NAVIGATING THE BORDERLAND THROUGH THE STORY OF ZEYNAB FATIMA: AN IRANIAN-BORN, ETHNICALLY AFGHAN-HAZARA REFUGEE GIRL NOW LIVING IN DENMARK

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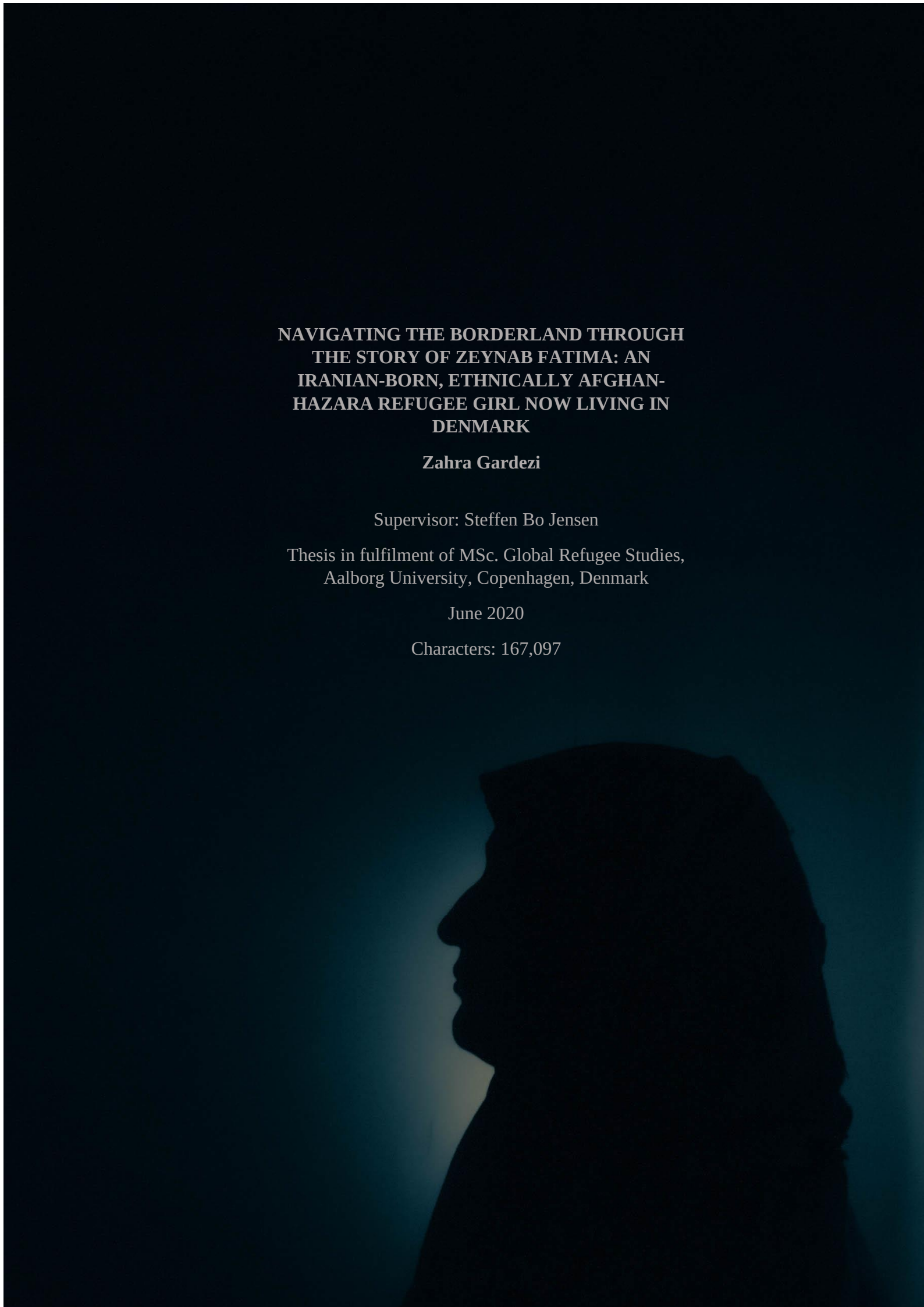

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Abstract

The Afghan Hazara people have long been persecuted for ethnoreligious reasons in their home country and have fled to nearby countries including Iran. However, in Iran they been met with discrimination and a lack economy opportunity, for which reason in some cases they have further sought asylum elsewhere. Such is the case of Zeynab Fatima, an Iranian-born, Afghan-Hazara refugee girl living with her family in Denmark.

This paper explores how one refugee family navigates the contexts of different borderlands and the extent to which their actions help us understand the make-up of these borderlands.

This approach is part of a self-fashioned dual-methodology used in this paper, of borderlands and the biographical method. Borderlands are theoretical lenses which occur in a complex manner and which facilitate interdisciplinary discussion. This concept has been deliberately limited to the geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic spheres in this paper for a more controlled discussion. For the purposes of this paper, these spheres may further exist in a more static, border-like manner or a fluid, frontier-like manner.

Further, this paper has loosely employed a biographical method in the form of narrative-style created with information gathered in an interview followed by multiple e-mail exchanges to facilitate a more creative approach to the theoretical concept of the borderlands.

In this unique manner, this paper introduces the Afghan-Iranian borderland predicated largely on the geographic boundaries of the *two distinct countries* viz Afghanistan and Iran. In this, Zeynab narrates her and her family's experiences supported by historical and political context to discuss not only the necessity of moving to Iran from Afghanistan, but also of her father moving back to Afghanistan. Despite the threat to his life in Afghanistan, it appeared the better country to live in, given discrimination and lack of opportunity in Iran.

It then introduces the Danish borderland, which is predicated on the lines of a political boundary – that of *citizenship*. In this borderland, Zeynab now exists as an adult independent of her father, to whom she was inexorably bound to in the previous borderland. However, it is important to note that in neither borderland can she truly exist exclusive of her father, as she is in each country because of his forced migration as the asylum-seeker. It is in this sphere that the discussion of the different barriers to citizenship in Denmark is carried out in conjunction with the historical and current political situation.

While in both of these borderlands a single predominant factor has been identified (geographic and political, respectively), it is important to note that these are not isolated, and that they exist as ongoing processes in conjunction with the set of factors existing within a borderland in this paper.

Finally, this paper ties together both borderlands by looking at navigating between them through two permeating themes: that of Zeynab's identity, and of the ideal lived refugee experience.

The outcome of the study shows the borderlands to be an appropriate tool to study how Zeynab's family navigated through a series of static borders and fluid frontiers between borderlands and consequently, between Iran, Afghanistan and Denmark.

Keywords

Afghanistan, asylum, Borderlands, Denmark, employment, ethnoreligious persecution, family reunification, government, Hazara, Iran, persecution, refugee

Acknowledgements

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Secondly, my father for not just proof-reading my paper, but for helping me reach out to Zeynab Fatima, on whose narrative this paper is written; without this effort, this paper would not have been possible.

Thirdly, my family and friends for all of their effort and help.

And finally, and very importantly, to Zeynab Fatima, whose narrative forms the core of this paper. Thank you for allowing me to (physically and metaphorically) sit with you and learn about your journey from birth to-date. It takes courage to express oneself as such, and I hope this paper has done justice to your story.

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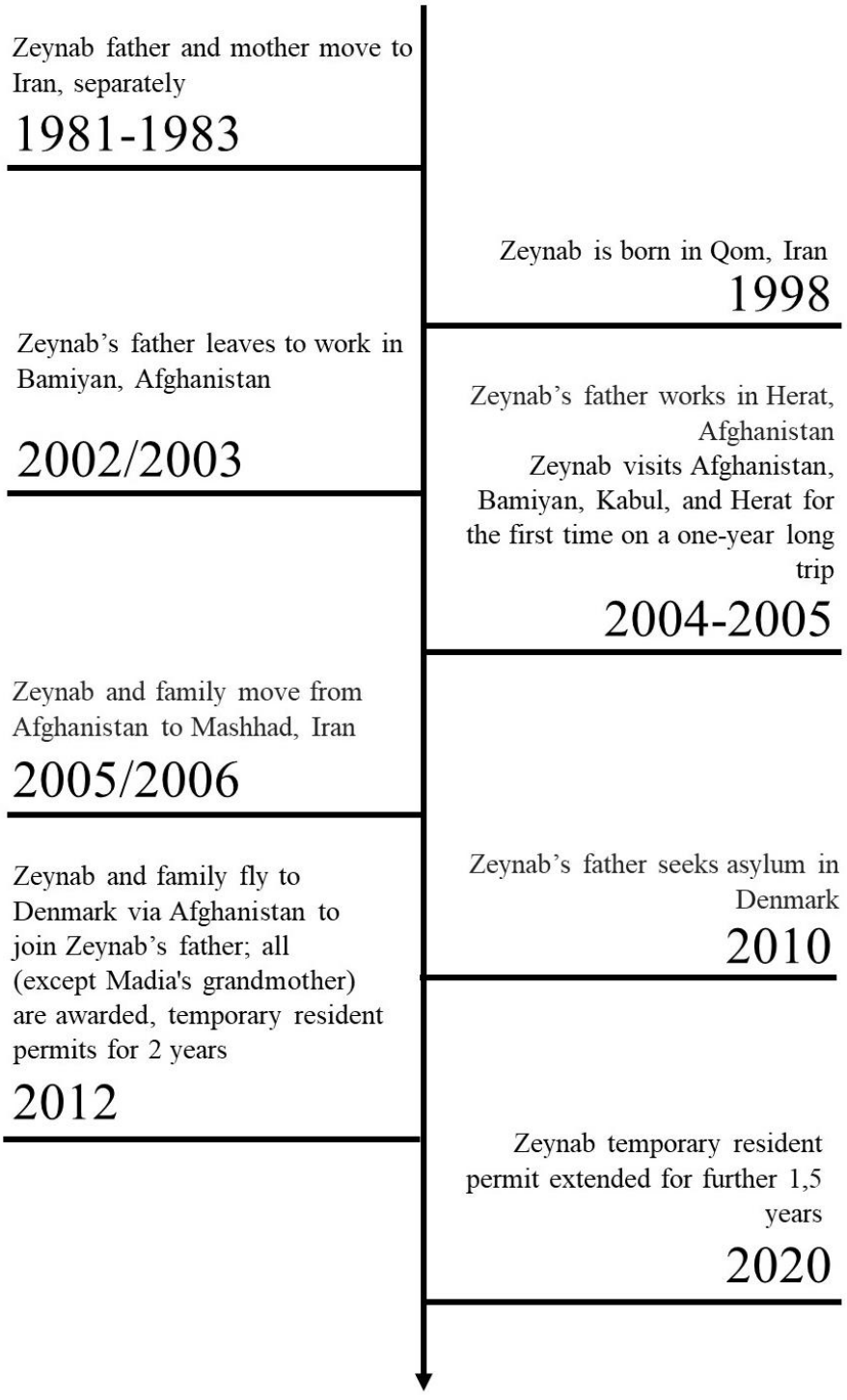


1.2. Profiles

Profile Zeynab Fatima

Full name: *Zeynab Fatima (pseudonym)*

Age: *21*

Role: *Narrator*

Occupation: *Student of Medicine, first year, at Copenhagen University, Denmark*

Refugee Status in Iran: *Born in Iran to refugee parents*

Refugee Status in Denmark: *Family reunification of Political Refugee (father)*

Resident Status in Iran: *Indefinite*

Residence Status in Denmark: *Temporary (renewed in 2020)*

Profile Zeynab's father

Full name: unknown Relationship to Zeynab: *Father*

Age: *presumably late-50s to early-60s*

Role: *asylum-seeker; story told through Zeynab*

Occupation: *bus driver; previously lawyer at Human Rights Commission, Afghanistan and Akhoond at an Afghan Hosseynie in Mashhad, Iran and Copenhagen, Denmark*

Refugee Status in Iran: *Political Refugee*

Refugee Status in Denmark: *Political Refugee*

Residence Status in Iran: *Indefinite*

Residence Status in Denmark: *Temporary*

1.3. Terms

Term	**Language, meaning in English**
Akhoond	*Persian,* Islamic Cleric
Hosseynie	*Persian,* Shi'ite place of worship
Mohajerin	*Persian,* religious migrant
Shi'ite	*Latin-derived suffix,* follower of Shi'ism Islam
Ziyarat	*Persian and Arabic,* pilgrimage

2. Chapter Two

2.1. Introduction

It was a cold and crisp Friday afternoon in February in Copenhagen, quintessentially marked by the sun hanging low on the horizon and branches baring themselves to the unrelenting wind, when I walked in much too early to the University where we were to meet. The building was tall, the colors steely, and the people sparse; I found the café easily up the stairs and to the right, where I had been promised it would be. I grabbed a seat and sent a message to Zeynab Fatima, my refugee interviewee, informing her of my arrival.

I had got in touch with her through somebody who knew her father, a former Human Rights Lawyer and Islamic Cleric and currently a bus driver by profession. He is an Afghan-origin gentleman who fled political and ethnoreligious persecution in Afghanistan first to Iran, and then due to discrimination and a lack of economic opportunity, to Denmark. I wanted to study the lived experience of a refugee and how they had navigated from their country of origin to their host country, and he had seemed the perfect fit. However, after a telephone conversation with him one evening, he suggested I speak with his daughter – a more comfortable option for him. He gave me her number, and I contacted her later that evening and I received a prompt and favorable response – she was interested in my thesis, and in helping me learn about her life as a refugee.

Before I had time to grab myself a coffee, Zeynab, a girl no older than 20 (I later learned she was 21, and just three weeks into Medical Studies at Copenhagen University) walked towards me. She wore a pink scarf on her head, checked blazer and an expression of intrigue as she extended her hand to meet mine in a firm handshake.

We exchanged pleasantries, I thanked her for agreeing to speak with me, and I told her a little about my thesis, that I aimed to interview her for her story to learn her lived experience as a refugee in navigating from her country of origin (which I was to later learn was not as simple as I had initially thought it to be) to her host country (Denmark). She was friendly, she was warm, and she was kind, and I was blessed with this outlook throughout our period of interaction.

I asked if she wanted a coffee and stood up, obliged, but she politely declined, and instead pulled out a home-packed lunch: she had intended to meet me for some time, and I was grateful for the gesture.

And so begins the story of Zeynab, the Iranian-born, Afghan-Hazara refugee girl now settled with her family in Denmark, and the girl who despite my lack of faith in getting somebody to open up to me as much as I needed for my paper, agreed to communicate with me on many occasions thereafter in my academic attempt to conceptualize this paper which you read.

'*After the situation in Afghanistan got worse, more Hazara people were coming to Iran'* *Zeynab began.*

The Hazaras of Afghanistan are a highly marginalized and often persecuted minority ethnic group situated in the central region of the country. They have long-faced oppression predominantly for their Shi'a religious faith in the Sunni-majority country less-than-tolerant of their beliefs. This has been further amplified by their distinct facial features and culture, which contrasts with the rest of the Afghans, making them more visible to behaviour of persecution. The Hazara have been targeted by militant groups including the Taliban as well as by state actors, which has resulted in massacres such as the infamous Hazara genocide of 1884-1905 which killed over half the Hazara population in Afghanistan (Marie, 2013).

Many Hazaras have therefore fled the country in search of more peaceful living in places of greater opportunities; approximately 900,000 live in Pakistan (Yusuf, 2011), and 387,000 in Iran (Project, 2020). These refugees have navigated political, economic and social structures within their origin country (Afghanistan) to flee to host countries (Pakistan and Iran). Some such refugees have felt the need to even flee these host countries and reach new host countries.

One such is the case of Zeynab Fatima. Both of Zeynab's parents hail from the Hazarajat region in Afghanistan and are ethnically Hazara. Although born in Qom, Iran, Zeynab herself is ethnically Hazara. Her parents fled Afghanistan due to ethnoreligious and political persecution. However, in Iran too, they also faced persecution and discrimination, and fled once more; they now live in a medium-sized town in Denmark.

The aim of this paper is to explore from below how a single individual's refugee life navigates away from push factors in their country of origin towards pull factors in their host country. It does so by examining the various structures which exist in terms of various legalities and how refugees move within these structures to reach their host country. It is analysed in this paper through a discussion of the inexorably-linked and intermingling geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic factors which create conditions of lived experience and constitute the theory of borderland. These lived experiences are what I refer to in this paper as 'borderlands' which are understood as spaces which are defined by borders but that transcend the national contexts of all three countries in question: Afghanistan, Iran and Denmark. This is explored through the case study of Zeynab and her family, who navigated through the various factors which shape their existence from Iran to Afghanistan and finally to Denmark.

2.1. Research Question

How does one refugee family navigate the contexts of different borderlands and to what extent do their actions help us understand the make-up of these borderlands?

2.2. Refugees

This paper deals with the notion of the modern refugee only. In this regard, this section briefly describes the history of the modern refugee, the plurality of the causes and the definition.

