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Seeking Empowerment

Asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how asylum-seeking refugees manage their lives in the situation they are in, a situation in which they are dependent and have to wait for decisions on whether or not they will get to stay in the country in which they have made their application for asylum.

The elaboration upon these questions and the purpose of the study is approached through a field study of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden. The thesis presents a background of international migration, refugee migration, refugee migration from Afghanistan and the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in the EU and Sweden, which tells us both that asylum seekers and refugees are not welcome in the countries of the 'North', where policies of containment and repatriation are the most common features of treating the refugee 'problem' and that the long period of waiting and uncertainty creates a situation of passivity and ill-health among the asylum seekers.

Employing grounded theory methodology in different forms based in data from fieldwork, including participant observations and informal conversations, the study applies a constructionist grounded theory approach in the analyses of the situation and the management thereof.

Steered by this constructionist grounded theory approach, strengthened by a situational analysis, the thesis presents a situational frame pointing to the situation for the asylum-seeking refugees as temporal and dependent on Swedish national discourse, racism and paternalism.

With this background and frame and generated by data from the field study, the thesis goes on to present the situation as disempowering. The disempowering processes are illustrated through looking at dependence and inhospitality, and are characterised by the asylum-seeking refugees' oscillation between feelings of hope and despair.

It becomes, however, also evident that the asylum-seeking refugees take action and that they are supported by latent empowering processes. The actions taken are categorised as actions of empowering in opposition to the processes presented as disempowering. The actions of empowering are connected to keeping oneself occupied, searching for and maintaining social contacts and in the asylum-seeking refugees' representations of themselves.

From the presentation of the situation as disempowering and the actions taken by the asylum-seeking refugees in response to this situation as actions of empowering, a process characterised as seeking empowerment is presented. In this process empowerment is discussed as the establishment of power to resist. During the discussion of the concept of seeking empowerment it is shown how the asylum-seeking refugees in this study,

through their actions of empowering, try to resist the disempowering situation. By seeking to establish power to resist, they are seeking empowerment.

Keywords

Asylum seekers, refugees, refugee migration, empowerment, grounded theory, constructionist grounded theory, Afghanistan, Swedish asylum policy.

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Introduction

> All human beings are social agents. Our lives are constrained by structural factors but at the same time we seek to modify our circumstances by making choices and acting upon them. In the case of forced migrants the weight of constraint is overwhelming and the range of choices is often minimal: by considering refugees as human agents we can, however, examine the constraints upon them, the options available and how they experience displacement, flight and exile. (Marfleet 2006: 193)

The above statement sums up quite well the premises and the theoretical and methodological assumptions that have guided my research. The asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in this study are social agents struggling with constrained structural processes. The circumstances in which they find themselves while waiting for the asylum process to take its course limit their options of creating a better life for themselves.

I based the ideas for this project on personal meetings with internally displaced persons in Angola and asylum seekers in Sweden. From these meetings the thought-provoking question of how they manage their everyday lives in their extremely difficult living circumstances as refugees arose, in particular their position as unrecognised refugees, which is what both asylum seekers and internally displaced persons are. Asylum seekers and internally displaced people are not allowed the immediate protection of permanent residence in the country or region they have come to. They are dependent on and have to wait for decisions about whether they get to stay and/or for the situation to change so that return is possible if preferred. In Angola I met people displaced from their region of origin for decades[1], but still considered as displaced persons living in camps. In Sweden, asylum seekers may have to wait for years for final decisions. International refugees in this sense can be found waiting in warehoused conditions for extended periods of time, meaning that they are denied the human rights of living as normal lives as possible when in exile (U.S. Committee for Refugees 2004). In meeting with people in these difficult circumstances I have come to appreciate how they replace their limited possibilities with strategies and actions to make the most of their lives.

This thesis also points to the asylum-seeking refugees' activities and agency as opposed to a proposed passivity that is often shown to be the consequence for people who land up in similar situations. Latent empowering structures as opportunities to keep oneself occupied, creation of social networks, having access to information and communication, and showing the 'right behaviour', together with the meaningfulness of the

[1] Personal notes on internally displaced persons in Angola (1994).

project of leaving Afghanistan for Sweden, create a base from which to seek empowerment.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how asylum-seeking refugees manage their lives in the situation they are in. This is done with the help of a field study of the situation of being asylum-seeking refugees in Sweden and how they manage life in that situation. The field study is based in grounded theory methodology and in field work including participant observation and informal conversations. Questions that have evolved through the research process are: In what context do the actions of the asylum-seeking refugees take place? How do they perceive their situation? What do they do to manage their situation? How can their actions be understood through theories of the individual in society?

The elaboration upon the questions raised in this thesis and its purpose of understanding how asylum-seeking refugees manage their lives during existing circumstances is presented by firstly outlining the situation the asylum-seeking refugees find themselves in by referring to the background of international migration, refugee migration, refugee migration from Afghanistan and the reception of refugees in the EU and Sweden. This background generates an understanding of how the situation can be constructed within a situational frame of national discourse, racism and paternalism.

The situational frame relates both to the outlined background of international refugee migration and the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden as well as to an understanding of the situation constructed in my meeting with the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden. Their particular situation is presented as one of temporality and disempowerment, as found in the analysis of the observations made and the informal conversations that took place in field work. The connection to national discourse, racism and paternalism is made to point to possibilities for deeper understanding of these processes of temporality and disempowerment.

All this interplay sets the scene for the presentation of the empirical findings presented in the thesis. The empirical findings suggest that the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden find themselves in a disempowering situation of dependence and inhospitality and that they find themselves situated between hope and despair.

In this disempowering situation it becomes evident that there are actions taken by the asylum-seeking refugees and that there also are latent empowering processes allowing them to act. Actions taken within the mainly disempowering situation I present as actions of empowering, thus creating a counterbalance against the situation presented as disempowering. Instead the actions of empowering imply that there is empowerment to be found in the discovered actions of keeping oneself occupied, searching for and

maintaining social contacts as well as in the asylum-seeking refugees' representations of themselves.

Empowerment in this thesis should be understood as the establishment of power to resist. The actions of empowering I have found are firmly based in the project of seeking asylum in Sweden being meaningful, from which energy for the actions of empowering can be drawn. From the actions of empowering, with their basis in the disempowering situation, I present the concept of seeking empowerment. With the concept of seeking empowerment I wish to show how the actions taken within the mainly disempowering situation can be understood as efforts made by the asylum-seeking refugees seeking to establish power to resist. Seeking in this instance refers not to a case of being in a state of being empowered, but to a case of trying to bring about empowerment.

The concept of seeking empowerment contributes to an understanding of the actions of empowering by pointing to how challenging and stressful situations put demands on persons to be reflective and creative in their actions. The reflectivity and creativity I found, based in emotions that the disempowering situation evokes, thus make it a case of seeking empowerment through emotions in and of the situation.

