



Afghanistan's Victims' Rights' Foundation

Neither peace, nor justice

A narrative research into the experiences of Afghan war victims residing in the Netherlands

Master's thesis victimology and criminal justice

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Preface and acknowledgements

After months of hard work, I finally finish my master's thesis about Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands. I specifically chose to do a social science thesis since I have a background in law and wanted to expand my knowledge on a different subject. During my studies I had a course on narratives and found it very interesting.

I wanted a thesis subject that contributes to the society, both scientific and practical. I think I succeeded in this. I broadened the knowledge on the situation of Afghanistan, which is both important for the scientific world and for society.

I would like this opportunity to a number of parties involved with this thesis because I could not have finished this thesis without them. Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the AVR Foundation, who helped me to arrange interviews with the Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands.

I am also very grateful to INTERVICT and especially my supervisors. Firstly, Mijke, who made critical notes in the first stages of my thesis trajectory. Secondly, Antony who has helped my form the final version of my thesis and, last but not least, Marola, who has supplied critical notes throughout my whole thesis trajectory and who has answered millions of worrying e-mails.

A special acknowledgment for the victims whose name I cannot mentioned but who participated in my interviews, and were very willing and open to share their most painful experiences with me. Their stories have touched me deeply and for the experience I will be forever grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support during the time I was working on this thesis.

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Abstract

Background: Afghanistan has been in war for the past 40 years. The 4 different regimes were oppressive and violated human rights on an enormous scale, which caused many victims and massive refugee streams. The Netherlands was one of the countries of destination. In 2018 there were almost 48.000 Afghans living in the Netherlands. This research examines the experiences of these Afghan victims and their perception of justice.

Methodology: This is a narrative research. For the purpose of this research, narratives were collected from 7 victims residing in the Netherlands who were either victimised directly or indirectly during the one or more of the four regimes.

Results: The experiences of the Afghan victims were possible traumatic experiences. The consequences of these experiences are influenced by several factors that can be explained with the socio-interpersonal model. Especially themes of agency and communion are important. The narratives followed two plot themes, they were either redemptive or contaminating. These themes come back in two plotlines: 'tragedy' and 'what does not kill you makes you stronger', the latter one is formed by the 'Quest' and the 'Overcoming the monster' plotlines. Finally, the victims expressed a clear perception of justice.

Conclusion: The traumatic experiences of the Afghan victims influenced their narrative identity. They disrupted continuity needed to be restored by connecting the past, present and future through a process of sense- and meaning-making. Their future prospects show the way in which they have done that. Justice reactions are an important factor for sense- and meaning-making. The reactions that were mentioned are consistent with the pillars of transitional justice. Their notion of justice is mainly forward looking and entails safety, equality, peace, freedom and a stable government.

Keywords: Afghanistan, victim, narratives, narrative identity, sense- and meaning-making, agency, communion, redemption, contamination, plot.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A war involves mass atrocities. It creates numerous victims. When an atrocity involves many victims, it is called mass victimisation. The victimised people feel consequences physically and psychologically, and these experiences change their lives forever. Their stories are shared their stories over and over again with their surroundings, being passed down to next generations. Since wars have the potential to destroy societies, these experiences impact both the current and future generations (Pemberton, Letschert, de Brouwer, & Haveman, 2015). For instance, properties are part of the residual damage, along with the country's social infrastructures become damaged. Moreover, wars cause many injustices that the country and victims must deal with. This process can take a long time for both the country and the victims. In short, wars create long-term damages and it takes a lot of time for a country to recover. One of the countries currently recovering from the aftermath of mass atrocities is Afghanistan (International Center for Transitional Justice, n.d.). The focus of this research is Afghans refugees residing in the Netherlands.

To give an image of the country: Afghanistan, officially called the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is situated in Central Asia, is landlocked and encompassed by mountains. Afghanistan has nearly 35 million inhabitants (The world bank, n.d.). Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country (Siddique, 2012). The majority of the population is Muslim, but Hinduism, Sikhism or Judaism are also practised (Lacopino & Amowitz, 2001). Pashtuns are the largest group, followed by Tajiks, Hazaras, Turkmens and then Uzbeks. The country's ethnic groups go beyond the Afghan borders. Many ethnicities have additional practising members in the neighbouring countries. For this reason, Afghans are not linked by a nationwide culture, but by a shared history (Lacopino & Amowitz, 2001). Afghanistan's history has been turbulent. The level of experience with this history might be dependent on a person's ethnicity. This link also implicates, that the country's history might even be more important for the Afghan people than it would be in other cases.

As said, this research focusses on Afghans refugees. More specifically, Afghans who sought refuge and are residing in the Netherlands. The major refugee streams were caused by wars and human rights violations. Afghanistan's most recent grouping of historical events were their forty years of war, oppression and large-scale human rights violations.

One of the most critical events of Afghanistan's history is the bloody pro-Soviet coup d'état on the 27th of April 1978 by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (hereafter: PDPA). This coup was the start of the *communist regime* that continued up until after the Russian invasion on the 24th of December 1979. The Soviet occupation lasted until 1989. During this period, thousands of the alleged enemies of the communist regime were arrested, tortured and murdered in prison (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). The regime brought along an enormous scale of displacement of the population. At the beginning of 1990 around 6.2 million Afghans of the total 13 million people had sought refuge in other countries, the majority being neighbouring countries (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2010). European countries, however, like the Netherlands, also received a large number of asylum applications. In 2018 there were 47.776 Afghans in the Netherlands alone (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2018).

This first main historical event indirectly triggered the events that followed. First, the *civil war* started after the Soviet troops withdrew and left an unstable government, handing Afghanistan to several warlords with an urge for power. The ethnic groups were once resistance groups aligned on the same side, they then engage in heavy combat. Approximately 40.000 people died as a consequence of this fighting. Half a million people were displaced, and finally, the landmines laid during that time killed another approximate 400.000 people (Lacopino & Amowitz, 2001).

During this civil war, the *Taliban* was formed and emerged from one of the resistance groups. Their actions left a lasting mark on the history of Afghanistan. The Taliban took power and imposed a strict traditional Islamic regime. The regime banned women from the public and social life. It was forbidden for women to go outside; study or work was strictly forbidden. This regime also obligated both men and women to wear traditional, conservative clothing and introduced Islamic punishments such as amputations and stoning (BBC News, 2018; Lacopino & Amowitz, 2001). This regime increased the flow of refugees to other countries (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2010). Statistics show that the number of asylum seekers in the Netherlands started to increase as of 1980. There are, however, no numbers known prior to this time. As of 1994, which can be seen in figure 3 in appendix 1, the numbers are exceptionally high after the Taliban came into power. The highest number of asylum seekers is in 1996 and 1997, with respectively 5920 and 7120 applications in the Netherlands (CBS, n.d.). The numbers show the impact of the events in Afghanistan and its people.

As a reaction to the actions of the Taliban Western countries set up *interventions*, mainly by the United States (hereafter: US). The guerrilla-like warfare between the US and the Taliban made it difficult to distinguish the military objectives behind actions. The difficulty in distinguishing these objectives caused an increase in civilian casualties (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2011). This period of warfare continues to impact the lives of Afghans, as casualties and victims keep increasing today. Terrorist attacks take place on a daily basis. This situation is the reality of the daily life of the Afghan people living in Afghanistan. Even up until today, the country still has not found peace, safety or justice.

The experiences of the Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands are possible traumatic experiences. The qualification as traumatic experience is dependent on their suddenness, controllability and negative valence. The traumatic experiences can have far-reaching consequences, such as mental illnesses that are still present today (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000). Several factors can influence these consequences. In order to explain these influences and their consequences, Maercker and Horn (Maercker & Horn, 2013) developed the socio-interpersonal model. This model considers three levels, each of which is explaining a particular aspect of a person's life. This research frames the experiences of these Afghan refugees residing in the Netherlands in this socio-interpersonal model.

It is important to keep in mind that the current research looks from the perspective of victims. The victims themselves explain their experiences through stories. Stories characterise human life, and are used in numerous ways. Therefore, there are many different forms of stories, such as personal stories, fairy tales, and media stories (Crossley, 2000). Every human tells stories, including stories of their own lives, also known as narratives. They contain the experiences of a person's life. These stories reflect a person's subjective reality. People need to create a coherent and integrative life story that connects the past, present and future. It explains the development of the person's identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). People express to others who they are and the development to who they are with their narrative identity. The experiences of the Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands are an important part of the development of their narrative identity.

The victimising experiences of the Afghan refugees may cause a narrative rupture (Pemberton, 2015). In that case, the coherence of their stories gets lost. The victim needs to make sense of the experience themselves to be able to go on with life and reconstruct a coherent story (Crossley, 2000). The victim incorporates the victimising events in the life story and, in that way, reconnects the past, present and future (McAdams, 2013). Studying this process of meaning-making can give great insights into the narrative identity of these victims and the experiences including their consequences. Narratives have the potential to reveal structures or meanings that normally would remain unrecognised or stay implicit (Crossley, 2000). Since, this research is searching for underlying themes and structures, looking at these narratives is the best way to gather the insights.

Despite the suffering in the case of the Afghans, counter actions are scarce. Moreover, it is unknown which counter reactions should be taken. An example of this scarcity is the fact that up until recently, none of the higher-ranking officials were brought to justice yet (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). High ranking officials that are considered to be perpetrators of the communist regime maintain their high-rank positions and continue to violate human rights (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2010; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2011). This situation is an example of an action that needs a reaction. There are several possible reactions. Transitional justice is one of them. It is the process that tries to address events of mass victimisation and help a society come to terms with the events (Dhawan, 2012). With its four pillars: prosecution, reform of laws and institutions, truth-seeking and reparations, it tries to address the essential aspects in order to enable the country and its people to deal with what happened (UN Security Council, 2004).

An example of the prosecution pillar is the initiative of the International Criminal Court in The Hague (hereafter: ICC). On the 20th of November 2017, the prosecutor of the ICC requested to start an investigation in the crimes in and to do with Afghanistan (Request for authorisation of an investigation pursuant to art. 15, 2017). The focus of the investigation is the alleged war crimes and the crimes against humanity that took place as of May 2003¹. These crimes include murder, denial of access to a fair trial, attacks against civilians, civilian objects and deprivation of liberty among other acts. The ICC has jurisdiction over a small number of crimes, which are worldwide considered to be unacceptable. The fact that the ICC takes this case on and enters into an investigation shows the gravity of the atrocities that happened in Afghanistan. It also shows that the Afghanistan's situation is slowly getting the attention it needs. Note, however, that the Western countries are initiating the ICC process, we do not know whether this is a preferred way of dealing with the issue from an Afghan perspective. The way the Afghan victims want to deal with this issue is unclear.

There is a lack of attention surrounding the situation in Afghanistan, despite the enormous scale of atrocities in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) says: "The atrocities that were committed in Afghanistan are of an enormous scale, and the sense of victimization among the people we spoke to is widespread and profound. Almost everyone had been touched by violence in some way" (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2005, p. 8).

The attention that is present, of Afghanistan's situation, is to the perpetrators, not the victims or their perspective. In fact, the perpetrators are recognised and even granted amnesty (Situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2017). The victims have not received anything. Moreover, this lack of attention also becomes clear in the literature. There is a lack of research and knowledge on victims in this area. There are many books regarding the war in Afghanistan, however, they do not pay any attention to the victims or look at their perspective (Adamec, 2010; Baker, 2011; Barfield, 2010; Bryant, 2007). There are only a few organisations who carried out research into Afghanistan's situation that touched upon the victims' perspectives (Amnesty International, 2007; Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2004; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2010; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2011; The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005), and only one organisation did research on the perspective of victims (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2005).

¹ Since Afghanistan only ratified the Rome Statute on 10 February 2003, the ICC only has jurisdiction over crimes in the Rome Statute that took place after May 2003.

As said, Afghans are connected by a shared history instead of a nationwide culture. The victims have narrated this history through their life stories. The life stories of Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands contain and explain their experiences and the consequences they faced. The narrative perspective is the best way to deal with the information, because, as will be explained in chapter three, narratives connect the past, present and future. In that way, they demonstrate how the past experiences can develop the victim's self as a person. The narrative method will be employed because this method makes it possible to gather the life stories without limiting its content. With the narrative method, the respondent is free to talk about the experiences without the questions limiting the scope of the answers. For this research, seven Afghan war victims residing in the Netherlands are interviewed. Their narratives give insights into the experiences of these Afghan victims. The following research question is examined to gather the insights:

How are the experiences of injustice and preferred justice reactions narrated in the life stories of Afghan war survivors?

To answer the question, this research will first start with sketching the historical context in chapter 2. After that, chapter 3 will address the theoretical concepts supporting this research. The first part will elaborate on traumatic experiences and the socio-interpersonal model to frame these experiences. The second part of chapter 3 will focus on justice and transitional justice in Afghanistan. The theoretical framework will continue in chapter 4. This chapter will deal with the theory on narratives. Even though together they constitute the theoretical framework, the subjects are separated into three chapters because the subjects are completely different. This set up contributes to more clarity in the research' structure. Next, chapter 5 will explain the narrative method. All of these chapters will be followed by the results that will link the interview results to the theory discussed. Chapter 6 will discuss these results. Finally, chapter 7 will provide the conclusion.

Chapter 2

Historical framework

This chapter will elaborate on the historical events of Afghanistan. Following chapters discuss the narratives of Afghan war victims. To be able to explain and analyse these narratives, knowledge on the background is essential because it creates an understanding of the context of the experiences narrated by the Afghan war victims residing in the Netherlands.

To give a complete picture as much as possible, this chapter briefly elaborates on Afghanistan's earliest known history first. This broad picture creates an understanding of the current situation that lies at the core of this research. It is important because this early history might influence the perspective of victims today. Afghanistan has always dealt with invaders. In earlier times this was mainly Great Britain. The most relevant period for this research, however, starts from the 27th of April 1978 coup d'état. Since the five decades prior to this, Afghanistan was the most peaceful country in Asia (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2010). Additionally, considering the respondents do not have experience with the early conflict with Great Britain, this research considers the coup d'état as a starting point. The earlier history is only discussed to create a full understanding on how Afghanistan got to its current situation.

A different regime, different rulers or a different kind of oppression divides the history of Afghanistan into roughly four periods, however, the uncountable number of victims is typical for all the periods. That fact shows the importance of discussing all the periods. After a brief explanation of the history that led to the coup d'état, this chapter discusses these four periods.

The map below provides an image of the areas discussed in later parts. Additionally, Appendix 2 provides another map. Together, these maps provide a better understanding of the ethnic ratios, which is recommended when reading up on the context of the civil war. The map below shows the important cities in Afghanistan and the different regions.



Figure 1 - Map of Afghanistan showing different regions and important cities.

Source: <http://www.mapsopensource.com/afghanistan-political-map.html>

2.1 From the beginning to the 'real' beginning

From the beginning of Afghanistan's history, they have had several occasions where foreign forces invaded the country (Riedel, 2014; Baker, 2011). In this earlier history, Afghanistan was the stage for the 'Great Game' between Russia and Great Britain, who were fighting their rivalry over political ideology within the Afghan borders. In this period, Afghanistan consisted of several indigenous groups living peacefully together. Eventually, these indigenous people of Afghanistan established a monarchy in the 18th century which they maintained until 1973.

Under king Zahir Shah, Muhammad Daoud Khan became prime minister. With the limited space in the latest constitution of 1931, he tried to incorporate some reforms. In order to do so, Khan accepted help from the United States (hereafter: US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (hereafter: USSR or Soviet Union). With their help, he managed to increase women's rights, however, later on, the US did not consider Afghanistan important enough anymore, and stopped their support (Adamec, 2010). That lack of support from the US tightened the ties between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. This event was the beginning of the political game that goes on even today and was the basis for Russian involvement in Afghanistan, which eventually caused thousands of victims. This involvement is explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Eventually, Daoud Khan was forced to resign after he became too unpopular, due to his way of ruling and a dispute with the king. In 1973, however, Khan came into power again when he overthrew the government with the help of the USSR, declared Afghanistan a Republic (Adamec, 2010). Daoud Khan became the first president of Afghanistan. Daoud Khan also explains the next significant event in the Afghan history. After he came into power, Daoud Khan turned against Russia and started to orientate himself more towards the west. It seemed like he was removing communists from governmental positions. As a reaction, Russia turned against Daoud Khan.

At the same time of Daoud Khan's ruling, the USSR influenced the establishment of the PDPA (Baker, 2011). The party functioned as a central role in the political dialogue between secular left and radical Islamic groups (Adamec, 2010).

After Daoud Khan and Russia turned on each other, the PDPA murdered several close relatives and associates of Daoud Khan. In return, Khan ordered the arrests of multiple communists. Eventually, the PDPA overthrew Khan's government by means of a coup d'état. From that moment on, Afghanistan was known as the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (Adamec, 2010).

The 27th of April 1978, would become known as the start of the bloody *Saur Revolution* (Riedel, 2014). Members of the PDPA murdered Khan and thirty family members, including children. They were buried in a mass grave, which would later become a characteristic element of the regime (Riedel, 2014).

This coup is the way the PDPA came into power and how the stage for large-scale human rights violations was set up. During the regime of this party, there was an institutionalisation of the human rights violations. The regime caused an uncountable number of victims during this period.

2.2 Afghanistan during the four main periods: The communist regime, the civil war, the Taliban ruling and the US intervention

This paragraph provides an overview of the several periods in Afghanistan's history. It also illustrates the experiences of injustice of the victims in these periods. The timeline below clarifies the complicated history by showing the most important periods and events.

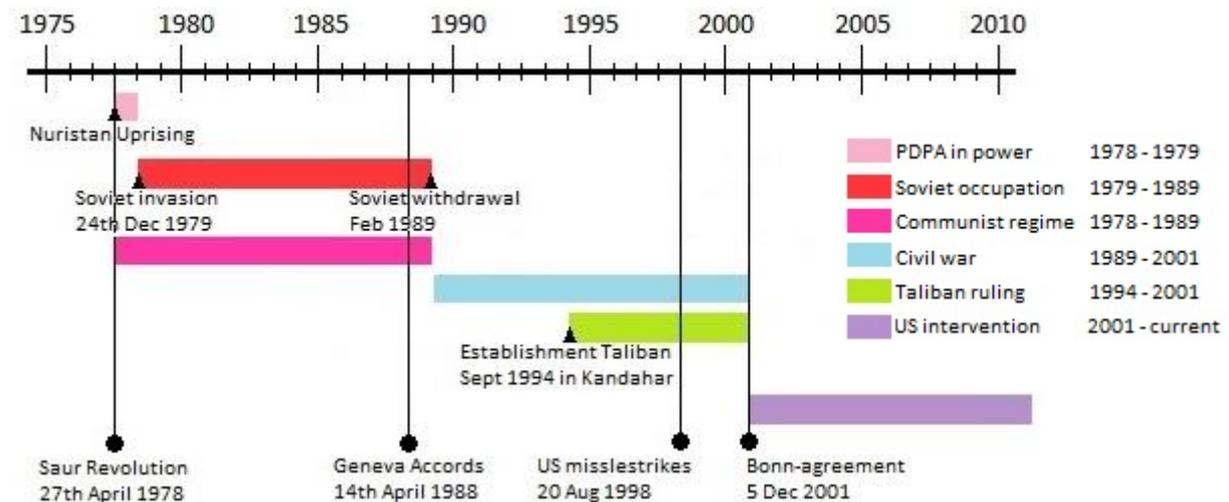


Figure 2 - Timeline of Afghanistan's history.

2.2.1 The communist regime

The day of the start of the **Saur Revolution**, the 27th of April 1978, is the start of the communist regime that would continue till 1989. As said, this was the start of the relevant period for the current day and this research.

When the **PDPA** came into power, they instated Nur Mohammad Taraki as a ruler, who was USSR oriented. The vice president was Hafizullah Amin, who was in favour of governing neutrally. The tensions between Taraki and Amin grew thicker, and Taraki failed at an attempt on Amin's life. After that, Amin took over the power of Taraki for a couple of months.

The PDPA aimed to modernise, including implementing secular laws. Afghanistan, however, was a country where religion played an essential role in the daily lives of people. Implementing secular laws caused a fast increase in the number of opponents (Baker, 2011). The PDPA eliminated suspected opponents on ideological grounds in the beginning (Riedel, 2014). They took these eliminations further and dismantled the tribal system and prosecuted Islamists.

The oppressive regime led to much rebellion. The *first fights* started in Nuristan, a region in the North East of Afghanistan, and spread throughout the country². This outbreak of violence was called **Nuristan Uprising** (Baker, 2011).

On the one hand, the government asked and received military assistance from the USSR to maintain power, which led to even more involvement of Russia in Afghanistan. On the other

² A map with regions can be found in appendix 2 figure 3.

hand, resistance groups received help from the US and Pakistan. This support would later turn out to be the beginning of a fight fought on the Afghan soil between the big powers. In other words: a political game. This political game is important to note since it is central to many of the historical events in the Afghanistan that influenced the experiences of victims.

