers had experience with quantitative tools, particularly closed question questionnaires, and would have preferred the study to have had a quantitative focus. Thus, they were all particularly interested in the rather detailed household codes for each extended family group that was to be included in the sample of fifty in-depth interviews. Both Dr Farah and I continued the training of the team members, pressing on with qualitative interviewing training in the hope that they would soon feel comfortable with this, apparently, novel approach to research.

I encouraged Dr Farah to purchase a four-wheel drive vehicle for the project – up to now she had depended entirely on Radhi-Saghair Bachir and his vehicle to move around the camps. Generally, she paid for petrol, tyre replacements and any repairs for this vehicle. However, I felt that it was important for the project to have its own means of transportation in a society where mobility was limited but highly prized. A project vehicle would have been seen by many local Sahrawis to represent the a form of independence from the SADR government.

Fearing that the quantitative bent of her research team would overcome her efforts to develop a more qualitative and participatory approach, I also encouraged her to identify her strongest two researchers to give more concerted training in in-depth interviewing, with an eye to shifting the

weight of this task on to them alone. During our discussion with her team at this time (December 2003), the following arguments were put forward by her researchers regarding the way in which fieldwork should be conducted and under what conditions:

Movement and transportation were difficult, especially during the hot season. The researchers felt it would be easier for people to work within the neighbourhood, or the camp, in which they lived without having to travel. Many people who worked in a location other than their home camp often slept at the work site. The same was true about visiting (including women) friends in other camps; such visits were often overnight or continued sometimes for days.

When possible (that is when visas/passports and finances are available), Sahrawis go to Algiers, Spain, Mauritania and the Canary Islands, often for months at a time. For this reason it was important to have a large research team to catch people when they were around the camps.

Team members did not feel comfortable interviewing families whom they did not know very well. Thus, there was a general consensus among the team members that it would be easier if they interviewed families that they knew, including relatives. Many began with their neighbours or with their own families. There was a lot of deference in the culture and in-depth interviewing required trust and a certain level of familiarity that was best nurtured by family or neighbours.

Furthermore, some of the male members of the team remarked that it seemed strange for men to interview children. They felt it would be regarded with disbelief by other people and they – the male researchers – might be ‘laughed at’. In hindsight, these comments by the research team should have been taken seriously but, at the time, they were regarded as trivial complaints. However, at the end of the research process, it became clear that these remarks should have been grounds to obtain specific undertakings from the male researchers that they would interview children. The research project was, after all, about youth. Furthermore, the field decision to interview family and neighbours raised a number of other ethical issues specifically regarding maintaining the confidentiality of the informants and respecting any wish to remain anonymous. Fortunately for the project, most Sahrawi wanted their story to be told, as they felt, rightly or wrongly, that their story of forced migration and exile has been largely muted by wider international political concerns.

Closing up the Field Sites

In March 2004, I organized a ‘dissemination’ workshop for the two teams in Damascus to discuss their provisional findings and identify issues, to be included in a ‘Lessons Learned Report’ for interested IGOs and NGOs working in these fields. Each team invited an important governmental or NGO figure from their field site to take part in the discussions and hear the findings which might influence future policy planning and programming with refugee youth. Dr Farah invited the Sahrawi Minister of Education. At this meeting it emerged that there were, as yet, only a dozen or so interviews completed by either the Afghan or the Sahrawi team. We renegotiated with both teams a new schedule for completing the in-depth interviewing. The deadline of August 2004 was agreed upon at this time and it was decided that all interviews would be completed, translated, transcribed and sent to Oxford by the end of August.

In the summer of 2004, both Dr Hoodfar and Dr Farah returned to their field sites to press forward on collecting the last of the interviews. During this time Dr Farah had the unique opportunity to travel to the Liberated Territories with some of her research team members and visited a number of families, most of whom were herding livestock – mainly camels and goats. This period of time, Dr Farah reported, was extraordinary as it gave her an opportunity to interview a number of respected elders and oral historians of the Sahrawi past. She also had the chance to spend time with youth out of the context of their schools in the refugee camps and to engage in some participant observation as well as some visual photography projects with youth.

By September 2004 the Afghan team had completed their interviews and finalized their field report but the Sahrawi team was struggling to complete the English translation of their interviews. In late August and then again in November Dr Farah travelled to Spain and Italy to enlist the support of the Sahrawi delegation in translating these interviews. Radhi-Saghaier Bachir, on a tour of Europe for Polisario business at that time, spent a week with her translating these remaining interviews.