The presentation and structure of the thesis takes the form of contextualising the field of study, asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden, before presenting the empirical findings of the situation and the management of it constructed through field work. This way of presenting the findings of this thesis does not mirror step by step how the analysis was constructed. By employing grounded theory methodology in different forms based on constructed data through field work, including participant observations and informal conversations, I have ended up in a constructionist grounded theory. The emerging use of grounded theory methodology and the construction of the analysis have been performed by relating the observations in the field to theory. The analysis has been characterised by going back and forth and checking between the observations made in the field and theory which can illuminate these findings. It is, however, problematic to visualise this shuttling back and forth between concrete findings in the field and larger and more abstract structures and discourses.

The structure of the presentation is intended to emphasise the importance of understanding the situation as framed by structures and discourses at levels that are not immediately visible in the empirical findings in the field. This frame is needed to understand how I discuss the situation found in the analysis as disempowering and how certain emotions and activities are related to this particular situation framed by extensive and abstract structural and discursive processes. The main emphasis in my presentation is on how the asylum-seeking refugees constrained by the situation create

ways of dealing with it and how these actions are related to the challenges and stress put on them by the situation.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters beginning with this introduction presenting the purpose of the study and introducing points of departure for the same. The chapter entitled Background will situate the study broadly within the field of international refugee migration. To contextualise the field I discuss the situation for refugees from Afghanistan, refugee reception in the EU and in Sweden and lastly in that chapter I also relate to reports and research on the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden. The chapter Methodology and Research Process will present the methodological design and practical realisation of the research, illustrating the assumptions of how reality is socially constructed in everyday lives and how a constructionist grounded theory can help us understand processes taking place in the field. The realisation of the research will present the practical considerations made through field work and analysis by also introducing issues of power, context and ethics. The process of doing field work will also be discussed separately to situate the construction of data in the field.

The chapter to follow, Situational Frame, seeks to illuminate the situation by describing what I identify as a disempowering situation. In order to do that I discuss how the asylum-seeking refugees try to make sense of the situation by perceiving it as one of temporality. I also relate the situation to studies of globalisation and postcolonial studies, and specifically global forces of nationalist discourse, racism and paternalism.

The two main empirical chapters, Disempowerment and Actions of Empowering, present the constructed categories, mirroring how the situation is perceived and how the refugees manage to handle it. In the chapter Disempowerment, the situation is discussed through the categories of dependence and inhospitality as well as through the emotions of hope and despair. The chapter Actions of Empowering provides a contrast to this situation by presenting an alternative and more invisible view where there is empowerment embedded in the meaningful project of leaving Afghanistan and applying for asylum in Sweden. It discusses how these actions of empowering take the form of keeping oneself occupied, searching for and maintaining social contacts and through representations of the self.

The chapter Seeking Empowerment discusses how these actions of empowering can be better understood with the help of an in-depth analysis of the concept of empowerment with special focus on the role of emotions in the process of seeking empowerment. The last chapter's concluding discussion sums up some of the findings, focusing on methodology and contributions to the field of study, and also points to what this study might mean for the understanding of the situation for asylum seekers.

Background

Refugee migration and more specifically Swedish policies on refugee migration will be in focus as the background to a field in which the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan are in when applying for asylum. Asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden serve as an example of a refugee experience connected to uneven globalising process. At the same time the reception and treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees in Sweden is an example of reactions to a refugee situation based in these global power relations. The reception of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan serves as a field in which the purpose of contributing to the understanding of how asylum-seeking refugees manage their lives and in what circumstances can be investigated.

The field of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden can be viewed as a meeting place, a meeting place in the sense used by Doreen Massey (1991), describing how a global sense of place integrates the global and the local. Instead of thinking of places with boundaries, we can imagine networks of social relations and understandings related to what is outside what we construct as the place itself. Whether we construct Sweden or the EU as the place in which asylum-seeking refugees are situated, these places are related to other places, places with networks of social relations and understandings both at the local and the global level. From Massey's discussion of a global sense of place, we can and must for the purpose of this study also relate the field of study (asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden) to the local and the global. Such a realisation is related to how social relations are stretched out over space. At every different level, structures of domination and subordination are part of economic, political and cultural social relations.

This chapter will introduce refugee migration and contextualise the study. Refugee migration will be contextualised through briefly presenting theories of international migration related to the field of refugee migration in Sweden. International migration and refugee migration will then be presented as part of uneven globalising processes, for example noting how, despite the widening gap between people in the world, there are not as many international or refugee migrants as one would expect and that the majority of refugees stay near their country of origin, thus never coming to the 'North'.

Refugee migration is discussed from the point of view of how refugee migration is treated among countries of the 'North', as something troublesome to deal with through containing the problem of refugees to regions from where they come or, if refugees manage to reach the borders of the 'North', how the concentration is on repatriation. At the same time the

same countries of the 'North' are obliged to obey the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Filtering down to the more immediate field of study, the refugee situation of Afghanistan will be presented as one of the major refugee situations in the world today with a history going back decades through wars in the country and it will be shown how the situation today, with the involvement of foreign forces from countries of the 'North', is still in turmoil, making people leave the country because of lack of security. It is also pointed out how the refugee population from Afghanistan has been the focus for repatriation strategies.

Refugee migration and the migration politics of the EU are discussed in the light of the efforts made within the union towards supranational solutions to the problem of refugees and asylum seekers, pursuing their own national interests. Much of the focus in these solutions is on containing the problem to the regions from where the refugees come through making it difficult to even reach the borders of countries in the union and through applying a 'root causes' approach to stop people from leaving their countries: a 'root causes' approach that focuses on economic development, promoting human rights and liberal democracy and even peace-keeping missions. Turning to the obligation to obey the 1951 Refugee Convention and receive refugees, there has been a move towards only granting temporary protection to refugees interpreted as being in need of protection.

Refugees in Sweden are discussed from the point of view of how Swedish authorities approach the question of refugees coming to Sweden. Sweden is presented as a country receiving a relatively large number of asylum seekers and refugees compared to its population, but which is very much involved in the promotion of supranational solutions within the EU and internationally with strong emphasis on containment, repatriation and temporary protection. It is also described how both the numbers of asylum seekers finding their way to Sweden and the numbers of asylum seekers being granted residence permits vary from year to year. During the period that the research was undertaken there were also changes in the Aliens' Act and procedures for receiving asylum seekers in Sweden that played a role in the lives of the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan participating in this study.

To conclude the chapter on the background I present reports made and earlier research into the Swedish reception of refugees and asylum seekers. It is discussed how immigration controls in Sweden have been strengthened over the years and how these developments can be understood in relation to both socio-economic reasons and reasons relating to nationalist discourse. The reports and research into how the situation of waiting for decisions influence the asylum seeker are presented as leading to passivity and ill-health and it is shown how occupation and meaningful activities are seen as something to work for. In these reports and research there are also

discussions to draw from that lead to the discussion underlying the analysis of the situation and how the asylum-seeking refugees manage this situation by being active in seeking empowerment.

International migration

International migration movements are one of the dynamics of globalisation, one which has intensified from the mid 1970s together with cross-border flows of investment, trade, cultural products and ideas (Castles and Miller 2003). It is difficult to know just how many international migrants there are. Between 1965 and 2000 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that the number of international migrants had doubled from 75 million people to 150 million people. Today the number of international migrants is estimated at 214 million, which is about 3% of the world's population (IOM 2010). These numbers are very much in doubt as not all international migrants are accounted for, but even if the number of international migrants is higher than what official statistics confirm, the majority of the world's population is not international migrants. To migrate internationally for whatever reason is still the exception to the rule. The impact of international migration is greater than numbers imply, though, and today most people have personal experience of international migration and its effects (Castles and Miller 2003).