Refugees as we know them first came about as a direct consequence of World War II in Europe; mass displacements first became prominent continent-wide, and then globally. Similarly, the refugee camp, which became a place of bureaucratic and administrative power, became standardized then, as well. Through many ongoing processes such as law-enforcement, public discipline and schooling and habitation, what Liisa Malkki has referred to as the 'modern, post-war refugee emerged as a knowable, nameable figure and as an object of social-scientific knowledge' (Malkki, 1995).

An identifying feature of refugees is that they do not take up a self-delimiting place in anthropological knowledge, and that forced displacement has historically been marked by a plurality of causes and patterns of movements. Therefore, the term 'refugee' is restrictive in defining an individual, but rather refers to broader 'descriptive rubric'; it is political (Malkki, 1995). According to Malkki, the 'generalized category of refugees is an object of anthropological knowledge that is still in the early stages of construction' (Malkki, 1995).

The definition of a refugee which I use in this paper is borrowed from the 1951 Refugee Convention, which forms the basis of an understanding of refugees:

> any person who:

> …owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country… is unwilling to return to it. (UN General Assembly, 1951).

Therefore, Zeynab fits the above criteria of a post-war modern refugee even though it was her father who faced persecution and brought her to Denmark through family reunification laws.

2.3. Country of Origin

Having defined the refugee, we can now turn to looking at country of origin, as this is particularly interesting and has bearing on addressing the research question in Zeynab's case. As this paper progresses, it will become increasingly evident that Zeynab's country of origin does not neatly fit into exact definitions. This section will explore the different facets of this definition and the impact of using one over another in coloring the discussion.

The definition of country of origin is in multitudes, ranging from 'where a person is deemed to have originated' (Country-of-origin dictionary definition, n.d.) to 'country from which a person originally comes' (Country of origin definition and meaning, n.d.). The one used in this paper refers to that put forth by the Statistics Canada, which posits that a place of origin is that which, for a person born outside [host country], was their last place of residency before moving to their host country (Place of origin of person, 2020). By this token, Zeynab's country of origin (also referred to as: origin country) is seemingly Iran, though legally Afghanistan; her host country is Denmark. Her father's host country is also Afghanistan, and

his host is Denmark. This is also linked to what constitutes identity, as it defines where a person is legally from, however it is not enough to categorize a person.

However, this is above complication of origin country is for two reasons. Firstly, she arrived in Denmark from Afghanistan – as her father applied for asylum as a political refugee from Afghanistan, for which reason it is legally her origin country. The second reason is that while her father's origin country is Afghanistan, she was born in Qom, Iran, lived in Mashhad, and was a minor. In addition to this she had only lived in Afghanistan for one year (2004 or 2005 to 2005 or 2006). The dates are unclear as Zeynab herself was unclear while responding to the questions. This is further complicated by the fact that Denmark allows refugees from intermediate host-countries – which is Iran, in this case.

Additionally, and for purposes of explaining, her father (the asylum-seeker) can be separated from Zeynab to determine more accurately the country of origin and host country. In the first 'wave' his country of origin was Afghanistan and his host country was Iran (between 1981 and 1983). He then moved back to Iran in 2002 or 2003, seemingly eliminating a 'host country'. In 2010, he went to Denmark from Afghanistan and applied for asylum, which was granted, thereby making his host country Denmark and his country of origin Afghanistan.

The complication which arises in this case has been explored and nuanced in this section, and it has been asserted both Afghanistan and Iran are Zeynab's origin country as there exist a duality in its nature which cannot be ignored. What then are the factors which encouraged Zeynab and her family to move from this country of origin to the host countries of Iran and Denmark? And how does this relate to the agency-structure debate?

2.4. Theories of Migration: Push and Pull Factors

International Migration can be split into three non-mutually-exclusive categories, which explain voluntary and forced migratory patterns, the latter of which is more relevant to this

paper. This discussion will establish the theoretical background to the context in which Zeynab's family migrated.

Macro theories emphasize the structural, objective conditions which act as 'push' and 'pull' factors for migration'. Push factors characteristically include unemployment and low salaries in the case of economic migration which are all reasons to leave a place, and pull factors include migration legislation and better labor markets, which are all reasons to go to a place. These theories are better equipped to explain forced displacement rather than voluntary migration. That is where the role of meso theories enters the scenario: meso theories reject push and pull factors and instead locate migration within a complex system of linkages between states. In this regard, networks and systems are exceedingly important in its understanding as it assumes migration to occur within a migration system (Why do people migrate? A review of the theoretical literature, 2020). Finally, micro theories of migration focus on those factors which act at an individual level and influence the rational decision to migrate, after weighing costs and benefits (Boswell, 2002); they draw from rational choice theory.

Of the three, most relevant to this essay are micro theories as they allow us to focus on Zeynab's individual story (which is deeply rooted and inexorably linked to her father's story), without compromising the larger structures within which she navigates.

A nod can be made here to the agency-structure debate, in which agency posits that individuals have the power to act independently and make their own choices, whereas structure posits that the individual acts in a manner which is in relation to, or dictated by, the social structure. It is a prominent debate in the social sciences but is relevant here only to the extent that Zeynab, the individual, navigates within the legal, political and ethnoreligious constructs around her to reach from one borderland to the next.

The point here, therefore, is to see that Zeynab's story is more complex than what can be attributed simply to refugee theory or theories of migration. It is for this very reason that a dual method is used in this paper.

The reason refugees and the theories of migration have been explored is to show that neither is comprehensive enough in recounting the experience of Zeynab and her family, for which reason this paper explores an alternate dual methodology by which to see it. This dual method is described below.

2.5. Research Design

This paper follows a dual methodology as previously mentioned – the biographical and that of the borderlands. This section will explore how both work together to create the larger framework within which the discussion of Zeynab navigating from origin to host is undertaken from a bottom-up and individual-story perspective.

What then, one may ask, is the benefit of the biographical method? And what creates the borderland which Zeynab and her family navigated? How do different aspects of the borderlands interact within one another to help advance Zeynab's story of navigating?

2.5.1. Biographical Method

The biographical method was used to document the part of Zeynab's life which pertains to my aim in this paper of moving from Iran (and Afghanistan) to Denmark, within a field as interdisciplinary as refugee studies. Zeynab is seen as the pioneering force and a vessel through which this study of lived experiences of herself and her family, especially her father, manifests within the discourse of borderlands. The biographical method has inspired the manner in which Zeynab's, and her father's stories are intertwined throughout the course of this paper, in both direct quotations and narrative-style.

The biographical method encompasses a set of variety of activities including 'narrative, life history, oral history, autobiography, biographical interpretive methods, storytelling, autobiography, ethnography, reminiscence', in which 'history, psychology, sociology, social policy, anthropology' and literature have a part to play (Bornat, 2008).

This paper is inspired by the work of Jonny Steinberg's 'A Man of Good Hope', which is a part-contemporary-history and part-biography piece of literature which covers some vital modern issues including poverty, migration crime and xenophobia (The Guardian, 2015). It

traces the story of a single Somali refugee and his experience of diaspora (Steinberg, 2014). In a (hopeful attempt at a) similar manner, this paper uses the biographical aspect to present Zeynab's story at the center of all analysis in the nearest-meaning to her truth in the way she narrated it to me, for the most holistic and accurate approach.

There are three prime approaches to the biographical method: the biographical interpretive method, which seeks to understand an 'individual's perspective within an observable and knowable historical and structural context, and what it is like to be the person describing their lives and the various decisions, turns and patterns of that life'(Bornat, 2008); the oral history method, which is derived from sociology, 'which seeks to give expression to marginalized voices with emphasis on the importance of language, emotions and oral qualities'; and finally, narrative analysis, which considers 'language, symbolic representations and cultural forms', forming a plurality which makes it difficult to define it (Bornat, 2008). In this paper, all three are used loosely in conjunction with one another, through three mediums of communication – interview, e-mail and WhatsApp chat.

According to Ursula Apitzsch and Irini Siouti, the biographical method is a social creation/construction' which 'constitutes both a social reality and the subjects' world of knowledge and experience and which is constantly affirmed and transformed within the dialectical relationship between life history and knowledge, experiences and patterns presented by society' (Bornat, 2008). Therefore, the primary question that is asked in this method of research is how biographical research which is different from cultural contexts and social situations is created and which 'conditions rules and patterns of construction can be observed in the process' (Bornat, 2008). Therefore, the concept of the biographical research is modelled a series of complex social and cultural research processes.

The initial goal was to do so through a series of unstructured interviews, which would guide the discussion. However, due to uncertainty elicited by the COVID-19 pandemic which restricted in-person meetings, only one in-person interview was conducted before it set-in. For the remaining, eight e-mails were exchanged in which I asked questions and Zeynab responded; we also kept in touch via WhatsApp to follow-up and ask for any supplementary information. E-mail responses which are used word-for-word are in *italics.* Since her first interview was not recorded, I made extensive notes on the situation around us, as well as changes in Zeynab's tone and language, which I continued to try to decipher on e-mail although now compromised, after having learnt what I had about her in person. Therefore, the biographical aspect in this paper is more than a 'just-words' approach and inculcates contextual analysis as well. This therefore allowed me to take a bottom-up, individual-focused approach in this paper, to more realistically explore Zeynab's story as she told me, and place it into a borderlands discussion. It also allowed me to understand her father's plight in his vital role in seeking and being granted asylum in two countries, which drives Zeynab's story.

For anonymity, the pseudonym 'Zeynab Fatima' has been adopted for the interviewee, and her father has remained anonymous.

The advantage that the biographical method presents in the case of this paper is that it encourages 'understanding and interpretation of experience across national, cultural and traditional boundaries to better understand individual action and engagement in society' (Bornat, 2008) because it is universalistic in nature. It is individual-focused interactive, contextual, structured and empirically captures the diversity, complexity and the transformational character of the phenomenon of the dualistic nature of migration of Zeynab and her family, as well as the reconstruction of their movements into a biographical analysis.

It allows for a bottom-up approach which tells a much larger story through one person and her family's experiences.

However, this paper is not written exactly in the biographical approach. This is because the part of the paper which concerns solely her father (which is a significant section of it) is told through the eyes of a young girl seeing her father's actions from a distance. Whilst the nature of her relationship with her father is not known, it may also be tainted by patriarchal hierarchies and moral ambiguities which may exist in Afghanistan. In keeping true to the narrative and history as our prime narrator tells us, any semblances of this have been retained.

One risk this method lends itself to, however, is that of over-interpretation, resulting from putting the person interpreting (myself) it into a position of authority. In this regard, I have made conscious attempt to remain as true to the narrative as possible, as will become evident as the pages turn.

The interview and ensuing textual communication give rise to the ensuing discussion and progression of answering the research question in a chronological manner. The biographical information about Zeynab is presented in *italics* in order to differentiate it from the rest of the paper. Essentially, everything we know about Zeynab and her father we know through Zeynab's eyes.

Having discussed the biographical method, we can now turn to a discussion of borderlands theory, the second half of the dual methodology.

2.5.2. Borderlands Theory

The nebulous concept of Borderlands will help this paper to conceptualize the individual aspects of Zeynab's life from origin to host country in a manner which is not explainable by individual, linear concepts such as geographical and political borders, or even larger concepts

such as refugeehood, as previously mentioned. Borderlands will, therefore, create a structure within which Zeynab, an Iranian-born Afghan-Hazara refugee in Denmark, and her story, are explored.

In its strictest sense and from the Oxford English Dictionary, Borderlands are defined as 'the land or district on or near the border between two countries' (Borderlands, 2020). However, this definition has been approached by professionals in different disciplines from their respective angles and expanded for a more dynamic depiction. For instance, cultural anthropologists have focused instead on how borderlands are areas where various communities have already, or are in the process of, developing across or around modern international borders, thereby defining a geopolitical space (Parker, 2006).

In parallel, approached from the study of identities, borderlands has been looked at as the space where 'two or more cultures confront each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory where all socioeconomic classes touch' (Yoshihara, n.d.). Yet another approach, by Katja Aas and Helene Gundus, suggests it is in 'geographical proximity to the border, but also alludes to an uncertain intermediate space[s] or…region[s] which is neither flawless nor marked by a well-functioning rule of law' (Aas and Gundhus, 2014).

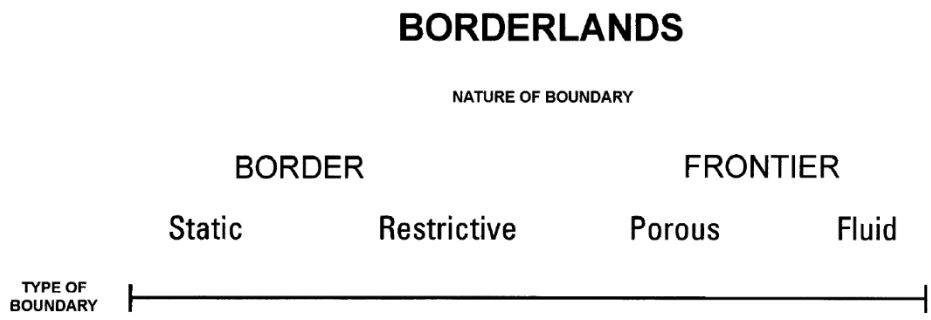
It is therefore evident that the concept of borderlands is not one which remains consistent across academic disciplines, and that the angle from which it is approached will influence the discourse for which it is used. All these elements factor into borderlands as used in this paper as Afghanistan, Iran and Demark in discussion act as inconsistent geopolitical places of contact and exchange in Zeynab's life, borrowing from different cultures and countries as the discussion progresses. This also has an impact on Zeynab's identity and is discussed later in this paper.

It is important to remember that borderlands depend on the people existing within them – they are the result of bordering policies and bordering processes, and about inclusion and exclusion as they weave into the various cultural, economic and social fabrics of a community. They result from continued interaction between people within the limits of contextual and structural factors, and competing cultural, economic and political interests that define bordering processes. Borderlands therefore become asymmetrical places of this interaction and forces which act with or in contradiction to the central governments within which they exist (Brunet-Jailly, 2011).

The significance of borderlands lies in its inter-disciplinary formulation and action, which allows for a contextually-placed exploration of Zeynab's situation within the countries she lives in. Without using borderlands as a framework of exploration, this paper's structure would have been significantly more linear, reaching a continuum of study. This flexible definition of borderlands therefore allows for a discourse which at once spans different disciplines allowing for a compact yet holistic discussion as well.

For this paper, the most neutral definition set in a discourse of cultural anthropology and political science will be used. Adopted by Bradley Parker in 'Toward an Understanding of Borderland Processes', it states that Borderlands 'are regions around or between political or cultural entities where geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic circumstances or processes may interact' (Brunet-Jailly, 2011).

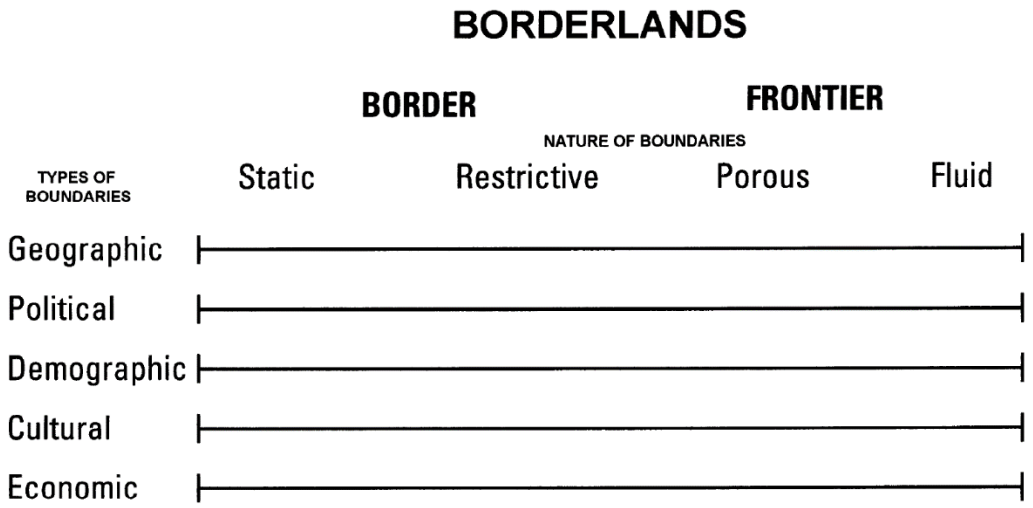
The diagram below taken from Parker shows this diagrammatically:



(Parker, 2006)

The diagram above depicts a continuum showing interrelationships between borderlands, borders and frontiers. Borders refers to the linear dividing lines which are fixed in a certain space, and frontiers refers to those zones which lie between political or administrative entities or a hinterland; both fall under the category of a boundary, which is an unspecific divide that sets various kinds of limits) (Parker, 2006). Borders and frontiers exist on opposite ends of a spectrum, although they may spill into each other in the middle.