The influence of the big powers became more visible when ruler Hafizullah Amin started to turn to the US for support as well, causing concerns in Moscow. On the 17th of December, they accused Amin of being a US spy, and they set up the stage for the Russian invasion. On Christmas Eve 1979 the Soviet 40th Red Army invaded Afghanistan and killed the current ruler, Amin. The USSR installed Babrak Karmal as the new leader, which enabled the USSR to keep controlling Afghanistan (Riedel, 2014; Baker, 2011). This invasion led to the next phase in the Afghan history, the **Soviet occupation**.

During the soviet occupation, the Russian secret service, KGB, established an Afghan 'look-a-like' called 'Khidamat – i Ittila'at – i Dawlati' or short '*KhAD*'. Dr Muhammad Najibullah founded the KhAD (Riedel, 2014; War Crimes Research Office, 2014). This organisation arrested or killed everyone who supported Amin before.

Shortly after the coup d'état resistance grew (Adamec, 2010). The resistance groups came to exist during the mid till late 1980 and grew out of the tribal structures that survived (Baker, 2011). They called themselves Mujahideen and claimed to be holy warriors, also called jihadists, fighting for freedom (Riedel, 2014). These Mujahideen received support from several countries, such as the US, Iran and Pakistan, that mainly consisted of the supply of weapons and money (Baker, 2011).

During this time, deserting became common. Sometimes whole units deserted to the Mujahideen. The Soviet Union was, however, in power for a long period because these Mujahideen groups were unorganised. Eventually, the resistance grew even more prominent when a Marxist banner replaced the Afghan flag.

When the Soviets realised that their army was unable to win the fight, the USSR started negotiations to save their face. President Karmal was forced to resign, and Muhammad Najibullah took over power. To refresh the memory, Najibullah established the KhAD, Afghanistan's secret service, that was responsible for large-scale human rights violations. This situation is the first time a 'perpetrator' of institutionalised human rights violations was instated in a power position, which became structural during the years after that. Even today high officials who could be qualified as perpetrators remain in their influential positions in Afghanistan.

After negotiations with Russia an agreement was reached in Geneva that became known as the *Geneva Accords*. It arranged the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, which was completed in February 1989, ending this era and the communist regime (Baker, 2011; War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

Experiences of injustice during the communist regime: suffering in prison

This bloodstained regime led to the deaths of thousands of moderate Afghans, which was the beginning of an era where human rights were violated on an institutional level. Tens of thousands suspected opponents of the regime were executed or just disappeared and it caused the first major stream of refugees to neighbouring countries (Baker, 2011). The scope and scale of these events are similar to those of the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia (War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

Arrests, disappearances and summary executions characterised the first period of PDPA ruling when the KhAD was established. The PDPA arrested everyone who was considered an obstacle to their reforming ideas, showing that oppression is one of the central themes of this

period. They targeted Islamists, tribal leaders, leaders of ethnic communities and leftists outside of the PDPA (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

During the communist regime, the violation of human rights became more systematic, which becomes clear by the establishment of Afghanistan's secret service, the KhAD. This organisation ensured control through these arbitrary arrests, torture, executions and imprisonment (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), 2005). Thousands of people got arrested without an explicit charge and were thrown in prison without a trial. The conditions in the Afghan prisons were painful, life-threatening and humiliating (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). The prisons were overcrowded, and the food was terrible. These circumstances led to diseases and eventually deaths (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). Moreover, the prisons were characterised by torture practices that could consist of a wide range of actions, both emotional and physical. Examples were the deprivation of sleep, electric charges, hitting, kicking, different types of burns and the tearing out of fingernails (War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

The KhAD worked following a specific pattern. Usually, they first brought a detainee to the KhAD headquarters. This place, Shash Darak, was the primary interrogation centre. After that, they transferred the person to the central interrogation office, Sedarat, where the detainees were held for a longer period that sometimes was extended to several months (War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

The period of the communist regime left its mark on the lives of the political prisoners. Moreover, it had a significant impact on family members and friends as well. Many of the relatives of detainees were not given any information on the situation of their loved ones. Sometimes detainees were executed soon after their arrests and that not communicated to the relatives in most of the cases (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). Therefore, family members often put a lot of time and energy in the search for information about their loved ones.

Beyond the prison walls: endangered civilians

The regime diminished the rule of law in a way that extended far beyond the prison walls. The regime put down demonstrations of the opposition with a lot of force during the Soviet occupation. These demonstrations were common every year around the time of the coup. For example, students and schoolgirls organised a protest march in 1980. Soviet troops fired on the demonstrators and arrested thousands of participants. Ultimately, they killed around fifty students, of which half were school girls. Regarding the arrested people, there were no clear charges, and there were no trials (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

Besides this oppression, the bombings created fear. The PDPA campaigns against local resistance parties involved many bombings that were mostly indiscriminate and disproportionate, causing many civilian victims. The PDPA was responsible for the mass killings of intellectuals, religious leaders and many others (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, there was a small change. The Soviets seized the massacres of the PDPA and employed a more systematic gathering of information. In other words, were more selective in their targets of repression. Their counterinsurgency, however, included indiscriminate bombings as well. They issued cordons, searches and reprisal killings of civilians with no regard for the laws (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), 2005)

2.2.2 The civil war

The Afghan people expected that Afghanistan would finally know peace again after the Soviet withdrawal. In order to create peace, ruler Najibullah was granting privileges and amnesty for

certain Mujahideen groups and set in place a new constitution based on traditional Afghan values, letting go of the PDPA ideology (War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

Later, However, instead of peace, a bloody **civil war** started that only added more victims to the existing number. It appeared impossible to unite the Mujahideen, who were fighting based on an urge for power (Baker, 2011). None of the groups were able to get entirely in control. The fights and unrest inevitably caused civilian casualties inevitable, a lot of fear among the civilians, and were responsible for another major refugee stream (Barfield, 2010).

Experiences of injustice during the civil war: civilians caught in the crossfire

After the Soviet withdrawal, the indiscriminate bombings of the resistance persisted. The factions seized and divided the entire arsenal of the regime that was supported by the USSR. Among the heavy weapons at their disposal were tanks with artilleries, mortars, RPG7 rockets and missiles. In this way, the number of victims among the civilian population kept increasing (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

During the time after the Soviet withdrawal, the government of Najibullah depended on the Mujahideen groups for defence, paying them with cash and weapons that were originally supplied by the USSR. The militia forces acted autonomously and arbitrarily in their regions without any consequences, rendering the rule of law irrelevant. For example, they waylaid travellers to rob them, among whom were returning refugees. They extorted money from traders, stole property, forcibly took land and planted mines without mapping or marking their locations (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). In other words, the Mujahideen were committing war crimes without being punished.

Many of these groups were based in Pakistan. The refugees residing in Pakistan were still largely at risk since many of the Mujahideen groups were based in Pakistan. Besides the Mujahideen, Pakistan's intelligence service formed a risk for the refugees because they interrogated and tortured Afghan refugees on the grounds of a security threat. Sometimes it was just because the refugees did not support one of the Mujahideen situated in Pakistan (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

In other words, the Mujahideen maintained significant control over the Afghan population. Moreover, they maintained the existing detention facilities. The Mujahideen mostly targeted combatants, however, sometimes they also held non-combatants as prisoners. They were often Afghan refugees suspected of being part of the opposition. Due to torture, these persons often gave false confessions, which could lead to a death sentence because Islamic courts sentenced spies to death during this time. Examples of the torture practices employed by the Mujahideen were suspension by hand from iron rings attached to the ceiling, electric shocks, beating with wooden sticks, sleep and food deprivations, sexual abuse and psychological torture in the form of having to listen to torture during night (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005; War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

At the same time of the Najibullah rule, the militia forces targeted the base of one of the Mujahideen groups. They adopted a scorched-earth tactic and were bombing indiscriminately. While executing their scorched-earth tactic, they burned down whole villages, creating fear among the population and many victims (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

During this period, the forces took men during night raids and put them to work. They had to chop wood or dig trenches. Some men never returned because they needed to pay an extremely high ransom to be released. These night raids were affecting the people directly and indirectly involved in a massive way. The night raids left the families involved in great fear for the return of the forces, who would harm the family. Also, they feared reprisals and there was a high risk of getting killed when speaking up, which kept them silent (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008; The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

The forces targeted civilians in a third way as well. They used rape as a weapon of war against women from other ethnicities, which was not present in previous regimes (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). Rape, as well as the other attacks, were based on ethnicity during this period. Ethnicity as a motivation for committing crimes is the distinguishing factor of the civil war time compared to the other regimes.

2.2.3 The Taliban ruling

Already during the civil war, a new movement emerged. One Pashtun group, 'Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami' or the 'Movement of the Islamic Revolution', started the **Taliban** in 1994 in Kandahar (Baker, 2011). With the emergence of the Taliban "A new player entered the scene, and a new dramatic narrative began to be written. They wore black-turbans, had good discipline in battle and were conscious of what they were fighting for and firmly committed to it. They were also ruthless" (Baker, 2011, p. 201). With fighting, the Taliban took out several small warlords, and they easily took control over several regions (Adamec, 2010). This movement led the country into another oppressive regime by trying to install a strict Muslim regime at the cost of anything. These rules meant: no music, games, school for girls and women were supposed to stay inside. Besides this oppression, they set extremely hard, medieval punishments in place for those who did not obey the rules to control the civilians. These punishments went as far as stoning to death and the amputation of hands. Moreover, the Taliban fighters are suspected to have used human shields, they transformed houses into bases and actively demolished schools. In order to achieve their goals, they used hostage-takings and abductions (Amnesty International, 2007). The Taliban's strict regime and oppression increased the number of victims even more (War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

Experiences of injustice under the Taliban rule: a continuation of previous regimes, but more oppression for women

When it comes to the experiences of the population, the Taliban ruling did not show any change compared to the previous ones. The level of oppression, however, grew higher, especially for women. The Taliban experienced opposition and tried to remain in control by massacring local civilians and other non-combatants. They burned down villages and orchards as a means to render the area uninhabitable, closed schools for girls and prohibited women to work or go outside alone (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). The Taliban's policy of abuses aimed to control the population. They used torture as a means of punishment and to extract information. Examples of the extremely harsh punishments are flogging and amputation of hands in cases of theft, adultery or alcohol consumption (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). In other words, the oppressive period functioned on the fear of the Afghan population.

The Taliban used the existing intelligence mechanism as their basis for the repressive regime. The primary organisation operated from Sedarat as well, just like the previous regimes. The Taliban targeted detainees based on ethnicity. All non-Pashtuns and the Pashtuns who did not belong to the Taliban group were at risk and living in fear because the Taliban targeted these opponents for arrest, torture and execution (War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

2.2.4 The period of US intervention

Afghanistan established a reputation of being supportive to religious fundamentalist groups, which caused concerns in the international community. They did, however, not act until after the bombing of US Embassies in Africa (Bryant, 2007). A real action was only taken after the 9/11 attacks, where Bin Laden was involved. He US started interventions since he was believed to reside in Afghanistan (Riedel, 2014).

This intervention ended the Taliban regime and started the phase of **western interventions in Afghanistan** (Adamec, 2010). The US defeated the Taliban quickly, which they saw as a model strategy for the future at that time. The first assessment did, however, not consider the enormous amount of damage done to the social structures in all these years of civil wars and foreign occupations (Baker, 2011). This fact proved it difficult to re-establish peace and stability.

When the US got involved in Afghanistan, a guerrilla-like war started. The level of the conflict kept increasing since the western forces and the Taliban kept reacting on each other. Along with the level of the conflict civilian casualties kept increasing (Baker, 2011). Furthermore, an important detail of this time is that the human rights violations continued. There is proof that US military personnel abused, mistreated and tortured detainees as well as other regimes (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Experiences of injustice during US involvement: not the change that was necessary

As mentioned, the violation of human rights and torture continued during the involvement of the US and the other coalition forces in Afghanistan (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). Torture was a persisting problem since the US forces employed many of the torture techniques employed in previous regimes (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). Prisoners reported cases like sleep deprivations, being held in awkward or painful positions, stripped of their clothes and forced to stand or kneel for hours. The coalition forces arrested some of the detainees during military operations, but some of them had no clear connection with the hostilities. Another pressing matter is the fact that the US forces did not allow the prisoners to have contact with their relatives (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The current national security service was, therefore, actually often referred to by the acronym of its predecessor, the KhAD.

Additionally, both the night raids mentioned earlier and bombardments continued during the US involvement (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008). The airstrikes of the US and pro-government forces had far-reaching consequences, such as a large percentage of the civilian casualties. Especially these airstrikes and night raids caused a lot of fear and intimidation (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008). As a consequence of this violence, individuals experienced psychological consequences. Moreover, it also affected the communities as a whole since the fear caused a huge displacement of the population (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008). Victims left their homes, livelihood and became dependent on charity or relatives. In that way, they got victimised again.

It is important to note that some of the perpetrators that committed war crimes fled the country as well. For example, a military commander during the Soviet occupation is believed to reside in the Netherlands since 2005 (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). In other words, the victims might not find the safety they were looking for by seeking refuge in another country.

2.3 Recap

This chapter explained how Afghanistan's history has had an influence on its population. There are millions of victims as a result of 40 years of war. The first period, the communist regime, laid down the fundamentals of institutionalised torture and maltreatment by the establishment of the KhAD, the organisation in charge of the prisons. Everyone in Afghanistan has either experienced time in prison themselves or knows someone who did (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). Torture was a characteristic element of this communist regime (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). The prison experiences impacted the lives of tens of thousands of people. Most refugees that arrived in neighbouring countries in the early 80s reported, however, that they fled because of the bombings (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). During the Soviet occupation, around 6 million people fled the country, which was around one-

third of the total population (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), 2005).

The second period, the civil war, started due to lack of leadership after Russia withdrew. The warlords from the several resistance groups tried to get in power, causing many fights and civilians casualties. Civilians were continuously at risk, both because of heavy fighting and night raids, which caused the second major refugee stream. Moreover, the risks were extended for refugees across the borders in Pakistan. A more important element of this period is the introduction of rape as a weapon of war. Finally, the most characterising factor is ethnicity as a driving force of all the crimes.

The third period was the Taliban ruling, which consisted of strict Islamic rules and harsh punishments for those who not obeyed them. Shortly said, the previous regimes continued under the new ruler. The oppression, however, specifically targeted women and girls.

The Taliban regime ended when the US started their interventions in Afghanistan. The US continued to commit most of the crimes from previous regimes. Furthermore, fights between the Taliban and US increased, and the number of victims still rises today.

In short, this chapter explained how each of the regimes caused the numerous victims, such as direct victims, indirect victims and massive refugee streams. The focus group, Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands, is part of the bigger group. The events described above clarify the context of the victimising events that influenced the lives of the Afghans who are now living in the Netherlands. This context is necessary to understand their victimisation to the greatest extent possible.

Chapter 3

Theoretical framework

Firstly, the experience of crimes has certain consequences that can be far-reaching. This chapter addresses how to frame these experiences and their consequences by employing the socio-interpersonal model. For the purpose of this research, the traumatising experiences are called *experiences of injustice*. These experiences and the explanation of the model are the first part of this chapter.

Secondly, the rule of law gets damages due to the government involvement in the crimes. The atrocities were of an enormous scale, causing a high number of victims. Despite the numerous victims, they are rarely recognised and efforts to give a counter-reaction are, even though possibly preferred, barely taken (Pemberton, Letschert, de Brouwer, & Haveman, 2015). Moreover, because of all the different regimes involved in the violations, there are many different victims who might need different things. It is not easy to determine what the counter-reaction should be. Therefore, the second part of this chapter elaborates on the possible reactions. They are referred to as justice reactions.

3.1 Experiences of injustice

Previous experiences and events shape current behaviour, which can sometimes be considered turning points that trigger other processes (Yoshioka & Noguchi, 2009). Victimisation can be a turning point, triggering all kinds of processes, because traumatic experiences can be such a turning point and victimising experiences can be traumatic. This paragraph first explains when experiences can be considered traumatic. This qualification as traumatic is important because research has shown that especially traumatic experiences can have far-reaching consequences, such as PTSD (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Maercker & Horn, 2013). These consequences are influenced by several factors that are explained by the socio-interpersonal model in the second part of this paragraph.

3.1.1 Traumatic Experiences

Victimising events can be considered as a traumatic experience when they are uncontrollable, sudden and extremely negative. When events cause physical or emotional pain or threaten to cause physical or emotional pain, they are perceived as negative. The suddenness of an event entails that the victim has no time to adapt to, act on or prepare for the outcome of the event, which can influence the intensity of the event. Then, the intensity, the duration and the nature of the event influence the severity of the consequences because the intensity of the experience influences the feelings of fear and helplessness. Moreover, the duration influences the perceived controllability of the event. Together, the intensity, duration and nature of the event shape the perceptions of the individual about the experience, which are important factors for responses and the emergence of persisting consequences (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000).

A traumatic experience can cause several responses. Emotions, such as feelings of fear and helplessness are the basis of those responses. Moreover, the emotional pain is an important factor in the estimation of the posttraumatic response. Also, the psychological pain involved in traumatic events may impose a threat to someone's psychic integrity or sense of self, which makes the events perceived as extremely negative and uncontrollable. Both controllability and the negative valence should reach at a certain threshold to be qualified as traumatising. The exact threshold, however, depends on each person. The personal perception of the events is the determining factor and is more important than the actual danger of the event (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000).

The experiences are inseparably connected to the environmental context and culture of a person (Yoshioka & Noguchi, 2009; Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000). These two aspects influence the individual's perceptions, which in turn influence the responses and possible consequences.

3.1.2 Socio-interpersonal model (Maercker & Horn, 2013)

Maercker & Horn developed the socio-interpersonal model (Maercker & Horn, 2013). Considering the aforementioned, this model constitutes a good framework because it frames the traumatic experiences, the influences on the process in the aftermath and the consequences of the experiences.

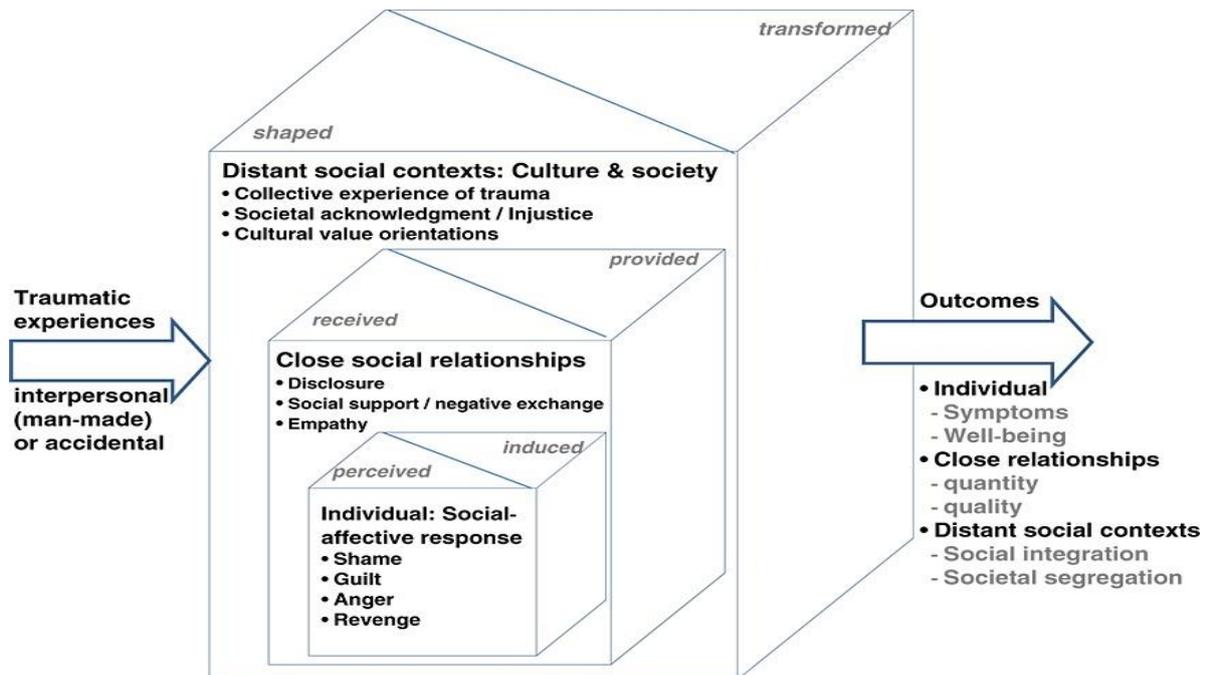


Figure 3 - Socio-interpersonal model (Maercker & Horn, 2013).

Figure 3 is a schematic representation of the socio-interpersonal model. As can be seen, the model consists of three levels, which are explained in the following paragraphs.

