Is There ´Tomorrow´? Recasting Visions of the Future Through Mental Well-Being:

A Grounded Theory Study with Afghan Women Refugees in Delhi

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ABSTRACT

India continuously receives a significant number of refugees from neighbouring countries and non. Lacking a proper framework for protection, the government assigned the mandate to UNHCR, thus putting in place a system with the same purpose. Yet, hierarchisation of Indian society on the basis of fixed gender roles, and other institutions in place create conditions of structural violence, particularly detrimental to refugee women. The present grounded theory study conducted with Afghan women in Delhi delved into their experience of refuge in order to scrutinize visions of the future. The subtle phenomenon of structural violence, whose consequences emerged from an analysis of capabilities, was detected in daily life of Afghan women refugees. The analysis yielded mental health as fundamental factor to determine refugees' well-being, whereas previous war trauma is exacerbated under circumstances of structural violence. The full development every human being deserves, is thus constrained by such conditions, further affecting mental well-being. Human security represents the framework to address this issue, provided that mental well-being is understood as determinant of human security for all human beings, precisely for being human.

Keywords: Gender in human security; Afghan women; Refugees; Grounded theory; Mental well-being; Structural violence; Future perspectives.

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To accomplish this work, a concerted effort was needed. It has been a long travel, begun where I come from, taking me to Sweden, then to India, to encounter all the people who made it realisable, who encouraged and supported me in different ways till here. Here where it comes to an end, this work as well as my student life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCS	Country Cooperation Strategy
DBA	Don Bosco Ashalayam - also referred to as 'Bosco'
IGA	Income Generating Activities
IP	Implementing Partner
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
SA	Subsistence Allowance
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM OUTLINE

The idea behind this research project saw its inception when the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan was imminent, expected for 2014; this event further spurred the continuous debate over reconstruction and what it would entail. The literature I was confronted to had for long discussed the impact of foreign intervention and the contested humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan; although, at this particular historical juncture, the question became crucial, involving the direction of future development that a torn state would have followed. Throughout the 13 years of war shredding the country and its people, women and gender roles in Afghanistan became central to the debate, turned controversial in the reconfiguration of women per se and their agency as whole, while bringing feminist scholarship to be confronted on the topic. The overarching question was whether Afghan women needed to be rescued from the brutality of Taliban, the patriarchal society and the Islamic fundamentalism, to end up with the issue of wearing the burqa and being imprisoned by this traditional clothing habit. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) is the author of a pathbreaking critique to the traditional realist view – as many other followed during this period – which interrogates if 'Muslim women really need saving', by seeking almost a non-answer based on cultural relativism and respect of difference, not always grasped in the dominant discourse.

While during the years of war, the outcome of intervention and development aid progressively revealed flaws, it is within this space of contestation that my interest was caught by that trend of feminist scholarship which brought to the forefront women's agency and their reconfiguration, thus the idea of undertaking the present research project. In reason of what mentioned so far, my aspiration was to ask people primarily involved what they really wished for this reconstruction, for their own future, in which direction should the change take place. Directly involved in this instance are Afghan women, as their identity is above all contested, therefore on this group I decided to focus my research. Considered the difficulty of conducting this typology of study in Afghanistan, I opted for accessing this group in India, hosting a significant portion of Afghans in exile. Only after entering the research field, new facets of this situation were identified, contributing to adding complexity and other dimensions I could not have foreseen.

AIM AND PURPOSE

This study sets out to investigate visions that Afghan women refugees in Delhi have about their own future; while in a first stance my will was to learn from them what was deemed best for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, soon after few conversations I understood that these women could not respond directly to such questions; their experience of war and displacement was so overwhelming, that discussing the future of their homeland was quite irrelevant. In reason of what I saw and where they directed this research, I decided simply to explore ways in which Afghan women refugees envision their own future. This choice was made in reason of their present condition, disclosing a life of suffering, therefore I aimed simultaneously at addressing a topic that would possibly result easier to approach. Exploring visions of the future appeared as a concept that rather avoids taking up old memories often connected to traumatic events, but seeks to look forward and eventually enhance positive feelings. Throughout the research process, aspects regarding the psychosocial sphere emerged, so leading to investigate "the influence of social factors on an individual's mind or behaviour, and on the interrelation of behavioural and social factors" (Loughry, 2009: 167). Since trauma dominates the field literature and is treated according to a conventional approach to science and medicine, often quantified through statistics, I aspired in this study to render justice to the very condition of Afghan women refugees in Delhi, by telling their "own stories and how they conceptualize their experiences, how they feel they were affected and, possibly more importantly, what they think it might be the best ways to address the consequences of the suffering" (ibid.). Making women's visions of the future the central element steering the direction of this study and giving it reason to be, represents in my view an essential and truthful way to convey their life experiences as well as to re-conceptualise their agency and resilience under arduous circumstances.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of all the above-mentioned, this research question will lead the discussion:

➢ How do Afghan women refugees in Delhi envision their future?

While the operational sub-question inquires:

➢ What could the results imply?

The purpose of the present grounded theory study, conducted *with* Afghan women as the title underlines – to highlight a participatory dimension, also in the co-construction of knowledge – is to understand different ways in which Afghan women refugees in Delhi envision their future, with this meaning perspectives and desired developments about a time yet to come. Results are subsequently problematised through the sub-question, which aims at reaching a deeper level of analysis, and motivating the contribution this research attempts to make.

DELIMITATIONS

Since mental well-being emerged as significant component of this research, the discussion here undertaken follows this thread of analysis. However, being such a vast and multifaceted concept, it could be approached through different disciplines; yet, investigating for example citizenship, inclusion and rights, identity and belonging, social justice and recognition, mental well-being could be enriched with other aspects. Albeit lying beyond the scope of this thesis, such aspects intervene and impact on mental well-being, in likewise serious ways and with damaging consequences as the direction explored by the present work.

THESIS DISPOSITION

Chapter 1 outlines the problem, aim and research questions explored within the thesis, while Chapter 2 revises the extant literature to simultaneously provide contextual background and rationale. Chapter 3 elucidates the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 anticipates interpretive tools, derived from data analysis, to facilitate the comprehension of the subsequent section. Chapter 5 presents Afghan women's experiences gathered on the field, decoded by the interpretive tools. Chapter 6 discusses the results while conveying my proposition as theoretical understanding, summarised in Chapter 7 with conclusive thoughts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HUMAN SECURITY

The debate on human security emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War, whose events yielded a twofold consequence: first, the classic unit of nation-state was no longer the only concern of the international community – due to new kinds of threat that began to trouble security; secondly, for this reason, security had to be reframed in other terms to include such threats, whose target became civilians, supposed to be protected by the state from external menaces. Human security emerged as a paradigm to address issues previously not included under the traditional realist definition of the term. It was understood that, as important as the national security is the security of people, that from now on included dimensions such as economy, food, health, and environment, for the first time put at the forefront of the international security agenda as main concerns. Its definition, therefore, had to take into account what security means for human beings, whereby the following statement has been chosen to begin the discussion.

> "*The objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, without impeding long-term human fulfilment*" (Alkire, 2003: 23).

Within the field of human security, one of the main challenges for researchers and experts has been to assess the constitutive elements of this concept; Alkire believes in the importance of contextualising human security, as it "gains coherence when it specifies carefully what it is trying to protect" (2003: 25). First of all, to delimitate the breadth of the term human, it could be understood as "qualify[ing] the discursive terrain of 'security'" (Marhia, 2013: 21) within which the concept is operating. It stems from the very idea of human being, and deals with a set of functions fundamental for survival, which is not confined to merely being alive, but could be extended to living outside of poverty and with dignity (Alkire, 2003). However, what the vital core includes and specifies is not given, "imply[ing] that the institutions that undertake to protect human security will not be able to protect every aspect of human well-being, but at very least they will protect this core" (ibid: 24). The relevance of institutions, already advanced in this statement, will be later discussed; however, object of debate are the definition itself and its content, which paved the way for critiques due to broadness and vagueness. Although a definition of what constitutes the vital core can be provided by medical and psychological research (Alkire, 2003), the debate over

multiple aspects of human security is broad and has arisen from differing views of researchers; some of these, that I have selected for the purpose of this paper, will be presented here with the aim of reaching a more comprehensive understanding of the concept and grasping its evolution throughout a particular historical juncture, in which the guarantee of human security, especially for certain categories of people, is at stake.

King and Murray (2001) proposed an approach of quantifiable human security, where the latter becomes identified with lack of poverty; this approach, though, presents numerous limitations, since obviously many aspects lie outside of poverty or will not come under this definition, for often being not quantifiable in terms of lack of property. "This neglects the terrible physical violence attendant in much human insecurity", and "mathematical formulae […] cannot consider the qualitative influence of social structures of violence" (Roberts, 2005: 10). Here the concept of human agency is used to explain poverty creation or wealth destruction; nevertheless, this could lead to misunderstanding, as it will be argued later, because not all individuals dispose of the same level of agency for different reasons. A reversed approach is thus recommendable, investigating causes of human insecurity, identified primarily with death, considered as "the ultimate condition of human insecurity" (Roberts, 2005: 11); as it is stressed, death represents only a starting point which should lead to analyse other aspects, perhaps not as remarkable as death or poverty at a first sight. Notwithstanding an expansion of the definition to include human agency and indirect violence, human security still does not account for "the realisation of full human psychosomatic potential" (Roberts, 2005: 12). Yet, a negative definition of human security, merely as lack of poverty, results quite limited; from feminist studies derives a refuse of dichotomous definition, which obscures all nuances existing between the two extremes and infers that all cases fall under either one or the other category. At the same time, a quantitative approach, as it can be the one of King and Murray, will be discarded in this study, rather aiming at grasping certain aspects of the complex humankind, and at least some of the nuances characterising its variety.

Roberts (2005) argues that a redefinition of human security is necessary to highlight some aspects related to the 'human' that have been neglected in the realist literature, yet maintaining that incoherence pervades the field. Some experts pointed out that factors such as pollution or mental health could enlarge the definition of human security, but at the same time an 'excessive expansion' of the term "would destroy its intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to

devise solutions to any of these important problems" (Roberts, 2005: 6). Such broadness could in turn cause a loss of focus over the framework applicability, while shifting the attention back to a classic view, that targets merely institutions as structural causes of human insecurity. The classic view derives from a realist perspective of world politics, for which national security is a prerogative for human security; according to this worldview, the state is the primary institution to guarantee and protect the security of its citizens, as well as to enforce mechanisms for its protection. However, in the contemporary era, this notion has been inverted in practice, since the state itself is sometimes accountable for human rights violations towards its citizens, or else it fails to protect them from threats (Haddad, 2003).

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Since the state is in some cases responsible for posing threats – direct or indirect – to its citizens instead of protecting them, it represents simultaneously the cause and solution of the problem (Haddad, 2003). In order to design a comprehensive human security framework, which would cover all aspects of insecurity of an individual, gender is fundamental to reach this goal, as it unmasks specific relations of power that characterise social interaction. When such relations, recognisable in structures of domination and submission, are eradicated at all levels, only then it becomes possible to think of a gender-just society, regarded as a prerogative for the achievement of a comprehensive security framework. Making of gender a category of analysis in the field of human security "is crucial to overcome certain gender silences" (Hudson, 2005: 156); it would entail an opportune scrutiny of power to individuate and explain the mechanisms behind a hierarchised society, in which individuals are differentiated on the basis of certain norms, that in turn ensure the reproduction of such mechanisms. Since the gender dimension within the debate "tends to be overlooked", the result is "only a partial understanding of the security issues" (ibid.: 157).