Following from the continuum, Parker progresses to the idea of a 'Continuum of Border Dynamics' (CoBD). He posits there to be five major categories of boundaries, or five major *boundary sets*, which are likely to occur within borderlands. These five, namely, are: geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic (Parker, 2006). Each of these factors falls on the continuum described above, between the border and the frontier. This is shown diagrammatically below:



(Parker, 2006)

The diagram above shows the different types of boundaries which interplay within borderlands, and on the continuum from static and restrictive borders to porous and fluid frontiers. It also shows that they act independently in terms of their fluidity, but do not represent the full picture. The next diagram in this paper will illustrate how they are interconnected.

Expanding from a simple border-frontier definition of borderlands to the more comprehensive as shown in the above diagram one allows this paper to juxtapose different factors against one another to determine a more complex set of circumstances which may exist in the borderlands. For instance, whilst the geographic boundary may be more static, the cultural boundary may be more fluid due to similar cultures on either side of the border, as would be the case with the Hazara ethnic group people split between the adjacent border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, for instance.

Parker further added subcategories for each boundary set above, shown below (Parker, 2006):

Geographic Boundaries

- *Topographic features*

- *Physical character*
- *Climate*
- *Flora and fauna*
- *Natural Resources*

Political Boundaries

- *Political*
- *Administrative*
- *Military*

Demographic Boundaries

- *Ethnic*
- *Population Density*
- *Health*
- *Gender*

Cultural Boundaries

- *Linguistic*
- *Religious*
- *Material Cultural*

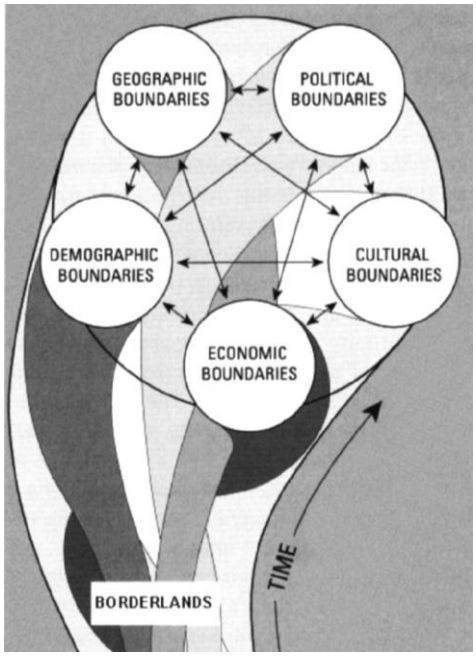
Economic Boundaries

- *Extraction of raw materials*

- *Transhipment of commodities*
- *Production of finished products*
- *Agricultural production*

For even greater qualification and to outline all methods used in this paper, we may refer to William Zartmann in ‘Understading Life in the Borderlands’, and his three qualifications of borderlands. First, he suggests a black and white model, in which there is a clear distinction between populations on either sides; second, he suggests a gray model, in which there is a heavy mixing of population on both sides of a border, and finally, the he suggests the buffered model, in which two populations are separated by a third group. This approach will be used in this essay where required to talk about demographic relations, under demographic boundaries (Braithwaite, 2011).

Returning to Parker he expressed the ways in which the various border sets interact within borderlands through this diagram below. Note that each double-ended arrow represents one factor within the border set, such as ‘linguistic’ within ‘Cultural Boundaries’. This shows they are all inextricably connected and overlap (Parker, 2006).



The figure above is a conceptualization of how boundaries interact and combine in borderlands over time, adding another dimension to the mix. There are dynamic interactions between boundaries which creates boundary processes. The arrows show the interconnectedness of the features. These interrelationships change and mutate overtime. It is the 'interaction that takes place within and between boundary sets through time – it is the essence of boundary dynamics' (Parker, 2006).

Still important to remember, is that Borderlands are not physically 'real' constructs which exist within the world, but rather that they serve as conceptual lenses through which to understand better especially in academic settings. In Zeynab's case, they are useful to understand how Afghanistan and Iran could be one common area of existence, and Denmark as another – all the while within which the various geographical, political, demographic, social and economic forces act in tandem and in conjunction with one another. It shows a transcendence of purely geographic boundaries to form more dynamic spheres of existence, as explored throughout this paper. Therefore, when this paper refers to borderlands, it in fact refers to structures of existence without physical bounds which allows for an academic

construction of the different places which Zeynab lived/lives and interacts within, to place her story and how she navigates within a zoomed-in framework.

This section has outlined the plurality in definitions of borderlands, as approached from different disciplines before taking the cultural anthropological approach and describing its significance. It then progresses to the notion of border dynamics in which there exist five border sets within which there are additional subcategories. Further, it explored a continuum of border dynamics, followed by an analysis of life in the borderlands.

Given that borderlands exist as conceptual lenses and that they allow for a holistic and nuanced approach to studying Zeynab in her existence in Afghanistan, Iran and Denmark (to be explored) it then begs the questions: how is borderlands used in this paper, and how is it appropriate in exploring Zeynab and her family's navigation from origin to host country?

2.5.2.1. Borderlands in this Paper

The second part of this discussion is through the theory of borderlands. This was chosen as while distinct political borders exist between the three countries of Iran, Afghanistan and Denmark, they do not necessarily coincide with the lived experiences of refugees. For instance, Zeynab's father moved back and forth between Iran and Afghanistan in search of employment even after his family had relocated to Iran. In addition, these experiences are often marked by further boundaries which exist, which may be simply unaccounted for in border studies. For this reason, the theory of Borderlands has been used to guide the discussion and attempt to answer the research question.

Furthermore and in the literature, the borderland is seen as a place not only where there are established borders, but also where there is the process of 'bordering, that is, social ordering and institutional formation to keep the world ordered and defined' (Drost and North, 2016). It

is therefore an ongoing process of creating a new social landscape of its existence which Zeynab is part, and this exploration will be visible in this paper.

The borderlands are not exempt from the human interactions that manifest within it. This places Zeynab at the center of the borderland discourse. As the borderland is an academic construct designed in this case to study Zeynab navigating from origin to host country. It becomes increasingly pertinent to understand that Zeynab maintains a sense of agency throughout the discussion, which is enhanced through direct quotations of her e-mails. For the purposes of this paper, Zeynab and (either of the two) borderlands are not mutually exclusive, but rather go hand-in-hand. It allows us therefore to see the novelty that is in Zeynab's story that would otherwise be less visible.

Also, important to note is that I arrived at the use of borderlands in this paper because of the empirical data collected that constituted Zeynab's life story, rather than from more legal categories. This has the effect of making the paper a more empirical and research-based individual account which relies heavily on a range of data and is then rooted in borderlands for an understanding of moving from origin to host country.

Borderlands are the more appropriate theoretical lens by which to study Zeynab as a vessel in navigating from origin to host country because of various reasons. Firstly, for the simple reason that they are areas of contestation in which various factors such as those geographical and cultural in nature interact with one another at varying degrees of static-ness and porosity, allowing for a realistic evaluation and application of Zeynab's case. Secondly, borderlands have historically been in spaces decentralized, away from the center of power and geographically remote. For this reason, they have been in the realm of potentially being exposed to factors which would hamper their political and economic development. However, it is for this very reason that borderlands concept is used in this paper – because despite these

reasons, the Afghan-Iranian borderland remained with a sense of renewed interaction of border sets within it, despite being at a distance from both Kabul and Tehran, the capitals of Afghanistan and Iran, respectively. Although the reasons why borderlands are more appropriate may be numerous, it is prominent because it allows for the application of the single, individual case that is Zeynab, and the examination of her journey from one borderland to another, and effectively, one country to another.

This paper is premised on two theoretical borderlands: the Afghan-Iranian borderland and the Danish borderland; while the former is characterized more by the geographical aspect, socioeconomic factors and ethnoreligious issues, the latter is characterized by the political – citizenship.

This section has outlined that bordering processes and human interventions are at play within the two borderlands which will be discussed in this paper, and that the borderlands has been approached from an empirical perspective. It departs from the notion that borders and frontiers are transcended (or not) to arrive at the mouth of the borderlands, in which context the remainder of the discussion is set.

2.5.3. Synthesis

It is not possible to know the details of everything which happened in an unmediated manner, but it *is* possible to have an analysis of the facts as we have them, nonetheless. The biographical method of Zeynab's story and the borderlands approach are therefore mutually reinforcing that this paper moves beyond simply discussing refugeehood and theories of migration, and onto discussing borderlands as both an approach to, and a fortification of, Zeynab and her family moving from one borderland to the next.

To what extent then is this method applicable to the countries of Afghanistan, Iran and Denmark, and how can they be separated or combined for a more engaging discussion of borderlands? And to what extent can borderlands be used to describe Zeynab and her family's situation within the respective borderlands?

3. Chapter Three: Afghan-Iranian Borderland

3.1. Introduction

In this section, I seek to explore what I have termed the 'Afghan-Iranian borderland'. I have combined Afghanistan and Iran into a single borderland as Zeynab's father – the eventual asylum-applicant in Denmark – moved back and forth several times before leaving for Denmark as for a significant period of time he was working in Afghanistan whilst the family lived in Iran.

In this section, I aim to first describe the Hazaras and their persecution and then outline this persecution at a more individual level, as perpetrated by the Taliban. I then focus on Zeynab's father who is an integral part of Zeynab's narrative, and the prime victim of targeted attacks which led him to seek asylum in Denmark. Then I turn to evaluate the Iranian government's role in and attitude towards Afghan refugees in Iran, followed by an evaluation of the employment available on both sides of the border. Finally, I tie-up the discussion with a discussion of the borderlands itself.

This section is linked to the research question as it outlines and evaluates the presence in the first borderland (Afghan-Iranian) and identifies and discusses the reasons they entered the Danish borderland, as well as the extent to which their actions help understand the make-up of this borderland.

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Zeynab sat across from me, a cafeteria coffee-table between us which held my laptop and her packed-lunch. I opened my laptop to a fresh page, ready to begin. She propped her bag a nearby seat and pulled off the tinfoil of her sandwich; I fidgeted a little and pulled closed the zip of my bag.

I had never intended to ask her too many questions, just to stir points or spark a thought – to be a catalyst to stimulate the semblance of a memory coming to light that would progress the discussion of this thesis. However, she expressed that she was not comfortable conversing too fluidly in English (which sounded, to a native speaker as myself, just short of fluent). We exchanged a few more pleasantries about the wet cold outside and the dampness inside, and I began by asking her where she was from, setting in motion the beginning of a tale that unfolded with zeal from what is marked by this paper as the start to the end of the period covered by this paper, though Zeynab's story is an everchanging one that lives on with her.

The first piece of information that she shared me was that both of her parents belonged to the distinctively Shi'ite Hazara minority community in Afghanistan, leading to the question: how did the asylum-seeker determine Iran to be the country he would flee to, along with his family? How does the persecution of one segment of a population elicit its move not just from one country to another, but to a third country as well, and how so especially in the case of Zeynab and her family? What constitutes the borderland in which all the activities above take place? How do the characteristics of a borderland explain the various boundaries that exist with it? The remainder of the Iranian-Afghan borderland section will aim to answer these questions and reach appropriate conclusions.

3.2. Navigating the Afghan-Iranian Borderland

3.2.1. Introduction

To approach the research question, it is important to discuss Zeynab's father as he was the asylum-seeker who applied for family reunification – the reason Zeynab later lived in Denmark.

Zeynab told me those who worked for human rights in Afghanistan, like her father, were at risk from the many who believe them to be working as spies for foreign governments, especially the American government. Her father was twice the risk: not only was he working as a Commissioner for the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission, but he is also a Hazara; this lent him to ethnoreligious persecution.

Zeynab finished her lunch and curled the tin foil from her sandwich into a ball which she buried deep in her bag. She asked me if I wanted coffee, but my investment in her story was peaking and I had to politely decline.

Zeynab's father was kidnapped, twice. The first time, she told me, he was returned with his arms slit and the second time – *Zeynab paused* – he was returned unharmed.

She had told the story before, I could tell, because she didn't flinch or break eye-contact with whatever it was she was looking at into the distance.

Her own father had been targeted by the Taliban and received many threats – he had even been shot at but had survived as his vehicle was bullet-proof (as most vehicles assigned to risk-prone professions are). This, however, was not the only reason for them to leave for Iran – Zeynab's grandfather was a Shi'ite cleric in a Sunni-majority Afghanistan, which was less-than-tolerant of their Shi'ite population. Further, they also belonged to a distinct minority group visibly different from others in Afghanistan. In her own words:

'The reason my grandparents chose Iran as the country they fled [many years before my mother and father fled to Afghanistan] to was the same as all the other Hazara people, who did the same thing. I think it was just a few years after the revolution in Iran, and the country was now an Islamic republic, and the majority of the people were Shi'a Muslims. The language was almost the same and the culture was also not that different from the Afghan culture. So it was the best place for the Hazara people to flee to. But as I know the Pashtoon people, who were Sunni Muslims, chose countries like Pakistan.'

Regarding the migration of Pashtun's to Pakistan, it is worthwhile to note for contextual reasons that the 'Pashtun tribes straddle the Afghan-Pakistani border and the tribe of Hazaras share affinity with the Persian tribes' (Dimitriadi, 2013). Immigration to both these countries is not only a natural consequence of the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan but also a result of historical and tribal relations' (Dimitriadi, 2013). Additionally, important to note that the border is extremely porous across the Durand Line, a border demarcated in 1893 between an Afghan ruler and the British Raj between what is Afghanistan and modern-day Pakistan (which until 1947 was part of British India) (Dimitriadi, 2013).

I asked Zeynab to wait a few minutes whilst I finished typing on my laptop; I was not recording the chat and therefore needed to write down as much of what she was saying as possible, as well as changes in her tone and the situation around us. Several more students now entered the cafeteria and it began to get noisy – lunch hour had started. However, as invested as I was in capturing as much of the conversation as possible, so was she in contributing to it most she could, so we pushed on ceaselessly. I indicated she talk about Iran; she spoke more about her father.

Zeynab's family moved to Iran in the early 1980's following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Her father began studying to become a Shi'ite Cleric – called an *Akhoond* in Dari. She told

me that her father later became an *Akhoond* in a Dari-speaking *Hosseynie* – a Shi'a place of worship in Copenhagen, Denmark as he had stopped practicing his human rights career. He therefore joined the community of other clerics in Copenhagen. He is currently a bus driver in, showing a career change from a more professional to a semi-skilled job potentially necessitated by the changed circumstances.

This section has discussed the changing circumstances of Zeynab's father which I learned in the very first conversation at the University, and later confirmed by Zeynab via e-mail. The circumstances relating to her father covered aspects such as his earlier career, subsequent kidnapping, retirement and subsequent change in career.

This is now the departure point for the discussion on the family and why they needed to move to Iran. I will now use the father as learned through Zeynab as a vessel by which to see the persecution he, and by extension the family (including Zeynab) faced, which led them to forced migration to Iran. This persecution is of two levels: ethnoreligious and secular; both are explored below.

3.2.2. Afghanistan: Ethnoreligious Discrimination During and After the Civil War

The Hazara community in Afghanistan hails from the Hazarajat area in the mountains of central Afghanistan. They speak Hazaragi akin to Dari and a variant of Persian. The Hazaras are the third-largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (some reside across the border in Pakistan where they constitute a minority (Warden, 2018). The name 'Hazara' comes from a fighting unit consisting of a thousand men many centuries ago. They now make up almost 20% of Afghanistan's 30 million population, making them one of the largest minorities in that country. (Hazaras - Minority Rights Group, n.d.).

The demographic boundary set between Afghanistan and Iran with regards to Zeynab's ethnicity as a Hazara (as both parents are Hazara and hail from the same region) in this case is more of a border, as both sides of the border (not adjacent) have very ethnically distinct populations – one side Hazara, and the other Iranian. However, the cultural boundary was more akin to a frontier – more porous, as the part of Afghanistan which her family migrated from speaks Dari – a dialect of Persian, which is spoken in Iran.

Afghanistan is a largely Sunni Muslim-majority country and as expressed has a history of strife between its Shi'a and Sunni inhabitants. Zeynab told me her family has faced religious persecution, in addition to political, cultural and economic exclusion however, she was not incredibly categoric with her examples of such. The situation of Hazaras being denied basic rights and persecuted in large numbers in Afghanistan has received international attention over the years.

The Hazara genocide started first in the 1880's, when the Pashtun King Amir Rahman declared Shi'ites to be infidels, and not worthy of citizenship, which led to the Hazaras rebelling. when it continued for a decade, an exasperated Rahman ordered the invasion of the Hazarajat region with the help of British Military Advisors, 40,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry and 100 cannons. By 1893, the Hazaras faced heavy defeat; tens of thousands were enslaved and many severed heads were sent back to Kabul. This resulted in the wiping out of almost 60% of Hazaras of Afghanistan, and a situation which forced many to exile in Pakistan and Iran (Gier, 2020).

In this section, I outline the ethnoreligious persecution by the Taliban in addition to what the group constitutes, in relation to the deadly history it has with the Hazaras of Afghanistan, before talking about the more individually-targeted approach they took in the case of Zeynab's father.