Level 1 – The individual level

The first level is the *individual level*, where the intrapersonal features or impairments become visible. Traumatic experiences can have *physical* and psychological consequences. A study into the physical and mental health of Afghans residing in the Netherlands shows that their experiences can leave long-lasting consequences. It shows that the victims were often suffering from more than one chronic condition. Among the most frequently reported physical conditions were severe shoulder problems, neck problems or both, and migraines (Gerritsen et al., 2006). Furthermore, there were persons who expressed that they thought some people became paralysed as a result of the torture practices in Afghanistan's prisons (War Crimes Research Office, 2014).

Among the *psychological consequences* are emotions such as shame and guilt. These are social affects because they refer to the self and do not exist without others. Another common emotion in the aftermath of a traumatic event is anger, which is related to feelings of vengefulness and forgiveness (Maercker & Horn, 2013). Vengeful feelings can explain possible wishes for (harsh) punishment of those responsible. An example from Afghanistan's history with far-reaching psychological consequences are the effects of airstrikes executed by

the US and allied forces (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008).

Other consequences become visible as *psychological symptoms* such as re-experiencing and avoidance behaviours, which are the core responses to traumatic events. Both can manifest themselves affectively, physiologically, behaviourally and cognitively. Which symptoms appear is depending on personal factors and may change over time (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000).

Regarding mental health, a study found that the problems were primarily PTSD, anxiety and depression. The symptoms of depression were mainly suicidal thoughts and death wishes. (Gerritsen, et al., 2006). Another study, focussing on torture victims in general, distinguished additional symptoms specifically related to the experience of torture. The study found that mental health symptoms of torture victims are broader than the ones mentioned before. The additional symptoms of torture victims are sleep disturbance, an effect on mood, and problems with cognition, memory or attention (Carlsson, Olsen, Mortensen, & Kastrup, 2006).

The last aspect that becomes visible in this individual level is the notion of agency and focusses on the development of the self and personal achievements. The next chapter explains the notion of agency further.

Level 2 – The close social relationships

The second is the level of close relationships, constituted by a high level of intimacy. Typically, these relationships are a partner, close family members and friends. This network is essential for successful coping and the process of adaptation (Maercker & Horn, 2013).

An important feature in this level is *disclosure*. It requires interaction and is therefore placed in the second level. Disclosure consists of three factors. First, the ability to disclose. People often feel unable to disclose their story because they are unable to talk about it. Second, the need to disclose their story. These two are independent of each other. Finally, the third factor, which is also independent, is the emotional reaction during the disclosure. The individual's perceptions of these three disclosure factors impact their sharing behaviour and the sharing behaviour influences the individual's social reality and narrative identity. The next chapter explains the latter. The three disclosure factors are essential because they predict possible later symptoms as a result of the experience (Maercker & Horn, 2013).

The second important feature of this level is *social support*, an important resource in the aftermath of a traumatic experience. A high level of social support is positive for the physical and mental health outcomes of the individual. There is, however, a difficulty because of the possible discrepancy between the level of perceived support by the victim and the provided level of social support by the person's surrounding network (Maercker & Horn, 2013). The victim can perceive receiving no support and the surrounding network is actually providing support. The importance of social support lies in the possibility to help to restore a person's feelings of controllability (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000).

Social interaction, however, can also lead to an adverse outcome. Victims can feel *ostracised* or *blamed*, which are common feelings among victims. It is important to take this into account because social exclusion is correlated with PTSD. Furthermore, victim blaming can take place at both level 2 and level 3. These two elements, together with *compassion fatigue* of the victims (inability to be empathetic), can lead to more problems and difficulties in intrapersonal relationships (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Maercker & Horn, 2013). It is exactly such a relationship that is a substantial risk or protective factor for PTSD.

Level 3 – The distant social level

The third level is the distant social level and focusses on culture and societal influences that are affecting the person processing the trauma. This level describes the context in which the

individual is nested. The individual belongs to a certain group, culture, religion or society, which is based on a certain justice or health system with shared values. At this level, the individual is interacting with a group. Not that these are not the acquaintances, because they are based in the second level.

This level also deals with *collectively experienced trauma*. It is suggested in the literature that collectively experienced trauma has fewer effects on possible future symptoms than individually experienced trauma. Furthermore, the feeling of belonging to a group is associated with improvements in health in the long-term.

Afghanistan's situation is an example of collectively experienced trauma. The several periods of war in Afghanistan have had a big impact on the whole population. Moreover, the period of civil war in Kabul is described as one of the most severe human rights violations of the Afghan war. It ruined major parts of the capital and left a whole generation traumatised (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

Acknowledgement of suffering is an important factor that explains the thought that collectively experienced trauma results in fewer symptoms. Even though this acknowledgement is vital on every level, it happens sooner in case the trauma is experienced collectively. The primary reason for this is that the suffering is still acknowledged, even if the victims did not disclose their story. Due to that acknowledgement, the victims perceive their environment to be more supportive. The characteristics of a group influence the success of coping when trauma is experienced collectively. There is, for example, a difference between collective and individual societies.

The recognition starts with the perspective of the perpetrator. There is a high level of distancing by perpetrators from their victims and as a consequence the victims become morally disengaged, explained further in the next chapter. This moral disengagement entails dehumanisations and de-individualisation of the victims, which influences the victim's agency. Lack of acknowledgement of victimhood and suffering by authorities in a later stadium leads to secondary victimisation and is slowing down the recovery of the victims (Pemberton, Letschert, de Brouwer, & Haveman, 2015). Victims see a lack of recognition of their harm as an injustice.

Victims who experienced a traumatic event can suffer from PTSD and often have general *feelings of injustice*. Maercker & Horn describe this with the following sentence: "perpetrators are winners – there is no justice in this world" (Maercker & Horn, 2013, p. 475). This sense of injustice has two implications. It can become visible in relation to *compensation* or the *embitterment reaction*. This reaction is a particular state after experiencing the most severe negative life events and has the effect of a general feeling of loss of control and the victim socially withdraws. Furthermore, these feelings of injustice may lead to extreme adhering to personal beliefs and worldviews. This adherence is explained as the Terror Management Theory (TMT). The theory suggests victims may become more in favour of harsher punishments to see justice being served.

To conclude, it is important to note that the characteristics of all the different levels should interact with each other. Levels 2 and 3 form the social context of the individual, which creates expectancies. In that way, it influences personal views on negative valence, controllability and to way to deal with situations. They, in turn, might lead to secondary responses in the form of other symptoms as a result of the experience (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Maercker & Horn, 2013). Furthermore, level 2 and 3 are also the basis for the notion of *communion*. This notion is about the connectedness with others, which is explained further in chapter 5.

3.2 Justice reactions

The Afghan people suffered major crimes that are qualified as the international crimes 'war crimes' and 'crimes against humanity' (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 17

July 1998). According to articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute, the crimes involve: murder, torture, enforced disappearance of persons, wilfully killing, wilfully depriving a prisoner of the rights to a fair and regular trial, intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects and many other acts. As seen above, the Afghan people suffered from these crimes with the crucial note that that government agencies were involved in these crimes, which makes the matter of justice complex. Besides, it is unclear what justice is from the perspective of the Afghan victims. The traumatic experiences as explained before can lead to feelings of injustice. It shows that victims often like to see a counter-reaction and it can consist of several possible elements. Therefore, this chapter addresses justice and the possible reactions. First, it defines justice and then transitional justice, including its four pillars.

3.2.1 Justice

The UN qualifies justice as “an ideal of accountability and fairness in the protection and vindication of rights and the prevention and punishment of wrongs” (UN Security Council, 2004). This is achieved by international legal systems and international law. Particularly human rights laws form the normative foundation, of which the Rome Statute, mentioned earlier, is an example.

Although justice seems to be an important element for victims, other matters might be even more pressing. Victims of international crimes consider health care, education, livelihood and peace to be the most important factors (Pemberton et al., 2015). There is a diversity of needs in post-conflict countries. This research tries to establish a clearer image of that since it is unclear what the needs of the Afghan victims are. During the interviews the respondents are supposed to answer the question of what justice should entail in their situation.

3.2.2 Transitional justice

As addressed in the introduction, countries and victims that experienced mass atrocities need time and mechanisms to come to terms with what happened. Transitional justice is a process that tries to address the mass atrocities and exceeds beyond justice in courts. It is the *whole range of processes and mechanisms* that are supposed to help a post-conflict society to come to terms with the past (UN Security Council, 2004). It is considered to be a way of undoing past violence and injustices, and also a way of getting to a situation of peace and security in the future (Dhawan, 2012). In other words, it has a forward and backward-looking function (Pemberton et al., 2015). The specific set up of these processes is depending on the context. Some features, however, are always involved. These features are recognising the dignity of individuals, the acknowledgement and repair of violations and prevention for the future (International Center for Transitional Justice, n.d.; Pemberton et al., 2015).

As explained, victims become disengaged from the moral sphere. Transitional justice mechanisms play an essential role to re-establish and confirm their membership in the society. In order to do so, it is essential to recognise their harm. Pemberton et al. note that the “denial of victimisation by authorities amounts to a strong form of so-called secondary victimisation, which in turn has a negative impact on victims’ recovery” (Pemberton et al., 2015, p. 358).

It is essential to consider the perspectives of the victims to give an appropriate and realistic reaction because the best method is depending on the diverse needs of the victims. International criminal justice might not do full justice since it is limited in what it can achieve (Pemberton et al., 2015). Therefore, transitional justice has four main approaches that should be incorporated in an integrative way (UN Security Council, 2004). The four pillars are: prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking and reform of laws and institutions, and are discussed below.

Prosecution

Afghanistan finds itself in a situation that's on repeat. From the pre-communist regime up until the present, Afghan leaders relied on subordinates and militia forces. This situation continued throughout all the regimes and periods. The forces in these alliances of convenience always kept a certain degree of autonomy in their regions and government authorities actually had minimal control over them. Moreover, the commanders have enjoyed impunity. During a gathering in New York in 1994, this impunity is explained. There the Finance Minister, Ghani, said the leaders of Afghanistan chose peace over justice (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). Perpetrators remain, however, in powerful positions and continue their violating actions. In other words, there is neither peace nor justice by the lack of reactions. Nevertheless, a high price for the civilians at their mercy (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

Furthermore, the US forces are responsible for a number of deaths of detainees. Despite the fact that it was officially qualified as a homicide and supported by documents, no charges were made (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). Also, the control in US facilities in Afghanistan is almost non-existent, only one facility that is granting access to outside observers (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Thus, they enjoy almost complete impunity, which is only adding salt to the injury.

To conclude, all forces allied with one of the factions have committed war crimes during the civil war. However, none of them were held accountable or punished in an appropriate way (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). The Afghan people display resentment for the high number of civilian casualties. They feel the high level of insensitivities and their feelings are strengthened by the lack of accountability and reactions (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008).

A key element of an appropriate reaction to the crimes is rebuilding the rule of law. This element is two folded. On one side, it needs to react to past crimes, which can be done by prosecution (Pemberton et al., 2015). In post-conflict situations, international criminal justice is often employed for this purpose because the international criminal justice emphasises the punishment of those responsible. On the other side, it needs to add to the legitimacy of the government and institutions (Pemberton et al., 2015). Reform of laws and institution can contribute to this aspect.

Reform of laws and institutions

It should be remembered that throughout the years of war, the government was, directly and indirectly, involved in the human rights violations. The persons in powerful positions were able to remain in these positions over time. For example, during the communist regime, the KhAD had a central role in the human rights violations. Many of the KhAD agents remained in a specific position over time. In 2001 the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that many of them were active in the intelligence services of the Afghan government (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). This fact enables the situation to continue, and human rights violations to continue as well.

Another example is from the time of involvement of the US and the coalition forces in Afghanistan. Former Mujahideen and commanders have been allied with the US because the US thought that the Mujahideen could help to defeat al-Qaeda (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005). As a result, the Mujahideen grew richer and more powerful. They are believed to have links with the narcotics trade and organised crime. These alliances assisted in the persisting torture in prisons and the ongoing human rights violations (War Crimes Research Office, 2014). Reform is necessary to change the ongoing human rights violations.

In conclusion: the numerous crimes committed by government leaders, groups in power and international forces caused a high level of distrust in the government institutions and security

agencies (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2008). The looking forward function of rebuilding the rule of law is essential here. It consists of reforming the government and other institutions and focusses on restoring trust in those institutions (Pemberton, Letschert, de Brouwer, & Haveman, 2015).

Truth-seeking

A persisting problem is the lack of information about the people who are in prison or the ones that never returned from the prisons. While the US was involved in Afghanistan, the truth-finding efforts were limited. The Bush government claimed the necessity of secret facilities for detainees for security reasons. The secrecy has, however, only limited the security. For example, a Taliban commander who was in Guantanamo was released and immediately took up weapons to fight against the US troops (The Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005).

International transitional justice mechanisms, like the ICC process, should be complemented by national proceedings or mechanisms to achieve the goals. One of these mechanisms, already in place, is the use of theatre. In this way victims are given a voice and truth finding is promoted (Siddiqui, 2010). The opportunities created with this mechanism are broader than the possibilities within the international criminal justice process. It helps to recognise victims and helps the victims in their recovery process.

Reparations

Reparations are considered to be part of the remedies for harm suffered from gross violations of international human rights (UN General Assembly, 2006). Appropriate reparations intend to promote justice and reparations that can be awarded can take one of the following forms: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition (UN General Assembly, 2006). Unfortunately, no reparation efforts were made in Afghanistan's case yet.

3.2.3 In a nutshell

The issues of transitional justice are politicised and quite sensitive in Afghanistan. There is a lack of accountability for perpetrators, which enabled them to participate in the new governments. It contributes to the persistence of violations and the perception of fear among the Afghan population. The recognition of suffering and victimhood is crucial for victims with regard to their recovery process. Therefore, transitional justice is focussing on an integrative approach consisting of four components. All of these are contributing to the recognition of the harm of victims.

Chapter 4

Narratives

The second chapter explained the story of the history of Afghanistan. This story has a lot of small stories behind it of people who experienced the several regimes and periods. Experiences of severe victimisation are common among the Afghan people. Unfortunately, the researched subjects are barely ever the experiences of Afghan victims. One research focused on victims and justice in the situation of Afghanistan. That research was, however, set up as a consultation, which is more limited than applying the narrative method (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2005).

The experiences are constructed as a life story because life stories consist of numerous memories from experiences. As Bruner noted, a story has “an agent who performs an action to achieve a goal in a recognizable setting by the use of certain means” (Bruner, 2003). Trouble or the misfit between those elements is what drives the story. Victimisation is such a form of trouble (Pemberton, 2015). In other words, victimising experiences will be constructed into a narrative. They follow a narrative mode. In order to get insight into the experiences of Afghan war victims, this research is done from a narrative perspective. This chapter discusses subsequently how narratives emerge, how it contributes to the narrative identity and how narratives contribute to the sense- and meaning making process.

4.1 From events to stories to narratives

Stories are everywhere (Crossley, 2000). People are dealing with stories on a daily basis, appearing in TV-shows or they tell stories to children because human beings are natural storytellers (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

People are constructing life stories. They consist of numerous memories from experiences of the whole lifespan. These life stories are used to make sense of the things that happened to them and are called *narratives*. Shortly said, Narratives are the representation of a series of events. It implies that something happens and it is more than just a description (Abbott, 2008). Narratives are subjective. They show a person’s reality of the experience (Crossley, 2000). While the narratives are constructed, the narrative identity is constructed during the narration process and gets affected by a victimising experience. After that victimising experience, a process of meaning-making starts. The way in which the victims narrate their story says something about how they give meaning to it, which is important for their recovery process (McAdams, 2013).

4.1.1 Narrative identity

Life stories fulfil an essential role in someone’s identity and personality. The narrative identity is de internalisation and construction of an evolving and integrative life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Thus, identity can be understood as a life story (Hammack, 2008). To get to know a person we need to get to know a person’s identity, this can be done by learning about a person’s life story, or narrative.

A narrative identity develops over time by creating and sharing stories and these stories create the self (McAdams & McLean, 2013). To explain the construction of identity and personality, McAdams developed the tripartite framework. This framework consists of three layers. The first layer is the self that starts as a *social actor*, having personality traits and certain social roles. Then, the self becomes a *motivated agent* and personal goals, values and motives are central. Eventually, a human being develops the third layer, the *autobiographical author*, that tries to develop a continuous and logical life story (McAdams, 2013). The autobiographical self

is creating a life story which contains a unity of selfhood, creating one coherent story of the reconstructed past, the perceived present and imagined future (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Establishing links between experiences and identity connects the past and the present. In this way, the narratives are formed through autobiographical reasoning, which is a process of self-reflective thinking or talking (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

As said, people's narrative identity is constructed by experiencing events and narrating those events. While the story is told, reactions from surroundings are monitored and people base their narrations on them (McAdams, 2013). Thus, the autobiographical self is strongly influenced by environmental elements, such as social class, gender, race and ethnicity (McAdams, 2013). This influence is what Hammack calls 'the looking glass self' (Hammack, 2008). It explains the way in which selfhood is constructed through reflections we receive in social interactions. In other words, identity is constructed by linking the self and society.

Moreover, people construct their identity by placing themselves or being placed in a certain place in society. Society has a certain meta-narrative that reflects the dominant discourse in a society, and it is a way of meaning-making of the cultural surroundings. The individual narratives either confirm or deny the dominant meta-narratives (Hammack, 2008). The fear of losing their identity makes people adherent to the collective identity or meta-narrative. This cultural concept of constructing a narrative identity entails that narrators determine which events are essential for their life story based on cultural norms (Hammack, 2008). This is an important note since perceptions of justice are based on cultural norms and values as well.

Narrative identity is an essential aspect of life stories that describe experiences of victimisation. The narrative identity of Afghan victims will tell a lot about their experiences and perceptions.

4.1.2 Sense and meaning making

Meaning-making is crucial in for the narrative identity since the process of sense- and meaning-making influences the change of the narrative identity. People need a sense of coherence, unity and meaning in their life stories (Crossley, 2000). Personal life stories give meaning to people's life by creating continuity of the self over time (Hammack, 2008). Life stories explain how the 'I' stays the same over time or changes over time (McAdams, 2013). Victimization ruptures this sense of continuity and narratives help to restore that sense (Crossley, 2000). In other words, telling stories has a meaning-making function. This research will, therefore, shed light on the meaning-making process of the experiences of injustice of Afghan victims.

Constructing experiences into a narrative is one of the fundamental ways to make sense of them (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Telling stories, and more specifically a life story, helps the person to achieve self-understanding and self-continuity. By allowing them to organise their recollective memories and general knowledge into a coherent biography, continuity is achieved. With self-defining autobiographical episodes and achieving self-understanding, a person can connect the reconstructed past, the perceived present and imagined future. In that way, it explains who the self is and how it came to be that person (McAdams, 2013).

Difficult life experiences need an explanation because these experiences are out of our ordinary perceptions. People have certain assumptions about the 'normal' situation and these 'taken-for-granted assumptions' become visible when a person experiences a victimising event (Crossley, 2000) because getting victimised shatters the assumptions (Pemberton, 2015). Victimisation may cause a narrative rupture and discontinuity in the self and, in that way, challenges self-continuity and the process of meaning-making. Piece by piece the story needs to be restored and become coherent again. Moreover, such a narrative rupture damages not only self-continuity but also the sense of continuity with surroundings.

The process of sense- and meaning making has a big influence on how victims deal with their victimising experience and, in that way, it also influences future behaviour. The importance of

this aspect, thus, lies in the way the victims make sense, which becomes visible in their narratives.

Chapter 5

Narrative method

As said before, this research employs the narrative perspective and examines the following question: ***How are the experiences of injustice and preferred justice reactions narrated in the life stories of Afghan war survivors?***

As seen in the theoretical framework, people give meaning to their experiences through the configuration of life stories. In order to fully comprehend the events experienced by the Afghan victims, the narrative method is employed. Narratives show the unique characteristics of each person and make it possible to understand people to the full extent (Polkinghorne, 1995). In that way, it gives insight into the Afghan war victims and the contribution of events to their lives and narrative identity. The importance lies in the wording used by the Afghan war victims, which makes this research qualitative. The narrative method is employed to determine the subjective side of the respondent, which is not necessarily an objectively verifiable 'truth' (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2003) but that is neither the target of narrative research. It will shed light on the identity, the values, the culture and communities of the storyteller. The most significant advantage of this method is that it gives an honest image of the perceptions of the storyteller, in this case, the Afghan war victims residing in the Netherlands. This chapter elaborates on the narrative method that is used. Interviews were conducted to gather these life stories.

5.1 Sample

To get access to the sample within the research field, the AVR Foundation has provided contacts. With this list as a basis, the snowballing method was used to try to assemble a group of respondents. All respondents were Afghan refugees residing in the Netherlands.