By introducing gender in human security, "we can capture the socio-cultural dimension of the […] concept" (Moussa, 2008: 81), that encompasses all norms governing society. Even the term 'human' becomes operative through a norm, according to which some individuals correspond to it, while others fall outside, considered as less-than-human; therefore it is important to contextualize "conditions for *recognition* as 'human'" (Marhia, 2013: 23), in order to

acquire an applicable meaning. This norm underlying the discourse, as in human security's normative assumptions, "[is] instrumental in the construction of the human as an exclusionary category, because not everyone meets the standards set by the norm" (ibid.: 26). With gender lenses, differing connotations of the term 'human' emerge: despite being presented as gender-neutral, "often it is an expression of the masculine" (Hudson, 2005: 157). For instance, a normative perspective of security distinguishes between international and social dimensions of it, according to which gender is included in the sphere of social security "because it concerns individual not collective security. Women are in the discourse, but are relegated to the margins. With this argument, the dominant 'malestream' thinking on security is effectively maintained and universalized" (ibid.: 160). In line with this statement, it is thus possible to recognise gendered practices adopted by the state, as structural and physical violence can be (ibid.).

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Once attempted to define human security and some implications derived from gender analysis, it is deemed relevant to investigate also what threatens it. Apart from physical and direct security threats, indirect or structural ones do exist and are nowadays acknowledged as equally serious and harmful; these can be defined as "actions by groups or systems or institutions whose threat to human security is a by-product of an action taken for a different primary purpose" (Alkire, 2003: 29). Such definition derives from Galtung's theory of structural violence – described more thoroughly in 'Interpretive tools' – while here the concept is introduced through definitions provided by other authors. Roberts, for instance, described it as a process, not a static entity – that acts silently and undisturbed, causing "unintended harm […] to human beings" (2005: 5), meaning that human-built structures might produce violence onto others unintentionally.

Using a feminist perspective to understand structural violence, Mary Anglin explained how "violence [is] produced by structures of domination" and detected its shapes (1998: 145). She argues that gendered structures of violence are also a by-product of the crisis of contemporary states, such as 'failed states', deemed unable to protect their citizens, thus creating situations of refugees around the world. Moreover, this phenomenon seems in her opinion connected to globalization and diffusion of capitalism. (Anglin, 1998) Going beyond a narrow definition, violence can manifest itself in different manners, like the "expropriation of vital economic and non-material

resources and the operation of systems of social stratification or categorization that subvert people's chances for survival" (Anglin, 1998: 145); race and gender relations can be considered as imposed "categories of difference that legitimate hierarchy and inequality" (ibid.). So, once again, with gender lenses it becomes possible to individuate such matrices of power, reproduced in society as a result of the structure in place, in the form of violence seemingly enhancing social order (Anglin, 1998). These forms of indirect violence further marginalize individuals "in ways that deny them the opportunity for emotional and physical well-being" (ibid.: 145). Such practices are then normalized and "accepted as part of the 'status quo'" (ibid.); among these, social programs, economic priorities or bureaucratic practices, constituting means through which the state exercises structural violence over its citizens. Yet, the author suggests that, talking about gendered structures of violence does not necessarily indicate that women are always the victims, but rather sheds light on "differential effects of coercive processes on women and men" (Anglin, 1998: 147.).

FAILED STATES & REFUGEE POPULATIONS

"Whilst we continue to exist within 'a community of nations, not of humanity'"…

(Walzer in Haddad, 2003: 5)

As long as this statement holds true, the issue of refugees around the world will never find a solution. Yet, state governance is weakened by contemporary conflicts – often triggering internal insecurity – as its structure did not envision features and consequences of such conflicts, making it unprepared to face them. These are 'failed states', among which Afghanistan is one crucial example. (Betts et al., 2012) Victims of such situations are vulnerable citizens, who, according to the logic of the war, should stay outside of it; unfortunately, they are the primary objective of modern conflicts, in some circumstances prevented from carrying out their daily activities, or forced to leave to assure themselves life in security. The by-product of failed states, or the natural outcome of such insecurity, is hence a new 'global refugee population' in quasi-permanent refuge, as these situations are not likely to find a durable solution in the immediate future. (ibid.)

Being the state the only guarantor of rights and security to its citizens, it results obvious that, when it fails to do so, there is no framework or institution in place to guarantee the protection of the two. The side effect is refugee, a particular category of person whose human security – consequently certain human rights – is continuously violated at the hands of the state.

However, even the human rights framework "would appear of little use to the refugee who lacks a state to enforce them" (Haddad, 2003: 7), which infers that "without membership in a political community our so-called human rights are worthless" (ibid: 6). From such statements, it is deducible that concepts of homelessness (Giles, 2008: 56) and rightlessness could overlap in their meaning. The condition of refugee, as being rightless, entails exclusion from belonging to "any community whatsoever: 'not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed, but that nobody wants even to oppress them'" (Arendt in Haddad, 2003: 20). Refugees nowadays are driven into marginalisation, because the guarantee of rights and protection is not available between states (Haddad, 2003), even though "they now have international obligations to accord rights to all individuals within their jurisdiction regardless of nationality or citizenship status" (Larking, 2014: 119). Although some forms of qualified status may be accorded from the receiving state to refugees, "in no case can they be considered to exist within the privileged pale of the law", and "the capacity to access and to enjoy even their most basic rights is undermined by the reality" (ibid.: 120) of such accorded status. Moreover, despite human rights' protection is accorded by international law equally to citizens and non, practice differs.

All such mechanisms reveal the exclusionary aspects of citizenship, and the extent to which they are applied even in extreme circumstances, as refugee life (Giles, 2008). A refugee, therefore, who lacks recognition of citizenship in the receiving country, and has likely lost it in the homeland, "breaks the singular identity of the individual and the citizen and destroys the nation-state-territory trinity along with the primacy given to citizenship" (Haddad, 2003: 16). In other words, this phenomenon, although not new anymore, still represents a revolution in the international system of states and how it was conceived, reason for which solutions are yet difficult to envision. Also, being the matter quite controversial, as breaking the trinity at the foundation of sovereign states, there is defiance in seeking a durable solution (ibid.). As a result, the fact that refugees are not citizens, hence denied of the right to claim for rights, corresponds to denying them the 'opportunity for emotional and physical well-being' (Anglin, 1998). The way it is, this can be considered already as a form of structural violence.

BEING A REFUGEE WOMAN

Modern conflicts no longer happen in battlefield between armed soldiers, but inevitably they involve and often target civilians, in particular women and children, abandoning the traditional meaning of war, which instead takes place in city streets, homes, public markets. It could be affirmed, therefore, that modern conflicts contribute simultaneously to the breakdown of public and private realms; as war can reach the door of homes, violence becomes a political tool, and the distinction between the two realms does no longer exist. It is well acknowledged that although men and women have the same rights, they do not bear them in the same way and have differential access to protection of their citizenship. When the subjects of analysis are not legal citizens but refugees, circumstances becomes even more blurred. The war in Afghanistan and the Taliban government are an example of the need to enlarge the concept of security, since during this conflict civilians were targeted, whereby women particularly in their body and home.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stipulated its mandate to refugee protection through the 1951 Refugee Convention, which declares who can claim the refugee status, rights accorded and legal obligations of receiving states. In this document, the given definition of refugee appears to be gender-neutral, however it can be challenged in this sense. "The UN Convention defined 'refugee' by the generic term 'person', which obliterated gender differences in practices of oppression and their effects" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008: 34); in regard to the separation of public and private realms, this phenomenon is reproduced also in the text of the Convention, "concealing the violence that women may experience in their own home as well as the political activities they may undertake at home", constituting "a continuum in violence that affects women's identity and well-being" (ibid.). A relevant study on gender and structural violence – taken up in 'Interpretive tools' – asserted that language is one of the means through which gendered structural violence is reproduced (Confortini, 2006); similarly, the production of knowledge is also biased, due to gendered structures of domination (Hudson, 2005). The reality of being a refugee woman is much more complex than what advocated in the Convention, therefore one must critically question the meaning behind certain definitions, by deconstructing it within a context that makes each experience unique (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). In fact, one should abstain from referring to 'the' identity of refugee women, while providing a context is fundamental for a multi-dimensional understanding of her identity (ibid.).

Until 1985 the Refugee Convention did not acknowledge that women were persecuted and their rights violated because of their sex (Daenzer, 2008); they did not fall under the definition of having 'a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of […] membership of a particular social group' as spelled out in Article 1A of the Convention. Women were victims of an 'enduring paradox', since they flee persecution in their home country, due to unequal protection under the law, to "enter a domain of statelessness, where men still have power over their destinies" (Daenzer, 2008: 231); the author maintains that women were transferred "from certain violence and persecution to a potential of violence and persecution" (ibid.). It took 34 years for the UNHCR to recognise that women actually constitute a 'particular social group' and are discriminated and persecuted in reason of their sex; UNHCR had to finally take this step in order to voice those gender silences of which the language is a means, and to ensure protection in a truly holistic sense, avoiding the reproduction of gender inequalities.

Mention has been made of the separation of public and private spheres, which partly obscures the violence of which women are victims, as well as the context in which their experiences are located. In certain context, as can be patriarchal societies or religious-oriented ones, "women are subjected to discriminatory treatment and social mores which are enforced through law or through the imposition of cultural or religious norms" (Crawley, 2001: 107), curtailing their rights and opportunities. However, when the religion of Islam comes into the picture, the debate could result delicate. Often the tendency is to homogenise women's experiences under Islam, while other factors, such as class or place, similarly determine differential experiences, unique as their identity earlier discussed. Islam, along with Judaism and Christianity, has "been characterised by a gender hierarchy, where women have been subjugated to social control and isolation from men" (Okkenhaug and Flaskerud, 2005: 1), although they have always been able to carve their space to exert some forms of agency in the context in which they are embedded, determining their own status in the private realm (see Kandiyoti, 1998). A code of honour, dependent on women's conduct, is central to the three religions and relative societies; however, the state intervenes through legislation in these matters, which take on political significance. Therefore Islam, or religion in general, is not the only factor shaping gender roles in society. (Okkenhaug and Flaskerud, 2005) In particular, for legislation to be enforced in the name of protection of family's honour, it is the family itself, or the community, responsible for the enforcement of the state's approach, which would be otherwise impossible, since the state cannot practically and ideologically "be directly in control of women's sexuality and relations with men"

(Crawley, 2001: 108). Such are instances in which the state, institutionalising certain practices, is also accountable for causing serious harm to its citizens; women who do not act according to the supposed behaviour, or 'dishonour' the family, are in some countries legally prosecutable. Albeit international law is deemed objective, universally applicable and gender-neutral, women refugees still encounter difficulties in obtaining the status of refugee, due to lack of proof of being persecuted or fearing it. (Crawley, 2001)

THE CASE OF INDIA

India receives refugee populations, mainly from neighbouring countries, due to political and social reasons; the former could be troubles caused by undemocratic governments, forcing citizens to leave and seek shelter abroad, and the latter may be common cultural, religious or ethnic roots shared by refugee populations and Indian inhabitants. However, one important remark is that India, like all South Asia and the majority of other Asian states, did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, implying that no treaty obligation is there to grant the international protection of refugees. (Chakrabarty, 2001) However, "India maintains that the 1951 Convention is Euro-centric and cannot be effectively implemented in the South Asian region" (Sengupta, 2008); yet, it is believed that even without being party to the Convention, its doors have always been open to refugees, in this peculiar area of the world where the flow is continuous. One of the reasons for refusing this responsibility could be of financial origin, implying that being party of the Convention could represent an economic obligation. (Sengupta, 2008)

As a sovereign nation, India has the right to admit or refuse the entrance of aliens, although it often depends on diplomatic relations with the country of provenience of refugees. Nevertheless, bound by customary international law, the state has "to provide certain minimum standards of treatment which should respect the fundamental human rights of the refugees" (Chakrabarty, 2001: 124), whereas international law is applied as long as it does not interfere with municipal law. Although India is continuously receiving a significant number of refugees, there is still no specific legislation in place to deal with the issue (Chakrabarty, 2001); UNHCR, therefore, has created an opportune system to supplement this legal vacuum, and administer refugees' matters concerning Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and resettlement in a third country (Sengupta, 2008). The issue becomes complex considering that the refugee situation is regulated

by 'The Foreigners Act of 1946' and other relative documents; this implies that refugees are not recognised as such by the Indian law, rather they are considered as foreigners. For this reason, the act is regarded as "an outdated and draconian piece of legislation" (Sengupta, 2008). Being the entry and presence of refugees regulated by the Foreigners Act means that one has to provide identity documents and proof of authorisation of the authority in order to enter, which results complex for a person who is escaping her home country to save her life. The fact that refugees do not to constitute a legal category worthy of recognition in the Indian legal system implies that they are treated according to the law applicable to all other foreigners, despite evident situational differences. (ibid.) Yet, although they are allowed to work in India, contrary to foreigners, it results difficult to be employed due to extensive unemployment, reason that pushes them to search for job in the informal sector, further exposing them to discrimination in the workplace. (Sengupta, 2008)

Despite its character 'entirely non-political' according to the mandate, UNHCR is often subject to states' political activity for its operations on the field. UNHCR operations in India are circumscribed to New Delhi – with the exception of a branch in Tamil Nadu – whereby its mandate of assistance and protection covers all refugees coming from non-neighbouring countries, such as Afghans. UNHCR is vested with the function of determining the status of refugees on the basis of fulfilling certain criteria by means of interviews (Sengupta, 2008). As it will be seen later through the experience of refugees, this practice could result discriminatory; yet, holding a certificate issued by the UNHCR and formally recognised by the Indian government is not of great value, since local authorities still fail to acknowledge the validity of this document, as in school enrolment or health care. The system in place is blamed for inefficiency and insensitivity, because "apart from their struggle for legal recognition in the host country, India, refugees face discrimination and harassment at the hands of the government, police authorities and local communities" (Sengupta, 2008).