In the light of this it is not the volume of international migrants which is the most interesting aspect, but the fact that the consequences of international migration go far beyond the actual numbers (Castles 2000). Papastergiadis (2000) connects international migration movements to the debate on globalisation and defines globalisation of migration as the

> …multiplication of migratory movements; differentiation in the economic, social and cultural backgrounds of immigrants; acceleration of migration patterns; expansion in the volume of migrants; feminization of migration; deterritorialization of cultural communities; and multiple loyalties of diasporas. (Papastergiadis 2000: 86)

International migration is related to internal migration and other forms of geographical mobility. People move longer or shorter distances and sometimes they cross national borders, making them international migrants. International migration is regulated, mainly by the receiving states, but on occasion also by the states of origin. To define international migration Tomas Hammar and Kristof Tamas (1997) point to migrants who move from one country to another and intend to stay in the receiving country for some time. In this regard refugees and asylum seekers are international migrants at the forced migration end of a continuum between voluntary and forced migration. Ishtiaq Ahmed (1997) discusses voluntary migration and forced migration as ideal-types conceptualised as a continuum. International migration is more often a mix of these extremes than pure cases that can be

categorised as one or the other. Voluntary and forced migration are related to a continuum of freedom of choice, from those with some choice as to when and where to move to those who have no control over when and where to migrate (Richmond 2002). For the purpose of this study, asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan will be viewed as migrants close to the extreme of forced migration and thus treated as refugees.

Important to note is that international migration is not as common as one might expect, even though the numbers of international migrants have increased. The difference in income between the 'rich' and the 'poor', the 'North' and 'South', and, from a Eurocentric perspective, the great opportunities of the 'North', should at first glance attract more people. Gunnar Malmberg (1997) shows how international migration is relatively uncommon compared to other forms of geographic mobility and international migration from the poorest countries is comparatively underrepresented. From a perspective of 'North' – 'South' relations, most international migrants from developing countries move to other developing countries. There are, as discussed by Malmberg and colleagues Hammar, Brochmann, Tamas and Faist (eds. 1997), many reasons and theoretical explanations for this. Among them is the regulation of migration, and refugee migration in particular, which is directly connected to the context of this study.

Poverty and inequality by themselves are thus not necessarily causal factors in migration or international migration. Although it would seem irrational for individuals not to migrate to where the riches are, the greater part of potential migrants never cross national borders to seek residence and a living across borders, especially not from the 'South' to the 'North'.

> This is puzzling because about half of the world's population constitute potential international migrants. They are supposed to have the necessary motivation to migrate since they do not belong to the upper echelons and they have the necessary resources to migrate because they are not absolutely poor. None the less, even many of those who are forced to move due to war, political instability, ecological disasters, economic catastrophes, or ethnic, religious, and tribal conflict never leave their country. At best they move to other developing countries – but not to the North. (Faist 2000: 4)

It is easy to forget that the vast majority of the world's population never moves across borders, and if they do so they move to other developing countries. Although the numbers of international migrants have increased and changes in the dynamics of international migration and refugee migration have changed, the main picture still remains: a small number of the world's inhabitants are international migrants and from the 'South' only a comparatively small number of people migrate to the 'North' as asylum seekers and refugees.

At the same time, international migration and especially refugee migration are very important to understand global processes of uneven development. Uneven development in our globalised world produces migratory movements and international migration is set to continue growing in numbers, not least because of the widening gap between the rich and poor in the world (Castles and Miller 2003). Free movement of people from low income countries and across borders into high income countries is not likely though. Most probable is that barriers to international migration from the 'South' to the 'North' will be strengthened. Refugee migration is part of this unwanted international migration.

Refugee migration

Definitions of asylum seekers and refugees are normally referred to the definitions of the refugee in the UNHCR Convention from 1951 which states that:

> A person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. (UNHCR 2007a)

Another definition in the Convention, which is directed towards the responsibility of the receiving states that have signed the Convention, is that of 'non-refoulement'.

> No Contracting State shall expel or return *[refouler]* a refugee against his or her own will in any manner whatsoever to the frontier of territories where life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group or political opinion. (UNHCR 2007a)

These two sections from the Convention are used by Whittaker (2006) to define and give a background to a discussion on asylum seekers and refugees in the contemporary world. The texts of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 protocol (UNHCR 2007a) provide the background to interpretations of the refugee situation and to national responses by the contracting states. Following the definitions of refugees Whittaker gives the following definition of an asylum seeker.

> Generally, in the eyes of authority, an asylum seeker is a person in transit who is applying for sanctuary in some other place than his native land. He is a migrant in search of something better and in that sense is an intending immigrant. He has moved across frontiers, in common with the recognised refugee, but motives and experiences will have to be rigorously examined to see whether or not they meet the strict definition as enacted in the Convention of 1951 and the protocol of 1967. (Whittaker 2006: 7)

Embedded in these definitions are emphases on individuality and on the asylum seeker being male, while referring to persons as individuals and their individual fear of persecution, who, based on these assumptions, also have to prove their status as recognised refugees. These sections from the 1951 Refugee Convention and the definition used by Whittaker in regard to asylum seekers give a background to the legal and official frameworks within which one can be an asylum-seeking refugee.[2]

Refugee migration is related to global forces of the world system, a world system in which capitalism is the driving force. Therefore the discussion on refugee migration needs to be understood in relation to capitalism as well as colonialism as they are historically intertwined. It is about relations between nation states and the relation between the nation state and capitalism. Refugees are dependent on the game of political control, power and money. How refugees are viewed and treated by the international community is thus dependent on the existing relations in the world system. One element in the world system today is the contradiction between the free movement of capital and the existence of political and economic elites co-existing with strong efforts to control migration over borders, especially into richer economies. Today refugees are seen as strangers in the 'rich' world, partly because they are viewed as coming from 'strange' places and partly because they are not seen as refugees in the strict sense of the word, but rather as economical migrants. The actions of the US and Europe support a view that they cannot afford to host these refugees either economically or politically because they are afraid of destabilising societies. The best solution to the refugee problem is, from that point of view, stronger immigration controls, repatriation and containment (Marfleet 2006).

The situation for refugees and how it depends on existing relations within the world system is visualised by Philip Marfleet (2006) who shows a background of changes in the view on refugees from the Second World War to today. The politics concerning refugees from the communist block were quite open. Refugees from the communist countries were seen as ambassadors for the greatness of liberal democracy, proving that communism was evil. Today, refugees are rather seen as threats to the promotion of liberal democracy in the receiving states of the 'North', as a large amount of refugees disturb ordered society. At the same time large numbers of refugees are today coming from countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where the liberal states are involved in supporting liberal

[2] The use of the concept of asylum-seeking refugee in this thesis is only indirectly based on the definitions above and based rather more on a subjective definition. The definition asylum-seeking refugee is based on the assumption that by applying for asylum in another country, a person seeks the protection of that country on the premise that they are refugees.

democracy and the government in place. To receive refugees from these countries would be to admit defeat, that they are not in control and that the installation of liberal democracy as a reflection of their own is not working out.

