Chapter 13
From *Muhājir* to *Āwāra*: Figures of Migration and Exile Among Afghans

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13.1 Afghan Refugees: Decades of Displacement

Afghans experienced large scale displacement from the late 1970s as the conflict in their country of origin ebbed and flowed. Using ancient migratory routes, millions of people sought refuge in neighbouring countries during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the eighties and the protracted factional fighting that followed in the nineties. Over time, Afghans have developed transnational networks based on the continuous circulation and dispersion of the members of domestic units (Monsutti, 2005). In 1990 there were 6.22 million Afghan refugees, in their huge majority between Pakistan and Iran, forming at that time the largest group of displaced persons in the world, accounting for 40% of the people of concern falling under UNHCR's mandate. And there were up to an estimated 1.5 million internally displaced people. Large numbers repatriated after the Soviet withdrawal (1989) and the capture of Kabul by resistance forces (1992), but over the following years this trend reversed as more outward flows accompanied the new outbreaks of violence. The invasion of Afghanistan by US-led forces and the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001 caused a renewed wave of optimism. From 2002 to 2014 some four million Afghans repatriated mainly from the neighbouring countries of first asylum (UNHCR, 2014). However, the Afghan democratic government established since then has proven incapable of tackling insecurity and violence, poverty and inequality. Increasing numbers of asylum seekers tried their chance to Europe, North America, and Australia (Monsutti, 2021; UNHCR, 2020). After the partial withdrawal of NATO forces in 2014, people were massively leaving again, including urban families who have lost protection and fear to be the target of retaliatory action for their supposed connivance with foreign troops.

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In May 2021, US and NATO troops started a full withdraw from Afghanistan. The Taliban did not wait to launch an offensive and rapidly took control over most of the national territory, capturing Kabul on 15 August. While land borders with Pakistan and Iran were difficult to cross, the US troops have organised an aerial evacuation that has benefited to some 120,000 people. The consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic on an already vulnerable population are likely to be serious but difficult to evaluate due to the lack of reliable data. Moreover, the sanctions imposed on the new regime by the United States and their allies has made the economic crisis worse with widespread food insecurity, further deterioration of public health systems and rampant pauperisation (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Since summer 2021, cities do offer less job opportunities due to the departure of many humanitarian and development organisations. Many people are leaving the cities and go back to their villages of origin in the countryside, adding more demographic pressure on lands with limited resources. The options open to Afghans may seem significantly different than they were during the anti-Soviet jihad. The strategic context has changed and Afghan refugees encounter an increasingly adverse protection environment and a gloomy economic situation in Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. Nowadays Afghans do not leave for Pakistan or Iran like in the 1980s and part of the 1990s. In spite of ever stricter border controls, Afghan candidates to migration strive to find new destinations and many – including those already living as refugees in Peshawar or Quetta, Tehran or Mashhad – try to reach Europe. Indeed, new generations of Afghan refugees are forced to move due to comparable factors as their parents, but they are compelled to seek protection in more distant places and resort to even riskier routes (Monsutti & Balci, 2014).

During these four decades of conflict and forced displacement, self-designation among Afghan refugees and migrants has evolved. While terms such as *muhājir*, "refugee," with a religious connotation, *panāhenda*, "refugee" in more generic sense, and *mosāfer*, "traveller," were used by Afghans in the 1980s and 1990s, they no longer have the favour of younger people who might have grown up in Iran or Pakistan and often aspire to try their chance in the West. New generations tend to describe their situation with words such as *āwāra*, *sargardān*, *dar-ba-dar*, which generally convey the idea of "wandering," "vagrancy," "homelessness," "lack of purpose." This evolving terminology suggest that exile has lost the religious and political significance it might have had during the anti-Soviet jihad, on the one hand. It also can be interpreted as a quest for meaning in life, an assertion of agency in an effort to define their place in an open world, beyond the narrow limits of nation-states, on the other hand.