The procedure of gathering the sample was as follows: The AVR Foundation provided a list with contact details to the researcher. The researcher then approached the contacts by telephone to ask them to participate in the research. By asking respondents for acquaintances, additional participants were sought and asked to participate. When the respondents agreed to participate, a meeting was set up at a location to the preference of the respondent. A total collection of seven interviews functions as the data basis of this research. Five of the respondents are ex-political prisoners during the first period, the communist regime in Afghanistan. The other two victims had relatives who became victimised during that period and experienced personal victimising events in the later periods. All, but one respondent, were men. Their age was ranging between 47 and 67 years old. Three of the respondents were from Kabul and the others from Kunduz. Furthermore, all, but one, respondents said to be either Pashtun, Tajik or both.

It should be taken into account that the sample has a limited number of respondents in the sample and all the contacts were gathered via the AVR Foundation, therefore it carries the biasness risk of the sample. The organisation has specific goals it pursues, the people connected to the organisations might pursue those same goals. Unfortunately, the snowballing method added only one participant to the sample. The additional participant was the only participant that was not actively involved with the AVR foundation. Therefore, it is unclear to what extent the findings will apply to a wider population. It is noted, even though generalisability is not the target of this research.

5.2 Interviewing

A life history interview or an oral history interview provides us with knowledge about how people perceive their past and relate it to the present (Walker, 2006). With studying the life

stories of Afghan war victims, the significant events in a person's life are understood. It also creates an understanding of the significant national events, such as the ongoing hostilities, because these events shape the life stories of Afghan people.

The interviewer plays an important role. The narrative method implies that open-ended questions are the best option. Here, there's a central role for the respondents. In this way, great insight into their lives was gathered, including their experiences and how these events influenced their lives. The course of the interview depended on the willingness of the respondents to share specific facts. It should be noted that the participants knew beforehand that they were participating for a reason, which might have influenced the things they told during the interview.

Furthermore, an oral history interview is a dialogue. Therefore, it is crucial, as Bryman notes, to record and transcribe the interviews (Bryman, 2012). These transcriptions are helpful to establish the most comprehensive understanding.

Before starting the interview, the interview set up was explained to the respondents together with the aim. Besides, they were informed clearly about the possibility to quit the interview at any point and permission was asked to record the interview. Finally, the fact that all information will be dealt with and analysed anonymously and confidentially was emphasised. When the respondents agreed with these points, they were asked to sign the informed consent paper that can be found in Appendix 3.

In the interview, there was first a basic introduction which explained the aims of the interview. After that, some basic data was gathered, such as sex, age, when they came to the Netherlands and more. Then, the respondent was asked to construct a lifeline together with the interviewer. During the construction, the respondent had the opportunity to talk about his or her experiences and how those impacted him or her. Based on the extensiveness of the story during the construction of the timeline, the interviewer asked for more detailed information on specific episodes. In order to prevent bias, the interviewer asked for more detailed information about all episodes that were not explained in a detailed way already. The full content of the interview can be found in Appendix 4.

5.3 Analysing the narratives

This paragraph addresses the analysing process of the narratives. After conducting the interviews, the interviewer first transcribed the narratives. The process of transcribing and the analysis itself kept the spoken language (Dutch) as a basis because a translation might lose its meaning. After the transcription, open coding was done. This coding was done by reading through the transcripts and making marks on the side for things that were remarkable according to the researcher. After this first-read-through, a theory-driven coding was done. The analysis consists of Polkinghorne's idea of narrative configuration, where there are two types of analysis: narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. These analyses fit Bruner's modes of reasoning (Polkinghorne, 1995). This twofold analysis is useful to analyse the narratives of Afghan war victims thoroughly and will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The first approach is the '*analysis of narratives*'. This aspect employs Bruner's paradigmatic mode of reasoning. It entails trying to find common elements in the life stories of the respondents. In other words, it is an effort of categorising the stories into themes. This categorisation is what Barkhuizen describes as the thematic analysis (Barkhuizen, 2015). The paragraph 'worm's eye view' discusses the first analysis in more detail. Ultimately, this analysis will serve to find relationships for the second analysis.

The second approach is the '*narrative analysis*'. Here, the underlying relationships and composing a plot or genre are central elements (Värinen, 2015). This approach employs Bruner's narrative mode of reasoning. The events are used as data and made into a plotted story (Polkinghorne, 1995). A plot is a scheme in which the meaning of the elements of the

story are displayed (Polkinghorne, 1995). It is the narrative structure in which events are framed, and it helps to display them in a meaningful way. According to Booker, there are seven basic plots (Booker, 2004) and every story fits in at least one of the plots. By using both elements the commonalities and the differences will become clear. This second analysis will be discussed in the paragraph 'worm's eye view' after the thematic analysis.

5.3.1 A bird's eye view: themes

The way in which the suffering is narrated is important for sense-making and the future. For example, if the story is narrated in an exploring way, it will give the victim insights and lessons to extract from the experience. Usually, this is associated with a higher level of well-being and happiness (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Two important themes in victimisation narratives are **agency** and **communion** (McAdams & McLean, 2013). When a person gets victimised, the self-continuity as a person becomes ruptured. Agentic themes play an important role to restore this continuity. Agency entails growing as a person (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). It is related to notions of self-mastery, empowerment, personal status and achievements. Agency also entails a person's ability to control one's fate. Shortly said, agency is about the individual. All narratives contain agency elements. When a person is mainly focussed on agency aspects, personal successes are the most important things for the victim. In that case, when agentic aspects get affected by the victimising experience, the impact will be bigger compared to a communion focused victim.

These notions of agency are closely connected to the notion of communion. As said, when the theory on narratives was explained, a person's narrative identity is constructed based on their surroundings and victimising events are disconnecting the victim from their surroundings. Communion concerns the interpersonal aspects of victimisation (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Notions like love, friendship, dialogue and the connection to the broader community are essential. When a person is communion focussed, belonging to a community and relationships with others are the most important things.

A victimising experience influences and threatens both themes (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996). A victim does not feel in control, and their self-esteem gets damaged. Moreover, at the same time, a victim's sense of communion gets damaged. A victim no longer feels connected to their community in the same way. Therefore, these are important notions for the Afghan victims.

5.3.2 A worm's eye view: plots

The connection of separate events happens by turning them into episodes. The process is called emplotment (Somers, 1994). A plot "is the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements – incidents, episodes, actions – of a narrative" (Brooks, 1984, p. 5). Every story follows one of the limited number of plotlines (Booker, 2004). The believability of a story is dependent on how well the story fits one of the plot lines because plots create expectations and these need to be met in order for a story to be perceived as believable (Polletta, 2009). In different stories, one general theme can be present (McAdams, 2006). This leads to the distinction of a plot. The configuration of a narrative, thus, involves themes and emplotment (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Plots can show an overall theme of **redemption** or **contamination**. These two motivational themes are important factors for the meaning-making process of Afghan war victims. First, redemption sequences are shown when the victim expresses a negative experience that's transformed into something positive (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In that case, something negative is 'redeemed' by something good that follows from it. The process of redemption is

done in two steps. During the first step, a victim thinks deeply about the experience. What it felt like, how it came to that point and the consequences for the person's life. Next, during the second step, the victim commits him or herself to a positive resolution. When looking to the way the suffering is narrated, victims who show redemption sequences tend to narrate detailed and thoughtful about the loss and struggle from the events in their lives. This theme is all about learned lessons, gained insights and enrichment of the person's life.

On the other side, there is the contamination theme, which is the opposite of redemption (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). In this case, the victim is moving from something good to something bad. In other words, the good is 'contaminated' by what follows. A person might try to undo the damage and experience the 'good' life again, but efforts are doomed to fail. The view of Afghan victims on their future is crucial since it might influence their perspective of justice. When a victim is still suffering and follows the contamination theme, he or she might, regarding justice, have a bigger urge to get a harsh punishment for the perpetrators.

Booker distinguishes seven basic plots. All of these plots show either redemptive or contamination sequences. The seven plots are, firstly, *Overcoming the monster* (Booker, 2004). Within this plot, the narrator comes across an evil force, or in Booker's terms "some superhuman embodiment of evil power" (Booker, 2004, p. 23). This 'monster' can take different forms but is always deadly or posing a threat of destruction. This evil power is mostly even threatening the whole community. The threatening figure is usually defined by the fact that he is egocentric, seemingly powerful and heartless and we see at the end that it has a vulnerable spot. This plot usually runs through five stages. 1) The anticipation stage and 'the call'. We see a glimpse of the 'monster' and the hero feels the call to confront it. 2) The dream stage, where the hero is preparing for the battle and still feels immune for the danger. 3) The frustration state, where the hero faces the monster and struggles. 4) The nightmare stage. Here there is the last ordeal and where the odds turn again in favour of the hero. 5) The escape, where the evil power is defeated.

The second plot is *Rags to riches* (Booker, 2004). At first, we see someone ordinary, even insignificant and given little value by others, but that person suddenly steps into the centre and becomes extraordinary and exceptional. Five stages can be recognised. 1) The initial misery at home and 'the call'. 2) Going into the world and experiencing the first success. 3) The central crisis, where everything suddenly goes wrong. Here the protagonist becomes separated from what is most important to him. 4) Discovering independent strengths and the final difficulty to overcome, a final test. Finally, 5) Completion and fulfilment.

The third plot is *The Quest* (Booker, 2004). In the quest plot, there is some priceless goal which needs to be achieved at any cost, in any effort. This goal can be something like a promised land or a treasure. It is something with an infinite value. This story is only resolved after the goal is achieved. This story usually follows five stages as well. 1) The call. The goal the hero needs to aim for becomes clear. 2) The journey. Accompanied by several companions, the hero starts his journey to achieve the goal, where they encounter monsters, temptations and the frustraters. Sometimes they also meet helpers. 3) Arrival and frustration. The goal becomes within sight, but the story does not end yet. There are appearing new obstacles. 4) The final ordeal. Again, there is the last test that needs to be passed to obtain the goal. 5) Finally, the goal is achieved.

The fourth plot that Booker distinguishes is *Voyage and Return* (Booker, 2004). Within this plot, the protagonist travels out of their familiar places to an unfamiliar place, where the protagonist is feeling threatened or trapped. This unfamiliar place can be a different social milieu. The difference with the quest is that with the quest there is a sense of compulsion to achieve that specific goal. The five stages of this plot are: 1) Anticipation stage and ending up in the other 'world'. We see the protagonist with limited awareness ending up in a different environment that they have never experienced before. 2) The dream stage or initial fascination.

At first, the new 'world' seems exciting, but then the realisation comes that the protagonist will never feel at home there. 3) The frustration stage. The mood is gradually changing to frustration, which leads to stage number 4) the nightmare stage. There, the protagonist is completely overshadowed and threatened. 5) Finally, the escape. When the protagonist gets back to the start, but probably gained massive life experiences.

The fifth plot is *Comedy* (Booker, 2004). Comedy is a particular kind of story, which is more than just funny. A funny story might as well follow a completely different plot than comedy. Also, if the author calls it comedy the story does not necessarily follow the plot. Love stories are usually comedies. Characters go from a struggle with misunderstandings into the 'light'. In the comedy, there's a happy, cheerful ending. Since the stories of Afghan war victims are unlikely to follow this plot, it will not be elaborate further.

The sixth plot is *Tragedy* (Booker, 2004). In these stories, the protagonist is tempted into something forbidden. The protagonist has a fatal flaw. At first, the protagonist is dreaming and enjoying success, but this fatal flaw is preventing any real success and is eventually his undoing. This plot, again, has five stages. 1) Anticipation stage. Here the protagonist is in some way incomplete, but he is looking towards the future. 2) The dream stage. He becomes committed to a specific course, and things seem to go well. 3) The frustration stage. Things begin to go wrong, in order to save his successful position, the protagonist might commit some 'dark acts'. 4) The nightmare stage. The protagonist is no longer in control, and he feels threat and despair. 5) Destruction or death wish stage. Either by the forces he has against him or due to his acts the protagonist gets 'destroyed'.

The last of Booker's plots is *Rebirth* (Booker, 2004). In this plot, the protagonist goes through some inward drama. The five stages of this story are: 1) a young protagonist who falls under a dark power. 2) It seems to go well, and the threat seems to have disappeared. 3) The threat approaches again, and this stage ends when the protagonist is in a state of living death. 4) The state of living death continues for a long time, where the dark power seems to have won. 5) The miraculous redemption. The protagonist 'wakes' up.

As we can see from the previous descriptions, victimisation fits in most of the described plots. When telling a story, unconsciously, the story is fit into one of the plotlines. The 'choice' for a specific plotline might be important because it can tell something about the victim's perception of things in their life story. Therefore, comparing the stories of the Afghan war victims and fitting them in a plotline is useful. Besides, an important note is that a story can show characteristics that fit into more than one plotline. The stories might, thus, not always fit perfectly into one specific plotline. In conclusion, by considering the information given in this chapter and the previous chapters the Afghan narratives will be analysed.

Chapter 6

Results: The narratives of Afghan war victims

This chapter will discuss the findings of the conducted interviews. The research aimed to shed light on the experiences of Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands and to clarify their perception of justice. The respondents were victimised during one of the four periods of war in the Afghan history and they provided very rich and comprehensive data about it. The data was collected while it was unknown what the exact experiences of the victims were beforehand. It turned out that most of the victims were victimised during the communist regime. Therefore, the results will address these experiences more than the experiences during other regimes.

The first part will zoom in on the narratives (analysis of narratives), as explained in the paragraph 'worm's eye view' of the previous chapter. Moreover, the important themes will be discussed. These themes will be linked to the theory described before. In this way, meaning will be given to the stories. The second part takes a helicopter view (narrative analysis), as explained in the paragraph 'Bird's eye view' of the previous chapter. In this part, the broader picture will be observed and the narratives will be categorised within plotlines.

Before analysing the narratives of Afghan war victims, the narratives will be briefly summarised. This summary is necessary in order to understand the context of the narratives that are described in the findings.

5.4 Meet the narrators

The first of the life stories is the one from **Khadim**. He is a 52-year-old man who was born in Kunduz, Afghanistan. He was 14 when the coup d'état took place and from that moment on his life changed forever. The regime took one of his brothers and killed him in prison. His brother was religious, but above all, he was an intellectual person. Despite many difficulties, Khadim was able to finish high school and started studying economy at the University. However, this study was forced on him. It was either studying economy or going into the military service. The studying time was difficult for him since he was not a member of the PDPA. Despite everything, he managed to get high grades. During his study time, the Mujahideen leaders were continuously trying to get in contact with excelling students. Therefore, Khadim was under the attention of the regime as well, which eventually led to his arrest in the 3rd year of his study at the university. He was held in prison for 41 days. He was against the regime, but not politically active. When he got released, he finished his studies and was able to start a job as a teacher. After 6 years he started a job at the Ministry besides it. In this job position, he was sent to Russia for a couple of years as a diplomat. When his position there ended and he was sent back to Afghanistan, the Taliban was in power and it was not safe for him to go back. Because of his contacts in Russia, he was able to come to the Netherlands with his family. The first years were hard for him, but despite some remaining difficulties, he is satisfied with his current life in the Netherlands.

The second story that was shared with me is from **Nazia**. She is now 50 years old and was born in Kunduz, Afghanistan. She was still a little girl when two of her uncles got killed by the Russian regime in a bomb attack. During the same period, their house was bombed as well. Her father was politically active. He was a socialist. Therefore, it was not safe for him to live in Afghanistan and the family fled to Pakistan for over a decade. Despite the economic hardship of living without official status, she perceives this time as being mostly good since she had the opportunity to go to school and study. After the Russian regime fell, the whole family returned to Afghanistan. To be sure that they were safe they did not go to their city of origin, but to Mazar-e-Sharif. During this period of return in Afghanistan, she met her husband, got married and gave birth to a daughter. However, the civil war had started and it was still not safe. The

Hazara group kidnapped her brother and kept him for 40 days. They were Pashtuns and the Taliban were Pashtun as well. Therefore, they were at risk for rivalling ethnic groups. This period she found even harder than the Soviet oppression. She mentions it was no longer Afghans against the oppressor, but now it was Afghans killing Afghans. In other words, it was not clear who was fighting who. During this period, she spent two weeks in a bomb shelter and that violence caused them to flee to Pakistan again. It took them 2 or 3 days to go with alternative roads to Pakistan. On their way, there were extensive controls in Taliban areas. After a short period in Pakistan, her husband fled to the Netherlands by foot. This journey was extremely difficult. Besides her own experiences, Nazia feels the consequences of the war via her husband. He was a prisoner for 12 years during the Russian regime. The whole family is still bearing the consequences today. She is satisfied with her life in the Netherlands, but her thoughts stay with the people and the country she left behind.

The next story is from **Yasin**, a 64-year-old man born in Kunduz, Afghanistan. He became a victim of torture during the years he spent in prison. He had a normal childhood, but at the age of 22, he went into military service for 1 year. One year later he got arrested and went to prison. He was not the only prison victim in his family. His brother was also arrested, but he never returned. After the time he spent in prison, his life continued normally. He worked as a nurse in the hospital for 6 years and opened a pharmacy after that. His life remained normal until the Taliban came. Even though he had no negative personal experiences during the Taliban regime, the whole family moved to Kabul. They stayed there until they came to the Netherlands. The reason they fled Afghanistan was the unsafe situation for his wife. The Taliban regime was oppressive for women and his wife was a women's rights activist. Because of her work, she had been threatened and it was no longer safe to stay in Kabul or Afghanistan. She came to the Netherlands first and then the rest of the family followed after 2 years. Yasin is happy and satisfied with his life here. He says he receives everything that he needs.

The fourth story is **Sayyid's**. He is a 67-year-old man who was a political prisoner for 4 years. As a 7-year-old boy, he lost his mother due to illness and his father was dominating the family with harshness. He does not reminisce about his childhood positively. However, he is happy he had the opportunity to study and graduate. After graduating, he worked in a commercial agricultural company, he got married and his wife gave birth to a son. He was resisting the communist regime, just like his brother. Sayyid was supplying his brother, who was a full-time combatant in the resistance movement. At 32 Sayyid got arrested while he was working and spent the next 4 years in prison. He describes that time as horrible and he is still suffering a lot from it today. He still has difficulties to talk about his experiences. He mentioned, however, that he saw his brother once and that was also the last time ever. His brother got killed in prison. After Sayyid was released, he worked for a couple of years in Afghanistan but he remained under the observation from the regime. When people from the regime threatened his son one night, he decided that Afghanistan was no longer safe enough to live. Through smuggling, he managed to go to Moscow. From Moscow, he went through several Eastern European countries to Germany and eventually came to the Netherlands. He is satisfied with his life right now but is still suffering a lot from his past experiences. Besides that, he also feels victimised by the Dutch refugee system.

The fifth person who shared his story with me was **Bostan**. He is a 47-year-old born in Kabul, Afghanistan. He experiences partly through family members what the consequences of the different regimes and periods were. He was just 9 years old when the coup d'état took place. Shortly after that his father was taken and never returned. This event has had a big influence on him and his family's life. The search for his father played a prominent role in his life. During his childhood, he experienced long days of waiting at institutions while trying to get answers. He said that as a young boy he missed the presence of his father in all aspects of life. As he was growing up, the next phase in the Afghan history started, the civil war. This was unexpected for him. The biggest part of the civil war took place in his hometown, Kabul. The violence in Kabul was the reason he came to the Netherlands. He believed that the risk of

getting arrested or killed was too high. Later on, his two sisters got killed in the war. At that time Bostan was already living in the Netherlands and he was trying to make arrangements for them to come to the Netherlands as well. Unfortunately, the process was too prolonged. He mentioned this loss was very hard for him and made him depressed. He was, however, lucky to meet his wife, get married and get children. These happy events have helped him to go on with his life. Nevertheless, even though he has been living in the Netherlands for more than 20 years now, he still feels as if he has a debt to pay to Afghanistan. He feels responsibilities towards the country and still misses it every day.

Gulam is the sixth story of this research. Gulam is a 54-year-old man from Kabul, Afghanistan, who was victimised for 7 months in prison as a political prisoner. He grew up in a middle-class family and he was leading a peaceful life. That changed when the coup d'état took place when he was 15 years old. He started studying law and he was taking part in demonstrations and student risings since he was against the regime. He studied law for 1½ years before he got arrested. He mentioned that the whole experience of arrest and imprisonment changed him. After he was set free, some of his friends got arrested again within a month. The risk of getting arrested a second time was a risk he was not willing to take. At this point, he decided to flee the country to Pakistan and there he got in contact with some people from the Red Cross. They sent him and a couple of other students to Norway to talk at a conference in Oslo. While he is in Oslo, he spoke with others and decided not to go back to Afghanistan but stay in the Europe region. He is thankful that he was able to study and work in a safe and peaceful environment. His urge to be part of the resistance stays, however, present even today. He strongly feels that he has a debt to pay to Afghanistan and the people who have suffered there. Eventually, he returned for a couple of years to Afghanistan. There, he fights for justice and attention for Afghanistan's situation. After those years, he came back to the Netherlands but he is still trying to bring attention to the events happening in Afghanistan.