THE VITAL CORE OF HUMAN LIFE

Summing up the discussion through Alkire's definition given at the beginning, it becomes evident that, under circumstances of structural violence, imposed by the state and its structures in place, the 'vital core of human life' is no longer safeguarded; yet structural violence hinders the

individual's psychosomatic potential to be realized. The capability approach formulated by Amartya Sen is here introduced through other scholars' perspectives, as it is instrumental to understand how structural violence impacts on this 'vital core'. Alkire in fact maintains that "one powerful and thorough articulation of this space is the capability approach which similarly re-orients the objective of economic activity" whereby reinstating people's freedom at the core (2003: 25).

Albeit it could be restrictive to univocally reply to what constitutes the vital core, experts have attempted to do so. Marhia pointed out that object of safeguard is actually "a particular set of minimal conditions that make a life worthy of a human being", whereas "capabilities […] are what dignifies a life as human" (2013: 22). Moreover, fundamental is to provide a context to the notion of vital core, in a way that 'worthy' could be fully grasped; as a matter of fact, Moussa (2008) highlighted as important the dimension of a free environment, in which individuals should be enabled to take decisions autonomously, as well as determine conditions of the life they lead. She also adopts the notion of empowerment, defined as "the ability of making choices" (2008: 94), which echoes Sen's definition of capabilities, appeared in *Development as Freedom* (1999).

More emphasis should be drawn onto what makes the core of human life valuable and respected globally. Once again human security comes into the picture; ensuring it, cannot be simply equalled to the satisfaction of basic material needs, but entails the "attendance to nonmaterial aspects as well" (Tomas in Giles, 2008: 62), if human dignity is the true objective. Robeyns (2003), for instance, used the capability approach in the assessment of gender inequalities; by comparing visions of Sen and Nussbaum, the author favoured the former since Sen observed that capabilities are real opportunities to convert resources into functionings, while Nussbaum argued that such capabilities are inborn to each individual. In support of Sen's conjecture, Robeyns stated that "people differ in their abilities to convert these resources into capabilities" (2003: 63), since external factors, such as social environment, or internal ones, such as physical or mental impairment, do have an impact on the conversion process. Being capabilities "people's potential functionings" (ibid.), focus should be shifted on these to appropriately assess life quality. According to this study, mental well-being is listed among capabilities considered important for gender inequality assessment, following life and physical health (Robeyns, 2003). By applying the capability approach to the theory of structural violence it becomes possible to investigate new aspects relative to the quality of life of individuals, impacted by this process.

METHODOLOGY

METATHEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Social constructivism is the underlying paradigm of this research, hence ontology and epistemology are both informed by this worldview. Adopting a social constructivist perspective entails acknowledging the existence multiple realities, whereas the task of the researcher is to uncover this multiplicity of views while looking for their complexity (Creswell, 2007). Since the researcher is immersed in the field for the duration of the study, new meanings emerge from the interaction with participants, each carrying a set of historical and cultural norms that influence action within the explored context, as well as creation of these meanings. The result is a "theory or a pattern of meaning" (ibid: 21) developed from a process of induction and deduction of information, enhanced by the creativity of the researcher and the flexibility of the method. For this reason, the choice of grounded theory seems to fit this study.

Starting from the conviction that realities are multiple, grounded theory allows voices of participants to guide the research process, thus emphasising their agency and role in the construction of realities and meanings. Grounded theory is an interpretive exercise, where understanding is preferred to explaining, since the latter would constitute a one-way reading of the phenomenon. It is therefore paramount to conceive that I merely suggest an "imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon" (Charmaz, 2006: 126), whereas my subjectivity comes into play to "provide[…] a *way* of viewing" (ibid.: 139) this world. Conform to social constructivist view, the research questions formulated, asking 'what' and 'how' of a certain process, aim at spurring understanding, to evidence the 'processual' nature of this interpretive study as much as of social life in general. It suffices to examine the sub-question, whose intent is to reinforce the validity of the argument, while attempting to "explicitly claim why [the present] grounded theory makes a significant contribution" (ibid: 156).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The choice of qualitative method is conform to the nature of this research and the participants selected as data source; yet it stems from a will to learn about the issue from Afghan women's direct experiences.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory methodology, involving the simultaneous occurrence of data collection and analysis, has been selected in accordance with nature of the study, guiding research questions and participants involved. Considering that the research questions aim at investigating visions of the future of Afghan women refugees and seeking reasons behind their answers, there was no scenario previous beginning data collection; moreover, I did not want to force pre-existing concepts to an unknown reality, rather I preferred to let meanings come up to then be interpreted. "In this pragmatic approach to social science research, empirical 'reality' is seen as the ongoing interpretation of meaning produced by individuals engaged in a common project of observation" (Suddaby, 2006: 633).

Since "grounded theory itself was introduced as an attempt 'to achieve a practical middle ground between a theory-laden view of the world and an unfettered empiricism'" (Suddaby in Dunne, 2011: 117), it seems to fit the purpose of this study. The middle ground is reached by following a detailed process that eventually yields a sound grounded theory study; one of its main features is to analyse data simultaneously to collection process, so that the latter proceeds informed by the direction suggested by participants as data recipient. The sample is refined along the process, while the interview outline varies to seek thicker data. [Sampling strategies in APPENDIX 1] The final statement comes as a result of "an organic process [...] based on how well data fit conceptual categories identified" (Suddaby, 2006: 634). Categories, drawn from analysis of interviews, observations, meanings and actions in the empirical world, are confronted with the aim of finding relationships; women's visions of the future were reframed in theoretical terms to provide an abstract understanding. The highlighted relationship thus constitutes the 'pattern of meaning' to make sense of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Theories as intended in grounded theory are frameworks that "provide different viewpoints to social reality" (Alasuutari, 1996: 372). However, being abstract and generalized mechanisms to understand reality, they have to be contextualised to be proved fully valid, since meanings "are always considered as historically and culturally specific" (ibid.). The theory comes from constant comparative analysis of the gathered material, being one of the distinctive characteristics of this method. Throughout the process, I had to take into consideration the interplay between extant knowledge and newly emerging data, and how the former could corroborate the latter in support of the direction I decided to follow. In line with Suddaby's

recommendation, I decided to "employ the more traditional presentational strategy of providing a theoretical overview first, to preview the major findings and resulting model. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these concepts actually emerged from the study itself (along with consultations with relevant literature that were guided by the emerging thematic analysis)" (2006: 637). The provided theoretical overview consists of two main concepts – albeit already existing, they were individuated on the field and derived from data analysis, eventually used to convey the final statement. By means of interpretive tools I attempted to show "how [the present] grounded theory *refines, extends, challenges* or *supersedes* extant concepts" (Charmaz, 2006: 169). Categories emerged by reason of creativity and attention not only to participants' words, but also to details relative to environment and body language. The research was concluded when saturation occurred in the comparison of such categories; in other words, when no new significant information emerged to continue data collection and analysis, rendering redundant those already formulated.

Feminist research

Interpretive positions – of which a feminist stance is adopted here – provide the lens to read and interpret all aspects of the current study (Creswell, 2007). Albeit this section does not claim to render justice to the relevance of a feminist perspective, avoiding the objectification of participants was a main criterion respected throughout the process. "A version of ethicism is thus expressed when development and change become the rationale of research, just as it is in therapy" (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005: 163), highlighting similarities with the present study, whose desired outcome is also self-reflexion, both mine and of participants. One of the participants expressed herself this way about feelings related to the interview:

> "I wanted to let everyone know how I am dealing with my life
> problems, also after sharing my story with you I am feeling very nice,
> because I have never shared my story with anyone else, apart from
> UNHCR. I want to thank you for this opportunity." (Shafiqa)

Central to and guiding this research project are Afghan women's voices about displacement and refuge, as well as their ways to envision the future. Within feminist studies, listening to direct

experiences means to build an understanding on 'situated knowledge', which is preferable to making generalisation without a context or taking certain values as granted and universally valid (Tickner, 2001). Such argument emphasised in feminist studies is also one of the pillars of grounded theory.

DATA COLLECTION

> *"Creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied"* (Patton, 2002: 302).

Data collection took place during the fieldwork conducted in Delhi from March 3rd until April 25th 2014. From the Delhi UNHCR office, I obtained consensus to undertake this research project with Afghan women refugees. Relying for its operational activities on Implementing Partners (IP), UNHCR cooperates in Delhi with Don Bosco Ashalayam (DBA), or Bosco, the only Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) managing refugee matters. Bosco provides help with documents, psychological consulting, classes to learn different skills, Income Generating Activities (IGA), vocational training, micro-credits, Hindi, English, IT classes. For the purpose of constant comparative analysis two localities of Delhi, where Bosco has its operative branches, were visited: Lajpat Nagar and Wazirabad, the former hosting a majority of Afghans of Tajik ethnicity, the latter of Pashtun ethnicity. Since a local dimension is relevant to contextualise the production of abstract understandings, I approached the study of social world by means of interviews and observations.

Interviews

Since the majority of elder women were not able to communicate in English, interviews were conducted in presence of a female translator provided by Bosco, according to the method of consecutive interpretation; nevertheless, for interviews with young girls, who spoke fluent English, translator was not required. During the period of fieldwork, 16 in-depth interviews were conducted with women and girls who agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were unstructured, meaning that, individuated a central topic to explore, the interview progressed around it. (Bryman, 2008) In reason of the research questions guiding the study, I developed an

'aide-mémoire' along a time-pattern, covering past, present and future of Afghan women refugees. The interview – a sort of informal conversation – usually began with asking about her reasons for leaving the home country, then how she happened to arrive in India; at this point she would steer the conversation, while I followed by asking some questions to gather details of interest for this research, regarding feelings about the future. I tried to formulate flexible enough questions to let participants dig into their experience from the perspective they wished. The interview guide was subject to variation throughout the process of data collection and analysis, since questions were modified according to newly emerging topics. This flexibility allowed me to explore and provide breadth to themes brought up by the interviewees, not included in the research plan. (Bryman, 2008)

Observations

Observation provides interesting material for qualitative research and increases its depth of analysis, since observing daily actions could yield more details than what participants are able to express in words, although being difficult and time-consuming (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Considering the sensitivity of the topic, observations allowed me to capture aspects not explicable through words. When I visited rooms and houses where Afghan women lived, the words of participants gained deeper meaning and were somehow contextualised, contributing to a holistic understanding of the reality I was immersed in. I would maintain that observations yielded a considerable portion of qualitative data, conferring a third-dimension to the wording of women refugees.

VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, LIMITATIONS

The theoretical formulation resulting from this study could be validated through application to other refugee contexts, in order to determine how people's life is affected by mechanisms regulating society. Considering the flexibility of the researcher, who interprets meanings to create understandings about the complex social world, grounded theory confers "theoretical reach and power within, beyond, and between disciplines" (Charmaz, 2006: 128).