13.2 Evolving Terminology: The Figure of the *āwāra*

In the eighties, Afghans who took refuge in Pakistan and Iran tended to designate themselves by the term *muhājir* (plur. *muhājirin*), an Arab word referring to the Prophet Mohammed and his companions who migrated from Mecca to Medina in

622 CE (a journey called *hijra*). Beside its religious connotation, *muhājir* was also translating the term 'refugee as defined by the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (Edwards, 1986; Centlivres, 1988; Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont, 1988). This designation was valorising. Afghans were people who left their infidel-ruled country, justifying their decision by reference to the life of Mohammed, while the populations of their host countries were called *ansar* (originally the inhabitants of Medina who welcomed the Prophet and his companions). The used terminology also included *mujāhed*, "fighter," who wages the *jihād*, or in some contexts *panāhenda*, the general Persian word for "refugee," or even *mosāfer*, "traveller" in the sense of "migrant."

Progressively, this terminology, without disappearing, has become less and less predominant. Social media and the myriad of blogs run by Afghans increasingly mention notions that have a very different connotation and express precariousness and unpredictability more than forced displacement per se. The related terms *āwāra*, "vagrant," "wanderer," "homeless," and *āwāragi*, "vagrancy," "wandering," "homelessness" are particularly interesting due to their long history associated with the language of mystic love in classical Persian poetry. Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207–1273) famously wrote for instance:

I swear to God that without you the city is like a prison to me,
*I long for vagrancy [*āwāragi*], mountain and desert.*[1]

Amir Khusrau Dehlavi (1253–1325) echoes the great Sufi poet. *Āwāra* is used to express the solitude of the lover's heart, whose thirst for the beloved cannot be quenched:

*My heart became vagrant [*āwāra*] when it fell in love, it may become more vagrant!*
My body became helpless without heart, it may become more helpless![2]

Much more recently, Ahmad Zahir (1946–1979), a popular Afghan crooner active in the seventies, was singing:

Free me from pain and loneliness,
From the infinite burning,
From the autumn storm.
From the red tears.
*Vagrant [*āwāra*], helpless,*
My heart is in hundred pieces.[3]

We collected our empirical material about the use and perceptions of the terms *āwāra* and *āwāragi* among Afghans who live in Western countries, some with a recognized status and some in transient situations.[4]Our interlocutors tend to be educated and active on internet. They represent a newer generation of mobile people who increasingly use some words and refer to some labels that were vague to their

[1] https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/shams/ghazalsh/sh441/

[2] https://ganjoor.net/khosro/gozide/ghazal-khosro/sh5/

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyhwTsj0-Sc

[4] All original names have been changed in the text.

mothers and fathers in the 1980s and 1990s. Each of them had his or her own understanding of *āwāragi*. The common feature is that *āwāragi* is an unfortunate and undesirable situation, although it might paradoxically open some spaces of agency and express some forms of hope in a better, more inclusive world.

13.3 Who Is Comfortable with the Term *muhājir*?

Afghans who came to West directly from Afghanistan and without the long-time experience of refugee life in Iran or Pakistan tend to avoid using the term *āwāra*. They often have experienced only one important move in their lifetime. They are more likely to have left Afghanistan when they were young adult. These people are more comfortable with the term *muhājir*. Anisa, for instance, grew up in Kabul. She has not lived in Iran and has only been briefly in Pakistan. She came to France through a scholarship and settled in Paris after claiming for asylum. She is married to a French man and is working for an organisation focusing on refugee rights. She feels in exile and part of her identity is far from her. Coming from an urban background, she insists however that she is not an *āwāra*. She comments: "I am a *muhājir*, because part of my identity, part of my memories, part of me, part of my soul have been left in Afghanistan. This is something I have not chosen." In her view, the terms *āwāra* and *dar-ba-dar* (literally "door to door") are depreciative and can apply to a person who has not been forced to leave his or her country of origin. She gives example of rough-sleepers, homeless alcoholics, those who do not have a residence and live in streets, beggars or Roma. All people with whom she does not feel to be minimally associated.