The Taliban, which has been known to target Shi'ite people in their attacks, is an off-shoot and was founded in early 1990s by an Afghan faction of Islamic fighters – the Mujahideen – who had resisted Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980's. They were covertly backed by the American Central Intelligence Agency, and its Pakistani counterpart, the Inter-Services Intelligence. The Taliban comprise of Pashtuns, a plurality in Afghanistan and parts of northern Pakistan. The word 'Taliban' has etymological origins in Pashtun and means 'students'.

The Hazaras have often been on the losing end of history, and their political relationship with it is of poor record. Most recently in May 2020 there was a bomb blast at a maternity ward in a hospital in Kabul in a largely Hazara neighbourhood, where 24 people including new-born children were killed (Jones, 2020).

Another incidence of this discrimination on a larger scale was in the 1990's when the Taliban declared war on the Hazaras. Their commander, Mawlawi Mohammad Hanif, reportedly once said: 'Hazaras are not Muslims, you can kill them' (Aljazeera, 2020). Many Hazaras therefore fled to nearby Shi'a-majority Iran, where they hoped to find refuge in the religious commonality. A large part of the almost one-million Afghan refugee population in Iran are Hazaras. Those who stayed behind in Afghanistan risked their lives. For instance, in 1998 in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, thousands of Hazaras were executed in one of the most brutal events of its kind in recent history (Afghanistan: The Massacre in Mazar-I Sharif |, n.d.).

The jurisprudence the Taliban sought to establish came from a pre-Islamic tribal code as well as from interpretations of Sharia (Islamic Legal Code) drawn from Wahhabi doctrines, often somewhat borrowed from Saudi Arabia. This regime enforced many things ranging from *burka* for women to long beards for men. In 1998, as many as two UN Security Council

Resolutions urged Taliban to put a stop to its mistreatment of women (Maizland and Laub, 2020).

From 1990 to 1995 due to rising Taliban activity in Afghanistan against the Hazara community, up to 1.6 million Hazara Afghan refugees fled Afghanistan to Iran. Of these, 540,000 were living on temporary residence permits – and were told by Iran to move to refugee camps or return to their country of origin. Three months later in June 1995, Iran began to 'voluntarily' repatriate 400,000 Afghan refugees. By September, the UNHCR who was repatriating Afghans from Iran, was forced to suspend its operations as the Taliban captured the city of Herat in Afghanistan – the city Zeynab's father work one decade later (Chronology for Hazaras in Afghanistan, 2004).

In 1994, the Afghan government was de-seated and two years later in 1996, Gulbudin Hekmatyar was sworn in as Prime Minister a move welcomed by Iran as well as Pakistan. Unfortunately, his assumption of power was followed by some of the deadliest Taliban attacks in the capital, Kabul. Also in the same year, the Taliban requested the United Nations to recognize it as the legitimate government of Afghanistan; this was opposed by Iran. Over these years, Pakistan and Iran both attempted various times to bring peace to Afghanistan with regards to the Taliban but met with little success.

From 1996 to 2001, Mullah Omar, led the Taliban as the title 'commander of the faithful' (Rosenberg, 2015). He also gave sanctuary to Al-Qaeda and their leader Osama bin Laden on the condition they would not provoke the United States (US). However, this condition which was violated by the al-Qaeda-led bombing of US embassies in East Africa in 1998 (Maizland and Laub, 2020).

In 1996, when the Taliban took control of Kabul, the Tajiks, Uzbeks and (notably for this assignment) Hazaras formed a Northern Alliance. This alliance was initially headed by Tajik

President Rabbani, and later by the Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostrum. The Northern Alliance officially known as ‘United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan’ helped the American-led forces in routing Taliban post 9/11 (Ubaidulloev, 2014).

The Northern Alliance fought defensively against the Taliban, with support from Iran, Russia, Turkey and others. In 2001, the Northern Alliance controlled under 10% of Afghanistan, primarily in the north-east of the country. When the US invaded Afghanistan in 2001, it too backed the Northern Alliance, resulting in victory against the Taliban following a two-month long war in December 2001. Following the defeat of Taliban, the Northern Alliance dissolved with some of its members joining hands with Hamid Karzai who later became the President of Afghanistan (Starr, 2020).

Although the Taliban have not had power since at least 2016, there have still been instances of civilian vehicles being hijacked and the passengers being executed. Individuals are also targeted and taken hostage by armed attackers, such as on June 25, 2016 when 25 Hazara women and men were taken hostage (Aljazeera, 2020). Similarly, the Islamic State, another terrorist organization, has also claimed responsibility for several other instances of violence against Hazaras.

Due to discrimination at various levels, and the resulting poorer living conditions than others, the Hazaras have tended to be even lesser educated and qualified, and work disproportionally in low-paid jobs, and face discrimination within jobs. Thomas Rutting, co-director of the Afghan Analysis Network is quoted as saying "Hazaras have been systematically discriminated against by Pashtuns and others during the Afghan pre-war periods" (Aljazeera, 2020). However, Zeynab’s father was a refreshing anomaly to this as he had held high, white-collar professional positions in Afghanistan, as per knowledge gained from interviews.

The cafeteria began to clear out, and the noise level lowered once more. I pulled my chair closer to the table and set my laptop aside to make her more comfortable in speaking, as Zeynab's expression hardened slightly and she spoke categorically about the Taliban.

She told me the Taliban were still active in Afghanistan, and responsible for terrorist attacks. She firmly repeated that the Taliban often targeted those who worked for the government or for foreign organizations. Zeynab stressed on 'human rights organizations' once more. She recalled the fate of one of her father's friends who worked as a commissioner and told me of how he was kidnapped by the Taliban on his way to work – and beheaded. His body was never returned to his family.

Facing ethno-religious persecution and having witnessed his relatives leaving Afghanistan one by one, Zeynab's father decided to follow-suit and relocate to Iran. There he joined some relatives from her mother's side who had migrated to Iran several years earlier. From this we can see that even though life in Iran was *tough* for the refugee family, they still chose to remain in Iran as the situation in Afghanistan was too precarious both safety-wise and money-wise (UNHCR, 2011).

As explored, this section has covered the Taliban who have historically been persecuting the Hazara of Afghanistan; this pattern was repeated with the persecution of Zeynab's father. This factor was the driving force behind his relocation to lran.

3.2.3. Iran: Ethnoreligious Discrimination and Employment Opportunities

I asked Zeynab, who had now picked up flow of the conversation and was telling me in detail the different aspects we touched on, to tell me more about her father.

It is important to understand the political context in order to better understand the second-generation Afghans like Zeynab, living in Iran. According to a UNHCR report, it is the

fourth-largest refugee host in the world with 979,410 refugees, after Turkey, Pakistan and Lebanon (Islamic Republic of Iran | Global Focus, n.d.). Iran has since been hosting Afghan refugees and until 2011 had only taken USD150 million in international aid to support them (Saleem, 2009). This section explores the trends in Afghan refugee migration to Iran and gives a macro overview of the situation.

Migration of Hazaras as well as non-Hazaras, from Afghanistan to Iran was the highest between 1979 and 2001. This has occurred for a number of reasons ranging from Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1980 to 1989), the fall of Kabul (1992), the oppressive rule of the Taliban (1994 to 2001) and other cyclical issues such as lack of employment, insecurity and violence. Iran's policy towards Afghan refugees has historically been described as 'open-door' for consideration of Islamic solidarity (Bhatnagar, 2020). Iran allowed Afghan refugees to use its considerably better social services including health and education, and permitted them to work, albeit largely in unskilled jobs. In fact, at the time of the Soviet occupation Afghan refugees were termed *Mohajerin*, meaning 'religious migrants'. By this token, Zeynab's father, who fled to Iran in 1983, can also be considered a *mohajer*. This term was subsequently dropped and after the Afghan civil war, they were simply referred to as 'refugees'.

The Iranian government is responsible for registering refugees and determining their status. From 1979 to 1992, Afghans who entered Iran were issued 'blue cards' which indicated their involuntary migration. Initially, Zeynab's parents also moved at the same time. (Iran, 2010). In 1993, the Iranian government began issuing temporary registration cards to newly arrived or undocumented Afghan refugees. In 2003, they stared issuing Amayesh cards (refugee identity cards), which are renewed on an annual basis (Refugees in Iran, 2020).

The greatest flow of Afghan migrants to Iran more specifically was between 1991 and 2001. This was also the time when there were the greatest number of repatriations (Human Rights Watch. n.d.). Overall, there were two periods of migration: during the 1978 coup by the Marxist Democratic Party of Afghanistan and during the civil war that followed the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1989. Even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the Communist party remained in power in Afghanistan till 1992. The ensuing civil war was one of the most devastating periods of time in the country's history. One after another, various factions succeeded in assuming power in Kabul, the capital. Eventually the Taliban rose with the aim of unifying the country and restoring security. They ruled from 1996 to 2001. The Taliban hailed from Pashtun tribes in the Western part of Afghanistan. During their reign, there was an exodus of Hazaras from Afghanistan to neighbouring Shi'a majority Iran; it is estimated over one million people fled during this period.

In 1979, the Soviet Union sent military forces to prop up friendly government in Afghanistan. This led to a resistance movement led by the Mujahideen. During what is termed as period of occupation, over 100,000 Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan who took control of major cities and highways to consolidate their control over the Kabul government. By the time these troops pulled out of the country, an estimated over one million civilians had been killed, in addition to the 90,000 Mujahideen fighters, 18,000 Afghan troops, and 14,500 Soviet soldiers (Taylor, 2014). At the end of Soviet occupation, there were 6.2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran alone, owing to both countries adopting the aforementioned 'open-door policy' for Afghan refugees.

Zeynab's father initially left Afghanistan for Iran during the period of Mujahideen resistance to the presence of Soviet troops and due to persecution of the Hazara community between 1981 and 1983. Her mother also left for Iran during these years. Her father remained in Iran until 2002 during which time he notably got married to Zeynab's mother and had two

daughters, Zeynab and her younger sister. Zeynab's father is among the 840,158 Afghans who fled Afghanistan for Iran since the start of the War (Colville, 1997).

This section outlines the political and historical context in which the Hazaras migrated to Iran from Afghanistan. It is evident that over time, the designation and status of refugees kept changing, such as *Mohajerin* for Zeynab's parents, which affected their resident permits (In this case, they were awarded indefinite stay permits). Another notable feature of Zeynab's parents is that they both migrated within two years of each other it is not known whether they met in Afghanistan or Iran; however, they got married during the period when they were refugees.

In addition to the ethno-religious discrimination faced in Afghanistan and Iran, as explored above, they also faced economic discrimination in Iran, which prompted Zeynab's family to seek refuge in Denmark. This section explores the opportunities available specifically to Afghan refugees fleeing to Iran in the context of the time-period of migration. It then talks about the on-ground reality of the provision of resources that otherwise are to be provided to refugees, and how the Iranian provision did not meet this standard. Throughout this section, it is examined in the context of Zeynab's father and her family. As the section progresses, the reasons for Zeynab's father seeking asylum in a third country (Denmark) also become evident.

For refugees, it is important to have the opportunity to work effectively to 'rebuild lives with dignity and in peace' (Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion, n.d.). This allows refugees to support themselves and their families, thereby becoming self-sufficient and free from reliance on support of international organizations and the likes. In 'Livelihoods and Forced Migration', Karen Jacoben draws on the theory of 'displaced livelihoods' to recognize that the livelihoods of the forcibly displaced differ from those of other migrants. She also stresses

the need to reconceptualize and restructure these traditionally conceived and targeted refugee programs in such a manner that they improve the opportunities for refugees by benefiting host communities as well (Jacobsen, 2014). As forced migrants are often expected to secure livelihoods in circumstances where the odds are weighed against them; thus, as they start from a position of loss, they must be facilitated more than others.

In this regard, the Iranian government, supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been 'implementing a diverse portfolio of livelihood interventions, including technical and vocational training for refugees, access to loans, and equipment and tools to facilitate establishment or expansion of refugee-run businesses' (Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion, n.d.). Only a small portion of Afghan refugees in Iran live in Refugee Camps – the majority are free to mix in Iranian society, attain Iranian education and have access to employment. This intermixing in fact is also said to have changed the demeanour of Afghans, who tended to be from a more patriarchal background than the Iranians. Therefore, one spinoff of this, seemingly, was that they learnt greater openness in Iran. (Colville, 1997).

Jacobsen draws from 'livelihoods theory' which is 'the means of gaining a living, including livelihood capabilities, tangible assets such as stores and resources, and intangible assets, such as claims and access' (Jacobsen, 2014). However, where refugees are barred from availing of opportunities, hey are unable to use their human capital because of a lack of the right to work or some form of discrimination, which is what Zeynab's father faced in Iran. This exclusion results in a level of social action which can be understood in the context of power relations in the host country (Iran) to understand livelihoods and force migration.

Iran claims to permit refugees with valid residence permits to work legally in the country. However, many have said this policy has been more of tolerance rather than provision. As

Zeynab's family was classified as *Mohajerin*, they all had legal permission to indefinitely stay in the country. As the situation worsened in Afghanistan, policies for Afghan refugees in Iran became stricter to prevent illegal entry and to encourage repatriation. In fact, Iran has increasingly pushed this policy approach.

In 2000, the Parliament in Iran passed legislation under Article 48 of the third Five-year Development Plan which mandated all foreigners without a work permit to exit the country by 2001 (Iran: Conditions of refugees in Iran; documents issued to refugees in Iran (follow-up to IRN36964.E of 22 May 2001), 2001). The following year, heavy fines sometimes accompanied by imprisonment, were levied – on illegal or unrecognized workers. According to Jacobsen, these measures are the result of obstacles and enablers in the host country. Such hinderances may manifest in multiple ways, such as stringent state refugee policies, encampment, restrictive legal status and documentation, anti-refugee civil society sentiment and limited facilitation by institutions (Jacobsen, 2014).

This was especially disadvantageous for Afghan refugees as many were not recognized by the UNHCR while others still did not have proper documents and were employed illegally. An estimated two million Afghans (refugees and non-refugees) live in Iran without legal papers and are at a constant risk of exploitation and deportation (Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, 2013). The large majority of the Afghan refugees who make up this population – up to 70% - belong to the Hazara and Tajik minorities of Afghanistan. The bulk of this population lives in urban areas, with the highest concentration in Tehran, the capital (200,000 refugees). It has been widely reported that these Afghan refugees constantly face a range of issues such as detention, forced payments for accommodation in deportation camps, physical abuse, forced labor and forced separation of families, which makes a difficult situation increasingly tenuous; in some extreme cases, this

encouraged voluntary repatriation, even though their lives were under threat in their own country (Saleem, 2009).

However, there have been reports that these efforts by Iran towards its refugee population have not been fully-heartened efforts, it may be argued, and that they have not translated into economic opportunities for Afghan refugees, who face limited economic prospects and even discrimination – even those who have permission to be in the country. Afghans were banned from living in almost half of the provinces in the country and in the provinces, they are allowed to live, they are banned from visiting certain villages and towns (رشته های ممنوعه برای اتباع غیرایرانی در کنکور ارشد و دکتری اعلام شد, 2020). Further, those with valid residence permits cannot get a driving licence. At times, the Afghan refugees have been termed as 'burdens on the economy' and 'recruits for terrorism' (Haidari, 2016), which had led to discrimination in daily life, as well. During this time, some work permits for those who *did* have them were revoked. Additionally, further restrictions were put on those with valid work permits, such as the limitation to work within 16 areas of work, primarily manual-labor where there was a shortage and a lack of interest for Iranians to work in. At the same time, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) re-registered all foreigners, resulting in the nullification of previously issued documents which were giving Afghans a status above that granted to refugees under the UN Refugee Convention. Racism is sometimes prevalent. Most recently in June 2020, there have been increasing protests against discriminatory practices of Iranian authorities against Afghans in major cities around the world. This was spurred by a car carrying Afghans being set ablaze by bullets fired at their car; in one news clip, one survivor of the car incident was shown to be handcuffed to his hospital bed in Iran (Glinski, 2020).

In 2000, the UNHCR joined arms with the Iranian government to encourage the repatriation of Afghan refugees; under this scheme, they could either receive material assistance in

exchange for repatriation, or they could declare themselves in need of protection. If they chose the latter, they would be awarded a three-month temporary residence permit which could be renewed up to four times. The pressure for repatriation was further increased in 2003, with 11 articles being passed in Parliament including measures such as legal penalties on those who hired Afghans without permits and further restrictions on work without permits. After the fall of Taliban rule, in 2002, Afghans around the world began returning to their country. The number of voluntarily-repatriated Afghans (predominantly from Pakistan and Iran) now stands at 5.8 million people (Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: Regional Overview, 2016). Those that remain in host countries such as Iran fear volatile conditions back in Afghanistan and find their host country provides better opportunities than their country of origin even now. However, this trend of repatriation picked up speed in more recent years, after Zeynab and her family had already left Iran for Denmark, via Afghanistan (Naseh, Potocky, Stuart and Pezeshk, 2018).