A situation is described in which states are more and more unwilling or incapable of giving protection to refugees. Refugees are seen as a threat to national and regional security. Everywhere there are laws to prevent refugees from entering states and laws limiting the rights of refugees. This is in sharp contrast to the time of the Cold War, when attitudes towards refugees were more tolerant and welcoming. This tolerance, built on the war on communism and refugees coming from communist countries, has been changed into an increasing interest among states to keep refugees outside their own borders and/or send them back. This is a worldwide trend and repatriation is seen as the only effective solution to the refugee problem (Loescher 2003).

The 'solution' to the 'problem' of refugee migration is thus very much a question of controlling and limiting the number of refugees. This is also partly done through the rhetoric of humanism in which 'rich' states talk of relieving people of situations from which they need to seek refuge. Controlling and limiting refugee immigration, though, is the paramount perspective of the states of the 'North'. Castles (2003) paints a picture in which the supported and supporting intergovernmental agencies of the states of the North have introduced entry restrictions to the north and 'containment' measures to the south, in order to prevent refugee migration. Entry restrictions include efforts to keep refugees outside the borders and then efforts to repatriate the refugees once they are in the country. Containment measures may include humanitarian aid, peace-keeping missions and even military intervention. One way of containing the problem of refugees to the 'North' and reducing the numbers of refugees is the 'root causes' approach (Richmond 2002), which is closely related to the containment measures mentioned above. At the same time as the 'North' tries to control and limit the numbers of refugees, Castles (2003: 18) argues that '*...the North does more to cause forced migration than to stop it, through enforcing an international economic and political order that causes underdevelopment and conflict*'.

In an era of globalisation and the weakening or at least transformation of the nation state, one can see that immigration controls in the EU and the US have been strengthened in the last decades. These immigration controls can be traced back hundreds of years in Western Europe, where the racialisation of particular groups of immigrants was pioneered in the late nineteenth century, first towards black and third world populations and continuing with refugees and asylum seekers today (Mynott 2002). Nation states are no longer able to effectively control their borders but they continue trying by

using harsh methods to try to control in-migration. Anthony H Richmond (Richmond 1994 in 2002: 709) relates to the controls of in-migration as a form of global apartheid as *'Attempts to restrict the flow of so-called "economic refugees" and others seeking asylum from political persecution have led to a form of "global apartheid"'.*

Further, immigration controls have also contributed to serious erosion of human rights. The talk of immigration and the welfare state and the costs of asylum seekers has led to a discussion on legitimate political refugees and illegitimate economic refugees (Faist 2000). Richmond (2002: 718) states that this means that '*Labelling asylum applicants, and others fleeing persecution and civil war, as "really" just economic migrants is based on misunderstanding and prejudice*.'

The controls and limitations upon the movements of refugees reacts to and takes its starting point in a discourse of increased numbers of asylum seekers and declarations of migrants from poorer countries coming in swarms. Speaking of refugees coming in swarms is made although the numbers show that only a small section of the total number of refugees ever gets to the borders of the 'North'. One reaction to these imagined swarms of refugees is addressed from a viewpoint of 'burden sharing'. Burden sharing is high on the agenda within the 'North', but in reality the sharing of the 'burden' is strikingly disproportionate between the 'North' and 'South'.

> During the 1990s roughly 100,000 Afghans sought asylum in Europe – nearly half were rejected. Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics, in which it is proposed to 'regionalise' or, more accurately, confine Afghan refugees in future, already contain between three and four million. Burden-sharing, then, is strictly a tussle between developed countries. The real burden must remain where it originated – and with those regions there is little evidence of Europe's willingness to share anything much. (Harding 2000: 73-74)

The 'burden' to share is that the world has seen a dramatic increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers from the mid-1980s and asylum has since become a major political issue in the 'North'. The number of refugees grew from 2.4 million in 1975 to 10.5 million in 1985 and 14.9 million in 1990, with a peak in the number of refugees in 1993 with 18.1 million. By 2000 the number was 12.1 million (Castles and Miller 2003). These numbers only reflect refugees recognised as such through the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees by the international community and under the umbrella of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. There are also numbers of unreported refugees living outside their country of origin but not accounted for in the statistics. For the period of this study the U.S. Committee for Refugees (2007; 2009) reported between 11.5 million (2004) and 14.9 million (2001) refugees and

asylum seekers at each year's end between 1998 and 2006. In 2008 the reported number was 13.6 million.

Despite showing that the number of refugees, although increasing, still constitutes only a small part of the world's international migrants and an even smaller part of the world's total population, the number of refugees creates both great debates and significant measures, especially in the 'North', for protection against them. What the statistics also show is that definitions are important. Counting the number of refugees implies defining who is and who is not a refugee and who is an asylum seeker.

With these definitions it is also up to the asylum-seeking refugee to individually prove that he or she is in well-founded fear of persecution. After applying for asylum the process and struggle for recognition thus begins. The struggle for recognition starts from a point where one is not welcome in which:

> Western states make the assumption that most applicants for refugee status are inauthentic – that they do not move under compulsion, seeking security, but are opportunists whose aim is to exploit potential host societies. Increasingly they also view refugees as 'illegals' – people who evade migration controls and who, placing themselves outside the law, abandon their rights to asylum. (Marfleet 2006: 164)

The struggle for recognition and not being welcome is a central theme through this report and I will come back to what this more directly implies. Filtering down to the field of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden I will now go on discussing the refugee situation of Afghanistan and policies towards refugees and asylum seekers in the EU and more particularly in Sweden.

Refugees from Afghanistan

Afghanistan has suffered from wars of occupation and struggles between east and west during the Cold War and through sponsored (by foreign states with different political objectives) warring groups within. In an overview of Afghan population movement from 1979 until 2001 Daniel A. Kronenfeld (2008) describes how it is likely that at least one third of the population has been displaced from their homes at some point in their lives. In December 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan approximately 3.8 million people fled the country. Hundreds of thousands more people fled the country during the following decade of war between the Soviets and the insurgency, made up of loosely allied warrior groups called the 'mujahedeen', who were supported with weapons and money from the West.

In 1988 it seemed as if the troubles might come to an end as the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. The return of refugees did not start until 1992 when the Soviet-backed government finally fell. Soon after this, however, war started again between different groups of

mujahedeen warriors in the country, especially in and around the capital of Kabul. This war created a situation with more refugees and internally displaced persons. After some years there was again hope as the Taliban was able to end the conflict among the mujahedeen. Refugee returns were once again hoped for, but as the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1996 it was clear that the war and severe repression of the people of Afghanistan was not over. The Taliban, taking control of the country, committed atrocities and repressed the population and at the same time the mujahedeen forces again allied to fight for the power of Afghanistan and against the Taliban.