Anisa's point of view illustrates how the terms *āwāra* and *āwāragi* may have a negative connotation for some of our interlocutors, even if their meaning is fluid and may evolve over time. Anisa considers herself to be a *muhājir* and she will always remain a *muhājir*. She feels like a person who is combining the East and the West, Afghanistan and France. She is not from there nor from here, she is an in-between person. To summarise her viewpoint, she quotes a poem by Rumi: "I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea […] My place is the placeless, my trace is the traceless."[5]

Generally speaking, Afghans who have come to the West legally by air are also likely to be comfortable with the term *muhājir* rather than *āwāra*. Some of them have come to Europe thank to a work visa, some with a diplomatic visa or a student visa. Maryam, whose husband works for BBC Persian, came through family reunification. She feels closer to the word *muhājir*, which expresses that she has moved through official channels from one place to another and started a new life in the West. She keeps a bond with both her country of birth (Iran) and country of origin

[5]The full poem can be found here: https://blogs.harvard.edu/sulaymanibnqiddees/2012/11/06/rumi-i-do-not-recognize-myself/

(Afghanistan). But she sees herself as a migrant like thousands of other migrants in this world, not much dissimilar from people born in Western countries or any other country who go to another place to experience a different existence. She admits that being a migrant (she says *muhājir*) had a different feeling at different times in her life. For example, in Iran, despite growing up and studying there, she saw herself as a person who never had a full sense of belonging and citizen rights. But in London, she does not consider herself different from other people with migration background and has a sense of responsibility for the common good. She does not consider herself to be a second-class citizen the way she was in Iran.

Another of our interlocutor, Afsana, was born and grew up in Iran. She went to the United States through a Fulbright scholarship and eventually settled there. She systematically uses the word *muhājir* to describe her situation and sees no religious connotation in it. She concedes that her circumstances and destiny have forced her to stay away from the country of origin of her family. But she does not see herself as *āwāra* or *sargardān* ("vagabond"), as for her those terms refer more to mental dispositions than legal status. In her view, one can be without homeland and not *āwāra* or *sargardān*, while one can be in her or his homeland and be psychologically *āwāra*. Alia equally feels the term *muhājir* reflects better her current condition. She is originally from Herat (Afghanistan) and was a few years old when her family moved to Mashhad (Iran). She grew up in Iran and found in a radio a job focusing on refugee life. She moved to London early 2000s and is now working for BBC Persian as a TV presenter. As an established and reputable journalist, she does not feel connected to the experience of most Afghans in the United Kingdom:

> *Here in London, I came through work visa, I am accepted at my work place, I went to university here, I have made deep and long friendship here. These all make me feel home in London.*

Our sampling is obviously too limited to allow us to draw general conclusions. The term *muhājir* was the most widely used as a self-designation among Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran in the 1980s and 1990s. With its religious connotation, it was considered as valorising. Refugees were making sacrifices in the name of their faith. But it was also used in reference to the international refugee regime. Nowadays, it seems to still have the preference of people who came to Europe through official channels, quickly got a protection status, a resident permit and were able to integrate into the job market.

13.4 *Āwāragi* and the Experience of Iran

Afghan refugees who spent time in Iran are more likely to use and connect with the term *āwāragi*. Indeed, the documents issued by the authorities allowing them to reside in Iran (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007) were popularly called "Blue Cards" but officially intitled "Identification Card and Visa for Afghan Āwāras."

Sima is Hazara. The Hazaras have long experienced socio-economic and political marginalisation in Afghanistan. Being in the majority Shiites, they were more likely to migrate to Iran after the political upheaval in Afghanistan in the late seventies. In the Islamic Republic, the Hazaras were deemed in low-skilled and low waged jobs with limited and sometime no access to basic services. Sima became conscious of her lower social status compared to her Iranian age peers. She always wanted to study art but that was not possible as an Afghan refugee. This experience of exclusion has shaped her perception of the country where she was born and grew up. She did environmental studies instead and has taught herself art. She addresses the emotional costs of feeling homeless:

> *In terms such as* āwāragi *and* dar-ba-dari*, there has never been immobility and it will never exist. In situation of migration, people move from point A to point B.* Āwāragi *expresses something else, wandering, a sense of not having a place, a sense of being suspended in the air without having an A or B points in life. The term* muhājir *irritates me when I hear it. We people, who were born and grew up in Iran, who were born in migration, are really* āwāra *and* dar-ba-dar*. We have never experienced such thing as homeland [*watan*]. From the beginning, we were born into a* sargardāni *that continues till now. Even if we have managed to come to Europe and live in the West, we still deal with that feeling of belonging nowhere. It is hard to say what I feel is missing? I mean I wonder what I long for? Homeland? But I do not have one.*

13.5 She Proceeds

> ***This status of not having a place makes one's emotions tense; people like me always have been*** dar-ba-dar***, always had to be*** darajechand ***[lowest social class/status], we were born*** darajechandomi ***and whatever we do, we cannot change it. If we go back to Afghanistan or Iran, we would still be*** darajechandomi***. We can never go beyond that, it is a fundamental problem and there is no solution for it.***

Mohsenwas a child when his family left Daykondi (central highlands of Afghanistan) for Iran. He is from a ***sayyed*** family (descendants of the Prophet Mohammad through his daughter Fatima). He started his artistic work as poet, photographer and painter in Iran. Thanks to a resettlement programme, he was able to move to Australia where he studied art at the university. He has published several poetry books and organised several exhibitions. His experience as refugee in Iran is strongly visible in all of his works. He explains what the terms ***muhājir*** and ***āwāra*** means to him:

> ***Personally, I am not very comfortable with the word*** muhājir***, but I have used it many times, mostly because this word is ingrained and conveys the general meaning. I migrated to Iran as a child and after a few years, I was no longer a*** muhajir ***psychologically, because I could reproduce the exact vernacular of that city, I had close friends and I was much more familiar with that environment than my hometown in Afghanistan. But in Iran, this feeling of being 'in-between' is always with us. That you are neither from that land nor from this land. Sometimes, you are reminded that you are not from here, and this gives a sense of emptiness and otherness, of being suspended. Maybe words like*** bewatan ***["homelandless"],*** bekhāna ***["homeless"] and*** āwāra ***are close. However, one can see the world*** āwāragi ***in two ways. First, as it was especially considered in Iran, as a person who has lost everything, is helpless and seeks refuge. Indeed, our refugee blue***

> ***card mentioned "for Afghan* āwāra*." I was not comfortable with that word. Then, when I came to Australia, I was referring in another way to the word* āwāra*. I found it poetic and at the same time sharp and painful. That is, I saw less of the humiliation in this term compared to my time in Iran.***

Mohsen used to be uncomfortable with the label ***āwāra***, but in Australia where he has settled, he accepted that it was expressing his experience of continuous mobility. Having lived in Iran, being sometimes born and raised there, was a decisive experience that has brought up the emergence of novel ways of defining themselves among the Afghan younger generations. From a bureaucratic label perceived as inherently derogatory, the notion of ***āwārargi*** has been progressively reinterpreted and reappropriated to the point of assuming a potentially liberating dimension.

13.6 Why Not *muhājir*, *mosāfer*, *panāhenda*?

Although many of our interlocutors keep using the terms *muhajir*, *mosāfer* and *panāhenda* as self-designation, *āwāra* and *āwāragi* are increasingly read on blogs and heard in the mouth of many people who are reaching Europe, North America and Australia, especially those who have spent time in Iran. These labels have different connotations and semantic fields, forced displacement between two locations on one hand, continuous mobility on the other hand.

Halima defines the *āwāra* as a person who was forced to leave the homeland against her/his inner desire to seek protection. It is not a positive and desirable situation. Fariba recalls: "when I was a child in Iran, *āwāragi* meant my refugee card and the Palestinian refugees who were constantly shown on the television. I thought *āwāragi* meant miserable, poor and homeless. Little I knew that *āwāragi* would stay with me for the rest of my life, that I would be homeless forever."