Concerning practical aspects of data collection and analysis, the necessity of a translator represented a twofold limitation: not speaking the language of participants precluded grasping expressions that language conveys, therefore the translation itself was a reduction of the real dialogue filled with feelings and emotions. The presence of translator per se could have sometimes prevented the respondent from answering in complete freedom. However, I tried to cope with such limitations by relying on other elements that I could grasp through observation, such as attention to body language and non-verbal communication. Another limitation that could be evidenced is the access to participants' group: given that I met refugee women at Bosco, it could be argued that such sample is restricted or biased, since women attending the NGO could all be in similar situations of hardship. However, Afghans outside of this context are not actual refugees, since all of them have to refer to Bosco for any matter concerning their status. Despite this possible limitation, I attempted to increase the quality of information by sampling the group purposefully throughout the process [see APPENDIX 1]; the sample varied based on the locality where refugees reside, within which different Afghan ethnic groups were represented with their own experience of refuge, of longer or shorter date. Similarly, a different age group – girls between 18 and 21 – was accessed, as I intended to know whether the pattern observed concerning women was reproduced also among young girls.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY

The role of researcher envisages also acknowledging that the provided "interpretation is an unavoidable limitation" (Charmaz, 2006: 127), since we cannot separate who we are from what we see. This statement entails awareness of how my personal background, social identity and even less-conscious beliefs come into play during data collection and analysis, eventually influencing choices operated. Reflexivity therefore represents a crucial feature of qualitative research (Dunne, 2011). Simultaneously, such feature conforms to the middle-ground nature of grounded theory, as the outcome lies between the researcher's internal perspective and the empirical world outside (Suddaby, 2006). Yet, since self-reflexivity is inherent to qualitative research, precisely for choices made by the researcher, it is deducible that "the whole point in cultural theorising is its potential for self-reflection in society" (Alasuutari, 1996: 382).

I entered the field as a western female student doing research, where the field is a portion of Indian society, governed by specific gender roles, hosting the Afghan refugee community, distinctively Muslim. Albeit cultural and linguistic differences, interaction with Afghan women presented less hindrances than expected; while I doubted about their easiness to share experiences with me, all the women attending the introductory meeting about my research project decided to take part in it. In this occasion, as in each interview, I made clear my limited capacity to bring about actual change or improve their status. My gender facilitated the interaction with Afghan women, otherwise nearly impossible. I also remarked that being stranger to the context was an additional reason to meet me; they talked freely precisely because I was foreigner, so I would not have had any judgment – deriving from culture and customs – towards them, nor contact with the rest of the Afghan community.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The validity of the present study is strengthened by ethical considerations and how these were accounted for. Brinkmann and Kvale asserted that "qualitative research inspired by social constructionism comes close to a kind of qualitative ethicism" (2005: 163), which corresponds to the choices I operated. However, they also warned inexperienced researchers from assuming that qualitative research is inherently ethical; it is rather an exercise requiring practice and sensitiveness (ibid.).

One of the main ethical questions in qualitative research is about publishing or sharing knowledge originated by private individuals, often vulnerable; this question is only partially solvable, by means of truthfulness in description of realities. Since "the real has to be described, not constructed or formed" (Merleau-Ponty in Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005: 158), exercise is needed to reach fairness and render justice to real people behind a research project. A researcher who takes ethics into consideration, values participants' experiences and avoids imposing ideas. It implies simultaneously respecting the cultural context where research is carried out (ibid.); therefore, I managed my appearance and behaviour during interaction with Afghan women in respect of their customs and religious belief. Yet stating clearly other aspects of my research contributed to its ethics; for instance, introducing the reason for gathering their experiences, asking for consensus previous the interview, exposing the voluntary character of participation,

ensuring their anonymity as well as the possibility to withdraw at any time. Within this study, Afghan women's identity was protected through substitution of real names with fictitious ones.

As participants of this research, Afghan women refugees were further exposed to certain power relations that cannot be ignored. Our interaction was characterised by relations of power, since I aimed at gathering data that was then to be used as material for my study. Failing to acknowledge such relationship means "fail[ing] to be objective – ethically and scientifically" (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005: 166). It was deemed important to state my role of student researcher before refugee women, and point out my limited position to bring about actual change; I thus abstained from faking friendship to obtain information, as it would have 'commodified' their feelings. Power relations though inevitably shaped interviews, since I asked questions for a specific purpose and steered the conversation towards my aim; yet having the 'monopoly of interpretation' infers that I am the only person to make sense of their experiences (ibid.). In reason of all this, it is fundamental to understand the outcome as limited and biased by my view and personality. However, since "power is shifting, relational and productive, the research participant also has power" over the production of knowledge, as she decides what to disclose, which in turn will become object of analysis (van Stapele, 2014: 15).

INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

In this chapter I attempt to introduce the two main formulations resulting from data analysis. Throughout the process, I observed that, Galtung's formulation on structural violence was in fact an emergent phenomenon, providing the key to make sense of the real world I was immersed in. The theory, considered as 'first tool' since it came as a result of a primary stage of data analysis, is here enriched by a gender perspective, while at the same time employed to answer the first research question. An interesting study argues about the importance of integrating a feminist analysis to the theory of violence, which will eventually benefit from the inclusion of gender concepts, since feminism and peace studies see respectively gender equality and peace as final goals, contextually realizable. "Feminism contributes to Galtung's theory by seriously tackling issues of power and gender, which are essential to an understanding of violence as a complicated process through which social relations of power are built, legitimised, reproduced, and naturalised" (Confortini, 2006: 356), as ascertained through the literary sources presented and evidenced through the fieldwork experience.

Joan Galtung begins from defining peace with the principle of 'absence of violence', or else as "the vast region of social order from which violence is absent" (1969: 168). As diametrically opposite there is violence, "present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations" (ibid.). It implies that violence lies between the differential of potential and actual realisation. Yet, he argues, "the potential level of realisation is [...] possible with a given level of insight and resources" (1969: 169), that should not be monopolised by certain groups to the detriment of others; here it becomes clear that the concept entails a psychological dimension. When there is no actor of violence, the latter is individuated as structural, inferring that "violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung, 1969: 171). The notion of power here indicates the ability to decide over the distribution of resources and, since at this stage it comes into the discussion, a feminist analysis of power is fundamental to grasp it in all its shapes. Power is embedded in the structure, which according to Galtung (1969) is composed of actors pursuing certain goals and organised in systems of interaction – suffice to look at states, legislations, international organizations, and their functioning, based on hierarchisation and permeated by gender imbalances. Violence is expressed and normalised also by means of

language, as the effect of its power can be observed, for example, through the use of dichotomies; the association of women with peace and men with violence is highly gendered, and this process led Galtung to unconsciously "support[…] the type of thinking which perpetuates violence in society" (Confortini, 2006: 344). Any society worthy of being called just should refuse the normalisation of violence, a fundamental step to reach gender equality, which is simultaneously a primordial component of a just society.

One relevant remark about Galtung's theory is the focus on material and non-material needs that are compromised as a result of structural violence. Here the idea of needs satisfaction to attain an acceptable level of good life is expressed through the analogy of 'preventing the machine from functioning' (Galtung, 1969: 175), taken up also by Amartya Sen. The concept is here approached through comparison of anatomic – intended as the body's structure – against psychological – relative to the body's functions; hence the human body, represented as the machine, could be prevented from its normal functioning when denied nutrition or basic needs of survival, but also movement. "The borderline between physical and psychological personal violence is not very clear, since it is possible to influence physical movements by means of psychological techniques, and vice versa" (ibid.).

CAPABILITY APPROACH

With the capability approach formulated by Amartya Sen, the analysis is taken forward, contributing to answer the second research question. This formulation emerged from women's experience as an evaluating tool of their condition, yet instrumental to grasp what the vital core of human life is about. Of the capability approach, consisting of two main normative concepts, namely capabilities and functionings, focus will be on the former. The theory is represented this way in order to better understand the concepts within and visualise their differences.

Capabilities → "the substantive freedoms to choose a life one has reason to value" (Sen, 1999: 74)

    or

    → "*freedom* to achieve" (ibid: 75)

In order to have dimension of the real opportunity an individual has to pursue her objectives in life, one should not only consider primary material goods owned, but also "the

relevant personal characteristics that govern the *conversion* of primary goods into the person's ability to promote her ends" (ibid: 74). Moreover, conditions of the surrounding in which the conversion takes place are equally significant.

Functionings → "the various things a person may value doing or being" (ibid: 75) or

→ "actual *achievements*" (ibid.)

Functionings vary from elementary ones, as having enough food and being healthy, to complex activities or personal states, such as taking part in the life of the community and having self-respect. A person's capability, instead, consists of "the alternative combinations of functionings" (Sen, 1999: 75) she can manage to achieve; this could be rephrased as the person's freedom to choose between different possibilities, whereby the choice is made by evaluating the best option for oneself.

By reading Sen's works one can grasp the importance of mental health and positive environmental conditions for the realisation of full psychosomatic potential of a human being: "in judging the advantages that the different people have compared with each other, we have to look at the overall capabilities they manage to enjoy" (Sen, 2009: 253). In order to assess well-being in all its connotations, capabilities will be taken as unit of analysis: whether the person is not able to make the best choice for herself among a range of options, due to her psychological conditions, the capability set is thus compromised. The concept of capabilities is intimately connected to substantive freedom, therefore paramount is the "person's *actual* ability to do the different things that she values doing. The capability approach focuses on human lives, and not just on the resources people have, in the form of owning" (Sen, 2009: 253). This approach represents an advancement as it makes "a fundamental shift in the focus of attention from the *means* of living to the *actual opportunities* a person has" (ibid.: 253), where "the *means* of satisfactory human living are not themselves the *ends* of good living" (ibid.: 254).

Actual achievements or functionings are not discussed here, since by arguing that the capability set differs for individuals with poor mental health, it comes as natural consequence that functionings are also impacted, thus the outcome compromised. Like in a machine that is not working properly, the product yielded cannot be 100%, since the machine could not work at its maximum potential; such is the analogy referred to by Galtung and Sen, although differently explained. As Sen goes, "the real value of a set of options lies in the best use that can be made of

them, and – given maximising behaviour and the absence of uncertainty – the use that is *actually* made" (Sen, 1999: 76). When a difference exists between the two, the machine, or the human being in this case, is not working or functioning at its full potential.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

> *"I had little idea of how to react to what I was hearing. […] I learned to listen to the testimony of refugees and not to dismiss it as not credible, simply because it was too horrible for us to believe. I learned about the courage and resilience of refugee women."* (Kumin, 2009: 219)

In the following section I attempt to illustrate how the two main interpretive tools are detectable in the daily experiences of Afghan women refugees; these tools, emerged contextually to data analysis, represent the two main categories under which refugee women's experiences can be organised. The data collected during the applied fieldwork in Delhi will be simultaneously presented, corroborated by an analysis that elicits the same concepts. Firstly, cases of structural violence will be individuated and explained, with the aim of unveiling how this process affects Afghan women refugees in Delhi, by hindering any progress or personal development. After this first level of analysis, it should be possible to answer the first research question that investigates how Afghan women refugees envision their future and what are the conditions determining their answers. Secondly, the capability approach is instrumental to reaching an understanding of the consequences of structural violence, and the degree to which they impact on women's lives, by curtailing the possibility to fully realise their psychosomatic potential (Roberts, 2005: 12).

However, as it resulted difficult to separate the stories told by women according to the emerged concepts, because often their answers contain explanations of both processes, the data has been divided according to the area where it was collected. By operating this distinction, it is possible to remark diverse circumstances and life conditions, thus already providing part of the explanation that motivates the final point of the discussion. Implications will be thoroughly analysed in this latter part, where the arguments are presented as separated.