Interviewing children proved unexpectedly and particularly difficult for the Sahrawi team. In hindsight, it is hard to separate whether this was due to the rigid Polisario control over so many aspects of the research effort or cultural factors, or a combination of inappropriate training and a powerful cultural discourse. Dr Farah had reported from very early contacts that it was much easier to hold informal conversations with children than with adults. Such encounters formed a body of participant observation notes from which she was able to get a general sense of children’s place in society, their concerns and worries as well as sense of their social identity, or belonging to the group. The themes raised by the children she came across in this

informal fashion focused on issues such as the extreme and harsh climate they lived in, their general poverty, and the lack of school materials or even toys. However, collecting data on children in more formal settings through household interviewing and narrative collection proved very difficult. Male team members, in particular, expressed discomfort at having conversations with the younger generation. The best information came from informal and spontaneous conversations with young people in the camps and in the Liberated Areas.

In the spring of 2005, when all of the fifty Sahrawi household interviews had been completed, translated, transcribed and sent to Oxford, I realized that only thirteen of the fifty household interviews actually included a young informant between the ages of eight and eighteen. The household coding had been completed to perfection, but in most cases the voices of Sahrawi youth were muted, the text reflecting an adherence to official Polisario narrative not often found in informants so young. Where the voices of the youth were heard, they appeared in the interviews which had been conducted by Dr Farah's female researchers.

What the fifty interviews did reveal was a strong focus on movement in and out of the camps, mainly of children going to summer camp in Spain, but also of adults travelling to Mauritania, the Liberated Areas and Spain. Young and old alike spoke of the summer experience in Spain. I asked Dr Farah whether she would be able to send her team back to the camps to try to tap into the voices of youth. Dr Farah unfortunately felt that cultural constraints were such that she could not ask her team to do any more than they had done.¹⁰ In order to bring out the voices of Sahrawi youth, I commissioned a further study in the summer camps of Spain where the words of young people could be recorded. The project research assistant, Gina Crivello, and my doctoral student, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, agreed to spend a month in Spain in the summer of 2005 interviewing Sahrawi children and their Spanish hosts in order to bring to life the voice of Sahrawi refugee youth. The findings from this month-long study have contributed to the development of chapter 1 on identity and territory as well as chapter 2 focusing on transnational networks and Sahrawi children.

The Sahrawi and Afghan teams faced very different field sites and extremes in welcome and accommodation. The Afghan study was smoothly integrated informally – without official government involvement – into a community already familiar with the research team and which was seeking expression and agency. The Sahrawi study, on the other hand, had to negotiate a strong-armed government effort to control and manage the research effort. No step could be made without official sanction among a people – much like the Palestinians in the 1960s – who largely voiced a formalistic, government-approved discourse. The details of this section regarding the processes of setting up, administrating and closing down this

research effort among largely Muslim refugee youth in very different social and political contexts are valuable in assessing and comprehending the findings of the chapters which follow.

Chapters in this Volume

This volume is divided into two parts: Part I includes chapters related to Sahrawi refugee youth; Part II is drawn from data on the Afghan refugee youth. Part I is made up of three chapters: chapter 1, Identity with/out Territory: Sahrawi Refugee Youth in Transnational Space; chapter 2, The Ties that Bind: Sahrawi Children and the Mediation of Aid in Exile; and chapter 3, Food and Identity among Sahrawi Refugee Children and Young People. Chapter 1, by Chatty, Crivello and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, sets out the contested history of the Sahrawi people and explores the social and political conditions which have led to the pre-eminence of formal education and learning-based activities within Sahrawi society as well as the emergence of significant transnational education networks. Based upon both the in-depth family interviews in the Sahrawi camps as well as the individual interviews with children and youth participating in a summer host programme in Spain, the chapter examines how Sahrawi youth identities have emerged in such a transnational context and how the Sahrawi government ‘in exile’ has promoted and encouraged this development. The chapter also looks at how Sahrawi youth come to terms with their reintegration into the refugee camps after months, if not years, abroad. It suggests that the original tribal ideology of pastoral-based mobility, while not representative of all Sahrawi people, may help to explain the relative ease with which many adults, if not the youth themselves, have accepted and tolerated long physical and temporal absence of close kin as part of the duty of a good Sahrawi citizen.

Chapter 2 by Crivello and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh then explores the way in which Sahrawi refugee children taking part in the annual *Vacaciones en Paz* (Vacations for Peace) in Spain came to mediate the flow of humanitarian aid and other expressions of solidarity for their families and the broader Sahrawi community-in-exile. This chapter is based on nearly fifty interviews with Sahrawi refugee children in the summer of 2005 in Madrid. It documents the views of Sahrawi children in relation to their daily lives in refugee camps, their ‘guest’ experience in Spain, and their aspirations for the future. The chapter also looks at the views of the Spanish host-parents and integrates information about the kind of support which they offer their guest child(ren) over the years. Crivello and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh see the *Vacaciones en Paz* programme as a vital transnational network that facilitates the shared care of Sahrawi children. The hosting scheme also illustrates the way in which mobility has become a necessary feature of Sahrawi childhoods in exile.