In finding himself and his family in such a dire situation, Zeynab's father risked his life and returned to his native Afghanistan whilst the family remained in Iran, where he joined the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission as a lawyer.

Zeynab and I had been e-mailing back and forth for about three months now, and we were past exchanging pleasantries. Our e-mails had become more direct, more detailed and more pertinent to the topic of this paper. In her own words, she told me:

'We left Iran first of all because of my dad's political situation. He wasn't safe in Afghanistan anymore, and he couldn't get a job in Iran as a lawyer, so basically we couldn't live in Iran as well. The situation for refugees in Iran is much different from European countries. Even though you are a political refugee, you don't have the same rights in the country as the Iranian people. You can't find a job easily. The only jobs that are easily possible for Afghan

refugees are at places such as building site and so. It is very hard to work as a doctor, engineer, lawyer and so. You can't buy simple thing such as a SIM card in your own name, and also the Iranians behaviour toward Afghan refugees are not that well.'

In addition to the legal matters discussed, there was also a more qualitative dimension. Zeynab told me:

'But all of this is understandable in my opinion because after the situation in Afghanistan got worse, more Hazara people were coming to Iran. So the number of Afghan refugees in Iran got around 3 million, and maybe more than because a lot of people are living illegally in the country. So, the it is understandable that the Iranian people are tired of the refugees, and especially in these times when Iran is under pressure from all over the world and is under boycott and has a week economy.'

As told by Zeynab, there was no hiding for her or her family given their distinctly Hazara features, easily recognized by Afghans and Iranians. This distinction has led to some ethnic discrimination, greater than that faced by Sunni Afghans in Iran as they outwardly do not look different from the average Iranian or Afghan. The Hazara living in Iran feel as second-class citizens, even though they are also Shi'ites, and engage in activities such as fighting in the Syrian war to protect Zainabiya, the shrine of the daughter of the first Shi'a Imam Ali outside Damascus, Syria, with Iran (Mostaghim and Bulos, 2016).

While Zeynab's father had felt the need to leave Iran, Zeynab seemed to feel right at home – a feeling she carried with her to the Danish borderland – more on this later in the paper.

This section explored the realities of the situation of Afghans in Iran and has outlines the many reasons why Zeynab's father was forced to seek asylum in a third-country. It seeks to question therefore what the role of the borderland is in the context her family's living in

Afghanistan and Iran and traversing between them. This will be addressed further in this paper.

3.3. Spatial Distribution in Iran

We can here note that unlike in Denmark (as will be mentioned later), there is no spatial dispersion policy in Iran; therefore, many Hazaras tend to settle in the same place, in Mashhad. This is no coincidence: Mashhad not only provides opportunities (being Iran's second-biggest city), but it is also the location of Imam Reza's shrine a site of pilgrimage for Shi'as like the Hazara. Even though Hazaras have historically constituted a significant percentage of Afghan refugees in Iran, they have only accounted for a disproportionate one-fourth of the UNHCR-assisted repatriations. There is a possibility therefore that the hesitation to repatriation is *also* potentially linked to the presence of many Shi'a Shrines in Iran (Glazebrook and Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007). This importance placed on the shrines is derived largely from the Quranic passage Sura 42:23:

"I do not ask you for this message any payment [but] only good will through kinship."

from the Holy Prophet Muhammad, ancestor of all twelve Imams (The Qur'an (Quran), 2019).

The pilgrimage which Afghan Hazara regularly able to make as residents of Mashhad is called *Ziyarat.* This shows the Hazaras' attachment to Iran, especially Mashhad (including Zeynab's family which lived here from 1981- 2012), and Qom (where Zeynab was born, and the site of Masjid Jamkaran, the site where the final and twelfth Shi'a Imam is said to have prayed). Perceived religious discrimination in Afghanistan has further strengthened the resolve of Hazara to remain in Iran especially near sites of *Ziyarat,* and therefore providing a safe passage to Iran may be one answer to encouraging returns on the part of the Iranian government.

Despite this blessing of residence, Zeynab's family eventually left Iran for Denmark.

3.4. Afghan-Iranian Borderlands: a Discussion

Having reached a point in background information and discussion equipped to address the various geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic boundaries which exist, this paper will now discuss the Afghan-Iranian Borderland. In Zeynab's case, this borderland was static in some cases and porous in others. Largely speaking however, this borderland is predicated on geographical lines, as there are two distinct countries within it.

The movement of Zeynab and her family between Afghanistan and Iran was the defining incidence which created the theoretical lens of borderland. Its characteristics have already been discussed above. This is not to say that the factors which constitute this borderland did not exist before this study – it is rather that these factors come together in manner that allows for academic discussion of how people live and operate within these constructs. Still, it is important to remember is that people's lives cannot be reduced to factors such as political borders, as people exist and operate despite them. In fact, this can be taken one step further as for instance, while there is a political border between Afghanistan and Iran, it may be connected over by a series of other links, such as demographic and cultural, showing them to be operating with agency although in an interlinked manner.

The demographic boundary set between Afghanistan and Iran with regards to Zeynab's ethnicity as a Hazara (as both parents are Hazara and hail from the same region) in this case is more of a border, as both sides of the border have very ethnically distinct populations – one side Hazara, and the other Iranian . However, the cultural boundary was more akin to a frontier (more porous) as her family migrated from Dari-speaking part of Afghanistan (a dialect of Persian, and the language spoken in Iran). At the same time, there is growing nationalistic sentiment, which is embedded in Iranian culture, which makes it more difficult for Afghans to assimilate into Iranian society, making the border more static than before.

These features interact with one-another to create a contesting and negotiating, living sense of the borderland.

In addition to the demographic and cultural boundaries, another aspect is the political boundary. Afghanistan and Iran are two separate sovereign states, with distinct laws regulating the movement of people between them. Zeynab's family went to Iran on asylum-seeking basis, thereby respecting the static political border; this was respected even when Zeynab's father moved across the border on his own.

Zeynab at this point shifted in her seat a little and studied me picking up my laptop again before continuing.

Zeynab's parents faced persecution for which reason they fled Afghanistan and went to Iran, where she was born, in the conservative city of Qom on December 1, 1998. These threats to Zeynab's fathers' life are what prompted him to move to Iran – where the Shi'ites are the majority and therefore assimilation was expected to be easier. Nevertheless, he faced unexpected difficulties and therefore decided to apply for asylum in a European country.

While based in Iran, she visited Afghanistan only once though for an extended period. Her second visit to Afghanistan took place when she transited through it in 2012 on her way to Denmark as a 13-year-old refugee. As Denmark does not allow one to travel back to the country they sought asylum from, she has not visited Afghanistan since migrating to Denmark (Refugee Law and Policy: Denmark, 2020). Comparatively, she has visited Iran four times since moving to Denmark.

The economic boundary set was also transgressed by migration as a political strategy and as a political necessity, as Adelkhah and Olszewska write in 'The Iranian Afghans'. They write that Afghans in Iran have used mobility as a cultural, political and economic strategy, which started as a necessity and progressed in the other direction. Although augmented by the

refugee situation in Iran, it has existed for centuries in the form of nomadism, trade and employment throughout the region; Afghans have often needed to supplement their own mountainous and drought-prone crop land with a more fertile and predictable Iranian one. Similarly, there has been economic seasonal migration for those who work in one place in the spring and another in the fall, such as Hazara *mohajerin* who 'would work in coal mines in the winter, and spend the summer fighting with one of the resistance groups' (Adelkhah and Olszewska, 2007), and not in white-collar jobs such as the one for Zeynab's father became eligible for. For this reason, spring and fall have often been times of transition and greater mobility, creating more porous economic boundaries.

With the passage of time, the economic and political boundaries have become increasingly intertwined, making them difficult to detangle from one-another. This is because they have become embedded in something centuries old: cultural values and practices. To cite an example, the inhabitants of Hazarajat one of the poorest regions of Afghanistan, have historically migrated to the Middle East for economic opportunities. In some cases, this has become a 'rite of passage' for men keen to support their families. This overlap of the economic and political factors created a porous border with cross-linkages which set the migratory scene for the case of Zeynab and her family.

The porousness of this border created ample opportunity for Zeynab's father to return to Afghanistan, as he did, to seek better employment opportunities – an individual decision he made at a micro level.

Borderlands are also (but not only) spaces of contestation where 'the interiority and exteriority of place and identity between 'us' and 'them', 'ours' and 'theirs' are configured' (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006). They also tend to be spaces where, as Kaiser and Nikiforova write, these configured aspects are in dialogue with one-another along with self-

identification; it is a space where one overlaps onto the other and gets juxtaposed with the other. In such cases, while borders may be porous, they remain ever-relevant as they 'may be seen as narratives and enactments used to stabilize the diving line between the interior and exterior of place and identity' and as 'sites of resistance' (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006).

Finally, the settling of Afghans especially Hazaras in Iranian soil seems to be one which is irreversible owing largely, in the understanding of this paper, to the porousness of the many boundary sets which exist. This makes boundaries less salient and more prone to transcendence, which Hazaras tend to do by entering, remaining, crossing back and forth, as well as in cases not repatriating. This creates a complex transborder reality which cannot be easily reversed due to a linkage of factors ranging from public sphere (commercial) to the private sphere (familial due to inter-marriages).

Another aspect to consider is that the Iranian-Afghan borderland is a space where the borders in the borderlands area are continuously contested; it also tests the claim to sovereignty of the two states (Deleixhe, Dembinska and Danero Iglesias, 2019).

This section has explored the move from Afghanistan to Iran (and back over several times) which created what this paper refers to as the 'Afghan-Iranian borderland'.

It is important to note that the conditions which are being examined in this paper within the borderlands discourse have existed within Afghanistan and Iran since their inception. This paper is simply an academically-fashioned snapshot which draws from those existing features and discusses them in the context of the theory of borderlands. On the boundaries: the demographic and political tend to be static borders, whereas the cultural and economic tend to be porous frontiers. Also, important to note is that they are all inexorably linked, especially the political and economic boundaries.

3.5. Conclusion

In this section, I have aimed to trace the various salient features of the Afghan-Iranian borderland which impact upon Zeynab's story. In doing so, I first introduced Zeynab's native Hazara community and outlined the ethnoreligious persecution they faced in Afghanistan. I then engaged Zeynab's father – a target for the Taliban and the original asylum seeker – in an attempt to establish the trajectory, the family – including Zeynab (a minor at the time of relocation from Iran/Afghanistan to Denmark) – followed. In order to conceptualize this discussion in a more empirical basis, I then traced the Iranian government's unfavourable provisions and policies towards refugees for the period Zeynab and her family were refugees in Iran. The most unfavourable aspect of the Iranian government's policies with regards to Zeynab's father were their barring of access to white-collar jobs, which made the situation so dire that Zeynab's father chose to risk his life and return to his native Afghanistan in search of employment whilst his family remained in Iran; eventually her father and his family relocating to Denmark. This is followed by a comprehensive tie-up of Borderlands theory in light of the theory discussed previously in this paper.

It then goes to reason that if Zeynab's father did not find suitable employment opportunity in his first country of asylum (Iran), would this also be the case in another host country? Did it make a difference that he reapplied for asylum though this time in a developed country in Europe? These questions are examined in greater detail in succeeding pages.

4. Chapter Four: The Danish Borderland

4.1. Section Introduction

Zeynab was a minor when she relocated from Iran to Denmark through Afghanistan. In moving so, she moved in this papers' theoretical understanding, from one borderland into the next i.e. from the Afghan-Iranian borderland into the Danish borderland. As a vessel, Zeynab guides our discussion from a nuclear, individual analysis, of a larger structure. The are several factors which distinguish the Danish borderland from the Afghanistan-Iranian borderland. For instance, its boundaries do not straddle two politically sovereign countries rather lie within a single country: before and after the political factor of citizenship within the borderlands discourse. In following Zeynab's story in the Danish borderland, we approach her as on an individual scale, as well as within the legal regimes of family reunification for refugees. It is worth noting that she, her mother, sister and her grandmother all *joined* her father in Denmark – who had been granted asylum already – via family reunification.

This section is arranged in such a manner that it first explores how Zeynab and her family navigated the borderlands with respect to the various situations in Denmark in which this took – and continues to take – place. This is done in a chronological manner which explores several situations, including how her father chose a country, the asylum process, the Danish authority view on refugees, the points system and family reunification, the situation after getting permission to stay, and finally ends with a discussion on citizenship – the *final frontier* of this paper. This chapter then progresses to a more informed discussion of the Danish Borderland, to understand Zeynab's individual life experience from origin to host country. I draw parallels with the previous discussion on the Afghan-Iranian borderland, and finally end with a conclusion and a set of questions which the succeeding section will aim to answer.

This section is linked to the research question as it not only explores navigating within the Danish borderland and the make-up of this borderland but offers insight the following section to look at navigating from one borderland to the other through the theme of identity.

Despite harsh criticism from opponents, Denmark has allowed in more than 20,000 refugees in what the Rockwool Foundation has dubbed the 'crisis period' of the influx of refugees (contrary to common perceptions, between 2013-16, non-EU countries accepted several times more refugees than Europe). The refugee flow to Europe peaked in 2015 with over one million entering its borders (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018).

This influx of refugees reignited the debate concerning integration, with many Danish people fearful of the impact refugees might have on their culture and heritage. This debate had earlier erupted during the war following the break-up of Yugoslavia from 1992 – 1995. The major influx of refugees from former Yugoslavia particularly Bosnia into Denmark peaked in 1992/1993 with up to 34,882 people arriving. For comparative purposes the number of refugees entering Denmark during the Syrian Civil War, (2014-2016) was 33,386 (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018).

As Zeynab's family came to Denmark in 2012, it was not part of either of these two peaks. From 1997 to 2016, a total of 7,002 Afghans were settled in Denmark, making up a total of 10.7% of all settled refugees (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018). Zeynab and her family have put emphasis on integration; for instance, her and her younger sister both went to the local Danish schools and learned the language. Based on my communication with Zeynab, it appears they have also steered clear of criminal offenses.

There are several questions which may be raised here: is Zeynab distinct from her father, the asylum-seeker, or are their resident permits contingent upon one-another, as they are tied through family reunification? What procedures do asylum seekers face upon entering

Denmark? Why has this borderland been divided along the lines of citizenship? How have Danish authorities and the people responded to refugees entering the country, over the years? What role does identity have to play in the Danish borderlands?

4.2. Navigating the Danish Borderland

4.2.1. Choosing a Country

Zeynab told me that while choosing the country for asylum, her father considered Germany, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries; however, she did not specify which country he had applied to initially. Once he was on his way to Europe, without the family the first time, he spoke to others on the plane who were also seeking asylum. By learning of their reasons for choosing a specific country, he decided that he would go to Denmark and ask his family to join him there. This reasons behind his decision included Denmark was 'easier' to settle in and the fact that Denmark was more lenient in allowing asylum-seekers to bring their immediate family members, including parents, spouse and children. By this token, he could bring his mother who lived with his family in Iran to Denmark as well. One more reason for choosing Denmark was because of the welfare-system, which he believed would be 'helpful' for the family in the future.

This point sees the creation of the Danish borderland, which in this paper is divided along the lines of the political border set of citizenship. Important to note is while citizenship is not exclusively mentioned in the borderland theory used in this paper, it may be categorized to fall under the political sphere. To elucidate, the divide of the borderland is that between not being a citizen and being a citizen. Since 2012, Zeynab and her family have been in Denmark on a temporary visa, which was recently reviewed in March 2020.. Neither Zeynab nor any of her family members have yet gained citizenship, so all are still on one side of the Danish borderland. Effectively then, this border is between temporary residence and permanent residency, which slopes to citizenship In one e-mail, she told me:

'It doesn't matter if it is for temporary residency, permanent residency or citizenship, I have to put a request to get it. But not necessarily with my family. It is possible that I get my

permanent residency before my dad or even my citizenship. So, whoever meets the requirements can get it.'

In this borderland, she is independent from her parents whereas in the previous one she was tied to them. This could be largely for two reasons: that there is more nuclear autonomy in Denmark compared to Afghanistan and Iran, and that she was no longer a minor in Denmark.

Additionally, from the perspective of culture, while Zeynab went to a Danish school and has assimilated Danish values, she has also joined another community – that of Afghans in Copenhagen via a *Hosseynie*. This is a borderland community, which develops within the larger institutional architecture of belonging, underlining the importance of local culture (Konrad, 2013). While differences between elements within a borderland community may exist and they may be divided by geographical borders and the like, they may nonetheless remain unified by common characteristic of language, ethnicity or culture. This exclusionary role of borders is therefore transgressed in favor of cohesion.

Finally, there are economic boundaries, which make themselves visible in the quest for citizenship: Zeynab is required to have several years of work experience before she becomes eligible for citizenship. However, she has just begun a three-year Medicine course at Copenhagen University and would like to pursue specialization in the medical field after this which would push her citizenship eligibility further down the line.

This section reflected the micro theories discussed previously and explored how Zeynab's father chose Denmark for rational reasons, after weighing pros and cons. It also explored that the Danish borderland is split on accounts of citizenship: before and after, which Zeynab has not 'unlocked' yet as she is required to put in an application for citizenship – for which she is not yet entitled.

