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*Alessandro Monsutti*

## **Migration as a Rite of Passage: Young Afghans Building Masculinity and Adulthood in Iran<sup>1</sup>**

*Migration is part of the Afghan social and cultural landscape. In spite of the unprecedented wave of returns following the fall of the Taliban regime and the establishment of a government backed by the international community, multidirectional cross-border movements will not come to an end. This paper focuses on the case of Hazara male migrants moving between the mountains of Central Afghanistan and the cities of Iran. For many young men, migration offers the opportunity to broaden their social networks beyond narrow kinship and neighborhood ties. It may be conceived as a necessary stage in their existence, a rite of passage to adulthood and a step toward manhood: the perilous journey may be understood as a spatial and partially social separation from the families and homes which contributes to cut the links with the period of childhood; their stay in Iran, during which they have to prove their capacity to face hardship and to save money while living among itinerant and temporary working teams, represents a period of liminality; at their return to their village of origin, they will be reincorporated as adult marriageable men, although they will keep commuting between Afghanistan and Iran for part of their life.*

### *Beyond Repatriation: The Existence of Ongoing Cross-border Movements*

Migration is part of the Afghan social and cultural landscape. Afghans have had a long history of migration in its various forms—seasonal movements of nomads who bring their herds to better pasture lands, but who take the opportunity to trade with sedentary farmers; mountain people who go to urban centers or to lowlands in order to find any menial job; and pilgrims, soldiers, or refugees.

The war, which has torn apart Afghanistan after the Communist coup of April 1978 and the Soviet invasion of 1979, has, nevertheless, given a more dramatic and massive dimension to those movements of populations. At the beginning of the 1990s, Afghans formed the most numerous refugee group in the world,

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on several field researches in Iran supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in 1996 and 1998, by the Mellon Foundation in 2003 (for a project of the Refugee Studies Centre of Oxford supervised by Dawn Chatty and entitled *Children and Adolescents in Sabrawi and Afghani Refugee Households in Algeria and Iran: Living with the Effects of Prolonged Conflict and Forced Migration*), and by the MacArthur Foundation in 2004 (for a personal project entitled *Beyond the Boundaries: Hazara Migratory Networks from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran toward Western Countries*). I would like to thank the reviewer, M. Jamil Hanifi, and Sarah Kamal for their helpful comments.

accounting for nearly half the total falling under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>2</sup> In 1990, a peak of 6.22 million Afghan refugees was reached. Large numbers returned after the Soviet withdrawal (1989) and the capture of Kabul by resistance forces (1992), but over the following years, this trend was partially reversed as more outward flows accompanied the new outbreaks of fighting, especially in the Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul regions. The American-led intervention of autumn 2001 and the subsequent fall of the Taliban regime, the establishment of a government in Kabul backed by the international community in winter 2001–2002, and the prospect of a restoration of normality have caused an unprecedented wave of returns. Around 3.5 million refugees are believed to have gone back to Afghanistan, more than three million of them having benefited from the UNHCR's assistance (for what is considered the most important repatriation campaign in the history of the UN agency), while several hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) had regained their villages.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the population of Afghan descent living abroad is still considerable, possibly exceeding the number of returnees.

The sustainability of such a large return movement has been questioned by many. Turton and Marsden,<sup>4</sup> for instance, assess the repatriation operation, reintegration opportunities, and the role and interests of the international community. They stress the fact that many registered returnees may be “recyclers,” repatriating to Afghanistan, getting the assistance package, and then going back to Pakistan or Iran. Some others may be seasonal migrants with no intention of staying in Afghanistan on a long-term basis. They also drew attention to the difficulties returnees faced in resettling, leading to a “backflow” of returnees to Iran and Pakistan and further movement within Afghanistan.

Return to Afghanistan does not necessarily mean the end of displacements and may prompt onward passage, following a pattern of multidirectional cross-border movements. Channels of pre-established transnational networks exist between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, as the movement of individuals to seek work, to escape drought or to flee war has been a common experience in Afghanistan. Families and individuals continue to move, and it seems unlikely that the back-and-forth movements will stop while they constitute a key livelihood strategy.

Migration to Afghanistan's neighboring countries, and the very significant sum of remittances sent home, can be seen not only as a response to war and insecurity, but also as an efficient economic strategy for households and a

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<sup>2</sup>Rupert Colville, “Afghan Refugees: Is International Support Draining Away After Two Decades in Exile?” *Refugee* 17, no. 4 (1998): 6.

<sup>3</sup>See the UNHCR site: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/afghan?page=chrono> and <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=421316072> (26 July 2006).

<sup>4</sup>David Turton and Peter Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan* (Kabul, 2002).

crucial contribution to the economy of the country as a whole. There is a clear pattern of multidirectional cross-border movements that indicates the ongoing, cyclical nature of migration—blurring the boundaries between refugees and voluntary migrants.<sup>5</sup>

This paper focuses on the case of Hazara male migrants moving between the mountains of Central Afghanistan and the cities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which represents their main migratory destination.<sup>6</sup> More generally, many Afghans have been shifting from one place to the next for years—some never returning to their place of origin and others only on a temporary basis before deciding to return into Iran, Pakistan, or further afield. Young men, who have not traveled before, are still choosing to leave Afghanistan, suggesting that displacement is not only caused by conflict. Migration is a way of life rather than merely a response to external constraint and does not prevent the reproduction of relations of solidarity and trust. For young Afghans, migration offers the opportunity to broaden and to diversify their social networks beyond narrow kinship and neighborhood ties. It may even be conceived as a necessary stage in their existence, a rite of passage<sup>7</sup> to adulthood and then a step toward manhood. The dangers of the journey may be understood as a difficult separation from family and home; their stay in Iran, during which they have to prove their capacity to face hardship and save money while living among itinerant working teams, represents a period of liminality; their return to Afghanistan may be seen as an incorporation, as they often get married and then change their social status.