Chapter 3 by Cozza examines the relationship between food and social identity among young Sahrawi camp refugees and complements the later chapter by Monsutti on issues related to food and social identity among Afghan youth. Although the social importance of food is widely acknowledged, little work has appeared in refugee studies on this subject. In this context, this chapter and that by Monsutti in Part II have sought to explore how the condition of forced migration and prolonged displacement might affect food practice, and to what extent changes in food practices and possible resistance to such changes might play a role in the reproduction of social ties and the construction of group identities. Cozza intends the chapter to provoke further debate on the relationship between food, displacement and identity. He finds that there are three categories of food among Sahrawi camp refugees: traditional food, food-aid and new food. For youth, there was an assumption among adults that a preference for new food was widespread and derived from their experiences in the Spanish summer camps as well as their general lack of ability in knowing what is best for them. Such explanations of youth's preferences for new foods, Cozza argues, reveal how food practices have taken part not only in the social construction of adulthood and childhood but also in intergenerational relationships. The relationship between food, gender and ideas of beauty are also examined in this chapter, together with a discussion of how youth's distinctive food preferences have acquired political significance.

Part II consists of three chapters: chapter 4, *Refusing the Margins: Afghan Refugee Youth in Iran*; chapter 5, *Afghan Refugee Youth in Iran and the Morality of Repatriation*; and chapter 6, *Food and Identity among Young Afghan Refugees and Migrants in Iran*. In chapter 4, Hoodfar sets the focus clearly on education while at the same time providing a general overview of the research effort in Iran. Drawing on her long research association with refugee women and children in Iran, Hoodfar prioritizes the remarkable development and manipulation of education, particularly for girls, among Afghan refugees. What is a defining element in the lives of these refugees is the way in which what was once cited as a major reason for fleeing Afghanistan – the imposition of compulsory education by the Soviets – had become a major priority – the acquiring of education, particularly for their daughters, as a requirement of good Muslims. Despite restrictions on access to education imposed on Afghan refugees by an Iranian government tired of looking after millions of refugees, the Afghan community developed informal, self-directed and self-funded schools. The Iranian government policy of banning Afghan children from Iranian schools, Hoodfar argues, has had far-reaching and unintended social, economic and political consequences. The chapter analyses the political and social conditions that led to the emergence of education as a priority for Afghan refugees over the last decade and explores how the attendance of Afghan students in Iranian

schools led to their developing a sense of ‘Muslimness’ as their primary identity, legitimizing their entitlement to education, security and equity.

Chapter 5 by Kamal examines the repatriation concerns of Afghan youth. It looks at the way in which they expressed and acted out their concerns in 2003 and then follows up four youth who moved to Afghanistan in 2006 and another four who remained in Iran. Kamal offers a comparative account of ‘return’ from the perspective of these Afghan youth as embedded within their family and peer group. In particular, the chapter explores the Afghan youth’s experiences of return as related to their construction of self and their future during the three-year time span she observed following a coercive Afghan repatriation programme. Contrary to her expectations, Kamal found that the returnee youth were happier and expressed greater satisfaction with their living conditions. She suggests that perhaps for these Afghan refugees born in exile, enduring the suffering of return was a rite of passage which initiated them into Afghan society.

Chapter 6 by Monsutti is the companion piece to chapter 3 by Cozza. It examines food practices among young Afghan refugees and migrants in Iran and finds this to be an arena where identities are negotiated in their complexity. Monsutti examines three areas of tension related to food and food habits. At the impersonal level, there is the ideal of equality which is implied by commensality; this conflicts with the reality of hierarchy which is inherent to hospitality. At the personal level, migration to Iran has led to a process of urbanization and detribalization and with it an abstract sense of ‘Afghan-ness’ which is embedded in emblematic dishes. These coexist with the narrower concept of self and everyday foods related to the specific regions of origin in Afghanistan. Finally Monsutti finds that food also expresses the ambivalent perception among Afghans of their Iranian host society. Among Afghan refugee youth and migrants there is an oscillation between a fascination with the modernity of Iran and bitterness towards the Iranian authorities who make them feel used and despised.