LAJPAT NAGAR

I began the interviews with women attending the DBA branch of Lajpat Nagar, as it was the first centre of which I was informed. Here I could interview 6 women of different ages and two younger girls [Interviews' schedule in APPENDIX 2]. They are all of Tajik ethnicity and of quite recent arrival

in Delhi, from few months to 2-3 years earlier. While the women's experience is reported here in the following section, I decided to dedicate two specific sections respectively to faith, which represents an important coping strategy as well as a significant component in the life of women refugees; and young girls, who highlight a distinctive experience of refuge, being exposed to this situation for a shorter time span. Women's experiences often follow common patterns, regardless of age and subsequent developments in their lives; previous events, which marked their personality, are the reason that forced them to seek refuge abroad.

Is life here or there?

Kamila arrived in Delhi from Kabul four months previous the interview because, after having promised their 16 years old daughter in marriage to a man, they found out that the boy's family was not a good one and her husband had been fooled when he promised the daughter to such family. When they decided to withdraw the proposal, they started being threatened, especially her older son: "They threatened my son with a knife, then we decided not to live in Afghanistan anymore because my children's life is more important than anything else in my life" (Kamila). Her life back in Kabul was fairly good, as her husband used to be a property dealer, so they did not face any serious economic difficulty, while here in Delhi

> "It is very difficult to work. They [UNHCR] gave my husband a job in a
> restaurant; his working conditions are quite bad. He was studying
> English at DBA before […]. I would like him to work in an office, but it
> is not possible for us to have such jobs in India." (Kamila)

She also reported having health issues relative to bones and constant pain, for which reason doing a physical work had become very hard and she was taking a lot of medicines, while admitting "there is no healing for this pain". Yet, she went on saying that being in India is hard times for her and the rest of her family, since she misses her relatives back home and their support, while the only thing making her happy is the opportunity of education for her children, that instead made her afraid in Afghanistan.

Kamila's experience brings to evidence the previous trauma she lived together with her family, the poor health conditions limiting their capacity to be successful in society, resulting from

what they underwent in the past and the hardship still part of their daily life. She reports that, despite language courses and training at DBA, even her husband, who had a decent job earlier, cannot fully become part of the new 'host' society, due to discrimination towards refugees; yet she admits that the pain she is bearing has no cure, where she could be referring to poor health care as well as to internal pain, consequent to protracted suffering. In India everything is harder, lacking family support and the facilities known back home. The status of asylum-seeker – holder of White Card issued by UNHCR – indicator of a temporary situation, adds up another dimension of insecurity in her life. When asked about her future, Kamila replied "my biggest wish is my children's happiness, that they would be comfortable in the future", otherwise what lies beyond human control is in the hands of Allah: "how can I say about the coming years? Allah knows better how it will be", inferring the significant role of faith.

> "If God wants and helps us to have a better life in another country, as
> the situation here is not good. I hope it will be better tomorrow,
> because *all dark nights will bring a brighter day*." (Kamila)

Shafiqa had a similar past: she escaped from Afghanistan with her only son and husband, as they were afraid that their child would be kidnapped by militant groups acting in the most remote areas of the country. They sought refuge in India to save their only-born child, after having lost three during pregnancy, for a serious injury in her backbone, due to which she falls down and becomes unconscious. Shafiqa wishes to ensure a brighter future to her 6 years old-boy and receive medical treatments, free for refugees in India. However, "there is a long waiting period for getting an appointment with the doctor", indicating the malfunctioning of the few options offered to refugees by UNHCR. Her and her family's problems did not end with the refuge in Delhi:

> "My husband suffers from mental disease and his leg got
> permanently injured by a rocket during the Taliban period, about 12
> years ago. He tells me everything I have to do, eats plenty of
> medicines and at times hits me and my little boy. Now with the
> medicines provided by UNHCR he is a little bit better." (Shafiqa)

This represents an instance of bodily injuries preventing the realisation of other objectives in life, as she admits of struggling just to walk and accompany her child to school. Moreover, her story is exemplary of what reported on the 'Operational Guidance: Mental Health and

Psychosocial Support Programming for Refugee Operations', a manual edited by UNHCR in 2013. Here a list of guiding principles is provided: the last of these, that mostly captured my attention, is 'do no harm', since – as stated in this report – "It is important to be aware of the potentially negative impacts of humanitarian programs and activities, including those with the aim to improve mental health and psychosocial support, and to prevent inadvertently harming refugees" (UNHCR, 2013: 17). Among the examples of humanitarian aid-induced problems, it is mentioned "If the health care staff [is] not properly trained, and/or if no psychosocial interventions are available a large number of people with mild depressive complaints may end up being prescribed unnecessary medication, and even become dependent on benzodiazepines" (ibid: 58). On this matter, I believe the report still stresses an individual response to trauma, despite acknowledging the significance of security in society, family and community support. When interventions to be implemented are listed, one can find 'providing essential drugs' (ibid: 47), which represents, in my opinion, an obsolete response to trauma, where medicines constitute a possible solution. In the discussion following this chapter, further explanation will be provided on this matter.

In regard to her family's financial situation, Shafiqa admits they carefully spend the savings gathered from selling property back home, and that allowed them to live in Delhi for the first few months. About her daily life and the place where they live – shared with another person to reduce rent and bills – she told me

> "I am at home all the time, just sitting there, because I can't work as I am illiterate. My husband can't work either, and on top of this we are not allowed to work since we still hold a White Card. The house where I live in Boghal lacks a lot of main things, such as a refrigerator and a carpet." (Shafiqa)

To be noted that a carpet in Afghan culture is a very fundamental piece of furniture for the house, it constitutes the bed when all other pieces are missing, therefore admitting to not have a carpet is equal to lacking a bed to sleep. Then Shafiqa, hiding some tears, began to tell that she does not know what to reply to her child "when he is looking to other kids and saying 'why mom I can't have this?' I don't want to tell him we are poor, I am just sad for not being able to satisfy his wishes". As for all the women I met, Shafiqa also stated the importance of ensuring an education to her son:

> "Educated people can do anything, they don't face difficulties in their
>
> life, no language problems; it helps in all kinds of things in life, and
>
> they won't be like us." (Shafiqa)

This statement is an indicator of the significance that education has for refugees; those who have not received one, see it as a tool for being redeemed from their present condition, allowing the future generation to escape circumstances their parents were forced to bear, for not being educated.

Experiencing distress

During the fieldwork and after numerous encounters with Afghan women, I understood that often being listened is part of the healing process, or at least it lightens the burden of painful or traumatic experiences. Like Shafiqa, Shala similarly reported symptoms of distress. Arrived in Delhi one and half year ago, she has not seen her husband for the last eleven years, following his escape to seek refuge in Norway, where the rest of the family was supposed to join short after; however, documents' matters did not work as expected, and they were forced to stay away from each other for so long. Consequently to this deception, Shala sought refuge in Pakistan first, to be sent back to Afghanistan, and eventually tried her luck in India before giving up.

> "I am facing a lot of difficulties here as I am still holding a White Card.
>
> It is useless though, we can't even buy a SIM card for the phone and
>
> my son is not accepted in university for the same reason." (Shala)

This situation is exemplary of how structural violence acts in the life of refugees, hindering their well-being and their freedom, as any other human being. In the 'Urban Profiling of Refugee Situations in Delhi' it is stated that Afghan refugees "mentioned […] that lack of valid visa was an obstacle to accessing housing jobs or buying a SIM card for mobile phone. The UNHCR refugee card seemed not to be a replacement for a valid visa" (JIPS, 2013: 42); similarly, lacking required documentation was a hindrance for university admission, since only primary education in government schools is free for refugees (ibid.). For Afghans, youth in particular, education is one of the main concerns; while displaying high levels of education, they show the lowest employment levels (JIPS, 2013). Often they have to pay fees as if they were overseas students, instead of

domestic fees, being a constraint for many, since they can be too high to be afforded by a refugee family. "The Afghans, with the highest education level amongst household heads [the survey includes for comparison refugees from Myanmar and Somalia], had the lowest percentage of children not attending school, and the Afghan youth expressed very strong motivation to enter college, considering it decisive for their future" (JIPS, 2013: 68), which emerges also from women's witness. In addition, the temporary status in which Shala lives since arrival cannot induce any improvement; it rather keeps her as many others in unstable situations, supposedly temporary, but actually going on for long periods. Such uncertainty can only be detrimental to the refugees' condition and hold them in the same status mental distress, resulting from previous events and sudden change of environment. When I asked how she feels about her future, Shala – married off at 15 – told me:

> "I have no idea. I feel my head too heavy, as if I had mountains inside,
> in this condition I can't think of anything. The only wish is to join my
> husband. You know, all these struggles and efforts I'm making is
> because I want to see him again." (Shala)

Of the women met at the Lajpat Nagar centre, Zeeba represented yet another reality. Mother of nine children, widow since six months, she arrived in Delhi a month after her husband was poisoned to death. He worked as driver for a foreign company, reason for which the Taliban, "who don't like non-Muslim people", as Zeeba explained, decided to kill him. Their life was quite good and normal back in Afghanistan, they could afford what they needed, were happy and their children were attending school; today, though, she cannot afford what her children need, which causes further suffering. Zeeba would have had her interview with UNHCR officers few weeks later, determining what it will be of her future.

The interview has become a quite stressful procedure for refugees; the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) carried by the UNHCR determines the future of refugees and whether they will be given the chance to rebuild a life in the new country. This is how the procedure is perceived by refugees. Several women referred to RSD during our meetings; during interviews they have to recall the same facts every time, to verify whether they are speaking the truth, in which case the refugee status would be granted. For people who live with mental distress, trauma and other issues, recalling events in details more than once could result pressuring, which makes the whole process even harder, and viewed as an exam from which their future depends. This is how an

UNHCR officer expresses herself on the issue, appearing in contrast with the real experience of women refugees I met: "Refugees complain that the UNHCR refugee determination process is arbitrary, complicated and full of delays. […] Refugees and their representative NGOs do not understand the UNHCR's criteria for refugee status determination and often complain of unfair treatment during the interview process" (Sengupta, 2008).

Of Zeeba's account, though, I would like to highlight the story about one of her daughters; following her husband's death, two of her daughters got shocked and began falling down for no reason. One of them, apparently reports serious problems, and cannot be left home alone, so Zeeba has to make sure to always leave someone at home when she is not there.

> "Her father died when she was in school. When she came home and saw the situation, she screamed a lot; since that day if we tell her even a single word she doesn't like, she would start screaming and crying." (Zeeba)

She was taken to the hospital, where she was given medicines and told that she has to take them for her whole life. Once again, it is to be questioned whether this is the most appropriate response to trauma. Zeeba told me that her daughter seems slightly better now with all the medicines, although she believes that 5 or 6 tablets per day are too much. "The doctor said to eat a lot of fruits with these medicines, but I don't know I can afford fruits and good food for her", as all refugees remarked higher living expenses in Delhi compared to life previously and to what they can afford. Usually their fortunes consist of properties and goods they owned and sold in order to gather money to live abroad for the first few months, but as the situation does not find a solution within few months of time, their savings are soon depleted for living costs.

> "I'm also having bad toothache lately; the doctor advised me to take it off, but I can't afford a visit to the dentist, so I keep taking painkillers, even though I know it is harmful to my stomach." (Zeeba)

Zeeba is aware of how her economic situation affects her health, but precisely for this reason, she cannot do otherwise. When the conversation shifts to the future, how it looks like, what her perspectives and wishes are, she mentioned her daughter's health, her children's future well-being, and her will to give them education. About the UNHCR decision, she stated:

"My future is not in my hands, it depends if our case will be accepted

by UNHCR and I will be helped to settle down." (Zeeba)

This time she clearly assessed that it is the institutional decision that will determine her and her family's future, whether they will be among the lucky enough, or not; it shows that – despite resilience and ability to act – certain mechanisms depend on the structure and its functioning, therefore hindering any development, regardless of capability or will.

WAZIRABAD

When I came to know about a DBA branch in North Delhi, where the Pashtun community resides, I had the opportunity to compare data already collected with new data, provided by women of another ethnic group, living elsewhere in the city. The branch is located not far from the central spot of Wazirabad, named Kabuli Chowk, as remote as it could seem to be in Afghanistan.