Adela has spent most of her childhood as a refugee between Pakistan and Iran. Her father was one of those 'boat people' who went to Australia, where he was able to bring his family some time later. Adela settled and studied law. She married with a well-known Pakistani Hazara artist. Beside serving refugees through her legal works, Adela is a social activist in the Hazara community and has recently launched a campaign criticizing a Shia centre in Australia. She posted videos in which kids were segregated. She comments:

> Muhājir, mosāfer *and* panāhenda *are about a temporary state.* Āwāragi*, and* dar-ba-dari*, however, is a permanent state. In the former state, there is a hope for return to the place one has been uprooted from. But in the latter state, there is no hope. For me, as a second-generation refugee, I see no hope and prospect in going back to Afghanistan.* Āwāra *are those who lost everything back home, while* muhajir *and* mosāfer *may hope to return as they have something left for them. I think that rupture from the string and freedom is* āwāragi.

In Adela's comment, *āwāragi* is characterized by feelings of loss of hope for return, but being detached from the homeland eventually comes with novel opportunities. Adela goes as far as talking about freedom.

Abbas was a child when his family left Afghanistan and took refuge in Iran. He studied agronomy but taught himself philosophy and social sciences. He met his wife, Begum, in Mashhad. Both moved to Kabul and were active in academia. Begum found a job in Paris and the couple moved there few years ago. Through some of his Facebook posts as well as direct conversations, it may appear that Abbas came to Europe reluctantly. He hoped to stay in Afghanistan and serve the 'subaltern people.' Politically engaged, he is going to begin his PhD in France on the oppression and daily resistance of the Hazaras. He believes that:

> Muhājirat, āwāragi *and* tab'id *["migration, vagrancy, exile"] are close to each other in terms of meaning and one can use them interchangeably.* Muhājirat, *beyond its religious meaning, contains a sense of authority, willingness and agency. For example, those who have left their home country in search of better life or better economic situation are* muhājir, *like many Iranian middle-class families who could stay in their home country but decide to migrate to the West. I think* āwāragi *and* tab'id *are different. There is an involuntary element in it, in which one is forced to leave due to war, insecurity, poverty, discrimination (religious, ethnic, linguistic…).*

Sima, who is quoted in the previous section, got a job in the International Organization for Migration after the 2001 international intervention in Afghanistan. She moved from Iran to Afghanistan while her family stayed behind. The high salary from IOM was a key factor that her family agreed for her to leave and live alone. She felt hopeful in the beginning but the systematic gender and social discrimination disappointed her. All of her friends in her art circled progressively left Afghanistan. She was able to get a scholarship in London and eventually settled there and never returned to Afghanistan or Iran. She is working for the BBC Persian Website and beside this job, she is slowly opening up her own art studio. She explains why in spite of her trajectory she sees herself as an *āwāra*:

> *I do not like the term* muhajir, *or actually it is not about liking, it just does not seem relevant. I feel* muhājir *implies peace and tranquillity. Once one becomes* muhājir, *she/he moves form on place to another. I mean there is an immobility point before and after being* muhājir. *You're in an immobile status, you decide to migrate to another place and there you become immobile again. That's why I think this term cannot do justice to our sufferings and trajectories.*

Karim is on a student visa in India and soon will migrate to the United States. For him, the destination of his life keeps changing as his situation keeps changing. That is why for him, the term *āwāra* is reflective of his continuous mobility:

> *When my family left our village in Daykondi in search of a better life, the constant concept of home and living disappeared from my life. From this city to that city, from this alley to that alley and from this country to this country … from here to there and from there to other places. We have been displaced and scattered in search of a place to live. It has been for decades now but we still do not have a fixed destination and place to live and we do not know where the next destination is. Which city and country will be next? We buried my father in one city, my aunt in another city and my uncle in another country. That is why the concept of* āwāragi *and* bewatani *["homelandlessness"] for me means the lack of a fixed place and destination to live and settle. It is like a leaf cut from a stem, the wind blows it wherever it wants.*

Adela, Abbas, Sima and Karim do not see themselves as *muhājirin* who were compelled to leave their country fleeing adverse conditions but hoping to get back one day, how distant it might be. Not having a home is not a transient experience, being brought from one place to another is their life and there is nothing beyond that. In a sense, they all inhabit mobility. With poignant eloquence, they evoke an *ontology of displacement and mobility*.