Conclusion

The chapters which follow offer a fascinating insight into the lives of refugee youth on the edges of the Middle East and North Africa. Their experiences call for some generalizations – both in the similarities of responses to prolonged forced migration, and in the differences which the specific contexts of lives caught in limbo take on – and may lead to further research questions being tested in the future on refugee youth in the region. Four key areas which have emerged as particularly significant in this study of refugee youth on the margins of the Middle East include: multiple or contested identification with places and spaces; opportunism and agency related to

gender discrimination and education; resilience and optimism expressed through further migration, and transnational networking in the face of poverty and limited political expression.

Multiple or Contested Identification with Places and Spaces

Ethnic or national identity is cultivated among all peoples through a variety of social processes and institutions. The family and oral history narration are particularly important to refugee youth as well as 'hegemonic social narratives that are not of their own making' (Somers 1994). For the Sahrawi in their camp schools and the Afghan students of the informal schools in Iran, schooling instils a deep sense of identity. Most of the young people in our research programme could describe the villages, towns and urban centres from which their families originated even though many had never been there, providing another layer of identity and connection to the imagined homeland and place of belonging. Afghan youth sought out ways to learn more about their homelands through the internet and by setting up peer-group circulated newsletters and poetry readings as well as historical prose competitions about their places of origin.

Much like the heteroglossia identified among the elderly former settlers of Algeria (*pieds-noirs*) of non-French European origins, contradictory narratives or the juxtaposition of competing voices (Bakhtin 1981, 1986) is a multivocality which is increasingly becoming recognized not only in research into popular memory but also in the narratives of the past by people of any subject position (Smith 2004:252). In the case of the material presented by Smith, former settlers of Algeria narrated their past integration in Algeria with both positive and negative memories. Sometimes the same informant spoke both of successful integration and in a later narration of its failure.

We did not expect to find contestation in terms of belonging and identity among refugee youth in the Sahrawi and the Afghan case material. However, we were surprised to find that multiplicity of identity and some contestation over social memory did exist among these youth. This finding suggested to us that there may, in fact, be a commonality, a multivocality and a heteroglossia among refugee youth in situations of prolonged forced migration across the Middle East and North Africa. The importance of identity and the sense of being 'different' and 'the same', of belonging and of being excluded, is shared by all the refugee youth who participated in the study. This may be explained by the reality of prolonged migration, of being different and marginal in a largely otherwise homogenous society or as an integral part of the social category of youth.

Gendered Opportunism and Agency of Youth

A commitment to helping the family, by taking any opportunity to work, generally in the informal economy, while also attempting to maintain a presence in schooling, was common across our data sets. However, a closer examination of this material revealed widespread gender discrimination which affected access to opportunities for employment as well as support for remaining in education. Throughout, girls faced restrictions on their movement and expression, and had heavier workloads in the household. Furthermore, early or arranged marriage often impacted on the girl's education; in most cases marriage marked the end of their educational opportunities. Clearly gendered similarities in findings become less obvious, however, in terms of the ideology of education. Across the field education was described as the most significant element in terms of future betterment.

Among Afghan refugees, the education of females was often the reason the family went to Iran (due to a fear that the Taliban in Afghanistan, who had banned education for girls, might still be restored to power). One of the greatest fears among Afghan families in Iran was that upon returning to Afghanistan, their girls and young women would lose many perceived freedoms, in particular, their right to employment and public mobility as well as education.¹¹ Many refugees argued that it was a religious duty to educate women, supported by the example of women in the Quran who had been educated. Among the Sahrawi refugee communities, the access to education was almost equal for girls and boys, up to university scholarships for male and female youth in Cuba, Algeria, Spain and Syria. On their return to the camps from abroad, Sahrawi male youths often leave for extended periods of time to tend to their family's herds, engage in trade, or participate in political activities. The presence of females in the camps is very noticeable. Women are particularly active in the daily administration of camp life and civil society. The progressive socialist agenda of SADR promotes an official image of gender equality and democratic organization in the Sahrawi camps. The role that women play in various aspects of camp life is important, as they comprise an estimated eighty per cent of the adult population.