The women I met here are all of Pashtun ethnicity and had spent longer time as refugees in Delhi, from 5 or 6 years to 25 years [see APPENDIX 2]; those of earlier arrival escaped Afghanistan during the Soviet war, while others had been in Delhi for a shorter time span. In reason of space limitation, not all stories of women I met can be mentioned here, nevertheless I chose to give an account of those eventually supporting the final discussion. Their past equalled all their experiences, characterised by traumatic events or conditions of hardship and poverty, urging to leave behind family and land and seek refuge abroad. India is a cheap and easy option to reach, but they have no idea of what to expect; often they believe refuge is a temporary solution, until further improvements of the situation in Afghanistan. Most of the refugee women I met came with a medical visa, which is the only way to enter the country with documents and visa; those arrived long ago had no clue about the documents they had at arrival.

Habiba tells about the war devastating her village in the 1980s, although they were unaware about these militant groups 'because of illiteracy', whether they were Taliban or Mujahedeen. When Habiba came to India, she ignored that she would not be able to see her country for so long; also, now she acknowledges that no improvement of her actual status is foreseeable.

> "I can't feel which life is better [before/present]; here in India it is like a jail, we cannot go back to Afghanistan, either to any other country. We are helpless, we can't touch the sky because of this roof, as it is too high. I just want to die but then I think about my children… it's not a little time, it's been to long here [24 years]." (Habiba)

'The waiting limbo'

Almost all the refugee women of early date expressed similar feelings, such as 'being in jail', 'being fed up with this life', 'being helpless', that I render through the concept of 'the waiting limbo'. Those who have lived longer in refuge have understood and learnt through their experience that in India there are no opportunities for them, neither for the future generation; they are aware their lives will not see any improvement, even after having escaped war back home. Women who expressed themselves in this way admitted that, when they left home many years earlier, they were unaware of the destination and of how the new life would have been; Habiba, 24 years later, understood that her situation is not any longer temporary. The Blue Card issued by the UNHCR does not entail freedom of movement outside the borders, since it is not an official identity document valid for travelling abroad; therefore, once they are declared refugees, they cannot leave again the country of refuge, otherwise the threat to life, for which they received shelter, will not be deemed a valid claim and withdrawn. The case of Marukh, instead, is exemplary of the UNHCR flaws in managing resettlement, by not only failing to inform refugees about the actual status of their application, but also by postponing the process without providing valid reasons:

> "We got resettlement to USA four years ago, we have passports but no visas and we are still waiting. In April 2011 we were supposed to leave but we are still here and they [UNHCR] keep telling us that there are security problems. When we go to UNHCR they tell us to go to IOM [International Organization for Migration]. We have been waiting for four years now." (Marukh)

As the refugee women I met in Wazirabad had spent longer time in Dehi, they provided richer information about their daily occupation, the environment in which they live, as well as unmasking some of the weaknesses of UNHCR and its IP, and how these directly affect their life

and well-being. For instance, the Subsistence Allowance (SA) is a financial aid that families receive to cope with their economic difficulties, although I could not determine its exact amount from the women interviewed. The system depending on international donors "is gradually being phased out […] due to increasing resource constraints at the UNHCR" (Sengupta, 2008); moreover, it results discriminatory towards women, since when they get married they are entitled to half of the amount intended for single women, as they enter the husband's family and become dependent on him (ibid.). In this regard, the Operational Guidance MHPSS asserts – among humanitarian aid-induced problems – that "inconsistent, irregular or random distributions of relief items mak[es] it difficult for families to plan rations & meals etc." (UNHCR, 2013: 58), whereby the SA, first provided then withdrawn, could represent an instance.

In Wazirabad, a sort of Afghan ghetto, integration with Indians did not see enhancement despite of the long time Afghans have resided here. For example, regarding the housing situation, evictions are common; sometimes Indians who are vegetarians for religious belief, would not let Afghans rent their apartments as they know meat will be cooked. Other reasons for eviction are inability to pay the rent, lack of valid documents – since often the validity of the Blue Card is not recognised – or big families living in the property, all reasons that can be translated into discrimination towards Afghan refugees (JIPS, 2013: 32). Among the refugee women I met, all such instances are identifiable; Marjan, for example, told me that the owner of the previous place she was renting did not collect the money for long time, but claimed it all at once and, unable to pay, they had to move out after 18 years in the same room "without a roof, even though at times Delhi gets extremely hot". Marjan, 52 years old, arrived in India in 1992 – ten years after her husband, who came in search of a better life – and recounts of having been accorded official refugee status in 2011, while during these years she had to renovate her papers annually, without guarantee of renewal.

> "Back then I was healthy and I was stitching clothes and making
> embroidery for Indians; I was gaining very little money for this work,
> what they gave me was not enough for living, as here in India
> expenses are higher. Nowadays, though, I can't stitch anymore
> because my sight is not so good."

Her words bear witness of how poor health and structural violence impact on the living of a vulnerable woman, eventually affecting her and her family's well-being. Moreover, considered

what pointed out beforehand about working permits and possibility of employment, one learns that for refugees is almost impossible to be employed, hence most of them find occupation in the informal economy, constituting the sole chance left to make a living, though working in this sector does not always ensure a good enough-living. "The Government of India has recently allowed UNHCR registered refugees to apply for long term visas and work permits, which will allow them to seek employment in the formal sector" (JIPS, 2013: 13), which seems to be an important development for the well-being of refugees. Marjan's story offered insights about the pressure felt in everyday life; for example, she mentioned one of her sons, Amjhad, who went to jail following a fight. Like other women, Marjan is worried about her sons, as they do not attend school due to structural impediment, and keep roaming around, perhaps drinking alcohol or being involved in petty crimes, which gives locals the opportunity to blame on refugees for disorder.

> "That's because my son was not studying, they [Indians] blame on us,
> they think we're all terrorists. When I came here, I thought we'd be
> safe in this country, but when I saw my son going to jail, I didn't feel
> safe here either."

Rejected cases

Another bold example of structural violence, where the malfunctioning of institutions causes unintended harm to others (Galtung, 1969), not only preventing individuals from realising their psychosomatic potential (Roberts, 2005), but most essentially depriving them of the right to a dignified and respectable life, is the instance of a rejected or closed case – as the interviewees referred to it. A refugee whose case has been rejected has to return home, since he/she does not have any valid document to stay, therefore making this individual non-existent 'within the pale of law' (Larking, 2014) of the hosting country, escaped from his own country, thus relegated to a condition of 'less-than-human' (Marhia, 2013).

In Wazirabad I met two women whose case had been rejected, Lela and Masuma; they were both not aware of the reasons, although Masuma said it might have to do with the language spoken by the interpreter, Farsi, which is another version of the language spoken in Afghanistan – Dari. The language barrier complicates the interviewing process; nevertheless, UNHCR should provide professionally trained personal, attentive to the psychic sensitivity of refugees, as well as

mastering the languages spoken by Afghans, be it Dari or Pasthun. As she reported, the interpreter was one factor determining the negative outcome of RSD, which is – to the least – detrimental to the refugees condition. Masuma and Lela have been in Delhi for 5-6 years, while two years ago their case was closed; structural impediment and issues they begin to face in this status are countless.

> "When the case is closed we have to go back, […] UNHCR leaves us
> alone. Because of troubles in Afghanistan we can't go back. My
> husband is old and sick, we don't have any source of living, not even
> money to treat him. […] When we first came, we thought that UNHCR
> is like a mother for refugees." (Lela)

These are the feelings Lela reported during our conversation: she recounted that due to economic hardship, they had to marry off their daughter Zohra, so that she could live with her husband; having him been granted permanent status, through the marriage Zohra too obtained the Blue Card. However, the new family is also very poor and they cannot afford living together, therefore Zohra with her new born-baby is still living with her mother, while her husband at his parents'.

> "The landlord found out and got angry, since she is supposed to live
> with her husband now that they are married. He wants to know how
> many people live in the house; if it's a big family, he will not give the
> house, if it's a small family it will be easier." (Lela)

Her experience confirms what stated beforehand about housing eviction and discrimination by the hands of Indians. In a similar situation, Masuma reported of not having any longer access to DBA, where her son was attending English classes, due to lack of documents to stay, since "there is not any help for closed cases" (Masuma); she believes that not being able to attend government schools, children should be allowed at least to continue going to class at DBA.

Considered the actual circumstances, it was not easy for these women to assert if their previous life was worse than what they are currently living; not seeing any improvement of their condition made them feel in this trap, namely the waiting limbo. The refugee women in Wazirabad expressed themselves as 'being tired of India and of this life', 'wanting this life to end', 'not seeing any better life compared to before'. From their answers I understood that they were previously

exposed to a direct threat to life, which was not anymore the case once in India, although here they came to know other 'threats', albeit indirect and not mentioned as such, for not being immediately recognisable. When asked to compare past and present, Lela replied:

> "In Afghanistan we faced a lot of troubles, we were afraid of those people who wanted to harm us, or of just being killed by a bomb blast, that's why we had to escape. When we came to India, one of my children was in age for schooling but he couldn't attend because of lack of documents, we can't rent a house legally because we have no permit to stay, my husband is sick but we can't even cure him."
> (Lela)

Her answer resumes the effects of structural violence on the life of refugees, who underwent previous traumatic experiences and still endure concealed forms of violence, inducing continuous suffering; these circumstances eventually impact also on her capabilities, since due to structural conditions, she is not free to achieve what is best for herself, affecting in turn the whole family's well-being, education opportunities for her son and health care support for her husband.

Envisioning the future

Exploring visions of the future of refugee women in Wazirabad gave an indicator of the degree to which the actual conditions influence and determine their perception of the future, and whether they will be able to even project thinking in a future dimension. At the same time, addressing such dimension was instrumental to reveal simultaneously psychological distress and symptom of issues troubling mental health, highlighted in the subsequent section. When women were questioned about their future, seemingly the last hope was towards Allah, as if their faith – beyond human control – was the force keeping them alive.

Masuma, one of the closed cases, said: "I cannot think about the future, only Allah knows how it will be. Here there is no more life for me, what I hope is just a better and safer life for my children". Nurturing hope for the future generation is one of the few possibilities for these women to express themselves in a future dimension; they hope for their children to realise what they had been waiting for so long, often mentioning the opportunity to be educated, which would provide

an individual with the capacity to choose, to choose autonomously and to opt for the option esteemed best for oneself. Faith represents also an important component in the life of Afghan women, therefore a section will be dedicated, where faith is analysed as coping mechanism. During our conversations, I approached talking about the future by asking how they imagine themselves in ten years from now. Marukh replied:

> "Because there are so many difficulties here today, I can't think how
> it will be in 10 years, I just think about today. I don't know in one
> month what will happen to us. Nothing to think… just suffering and
> suffering for 20 years. I can't imagine anything" (Marukh)

Her reply clearly shows inability to imagine a future, due to present suffering. Although a psychological analysis of such statement is beyond my competence, it still reveals that her mental status is somehow troubled and not serene. In this regard, similarly to 'feeling mountains in my head', Marjan's reply was a hint that spurred the investigation of mental health related-aspects, which I understood from her statement as the submerged part of the iceberg. While the tip had been uncovered through their life stories and experiences recounted, some of their statements and thoughts helped to explore new paths within this research. Albeit a thorough psychological analysis is missing, I believe this concealed topic is the one deserving the greatest attention, since it represents the basis upon which all other arguments can stand, being an important reason to consider in the overall analysis of findings.