After the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 Afghanistan was very much in focus in the Western world, with the invasion of the country by the US and its allies and the subsequent fall of the Taliban regime in December 2001. These dramatic changes would bring with them free elections for President, the adoption of a new Constitution and the installation of a National Assembly. There was hope, in Afghanistan and abroad, of developments towards a less violent and richer future with the assistance of the international community (UNHCR 2007b). The UNHCR sees this optimism reflected in the return home of more than 4 million people. The promises of economic development and security have not as yet been fulfilled. The insurgency affects a large proportion of the population and in many conflict-affected provinces the presence of the central government is limited. Violence is connected both to the attacks made by the insurgents, including suicide bombings, and counter-insurgency operations. Poppy growing and drug trafficking are also contributing to the lack of security in the country. This insecurity has created new displacement and discouraged the return of more refugees (UNHCR 2007b).

The Afghan refugee population is one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Between 1996 and 2005 the number of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan has been over 2 million people, with a high of 3.8 million asylum seekers and refugees in 2001. The vast majority of these, for example 3.7 million of the total 3.8 million refugees and asylum seekers in 2001, could be found in the neighbouring states of Pakistan and Iran. Another example of the distribution of Afghan refugees between the 'North' and 'South' is that in 2004 a mere 1,353 persons had sought asylum in Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2004) compared to the total number of 2.1 million asylum seekers and refugees from Afghanistan in the same year; most of them (about 2 million) were divided between Pakistan and Iran (UNHCR 2005). Asylum seekers in industrialised countries originating from Afghanistan totalled 8,657 in 2006 and 9,309 in 2007 making them the seventh and eighth biggest group of asylum seekers in industrialised countries.

Movement marks Afghan society and many (if not most) people have left the country at some point and many have also returned. The constant

mobility and migration make it difficult to categorise the movement of Afghans as, for example, either 'economic migrants', 'political refugees', 'voluntary' versus 'forced' migration or for that matter 'host country' or 'return' (Monsutti 2008). Although Afghans have moved out of the country in numbers due to events relating to great disturbances of society, each individual movement is in tune with the individual sociology of the person (Connor in Monsutti 2008), meaning that they have their own differing reasons for leaving the country. Afghans have moved due to war, but their circumstances and reasons for seeking refuge elsewhere in the world are a part of their own sociology, creating a need to nuance the dynamics of Afghan movement in general and refugee migration in particular.

One such nuanced understanding of refugee migration is that, without underestimating the hardships faced by refugees, they can also be seen as not mere victims of circumstances, but also creative people adapting to the world around them. This statement is made by Alessandro Monsutti (2008) in relation to transnational connections made by Afghans in exile around the world, including in Western societies. Answering the question of not why people migrate to and from Afghanistan, but how, Monsutti presents three complementary phenomena of solidarity:

> ...first, the spatial mobility of individuals, their transnational routes and the migrant smuggling rings (travelling is risky, involves trust relationships and implements common economic strategies); then, the transfer of goods and money, and the trading activities across international borders; finally, the circulation of information through visits, telephone, letters and e-mail. (Monsutti 2008: 67)

Monsutti makes three claims from his study on Afghan mobility: the normality of movement and existing transnational networks, resilience and inventiveness in the trying conditions of war and exile and the relevance of transnational networks in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Part of the inventiveness of the Afghan refugee population is the use of trafficking, encouraged by European policies of restrictions on asylum seekers. At the same time, the asylum seekers have become dependent on traffickers (for many it is their only way to be able to apply for asylum), who have made them even more vulnerable in the process (Koser 2000). Many, if not all, of the informants (asylum seekers) from Afghanistan will have had this experience, before ending up in reception centres in Sweden.

Refugees from Afghanistan to the EU have not been welcome, and have met with different repatriation schemes. Brad K. Blitz, Rosemary Sales and Lisa Marzano (2005) look into one such supposed voluntary scheme for repatriation within the context of the UK. They question the voluntarily return of refugees as part of repatriation schemes with the background of the forcible deportation of 35 Afghan nationals in 2003 and the fact that only 39 Afghan people living in Britain had taken part in the repatriation schemes, which were organised by international agencies (out of approximately

52,000 Afghans living in the UK). The authors report how the repatriation process followed the logic of backing the western-backed leadership in Afghanistan and how the British government was anxious to paint a picture of the country of Afghanistan as safe, which would mean that asylum claims would therefore be unfounded. This point was stressed even more as the war in Iraq was building up.

Blitz, Sales and Marzano identified three discourses of return in these schemes of repatriation. The first they refer to as 'justice-based' arguments in which return is seen as a way to resolve conflicts and re-establish social order. The second is referred to as 'human capital' arguments for reconstructing the country of origin using the skills of the returnees. The third, the 'burden-relieving' argument, reflects the notion that large numbers of refugees can create disturbances in the host country. The authors of this study argue that, while the two first arguments were used to back repatriation programmes, in reality it was the third that was the main focus behind British policy. The different arguments turn to different audiences, from the refugees themselves and the government of the country of return, to domestic politics. The authors state that the stress on repatriation, tied to promises of foreign aid to the country of return as a process of 'burden-sharing' set to appease domestic populations, endangers the voluntary returns. In their study of Afghans and the possibility of return they found that:

> While these discourses reflect a potentially shared agenda between returnees and governments of host and receiving country, the predominant discourse of 'burden-relieving' is based on a conflict. By portraying refugees as a problem to be removed as far as possible, the elements of trust and choice are compromised. The targets for deportations, and the determination to press ahead with these in spite of the warnings of human rights organisations about safety in Afghanistan, suggests that this is the overriding motive for promoting return programmes. The awareness of this threat clearly affected the views of the community about return programmes, and undermined their trust in them and the organisations promoting and implementing them. (Blitz, Sales et al. 2005: 196)

Refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden have also been targeted for repatriation as are most asylum seekers to Sweden. The tripartite agreement (UNHCR 2007c) made between the governments of Sweden and Afghanistan and the UNHCR on support for asylum seekers returning from Sweden clearly states that asylum seekers should return by their own free will, but also that:

> IV. Return may include – based exclusively on decisions in accordance with Swedish legislation – alternatives to voluntary return of Afghans ordered to leave Sweden, as an option of last resort.
>
> The return process of Afghans found through this process not to have protection or compelling humanitarian needs will be phased, orderly and humane and accomplished in manageable numbers.

At the same time as there is concentration on repatriation for asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden, the situation in Afghanistan is described by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Utrikesdepartementet 2007) as that of a human rights situation that continues to be serious and that serious transgressions are made against human rights, among them torture, unlawful detentions, rape and the harassment and discrimination of women. The exemption from punishment stems from weak public administration and the lack of a functional legal system. The lack of respect for human rights can be directly connected to the poor security situation in the country, which the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs means has deteriorated in recent years. The report prepared by the Ministry points to insurgents openly combating the Afghan Security Forces, the American coalition and the International Security Force in some parts of the country and how violence is widespread in the country, also affecting the capital of Kabul.