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<sup>5</sup>On those questions, see Alessandro Monsutti, “Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras,” *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004): 219–240; *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazaras of Afghanistan* (New York, 2005); and Elca Stigter and Alessandro Monsutti, *Transnational Networks: Recognising a Regional Reality* (Kabul, 2005). See also M. Jamil Hanifi, “Anthropology and the Representations of Recent Migrations from Afghanistan,” in *Rethinking Refuge and Displacement: Selected Papers on Refugees and Immigrants*, ed. E.M. Godziak and D.J. Shandy, VIII (Arlington, 2000), 291–321. This author considers in a historical perspective the political economy of the whole region of which Afghanistan is a part. He argues that all the Afghans who left their country in the 1980s and 1990s cannot be univocally labeled as refugees, as they have followed ancient patterns of economic migration.

<sup>6</sup>The destinations often differ from one community to another. Shiites tend to go more to Iran than to countries with a Sunni majority. The Hazaras, who are predominantly Shiites, constitute in particular more than 40 percent of all the documented Afghans in Iran, but only a tiny minority in Pakistan and in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula; see Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Diana Glazebrook, Gholamreza Jamshidiha, Hossein Mahmoudian, and Rasoul Sadeghi, *Return to Afghanistan? A Study of Afghans Living in Tebran* (Kabul, 2005), 18.

<sup>7</sup>The notion of rite of passage had been proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century by Arnold Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage: Étude systématique des rites...* (Paris, 1981), rev. ed., and then reframed by Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London, 1969) and Pierre Bourdieu, “Les rites comme actes d’institution,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 43 (1982): 58–63. These are rituals and ceremonies performed at major junctures of social life, like birth, marriage or death. Each rite generally involves three stages: separation, transition (or liminality), and incorporation.

*From One Revolution to Another: The Afghans in Iran*

The Islamic Revolution in Iran almost coincided with the Communist coup and the subsequent Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1978–1979). Yet, both countries have developed in very different ways. Despite an endemic crisis, the Iranian economy offers an attractive labor market and numerous employment opportunities; Afghans began to migrate to Iran before the Communist coup of 1978, and some had been going there in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that until the fall of the Taliban, the number of Afghans in Iran had been more stable than in Pakistan, being less dependent upon the political-military situation in Afghanistan. In 1990, Pakistan had 3.27 million Afghans (compared with 2.94 million in Iran), whereas in 1996, UNHCR figures (UNHCR 1998) show more in Iran than in Pakistan (1.4 million and 1.2 million, respectively).

Unlike Pakistan, the presence of the agencies of the United Nations and the international NGOs in Iran has been discreet, and it is assumed that less than 3 percent of the Afghans lived in refugee camps.<sup>9</sup> Afghans were welcome as Muslim brothers fleeing their country where they were unable to practice Islam, and most of them were integrated in the labor market at a time when Iranian youth were involved in the war against Iraq.

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and the fall of the regime of Najibullah in 1992, the attitude of the Iranian authorities towards the Afghan presence became progressively tougher. Ever since the international coalition led by American forces intervened in Afghanistan, causing the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, the conditions of life for Afghans in Iran have deteriorated further. The authorities have increasingly been implementing a policy to limit their number and to push them back, arguing that their home country is now peaceful. Regulation of the labor market became stricter. Police control building sites and factories, and employers hiring illegal Afghan workers are severely fined. Welfare facilities (in education and health sectors) are progressively withdrawn. Under pressure, several hundred thousands Afghan refugees and migrants have decided to repatriate.

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<sup>8</sup>Actually, the presence of the Hazaras in Iran goes back a long way before the 1978 coup, as they were probably involved in the massive population transfers of the eighteenth century, especially in the reign of Nader Shah Afshar (1736–1747). See John R. Perry, “Forced Migration in Iran during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Iranian Studies* 8, no. 4 (1975): 199–215. Captain Napier, a British intelligence officer who traveled in northeast Iran in 1874, noted the presence of Hazaras in Khorasan before the subjugation of Hazarajat by Abdur Rahman (1891–1893), even if the identity and the religious affiliation of such a group are not totally clear. G. C. Napier, *Collection of Journals and Reports from Captain the Hon. G. C. Napier* (London, 1876). See also *Gazeteer of Afghanistan: Herat*, vol. 3, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Calcutta, 1910).

<sup>9</sup>See Colville, “Afghan Refugees: Is International Support Draining Away After Two Decades in Exile?” *Refuge* 17, no. 4 (1998): 6–11 and Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, and Sadeghi, *Return to Afghanistan?*, 16.

However serious the Iranian efforts to control illegal activity might be, one sometimes has the impression that the authorities are playing a game of cat-and-mouse. On the one hand, the country has needed Afghan manpower (especially during the Iran-Iraq war and the ensuing reconstruction), but the government also wants to avoid a Pakistani-style situation—where Afghans have monopolized several sectors of the economy—and take various steps to discourage integration and long-term residence. This complicated policy, where repression alternates with periods of much greater tolerance, leads to a degree of arbitrariness that may be ruinous to the morale of the Afghans.

In 2005, over one million documented Afghans were present in Iran, mostly people living in households. There were also some 500,000 undocumented labor migrants<sup>10</sup> who have left their families behind in their country of origin and constantly move back and forth between Afghanistan and Iran. Most of them are working in the agriculture and construction sectors.

### *The Route to Iran*<sup>11</sup>

Since 1978, the political and military conditions in Afghanistan have made all movements difficult. The persistent insecurity, together with the destruction of most of the infrastructure, means that travel is a long and perilous undertaking. Because of the war and insecurity, it is usually small support groups which are relied upon to organize the often large-scale relocation. As far as possible, migrants travel in groups of relatives and neighbors and enter into relations with “strangers” (*begana*) only when it is absolutely necessary to cross international borders. Numerous obstacles stand in the way of anyone wishing to go to Iran or the Arab Gulf states, while the West—a magnet for many city-dwellers and intellectuals—is a remote horizon for the rural population. Being predominantly Shiites, the Hazaras have established large-scale transnational circuits with Iran.

Unlike many Afghan families who have been living in Iran for a long period of time—sometimes more than twenty years—without being able to visit their home country, some young men have kept moving constantly with fellow migrants. The situation of the young Hazaras in Iran perfectly illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing between economic migrants and political refugees. Hazarajat is one of the poorest regions in Afghanistan, and none of the governments in Kabul has been able or willing to make the necessary effort to improve its economic situation. It was relatively spared by the Soviet occupying forces, but the

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*, <http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?subm=&ssm=&cid=118>, quoted in Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, and Sadeghi, *Return to Afghanistan?*, 10.