Resilience and Optimism

Although economic and political activities are particularly gendered in the Palestinian and Afghan communities and not so formally in the Sahrawi, the refugee youth all exhibited remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, poverty and political morasses. Refugee youth looked to the future with optimism whether it involved leaving school and working, or emigrating and supporting their families through remittances. It was not unusual for school-age children to drop out of school or take on informal work outside of school

to supplement their families' incomes. The financial hardships faced by Afghan children and their families in Iran did not undermine the youth's determination to get as much schooling as possible. Afghan children were often expected to contribute to the family income, and made to juggle the demands of school and work on a daily basis. When school interfered with their ability to generate an income, however minimal, youth often had to abandon their education in order to work full-time. The jobs for which they were hired were often dangerous (e.g. assembly line work lacking safety nets, garbage collection and sorting without protective clothing or gloves). At the same time, we observed that young Afghans undertaking manual labour regarded it as a source of pride and a trait that distinguishes them from the Iranian population. However, political activism among Afghan refugee youth in Iran was, out of necessity, muted. Here it was important to blend in with the surrounding Iranian population and not be easily identified as an Afghan refugee. Instead the youth demanded an outlet for their self-expression in the form of newsletters, and poetry and prose competitions.

However, among Sahrawi youth political participation was largely shaped by the governance structures in the refugee camps. The school curriculum, planned by SADR, included a political education. Reliance on humanitarian food packages and a general lack of employment opportunities encouraged young people to continue their education to secondary and tertiary level.

Emigration, or the desire to emigrate, to find work and send remittances back to their families, is a form of hope among all these refugee youth. Among Sahrawis, permanent emigration is limited as SADR encourages the formation of transnational links in Spain, Cuba and other places in the Middle East over settlement abroad. Afghans, on the other hand, have a long history of migration to Iran. Many of the families who participated in the study had members who had first migrated there over fifteen or twenty years ago.

Many of the conclusions drawn in the earlier Palestinian refugee youth study resonate in the following chapters. Yet their expression has varied, highlighting the importance of local context and historical specificity. Seeking an education, while also committing to helping the family, was, among each of these sets of refugee youth, significant. So, too, was their resilience and optimism expressed through the constant searches for identity, work or self employment in the informal economy and their awareness and response to gender discrimination. By drawing together in this volume these two related but distinct examples of young refugee lives at the margins of the Middle East and North Africa, it has become possible to identify features that are shared across the region. At the same time it allows us to better understand the specificities of each refugee case and so improve our understanding of both the commonalities and the differences that exist in refugee youth's response to prolonged forced migration.

Notes

1. The perception of exceptionalism can be overcome by setting up further studies, using a similar methodology, allowing for the comparisons between the data sets on other refugee youth. However, critics of comparative studies frequently assert that anthropological and especially participatory studies are not framed in such a way as to be empirically comparable. I take the position that generalization is at the core of the anthropological knowledge project of cross-cultural or cross-societal comparison and that social science is the study of meaningful human behaviour.
2. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) does have a presence in Iran and in the Sahrawi refugee camps, but both operations have limited budgets.
3. The Palestinian group, however, had a particularly significant Christian minority.
4. According to United Nations' figures for 1998, there were 275,000 inhabitants in Western Sahara, excluding Moroccan settlers in the territory, as well as refugees in neighbouring countries.
5. On 27 February 1976, the day after the Spanish officially withdrew from the territory, the Polisario proclaimed an independent Western Sahara (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, or SADR).
6. The Smara, Auserd and Aaiun camps are located in close proximity to one another and each claims around 40,000–45,000 residents. The fourth camp, Dakhla, is located at some distance from the others and claims a higher population of between 45,000 and 50,000 residents. Each camp is intended to function as a self-contained wilaya or province of SADR. Each wilaya is divided into six *daira* or districts, with Dakhla having seven due to its slightly higher population. Each *daira* is subdivided into four *hay* or sub-districts (UNHCR (2003/4/5) Statistical Overview 2002/3/4). Available at www.unhcr.org.
7. By 1998, their official numbers reached some 2.35 million and by 1992, nearly 3 million.
8. The Middle East is here defined as stretching from Mauretania to the West and Afghanistan to the East. This broad geographical definition has been widely used in recent years by a number of scholars working in the region (see for example Eickelman 2001).
9. The very high regard in which the Palestinian, Sahrawi and Afghan communities held education meant that the school classroom was an ideal initial point to commence fieldwork for this project. Permission was sought, and gained from – in the case of the Sahrawi – the Polisario government in exile and – in the case of the Afghan refugee community in Iran – the individual informal school headteachers. Any bias or compromise which such authority figures may have had on the research were compensated for by the ease of access and gradual transition to a less structured field situation.
10. Dr Farah was invited to write chapter 2 for this volume. However, she declined the invitation and passed a message through the Chair of her department at the University of Western Ontario that she might engage with this material at some time in the future.

11. Kamal remarks that although some of the refugees who returned to Afghanistan recognised that the quality of education was higher in Iran, the prospect of not being able to attend university or having schools shut down in Iran was a big factor in promoting their return to Afghanistan (personal communications, August 2007).

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