13.7 Going West

As already mentioned, those Afghans who had the experience of refugee life in Iran and are now settled in the West are more likely to refer to themselves as *āwāra*. This seems an even more marked tendency among people who returned even briefly to Afghanistan in-between. Many of our interlocutors are activists advocating for social and political justice. In their works, which can range from a piece of music, a painting, an article in non-mainstream media, a Facebook post, they do not talk only about the painful experience of migration. They often criticize the warring parties in Afghanistan, but also elements inside the national government and more generally the country's conservative social order.

Ahmad seems to be one of the first individual who has widely used the word *āwāra* in his writings. He has studied philosophy in Iran and lived many years in Afghanistan before having to flee for his life to Sweden. With the emergence of the social media, he used his Facebook account as a platform to advocate his ideal of social justice and equality. He became quickly popular among the youth but disapproved by some political and religious leaders in Afghanistan. He describes his arrival in the West with mixed feelings:

> *When* āwāra *people arrive in the West, initially it is a sentimental period. They are filled with emotions. Refugees are attracted by the Western way of live. However, gradually, reality hits and one starts to deal with differences and get entangled in Western institutions. Then, you try to position yourself. At some point, you realize this society is too complicated for you to understand. Differences are more serious than what you thought. This experience makes you being reflexive. You start to understand yourself. This process brings you back to the square one, where you wanted to try to be part of this society, then you get aware you will never be able to be part of this society. The degree of how much you feel* āwāra *depends on how much you try to understand yourself. The more you observe societies and yourself, the more you see the differences and perceive what* āwāragi *means.*

Abbas expresses the feeling of having been expelled from his country of origin (Afghanistan), the country where he became an adult (Iran) without considering comfortable in the country where he eventually took asylum (France). He reflects on his current life in Europe:

> Āwāragi *and exile is a situation with restlessness, regret and anxieties. While it is practically about getting detached and thrown out of the motherland, but mentally and emotionally, the mind is constantly involved with it and one does not feel peace of mind in the host society.* Āwāragi *and exile are associated with great sufferings. It is like being in limbo. It*

is about getting uprooted from a context and not getting established in a new environment. This is the least common situation for most people who are forced to leave home as adults. I think I am experiencing the same situation. I consider myself a wanderer, a wanderer and an exilé who has lost many things and is in a state of suspension between two cultures and two societies.

However, Abbas does not deny that migration may bring new opportunities and benefits to some people depending on their degree of emotional attachment to one's homeland, education, skills and cultural and social capital:

Cultural integration and the formation of multicultural identity is one of the consequences of migration. Even migrants and refugees unknowingly spread cultural elements in the new society. They carry symbols of identity and transfer them to other regions. They even challenge officially accepted forms in the world, such as the concept of border and nation-state. These are aspects of the agency of refugees and exilés.

For Ahmad and Abbas, reaching the West and settling down there did not bring an end to their moral vagrancy. For them, longing for the lost homeland comes along with being politically engaged, feeling estranged in the host country opens novel opportunities and forms of action (also see Bittel & Monsutti, 2022).

13.8 A Non-parochial Sense of Belonging

The notion of *āwāra* appears in classical Persian poetry to express the condition of the lover who is away from his/her beloved, God in the context of Sufism. Employed as a bureaucratic label in Iran, it is acquiring new meanings when our interlocutors use it to designate themselves. Blogs as well as rap songs express the idea that being an Afghan refugee is not merely a parochial identity related to specific circumstances, to violence and conflict, the loss of the place of origin, or the lack of social inclusion in the country of asylum. Being an Afghan refugee opens, albeit painfully, broad horizons; forced displacement and exile is progressively universalized to mirror human condition (Abbasi & Monsutti, forthcoming). Let us refer to Fariba for instance. She is a writer and an active blogger. The term *āwāragi* appears in many of her posts. Here is a translation of one out of many of her thoughts:

"Human is not a bird to feel at home wherever it flies". It has been a long time, years, that this piece of poetry has lost its meaning for me. We are wingless birds that we fly wherever we could, homeless birds. I was born in a place where I waited every moment to be told "to gather your belongings and leave," and "this is not your home." We were Afghan refugees, on our blue card it was written boldly Afghan āwāra*. I thought* āwāragi *was bad,* āwāragi *meant* khāna ba dush *["house on shoulder", like a snail or a turtle]. But we actually did not have a home. We carried with us whatever we had. We were always ready to leave. I went to Afghanistan, I came here [the United States], I took this constant feeling of* āwāragi *with me. I like it more here, but I know here too my home is on my back, like a snail which takes its house with it wherever it goes.*

Fariba draws on her personal experience to question the current global order in which we live. She wonders in which direction the world is going as the number of

āwāra people is increasing every day. She has settled down in the United States but feels connected to homeless people who flee their so-called sweet 'homeland' in search of safety and better life. Her feelings of *āwāragi* stay alive by witnessing the conditions of many other people:

> *The seas are full of corpses of people who wanted to find a better home. The refugee camps are full of children who do not know the meaning of home. The borders, these narrow lines on the map, how big they get when you just try to cross them! You may pass or you may not pass. A piece here, a piece there, who collects our pieces? Who will pull me out of the mouths of fish and sharks? Who will pull me out of the glaciers? Who will pull me out from under the wheels of the train? When will this constant* āwāragi *leave me?*

Our interlocutors are in a quest for personal autonomy and social recognition (Scalettaris et al., 2021). Their constant mobility has made them develop a non-parochial sense of belongings. They had their loved ones dispersed around the world. They develop multi-local social and emotional ties, they do not have the sense of being linked to a particular place. Maryam comments:

> *I actually do not have feelings of belonging to any particular place and I think it is because I have migrated so many times in my life and I had to live in different countries with different cultures. Also, it is because my loved ones are also scattered around the world. My heart is everywhere but I do not feel rooted in a specific location. I even do not feel too much attached to Afghanistan.*

Nadia was born to a Hazara refugee family in Iran. She has never seen Afghanistan. She believes her situation is worse than that of her parents, who knew were they came from and who they were. Her parents had first-hand experience of life in Afghanistan, while she has no personal connection to the country of origin of her family. She speaks of herself as *sargardāni* and *behowiati* ("without identity") but makes her best to consider in a positive light such feelings:

> *I try to turn my face away from those feelings. I try to use terms such as 'global citizen,' 'multinational' or 'multicultural' instead of expressions such as 'burnt generation,' 'wandering generation,' 'displaced generation,' 'identity-less' or 'identity confusion' and 'rootless generation.' The feelings of belonging nowhere is painful. I prefer to be from everywhere.*

This feeling of belonging nowhere may lead to the contestation of the nation-state. Several of our Hazara interlocutors are deeply mistrustful of the Afghan state. They present it as a Pashtun state, which excluded other populations that were systematically produced as 'minorities.' Ahmad is particularly emphatic, but he builds on his perception of Afghanistan's past and present to develop a broad critique of the nation-state as the entity organising globally social and political life:

> *When a state is established, minorities all become* āwāra*, no matter if they migrate or not. I felt* āwāragi *in my so-called homeland Afghanistan too. States are bordered. In these bordered states, one is welcome and the other is not. The whole world is full of bordered states. Today's world is a mosaic of bordered islands that include some and exclude others. Now the question is to which island you belong? Some live on a good island and some do not. But some people have no place in any of these islands. These are the* āwāra *people. States speak to states. Stateless people are invisible.*

For some of our Hazara interlocutors, *āwāragi* means moving from being an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority in Afghanistan to the status of being a refugee in Iran or Pakistan. Once back to Afghanistan, the returnee label adds on their already deep feeling of marginalization. Migration to the West does not help them to go beyond their predicament. In Ahmad's view, states are inevitably established on the basis of a particular identity, be it ethnic, religious or linguistic, as a result they produce social and political exclusion. *Āwāragi* is created not by conflict and displacement alone but by the fundamental principles organizing international relations. According to him, the only hope and solution is a world without states. *Āwāragi* can be seen here as a testimony of the immorality of the global national order of things, it becomes a political act subverting classical forms of state territoriality and belonging (Monsutti, 2018).