<sup>11</sup>See Monsutti, *Transnational Networks: Recognising a Regional Reality*, 145–172, and Elca Stigter, *The Kandabar Bus Stand in Kabul: An Assessment of Travel and Labour Migration to Pakistan and Iran* (Kabul, 2004); *Transnational Networks and Migration from Herat to Iran* (Kabul, 2005); *Transnational Networks and Migration from Faryab to Iran* (Kabul, 2005).

partial severing of migratory routes to the urban centers of Afghanistan made life even worse for its inhabitants. Although economic and personal insecurity due to the ravages of war partly explain these population movements, they were never unidirectional. We are a long way from the figure of the refugee compelled to leave his or her homeland in the face of a towering threat, with the vague hope of one day being able to return. Seen through those migratory strategies, the concepts of “economic migrant,” “political refugee,” “country of origin,” “host country,” “voluntary” or “forced” migration, or even “return,” appear singularly reductionist. The fact is that all these categories overlap in the Afghan context, with its combined presence of political, cultural, economic, and ecological factors.

During the years of war, population movements did not always follow the same routes. A first period, from the coup of April 1978 to the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, was marked by repression at the hands of the Kabul regime and the Soviets, but also by a degree of collaboration among resistance groups. People on the move could count on reliable places at which to stop over inside Afghanistan itself. Between 1989 and the fall of the Communist regime in April 1992, a wait-and-see period in which the various parties reorganized their relations with one another witnessed a rampant ethnicization of Afghan political life.

In the 1980s and 1990s, travel in Afghanistan was both difficult and dangerous. In Hazarajat, in particular, the terrain was highly uneven and fighting was endemic among the various Shiite factions. Moreover, unlike Pashtuns, the Hazaras were cut off in the center of Afghanistan and had no direct access to an international frontier. When the main roads were in the hands of the pro-Soviet government, a whole alternative world of communication routes and commercial centers took shape in formerly isolated regions. With its mountainous terrain and scant strategic importance, Hazarajat was relatively untouched by Soviet army incursions; it became crisscrossed with new roads, in a kind of late and temporary revenge for a region that had throughout history been geographically and economically marginal. Despite the hostilities between different fighting groups, lorries and travelers continued to move between areas in the hands of the resistance, whereas they were unable to take the government-controlled road between Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat.

Most people were traveling to Iran through Pakistan, circulating along tracks that crossed the provinces of Paktika, Ghazni, and Zabul. By 1995–96, this region fell into the hands of the Taliban, who were in open conflict with the different Shiite parties. Yet the Hazaras, by keeping a low profile, were still able to cross areas under Taliban control. The situation grew worse as the conflict intensified in 1997 and the Taliban imposed a blockade on Hazarajat.<sup>12</sup>

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, most Afghan migrants do not travel anymore through Pakistan but cross directly into Iran, either near Islam

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<sup>12</sup>The movement of persons never came to a complete halt, however, as the blockade mainly affected goods.

Qala (on the road between Herat and Mashhad) or through the southern Province of Nimruz.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the impact of political-military events, there is a seasonal migratory cycle. The movement of people and goods is most intense in spring and autumn. Summer is the agricultural season in Afghanistan, as well as the time of the year when construction work reaches its peak in Iran. In winter, fewer jobs are available in Iran which can encourage people to be back to Afghanistan for that period of the year. Thus, in both summer and winter, most people remain where their plans have taken them, while spring and autumn are transitional periods in which the temperature is more agreeable.

In the 1990s, the state of lawlessness on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan paradoxically enabled a certain freedom of movement. On the contrary, between Pakistan and Iran, the main difficulties stemmed from the attitude of the Iranian authorities. It was the border crossing to Taftan that was the trickiest moment for migrants, and it was here that they turned to the services of professional smugglers. They swam in an illegality that was tolerated to a greater or lesser extent according to the period: the administrative and legal framework certainly allowed some special arrangements to be made, but a sudden crackdown was always to be feared. The authorities of the Islamic Republic have taken a much harder line than the Pakistani government towards Afghan refugees, not to prevent them from coming to work, but to maintain a degree of control over the clandestine immigration.

Most young Hazaras had to come into contact with the shady world of forgers and people-smugglers, entering into the debt that was then passed on at each stage of the journey until it was finally cleared by a relative at the final destination.

In the 1990s, most young Hazaras were traveling through Quetta, where some inns were the hub for organizing the journey to Iran. For each customer that they recruited in an inn, the people-smuggler had to pay a "person price" (*baha-ye nafar*) that could be as high as 200 or 300 rupees (roughly \$6 to \$10 at that time), or sometimes even 500 rupees (\$15). The group of migrants would leave Quetta by bus for Taftan (200 rupees), where the Hazara guide passed them on to a Baluch smuggler who took them across the frontier on foot and on to the outskirts of Mirjaweh, where vehicles were waiting to take them to Zahedan.<sup>14</sup> This part of the journey was particularly dangerous, as a patrol could always intercept the convoy and begin a shoot-out. At Zahedan, the migrants were hidden in a special place fitted out for them by the local smugglers, paying an extra 3,000 tomans per night (roughly \$7.50) that was not included in the fee for the trip. The group of migrants, still accompanied by an Afghan intermediary and a Baluch smuggler, then took a specially hired bus for the night-time journey to their destination. The price of this final leg was 15,000 tomans (approx. \$37.50) per person.

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<sup>13</sup>See two AREU's reports already quoted: Elca Stigter, *Transnational Networks and Migration from Herat to Iran and Transnational Networks and Migration from Faryab to Iran*.

<sup>14</sup>Taftan and Mirjaweh are small frontier towns, respectively in Pakistan and Iran, while Zahedan is the capital of the Iranian province of Baluchistan va Sistan.



The Baluch smuggler handled the tricky relations with the Iranian police. The risks were high, and although the checkpoints thinned out as they moved west, there was an average of ten on the way from the frontier to the final destination. Each time it was necessary to pay some bribes, and it was always possible that the Iranian police or army would refuse the money and detain everyone in a camp<sup>15</sup> before expelling them from the country. Once they arrive, the migrants have to pay for the journey: usually they phone a relative or friend to come and pay for them. In general, a system of family support is organized in advance, so that one member is always working in Iran and able to prepare the ground for his “successor.”