Sweden is presented as taking part as an international counterpart in the reconstruction of the country, to stabilise, democratise and build up the country. Sweden contributes with humanitarian aid, supporting the infrastructure and the political peace process. Afghanistan is, and has been for some time, one of the main recipients of Swedish aid in Asia. The overarching goal of Swedish aid is to alleviate poverty and to strengthen democracy and human rights. Sweden is also involved in ISAF – the International Security Force providing about 500 personnel (Utrikesdepartementet 2010). The Swedish government in this sense is in a similar position to the UK government in having to consider asylum seekers from Afghanistan in relation to its foreign affairs, including development aid and military intervention.

Refugee migration and the EU

The asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan come to a context of Swedish migration and asylum politics that has its own characteristics but that is also dependent on supranational relations in general and in particular on the other member states of the EU.

In the EU, the political construction of 'fortress Europe' was the reaction to a larger number of asylum seekers, with a number of restrictions to entry to these states, such as restricting access to refugee status, restrictive interpretations of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, temporary protection regimes, 'non-arrival policies', diversion policies and cooperation on asylum and immigration rules between the member states of the EU (Castles and Miller 2003). Also related to the efforts to control immigration were efforts to contain people at their origins, with the 'root causes' approach being introduced to stop movements to the 'North'. For those actually making it to

the borders of the 'North' and the EU, repatriation was the preferred solution.

In line with the efforts to repatriate asylum seekers and refugees the concept of temporary residence permits has been introduced. The introduction of temporary residence permits by the UNHCR was a response to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in 1992 and was an attempt to make states more prone to receive refugees. The idea was that the issuing of temporary residence permits would counteract the integration of these refugees in the receiving countries. The problem of temporary residence permits is that they are framed as suiting the interests of states instead of stressing the right of asylum. It was implied that the best option for the refugee would be to return to their country of origin, but:

> Since refugees can make up their own minds about what is in their best interest, the emphasis on repatriation essentially spoke to the presumed interest of receiving states to limit the number of foreigners… (Roxström and Gibney 2003: 49)

Temporary residence permits should not be seen as a separate feature, but part of a wider policy of concepts and policies of containment such as the right to return, the right to remain and preventive protection, all measures to keep refugees away.

On the politics of migration within the EU, Peo Hansen (2008) points to how developments towards a supranational solution to migration, instead of taming xenophobic and self-centred national interests, have been adopted by the member states, as a means to more effectively pursue their own national interests.

Asylum policy is the area of migration policies that has reached the most supranational harmonisation within the EU. In Tampere in 1999 it was decided that a common asylum system for the EU would gradually be established in line with the timetable of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999–2004). Since then many common regulations have been put in place, among them minimum demands on common views on receiving asylum seekers, but also regulations targeted at the inflow of asylum seekers, such as visa requirements, demands on carriers' responsibility for bringing asylum seekers to the EU and the Eurodac system. The Eurodac system of controlling asylum seekers' identities through a database with finger prints came as a response to the Convention of Dublin's (1997) regulation of first country of asylum. The Convention of Dublin regulates that an asylum seeker can only apply for asylum in one country within the EU and that decision is valid within the whole of the EU. To make sure that no asylum seeker refused entry in one country could make another claim in another EU member state, the Eurodac system introduced finger print control of asylum seekers. Hansen points to how despite the agreements and work under way

to harmonise the asylum system, the European Commission was not satisfied with the results, as it had not been able to deal with the problem of asylum politics within the EU. To meet the crises of asylum politics the Commission recommended not only an internal response to immigration and refugee politics, but also an external response to the inflow of migrants.

Pointing to external responses to the inflow of migrants was nothing new, but to reinforce the external responses was to establish a strong link between the EU's policies on development aid and agreements of return between the EU and third countries, among them a return plan for Afghanistan. The Commission puts great focus and effort on the issue of return, repatriation, refusal of entry and deportation and is also very consciously making the public aware of the efforts made in the fight against 'bogus' asylum seekers. Also high on the agenda have been the efforts to strengthen the protection of refugees in places of origin. The dominating reason for these efforts seems to be keeping refugees at bay, as far away as possible from the EU, and shifting the responsibility for refugees from rich regions to poor regions. Part of this focus is also the 'root causes' approach, meaning to come to terms with push factors such as poverty, unemployment and violations of human rights, by means of development aid and reformed politics on trade and investments between the rich and poor.

In continued pursuit of this aim of shifting the responsibility of receiving refugees on poorer regions, Hansen discusses how refugee camps, or regional protection camps as they were called, were created in areas outside the EU where refugees would be kept from entering the EU spontaneously. Along the same lines there has been a tendency to integrate the policies on refugee migration with those of labour migration and integration so as to be able to 'choose' the refugees who would most easily integrate into European society. With the programme of Haag (presented in 2004) the second step of harmonising towards a common asylum system within the EU was to be concluded in common views and practices towards asylum. Regional programmes of protection are still very much in focus together with linking these programmes to development aid policies and programmes.

In 1999 Maria Appelqvist (1999) made an analysis of Swedish refugee law and policy as one in transition between responsibilities. Summing up:

> The aim of giving 'greater financial support' for return migration in combination with increased restrictions for entering European territory, and the way in which developmental aid is connected with issues of migration, transfers responsibility from Sweden (and from Europe in general) to the countries in question. The legal right to seek asylum is now re-articulated as the legal right to remain. (Appelqvist 1999: 30)

Appelqvist also interestingly concludes that just as policies on the protection of refugees changes, definitions of who is to be seen as a refugee change too. Not only does the interpretation of refugee law change, refugee laws

themselves change, even if the Convention of 1951, on which they are based stays the same. These laws and interpretations, she continues, have to refer to 'objective justice'.

> Therefore, even those who advocate a policy of expulsion have to justify themselves by arguing that their proposals are in the best interest of those whom they want to expel (e.g. they are needed in their country; they are homesick; they cannot make a living in the receiving country anyway; we cannot contribute to ethnic cleansing). (Appelqvist 1999: 30)

Policies of repatriation are thus also based on EU member states' right to interpret what is best for the asylum seekers and refugees trying to enter their countries, by speaking of what are best for them. This means that responsibility is not only in transition, it also deflects responsibility from the receiving countries' obligations to accept refugees through a paternalistic interpretation of what is best for the individual refugee.

Refugees in Sweden

The picture drawn by the government(s)[3] (Regeringens skrivelse 2003; 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008) is that the aim of Swedish migration politics is to ensure that migration to and from the country is done in an orderly manner, that regulated immigration is maintained, that the right to asylum in Sweden and in an international perspective is protected and that refugee and immigration politics in the EU is harmonised (Regeringens skrivelse 2003). The new government's goals for Swedish migration politics are also to increase possibilities for an influx of foreign labour (Regeringens skrivelse 2007), that the politics of migration in the future should facilitate movement across borders and to clarify the link between migration and development (Regeringens skrivelse 2008).

The point of departure for the rights of asylum and asylum seekers is that the government recognises its responsibility to grant people asylum and give them protection in the spirit of the Convention for refugees. On the other hand the government stresses the importance of supporting refugees first and foremost where they come from. Swedish refugee politics takes its starting point in a strong international commitment for solutions in the long-term for refugees. It also stresses that many people today apply for asylum for reasons other than the need for protection. Reasons mentioned are poverty, lack of future prospects, and economic and social problems that lead to people leaving their home. Traffickers are blamed for giving these people hopes of a better future at the same time as taking their money.