13.9 *Āwāragi*, Towards Cosmopolitanism from Bellow?

The Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s provoked one of the world's largest forced displacements of population since World War II. Some twenty years later in 2001, another intervention – this time lead by the United States – had produced further turmoil. Despite hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign aid money, Afghanistan still ranked at or near the bottom of many human development indicators, including infant mortality, life expectancy, and indices of societal violence. The urban population continued to swell, while rural areas were not able to integrate more people due to demographic pressures and limited agricultural potential. The failure of the reconstruction and democratisation process promoted since 2001 by the international community has led to the fall of Kabul to the hands of the Taliban in August 2022. The little-known implications of Covid-19 and the lack of response of past and present authorities to the pandemic, the collapse of the job market related to the international presence, the sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies on the Taliban regime have exacerbated the vulnerability of large segments of the Afghan population. Unfortunately for the Afghans, their options may seem significantly more constricted in 2022 than they were during the anti-Soviet jihad or between 2001 and 2021. The strategic context has changed and neither Pakistan nor Iran are ready to welcome new flows of Afghan refugees anymore, a worrying situation. Concomitantly, more and more Afghans are trying their luck embarking upon an hazardous journey towards Europe, North America or Australia.

To the dramatic developments in Afghanistan and this reorientation of migratory destinations corresponds an evolving terminology. In the eighties and nineties, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran tended to use the word *muhājir* to designate themselves. If this reference did not disappear, the notions of *āwāra* and *āwāragi* are increasingly used since 2001 on social media and blogs among the younger generations. For them, exile has lost the religious and political significance it might have

had for their parents. *Āwāragi*, which may also be rendered in English by 'itinerancy,' comes with the idea of being without home and without work, vagrant and idle. Various forms of itinerancy, expressing global inequalities and power relations, take shape around Afghanistan. Indeed, not all itinerants are *āwāra*. The outflow of Afghan refugees is matched by the inflow of experts, who, fresh from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine or East Timor, come to exercise their talents in Afghanistan. The latter circulate from north to south to promote supposedly universal social and political norms. The former travel from south to north and, through their mobility, make visible inequitable access to global wealth and security (Monsutti, 2021). The term *āwāragi* used by our Afghan interlocutors to describe their own situation offers a testimony of the unequal rights to circulate. It also expresses how mobility – beyond the hardship it entails – may subvert and contest classical forms of state territoriality.

In a classical article, James Clifford (1994) proposes to think about the changing global conditions of today's world outside the dominant norms of the nation-state. He takes the term *diaspora* as "a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggle" (1994: 308). Furthermore, Edward Said (2000) considers that aesthetic references to exile in literature tend to obscure how much the experience is horrendous, caused by human being on other human beings in context of political violence, in an age of imperialism and totalitarianism. He quotes Hugo of St. Victor, a twelfth-century German monk, who wrote these haunting lines (2000: 395)

> *The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his* (Said, 2000: 395).

Āwāragi should not merely be equated to diaspora or exile, but this quote expresses strikingly the aspiration felt by our interlocutors to transcend national boundaries and parochial limits. Beyond the suffering and feeling of loss, the partial shift from the notion of *muhājir* to that of *āwāra* is the expression of an ontology of displacement and mobility. The writings and discourses of many young Afghans echo Clifford's and Said's considerations. Indeed, the term *āwāragi* allows to conceive human mobility beyond the classical distinction between voluntary and forced migration, to decentre our perspective from a polarization between a place of origin and a place of destination, between exile and return. Our interlocutors evoke ongoing displacement and suffering, experience of discrimination and exclusion, but acute distress coexists with the capacity of resistance and the hope for a more open and tolerant world. They disrupt linear narratives of migration, take distance from their country of origin and dissociate themselves from the nation-state as the political model organising human life. Here lies the empowering paradox of *āwāragi*, which ultimately elicits a form of cosmopolitanism from bellow.

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