> "I just think and think but I don't feel, I don't know where is the life.
> […] Some other times instead I'm just not here with my thoughts."
> (Masuma)

> *"Resilience and fortitude rest upon a sense of hope: the belief that adversity can ultimately be overcome and a process of 'meaning-making' that gives coherence to past, present, and future experiences."* (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010: 81)

During the period of interaction with Afghan women refugees, I understood something very important about the ability of imagining the future; I came to realise that it depends on the present situation, whether and how one will be able to imagine the time yet to come. This paragraph aims to shed light on the resilience of refugee women I met, by discussing their agency or 'capacity to act' (Charrad, 2010: 517), yet important to contextualise to be conceived as the intersection of several factors, be it race, gender, citizenship and others (ibid.). The intent is to reconfigure Afghan women not only through images related to suffering, but also through ways of coping, similarly constitutive of their identity. As advanced in the introduction, Muslim women do not constitute a homogenous entity, but are diverse as their identities, therefore framing them only as victims would be constraining to capture the multiple forms of agency they exert. (see Mohanty, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2002)

Being state structures embedded in patriarchy, women live through by developing their form of agency within the order prescribed by gender hierarchies and institutional contexts, even in "the most disempowering circumstances" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009: 29). Such circumstances constitute a challenge to identity, especially in situations of uprootedness, when individuals undergo a process of identity rebuilding. In the context of this research, I have individuated some forms of agency, which I rather refer to as resilience, since refugee women's capacity to act within the structure of state, legislation and cultural norms actually represents a way of coping. "Violations of human dignities through social abandonment or erasure" should be acknowledged "as real social danger to the well-being of persons" (Jenkins, 2013: 280); it is clear from this formulation that violence in its concealed shape has profound implications on mental well-being, as it will be seen later on.

Faith

Faith emerged from Afghan women's experiences as a symbolic form of resilience, allowing them to keep hoping about the future; once hope is restored in the hands of Allah, it is no longer human will to determine future events. Yet, not imagining the future could be as well a way to cope, to survive. Resilience thus "explain[s] why, despite significant exposure to war, individuals and families achieve emotional adjustment and social functioning" (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010: 71). Hope, embodied in the Afghan culture as faith, is a significant component of resilience when hardship persists. Among the women I met, it seems to represent the main coping strategy, since "strong religious conviction was clearly a source of individual strength in the face of misfortune" (ibid.: 76). Faith constitutes "a central component of an imagined future, one which depended upon the benefice of God" (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010: 77), as the following account reveals.

Mahdia's experience is representative of the strength of faith in the life of Afghan women, regardless of which religious belief. She shared with me her path to conversion to Christianity, powerful and touching. Belonging to a wealthy and religious family, Madhia now 32 arrived in India three years ago with her younger sister, in order to evade familial authority, particularly forceful towards women in the Afghan society. She had lived her previous experience of faith through family imposition, which she later rejected by escaping and converting. Albeit we could communicate only in simple English, she openly asked me not to have a translator, as she was willing to share her story freely and confidentially. As she stated, religion was the reason to flee Afghanistan and seek refuge in India, where now she can attend church on Sundays.

Young generation

While proceeding through constant comparative analysis, I decided to investigate the point of view of young girls with the intent of finding parallels or differences with answers given by adult women; furthermore, the young generation embodies adults' hopes, as resulting from interviews, and represents a distinctive vision in respect to what has been presented so far. Considering their young age, war trauma did not affect girls the same way as adult women, nor they have the same degree of awareness about events.

The girls I interviewed were between 18 and 21 years old and, arrived in Delhi about two years before; they were able to project themselves in the future, wishing to pursue their studies, to become for example beautician, or others willing to begin university, dreaming to become doctors or teachers. However, regardless of hopes and dreams about the future that they have today, hints came up showing that, whether exposed to circumstances and hardship for longer time, they would likely answer as the adult women I interviewed, because time will make them aware of circumstances.

The account provided here is of Rohina, 18 years old, who left Afghanistan along with her family, following threatening attacks, that already ten years before caused her father's death, as he was policeman. At the time of our conversation, she disclosed that her family's case had been rejected and they were staying illegally in India, also in reason of presidential elections in Afghanistan making it unsafe to go back, and of lack of money to travel. While talking about her life before and today, she said:

> "Now I'm happy, now I don't want to go back. When we came here I
> was telling my mother I was not happy, I wanted to go back. But
> when she told me what happened, I said I want to stay here. Now
> they want to go back." (Rohina)

An interesting parallel that she made effectively describes the experience recounted in different ways by all refugee women I met: "life in Afghanistan was good but not secure, while here it is secure, but not so good" (Rohina). Youth's experience of refuge is similarly traumatic, because it entails rebuilding an identity not completely shaped yet, together with all implications of such life (Khanlou and Guruge, 2008). She told that "just here [at Bosco] they don't know about our story; if they know, they will kick us out" (Rohina). While talking about future, she would love to travel, particularly to Spain, due to her passion for football. This is an excerpt of her account:

> "My mother says 'I don't think I have three daughters and three sons,
> but only two daughters and all the rest are sons' [smiling]. When I
> was younger, like 13 years old, I was like boys, wearing boys' clothes,
> my hair was also like this, like Ronaldo, but I didn't know Ronaldo at
> that time. [...] But when my sister got married, her husband was very

strict and he told my sister to change the way she used to wear."

(Rohina)

The phenomenon described – thoroughly documented in the book *The Underground Girls of Kabul* (Nordberg, 2014) – regards the habit in Afghanistan of dressing girls as boys before they reach puberty, to temporarily save them from the patriarchal constrain that will act upon them later in life, but also to leave traces of an empowering experience, as living as a boy in young age can be. During our conversation, Rohina remarked that "there is always change", relevant in terms of identity rebuilding, as "each change is a source of identity transformation" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008: 32), which will be explained in depth in the next chapter.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter I propose an explanation of the situation encountered on the field by making use of extant researches and previous studies to confer theoretical meaning to real life experiences. For this purpose the chapter is divided according to the three sections covered during interviews – past, present and future – convenient to understand the reality refugees leave behind, their present condition and challenges, to then motivate visions of future through a perspective of mental well-being, determinant for envisioning tomorrow, while determined by today's circumstances.

PAST

A gender perspective takes relevance within the debate over conflict and post-conflict situations, since it is considered that the already disadvantaged position of women and other vulnerable people is magnified in such situations in terms of gender inequality, implying that they are exposed to greater insecurity, differential access to resources and human rights violations. Such are the consequences of modern conflicts, easily troubling the overall well-being of individuals. (Jansen, 2006) A gender analysis reveals that suffering does not end with the conflict, as proved during the field experience (ibid.). "The mental health effects of war and armed conflicts on combatants and civilians are enormous and can last for a lifetime. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as anxiety, depression, […] are the by-products of atrocities" perpetrated on the population as whole (Jansen, 2006: 142). Investigating population's health pre- and post- conflict – a domain yet unexplored – would help unveil the impact on well-being, both physical and mental (Moran et al, 2011). The women I interviewed had all been equalled by the experience of war and displacement, which consists of living traumatic events and being separated from family and community, constituting for Afghans the basis of social security. Often women recounted of having left their home country ignoring they would have never made return. The concept of 'waiting limbo', emerging from women's accounts, was thus created to convey their significance; as such I interpreted the condition in which Afghan women are bound to live in refuge. This expression was used to describe how women in Wazirabad feel about their daily existence, since they spent comparatively longer time under the same adverse circumstances than women of

Lajpat Nagar. For all these reasons, it is important to understand the condition lived by refugees as collective trauma, not individual thus derived by mental issues (Moran et al, 2011).

In the Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) of Afghanistan mental health emerges as a crucial aspect, since it determines other states of being and allows an opportune assessment of health status. The report indicates an incidence of mental disorders higher among women than compared to men, whereby a correlation exists "between the number of traumatic events and the likelihood of developing psychopathology" (WHO, 2010: 32), in line with Jansen's analysis. Furthermore, it is stated that "a wide range of socioeconomic and environmental determinants influence health outcomes" (ibid: 24), hence remarking that conditions of the surrounding do affect individuals.

PRESENT

The adjustment period in a new country represents a 'secondary trauma' (Khanlou and Guruge, 2008: 175), since refugees experience discrimination, economic hardship, difficulty of integration. Yet, the loss of familial support may compromise refugees' mental well-being, as Robeyns noted that "belonging to a supportive community or family [...] can also be seen as an important resource for mental health" (2003: 76). Some interviewees also mentioned of feeling 'always in change', to indicate lack of stable conditions to rebuild their existence. Being change responsible for identity transformation, refugees live through multiple realities and struggle to find ways to cope; when individuals undergo this process, sense of self, agency and well-being are all modified as a consequence of external factors (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). Considering that some of the women interviewed are widows, and all of them have lost family support in refuge, they appeared as particularly sensitive to such changes. During the period of secondary trauma, refugee women face unknown realities, where customs and daily life differ, they do not speak the language and have to send the older son to make a living for the family, at times numerous, otherwise with someone in poor health conditions.

The interaction between individual and environment is paramount for identity development and well-being, mental and physical; an individual's identity is shaped by its surrounding, as confirmed by a study conducted in South India, which explores the connection between social status and depressive symptoms among women in this area (Rao et al, 2012). The

authors argue that "culture plays a central role in shaping emotional experience both within and outside of the individual" (2012: 1968), therefore women's negative experiences result from a socio-cultural context that prescribes for them a lower status in society (ibid.). Social differentiation and marginalisation of refugees happens within society, where "power differentials enable and perpetuate stigma" (ibid.), overlapping with the outcome of structural violence. Previous trauma consequent to conflict, on which structural violence is added, constitutes a form of capability deprivation, which "affect the lives of women in countries like India more than men" (ibid.). Afghan women in refuge endure mechanisms of isolation, for which they are relegated to the margins of society, with no possibility of integration with Indians and within the Indian society. A striking aspect emerged through interviews is that women did not notice any improvement in the present life as refugees, but at times described it as even worse than before, as now they were alone facing all hardships; conditions of structural violence persisted and were reproduced within the hosting society.

At this stage of the discussion it is important to provide an explanation of how such conditions intervene to affect individuals' well-being. In 'The Idea of Justice', Sen (2009) advanced the idea of 'internal' and 'external' view of health, meaning respectively the dimension perceived by oneself and the one detectable through medical analysis. Suffering, related to the internal view, is considered as a "central feature of illness" (Sen, 2009: 285), and has been taken up by scholars like Arthur Kleinman, who makes a detailed analysis of social suffering, as in 'The Violences of Everyday Life' (2000). Sen addressed his discussion to disabilities: if collective trauma is considered as mental disorder thus as disability, the connection becomes easier to reveal. One can be disable also in reason of age or illness, therefore it results harder to convert capabilities into functionings, as much as to earn an income (Sen, 2009). By adopting this argument, I would like to propose an enlarged view of disability, since protracted trauma, representing a kind of disability, leads to mental impairment – important to consider as conversion factor.

> *"The relevance of disability in the understanding of deprivation in the world is often underestimated, and this can be one of the most important arguments for paying attention to the capability perspective. People with physical or mental disability are not only among the most deprived human beings in the world, they are also, frequently enough, the most neglected"* (Sen, 2009: 258).

Afghan women refugees are among the most deprived and neglected, even twice: firstly, in reason of the war trauma they carry and secondly, due to isolation they are subject to, as strangers in the Indian society. Such complex circumstances keep refugees in a state of social isolation, where this could be "the single most robust predictor of health and illness worldwide […]. Persons who are socially abandoned or isolated uniformly fare poor on all indices of health, mental, and physical alike" (Jenkins, 2013: 269). Considering trauma as a form of disability and isolation as further enhancing such condition, it can be inferred that mechanisms of structural violence – whereby isolation is one – may keep refugee women in the status quo, while also enclosing them in a vicious cycle of reproduction of the given circumstances, detrimental to their personal and mental well-being.

To resume, refugees cannot rely on the same capability set of individuals who enjoy full mental well-being and did not endure traumatic events, let alone the debate about functionings. Even if refugees would be able to value the same things as individuals who did not undergo the same experience, they will not have the same freedom to achieve those valued functionings, because their suffering constrains action, posing a limit to its realisation. Beside all this, structural violence in the new environment further limits refugees' freedom to achieve. In particular, the form of gendered structural violence emerged from the experience of Afghan refugees in Delhi poses a serious limit to women's well-being and realisation of full psychosomatic potential. Therefore, it could be assessed that Afghan women already come with a disadvantage – the traumatic experience – and in refuge another unfavourable aspect – structural violence – adds up to the existing condition, constraining in turn the set of capabilities normally available. Opting for the best choice for oneself or taking certain decisions under similar circumstances, of the psyche and the surrounding, becomes complex enterprise.