[3] After the election in 2006 there was a change in government from a Social Democratic government to an alliance of right wing parties, an alliance consisting of the Moderate Party, Centre Party, Liberal Party and Christian Democrats.

Government rhetoric supports the idea that many people seek asylum although they are not really in need of protection, pointing to the fact that Sweden does not give them protection and that many people arrive without their papers in order (Regeringens skrivelse 2003). With this kind of argumentation by the Swedish authorities their interpretation of the need for protection by asylum seekers coming to Sweden can never be questioned. The only valid interpretation is that of the Swedish authorities.

This means that although realising their responsibility to give protection to refugees in the spirit of the Convention of refugees, the interpretation of these needs is very much up to the Swedish authorities. The discussions on receiving refugees in the 'North' are often focused on who is not a refugee in need of protection. When the Swedish authorities make their interpretation many people are not viewed as refugees, but just as people in search of a better life. The responsibility for the amount of people coming to Sweden in search of this better life is put on traffickers and is extended to the asylum seekers themselves who, in the eyes of the Swedish authorities, have interpreted their situation wrongly as one from which they need protection.

The Swedish government continues saying that the amount of asylum seekers, including and especially 'bogus' asylum seekers, weighs down the system of receiving asylum seekers leading to long turnaround times and therefore long waiting times for the applicants. It is also realised that this waiting falls upon the asylum seekers, but at the same time the blame is put on the asylum seekers. To solve this problem the government wants to make efforts to strengthen the rule of law, shorten the time for decisions on applications, fight trafficking and strengthen measures to deal with asylum seekers without papers (Regeringens skrivelse 2003). Recent letters from the government to the Swedish parliament on migration and asylum politics have stressed the importance of keeping the asylum system in balance by working towards the repatriation of people with refusals to entry and deportations orders (Regeringens skrivelse 2008), due to the fact that many people stay put in Sweden although they are supposed to leave.

In conclusion, while mentioning the right for protection under refugee law, most emphasis is put on controlling and limiting the number of asylum seekers and refugees and explaining why these efforts are not successful and what the problems are. The asylum-seeking refugees are subject to these politics and, as will be shown, are subject mainly to the regulation of immigration and to the official Swedish policy of protecting the right to asylum in Sweden and worldwide by restricting the possibilities for people coming to Sweden with a minimal interpretation of the Convention of refugees. At the same time migration politics does not take into consideration, although it speaks of the link between migration and development, the role of Sweden in uneven globalisation and in this respect

its moral responsibility towards refugees around the world and in particular in Sweden.

Sweden is described as a society marked by grand migration flows. It changed from being a country of emigration in the nineteenth century, when over a million persons left Sweden and poverty behind them, to being a country of immigration; in the 1960s and 1970s it was marked by labour immigration. The last twenty years have been marked by refugee migration and people seeking asylum in Sweden (Regeringens skrivelse 2003). The number of asylum-seeking refugees has changed over time. In the years that this research took place and from early 2000 the number of asylum seekers to Sweden doubled to about 33,000 asylum seekers in 2002. The number of asylum seekers then decreased between 2003 and 2005 when numbers returned to those in the year 2000. In 2007 the number of asylum seekers reached a new high of 36,207 asylum seekers. The expectation for 2008 was that the number of asylum seekers would decrease again (Regeringens skrivelse 2008). The composition of numbers of asylum seekers is such that women seeking asylum are in a minority in Sweden. Only a quarter of the adult asylum seekers were women in the years between 2001 and 2002. It is more common for men than women to come to Sweden alone to apply for asylum (Råhberg 2004).

In comparison to the rest of the EU and other industrialised countries Sweden receives relatively more asylum applications than most other countries of the 'North', and also in absolute numbers Sweden is among the main recipients of asylum seekers. During 2003-2007 Sweden was the fifth biggest recipient of applications from asylum seekers in industrialised countries, receiving 133,000 applications compared to the biggest recipient, the USA, with 276,000 applications followed by France (228,000), the United Kingdom (188,000) and Germany (155,000) (UNHCR 2008). Between the same years Sweden ranked second using the relative measure of comparing the number of asylum seekers to the national population, receiving 15 per 1,000 inhabitants, only surpassed by Cyprus (39) and well ahead of the U.S., the main recipient in absolute numbers that received on average one asylum seeker per 1,000 inhabitants (UNHCR 2008).

The number and share of the asylum seekers who are granted residence permits also changes over time. The share of granted residence permits for example has increased from 13% in 2005 to 48% in 2007, only to decrease to about 25% in the first six months of 2008.[4] The share of granted residence

[4] The number of granted residence permits in the years between 2004 and 2008 were 23 %, 32 %, 36 %, 46 % and 34 % (SOU 2009).

permits for asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan went from 19% (174/903) in 2004 to 54% (328/609) in 2007 (Regeringens skrivelse 2008).[5]

The numbers and statistics presented only give an overall picture of the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden for the years in which the research was made. The individual experiences and the group of asylum-seeking refugees I have spoken to in this study do not necessarily reflect the statistics presented. Two important conclusions can be made from the numbers though. One is the temporality of both the numbers of asylum seekers coming to Sweden and how the amount of people being granted refugee status and residence permits changes over time; the other is that compared with other countries of the 'North', Sweden takes on quite a big responsibility for receiving asylum applications, while at the same time tries to control and limit the number of applications and granting of applications. Sweden is working towards more harmonisation within the EU to share the 'burden' more evenly among the member states to deflect some of that responsibility.

From the numbers above, about half or more of the applications for asylum made by asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan are rejected, meaning that they have to leave Sweden and that they are not granted refugee status. Also for those who get to stay, the decision-making process is lengthy, leaving the applicants waiting for a long time. The median numbers of days of waiting for the final decisions on applications for asylum between the years 2005 and 2007 were 484, 375 and 401 days (Regeringens skrivelse 2008). It is this period of waiting I have chosen to focus on. I have chosen to include asylum-seeking refugees with only temporary residence permits as also waiting for the final decisions and thus as also being asylum-seeking refugees waiting for decisions. I have also continued following asylum-seeking refugees who, in the eyes of the Swedish authorities, were no longer allowed to stay in Sweden and who were in hiding or ready to go into hiding.

The reception of asylum seekers who come to Sweden has also changed in the years during which this study was made. In 2001 the process towards a new system for the reception of asylum seekers and the handling of their applications was started (Regeringens skrivelse 2003). The Swedish parliament decided on new authorities and processes in matters of aliens and citizenship (Regeringens proposition 2005; Regeringens skrivelse 2005). These reforms to the asylum process came into action from the 31st March 2006. Decisions made by the Swedish Migration Board are now to be

[5] The numbers of granted residence permits in 2005 and 2006 were 47% (204/435) and 97% (575/594) respectively. For the number of granted residence permits in 2006 one has to keep in mind the temporary law on impediments to enforcement of repatriation in force between 15 November 2005 and 31 March 2006 (Regeringens skrivelse 2007; Regeringens skrivelse 2008).

appealed to special migration courts and the decisions of the migration courts can, through leave to appeal, be tried by a process created via a Migration Court of Appeal. With these new authorities and processes, the Aliens Appeals Board and the possibility for the government to guide in individual cases cease to exist. In the migration courts a process between two parties is conducted where the Migration Board is the opposite party to the complainant.