4.2.2. Asylum Process in Denmark

At this point, it is important to present the facts of the case before entering into further discussion. In this vein, this Section outlines the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention provision for asylum-seekers and the process in Denmark, along with a description of the different types of refugees which are admitted into the country.

The 1951 Refugee Convention gives all the right to seek protection; in Denmark, this provision is irrespective of whether they already hold a resident permit in Denmark or not. All asylum seekers are police-registered and must complete an application form. After a short period of waiting (this has fluctuated over time, and is elucidated further in the following section), asylum-seekers are called for an information and motivation interview, during which they are asked about their reasons for fleeing, and their background. The responsibility for such an interview lay with the police until 1996, when the Immigration Service took over. On the basis of this interview and other supplementary information, the decision for whether the asylum-application should be processed further or forwarded to another country is made (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018).

As per the Dublin Regulation, prior to the processing of an asylum case, the applicant must be gauged on whether they have made an application in the past to another European country or not. If such is the case, then Denmark may request the country which the applicant previously applied to, to take the applicant back; such requests made by Denmark are often successful (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018).

Each case is processed individually, and great emphasis is placed on the country of origin. Denmark grants seven types of resident permit to applicants who are granted asylum. The table below elucidates this.

Table 3.1 The various types of residence permit for refugees

Residence status	Description	Aliens Act	Time period [1]
Convention status	Applies to refugees who fulfil the requirements of the UN 1951 Refugee Convention. It concerns people who have a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (Christensen et al., 2000, p. 22).	Section 7, Subsection 1	Still applies
De facto refugee status	Refugees who are not covered by the Refugee Convention, but who have 'other similar or substantial' grounds for not returning to their country of origin (ibid.; our translation). These factors must create a well-founded fear of persecution for the refugee if he or she were to return home (ibid., p. 379).	Section 7, Subsection 2	Abolished July 2002
Subsidiary protection status	Refugees who are not covered by the UN Refugee Convention, but who face a 'risk of being executed or subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment' if they return to their country of origin (Starup, 2012, p. 82; translation).	Section 7, Subsection 2	Applicable from July 2002 onward
Temporary protection status [2]	Refugees who are not covered by the UN Refugee Convention but who come from countries 'marked by arbitrary acts of violence and attacks on civilians' (Jacobsen et al., 2017, p. 276; our translation).	Section 7, Subsection 3	Applicable from February 2015 onward
Quota refugees	Refugees who are resettled in Denmark in agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Since 1989, it has been agreed that Denmark will provide places for 500 quota refugees annually. The Immigration Service assesses all quota refugee cases before residence permits are granted.	Section 8	Still applies [3]
Humanitarian grounds for residence	A residence permit can be granted to a registered asylum seeker if significant humanitarian considerations warrant it. However, humanitarian residence permits are only granted as exceptions, and in very special cases.	Section 9 b	Still applies
Other grounds	A residence permit can also be granted on other grounds, for example in the best interest of children. This applies both to unaccompanied minor and to accompanying children.	Section 9 c	Still applies

(Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018).

Under family reunification, those who are immediate family members including children, spouses and parents, may join a family member presently in the host country. As per this provision of family reunification, Zeynab and her sister joined her father as children, her mother as spouse and her grandmother as a parent of the applicant. Therefore, the status granted to her father was extended to the family, as well. There are many aspects of family

reunification which need to be considered in this case, as prompted by UNHCR. For instance, one person must be settled in final host country to invite the rest of the family (which Zeynab's father was, in Denmark). Additionally, one part of the family may be in a country of temporary asylum while others are in country of origin at the time the prime applicant goes to the final host country. This was the case as Zeynab, her sister, her mother and her grandmother were living in Iran, a temporary asylum country, whilst the father was in Afghanistan – and then when he went to Denmark (UNHCR Guidelines on Reunification of Refugee Families, 2020); it is a possibility though that they may be living in Afghanistan at the time of application, but is not clear due to the nature of information collected.

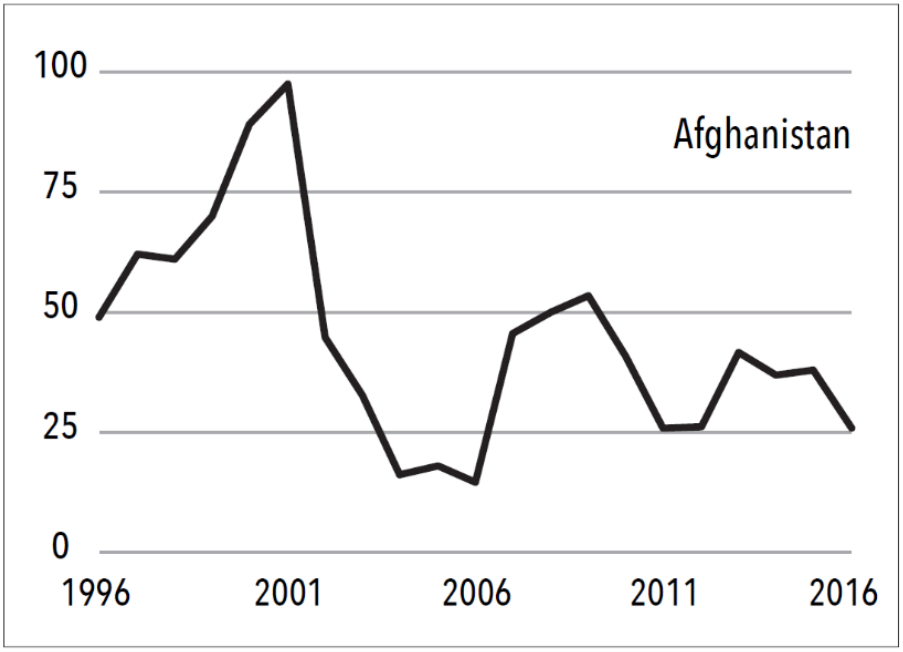
Regarding Zeynab's status in Demark, as her father was persecuted for working as a human rights lawyer in an international organization in Afghanistan, and for being a Shi'ite cleric in a less-tolerant Sunni-majority country, he claimed asylum based on political persecution. In studying the table above, political refugees fall under the category of a 'Convention Refugee' as there is a well-founded fear of persecution owing to political opinion.

Therefore, this section has established the procedures faced by asylum-seekers at the Danish border and described Zeynab and her family as Political Refugees with family reunification.

4.2.3. Contextualizing Asylum-Seeking in Denmark

This Section aims to contextualize the situation for asylum-seekers and refugees in the Danish system at the time Zeynab and her family migrated to Denmark in 2012. This will allow for a more holistic discussion of borderlands concept later in this paper. In 2012, there were more claims for asylum than there were refugee registrations, and more refugee registrations than number of recognized (for protection) refugees (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018). This latter part is the expression of the recognition rate, which expresses the proportion of resident permits granted to asylum seekers of the total asylum cases. In 2012, it

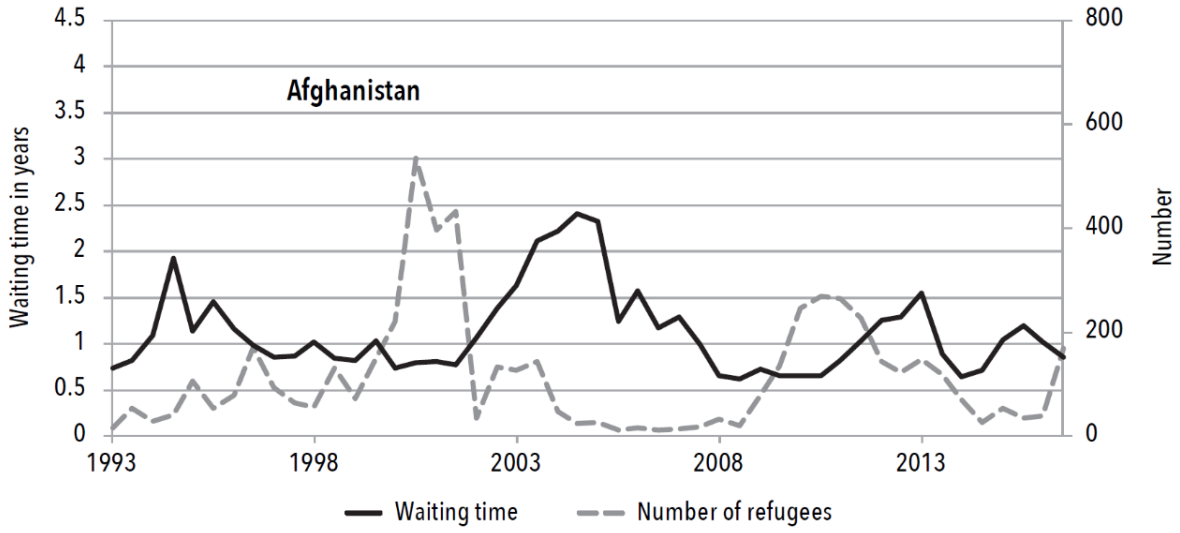
was 46% i.e., just below average for the period 1992-2016. Below is a graph showing the recognition rate for Afghan refugees. To put matters in perspective, this rate was lower than recognition rates for Iraq.



(Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018)

Further, in 2012, the waiting time under the asylum system was eight months which was one of the lowest since 1992. According to Zeynab, this is coincidentally also the time it takes the Danish authorities to take a decision regarding extending temporary permits and granting permanent residency. Additionally, from 2012 – 2016, just 3.9% of asylum-seekers were from Afghanistan, of which a large 63.9% of refugees were Convention refugees.

The graph below shows the waiting time as well as the number of refugees from Afghanistan, on the same graph. In 2012, the two measures were almost equal.



(Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018)

4.2.4. View of Danish Authorities and the Danish Society Towards Refugees

This section explores the different ways the Danish government and the Danish people have reacted to incoming refugees. Until the 1980's, successive Danish governments adopted a liberal attitude towards refugees. Although this was made more restrictive after 1980, between 2008 and 2013, as many as 28,926 people applied for asylum, constituting 0.5% of the Denmark's total population. During the global refugee crisis, between January 2015 and January 2016, it is estimated there were at least a record 92,000 asylum seekers that crossed into Denmark – many of whom went onto other countries such as Sweden and Norway (Hercowitz-Amir, Raijman and Davidov, 2017).

In this regard, in 2016 the relatively conservative Danish government introduced a thirty-four-item list of measures to make Denmark less attractive to refugees by, for instance, shortening periods of residency permits and making family reunification stricter; eleven such measures have been implemented by parliament. One such extreme measure involved giving Danish authorities the right to seize items valued at over DKK10,000 (USD 1,459) from asylum-seekers; this was also called the 'jewellery bill'. Regarding the Dublin II Denmark

has according to some sources looked for ‘loopholes’ to justify human rights violations (Humanitarian Asylum Policy: Does Denmark Believe in It? - Humanity in Action, 2020). For instance, like some other countries, Denmark has returned asylum-seekers to countries they entered from, which tends to be the Southern European countries due to refugees’ arrival by seaport.

Other problems have arisen with the Danish asylum-system too. As one source recounts

> Asylum seekers are not allowed to work, and adults are not allowed to be taught Danish… schools situated in the refugee centers which are worse than common elementary Danish schools…asylum children do not end up with the same qualifications as children in the Danish school system (Humanitarian Asylum Policy: Does Denmark Believe in It? - Humanity in Action, 2020)

The right-wing government’s restrictive policies faced little real resistance as the Danish opposition parties’ stance also kept moving surely but slowly to the right in the field of immigration and refugee policy.

Nevertheless, this changed with the recent voting-in of the new left-of-center party in Denmark with its social democratic Prime Minister in Danish Mette Frederikson (Henley, 2020). Some signs of change are already emerging, and for context on the current policies towards refugees, we may refer to the current government’s less restrictive policies towards refugees compared to their predecessors led by Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen from 2015 to 2019. Prime Minister Frederikson in an address stated her government would grant protection to refugees who come to Denmark in time of need, but that they must return to their home country once peace has been restored (Wallis, 2019). Additionally, she pledged to ‘improve conditions for families of rejected asylum-seekers and recommence accepting refugees under the UN’s quota system’ (Wallis, 2019). In addition, the previous

government's plan of housing asylum-seekers before their deportation on an island in the Baltic sea has been done away with (Henley, 2020).

What Zeynab and her family can benefit from in the current government's policies are that "refugees who lose their residence permit if conditions in their home country improve, will now be allowed to stay if they have already had a job for a minimum of two years and still have it" (Wallis, 2019). Additionally, Zeynab also currently benefits from free higher education.

Nonetheless, Frederikson's policies have still been criticized as she has been accused of supporting the policies laid out by the former less-left-leaning party, such as support for the 'jewellery bill'. This shows a complexity in the refugee and asylum policies in recent years especially since the incumbent government came to power, and shows the difficulties still faced by refugees, as well as offers a snapshot into some of the policies Zeynab and her family can benefit from.

Although exact information on the above was not provided by Zeynab, the above general trend has been discussed so that it can be applied.

Regarding the Danish people and their attitudes towards refugees, this has been measured by Hercowitz-Amir et al by the 'willingness of [a] country's citizens to include and share their national benefits (financial support, the right to work and family reunification) with asylum-seekers' (Hercowitz-Amir, Raijman and Davidov, 2017). This analysis is different to others used in similar literature as it focuses instead on exclusionary aspects to determine attitudes towards refugees. In tandem, the inclusionary approach has been used in this paper is because it allows for a continuation of the discussion on residency, citizenship and the qualities of the welfare system which are available to both. However, these inclusionary factors are then supplanted by three exclusionary factors, namely

(1) Perceptions of legitimacy of the asylum seekers' claims

(2) Role of support for humanitarian policy measures and

(3) Social contact (Hercowitz-Amir, Raijman and Davidov, 2017)

Their study found that the Danish people express lower levels of being threatened and exclusionary attitudes overall. Overall, the host population of Denmark views refugees from a comparative perspective (Hercowitz-Amir, Raijman and Davidov, 2017).

Overall, the Danish authorities and Danish people tend to have their own views formed by their own experiences with refugees. While the Danish authorities have been strict since the 1980's in refugee policy, the Danish people have largely been more welcoming (emphasis on largely), though they tend to be heavily affected by negative experiences as well. As exact information was not provided by Zeynab in this regard, this discussion has been vital in establishing a pattern.

4.2.5. Points System, Family Reunification and Applicant Country

Since the inception of rules and regulations pertaining to asylum-seeking in Demark, there has been a points-system by which family reunification and immigration examination by which asylum seekers and their families were judged. It required asylum-seekers to reach a minimum 100 points based on a series of diverse criteria. This was repealed in June 2012. A new examination was introduced for spouses coming into Denmark which they had to pass within six months of their arrival (Act of Parliament L418 of 12/05/2012). Similarly, it was now required that the attachment to Denmark simply be greater than to any other country for citizenship, and the guarantee sum was reduced from DKK 100,000 to DKK 50,000.

However, as this was repealed three calendar months after Zeynab's family moved to Denmark, and they did not benefit from its repeal. Rather, their family unification was judged on the basis of the points system which they passed, unlike many other families.

Regarding migration and family reunification of Zeynab's family, her father applied for asylum in Europe, and left for Denmark in 2010. In 2012, he was granted asylum and invited his family to join him. The family was in Mashhad, Iran at the time. They flew to Denmark via Kabul, Afghanistan. This visit to Afghanistan was the second and last time that Zeynab has been to that country in in her lifetime thus far. This is potentially one reason for the initial difficulty in obtaining information from Zeynab about her and her family's timeline and could also be why Zeynab was cursory when speaking about her trips to Afghanistan. This situation then begs the question: did Zeynab and her family go to Afghanistan to seek asylum in Denmark *because* they may not have got asylum there as Iran-based Afghan refugees? Therefore, going to Afghanistan from Iran was potentially strategic in nature and therefore vital to getting asylum in Denmark? Or did they apply to Denmark as refugees living in an intermediate host country?

To take this one step further, one reason for going back to Afghanistan could also potentially be to strengthen their 'case' for asylum in Denmark – with more history of persecution or living in a country which persecutes their ethnicity or professional especially compounded with the ethnicity, there is greater basis for being awarded asylum in Denmark. This then set the stage for a shift from one borderland strategically (in this discourse) to the next.

Oscar Martinez writes of four types of borderlands to capture their complexity. Of these, two are relevant and allow us to conceptualize that Zeynab's lived experiences of borderlands differs from that of her parents, and therefore to conflate her experience to her family would be inaccurate. The first relevant one is an interdependent borderland, in which there is a

considerable flow of human and economic resources across the borders. This applies to her father as he moved back and forth between the political boundaries of Afghanistan and Iran. As for Zeynab, however, she lived in an 'alienated borderland', in which routine cross-border exchange is virtually non-existent – save for her single year-long trip; the second trip does not factor in here as it was between two borderlands. This distinction allows us to understand the differential impact of her father's case on her his life and her (Martínez, 2005).