FUTURE

If such are the actual circumstances in which Afghan women refugees live, how can they think about tomorrow? What are today's premises on which to build hopes for tomorrow?

Jenkins argues that "the social, cultural, or economic denial of fundamental needs, through a societal failure to recognize them as both legitimate and requisite, may adversely affect well-being to produce discomfort, illness, suffering" (2013: 269). In his proposition, it is remarkable the

attribution of responsibility to a societal failure to recognise such needs as fundamental for life and overall well-being of individuals; such failure is what he intends as structural violence, strengthened by social and cultural denial (ibid.). Through an analysis of the material gathered in Lajpat Nagar and Wazirabad, where respective circumstances differ, I observed that women living in Delhi since longer time have experienced the hardship of life in refuge as well as institutional malfunctioning at a higher degree, with all the consequences both entail. It was the case of women in Wazirabad, who for longer carried the weight of structural violence, as refugees and as women; they appeared as hopeless and desperate for having spent about half of their life in constraining conditions, while facing unchanging problems. Regardless of locality, women replied in a similar manner about their future, all making reference to children, education, faith, as possibilities of redemption, but also of addressing the future. However, I somehow felt the hope of women in Wazirabad not as young and strong as if they had just arrived; they appeared worn down by the life they lead, just like the houses I saw walking around the district. The outside was an image of the inside, I learnt through observations. On the other hand, women of more recent arrival were bearing the fresh memory of war and fear of escape, while being less aware of difficulties the new life as refugees entails. What I could determine as a result of such considerations, is that there is a time-effect influencing life of women refugees I met in Delhi: it seems that the longer exposed to such circumstances, the more they have been suffering, since harder would be to recover from the double trauma, as daily suffering of life in refuge just adds up to feelings they carry as a consequence of war in Afghanistan.

The outcome of structural violence represents what I could reconstruct of these women's experiences, what I grasped from their accounts and attempted to render theoretical concepts. However, since consequences were not immediately observable, it was necessary to employ a second tool in order to highlight the path of this concealed process, whose outcome is though quite serious. As numerous scholars have proposed, the capability approach envisaged by Sen is an appropriate tool to evaluate repercussions of structural violence on people's life, while also an instrument to assess human security as whole. The approach is made up of several aspects; here though the first concept, that of capability, is adopted for advancing the analysis.

Jenkins, investigating effects of insecurity over people's well-being, asks "what makes suffering and insecurity dangerous? I would say that it is the suffering created by vulnerability"

(2013: 279), which is the case of refugees, bearing trauma and living in isolation in the new society, as a result of structural impediment to achieve the desired functionings. As Jenkins goes

> *"Any perduring social condition that acts upon that fragility to produce mental conditions such as depression, trauma, or debilitating anxiety [...] is harmful and in my view understood as structural violence"* (2013: 279)

Since the response to trauma has to be sought in the environment, the approach here proposed is not relative to the individual – as if the trauma were an internal psychological issue – but to his environment; solutions therefore should be sought in society, likewise the issue should be understood as collective, involving all people who lived the first trauma of war and the second of marginalisation and neglect in refuge. In this regard, a study conducted about the status of mental health, social distress and political oppression advices to seek a 'culturally appropriate response to trauma', instead of a medicalised one, which would obscure social and political meanings that exposed people attribute to their collective experiences (Giacaman et al, 2011). It is significant to separate the two responses to trauma, since they represent distinct challenges and do not have common source: collective trauma is not an "effect [...] of war located inside a person, [that] can be cured through individual treatment" (Giacaman et al, 2011: 551); it is rather a form of collective suffering due to "long protracted consequences of historical and contemporary political injustice" (ibid.). This form of social suffering should instead be healed by eliminating injustice through a socio-political response, which entails granting conditions of human security and respect of human rights to all individuals, including vulnerable people, women and refugees, albeit lacking a state to enforce these rights for the latter category (ibid.).

To conclude the reasoning about women refugees' visions of the future, I propose the definition of mental health given by the World Health Organization (WHO), which corroborates the validity of the argument advanced in this research. The reason for inserting it in this concluding part is that mental well-being emerged as a result of evaluation and analysis of the material gathered; it should hence serve to shed light on the phenomenon so far investigated, while providing the reason that explains all experiences of daily hardship. Interestingly, the definition takes up the dimension of potential's realisation, suggested at the beginning of this study; yet, it reiterates the refuse of dichotomies, such as presence/absence of disease to define a complete state of well-being.

"Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of health as contained in its constitution: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (WHO, 2014)

CONCLUSION

After the field study conducted, corroborated by other research in the area, I came to conclude that insecurity characterising Afghan women's life before and during refuge renders them essentially unable to envision their future. The experience of displacement exposes them to profound change, which entails rebuilding an identity already impacted by war trauma; once reached the land of refuge, as the term indicates, a peaceful period should begin, in which refugees try to rebuild a life in dignity and to partly overcome previous trauma in the new environment. However, what I observed and understood during the fieldwork in Delhi is that this course of action is subverted.

Within the present study, I argued that Afghan women refugees' inability to envision a future is particularly due to actual conditions on arrival that accompany them through the whole life in refuge. In Delhi, Afghan women are subject to mechanisms identifiable with structural violence, that takes up notably gendered connotations; legislation and institutions in place are responsible for creating such conditions, affecting women and men at a different degree, especially when they land in a socio-political context extremely gendered – as India and Afghanistan can be, where gender roles are fixed and embedded in cultural norms thus continuously reproduced.

Structural violence is perceived not only as obstructive to the development of human capabilities and to the preservation of these in refugee situations; but also as responsible for keeping refugee women in a stagnant situation, both social and psychological, difficult to escape. While the social impact of structural violence is explored by Galtung himself, a psychological dimension, whose effects are perhaps more subtle and not directly observable, deserves equal attention, since consequences are no less significant than social ones. In reason of this, violence should be detected in all its shapes, if the aim is to truthfully address suffering to eliminate insecurity and achieve well-being. A vicious cycle is thus identifiable, in which psychological aspects determine social ones: being deeply intertwined implies that the socialisation of an individual depends on his/her mental health, hence opening the possibility of interaction with peers and avoiding isolation. Therefore, implications of structural violence over mental health deserve further attention, since the impact of the former over the latter is considerable when determining the level of human security, yet unexplored in many of its facets.

Repercussions of refugee life for a woman are multiple as the disciplines involved into the analysis; being one feature of grounded theory its multi-disciplinary theoretical reach, implications of the present study are detectable across different fields, such as feminist studies – for a coherent analysis of power; public health and psychology – concerning well-being and functioning as well as impact of state policies; sociology – being society the field of interaction. All these perspectives are interrelated to ultimately describe the complex reality of being a woman in refuge, as this study conducted in Delhi has shown. Dimensions of gendered structural violence and their impact on mental health emerged from an analysis of capabilities, whereas the capacity to envision the future was taken as an indicator for the present case. An analysis of refugee women's capability revealed the reason behind a vague vision of the future, by looking into the status quo; although Afghan women had difficulties in envisioning their future, they were somehow able to address it by talking about children's life or faith.

The capability approach allowed grasping mental well-being as fundamental part of the vital core of all human lives, simultaneously providing the answer to the second research question, attempting to motivate why and how this thesis aspires to contribute to extant knowledge. Enjoying mental well-being is an important resource to convert capabilities into functionings, yet prerogative of the absence of structural violence. I am grateful to the Afghan women I met for having taught me something I ignored: being well today, under all emotional and physical aspects, determines tomorrow's ideas and hopes. Although simple, I was unaware of this, since all experiences of suffering I have only *seen* go beyond my own experience, hence were not immediate to conceptualise. Furthermore, it has been assessed, the psychological dimension here considered is a collective one, involving mass suffering, as the whole population is exposed to conflict and has to endure its consequences. By taking this collective dimension into consideration, mental well-being should definitely be included in the human security framework, provided that the latter is considered as effective and reliable for achieving durable solutions.

Concerning the universal applicability of the human security framework, while some may argue that enlarging meaning and content of what it aims to protect risks to increase its vagueness, reducing its effectiveness; I maintain instead that mental health should become a component of human security since it is paramount to the overall well-being and security of individuals. Being its primary objective "to safeguard the vital core of all human lives […] without impeding long-term

human fulfilment" (Alkire, 2003: 23), it could be inferred that mental health actually determines the course of social life and daily activities, while enhancing long-term human fulfilment.

The present work comes as a result of my own way to answer questions arisen before and throughout the project; however, considering my limited knowledge and experience, its scope was not to resolve the overarching issue of refugees' mental well-being, but merely to indicate a path to follow for future research, as I did with previous research, giving origin to this project. The intent is to spur scholars, governments, institutions, field practitioners to seek solutions in the immediate present, so to bring relief in the daily life of refugees; proceeding inductively, as evidenced throughout this thesis, by individuating the matter at the local level, seems to be an effective way to work for lasting solutions. These should in fact be sought in the real world of today, if the goal is to veritably make tomorrow better, or simply imaginable for someone.

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APPENDIX 1

SAMPLING STRATEGIES

Data collection in a qualitative study proceeds following the strategy of purposeful sampling, meaning that the selection of participants is conducted with the purpose of finding information-rich cases, that will provide insights on the questions to investigate (Patton, 1990). The interviews I collected with my participants guided the analysis as well as following stages of data collection. Throughout the process, sampling strategies and direction of the study evolved. Different sampling approaches could be used at the same time while collecting data, and sometimes the research itself requires more than one strategy to ensure breadth and depth. To find a balance between the two should be the aspiration of a researcher who is willing to produce a valid study. (ibid.) For these reasons, it is secondary to discuss the sample size, since this sample should rather aim at covering the topic, developing categories for the analysis and answering the research questions.

Different sampling approaches were used at different stages of data collection; according to the study conducted by Patton, I used these three approaches: *purposeful random sampling, maximum variation sampling* and *snow-ball sampling* (1990). I started with the first one at DBA in Lajpat Nagar, where I met a group of 10 women and girls, all of Tajik ethnicity living in this area, refugees or waiting for status determination, attending the NGO and having previously agreed to participate in this study. The purpose of this sample was to find cases rich of information, but still random, that would provide insights about the situation, and possibly give a direction for the next stage. After having interviewed some women of this group, I asked myself whether the same pattern was observable among another ethnic group, if similar situations were happening also in other communities in differing conditions. I got to know about a DBA branch in Wazirabad, where the Pashtun community resides; access to a third ethnic groups was impossible when I conducted my fieldwork, since the amount of Hazara or other ethnic groups is quite limited in Delhi. The aim of maximum variation sampling is not to generalise findings to the whole population, but rather to look for information that elucidate variation and significant common patterns within it. (Patton, 1990)

Interviewing these women of different ages helped me to develop the analysis and create categories. The last approach was used to continue testing the categories I came up with; some women or girls who had heard from friends or neighbours showed up to be interviewed. Some choices, however, had to be made, while I let other events or information indicate new paths to explore during interviews. Once redundancy – the point when no new information emerges – was reached, data collection ended; at this stage I attempted to develop a meaningful argument out of the categories (Patton, 1990). The formation of categories, limitations of research and point of saturation depended also on time and resources available, while I tried not to compromise quality and validity of the study.

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APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEWS' SCHEDULE

- LAJPAT NAGAR

Shafiqa, 38 years old	2014-03-25
Kamila, 41 years old	2014-03-27
Zeeba, 39 years old	2014-04-01
Shala, 53 years old	2014-04-09
Rahima, 25 years old	2014-04-09
Mahdia, 31 years old	2014-03-23
Rohina, 18 years old	2014-04-02
Meena, 21 years old	2014-04-02

- WAZIRABAD

Marukh, 47 years old	2014-04-15
Marjan, 52 years old	2014-04-15
Habiba, 64 years old	2014-04-16
Nahida, 48 years old	2014-04-16

Shagulam, 54 years old	2014-04-18
Zohra, 21 years old	2014-04-18
Masuma, 43 years old	2014-04-21
Lela, 50 years old	2014-04-21