In the mid-1990s, the cost of the trip to Iran from Quetta was between 50,000 and 60,000 tomans (\$125 to \$150).<sup>16</sup> The Hazara guides made a net profit between 5,000 and 15,000 tomans (\$12.50–\$37.50) per traveler on the whole trip—a sizeable sum, given that they took some thirty to fifty people each time. It certainly had its dangers, but they could pocket as much as a thousand dollars at the end. They often worked in teams of two, one operating between Quetta and Zahedan, the other between Zahedan and the final destination in Iran; the man accompanying the migrants would collect the money at the journey’s end. These Hazara guides were key intermediaries between the migrants and the Baluch people-smugglers; the former turned to them because they were from the same region, while the latter had known them for a long time because of their common activity and interest.

When the Afghans left Iran, they usually traveled freely as far as Zahedan, where they made contact with a smuggler and paid between 7,000 and 10,000 tomans (\$17.50 to \$25) for the riskier border-crossing to Taftan. Then they continued on public transport to Quetta. On their way to Iran, having no money and no contacts, migrants are forced to rely upon the people-smuggling networks. But, on their way back, they have fewer problems using public transport. They are also freer, in the sense that they have saved some money and are no longer in the grip of debt. Nevertheless, as they still have no official papers, they prefer to cross the international frontier by clandestine means.

Asef,<sup>17</sup> a young Hazara worker I met in Tehran, narrated that on his first trip to Iran in 1993, he and 350 others had crossed the frontier with a man from Dai Zangi (Central Afghanistan) whom they had met in a Quetta inn. He had stayed three nights in Taftan, then another three in Zahedan, and four en route to Tehran (the whole journey from Quetta to Tehran thus lasting ten days). The group had traveled by night, taking minor roads that allowed them to

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<sup>15</sup>Countless stories circulate about widespread physical abuse at the two infamous internment camps of Tal-e Syah (near Zahedan) and Sang-e Sefid (near Tahebat). By an irony of fate, these two names translate as “Black Hill” and “White Stone.”

<sup>16</sup>Comparatively, ten years later, the costs of entering Iran directly from Afghanistan usually range between \$150 and \$180 but may be as high as \$300 if the migrant is, for instance, traveling from Faryab. See Stigter, *From Herat to Iran*, 24; and *From Faryab to Iran*, 24.

<sup>17</sup>All the names have been changed to protect my informants.

bypass certain checkpoints. He himself had then spent two nights in a hidden location in Tehran until his brother came to pay off his debt and obtain his “release.”

In the spring of 1995, when Asef temporarily returned to Afghanistan, some people with connections helped him obtain a permit so that he could travel by public bus through Mashhad, Islam Qala, Herat, and Kandahar to Hazarajat (Jaghori). In September 1995, after spending three months in his village of origin, Asef traveled back to Tehran, this time with a forged Pakistani passport bearing a one-month’s Iranian pilgrimage visa. Out of fear that a police check would spot the forgery, he turned to a Baluch smuggler in Taftan to take him across the border and then made his own way by public transport.

Once in Tehran, Asef went to see his uncle (father’s brother) and worked a couple of months with him for a construction firm. After he found a job as a guard in an Iranian private school, caution led him to throw away his false passport. He then carried around a simple certificate issued by his employer which, though not an official document, was usually enough to satisfy the police. During one large campaign of expulsions, however, when he was on a trip to the holy shrine of Qom, he was stopped by the police, detained for eighteen days in the camp of Sang-e Sefid, and forced to leave the country. At Islam Qala, in Afghanistan, he immediately got in touch with a Pashtun smuggler who took him back to the outskirts of Tehran. There he spent two nights in a basement and, without delivering payment, was eventually able to escape with three other Hazaras. I met him again in autumn 2003 in Tehran, after he got married in his village of origin. He had not interrupted his movements to and fro between Afghanistan and Iran, but he tended to shorten the length of his stays.

By sticking together, migrants of the same origin find it easier to look for work and to pay back the smuggler for the costs of the trip. Hazara migrants, who in this respect are no different from other Afghans, have many people to whom they can turn in their final destination in Iran as well as along the way. Young Asef, for instance, found his job as a guard at a private school in Tehran through his brother, who was working in a similar institution at the time of his arrival. His brother’s return to Afghanistan shortly afterwards is a good illustration of the rotation between close relatives; migration flows should, therefore, be located among the strategies worked out by family groups and in a life-cycle.

More generally, the perilous journey young Afghan migrants have to undertake may also be placed in the framework of the rites of passage: it is a spatial and partially social separation from the families and homes which contributes to cut the links with the period of childhood.

### *Employment Structures: The Multiplicity of the Sources of Solidarity*

Already before the war, many Afghans were going to Iran in search of work. After 1978–1979, if the number of Afghans living in households has

increased,<sup>18</sup> laborers kept coming without their families. Since then, the Afghan population in Iran has never lost some sociological features of a labor migration, with a high proportion of young males.<sup>19</sup> As we have seen, many of them enter Iran clandestinely, working without social protection for wages 30 percent below the average.<sup>20</sup> This makes them attractive to employers, especially in low-status jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder: agriculture and gardening, construction, road maintenance, excavation and canalization, quarrying, brick production, abattoirs, tanning, caretaking and security, tailoring, shoe mending and hawking, and so on. Even if it is always possible to be expelled, it is then relatively easy to find a job.

The Afghan laborers live scattered in the Iranian society, moving all the time from one building site to another, following work opportunities. They form temporary groupings as the employment structures and the possibilities to find a job determine their choices. Social networks are only partially determined by kinship, and migration offers to young Afghans the opportunity to diversify their social relations. Certain enterprising and competent individuals are promoted to take charge of a work team. The foreman is usually an Afghan himself and has responsibility for the hiring of workers. The Iranian employer allows him considerable leeway and, so long as things are running smoothly, does little to intervene in the everyday organization of work. The laborers group around a central personality and it is the relations of each individual with that figure which are decisive. The members of the team do not necessarily know one another, since the sources of the relationship with the foreman may be sociologically diverse: paternal kinship (*qawm*, *kakakbel*), maternal kinship (*mamakbel*), kinship through marriage (*kehesh*), neighborhood circle in the village of origin, and so on.