This Section has explored the peculiar nature of the move from Iran to Denmark via Afghanistan. While doing so I have highlighted the differing nuances of movement within the Afghan-Iranian borderland for different the family members.

4.2.6. After getting permission to reside in Demark

Once refugees are cleared to live in Denmark, they are moved to a municipality where they reside.

A spatial dispersal policy has been in effect since 1986, which requires refugees to be spaced across the country to avoid high concentrations of foreigners living in one single area.

In 1998, the Integration Act was passed, which was a three-year integration programme in which the responsibility for both the integration programme as well as the housing was shifted to the municipalities. Additionally, the introductory allowance was linked to settlement so if a refugee left their municipality, they also risked losing what was usually their primary source of income. Once a refugee has a municipality assigned to them, it becomes the municipality's role to help them find a new home. One difficulty Danish authorities face is finding a balance between location and price of new accommodation, and distance or commute to and from the place of employment. The largest proportion (12.4%) were settled in Zealand region, where Zeynab also lives along with her father, mother, younger sister and grandmother (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielson, 2018).

Family reunification laws for refugees largely came about in the early 1990s, and stipulated that children under 18, spouses, permanent partners and parents over 60 (in some cases) were eligible for family reunification with a person who is a resident in Denmark. While many amendments have been made, the principle remains the same, and as discussed above is one of the decisive reasons behind Zeynab's family moving to Denmark.

4.2.7. Citizenship

While for others, citizenship is a right, for the refugees it is a privilege, whether in the context of a new home, or in returning to an old home once the threat is over (McGranahan, 2016). Citizenship is therefore something to pursue and acquire, as in case of Zeynab and her family who have now been living in Denmark for eight years but are still on temporary residence permits because they have not fulfilled the criteria for citizenship.

Zeynab's family was granted a temporary residence permit upon arrival. As per Danish laws, if one holds a Danish temporary residency (*tidsbegrænset opholdstilladelse)* for eight consecutive years, they become eligible for a permanent residency (*permanent opholdstilladelse)* should they meet all other conditions. Zeynab's family arrived in Denmark in March 2012 – exactly eight years since writing this paper – for which reason their temporary cards were nearing expiration. They could have done one of two things to remain in Denmark: applied for temporary residence permit once more or applied for permanent residence whereby they remain Afghan citizens till they acquire Danish citizenship. As Zeynab is an adult, she would apply depending on her own status, rather than that of her parents. The Danish laws stipulate that an individual must have lived in Denmark for nine consecutive years to be eligible for citizenship; this ceiling is eight years for refugees. As this is Zeynab's eighth year in Denmark, she and her family become eligible for Danish citizenship in the current year (2020) provided they fulfil all other criteria.

Danish citizenship is granted to foreign nationals such as Zeynab through legal naturalization, in which the application must be approved by a parliamentary majority, which sits and decides twice a year – in April (2020, when Zeynab's family's decision was made) in October. Once an individual has acquired citizenship, they also get a Danish passport and the right to vote in parliamentary elections and the right to permanent residency.

The six-point criteria which must be fulfilled to become eligible for citizenship, is as follows:

1. Declaration of loyalty to Denmark, obeyance to its laws, constitution and principles of its democracy
2. Fulfilment of the residency criteria: eight consecutive years of living in Denmark with no more than three months abroad per calendar year
3. No criminal convictions
4. Free of debt to public sector and financially self-sufficient (and that one has not received benefits provided to refugees [*integrationsydelsen] in the last two years)*
5. Danish language proficiency (Pass *Prøve i Dansk 3*)
6. Passing a citizenship test (*indfødsretsprøven)* and demonstration of knowledge of Danish society (Barett, 2020)

Applications for citizenship are made on www.borger.dk, a citizens self-service website; a person can fill this application themselves or with declared legal help. Once the application is submitted, the waiting time is up to 20 months for a decision, as per the Immigration Ministry. If the citizenship is approved, the final step is to attend a ceremony in which the individual declares to uphold Denmark's laws, values and principles, after which they shake hands with an official and become a citizen.

However, neither Zeynab nor her family fulfilled the full criteria for citizenship, they were not granted citizenship, thus, keeping them squarely on one side of the Danish borderland. However, there have been, as has been discussed and will be discussed in the following section, various factors which have permeated across the boundary between pre and post-citizenship, such as language.

As this section has outlined, the type of resident permit Zeynab has is not identical to that of her parents' as she is an adult; therefore, she has to meet the full criteria and the conditions of residency and citizenship on her own accord.

4.3. The Danish Borderland: a Discussion

The fundamental characteristic in case of this borderland is the political sphere, specifically, citizenship.

The borderland covering the domain before and after citizenship is the time when one starts learning the language, starts dressing like a Danish person, and so on. This raises the question at what point does one stop assimilating as there are some things which just cannot be changed, like ethnicity? This means there is an evolving definition of what it means to be Danish.

To understand this side of the borderland, we must understand the situation as pertains to Zeynab. She is presently in a stage which is pre-permanent residency and pre-citizenship. However, Zeynab does not fulfil the conditions of citizenship (as a student she cannot hold a regular job), and therefore in August 2019, she applied for a renewal of her temporary residence permit which was granted to her in March 2020 for two years.

The formation of the borderland for Zeynab manifests itself in how she described leaving Iran and coming to Denmark, to me:

'Before coming [to Denmark], *I was both happy and sad. I was sad to leave my home* [in Iran], *leave my school, leave my friends and was afraid of not being able to see them again. At the same time, I was super excited about going to a whole new country* [Denmark] *and getting to see and experience many new and different things.*

'When I landed in Copenhagen, when I was sitting in a car, going to the apartment, which was going to be our temporary home until we found a new place, I began to compare everything I saw on the way with Iran…Even though everything was fancier, prettier, cleaner and different in general, they didn't make me excited anymore. I was actually kind of disappointed.

'I knew from the beginning that I was going to a new country which had nothing in common with the country I came from, but I didn't know that the differences wouldn't make me more excited and happy, but rather sad and regretful'

She compared this to her experience in returning to Afghanistan, within the Afghan-Iranian borderlands: '*So this time was different from when I went to Afghanistan for the first time. I can say that I began missing Iran from the first day. But the thought that there is no way back* [from Denmark], *made me try to adapt to my new life. I tried hard to get used to everything. To accept the new lifestyle and to appreciate the things I had.'*

She shifted in her seat and went back to talking about Danish borderland:

'*If I look at it from a materialistic point of view, I have a better life in Denmark. We have access to more advanced technologies here in Denmark than in Iran, we have many more civil rights as refugees, better welfare amenities and more opportunities in general.*

'But even though all of these things have made life easier for me, I still keep missing the life I had back in Iran. It doesn't mean that if I go back to Iran, I wouldn't miss Denmark at all.

'Last summer I was in Iran for about a month. It definitely feels like going back home, whenever I go back to Iran. But still, after a few weeks, I always begin to miss Denmark.'

As she moved back and forth in her narrative between Iran, Afghanistan and Denmark, I felt the faintest glow that she, too, was in fact placing them in two separate circles, understandably so as the culture between Afghanistan and Iran, although very different, is much more similar than either between Afghanistan and Denmark, or Iran and Denmark.

This distinction that appeared between the two borderlands in her speaking allows for me to return to its analysis of the five factors within border sets, on the continuum between a static border and fluid frontier.

Following from this, we can see that she is subconsciously alluding to a feeling much closer to her individual self, and that is identity. This falls under the category of the cultural boundary set, which in the case of this paper further refers to religious aspects, linguistic and cultural. This, combined with the sense of belonging Zeynab feels in both borderlands, brings this paper to a new sort of relationship forming, that not between situations within borderlands, but rather between borderlands themselves.

To analyse this, we must juxtapose this borderlands theory and these factors with some lived conditions of Zeynab, gleaned during our many conversations and e-mail exchanges. As explained in this paper earlier, the characteristics of borderlands include cultural factors which incorporate religious and linguistic dimensions, which we see this in case of Zeynab as well. There is a distinct community of Afghan Shi'a Muslims in Copenhagen about 50 kilometers from their home, at which and her family regularly attend religious ceremonies. This association is expected to continue as her family hopefully receives citizenship from the Danish government. This is therefore both a static border, as it is very different from what it means to be 'Danish' in a traditional sense, but also a fluid frontier, as she is part of a community akin to hers back in the Afghan-Iranian borderland.

Regarding the linguistic aspect, Zeynab was put into a Danish school upon her arrival in Denmark, which with plenty of practical experience and hard work, has enabled her to learn Danish fluently. Therefore, while she was between a border and a frontier when she was between the Afghan-Iranian borderland and the Danish borderland, it has now within Denmark become a fluid frontier between before citizenship and after it for her. Had she had not already learnt Danish; she would have to traverse a static border when applying for citizenship. Finally, the cultural material aspect, which is difficult to quantify, unlike the first two. In this case, this is therefore considered a fluid frontier specifically in her case.

As regards the welfare benefits available to Danish citizens including healthcare and schooling, temporary residents are also eligible for these. In fact, asylum seekers receive certain benefits such as housing and monetary benefits which even Danish citizens do not. Housing is provided in asylum centers for up to six months after arrival, after which refugees are required to find their own accommodation which they must pay for themselves. They also cannot buy property. Regarding monetary benefits, all asylum seekers receive payments whilst their applications are under process and they are unable to earn. In 2015, this amount was DKK 54.04 (USD 7.89) per person per day, while they lived at rent-free asylum centers where food is included (Refugee Law and Policy: Denmark, 2020).

This Section has explored the borderland before and after citizenship (political factor), which was the diving line on which this paper is premised. It placed Zeynab on the side before citizenship (with temporary residency). It then outlined Zeynab's experiences of leaving Iran and arriving in Denmark, creating a new relationship hitherto unexplored in this paper - that between Afghan-Iranian borderland and the one in Denmark. Additionally, it explored how the boundaries which exist within the Danish borderland, tend to be porous frontiers, as compared to the static borders (along with porous frontiers) which existed in the Afghan-Iranian borderland. It also added another determinant to the mix: the Danish welfare system.

Zeynab's story is one that evolves with her, and that has given us the insight from below into how a single person navigates within the much larger borderlands space within which they existed. Borderlands, borders and frontiers range from static to fluid, and within it, so do identities.

4.4. Section Conclusion

In this section, I have explored the Danish borderland in what would be a chronological order to follow from an asylum-seekers point of view, by tracing Zeynab and her family's story. I first opened with the process of choosing a country, in which case the prime actor was Zeynab's father, followed by an outline of the asylum process which he underwent. In seeking asylum in a country, an important element is the outlook of the government and people of the host country towards refugees. However, from the research it is not clear whether this was a consideration for Zeynab's father in seeking-asylum. This was followed by a brief on family reunification, by which Zeynab and her family were able to join her father in Denmark. It then covered the case of being granted asylum in Denmark, and continued onto a discussion on citizenship, in which it was established that no member of Zeynab's family is presently a citizen, nor is there any immediate action being taken for anyone to become one; they are all therefore presently on temporary resident permits. Finally, this section progressed to an informed discussion of the Danish Borderland and established the various borders and frontiers that exist within it, ultimately concluding that there is a multitude of factors which exists, before and after citizenship, in which Zeynab lives.

In having now discussed both borderlands in this paper and navigating within them, we may now turn to a discussion of navigating *between* them. One important theme which has permeated the discussion though it has remained hitherto only mentioned, is *identity*. To what extent has Zeynab's identity been shaped in the borderlands, and how has this played a role in her navigating from one borderland to the next?

5. Chapter Five: Navigating Between Borderlands

5.1. The Impact on and Role of Identity

According to Reiko Yoshihara in 'Identities in Borderlands' (Yoshihara, n.d.),

> Borderlands are present wherever two or more cultures confront each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where all socio-economic classes touch, and where the confusion of sexual and gender identity exists…preoccupations with the inner life of the Self, and with the struggle of that Self in the borderlands provide the unique positioning consciousness. The quest for one's identity based on race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, etc., ends up in the system of binary oppositions.

The self, she therefore insists, is 'plural, transformative and performative'(Yoshihara, n.d.). People living in these borderlands therefore try to balance these binaries in identities that exist.

In a similar vein, Robert Kaiser & Elena Nikiforova write in 'Borderland places of Identification and Dislocation', borderlands are 'logical sites in which…the interior and exterior of place and identity are continually subjected to re-narration, contestation and re-enactment' (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006). They are localized spaces where 'border identities' develop but also where they are 'narrated, re-enacted and reconfigured' (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006).

Through these texts, it can be seen that identities in borderlands form unique manner which creates a constant tussle between each other. It is in this context that after providing some background, I continue this discussion on Zeynab's identity in the borderland.

The origin country of a refugee is marked by the country from which an individual refugee seeks refuge. In Zeynab's case, it does not coincide with the country she is originally from, based on the ethnic origin and parent's birthplace, as discussed.

As Regards Zeynab's identity, there is an interesting overlap between the two borderlands: she claims that 80% of it was created in Iran in the Afghan-Iranian borderland and the remaining 20% only was acquired in Denmark. This shared process of identity creation across time, regions and most importantly, borderlands, leads us to the peculiar understanding that there is an established limit to place and identity, and both interact to form the other (Vlassenroot and Büscher, 2013). Both the identities and borderlands are evolving concepts, definitionally as well as practically; these will be discussed in detail in a later section.

The host country is marked by the country in which a refugee seeks asylum, and in which asylum is granted. In Zeynab's case Iran would appear to be her country of origin as she was born there. However, analysis often does not fit neatly into such categories: although she herself was born in Iran, both of her parents (and herself, ethnically) were from a region in Afghanistan. Further, when her father sought and was granted asylum in Denmark, he did so with Afghanistan as the host country. As Zeynab was born and grew up in one country, while ethnically from another, and was a refuge in yet another, her personal sense of identity transformed along with her navigating from one borderland to the next, as briefly discussed.

I had touched upon her sense of identity and belonging in our very first conversation - appetizer to the rest of the courses of our conversations. She told me little but when I asked again via e-mail, she was descriptive and thorough. In her own words:

'Back then when I was living in Iran, I didn't realize how big my feelings were for the country I was born and raised in, because I didn't know how it felt to leave the country. I took it for granted until I for the first time travelled to Afghanistan'.

This shows that Zeynab felt her loyalty to Iran was an absolute until she was faced with her Afghan background; the introduction of this new (in a manner of speaking) facet of identity transformed her Iranian identity into a relative one – relative to her Afghan identity.

'When I took the first steps in my own country, Afghanistan, I felt kind of peace in my heart and was happy to see people with the same facial features as me and my family, and people who also spoke the same language and accent as us and stuff. It felt different to be in that environment. I wasn't used to it, but it felt nice to see my own people, and not feeling like a guest in the country, but as one of the people.'

In this we see a conflict arising; here Zeynab considers Afghanistan 'home', whereas she had previously used for Iran. This reflects a duplicity in the presence of 'homes. This is further supported by her immediate sense of belonging.

'However, it didn't last long. After a few days, I could feel that I didn't fit in in the country and the environment, even though I had roots there.'

She has so far felt this sense of homecoming into Afghanistan because of the cultural (linguistic) and demographic (ethnic) reasons of borderlands, both of which she does not find in Iran.

'It was nice to see the capital, the streets, the people and the culture which I only had heard about from my grandparents and only seen in pictures and the television, but deepest in my heart, I didn't felt at home.'

She was now coming to the realization that ethnicity and linguistic affinity are not the only features of boundary sets which are relevant, and that there are further factors at play as well.

'I didn't have that much in common with the girls of my age in Afghanistan. They played different games, they had different hobbies, and different things made them happy. I can't remember that much because it was such a long time ago, but I can remember that I truly missed the life I had in Iran. Not only speaking about the people and the culture, but the

material things also made it hard to live in Afghanistan. I really missed the little things I took for granted in Iran because I never thought I would someday live without them. For instance, a kitchen with faucet, or bathroom with hot water, and all the things that I was used to having around me and were no longer available.'

She had now started to realize the relativeness of her belonging to Iran or Afghanistan vis a vis each other; identified the characteristics of Iran which she missed in Afghanistan during her year-long trip from 2004 to 2005. (During this period, her father worked in Herat – a Hazara-populated area in Afghanistan (Laipson, 2012). Other cities Zeynab visited include Bamiyan and Kabul. She had now moved into deeper aspects of demographic and cultural boundary sets, realizing them as more complex, placing them, as I understand it in this paper, on a continuum. The linkages between the boundary sets of demographic and cultural are also becoming more prominent now, placing them both more on the dynamic, frontier side rather than the static, border side.

'After one year I came back to Iran. And at the same moment that I crossed the border and breathed the air in Iran, I felt at ease.'

Crossing this static political border between two countries changed the situation for her almost in its entirety as she learned the differences in lifestyles between the two countries. Within the Afghan-Iranian borderland due to the differing placements on the continuum of the different boundary sets (as I understand them in this paper and use them for ease of understanding and analysis), she felt a sense of fleeting home in one geographical area, and a sense of home in another; in this case, as both geographies are also different, the geographical correlates directly with the political, showing them to be inexorably linked.