The last story is about **Alimi**. He is a 55-year-old man born in Kabul, Afghanistan. He was a political prisoner for 4½ years in the Pul-e-Charkhi prison. As a child growing up, he had a wealthy life. His father was highly educated and earning a decent income. Alimi did not need to work to be able to follow a study at University level. While he was studying at the University, the Soviet invasion started. As an opponent to that regime, he started to become politically active in student risings. His participation in these student risings eventually led to his arrest, and as a result, he was sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment. There, he experienced all forms of mental and physical torture from the KGB handbooks. Despite all the hardship he experienced, he still has a positive attitude towards his time in prison. After 4½ years in prison, he was released based on a general pardon. The risk of getting arrested again was, however, high. After he was informed that one of his friends got arrested again, he decided to flee to the Netherlands since the risk was too prominent. Alimi is happy with his life here. He feels connected with his community and actively participates in it. However, he also wants to do something for Afghanistan and the Afghan people in the future.

5.1 A bird's eye view: themes

This paragraph discusses the common themes that occur in the narratives of the Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands and links them to the previously described theory. These themes give more inside into the content of the narratives. They show the experiences of the victims and the influence of the experiences on their lives. They also show how the victims give meaning to their experiences and how they perceive justice. The themes are supported and explicated with quotes from the respondents' interviews. The quotes are translated from Dutch, the original text can be found in Appendix 5. This chapter first frames the experiences in the negative valence, suddenness and controllability because these elements are the basis for traumatic experiences. After that, the three levels of the socio-interpersonal model on the impact of traumatic experiences frame implicit themes.

5.1.1 Traumatic Experiences

It is important to remember that the experiences are likely to be perceived as traumatic when they are sudden, uncontrollable and negative. Experiences are mostly considered negative when they are physically or emotionally painful. During the interviews, it became clear that the victimising experiences of the respondents are negatively perceived events. The experiences of respondents mainly consisted of prison experiences. Not all of the respondents were victimised in prison themselves, but they all had someone close to them who became a victim there. This period has been a major influence on the victims. Therefore, the prison experiences are discussed more broadly than others.

Negative valence

During the first regime, the communist regime, the respondents became a victim of torture in prison. This torture entailed both physical and emotional torture. The respondents narrated their experienced suffering in great detail. The respondents who spend time in prison during this period were able to recall the exact date they were arrested, which shows the impact of the experience on their life story.

“Around 22 February some unrest appeared. It was commemorated again. Risings would take place again. One day before that rising – the remembrance – I was arrested.”ⁱ Gulam

All of the respondents who had victimising experiences in prison confirmed what the literature explained. The torture practices of the KhAD were extensive and involved different types of physical and psychological torture. The ex-political prisoners experienced emotional torture like being sworn at and being manipulated. Besides, they experienced physical torture like beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation and so on.

“Day and night, there was a strong light above your head. It was impossible to sleep. On the other side there were electric shocks. I experienced those myself.”ⁱⁱ Khadim

An event that causes a direct threat of physical or emotional pain is usually perceived as negative. The event is also perceived as negative when it is perceived as *likely* to cause physical or emotional pain or death. One of the situations that had a significant influence on the mental state of the respondents was the ceremonial way in which prisoners were killed during the night. The respondents specifically mentioned this ceremony during the interviews. The victims were confronted with their mortality and vulnerability.

“At night, when the lights were turned off, it was a sign for the people that there would be people shot. It was a kind of torture. It was intended, what they did, the sign of lights off for 10 minutes. Those 10 minutes, all – more than 20.000 people in the prison – all of them knew that tonight there would be a few people shot.”ⁱⁱⁱ Sayyid

Another person said:

“Every time, late at night, suddenly there was a very... what should I say... a weird way of securing. For example, no one was allowed in the hallways. All doors were closed, and many armed people were present in this big hallway in block 2. Or block 1 or block 3. It was the same. Many armed people. Once, for example, this room, two or three people. The list was called. One, two, three came from this room. One, two, three from that. In total 20, 25, 30 people. This happened every two weeks. Every three weeks.”^{iv} Alimi

Another example of the negative valence of the experiences of the Afghan victims are the living circumstances in prison. As said, the intensity, duration and nature of the events are important factors for the eventual consequences. These circumstances add to level of the intensity of the

experience on top of the torture practices. The circumstances in the prisons were very deplorable. The prisoners had no usual facilities. They were limited to use toilets or showers, and the prisoners had neither any place to sleep.

“Once in prison, there was a long hallway. 26 rooms. 2½ x 2½ meters, where three mattresses would fit. Here we were placed with seven people. Six people were able to sleep in the room. (...) The seventh person was sleeping outside.”^{v Gulam}

A type of event that is perceived as likely to cause death as well, are the many fights during the civil war. This regime caused many civilian casualties. In other words, the negative experiences of the Afghan people were not limited to the prisons.

“I was living in a village. Every day after four there was war. At one point we knew, every afternoon at four it would start again. You could see it. The people, in front of you – your neighbour, the neighbourhood girl – dying.”^{vi Bostan}

Suddenness

The respondents remembered explicit details about their arrest. For example, where it happened, how they were brought to the investigation place and everything after that. For the Afghan victims who were political prisoners, their victimising period started after their arrest. For two of them, that period extended until multiple years. Moreover, the particular way of the KhAD to make arrests create the suddenness. One moment, the victim was at work or meeting up with friends, the next moment they were taken to the investigation centre of the KhAD.

“And then I was taken by someone. Someone came to me, very polite. He wanted... He shook hands with me and asked if I was Alimi. ‘Yes, I am Alimi’. I happened to be with a group of students. He said he wanted to talk with me. I got an uneasy feeling. I wanted to say that I was going to the bathroom or somewhere. But, he said: ‘No, no, you cannot’. At that time, I noticed he was not alone. There was a group of people. All of them armed but it was not noticeable very well. He told me to step out for a moment. I found it very strange. I stepped outside, and I noticed the KhAD cars. Everyone well knew these types of cars. He threatened me to get into the car without talking or reacting. I noticed the danger. I was unable to do anything. The group I was with, most of them did not notice. Maybe one or two, but they did not know I was arrested until days later. When I sat in the car, they drove away. There were five cars in total. I was brought to the KhAD centre. It was called Shash Darak.”^{vii Alimi}

Furthermore, there were no clear rules during their time in prison. Therefore, it was impossible for the victims to adapt their behaviour to the standard. This impossibility makes them unable to prepare themselves for what was coming. This inability to prepare continues throughout the civil war. There was no way of telling when and where the fighting would start or continue, or when the Taliban would come. This makes the events sudden.

Controllability

Before the communist regime was in power, the people in Afghanistan felt safe and connected to their surroundings and home country. After the communist regime started, their sense of safety completely disappeared. Fear and anxiety are central themes in the lives of the respondents in Afghanistan. Feelings of extreme fear and helplessness are an essential part of the emotional response to the events. One respondent expressed this fear as follows:

“When you were not a member of the party you were under constant observation. Even though you were just a student, you always needed to be careful, especially with the people who were a member or with the secret service.”^{viii Bostan}

During the regimes, everything was controlled by the rulers from that time and their officers. For example, the ex-political prisoners expressed they had no control over anything. The prison guards had the power to decide on a person's faith.

"And then a soldier came. He was prison's God. He was able to do as he pleased with you. If you looked up, you looked wrong at him. You would get beaten up." ix Gulam

Furthermore, the prisoners were always aware of the torture practices. They could hear sounds or saw someone severely injured coming back. They could see what could happen but had no possibilities to react to it.

5.1.2 Individual level

As explained in the theoretical framework, level 1 is the individual level. On this level, personal symptoms and well-being become visible. During the interviews, it turned out that none of the victims has fully processed the events. When talking with the respondents, it became apparent that their experiences left a mark on them. An ex-political prisoner said:

"That whole experience of imprisonment, lock-up, deprivation of liberty, humiliation, torture, it leaves a mark on you." x Gulam

The respondents expressed the consequences of their experiences, which were both physical and mental. *Physical* pains were merely expressed as having chronic pains and hyperventilation. One of the respondents says his hands are shaking when he tries to lift things.

"From that time, I have something. I cannot keep my hands still." xi Khadim

Mental consequences, however, were much more common. Among the mental consequences are flashbacks, re-experiencing, nightmares, depression, and inability to talk about what happened to them. One of the respondents explains:

"At first, when I came here, when I heard aeroplanes - the sound of aeroplanes - I thought that bombs were coming." xii Nazia

One of the consequences of the experiences is that the respondents are stuck in the past. During the interview, the respondents were asked how they imagined their future. Then, it became clear that the respondents have difficulties to imagine their own future. When they were asked about their prospects, they mostly answered their life would not change too much, or they mentioned general thoughts as being positive or things that are happening for sure. For example, retiring was one of the things that was often mentioned.

"In 10 years, 15 years I am definitely retired. Maybe, a calmer life." xiii Khadim

However, the respondents had big hopes for the future of their children. They wished a good education and a good job for their children and that their children would become independent. The future of their children seemed to be extremely important to them. More important than their own future. One of the respondents talked about the future of his children but did not mention anything specific about his own future.

"Me: 'What do you imagine your future will be like?'"

Translator of the respondent: 'He has a positive view here. He hopes for his children to study and become independent'." xiv Yasin

Agency

Important to recall is that agency is connected to a victim's personal achievements and empowerment.

Achievements

The experiences of the respondents of being in prison and the severe oppression in later periods had a major influence on the rest of their lives. Dreams and hopes they had for the future got destroyed and that already started during the first regime. The PDPA had a big influence on the university studies. Some studies were not open for people who were not part of the PDPA party. For the students who were not a party member, the PDPA decided which study they were going to follow. At that moment these students were limited in achieving goals they envisioned before. For example, Khadim always dreamt of becoming a doctor or engineer. He chose to study medicine, but the PDPA placed him on the faculty of economy. As Khadim explained: *“those are two different worlds”* ^{Khadim}.

Especially, achievements with regards to jobs and education appeared to be important for the respondents. These achievements disappeared from the moment the Afghan victims came to the Netherlands. Their importance becomes evident because the respondents repeatedly come back to this subject. All respondents repeatedly mention their occupation and education during the interview both when they were living in Afghanistan and here in the Netherlands. They were especially comparing their situation then in Afghanistan and their situation now in the Netherlands.

“You are used to sit behind a desk all the time and to have a high-ranking position. You never had a low-ranking position. At once you become a taxi-driver on the payroll here.”
^{xv Sayyid}

They felt like all of their achievements in Afghanistan did not count anymore and they had to prove themselves all over again. They think of themselves as being lower than they were in Afghanistan. Their experience damages the agency of the victims again, which needs a process of sense and meaning-making to be restored.

“Here, I will never be more than just a refugee.” ^{xvi Bostan}

Dehumanisation

The ex-political prisoners were stripped of their humanity. The living circumstances in the prisons were deplorable and they had no control over anything. This situation is a process of dehumanisation and is especially of influence on a person's agency. With their victimisation, their agency got destroyed. This sense of agency is essential to come to terms with their experiences eventually.

During the civil war and the regime of the Taliban, this dehumanisation was also present. They did only consider the ethnic background of people when they were acting. The victims were no longer persons on themselves but just part of an ethnic group.

“They thought that Taliban are all Pashtun. The Hazaras were abducting all Pashtuns. Because of that, my brother was abducted. They thought we were Taliban. But, we were against the Taliban and all factions because we are socialist.” ^{xvii Nazia}

5.1.3 The close social relationships

The respondents mentioned the loss of loved ones repeatedly during the interviews. It shows the importance of close social relationships for them. They did not only mention the same persons more than once but also emphasised the different people they had known.

The family members are an important aspect of the close relationships circle. The consequences of the experiences of the victims can be extended to family members. Victims sometimes experience their victimisation accompanied by their wife and children. Others got

married afterwards. However, in both instances, the victimising experience had a significant influence on the family life.

“My husband was very ill because he was just released from prison. It was very difficult for him. He was dealing with many thoughts, and he is still receiving treatment from GGZ (...) Up until today, he is still getting all sorts of treatments. We also had to go to GGZ, because the children had to learn how to live with a patient. I also need to do a course to learn how to deal with it. That has been very hard.” xviii Nazia

As mentioned earlier, the respondents find their children the most important. This importance became especially clear when talking about a possible return to Afghanistan. The respondents have children that grew up here. Several factors brought them to the Netherlands, such as the lack of safety and stability, their fear for the regimes and the influence of these factors on their future and the future of their children. When talking about a possible return to Afghanistan during the interviews, all of them said to want to return. The current situation in Afghanistan, where there is still no safety and stability is, however, holding them back. Moreover, the prospects of their children are a crucial factor to not return. This connection is closely linked to communion. The importance of their children, a close relationship, rises above their own wish to return. However, it should be noted this especially counts for the respondents whose children have never been to Afghanistan. For example, one of the respondents has only been here for a couple of years. His children have spent the most their lives until now in Afghanistan. These children want to return to Afghanistan themselves to help and rebuild the country. They see it as their obligation, which the distant social level elaborates further.

Disclosure: Ability to talk, need for disclosure, emotional reaction during the disclosure

All of the respondents stressed the importance of sharing their story and their need to share their experiences with others. By sharing their life story, victims can connect with their community and the broader society, something that seems to be very important for the Afghan victims in the Netherlands. Moreover, the respondents feel grateful that someone is willing to do research into the situation of Afghanistan and that someone made time to listen to his or her story. They feel that previous attempts by Afghan organisations are not taken seriously. Therefore, they are hopeful and grateful that there is someone who is not focussed on the side of the perpetrators. One of the respondents expressed his dissatisfaction with the Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan.

“There is not some big effort or something. What do you propose? What are you going to do? What are your findings? What did you do during the past 17 years? What kind of investigation? I think this research at Tilburg University is even better and more effective. At least, that one will be in the archives. People can point each other towards it.” xix Khadim

An important factor of the sense- and meaning-making process is the way in which the respondents started telling about their life story. The respondents were not telling as extensively about their life before they got victimised. Regardless of how they got victimised, after a couple of introducing sentences, the respondents immediately shifted to the victimising events. A civil war victim started her story with the following sentence:

“When I was living in Afghanistan, when I was young, around 10 or 12 years old, my two uncles were killed by the Russian regime”. xx Nazia

One explanation for it is that the events play such a big role in their lives, that it becomes centralised. A victimising event shatters a person’s assumptions of orderliness and meaning and need an explanation. Since people use storytelling to make sense of their experiences, it can be the reason the victimising event becomes centralised to the story. A second reason

can be because culture influences what events are told. Respondents might choose these victimising events because they fit to their Afghan meta-narrative.

The respondents were very willing to talk about their experiences. They lacked, however, words to describe what they experienced. One of the respondents felt she had to endure much hardship in her life but when she was telling her story, she was only able to emphasise this by saying: *“It was very hard”* ^{Nazia}.

Another respondent was trying to explain the situation in prison, but he was unable to put his experience in words.

“Everything was extremely dirty. Yes, it was very... I cannot describe it.” ^{xxi Alimi}

Moreover, the respondents were often not able to tell a coherent story. They were disorderly shifting between subjects and experiences in different periods. Which shows, they are still in the process of making sense and giving meaning to their experiences to construct a coherent story. They did not fully come to terms with their experiences yet.

The respondents showed many emotions during the interview. One of them got so emotional that he needed a moment to catch his breath before he was able to continue. Another respondent expressed feeling bad again while sharing his story. Whereas an emotional reaction is expected on the individual level, showing pride is not necessarily expected. Despite their suffering, the respondents showed that they take great pride in their resistance to the regimes. Many of the respondents who got victimised in prison explicitly said that they were proud to be against the regime and to be part of the resistance. Even though that was the reason to get arrested and to endure the torture and maltreatment.

“I was fighting for freedom of speech and opinion. That is why I was in prison. The invasion of the country, my home country, by the outsiders. The Russian military invasion. Yes, in that period, when you were imprisoned, you were proud of it. I am proud of it, still.” ^{xxii Sayyid}

This pride is an important feature of the sense- and meaning-making process. The respondents who expressed these feelings of pride made sense of their experiences in a redemptive way. They were able to give a positive meaning to their experiences by linking it to these positive feelings of pride.

Social support

During their victimising period, every possibility for support got destroyed. As part of the emotional torture, prisoners were being isolated but the connection with others is vital for the respondents. All possibilities to connect with others were, however, being destroyed by the prison personnel. For example, when several prisoners were talking with each other about politics or religion, they were moved to another cell and heavily punished.

Besides, the respondents spoke of not having the opportunity to see their family. Direct contact was not allowed. If there was a possibility to have family visitors, it was only for a short time and they were heavily guarded.

“The first year I was not allowed to see my wife, my whole family.” ^{xxiii Sayyid}

The victims' social support got affected as well when they fled to the Netherlands. They had to leave behind their community, livelihood, a part of their family and their friends. Here, in the Netherlands, they had to start from scratch, without the support of a social network.

Communion

The respondents expressed a strong sense of communion. Both connections with society and connections with family are considered to be very important. For example, the respondents talked about their first concerns after they got arrested. Among these concerns were their family members.

“(..) on the other side, I was very unsettled about my parents.”^{xxiv} Alimi

Moreover, the other side, the family members did not know what had happened to their relatives most of the time. They were trying everything in their power to find answers. The ‘not knowing’ is hard for the families. This lack of knowledge victimises them indirectly and becomes clear from the following quote:

“There were about four or five places where they knew where these people were, one of them was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We had to write a letter and give it to them and we went there. Then, we had to wait the whole day behind the door. Waiting from morning till evening and eventually, you got a ‘no’ or ‘We do not know’ for an answer. All negative answers.”^{xxv} Bostan

Furthermore, the respondents who were ex-political prisoners expressed a need to connect during their victimisation. The network prison victims had outside of prison got destroyed when they were imprisoned and inside the prison the prisoners tried to re-establish a new sense of community, despite the risks. This attempt is showing the importance of a sense of communion for the respondents.

“(..) or gatherings to share stories. Among the prisoners were also security officers of the security service. When three or four people wanted to talk about politics, or... well, one night or day after that, he was moved to another cell. This was not normal moving. It came with heavy punishment.”^{xxvi} Alimi

5.1.4 The distant social level

The feeling of belonging to a group is essential for victims. Afghanistan, as a country, still plays an important role in the daily lives of the respondents. For example, all of the respondents remain up to date with Afghanistan’s current situation via the news.

“Every day killing, bombings and committing suicide. (...) Yesterday and today I saw it on television, something happened again.”^{xxvii} Sayyid

Furthermore, when they left Afghanistan, the respondents left behind their community, family and livelihood. After arriving in the Netherlands, they tried to establish new connections with the Dutch society. The two cultures are, however, entirely different. This difference makes it hard for them to adapt and re-established their sense of communion here.

“At first, the first years, I was even struggling with the smile of the Dutch people. You think, believe me, the Afghans think that the person smiling is laughing at me. Maybe, I am being laughed at. But, this is a beautiful culture.”^{xxviii} Khadim

The respondents are generally very satisfied with their lives in the Netherlands, especially with the Dutch facilities, safety and stability. Despite the high level of satisfaction, the respondents feel very nostalgic. As a refugee, the respondents miss their culture and their holidays among other things. One of the respondents explained this with the metaphor of *“cooking good food, but it lacks salt”*.^{Bostan}

On the other side, the respondents try to adapt to their new life. They contribute to and actively participate in their new society, the Dutch society. They actively take part in victim foundations or other foundations and join neighbourhood initiatives.

"I am someone who is very active. I do many activities. Societal engagement. Social engagement, of course... Here, I am a member of Afghan organisations. I am also part of the neighbourhood organisation." ^{xxix} Alimi

Collectively experienced trauma

As explained, the Afghan people have experienced collective trauma. The respondents see the Soviet invasion as the '*beginning of all misery for Afghanistan*'. They do, however, not want to diminish the impact of any of the other periods or the victims caused by those periods either. Despite the fact that most respondents got victimised in prison during the communist regime, they also explicitly stress the importance of taking in to account the next regimes. An ex-political prisoner said:

"(...) I do not only want to talk about that period. Also, later, the Mujahideen committed many horrible acts. Many horrible acts. Also, the Taliban and during the US intervention, they killed many civilians with their bombardments." ^{xxx} Khadim

When the Russians withdrew from Afghanistan, the Afghan people expected things to get better. The opposite, however, happened. The respondents even marked the periods after the communist regime to be even worse.