Families always try to have one of their male members in Iran as a means of financial support. Whenever an Afghan goes there, he has good chances of finding a job through a relative or neighbor; he can also be sure that someone will pay the debt he contracted to fund his journey to Iran. As this is expensive and may be risky, ordinary laborers, unlike traders, tend to spend rather long periods in the Islamic Republic—rarely less than a year, often much more. But migration is not due only to economic need; it is also a kind of rite of passage to adulthood through which young men spread their wings and prove themselves. The men in Hazarajat for instance usually go to Iran once before they marry. Such a first stay is often the longest, several years during which they send their savings to their families left behind in Afghanistan; they also put

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<sup>18</sup>See Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, and Sadeghi, *Return to Afghanistan?*, 10–11, 13.

<sup>19</sup>Men are in a clear majority (71.2 percent against 28.8 percent for women) and 65 percent of Afghans in Iran are unmarried, according to some 1990s figures; see Bijan Khajepour-Kouei, “Panahande paziri-ye shahrندان-e tehrani,” *Goft-o-gu* 11 (1996): 26, and Omid Farhang, “Karigarane-afghani, sazandegan-e binam va neshan-e iran,” *Goft-o-gu* 11 (1996): 47.

<sup>20</sup>Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Iran: comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse* (Paris, 1996), 251.

aside money for wedding expenses and gain some experience of living away from the parental home.

The case of Mohammad Ali may serve to illustrate the structures of employment in Iran. He is the foreman in a Tehran construction company that specializes in the production of friezes, window-frames, and stucco doors. He hires the workers, while the Iranian boss is happy to confirm his choice and to pay him a lump sum for the work. Mohammad Ali then distributes this sum among the members of his team. We met for the first time in spring 1996. His team consisted of a group of six Hazara workers: Mohammad Ali himself, Mohammad Husayn, Mohammad Jawad, Ghulam Ali, Ahmad, and Sakhi. The first four were from the same valley and the last two from a nearby village. It was late April and the summer months were approaching—the high season for construction work. A lot of people were coming and going. Mohammad Ali's team was recomposed several times in less than a month, as he successively took on two new workers: Mohammadullah and Ali Mohammad. It was a complicated chain of relations as everyone was related to, at least, one other member of the team.

Mohammad Ali was then about twenty-eight years old. He left his home for the first time in 1982, before his fifteenth birthday, and spent two-and-a-half years in Pakistan and one year in Iran. Between 1986 and 1987, he again spent a year in Iran with his father. Then, after a year back in Afghanistan, he traveled a third time to Iran for a period of eleven months (1989), before returning to his village for another three years. He married in the mid-1980s, between his first and second trips abroad. When I met him in Tehran, he had been there since 1993. He had not yet seen his three-year-old daughter, who was born shortly after his departure. We met again in 2003 in Tehran and in 2004 in Afghanistan. Tired of his traveling life, he has been unable to save enough money to stay on a more permanent base in his country of origin and keeps going back and forth between Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>21</sup> He is considered by his fellows as an honest person and a very skilful worker, but also as a somehow unsuccessful and unlucky man.

Mohammad Husayn is the *bacheb kaka* (father's brother's son) of Mohammad Ali. Being almost ten years younger, as well as lower in the hierarchy, he says "uncle" (*kaka*, father's brother) to his cousin. Still unmarried then, Mohammad Husayn had been living in Tehran for a year-and-a-half, having previously spent a year-and-a-half there with his elder brother. In the following years, he tried his chance in Dubai, before getting married in Afghanistan and going again to Iran for work.

Mohammad Jawad belongs to the same lineage as Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Husayn, but he does not come from the same hamlet. One of his sisters was married to Mohammad Yusuf, a *bacheb kaka* of Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Husayn. He was thirty years old, and this was his third time in

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<sup>21</sup>In the late 1990s, he lost the equivalent of several thousand dollars when the Iranian accountant of the company which employed him disappeared with the wage of the whole working team.

Iran. He first went there in 1989 and stayed for four years; then he returned for eight months to Afghanistan before spending another two years in Iran. There followed six more months in his village of origin during which his wedding took place. He returned to Iran in the late winter of 1995–96 but no longer thought of staying for more than a year. His periods there have tended to grow shorter with age and family responsibility. After the Taliban took over Central Afghanistan (autumn 1998), he brought his widowed mother and his wife and children to Quetta (Pakistan), but kept going to Iran for work.

Ahmad was twenty-one years old and born in another village than Mohammad Ali's. At the age of ten, he went to Iran with his elder brothers and, since then, he had only been back to Jaghori for one nine-month period. He has found work with his relative, Mohammad Ali, coming from the same lineage as his paternal grandmother, mother and wife—quite a typical case of repetitive marital unions over several generations. He addresses Mohammad Ali as *khwarzāda*, literally sister's child, a term also used among the Hazaras to designate one's father's sister's child and, more generally, all men whose mother is from ego's lineage. Ahmad's father is also the *bacheh kaka* of the paternal grandfather of Mohammad Ali's wife.

Sakhi was twenty and from Ahmad's village. His mother comes from the same lineage as Ahmad and, therefore, the same as Mohammad Ali's mother and wife. He is also the *bacheh mama* (mother's brother's son) of the wife of Aziz Azizi, Mohammad Ali's younger brother. Curiously, given the difference in age and status, Mohammad Ali and Sakhi address each other as *bola*—a symmetrical term for the sons of two sisters—and justify this by saying that their respective mothers come from the same lineage and may be classificatorily considered as sisters. Sakhi had been in Iran for more than six years and plans on returning to Afghanistan to marry. Throughout these years, he had sent his savings back to his family in Afghanistan through the *bawala* system.<sup>22</sup> He had joined Mohammad Ali's working team only recently, having previously lived in Arak, 250 kilometers south-east of Tehran. He telephoned various relatives, friends, and neighbors to ask if they could find him a job, and it was because of kinship links that Mohammad Ali agreed to employ him in his team without really knowing him in advance.