'It is truly a hard topic to speak about, because of the many conflicting feelings and emotions I felt whenever I changed my residence. But at that time, after my first experience in Afghanistan, I came to realize that even though we had some difficulties in Iran as refugees,

but still Iran was my birth country and a place where I felt most at home and could relate to everything. So for me personally, Iran was the country I considered as home.'

Here Zeynab explicitly states her home is Iran, reflecting a sense of belonging to her country of origin – but it was not. It was not so because her father claimed asylum from his home country, Afghanistan, and the family was invited as per family reunification. As stated above, the family travelled from Iran via Kabul (Afghanistan) to reach Denmark. She referred here to refugees for the first time in our conversations, both in-person as well as via e-mail, as well as to the difficulties faced there.

This sort of identification is somewhat typical of second-generation Afghans in Iran. A study conducted in 2008 had several findings, which are relevant to this section (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha and Sadeghi, 2008). Firstly, it found that those who are satisfied with their jobs have the intention to remain in Iran. Furthermore, it found a convergence in 'second-generation attitudes and preferences with Iranian counterparts in relation to gender relations, the value of education and economic aspirations' (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha and Sadeghi, 2008). Additionally, good relations with neighbours has shown less desire to move to Afghanistan. In an interesting finding, the group of second-generations Afghans used the following words to describe other Afghans: 'patriarchal, devout, immoderate, not literate, hard working and resigned to fate' showing a mixed response (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha and Sadeghi, 2008). Despite this, most respondents found Afghanistan to be their true homeland. Interestingly, we see that Zeynab expresses many of these sentiments in our conversation and our e-mails.

And then Zeynab wrote something even more interesting:

'I began to learn and realize that one's roots and origins are not the only things that matter when speaking about this topic. I realized that the whole environment I was raised in, the lifestyle and mindset of the people around me and myself, all the small things that I had in my

everyday life, the memories and especially those from my childhood, had all a big roll in where I could most identify myself with. And back at that time, it was Iran'.
While she has ethnic Afghan influences due to her parents, she identified more with the Iranian side of it – making it an emotionally porous border for her.

Through her words, we begin to see how a multitude of factors shaped her experience in this borderland. To put into theoretical analysis, it is understood by this paper that her experience was shaped by a restrictive geographic border, a static political border, a porous demographic frontier, fluid cultural frontier and a neutral economic boundary – though these are not static concepts, but rather evolving. Many different factors existed, not all of which were even touched in the scope of this paper, and they intermingled and overlapped to create a dynamic conceptualization of a borderland encompassing Afghanistan and Iran to give Zeynab the experience she had in moving from her origin country, which in itself is not a static one as while she was born in and felt at home in Iran, she was ethnically and by her parents from Afghanistan, to her first host country, Iran (if Afghanistan is the origin country). This of course, is different from her parents – whose origin country is Afghanistan, and host country is Iran.

Now, she has introduced a time factor by stating 'and back at that time'. Therefore, her origin was divided across a borderland which makes it even more pertinent that Afghanistan and Iran be part of one. This goes to suggest that once she moved from Iran, to Denmark, her notion of belonging and identity changed once more. I enquired more along these lines, and Zeynab's response did not disappoint.

'[it has been] 7-8 years [since] I came to Denmark. Before coming, I was both happy and sad. I was sad to leave my home, leave my school, leave my friends and was afraid of not

being able to see them again. At the same time, I was super excited about going to a whole new country and getting to see and experience many new and different things.'

This shows a natural hesitation to a move, especially as an adolescent.

She continued. 'When I landed in Copenhagen, when I was sitting in a car, going to the apartment, which was going to be our temporary home until we found a new place, I began to compare everything I saw on the way with Iran. The streets, the cars, the people, the clothes they were wearing, the air, the nature, and everything. Even though everything was fancier, prettier, cleaner and different in general, they didn't make me excited anymore. I was actually kind of disappointed.

I knew from the beginning that I was going to a new country which had nothing in common with the country I came from, but I didn't know that the differences wouldn't make me more excited and happy, but rather sad and regretful'.

Once more, Zeynab began to compare the place of origin (Iran, for identity purposes and Afghanistan, for legal purposes, depicting a dichotomy) within the Afghan-Iranian Borderland to the newer Danish Borderland, and identified many differences and few commonalities. She further compared the Danish Borderland with the Afghan-Iranian Borderland:

'So, this time was different from when I went to Afghanistan for the first time. I can say that I began missing Iran from the first day. But the thought that there is no way back, made me try to adapt to my new life. I tried hard to get used to everything. To accept the new lifestyle and to appreciate the things I had'

It is important to break the narrative here to point out that Zeynab's words in this section became more fluid and the style more narrative.

'If I look at it from a materialistic point of view, I have a better life in Denmark. We have access to more advanced technologies here in Denmark than in Iran, we have many more civil rights as refugees, better welfare amenities and more opportunities in general.'

Zeynab understands the facilities she has in the Danish Borderland which she did not in the Afghan-Iranian Borderland.

'But even though all of these things have made life easier for me, I still keep missing the life I had back in Iran. It doesn't mean that if I go back to Iran, I wouldn't miss Denmark at all. Last summer I was in Iran for about a month. It definitely feels like going back home, whenever I go back to Iran. But still, after a few weeks, I always begin to miss Denmark.'

Zeynab once more exhibits a human confusion in homes, identities and belonging. Whilst they all felt like home – there was also parts of all which made them not feel like home, except Iran and Denmark, but that too only initially.

'I guess it is because as much as I love Iran because of my childhood memories, I also do love Denmark because I spent my whole teenage life here.

If you ask me where I consider as home, I would definitely say 50% Iran and 50% Denmark. I can't choose one, because as I said before, I've spent two of the most important phases in my life, in those countries, my childhood in Iran and my teenage years in Denmark. But if you ask where I identify most with, I would say Iran. Because I feel like, over 80% of my identity was made when I was in Iran. My lifestyle, my values in life, my religion, my mindset, my vision of the world, my music taste, food taste, the people I like to associate with, the gatherings I like to participate in, the language I feel most comfortable with, and many other things, have all roots in the days I was in Iran.

I can say that I'm still not used to everything here in Denmark, but after a few times of changing my residence from a country to another, I've kind of learned how to adapt to a new environment.'

This shows a complexity of character only expected of humans, in which she had grown to develop a certain identification with one boundary set – away from the static ethnic in Afghanistan, and into the more porous identity that she had created for herself in the space in between the two countries – in the Afghan-Iranian Borderland. This has resulted from Zeynab's experiences of mobility which left her with uncertainties in what it meant to be her – Iranian, Afghan or Danish, which are not mutually exclusive.

Her back-and-forth in her identity has been further enhanced by her ability to visit her homeland as she learnt that despite *looking* and speaking as one from the Afghan-Iranian borderland, she identified herself to be Danish, as well. This draws from Valentine, Sporton and Nielson that 'children who have had the opportunity to visit their homeland, their sense of identity has been further troubled by a recognition that despite looking and speaking…their identities are read as 'not belonging' by the local population' (Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen, 2009). In this regard, identifying as Muslim gives them an anchor. Zeynab's family identifies as Muslim and, in our interview, Zeynab wore a scarf around her head as well (intended as supplementary information). In fact, as previously discussed, Zeynab's father was a practicing *Akhoond* at an Afghan *Hosseynie*. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that while Zeynab integrated into Danish society, she did not fit the notion of 'Danish nationhood predicated on secularism and whiteness' (Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen, 2009).

It also allows us to distinguish further between the Afghan-Iranian Borderland and the Danish one. While Iran and Afghanistan are different from one another, they have more similarities than either Afghanistan and Denmark or Iran and Denmark.

Another aspect of migration was that the first time Zeynab's family sought asylum in a developing Middle-Eastern country (Iran), whereas the second time it was in a developed

European country (Denmark). Thus their experience in Denmark would be entirely different from that in Iran. There are various factors for this which I was got the hint that her father was aware of in seeking asylum in Denmark. For instance, unlike Iran, Denmark is a developed country which is also a welfare state, which allows free education and healthcare to all its residents, including Zeynab's family, since 2012. Additionally, there is also equal opportunity for employment. Although education is generally centralized in Iran, there may have been difficulties in attaining healthcare, and there were substantial barriers to employment. Therefore, simply with her resident permit in Denmark, Zeynab is now able to access all these features of the borderland not just as a family-member of the asylum seeker, but herself as an individual, as well.

This section has explored the overlap in borderland with regards to identity, and the binaries and pluralities that exist within them. It has done so by weaving in Zeynab's lived experiences as a refugee in Iran and then in Denmark, and more pertinently, within the Afghan-Iranian borderland, and separately, within the Danish borderland, and then both in parallel with one-another. Zeynab was able to distinguish between identity as lived, and identity in development, and said whilst she divided her identity equally between Denmark and Iran, 80% of the development of this identity was in Iran, where she was born and grew up; it is interesting therefore that whilst she expresses a sense of homecoming when she visited Afghanistan for the first time, it neither factored in the creation nor the lived experience of her identity. This section also explored the various characteristics of identity (only a small part of a much larger discussion which is beyond the scope of this paper) and the qualitative nature of them, as identified by Zeynab. It also identified the differences in identity which may exist even the same borderland – afterall, there are *two* distinct, non-homogenous countries which have been grouped together in the Afghan-Iranian borderland. Finally, the apparent confusion that persists throughout this section and previous mentions of

Zeynab's identity can either be seen as what it appears to be at the surface level – confusion – or it can be seen as a co-existing plurality, which is the stance this paper takes.

5.2. The Ideal Refugee Lived Experience

Through my multi-faceted interactions with Zeynab and through the entire process of this paper, it became increasingly clear there was something interesting about the outcome of this paper: it was convenient.

Zeynab's father fled to Afghanistan in the early 1980's, and fled Iran back to Afghanistan in the early two-thousands (2004, to be precise); in the approximate decade he was in Iran, he also got married and had Zeynab and her sister. When he moved to Iran, he worked for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, for which he was persecuted by the Taliban. He had now become the refugee who had once fled his home country (Afghanistan) due to Soviet occupation, and secondly fled his host country (Iran) due to push factors such as lack of employment opportunities and discrimination in Iran and persecution in Afghanistan, and due to pull factors such as better employment opportunities. He now found himself in a situation to seek asylum in a third country – and chose Denmark.

Zeynab's father had been on a plane to Europe when he conversed with others on the plane who were also seeking asylum regarding which country would serve him and his needs (family reunification) best. The answer, appropriately, was Denmark.

Her father then arrived in Denmark, and applied for family reunification, and called his family which was in Iran at the time, to come to Denmark.

Fast forward eight years since their arrival in Denmark, the family is largely comfortable, from a refugee studies point of view: Zeynab's father is now working on a regular job as a bus driver, having retired from being an Akhoond at an Afghan Hosseynie in Copenhagen,

Zeynab has just begun medical studies, and her sister is in the Danish education system; the status of her mother and grandmother are not known.

The Danish Ministry of Integration for Refugees devised the National Integration Barometer, to measure progress of integration of refugees into the Danish system. This Barometer incorporates nine factors in the following three categories: employment, education, and equal treatment (Jorgensen, 2014). To do a rough estimate of just these three broad factors at the risk of oversimplification: Zeynab's father is still working (employment), Zeynab herself is studying medicine (education) and they have both had equal opportunity of 'everything except the right to vote', as Zeynab told me on the very first occasion we spoke. There was never a moment in their lives where Zeynab's family was illegal in any country, a notion which had it been any other way, would have struck out more in the Danish borderland than the Afghan-Iranian borderland.

So, if Zeynab's father faced a debacle (for decades), was granted refugee status in a final host country (Denmark), brought his family and the family has assimilated – does this not make for a convenient case study for this research paper? Would it not have been more befitting to interview somebody who was still facing difficulty – in getting asylum, in getting integration, in for a more nuanced paper?

The more primary and secondary research I did and the more I wrote, the more it became clear to me why it was vital to this research question and method that the case study be of Zeynab's and none other. The fact that Zeynab's story as a refugee had been wrapped up and she had integrated largely into Danish society showed hers to be what I term here the 'ideal refugee trajectory' – although she was still on a temporary resident permit. This allowed for an approach to the topic which was unmarred by red herrings and hinderances which would otherwise pull from an academic discussion. This allowed a 'control group' of sorts to form,

allowing borderlands to be studied without deviations such as falling prey to variations in the story. A predictable (now that we are aware of the trajectory Zeynab's life took) storyline marked into segments neat enough for discussion but still uncertain enough to reflect the thoughts in the mind of an adolescent navigating from origin to host.

Therefore, there was a certain pattern which exhibited a sense of convenience through this paper – which is taken as a strength rather than a weakness, as it allowed for a 'control group' exploration of the research question, unmarred by hindering variables.

6. Conclusion

This paper has followed a dual-methodology using the biographical method in approaching how Zeynab and her family (with a focus on her father, who sought asylum in both Iran and Denmark) navigated from the Afghan-Iranian borderland to the Danish borderland. While the Afghan-Iranian borderland is largely based on the geographical factor and the Danish on the political, they are not isolated as many factors co-exist and intermingle. Zeynab's father decided to move from Afghanistan to Iran initially on grounds of ethnoreligious persecution; he then moved back from Iran to Afghanistan for economic and discriminatory reasons. He then sought asylum in Denmark from Afghanistan as a political refugee; where his family joined him via reunification two years later. Borderlands theory has enabled this discussion as it allowed a holistic and independent analysis of the geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic boundaries which exist as ongoing processes. Similarly, Zeynab's experience has been crucial to this paper as it has been the driving force behind the biographical method, and the narrative in this paper.

In this thesis, I asked and attempted to answer how one refugee family navigates the contexts of different borderlands, and to what extent their actions help us understand the make-up of these borderlands.

The Afghan-Iranian borderland, which is predicated on the existence of the two sovereign countries of Afghanistan and Iran (geographical aspect), is deeply rooted in and cannot exist exclusive of the history and plight of the Hazara people. Their ethnoreligious persecution is a driving force behind its creation and is the spark which ignited Zeynab and her family's journey through various situations geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic in nature, as posited by the borderland's theory used in this paper. Conversely, the Danish borderland spurs from Zeynab and her family entering it and the possibility of moving from a temporary residence permit to permanent citizenship (political aspect). It is therefore

predicated on the lines of the political factor of citizenship as while just as Zeynab and her family's goal could be to return to Afghanistan on the restoration of peace in the country, it could also be to gain citizenship in Denmark and remain there; this was not made clear to me in my communication with Zeynab. While the geographical and political aspects seem to be the most prominent respectively, they cannot exist without constantly and consistently engaging with the other factors which exist within the borderlands.

While given the circumstances, repatriation is sometimes an outcome of improved conditions in origin country, it may also not be an option in some cases. One such example, for instance, is where identity has undergone such changes that it is incongruous with the life in the origin country. Such is the case of Zeynab, whose identity has been moulded by moving between Iran, Afghanistan and Denmark during her childhood and played a weighty role in navigating between the two borderlands.

Condensed to its essence, the most pressing issue for the family in Afghanistan was ethnoreligious persecution and in Iran was discrimination and a lack of economic opportunity. In Denmark, conversely, it is difficulty in attaining citizenship. As is evident, in the Afghan-Iranian borderland, the difficulty was of losing something, whereas in Denmark it was of gaining something. On a similar comparative note, in the time that Zeynab and her family were in Iran, the government's policies and people's views of the Hazaras was negative; they faced a similar situation in Denmark. However, the difference was that the overall socioeconomic and legal conditions were better in Denmark and although restricted, there were greater opportunities, which her family has availed in areas such as education and professional life.

It is important to note that Zeynab and her family existing within the borderlands simply forms a model within which their navigating between them can be studied. The features

which are being studied have existed exclusive of the study and have simply been borrowed for it. Zeynab's family is one of many who experience the circumstances and situations which they have but remain significant for two prime reasons: their personal endeavors, and for what they represent – a refugee family forced to move from place to place in hard pursuit of the better life. However, as has been noted, despite not entering citizenship at the time I was writing this thesis, Zeynab and her family still had managed to follow an almost ideal trajectory in gaining asylum and living relatively comfortably in a new country – something which cannot be said for a significant proportion for refugee families. This point is therefore both a limitation of and an opportunity availed in this paper.

Another limitation of the paper arises in the case of the biographical method: that the paper has covered a single individual. However, as her story is intended to inform of the general larger perspective rather than assert it and allow a bottom-up approach to the research question, it suffices for this paper.

As I write, analyze and draw this paper to a close, the story of our narrator Zeynab continues to develop and unfold, and her identity within her home country of Denmark continues to form in a riveting series of processes we have had but the briefest of engaging encounters with; in her own words, she says

'And I'm still learning. And as time goes by, I feel like my lifestyle here in Denmark not changes my identity, but completes it, little by little.'

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