"I was against the occupation of Afghanistan by Russia and later when the Mujahideen came into power. I am not religious, and they were fundamentalists. An Islamic government. They were even worse than the previous." ^{xxxi} Sayyid

A possible explanation is the feeling of belonging to a group. During the communist regime, the Afghan people were united against the invader, Russia. During the civil war, Afghans were fighting each other based on ethnicity. Even though before the civil war people from different ethnicities were united in political parties for example.

The importance of belonging to a group also became apparent when the respondents were telling about their feelings of being strengthened because they were not alone. The respondents expressed they felt like they were in it together, that made them feel strong against the oppressor. This feeling of being strong shows a strong sense of communion.

"Even there, in prison, they never gave up. They had hope that one day they would be free again. He says: 'I was not the only person. There were many people'." ^{xxxii} Yasin

Acknowledgement of suffering

As explained in the theoretical framework, acknowledgement of suffering is a very important aspect for victims. They consider lack of this recognition as an injustice. Moreover, the acknowledgement is actually important on every level. It already starts with the point of view of the perpetrator. Barely any perpetrators have been punished in Afghanistan, and none of them took responsibility for their actions. In that way, the suffering of the victims remains unrecognised by this group.

Also, on the first level, the individual level, this acknowledgement is essential. However, the respondents sometimes do not recognise themselves as a victim. They are often focussed on the suffering of others or the people close to them instead.

"When I compare my suffering with the suffering of many other people, it is nothing what I experienced." ^{xxxiii} Gulam

In the social context, mainly level 3 (the distant social level), this acknowledgement is often lacking as well. Both the Netherlands and the international community have not done much. Even Afghanistan itself did not do anything useful for its victims. To start with the latter,

Afghanistan has ratified an amnesty law for some of the perpetrators. In other words, instead of recognising the victims and relieving their burden, the perpetrators are recognised and protected. Many of them remain in their powerful positions. As a consequence, the violations continue, which is something that is hard to deal with for the victims.

During the research, it became clear that there is a lack of attention for the situation in Afghanistan. While conducting the interviews, it became clear that most of the respondents actually became a victim multiple times in multiple ways. In the Netherlands, there has been barely any attention for the Afghan victims. The respondents, now living in the Netherlands, feel like they are living in a society where people simply do not know about the atrocities. Furthermore, the government does not always recognise them as victims. As a result, their suffering is not recognised to its full extent or not at all. They even feel victimised again when they come to the Netherlands.

“I was not only victimised by the puppet regime of Russia, but I was and still am victimised by the Dutch legislation on asylum applications in the Netherlands. No one is, like me or [friends name] or other friends, a real asylum seeker. A political asylum seeker. Most of the political asylum seekers are high officials of that time. They are mentally pressuring me. They are hacking my Facebook account. They follow every minute of my thoughts on social media. I was not recognised as a political asylum seeker, but they were.”^{xxxiv} Sayyid

Moreover, not only victims fled to Europe. Perpetrators from the first regimes fled to Europe and the Netherlands as well. These perpetrators are not recognised as such in the Netherlands. The victims here live alongside these perpetrators, which they find hard to deal with. All respondents expressed deep feelings of injustice towards this, especially about the fact that those perpetrators seem to live a good life here. The respondents feel the perpetrators of that time are living a wealthier life than they are, which is difficult to accept for them. The respondents mention their disappointment with the European system in this aspect. The system is not reacting appropriately to the perpetrators, which enables them to lead a good life in European countries, including the Netherlands. This is how Europe and the Netherlands lack actions.

“They come here and live 100 times better than I do. They do not work, because they already collected a lot of money. Stolen from the people of Afghanistan. And here, they live, and nobody cares because his capital is in other countries. In Russia. In Dubai and also in Afghanistan. They receive a lot of money, and they live with all the possibilities here and in Amerika and in England. The Netherlands or any other country did not do enough. It is very few and not convincing.”^{xxxv} Alimi

Communion

As seen above, the sense of communion on a distant social level becomes visible in different ways. The respondents express a need to connect with their surroundings and are still attached to Afghanistan. As mentioned at the close relationship level, sometimes the children feel an obligation to Afghanistan. Furthermore, the respondents themselves mentioned the *debt* they owe to Afghanistan. For the respondents, this is translated into the active participation in one or more organisations focussed on creating a better future for Afghanistan and the Afghan people. The respondents, joining these organisations, have made sense of their bad experiences in a redemptive way. They have translated that negative experience into doing good for their home country.

5.1.5 Justice reactions

This section discusses the perspective of the Afghan victims and it fits their thoughts into the four pillars of transitional justice. To refresh the memory: these pillars are prosecution, reform of laws and institutions, truth-seeking and reparations. The last part of this paragraph discusses justice as a goal for the Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands.

Prosecution

The respondents hope that eventually the persons responsible will need to take responsibility for their actions in some way or that they will be held accountable. The lack of accountability for perpetrators and their ability to continue to remain in powerful positions in Afghanistan is something that is impossible to accept for the victims. The respondents mention the wish for punishment for those who committed the atrocities. As becomes clear during the interviews, it is more of a means to prevent such a situation from happening again. The respondents want to see these perpetrators punished to change the current unstable, unsafe situation into a better one.

The people responsible for it need to be punished. As long as they will not be punished, there will not be safety or peace in Afghanistan. Those people are still in powerful positions. These people need to apologise to the Afghan people and accept what they did.” xxxvi Yasin

As explained before, the criminal justice processes serve important roles. It is a reaction to past crimes, and it helps to rebuild the rule of law. Especially for Afghanistan, the latter is critical. During the atrocities in Afghanistan, government officials have always been involved. This involvement completely damaged the rule of law. From a transitional justice point of view, it is important to re-establish this rule of law in order to achieve justice.

Recently, the ICC started an investigation. This effort, even though too few in the eyes of respondents, is appreciated. It is seen as being a good starting point and gives the respondents hope for real justice in the future. Nevertheless, they remain sceptic. This scepticism becomes specifically clear when talking about the preliminary process of the ICC.

“So many people get hope again due to the ICC. It is a good start. It is something positive. The people have hope, but they do not believe something is going to happen.” xxxvii Yasin

Reform of laws and institutions

Because the rule of law got severely damaged in Afghanistan, the respondents feel sceptic towards justice being done to their situation. The cause of this scepticism already started during the first regime. The respondents spoke of a special revolutionary court, which was giving prisoners their verdict. This was, however, not a fair process. For example, the prisoners had no right to an attorney, they were not allowed to speak during the process, and above all, the accusations were often false. In other words, the juridical institutions were not functioning correctly.

One day, after spending 11 months in an isolation cell, we all went to an alleged court. Without a lawyer, without a justification, without an accusation, without knowing anything about what I did. In the Court, I, together with my brother and my companions, was only asked: ‘what is your name?’, ‘what is your father’s name?’, ‘where do you live?’, ‘what do you do?’. Only this.” xxxviii Sayyid

Those same type of institutions are not functioning well in the current time. As explained above, in Afghanistan, none of the higher officials have been brought to justice yet. Therefore, a reform is necessary.

A second point that is stressed is the necessity to elimination foreign influences in Afghanistan. Throughout this research, this political game has been mentioned and explained several times. The foreign forces in Afghanistan have been a major determinant throughout the Afghan history.

“All factions need to disappear. Now, they all receive the help from foreign countries so that no one can stand up to them. If the foreign business is gone, these people can go out. From Europe, from America, all intellectuals can go to Afghanistan and start working. Then, Afghanistan will be safe and good in a couple of years I think.” ^{xxxix} Nazia

Moreover, the respondents strongly believe these influences are the reason that Afghanistan still doesn't know any peace, safety and stability.

“The United States, Russia and Iran, these three are enemies of peace.” ^{xl} Khadim

Eliminating this political game will contribute to the *peace* and *safety* in Afghanistan. As explained by the respondents, they think the foreign forces do not have the Afghan interests at heart. Right now, their support enables the situation to continue. Warlords still have access to weapons and continue to violate human rights.

As mentioned, scepticism about justice already started in the first regime, but in later regimes, this scepticism only grew stronger. The Mujahideen parties and Taliban were corrupt and were violating as many human rights as the previous regime. Afghans do not believe justice can be 'served' as long as the perpetrators of the regimes are still in power. The victims express the need to remove these persons from their positions.

“Their names need to be mentioned, of the people that did this. They should not be able to continue” ^{xli} Nazia

A well-functioning democracy is an envisioned end-point for the respondents. Being realistic, however, many steps need to be taken to get there. The respondents imagine something like a transition period. Where a well-functioning democracy is reached step by step. Nevertheless, eventually, they want a real democracy.

“In my country democracy is a freedom that the people are not used to. Therefore, they are unable to deal with it properly. After the Taliban fell, we were also there. We did not know anything about freedom, about democracy. Everyone changed their turban and traditional Afghan clothing for a tie and Western suit. They thought they became a Democrat. They bought and sold votes to get in power.” ^{xlii} Gulam

By establishing democracy, the Afghan people are given a voice to contribute to a stable government. By giving a voice to the Afghan people, the respondents are also given a voice. This aspect is important to re-establish their membership to the society. This membership got destroyed during the atrocities.

Truth-seeking

The communist regime is seen as the start of all injustices. From that moment on the Afghan people were oppressed because the regime came with many rules. Not obeying these rules in the eyes of the oppressor resulted in an arrest, torture and possibly murder. Thousands of people had this fate, and they were not given any reason for it. All respondents who experienced time in prison expressed incomprehension on the reason of their arrest. They did not take up any weapons. They only expressed their aversion to the regime. The respondents who were students when they were arrested, took part in one of the non-violent student risings.

However, freedom of thought and speech was nowhere to be found. Expressing, or even just having an opinion, was enough to be arrested.

“Only by talking to someone or just writing something or handing it out (...) But, not to get weapons. Having weapons to fight against the regime. That was not the case. We did not want that either. (...) When comparing it, I did nothing wrong” ^{xliii} Alimi

This lack of information on the reason of their arrests is a quite painful fact and is experienced as extremely unjust. The respondents still express this lack of information.

Reparations

The respondents did not speak directly about receiving reparations. Based on the theory this part, however, represents the implicit wishes for reparations. Firstly, the respondents express the importance of creating awareness. They want the Afghan people to learn about their rights and duties. The Afghans need to learn how a community needs to function, based on education, religion and interpersonal relations. This form can be seen as reparation in the form of guarantees of non-repetition.

Awareness is an important factor. People need to be aware of their own interests, their own rights and their duties. The people think we are ordinary people. We do not have rights or duties, so the officials can do as they please.” ^{xliv} Alimi

Awareness needs to be created through education and constitutes a lesson for the future. Often Nazi Germany is mentioned as an example. We learn about it. We create awareness of the atrocities that happened then and, in that way, we can learn a lesson from it. The respondents feel this same need for Afghanistan’s situation. This a reparation in the form of satisfaction.

As explained, the respondents express a need for punishment of the perpetrators. Punishment is, however, mostly not a goal in itself. During the interviews, it was clear that punishment serves multiple goals. Respondents specifically mention non-repetition and a lesson for the future.

“One thing is that someone did something which he needs to be punished for. But, it is also a lesson for the perpetrators and an example for the new generation.” ^{xlv} Bostan

Finally, one of the respondents also mentioned a need for measures that keep the memory alive, such as memorials or commemorative days. This reparation is categorised within satisfaction. Gulam said:

“It would be nice if the memories are captured.” ^{xlvi} Gulam

In addition, Khadim said they *“asked the government (...) to build a monument for the people in the mass graves from the Pul-e-Charkhi prison. Somewhere around the Pul-e-Charkhi prison.”* ^{xlvii} Khadim

Justice from an Afghan victim perspective

During the interviews, the respondents were asked what justice would entail for them. For the respondents, it entails three main elements. There is a just situation when there is *peace, safety and a stable political system*. It is important to note that the respondents specifically mention the differences in between peace and ‘real’ peace. The respondents specifically mention they want ‘real’ peace.

“The people in politics, the factions that fought each other, they can always make peace. But, when will there be real peace in the society?” ^{xlviii} Bostan

Peace also entails respect for people and respect for human rights. While talking to the respondents, this second layer of justice could be distinguished. It entails freedom and equality

The respondents expressed different goals they want to achieve. The primary goal is a better future. Therefore, they see punishment as a means of non-repetition and a lesson for the future. The respondents want to prevent the situation from happening in the future because they want to achieve freedom and equality, things that were lacking before.

5.2 A worm's eye view: plots

This paragraph creates a broader picture after discussing the different themes present in the narratives. For this purpose, it discusses plotlines that are visible through life stories of the Afghan war victims. These plotlines are important because the way victims frame their experiences says something about the way they make sense of them. There are mainly three plots fitting to the narratives of Afghan victims. These plotlines are 'overcoming the monster', 'quest' and 'tragedy'. First, it is important to note that every narrative is unique, but most of the narratives follow a combination of the three mentioned plotlines. The first two plotlines mainly show the fight for justice, and in the 'tragedy' plotline the suffering prevails. This paragraph starts with the tragedy plotline. After that, the paragraph discusses the other two plots.

5.2.1 Sometimes suffering is just suffering

Especially, two of the narratives follow this tragedy plot. This tragedy plotline is characterised by sad and tragic themes and does not have a happy ending. The traumatic experiences of the victims mainly explained these tragic themes, and they became visible on the different levels. On the individual level, the victim's symptoms as a result of the experiences become visible. On the close social relationships level, tragic themes become visible in the loss of family members. Finally, on the distant social level, it becomes visible in the need to get recognition for their suffering. One of the things the narratives of the victims show, is the lack of recognition of their victimhood. Due to the fact that their victimhood is not recognised, it is hard for them to share their stories in their current surroundings. Therefore, they barely shared their stories. However, it is important for the victim's recovery.

"There are very few people who did not lose a loved one. These people need something. A community to share their experiences." ^{xlix} Khadim

All narratives contain tragic themes, but not all of them follow contaminating sequences till the end, which characteristic is leading to this tragic plotline. Contaminating themes are both related to themes of agency and themes of communion. The agency themes become visible when the respondents talk about their jobs and education. They gave up their achievements in Afghanistan regarding jobs and education. When the respondents came to the Netherlands, they had to rebuild their lives. Even though the respondents might live a relatively good life, they are not satisfied. They feel dissatisfaction when they compare their current achievements and the achievements in Afghanistan. This dissatisfaction becomes even more evident when they compare themselves to some of the perpetrators that are living here.

Furthermore, contaminating themes in relation to communion become visible in the level of attachment to their deceased loved ones. The respondents explained they were suffering, due to their losses. Every single one of the respondents lost someone they were close to. A couple of examples:

"During this time one of my brothers, five years older, got killed in prison." Khadim

"From a group of 16, ultimately five could return to their lives. All others got hanged." Alimi

Negative experiences lay at the heart of this plot. The respondents who were ex-political prisoners during the communist regime had traumatic experiences during their time in prison. There, they were tortured physically and emotionally.

“From that moment, after a couple of minutes, the beating started. With all kinds of... Not only words but all kinds of beating with hand, with a metal stick. On your head and feet and...”ⁱ Alimi

Negative experiences, characterised by feelings of fear, occurred outside of prison as well. The fear and oppression continued throughout the whole period of war even though targeted groups changed from religious leaders to women, to all non-Pashtuns.

The respondents' narratives until they came to the Netherlands, all fit into the tragedy plot. They all experienced many tragic episodes. Besides, the respondents are still bearing the consequences of their experiences up until today. Some of them are still suffering from pain or mental problems. What is determining for the two narratives fitting here is their idea about their present situation and their imagined future. For these two their suffering continues until the current day. As said before, one of the respondents felt victimised by the asylum procedure in the Netherlands. Furthermore, one of the respondents mentioned he still feels scared today, because many torturers from that period are now living in the Netherlands or Europe as well.

“Everyone says to me ‘keep your mouth shut. Don’t talk too much. These people are also powerful here in the Netherlands’.”ⁱⁱⁱ Sayyid

The respondents whose story was narrated tragically do not see a bright, if any, future for themselves. For example, Bostan explained his future as follows:

“Well, we shall see, I cannot it say exactly.”^{liii} Bostan

This inability to imagine their future shows a narrative rupture in their identity that has not been made sense of. Their self-continuity is not restored yet.

5.2.2 What does not kill you makes you stronger

As seen above, the tragedy plotline is a plotline that consists of contaminating themes. Within this title, two plotlines are intertwined. The first is *Overcoming the monster* and the second is the *Quest*. Both of them follow redemptive sequences. All, but two, respondents narrated their stories in a redemptive way. The redemptive themes are mostly recognised in taking action to establish a better situation in Afghanistan and for the Afghan people. To achieve it, the respondents joined different organisations that try to achieve that goal.

First, these two plots will be elaborated separately. After that, the paragraph explains the way they are intertwined and how they together fall within title ‘what does not kill you makes you stronger’.

Overcoming the monster

To refresh the memory: this plot is about confronting and fighting a ‘monster’ or *evil force*. During their ‘fight’ the people might suffer, but eventually, they will win the fight. Regarding the atrocities in Afghanistan, the evil force takes several forms. First, the government and other people in leadership positions can be seen as the monster. These people enacted an oppressive regime, where rights are violated on a large scale.

“You were not allowed to write articles against the government. You were not allowed to say something. No freedom of speech or opinion. You were not allowed to... the radio broadcasting was controlled by the regime. The television was controlled by the regime. All publications were controlled by the regime.”^{liv} Sayyid

The respondents who fled to neighbouring countries returned to Afghanistan after the communist regime fell. That moment felt like a victory to them. Unfortunately, this struggle for freedom, rights and justice did not end then and there. The regimes that followed were just as much violating human rights and oppressing as the communist regime was.

The respondents overcame their personal hardship by seeking refuge in the Netherlands. Here, there is peace and safety. This secure situation enables them to continue their fight for freedom and rights for the people of Afghanistan. The ability of the respondents to transform their experiences into the continuation of the fight that started during the communist regime, shows the redemptive sequence in the respondents' life stories.

The monster, i.e. the oppressive regimes, that the Afghan people were facing has changed over time but is not defeated yet. Now, a lot of foreign forces are involved in the politics of Afghanistan. The respondents name this as one of the reasons that rights continue to be violated and that there is no peace, safety or justice.

"The Russians left in 1989 Afghanistan. Now peace is coming with the help of the NATO, the Americans and the Western countries. The Russians do not want that." ^{lv}
Khadim

The Overcoming the monster plot has a close connection to the Quest plot. Their Quest lies in achieving human rights and justice. It is something that goes hand in hand with fighting against the regimes. These regimes are impeding their ultimate goal of justice and freedom. This close connection will be explained later. First, the Quest plot showing in the narratives will be discussed.

Quest

As said, this plot line is about achieving an ultimate goal. This goal needs to be achieved at the cost of anything and becomes visible in the way in which the respondents give meaning to their experiences in their life stories. They try to transform their experiences into something meaningful. This transformation is translated into reaching the ultimate goal of the establishment of rights for the Afghan people and the achievement of justice for the victims.

The respondents started the quest for this goal already back in Afghanistan. They were striving for this goal by taking part in the student risings against the communist regime. They knew there was a big risk, but their *higher goal* needed to be achieved at the cost of anything.

"As Afghans, we fought against the big Soviet Union. Sometimes this meant proudly taking part in demonstrations or taking part in risings." ^{lvi} Gulam

Even today, the victims are striving for this goal. The respondents that are now living in the Netherlands are striving toward their goal from a big distance. The respondents are actively taking part in organisations that fight for rights and justice for Afghanistan. Some of them are also trying to make a difference in Afghanistan itself and returned for a period to Afghanistan.

"After that, I started taking part in Afghan refugee organisations. That, I have been doing for 20 years. I always go to meetings and demonstrations, and we have a website, newspapers, everything. That is what I am doing." ^{lvii} Nazia

It should be noted that the Quest plot is not at its end yet. The Afghan victims are still in the midst of the process of reaching their goal. As said, this plot is closely connected to the plot of Overcoming the monster. Both plots show the redemption sequelae in the narratives of the Afghan victims, they are intertwined and therefore, merge into 'what does not kill you makes you stronger'. In other words, the plots are reciprocal and inseparably linked. Reaching the goal means overcoming the monster. Also, by overcoming the monster, they started or continued the quest.

What does not kill you makes you stronger

As explained, the Quest of the Afghan victims is to achieve rights and justice. Striving for it goes hand in hand with overcoming the oppressive regimes. The regimes are violating the rights and preventing justice to prevail. By reaching their ultimate goal, the Afghan victims overcome their monster as well. In other words, overcoming their monster is part of their Quest.