Ghulam Ali is the son of a fellow-worker of Mohammad Ali's elder brother in the coalmines of Quetta (Pakistan). He was twenty-one and had been living in Tehran for three years. He originally comes from the same hamlet as Mohammad Ali, but belongs to another lineage. Mohammadullah, aged twenty-three, is the *bacheh kaka* of Ghulam Ali's father. When I met him in April 1996, he had just arrived on his third trip to Tehran. Ali Mohammad, only just fifteen, is the younger brother of Mohammad Jawad, who was already employed there; he had traveled with Mohammadullah and was in Iran for the first time.

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<sup>22</sup>On the *bawala* system, see Monsutti, "Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras," and *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazaras of Afghanistan*, 173–205.

Other people, such as Asef and Mohammad Yusuf from Mohammad Ali's lineage, regularly come on visits and occasionally even lend a hand. Asef (already mentioned in the previous section), seventeen years old, is the *kebosurbura* (wife's brother) of Mohammad Jawad and his father is the *bacheb mama* (mother's brother's sons) of Mohammad Husayn's father. He had been in Tehran for seven months, having spent three summer months in Afghanistan and two previous years in Tehran. He was working in a private school as caretaker, security guard, and general handyman, earning 30,000 tomans (\$75) a month. Two of his elder brothers have already been to work in Iran. At this moment, many relatives of his are in Tehran: one *kaka* (father's brother), three *bacheb kaka* (father's brother's sons), two *damad* (sister's husbands) and a number of more distant ones such as Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Husayn.

In the late winter of 1995–1996, Mohammad Yusuf, another *bacheb kaka* of Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Husayn, came from Afghanistan with Mohammad Husayn's mother. She stayed a month and then returned to Pakistan to spend some time with her daughter and son-in-law. Mohammad Yusuf remained in Tehran and found work in a building firm with a cousin of Asef. Being also a *hawaladar*, he makes use of his time there to visit workers from his place of origin and to collect the money they have saved.

Safdar Khan, the *kaka* of Asef, is also the *bacheb mama* of Mohammad Husayn's father. He has been in Tehran for two years. He is a foreman in an Iranian building firm that employs many Afghan workers. Safdar Khan first came to Iran on a pilgrimage in the 1970s, in the time of Mohammad Reza Shah. He worked for a long time in Kandahar for an American electricity company and was there at the moment of the Communist coup in April 1978 while his family was living in the village of origin. He fled to Iran through the Province of Nimruz and, since then, has divided his time between Iran and brief visits to Afghanistan. Unusually old among the Hazara workers, he is surrounded with formal respect but is considered to be a loser who has not been able to escape from the migration cycle.

Afghans abroad form groups together, and the employment networks make this a necessary strategy. In the case in question, it is Mohammad Ali who, as team leader, is responsible for the quality of work, hires workers as they are needed, keeps attendance lists, and communicates with the Iranian boss. The latter hands over to him all the wage money, which he then distributes among the members of his team. His responsibilities mean that he earns 3,200 tomans (roughly \$8) a day, compared with 2,000 tomans (\$5) for a skilled mason and 1,200 tomans (\$3) for an unskilled worker. All members of the team have agreed that Mohammad Husayn—who spent two months in hospital and is unfit to work after a bad fall from the sixth floor of a building—should continue to receive his wage. As they live on site, sleeping and eating in simple accommodation provided by the company, they spend little and have no bills for rent, water, or electricity.

During my stay in 1996, I shared their Spartan accommodation—less than ten square meters—on the second floor of a building under construction; the room

contained nothing other than four metal boxes, a few suitcases, mattresses and blankets, a small black-and-white television, a few photographs of male relatives on the walls, and some nails on which to hang their clothes. My informants preferred this crowding to isolation (they did not like to sleep alone in a room). The only water point, a pipe jutting out from a bare brick wall, was in the basement; the toilets consisted of a hole in the basement, curtained off with pieces of hessian. The team members took turns cooking. A team of Iranian Lurs were living on the ground floor of the same building, but the two groups of workers did not sleep or eat together and did not seem to be on very friendly terms. The Hazaras looked down on the others, considering that their own work (the making of friezes for the facade) was artistically superior to the building work performed by the Iranians, while the Iranians thought the Afghan workers were a bunch of peasants.

Members of the working teams do not necessarily know each other before, because it is their relationship with the team's head that determines their inclusion. They may be diverse: (1) people who are members of his lineage; (2) people from his mother's or wife's lineage (possibly from another village) and that are related to him in one way or another by marriage; (3) people with whom he is not directly related but who live in the same hamlet or village as himself; and (4) acquaintances, people met during migration. In other words, the groupings around the foreman are on the basis of patrilineage, kinship through the mother or wife (and women more generally) and residential proximity, but also, in some cases, friendship.

Practical links among members of the work team were organized around the foreman and remained dependent on that context. On the other hand, festivities gave rise to meetings of a more official nature, when the *qawm* functioned as the significant level. Bourdieu's distinction between official kinship and practical kinship<sup>23</sup> was in evidence here: the former, based on an abstract geographical definition of groups that legitimated a social order, came to the fore at certain highpoints of social life; the latter, arising out of everyday strategies, consisted in the relations actually deployed for the ordinary needs of existence. The *id-e qorban* meal that I attended in Tehran in 1996 provided a striking testimony of this distinction. Sakhi and Ahmad did not join the group but went off to find other people from their village. As to Mohammadullah and Ghulam Ali, the only members of their lineage in Tehran, they took part in the festivities of Mohammad Ali's lineage. On that day, eighteen people gathered in a room measuring six to seven square meters: except me, Mohammadullah and Ghulam Ali, all people present belonged to the same patrilineage. Unlike everyday work relationships and employment structures, such festivities bring paternal kinship to center-stage. The feasts of *eid-e qorban* and of *eid-e ramazan* represent the opportunity to express the symbolic primacy of the lineage over the work relationships.

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<sup>23</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique précédé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Paris, 2000), rev. ed., 86–99, and *Le sens pratique* (Paris, 1980), 279, 282–284.

Let's take the example of another team in Tehran (autumn 2004): Mohammad-Yusuf (already mentioned), almost forty, is the foreman and has a long experience of migration to Iran; Karim, twenty, the son of Yusuf's late brother (who was killed in some fighting in the early 1990s); Hanif, twenty-four, from another lineage but from the same hamlet as Yusuf; Mohammad Jan, twenty-one, Hanif's brother, married to a paternal cousin of Yusuf; Husain Ali, nineteen, unmarried, from the same lineage of Hanif and Mohammad Jan (their fathers are distant paternal cousins); Habibullah, nineteen, unmarried, from the same lineage as Yusuf, but originating from another hamlet; and Abdullah, eighteen, unmarried, his family is originally from the same district as Yusuf and the other members of the team, but he was born and raised in Pakistan and had never been to Afghanistan.

Like in the previously discussed example, there are several sources of solidarity which partially overlap: consanguinity, affinity, geographical proximity of homes in Afghanistan, and so on. There is, nevertheless, a worker who has no direct relations with the other team's members: a close relative of Yusuf met Abdullah on a building site and introduced them to each other. The employment structures in Iran, then, allow young Afghans to diversify their social networks, which are not only determined by kinship and residence in the country of origin.

The age of repartition is also interesting. The foreman is in his late thirties, while the other members of the team are in their early twenties or less. Such groupings are led by a mature and experienced migrant who supervises younger men and adolescents. As the foreman, he is responsible for the quality of work, hires laborers as they are needed, keeps attendance lists, and communicates with the Iranian boss. The latter leaves him with much freedom to manage everyday work; he hands over to him all the wage money, which is then distributed. Yusuf came for the first time to Iran about twenty-five years ago and sojourned for five years. He returned to Afghanistan with some savings and got married before migrating again. Nevertheless, with the passing of time, his stay abroad became sparser and shorter. If he does not want to be considered an unsuccessful man, like Safdar Khan, his challenge is now to succeed in going out of the cycle of migration and to hand over to the younger generation.

In their first experience in Iran, the young Afghan migrants are supervised and trained by an older brother or cousin. This first stay is most of the time done when they are only adolescents and it tends to be the longest, five or six years, sometimes more. They have to learn new skills, develop their reputation as a hard worker and sober person, save money for their family, and to start their future lives as married men. Over the years, their family responsibility at home will increase and the trips to Iran will become scarcer and shorter. It is progressively their turn to welcome and educate the new generation, before they can consider stopping their back-and-forth movements.

In spite of some age hierarchy, the itinerant and temporary working teams of young Afghans in Iran resemble the *communitas* defined by Turner, namely a group of peers experiencing liminality together, bound by common hardship



and escaping from the strict kinship structures of their society of origin.<sup>24</sup> These men are in a transitional period characterized by separation, tests, humility and, sometimes, sexual ambiguity. They are between two phases of their existence but also two societies: they have left their villages of origin as young men and will be reincorporated as adult marriageable men, although they will keep commuting between Afghanistan and Iran for parts of their lives.

### *A Gendered View on Migration*

For young male Hazaras, going to Iran is a way to achieve a certain idea of their personal autonomy. For their families, their migration is a way to diversify the domestic economy and to spread risk. It is then a survival and coping strategy, but also—as it has been recognized in other cases in the ethnographic literature<sup>25</sup>—a rite of passage to adulthood through which a man proves his masculinity. Migration, even in such an uncertain context, is not a rupture but a crucial stage in the life cycle, which participates in the idea people have of the male coming of age.<sup>26</sup>

In the village of origin, in Hazarajat or elsewhere, the domestic economy is based on a strict division of tasks. Men assume the main agricultural work and relations with the external sphere; they go to the bazaar to buy food and tools, and all the items the family needs at home. Women cook, collect the scrub which serves as combustible, and take care of the farmyard animals. The degree of female seclusion depends on the context. The *parda* (literally “curtain”) implies, first of all, discretion and modesty. When they evolve in the face-to-face context of villages, Hazara women wear a simple veil (often green) and just turn their head away when they come across a man, exchanging the customary greetings. When they travel outside their village, they adopt the Iranian-inspired *chador*, which leaves the face partially uncovered, or—especially at the time of the Taliban—the *chadari* or *burqa*, a long-pleated cloth covering the eyes with a grid.

Men are the more mobile elements of domestic units. They go fighting or migrate abroad for work, sometimes for several years. Rural women tend to move less but play a much more crucial role in the family economy and strategies—possibly increased throughout the years of war—than men would publicly admit. Staying behind in the village of origin while so many men are absent, they gain a considerable importance and assume increasingly traditionally male tasks.

<sup>24</sup>See, for instance, Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

<sup>25</sup>For the Kikuyu of Kenya, see, for instance, Yvan Droz, “L’ethos du *mûramati* kikuyu: Schème migratoire, différenciation sociale et individualisation au Kenya,” *Anthropos* 95 (2000): 87–98. For Southern India, see Filippo Osella & Caroline Osella, “Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6 (2000): 117–133.

<sup>26</sup>For instance, Mohammad Ali, already mentioned, does not want to send his older son to Iran. He has been criticized by some relatives and neighbors, who say that through migration, young men learn things which cannot be found in books.

The complexity of decision-making in the families is difficult to understand for a male external observer, receiving too often the official and somehow stereotyped discourse on the male pre-eminence. But beyond public statements, there is a subtle matrifocality of the Hazara kinship system.<sup>27</sup> The honor of a man is contingent on the behavior of his dependent women (wife, mother, unmarried sisters, and daughters, etc.). Such a conception allows women to develop what Nancy Tapper would call their “subversive” power.<sup>28</sup> Honor and shame are then defined by women’s comportment. There is an alternative discourse to the public male dominance and an informal agency of women based on a set of practices.<sup>29</sup> Paradoxically, the situation of overt subordination, where men are supposed to exert control over women, may actually empower women and render men quite vulnerable.<sup>30</sup>

Afghanistan has suffered from a long-lasting war. Most of its infrastructure has been destroyed, and insecurity and poverty are major obstacles to the reconstruction of the country. Nevertheless, it is possible to live in rural regions without spending much money, even if almost all the manufactured goods have to be imported from Pakistan, Iran, or beyond. Most young Hazara migrants I met in Iran have kept their links to their place of origin, where the women, the children, and the elderly of the family have remained. In the village in Afghanistan, women are not isolated but live among relatives and acquaintances. Men may migrate to Pakistan or to Iran, leaving their families behind. If it appears in some recent studies that Afghan women in Iran are clearly less willing than men to return to their country of origin,<sup>31</sup> some rural women consider that villages, with their high level of face-to-face relations, offer more freedom than the city, where they are often secluded in closed compounds.