"We want to do something for Afghanistan. But, everything was targeted on the Russians and the regime in power."^{lviii} Alimi

Together these plotlines explain how the Afghan victims make sense of their victimhood. The previous paragraphs already mentioned the theme of redemption. Such a redemptive narration is important since the redemption theme is associated with higher levels of well-being. The Afghan victims make sense of their experiences in a positive way. Eventually, their bad experiences made the Afghan victims stronger. The respondents are now able to fight against the evil that was responsible for their experiences. They actively participate in organisations that are fighting for justice, and they are trying to do something meaningful for Afghanistan. With their active participation, the victims are strengthening their sense of agency and communion.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the experiences of Afghan war victims with a focus on justice employing the narrative method. To go back to the beginning, the research question that was formulated in chapter 1 was: ***How are the experiences of injustice and preferred justice reactions narrated in the life stories of Afghan war survivors?***

A lot has happened in Afghanistan during the past 40 years. Afghanistan has known several regimes, one is considered even worse than the other. All those regimes caused an uncountable number of victims, oppression and fear.

Narratives of Afghan victims

The Afghan victims experienced several forms of injustice. The number of people that got victimised in prison is very high. These persons experienced many forms of torture consisting of both physical and psychological torture. Others lost their loved ones in prison or during one of the many fights during the civil war, Taliban ruling or US involvement. Oppression, fear and anxiety are major reoccurring themes because civilians were at risk at all times.

These experiences of injustice are possibly traumatic and can have far-reaching consequences, that become visible on three different levels: the individual, the close relationships and the distant social level. The respondents expressed a wish for a counter-reactions. This research investigated what an appropriate reaction entails. Transitional justice is the mechanism that is focused on helping post-conflict countries and victims come to terms with their experiences. The four pillars of transitional justice, prosecution, reform of laws and institutions, truth-seeking and reparations, all address essential aspects.

Furthermore, narratives play an important role. People construct a narrative identity and use their life stories to make sense of things that happened to them. The way in which they do this is important because it tells something about their recovery process. Therefore, this research looked at themes and possible plots in the narratives that were gathered.

The narrative identity and the process of sense- and meaning-making

One thing that should be remembered is that people are internalising important episodes and telling stories to create the narrative identity. It enables them to tell who they are and how they came to be like this. It structures the past, present and the future in such a way that there is a certain level of coherence in the life stories. Through their narrative identity, people can make sense of and give meaning to their experiences. The themes and plotlines in the stories are integrated into the life stories of the victims and, thus, in their narrative identity.

The findings show that development of the narrative identity of the Afghan victims residing in the Netherlands was impacted massively. The consequences of the traumatic events they experienced are both psychological and physical and are still felt up until the current day. Disclosure, as a crucial part of the development of the narrative identity and the sense- and meaning-making process, was difficult for them. The narrative rupture was still visible in the life stories. This entails that the victims were unable to reconstruct a coherent life story where they connected the past, present and future.

The experiences of the victims influenced both their sense of agency and communion. While coming to the Netherlands, they left behind their community, livelihood, family and friends. Thus, it was an enormous influence on their sense of communion. Communion is a very important theme for the Afghan victims. During the interviews this became visible in several

ways. Firstly, the victims tried to re-establish this sense of communion when they came to the Netherlands. They actively participate in the Dutch society. Due to difficulties because of culture differences, they stay, however, very attached to Afghanistan. Secondly, the victims have big needs of belonging to a group. Concerning this subject, the victims mentioned to be proud of fighting against the oppressor and mention that the first period was less hard for them. This is the period when all Afghans were united against the oppressor, whereas later several ethnic groups were fighting each other. This pride and the consideration of later periods being worse was an unexpected finding. Especially, since most of the respondents became victimised in prison during the first period.

Moreover, agency themes are important as well. Especially achievements in terms of jobs and education were mentioned repeatedly. Both of these themes are important for the development of the narrative identity and for the way in which the victims made sense of their experiences.

The process of sense- and meaning-making was visible in two ways in the life stories. They narrated their story either in a redemptive way or in a contaminating way. This distinction says a lot about the possible lasting consequences. Themes of redemption are associated with higher levels of well-being and mental health, whereas contaminating themes are the opposite. This difference is important for and visible in the development of the narrative identity as well. The respondents who followed a redemptive plotline were able to find strength in their victimising experiences and grew as a person. These respondents were able to restore their disrupted story into a coherent story by connecting the past, present and future. In their description of the future they imagined to take active part in Afghan victim organisations. On the other side, the victims who followed the contaminating plot were not able to reach that point. They were focussed on their past and ongoing negative experiences. Additionally, they were unable to envision a clear and bright future. In other words, they were unable to connect the past, present and future yet. Therefore, the development of their narrative identity is disturbed.

As became clear during the first analysis, victims want their harm to be recognised. Lack of that recognition is seen as an injustice. The feelings of injustice are translated into the wish for justice reactions. Furthermore, justice might be an important factor to deal with their experiences. The appropriate reaction depends on the needs of the victims, therefore, this research looked to the possible and desired reactions.

Justice

The victims were asked what justice would be according to them. When summarising their answers, a couple of common elements could be distinguished. Justice from an Afghan victim's perspective is a situation where Afghanistan is safe, there is peace, a stable government, and freedom and equality.

Furthermore, when discussing the content of justice, the respondents were clear about their perception. They expressed wishes that are consistent with the four pillars of transitional justice. Punishment plays an important role. The respondents express their needs for accountability and mostly see punishment as the best solution for this. They also expressed other goals that can be achieved by punishment. These goals are consistent with the existing reparation options. The respondents find prosecution necessary to prevent a similar situation in the future. In other words, it is a reparation in the form of a guarantee of non-repetition.

The respondents want to send a message and teach a lesson for the future. They do not want the impunity to become part of their culture. In other words, justice should be served to maintain the metanarrative, norms and values, which are influencing the development of the narrative identity. Their notion of justice is mainly forward looking. The respondents expressed, however, distrust in the western initiatives for criminal proceedings.

The respondents also stressed their dissatisfaction with the current governmental setup. As a contribution to a stable government, the respondents mentioned democracy. The respondents envision a *real* democracy. In that way, the victims are given back their voice and their membership in the community is reconfirmed. The dehumanising practices that made them become a victim damaged their sense of agency and communion. By reconfirming, these senses are restored and, in that way, the victims can reconstruct a coherent life story.

The influence of foreign forces is mentioned repeatedly. The respondents strongly believe the foreign forces are limiting justice in Afghanistan. In their life stories, the victims express strong feelings of distrust towards these influences.

5.2.3 Justice and the narratives

Both the themes and the plotlines show the importance of justice. For example, on the distant social level, where acknowledgement of suffering is an important theme. Justice involves acknowledgement of suffering for the Afghan victims. This theme becomes especially visible in the tragedy plotline. The victims explain they still suffer and are still being victimised due to the lack of a just situation. For example, Sayyid expressed he feels victimised by the Dutch asylum system. For him, his suffering did not finish when he left Afghanistan. His suffering continues.

Secondly, in the distinguished plotlines, the wish for justice became apparent. In the Quest plotline justice is part of the priceless goal pursued by the Afghan victims. This plot is showing the need for justice. Victims are actively pursuing activities to achieve justice up until today by actively participating in victim organisations.

In conclusion

To answer the research question in short: The Afghan victims experienced traumatic events that had a major influence on their narrative identity. They had to make sense of what happened to them by connecting the past, present and future in a coherent life story. The way in which they gave meaning to their experiences is important and mainly visible in the future prospects they see for themselves. Justice reactions are an important factor to make sense of what happened. The reactions mentioned by the respondents are consistent with the four pillars of transitional justice. The pillar of prosecution is mentioned most often, but punishment is actually a means to reach a better future. In other words, their notion of justice is mainly forward looking. Justice entails safety, peace, freedom, equality and a stable government.

Reflection

Researcher

Before my first interview, I was extremely nervous since I had never done research by conducting interviews before. Especially the fact that I could not prepare a list of questions was making me nervous. Fortunately, it got better every time.

It was hard for me to learn about these terrible stories. The emotions of the respondents could be felt, even if the respondents were not specifically talking about it. All the interviews left a big impression on me. However, one specific story that struck me as a researcher was when one of the respondents told about his time in a small cell with eight people. One of the others was a young boy, only 18 years old. He was arrested at the age of 16, and his verdict said he would be killed when he is 18. He was a religious person, even though he was analphabetic he carried a copy of the Koran with him. One evening he wanted to know if it would be his fault if the verses would touch the ground if he would get killed. Two days after this he got called by a guard and did not return. The respondent who experienced this was shocked and became emotional when telling this part of his story. He expressed that he found this emotional torture more harmful than the actual torture and suffering. For me, this highlighted the harshness and psychological torture of the treatment of prisoners.

There were times where I wanted to cry, but even more, I wanted and needed to stay professional. However, that does not change the fact that these stories deeply touched me. I will carry this experience for the rest of my life and I feel incredibly grateful to have experienced it, despite the hard times I had.

Some of the respondents even thanked me more than I could thank them. I was happy to hear that the respondents were finding it meaningful to share their story with me. I was surprised about their openness and willingness to share. Some of the respondents got emotional during the interview, which shows how profound these experiences still are for them. Some of the respondents had memories that were too hard to share for them, but they were very willing to share their story with me. For that, I am very grateful.

Methodology

Some points were already stressed earlier in this research, but to be complete, the limitations of this research will be elaborated in this paragraph.

The first point is concerning the sample. Contacts from the AVR Foundation formed the whole sample. Since all of the respondents were involved in the foundation, they might be thinking the same about several aspects touched upon in this research, like justice. It was tried to expand the sample size by using the snowballing method. Unfortunately, this only led to one other respondent. Therefore, it is not clear if the results are reflecting all Afghans residing in the Netherlands.

Another marginal note concerning the sample is that the sample size was rather small, even for a qualitative research like this. However, all stories had evident common themes and fitted in one of the distinguished plotlines.

Furthermore, not all respondents were able to communicate in either Dutch or English. Therefore, a translator was needed. The meaning of words might have been lost in the translation. Also, there is no way of knowing if the translator missed some points while translating and the researcher had no idea what was being said. In this way, valuable information might have been missed. Also, since the translator and respondent were related, it is unsure whether the respondent would have told the same things without the translator.

In addition, during a few of the interviews, a relative was present during the interview. This fact might have influenced the things the respondent shared with the researcher.

Another note is that the sample mostly consisted of ex-political prisoners, who became a victim during the first regimes. The results might be limited since it was unknown beforehand what the victims experienced and, in the end, it turned out the sample shows mostly one period.

Finally, the last limitation concerns the use of the narrative method. Even though it gives great insights that could not have been gained in any other way, the researcher might influence the outcome. The researcher's subjectivity influences the analysis. The first coding done by the researcher is focussing on things that stand out. These things might not be the same for every researcher.

Future research

Inability to find much other research on this topic leads to the conclusion that this is the first research looking at the Afghan victims of *all* of the regimes residing in the Netherland. Earlier research has mainly focussed on the first period, the Communist regime.

Additionally, the sample consisted of only one woman. Therefore, future research could be done into gender differences since this research cannot make any valid conclusions about it.

During one of the interviews, the daughters of the respondent were present during the interview, and it became apparent that they had clear ideas on some of the subjects discussed. Future research into the narratives of 2nd generation Afghans in the Netherlands can add much knowledge to what became known until now. All the more because severe victimisation also influences the family and family life.

Final remarks

Despite the limitation of this research, it adds much knowledge to what is known now. The previous research focussed on the victims of the first regime and the relatives of the victims of the first regime. With this research, a further attempt is made to give the Afghan victims a voice. As seen, their victimhood often goes unrecognised. Research in this area can, however, also be seen as a signal to situations like this, where atrocities are being ignored. The large-scale human rights offences should not go unrecognised and need to be punished.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Graphical overview of asylum applications

Asielverzoeken; nationaliteit, vanaf 1975

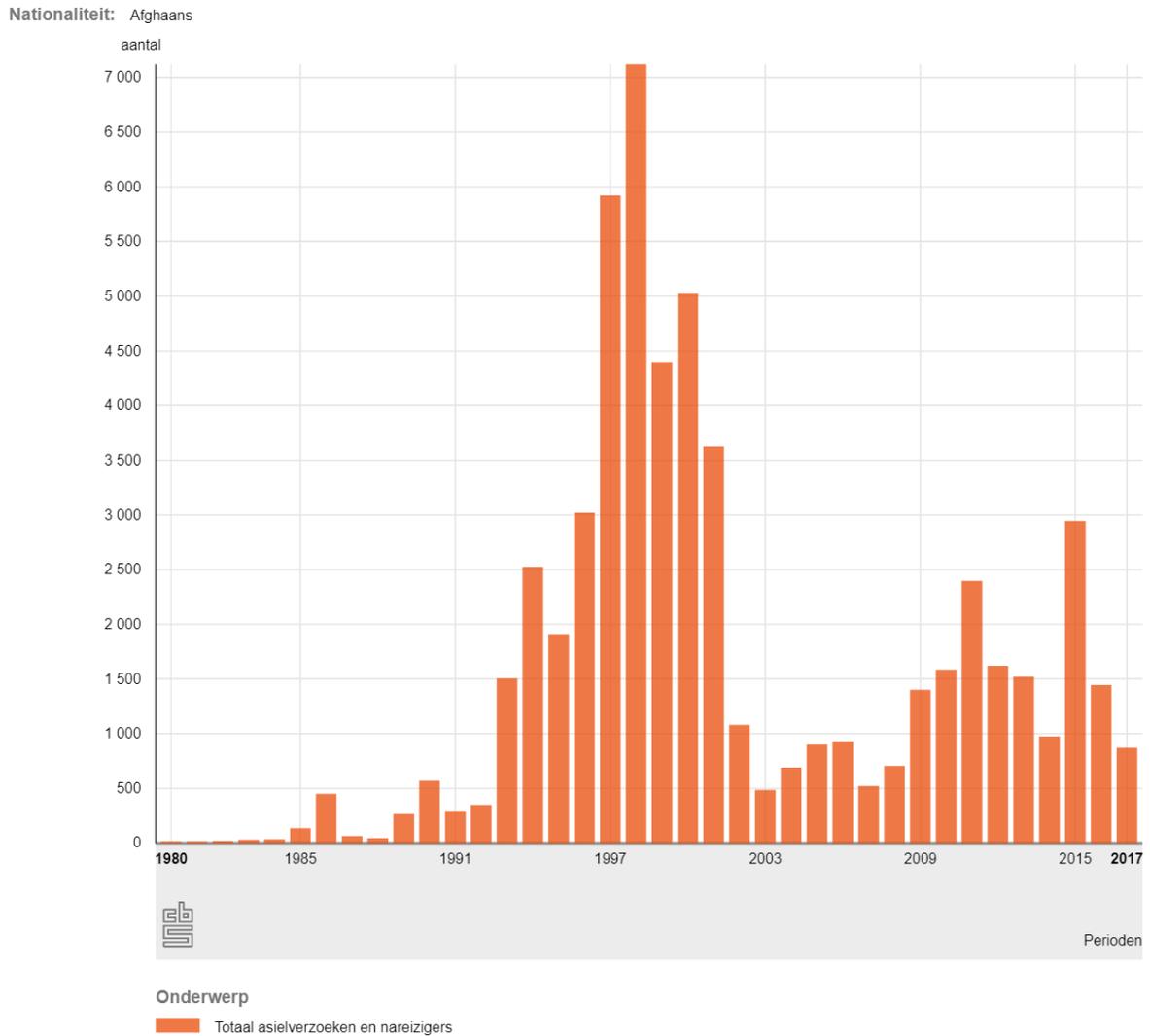


Figure 4 - Graphical overview of asylum applications from Afghans in between 1980-2017.

Source: CBS,
<https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/80059ned/barv?ts=1533022792255>, filter:
Afghanistan.

Appendix 2: Map of Afghanistan



Figure 5 - Map of Afghanistan showing indigenous tribes

Source: http://www.dnipogo.org/images/maps/afghanistan_ethnic_mix.htm

Appendix 3: Informed consent form

Toestemmingsverklaringformulier

Datum:

Plaats:

U bent gevraagd deel te nemen aan een interview voor het scriptieonderzoek over “Afghaanse slachtoffers”. Dit is een wetenschappelijk onderzoek dat verricht wordt door Kyra Rikhof, Master student aan Tilburg University, in Nederland.

Het doel van deze studie is kennis te verkrijgen over de ervaringen van slachtoffers van het geweld in Afghanistan door middel van het afnemen van een interview. Het interview zal opgenomen worden en zal bewaard worden als beveiligd document.

Uw persoonlijke gegevens zijn vertrouwelijk en zullen nooit gepubliceerd worden.

Door dit toestemmingsverklaringformulier te tekenen, ga ik akkoord met deelname aan dit scriptieonderzoek van Kyra Rikhof.

Ik bevestig dat ik...

- ben geïnformeerd over het onderzoek, zowel op papier als mondeling,
- de vormgeving en de inhoud van het onderzoek begrijp,
- de gelegenheid heb gehad vragen te stellen over het onderzoek voorafgaand, gedurende en na afloop van het interview en dat deze vragen voldoende zijn beantwoord,
- toe sta dat het interview wordt opgenomen en dat ik op elk moment mijn deelname kan terugtrekken, wanneer ik niet wil dat het interview wordt opgenomen.
- het recht heb om vragen *niet* te beantwoorden als ik me niet comfortabel voel de vraag te beantwoorden,
- toestemming geef voor de verwerking en de analyse van de data dat verzameld is voor wetenschappelijke doeleinden,

terwijl ik te allen tijde kan afzien van deelname aan het onderzoek, zonder daarvoor een reden te hoeven geven.

Persoonlijke gegevens respondent

Naam:

Leeftijd:

Land van herkomst:

Woonplaats:

Handtekening:

Appendix 4: Interview format

Datum:

Plaats:

Duur van het interview:

interview:

Naam respondent

E-mailadres (optioneel)

DEEL 1 - DEMOGRAFISCHE GEGEVENS

1. Geslacht

Man

Vrouw

2. Geboortedatum

3. Geboorteplaats

4. Burgerlijke staat

Gehuwd

Weduwe/weduwnaar

Gescheiden

Anders, nl:

5. Hoeveel kinderen heeft u? (Leeftijd?)

6. Religie

7. Hoogst genoten opleiding

8. Huidig beroep

9. Beroep beoefend in Afghanistan

10. Tot welke etnische groep rekent u zichzelf?

Pashtun

Turkmenen

Tajiken

Uzbeken

Hazaras

Anders, nl:

DEEL 2 – START VAN HET INTERVIEW

Introductie

We zullen nu beginnen met het interview. Het vervolg zal bestaan uit drie delen. In het eerste deel zullen we een tijdlijn maken, die uw leven reflecteert. Daarna krijgt u in het tweede gedeelte de gelegenheid om mij meer gedetailleerd te vertellen over de gebeurtenissen. Ter afsluiting zal ik nog een aantal aanvullende vragen stellen gebaseerd op het verhaal wat u met mij heeft willen delen.

Tijdlijn

[Start voice recorder]

[Tijdlijn tekenen]

Ik wil u nu vragen om samen met mij een tijdlijn van uw leven te maken, waarbij we de voor u belangrijke uw geboorte tot nu weergeven en waarbij we een blik op de toekomst proberen te werpen. Op deze manier maken we een korte samenvatting van de belangrijke gebeurtenissen in uw leven. Denkt u daarvoor aan uw leven alsof u het gaat vertellen als een logisch verhaal. Welke gebeurtenissen zou u daarin opnemen? Die gebeurtenissen hoeven niet per se iets te maken te hebben met de reden dat u naar Nederland bent gekomen. Het kan alles zijn dat voor u belangrijk was/is. U mag mij daar kort iets over vertellen. In het volgende gedeelte zullen we gaan focussen op de gebeurtenissen die ertoe hebben geleid dat u naar Nederland bent gekomen, die kunt u dan in meer detail vertellen.

DEEL 3 – HET LEVENVERHAAL

We hebben nu een samenvatting gemaakt van uw leven. In dit gedeelte gaan we focussen om de gebeurtenissen in uw leven die ertoe hebben geleid dat u naar Nederland bent gekomen. Hierbij is het belangrijkste hoe u de gebeurtenissen heeft ervaren. Het gaat om uw perspectief op de gebeurtenissen.

“Kunt u mij iets vertellen over de periode in uw leven voordat u naar Nederland kwam?”

[Hier ook vragen naar gebeurtenissen die belangrijk lijken te zijn op basis van de tijdlijn, die respondent niet meer terug laat komen door gelimiteerde tijdsframe waarnaar gevraagd wordt]

DEEL 4 – AANVULLENDE VRAGEN

Heel erg bedankt dat u uw verhaal met mij wilde delen. Ik heb nu een goed beeld van de manier waarop u de gebeurtenissen heeft ervaren. In het volgende gedeelte wil ik u graag nog een aantal aanvullende verdiepende vragen stellen op basis van het verhaal dat u mij hebt verteld.

[Deze vragen zijn ook afhankelijk van hetgeen de respondent al heeft verteld]

Onderwerp 1: Heden en de toekomst

Het voorgaande gedeelte zag vooral op gebeurtenissen in het verleden. Om een volledig beeld te krijgen wil ik u graag een vraag stellen over het heden en een over de toekomst.