Discourses on Iran play on different levels. Many Hazaras perceived the Islamic Republic in an ambivalent way, a mixture of love, admiration, but also frustration and bitterness. On one side, they complain about the contempt Iranians have for them. They take pleasure—small consolation—in criticizing endlessly the quality of the bread in Iran and to celebrate the climate and pure air of Afghanistan.

<sup>27</sup>I discuss this issue elsewhere; see Monsutti, *War and Migration*, 77–82, 98, 227–233.

<sup>28</sup>Nancy Tapper, *Bartered Brides: Politics, Gender and Marriage in an Afghan Tribal Society*, (Cambridge, 1991), 21–22.

<sup>29</sup>The term *namus* (from the Greek *nomos*, “law;” it was used to designate the angel who brought God’s revelation) refers in Afghanistan to women’s shame and men’s honor and expresses the idea that the honor of the men is defined by their capacity to control women’s sexuality. See M. Ibrahim Atayee, *A Dictionary of the Terminology of Pashtun’s Tribal Customary Law and Usages* (Kabul, 1979), 65; Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* (London, 1991), 298; Tapper, *Bartered Brides*, 22–23.

<sup>30</sup>See classical works such as Pierre Bourdieu, “Le sens de l’honneur”, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique précédé de trois études d’ethnologie kabyle* (Paris, 2000), rev. ed., 19–60; Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge, 1977); *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, ed. J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>31</sup>Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Diana Glazebrook, *Continued Protection, Sustainable Reintegration: Afghan Refugees and Migrants in Iran* (Kabul, 2006), 7.

On the other hand, they admire the great Shi'a country for being clean, well organized, and economically developed. Many Hazaras are impressed by what they consider to be the progressive side of Iranian society and are increasingly sensitive to the issue of female education and empowerment. Influenced by what they see in Iran, Afghan women have adjusted their notions of female roles, gender relations, and family structure.

Women's presence in the public sphere in rural Afghanistan is discreet, and they rarely travel without being with some male relatives. They nevertheless play a crucial role. In a migratory context in particular, social life is maintained by gifts and counter-gifts; commodities are culturally invested and objectify social relations. Women are often the main actors of this cycle of invitations and system of services. As such, they have a considerable influence on social life and are involved in the decision-making process concerning the domestic unit.<sup>32</sup> The shock faced by male and female refugees going back to Afghanistan after having lived for long years in Iran is all the more acute. Gender relations have to be renegotiated in a setting that is very different than the one in which they have lived for years, but also from the Afghanistan they had known in the past.

Afghans have been able to mobilize their social and cultural resources in response to a very difficult situation. But aside from their dislocating effects, war and exile have also been a vector of social change. For many young male Hazaras, migration to Iran became a socially obligatory stage in their lives, during which they had to prove they were able to work hard, to live modestly, and to accumulate the money needed to face the expenses of marriage. They then had to demonstrate the qualities expected of a future family head: enterprise, endurance, courage, decisiveness, generosity, altruism, temperance, and so on. Migration to Iran without their families was then a way for young Afghans to build both their adulthood and masculinity and to become recognized as a full man.

The fact that the journey—often undertaken illegally—is risky and the living conditions are particularly precarious and demanding gives an initiation dimension to migration. The great hardships they have to suffer structure the discourse on success and masculinity around the valorization of work, physical courage, frugality, and the capacity to save money for relatives left behind in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, migration also contributes to blur the traditional sexual division of tasks. In Iran, men without their families cook, do the laundry and the washing-up, sew and, generally speaking, do all domestic chores. In Afghanistan, the numerous women whose husbands are absent acquire new responsibilities: they manage the household and make decisions alone; and they are sometimes

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<sup>32</sup>The important role that women play in establishing relations of friendship is illustrated by the Pakistanis in Great Britain. Settled in a new context, families that arrived from Punjab have set up large networks going beyond kinship ties. See Pnina Werbner, *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among the British Pakistanis* (New York, 1990).

obliged to plough, to sow, and to harvest the family fields. Paradoxically, hardship allows them to conquer a new space of autonomy and to gain more leeway. In Hazarajat, women have participated much more actively than in other rural regions of Afghanistan in the presidential and legislative elections of October 2004 and September 2005, exceeding the number of male electors in some districts.

Unfortunately, the image of Afghan women conveyed by western media is simplistic. Their efforts and agency have rarely had due recognition. That is echoed in many development programs aiming to promote female empowerment but conceiving them as passive victims of a fate external to them. Those programs often tend to deepen the gap between urban and rural women, the former being considered more receptive to western models and the latter as the mere recipients of a message coming from outside.

Women rarely travel anywhere without a male companion and do not seem to go back and forth with the same intensity as men do. But, although they receive little public recognition, this does not mean that they play no role in the shaping of migratory strategies. On one side, the reduced presence of men in their home villages allows women to modify the usual division of tasks and, in many cases, to engage in normally forbidden agricultural labor. On the other side, Iranian society represents a modernizing example. There is then a slow evolution in domestic relations of power.

The Hazaras, like other Afghan groups, have kept the memory of past and recent migrations. Those displacements have not necessarily had an exclusive traumatic dimension, even if they have taken place in a context of war. Although they have taken a more massive scale after 1978–1979, migratory movements are an ancient phenomenon, a constitutive feature of social life for the population of Afghanistan. The modality and the general context have, nevertheless, evolved. Social existence is not located only in the village of origin. The Hazaras are being increasingly integrated into the Iranian polity and economy and, conversely, trips to Iran are being increasingly part of the life cycles of the Hazaras. Young men leaving home go through a rite of passage to adulthood, characterized by the three classical stages (a separation from a previous status by the dangerous journey abroad, a period of liminality during their stay away from family, and a reincorporation to a new social position on their return). The fact that so many young men are absent has brought important social, cultural, and economic changes concerning the division of labor by gender and generation. The mobility of people and the dispersion of the members of households and broader groups of solidarity are not seen in themselves as de-structuring phenomena by the Afghans. They constitute an arena where the roles of the men and the women, of the youth and the elderly, are constantly renegotiated.