Hoe zou u uw leven in Nederland omschrijven?

[Het doel is een beeld te krijgen of ze gelukkig zijn in hun huidige situatie, dit zou van invloed kunnen zijn op hun ideeën over het straffen van de daders, in welke mate ze nog bezig zijn met wat ze hebben mee gemaakt etc.]

Hoe ziet u uw toekomst?

[Ook hier is het is achterliggende doel te onderzoeken in hoeverre ze hun ervaringen een plek hebben kunnen geven en door zijn gegaan met hun leven]

Onderwerp 2: Slachtoffer en positionering ten opzichte van de dader

Ik zou nu graag een aantal vragen willen stellen die wat dieper in gaan op de gebeurtenissen die hebben geleid tot uw vertrek uit Afghanistan.

Voelt u zich een slachtoffer? Op welke manier en waarom voelt u zich een slachtoffer?

[Het al dan niet voelen als slachtoffer heeft invloed op volgende keuzes die een persoon maakt in zijn leven]

Wie is volgens u verantwoordelijk voor de gebeurtenissen?

Wat is uw gevoel ten opzichte van de verantwoordelijke personen?

Vindt u dat de verantwoordelijken gestraft moeten worden?

Heeft u de verantwoordelijken vergeven?

[Dit is om een idee te krijgen welke personen eventueel meegenomen zouden moeten worden, wanneer blijkt dat een strafproces tot een gerechtvaardigde situatie zal leiden. Bovendien maken deze vragen duidelijk in hoe het slachtoffer individueel over de 'daders' denkt]

Onderwerp 3: Justice

Nu zou ik graag wat dieper in gaan op passende reacties en rechtvaardigheid.

Wat zou een rechtvaardige situatie zijn volgens u?

Hoe moet dit volgens u worden vormgegeven?

[Hierbij gaat het er om hoe het een rechtvaardige situatie bereikt kan worden. Kan dit op nationaal niveau of zou het afgehandeld moeten worden middels een transitional justice mechanisme zoals de ICC. Of misschien lokale initiatieven of een truth and reconciliation commission]

Hoe zou volgens u de ideale toekomst situatie voor Afghanistan er uit zien?

Hoe kan die situatie bereikt worden?

Waarom hebben slachtoffers het meest behoefte volgens u?

[Deze vragen moeten inzicht verschaffen in eventuele andere behoeften en zaken die zullen leiden tot een gevoel van rechtvaardigheid. Welke acties zijn daarvoor vereist. Deze vragen richten zich op eventuele alternatieven voor een strafproces]

Appendix 5: Dutch translations of cited pieces of the interviews

ⁱ 22 februari werd het meestal een beetje onrustig. Het werd weer herdacht. Zal weer een opstand plaatsvinden. Eén dag voor die opstand - de herdenking van die opstand - werd ik opgepakt. ^{Gulam}

ⁱⁱ Dag en nacht hadden ze een hele sterke lamp boven je hoofd. Je kon er niet van slapen. En aan de andere kant was elektriciteitsschokken. Die heb ik zelf ook meegemaakt. ^{Khadim}

ⁱⁱⁱ 'S nachts, en de lichten gingen uit en dat was het teken voor de mensen dat er werd doodgeschoten. Dat was een soort marteling, een soort opzet, wat ze deden. Het teken van de lichten uit voor 10 minuten. In die 10 minuten wisten alle, meer dan 20.000 mensen die in de gevangenis zaten, al die mensen wisten dat er vanavond een paar mensen werden doodgeschoten. ^{Sayyid}

^{iv} Elke keer heel laat in de avond. Ineens een heel... wat moet ik zeggen... die rare manier van beveiligheids... die bijvoorbeeld, niemand mocht eigenlijk in de gangen. Alle deuren waren dicht en heel veel bewapende mensen in deze grote gang bij blok 2. Of blok 1 of blok 3, was hetzelfde. Heel veel bewapende mensen. En in 1x bijvoorbeeld in deze kamer 2 3 personen. De lijst werd genoemd of geroepen. 1 2 3 kwamen van die kamer. 1 2 3 van die kamer. In totaal 20 25 30 personen. Dat was elke 2 weken. Elke 3 weken. ^{Alimi}

^v Een keer in de gevangenis, daar was een lange gang, 26 kamers, 2 1/2 bij 2 1/2 waar 3 matrassen pasten. Daar zaten we met z'n 7en. 6 man kon erin slapen. Je kon misschien naast je vriend slapen, slapen met een afstand, maar als je op 1 matras zo (gebaard ongeveer 70 cm) met 2 personen moet slapen. 2 mannen. Zijn niet allemaal homoseksuelen, dus dan is het heel erg moeilijk om naast elkaar te gaan liggen. Dan lag de ene die kant met zijn hoofd en de andere deze kant, zodat er enigszins iets van privacy was, en de 7e man die sliep buiten. ^{Gulam}

^{vi} Ik woonde in een dorp waar bijna elke week oorlog was na 4 uur s middags. Op een gegeven moment wisten we gewoon, elke middag na 4 uur, nu begint het weer. Je zag het ook. De mensen voor je - buurvrouw, buurmeisje – doodgaan. ^{Bostan}

^{vii} Toen werd ik door iemand... iemand kwam naar mij en heel beleefd wilde hij met mij... hij gaf een hand en vroeg of ik Alimi ben. Ja, ik ben Alimi. En toevallig waren wij met twee of en groep studenten. En hij zij dat hij even met mij wilde praten. Ik kreeg een beetje een gevoel dat er iets aan de hand is. Ik wilde... zei tegen hem dat ik even naar toilet of ergens... hij zei, nee, nee mag niet. Inmiddels viel mij op dat hij niet de enige was. Maar er was een groep mensen. Alles bewapend. Alleen bewapen zonder dat iemand het voelt eigenlijk he, kan zien. Hij zei dat, even naar buiten. Ik dacht ja dat is een heel raar stel hier, je kunt het je niet voor stellen. Ik ging naar buiten. Ik merkte dat die auto's van de KhAD... misschien heb je die naam gehoord, het was... iedereen wist wat voor en nog enkele andere auto's waren erbij. En hij vroeg mij om binnen de auto te gaan. Maar hij dreigde mij om zonder iets te zeggen, zonder te reageren, heel normaal te gaan. Ik merkte dat het heel gevaarlijk was. Ik kon niets doen. Die groep mensen die, natuurlijk op.... Studenten die mij kenden, zij voelden het grotendeels niet. Misschien 1 of 2 wel, maar de meesten dachten oké misschien een vriend van mij is op.... Mijn geval, later wisten ze dat ik opgepakt was. Toen ik in de auto was en eerst ze reden weg met nog enkele auto's en alle twee bewapende mannen naast mij en ook de andere, behalve de driver... in totaal 5 maar nog andere auto's... ik werd naar een KhAD center, dat heette Shash Darak. ^{Alimi}

^{viii} Als je geen lid was van de partij hadden ze je de hele tijd onder toezicht. Terwijl je gewoon een student was. Je moest de hele tijd oppassen, met al die mensen die daar wel lid waren van de partij of de geheime dienst. ^{Bostan}

^{ix} Dan kwam zo'n soldaat en die was de god van de gevangenis. Hij kon doen en laten met je wat hij wou. Als je opkeek dan had je hem verkeerd aangekeken. Dan werd je in elkaar geslagen. ^{Gulam}

^x Die hele ervaring van gevangen name, naar opsluiting, vrijheidsberoving, vernedering, marteling, doet wat met je. ^{Gulam}

^{xi} Ik heb van die tijd iets dat ik mijn handen niet stabiel kan houden. ^{Khadim}

- xii *Toen ik voor het eerst hier kwam... toen ik vliegtuigen hoorde, het geluid van vliegtuigen, dacht ik misschien dat er straks bommen zouden komen.* ^{Nazia}
- xiii *Over 10 jaar, 15 jaar ben ik sowieso met pensioen. Misschien een wat rustiger leven.* ^{Khadim}
- xiv Ik: 'wat ziet u dan voor de toekomst?'
Tolk van de respondent: 'hij heeft een positief beeld hier. Hij hoopt dat zijn kinderen iets studeren en zelfstandig worden'. ^{Yasin}
- xv *Je bent gewend om achter het bureau te zitten werken de hele tijd. Hoge functie. Nooit een lage functie gehad. In een keer kwam je hier als taxichauffeur in loondienst* ^{Sayyid}
- xvi *Hier blijf ik gewoon een vluchteling* ^{Bostan}
- xvii *Ze dachten dat - de taliban zijn allemaal Pashtun - en de Hazara's gingen alle Pashtuns ontvoeren. Daardoor is mijn broer ook ontvoerd, ze dachten dat wij taliban waren. Maar wij waren tegen de taliban en alle partijen, want we waren socialist. Wij waren Pashtun, ze dachten dat wij aan de taliban kant stonden.* ^{Nazia}
- xviii *Mijn man was heel erg ziek want hij was net uit de gevangenis gekomen. Voor hem was het heel moeilijk. Hij had heel veel gedachten en hij is nog steeds onder behandeling van de GGZ. [] Tot nu toe is hij bezig met allerlei behandelingen en zijn wij ook naar de GGZ geweest, omdat de kinderen moeten leren hoe ze met een patiënt in huis moeten wonen. Ik moet ook een cursus volgen, hoe wij met hem moeten omgaan en dat was heel erg geweest hier.* ^{Nazia}
- xix *Er is geen sprake van een grootschalige activiteit of iets. Wat is je voorstel? Wat gaan jullie doen? Wat is jullie bevinding? Wat hebben jullie gedurende die 17 jaar gedaan? Wat voor een onderzoek? Ik denk dat het onderzoek van de universiteit Tilburg nog beter is en effectiever. Want dat staat tenminste in het archief. De mensen kunnen naar elkaar verwijzen.* ^{Khadim}
- xx *Toen ik in Afghanistan woonde, toen ik klein was bijna 10-12 jaar zijn mijn twee ooms dood gemaakt door het Russische regime".* ^{Nazia}
- xxi *Het was allemaal zo vies. Ja, het was heel... Kan ik eigenlijk niet schetsen.* ^{Alimi}
- xxii *Ik vocht voor meningsvrijheid en daardoor zat ik in de gevangenis. De bezetting van het land, het vaderland zeg maar, door de buitenlanders. De militaire bezetting, aanval door Rusland. Ja in die periode, tegen die onderdrukking, als je de gevangenis in moet, dan ben je daar trots op. Ik ben er trots op. Nog steeds.* ^{Sayyid}
- xxiii *Het eerst jaar mocht ik mijn vrouw niet zien, de hele familie niet zien.* ^{Sayyid}
- xxiv *[] van de andere kant was ik heel onrustig over mijn ouders.* ^{Alimi}
- xxv *Er waren 4 of 5 plekken waar ze wisten waar die mensen waren, dat was het ministerie van binnenlandse zaken. Daarvoor moesten we een brief schrijven en aan hun geven en gingen we daarnaartoe. Vervolgens moet je een hele dag daar achter de deur wachten van ochtend tot avond en uiteindelijk kreeg je nee als antwoord of weten wij niet. Allemaal negatieve antwoorden.* ^{Bostan}
- xxvi *Of van bijeenkomsten om iemand iets te kunnen vertellen. Tussen de gevangenaars zaten ook agenten van de veiligheidsdienst en als 3 personen of 4 personen iets wilden vertellen over politiek, over... ja... op die avond of een dag daarna werd hij geplaatst naar een andere cel. Maar dat was niet alleen een normale verplaatsing, maar met hele zware punishment.* ^{Alimi}
- xxvii *Elke dag vermoorden, bombarderen en zelfmoord plegen. Tegenwoordig. Heel veel. Gister en vandaag zag ik het op de televisie, er is weer iets gebeurd.* ^{Sayyid}
- xxviii *In eerste instantie. De eerste jaren had ik zelfs moeite met de glimlach van de NL'ers. Je denkt, geloof mij, de Afghanen denken dat die persoon die tegen mij lacht dat hij mij uitlacht, misschien. Ik word uitgelachen, terwijl dit een prachtige cultuur is.* ^{Khadim}
- xxix *Ik ben iemand die altijd heel actief is geweest wat betreft activiteiten. Maatschappelijke betrokkenheid. Sociale betrokkenheid, natuurlijk. [] Hier ben ik ook lid van Afgaanse verenigingen. Ik ben ook in de buurtcommissie hier.* ^{Alimi}
- xxx *[] ik ga niet alleen over die tijd periode praten, maar ook later. De Mujahideen hebben heel veel vervelende daden gepleegd. Heel veel slechte daden. Ook de Taliban en tijdens de Amerikanen. Zij hebben ook veel burgers vermoord met hun bombardementen.* ^{Khadim}
- xxxi *Ik was tegen het bezetten van Afghanistan door Rusland en later toen de Mujahideen opkwamen in de macht, ik ben niet gelovig en zij waren fundamentalisten. Islamitische regering. Die waren nog slechter dan de oude.* ^{Sayyid}

-
- xxxii Toen ze daar waren, in de gevangenis, hebben ze het eigenlijk nooit opgegeven. Ze hadden wel ergens hoop dat we misschien op een dag vrij zouden zijn. Door die reden leven ze zo. Hij zegt, ik was niet de enige persoon, er waren heel veel mensen. ^{Yasin}
- xxxiii Als ik mij vergelijk met mijn lijden, met het lijden van vele andere mensen, is het nihil wat ik meegemaakt heb. ^{Gulam}
- xxxiv Ik was niet alleen het slachtoffer van het marionettenregime van Rusland, maar ik was ook en nog steeds wel, slachtoffer van de kromme wetgeving van de asielaanvraag in NL. niemand is, zoals ik of [naam] of bevrienden van hun of van mij, de echte asielzoeker. Politiek asielzoeker. De meeste politieke asielzoekers zijn de hoge functionarissen van toen. Ze zetten mij geestelijk onder druk hier. Ze hacken mijn Facebook, ze achtervolgen elke minuut mijn gedachten via sociale media. Ik werd niet als politieke asielzoeker erkend, maar zij wel. Het is niet alleen dat. ik ben niet alleen slachtoffer van Afghanistan geweest, maar hier ook hoor. De wereld is krom hoor. ^{Sayyid}
- xxxv Ze komen hiernaartoe en hier leven ze 100x beter dan mij. Ze werken niet want ze hebben al veel geld verzameld. Gestolen van de mensen, van de bevolking. En hier leven ze en niemand interesseert het. Omdat zijn kapitaal in andere landen is. In Rusland. In Dubai en ook in Afghanistan. Ze krijgen heel veel geld en met heel veel mogelijkheden hier en in Amerika en Engeland leven ze. Tot nu toe heeft NL of een ander land absoluut niet voldoende gedaan. Het is heel weinig en niet overtuigend. ^{Alimi}
- xxxvi Mijn vader wil dat dat te mensen die afhankelijk waren voor al deze dingen (ze bedoeld verantwoordelijk) gestraft worden. Zolang die mensen niet gestraft worden, komt er geen veiligheid of vrede in Afghanistan. Die mensen zitten nog steeds in de macht. (Afghaans) die mensen moeten sorry zeggen tegen de mensen en moeten accepteren wat ze hebben gedaan. ^{Yasin}
- xxxvii Mijn vader zegt dat er zoveel mensen zijn die wel hoop krijgen door de ICC. Het is een goed begin. Het is een positief ding. Ze hebben wel hoop dat het gaat gebeuren. Maar veel mensen geloven het niet. ^{Yasin}
- xxxviii Op een dag, na 11 maanden in de geïsoleerde cel, moesten we allemaal naar de zogenaamde rechtbank gaan. Zonder advocaat, zonder rechtvaardiging, zonder beschuldiging, zonder iets te weten over wat ik gedaan heb. Alleen in de rechtbank word ik, en mijn broer en de andere rest van mijn kameraden wordt gevraagd: hoe heet jij, wat is de naam van je vader, waar woon je, wat is jou werk. Alleen dit. ^{Sayyid}
- xxxix Alle partijen moeten weg. Op dit moment krijgen ze allemaal hulp van het buitenland, dus niemand kan tegen hen op. Als alle buitenlandse handel weg is, dan kunnen ze gewoon naar buiten. Vanuit Europa van Amerika kunnen alle intellectuals naar binnen en zelf beginnen met werken. Dan denk ik dat het over een paar jaar veilig zou zijn en goed. ^{Nazia}
- xl Verenigde staten, Rusland en Iran, deze 3 zijn vijanden van de vrede. ^{Khadim}
- xli De namen moeten mentioned worden, dat die mensen dit dit dit hebben gedaan en zij mogen niet verder daar of dit doen. ^{Nazia}
- xlii Democratie ziet men in mijn land als vrijheden die men niet gewend is, daardoor kunnen ze daar niet goed mee om gaan. Na de val van de taliban was men ook daar, wist men niets van vrijheid, van democratie. Iedereen heeft zo'n tulband een proletariaat pet en Afghaanse kledij voor geruimd voor een stropdas en westerse kostuums en dacht dat je zo democraat bent geworden. Ze hebben stemmen gekocht. Stemmen verkocht om aan de macht te komen. ^{Gulam}
- xliiii Allen door met iemand te praten of gewoon iets te schrijven of uit te delen [] Maar niet om wapens te krijgen. Wapens in handen om tegen het regime te vechten, dat was niet. Wij wouden dat ook niet. [] als ik dat vergelijk, ik heb niets verkeerd gedaan. ^{Alimi}
- xliv Het bewust zijn van de mensen is een hele belangrijke factor. Dat mensen van eigen belangen, van eigene rechten en plichten besef hebben. Te weten als Afghaan als een mens welke rechten en plichten heb ik. [] Omdat ze het niet weten. Ze denken wij zijn normale mensen. We hebben geen andere rechten of plichten, dus zij mogen alles doen. ^{Alimi}
- xlv Het ene is dat iemand iets heeft gedaan en hij wordt gestraft daarvoor. De andere is voor de maatschappij en voor volgende generaties een les. Dat niemand dat doet. Kijk, als een misdadiger kan verklaren dat hij dat heeft gedaan en spijt heeft en iedereen weet dat hij dat heeft gedaan, dan kan je vergeven. Maar dan is het ook een les van de daders en een voorbeeld voor de nieuwe generatie. ^{Bostan}
- xlvi Het zou fijn zijn als er ergens de herinneringen worden vastgelegd. ^{Gulam}

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- xlvi [] gevraagd van de overheid [] om een monument op te bouwen voor de mensen in het massagraf bij Pul-e-Charkhi. In de omgeving van Pul-e-Charkhi. *Khadim*
- xlvi Kijk, de mensen die in de politiek zitten, die partijen die tegen elkaar hebben gevochten, ze kunnen altijd met elkaar vrede sluiten. Maar wanneer komt er echte vrede in de maatschappij? *Bostan*
- xlvi Er zijn weinig mensen die geen dierbare hebben verloren of. Die mensen hebben wel iets nodig. Een gemeenschap om de ervaring met elkaar te delen. *Khadim*
- i In die tijd is een van mijn broers, 5 jaar ouder, vermoord in de gevangenis. *Khadim*
Van die 16 zijn we 5 uiteindelijk terug in leven. Kunnen we met vrije voet naar buiten. De rest is allemaal opgehangen. *Alimi*
- ii Vanaf dat moment, eigenlijk na een paar minuten, begon met slagen, met allerlei... niet alleen met woorden, maar met allerlei, met slag en met een boks en met die metalen stok. Op je hoofd en je voeten en... *Alimi*
- iii Iedereen zegt tegen mij, hou je mond. Niet te veel praten. Die mensen zijn machtig, hier in NL ook. *Sayyid*
- iiii Ja, we zullen zien, ik kan het niet zo zeggen. *Bostan*
- lv Je mag niet... Geen artikelen schrijven tegen de overheid. Je mag niet iets zeggen, mondeling. Geen vrijheid, meningsvrijheid. Je mag niet... de radio was in de handen van het regime. De televisie was in handen van het regime. Alle publicatie was in handen van het regime. *Sayyid*
- lv De Russen zijn in 1988 weggegaan uit Afghanistan en nu komt vrede met de komst van de NAVO, de Amerikanen en het westen. De russen willen dat niet. *Khadim*
- lvi Wij als Afghanen vochten tegen de grote Sovjet-Unie en soms was dat trots gedemonstreerd of aan een opstand deelgenomen. *Gulam*
- lvii Daarna ben ik bezig gegaan met Afghaanse vluchtelingenorganisaties. Dat doe ik sinds 20 jaar. Dus ik ga altijd mee naar vergaderingen en demonstraties en we hebben een website en de kranten en alles. Dus ik ben bezig daarmee. *Nazia*
- lviii We willen eigenlijk iets doen voor... in verband met Afghanistan. Maar alles was gericht tegen de russen en tegen het regime die toen aan de macht was. *Alimi*