At the same time a new Aliens' Act replaces the old. The different grounds for residence permits are argued to be more clearly divided and the grounds for protection become more salient. The grounds for protection are now also to include the asylum seeker who, due to a situation of deep conflict in the home country, feels well-founded fear of serious assault (Regeringens skrivelse 2005).

From the 15th November 2005 until the 31st March 2006 a temporary law on impediments to the enforcement of refusal of entry meant that the Migration Board was able to grant residence permits on the ground of certain conditions of changed circumstances for the asylum-seeking applicant. These special applications and decisions were finished by the 1st October 2006. The 'temporary law' gave 17,300 residence permits. The main categories receiving residence permits were families and persons whose refusals of entry it had not been possible to execute. The applications made within the framework of the 'temporary law' also resulted in a number of temporary residence permits (Regeringens skrivelse 2007).

Many of the informants in this study were subject to the old Aliens' Act and system and later the 'temporary law', giving some permanent residence permits, but leaving many with temporary residence permits. Those of my informants whose applications were handled after the new law were subject to the new procedures described above.

In reference to these procedures, the refugee can apply for asylum at the Swedish border or at one of the Migration Board's offices in Stockholm, Gothenburg or Malmö. In these instances the process, the investigation, starts with a shorter interview focusing on the reasons for applying for asylum and the route taken to Sweden. If the asylum-seeking refugee's story is not apparently false in the eyes of the Swedish authorities and it is deemed that Sweden is where the application for asylum should be processed, the asylum-seeking refugee is provided with somewhere to live at a reception centre in Sweden. It is also possible for the asylum seeker to arrange his or her own housing while waiting for the application to be processed (Öberg 2007; Migrationsverket 2006). At this point the process and investigation start, including investigative interviews, deliberations with solicitors and decisions by the Migration Board and the Aliens Appeals Board and, after March 31st 2006, the migration courts. Many of my informants were also included in the temporary law on impediments to the enforcement of refusal

of entry (November 2005–March 2006) whilst waiting for the new Aliens' Act (March 31st 2006) to come into force. During the asylum-seeking refugees' stay in Sweden, they are also required to take part in organised activities and the asylum seeker is also allowed to have an ordinary job, if the waiting period is expected to be more than four months (Migrationsverket 2006).

At the start of this study there were 43,402 asylum seekers in Sweden by December 31st 2003 waiting for decisions from the Migration Board or the Aliens Appeals Board. The average time of waiting for final decisions was 404 days and many wait for up to two or three years (NTG Asyl 2004). The long waiting times for decisions from the different bodies and what this waiting does to the asylum seeker have been the focus of reports and research, among which this report will find itself.

When in Sweden, having made their application, there is a period of waiting for decisions on their applications. It is this time which is in focus in this research as I wish to understand the situation they are in and how they manage this situation. Research has been carried out and reports made both regarding the situation and how asylum seekers manage their situation, but the need for further research on the situation of asylum seekers in Sweden has been stressed for the betterment of asylum seekers' possibilities for social and vocational integration in the country of asylum, or in the case of negative decisions on the asylum application, re-integration in the country of origin or its equivalent. Research on the situation of asylum seekers in the EU has been described as insufficient (Råhberg 2004).

This research tries to make a contribution to this field of study and sits among many other studies in the field made both before and during the period of this research.

Reports and research on refugees in Sweden

The reception of refugees in Sweden takes place in the context of more restrictive immigration controls. Tomas Hammar (1999) describes how a new policy on immigration was introduced in the mid-1980s, which integrated immigration control policies with those of foreign and security policies and with Swedish development assistance. He also notes two domestic reasons for this change in immigration policy, which were record high levels of unemployment and a new programme for refugee resettlement. The number of unemployed foreign workers increased, straining the welfare system and producing especially difficult consequences for newly arrived foreigners and refugees. The increased segregation and marginalisation of immigrants and refugees, with costs to the welfare system, led to negative opinions towards immigrants and refugees, as well as to demands for tougher immigration controls. At the same time, integration policies targeted integration by resettling refugees in areas with good possibilities for finding

housing, jobs, schooling and so forth. It was argued that the capability of such integration policies meant that only a limited number could be cared for within the programme, hence another reason for more restrictive immigration controls.

Hammar also points to negative opinions towards immigration and refugee immigration coming to the surface at the end of the 1980s. Negative opinions, expressions and even aggressions made the major national parties take on more restrictive immigration policies. These same more restrictive immigration controls also made it legitimate to talk of an 'us' and 'them', as these new more restrictive immigration policies implied that earlier immigration policies had been too liberal and that too many non-deserving people had been admitted to Sweden, people who were now a cost to the welfare system. At the same time more restrictive policies on immigration were imposed in other European countries and Sweden could not maintain liberal policies as the rest of Europe protected itself. Sweden even took a leading role in harmonising policies on immigration in Europe.

Christina Johansson (2005) challenges the view of socio-economic reasons for the more restrictive immigration policies introduced over time, in her study about Swedish discourses of migration politics in the second half of the twentieth century. She asks the question of how an ideology of the nation state manifests itself in discourses of migration politics. Her investigation into this question takes its starting point in turning points for Swedish migration politics through which practices of Swedish migration politics have become more restrictive. The restrictive migration politics and the politics and practices of repatriation can be traced through turning points in Swedish migration politics. The turning point of practices of migration politics aimed at repatriation which were introduced in the mid-1990s were preceded by turning points in the regulation of labour immigration at the end of the 1960s and the regulation of refugee immigration at the end of the 1980s. Johansson discusses how these turning points in Swedish migration politics all relate to thoughts of the nation state and different aspects of it, such as ethnical, social and economical. She nuances an understanding of the process of more restrictive migration politics from purely socio-economic reasons by showing how restrictive policies and practices were introduced in 'good' years and by showing empirically how ideologies of the nation state have permeated Swedish migration politics. In migration politics both civic and ethnic considerations are key. Civic considerations deal with the creation of able citizens, capable of realising their rights and obligations as citizens, and ethnic considerations are referred to in the Swedish context by pointing at groups of migrants as different, and as having difficulties in adapting to Swedish society. Both civic and ethnic considerations in this case are part of a process of homogenisation of an ideology of the nation state.

The introduction of Swedish repatriation policies was thus accompanied by discourses of the nation state. One theme of this was the view of repatriation as the most durable solution to refugee migration. Another was that it was better to help refugees in the immediate regions from where they fled. A third theme was that the refugees really belonged somewhere else and it would be best for everybody if they returned. Refugees would be an economic and social stress to Swedish society while, at the same time, they were seen as invaluable for their home countries. The ethnic dimension was also clear as some groups were given priority in Swedish repatriation efforts. Refugees from Bosnia, as they were many, and refugees from Somalia as they were seen as too 'different' and difficult to adapt to and integrate into Swedish society. The discourses of Swedish migration politics contribute to the view of Sweden as a welfare state and as an ethnically homogeneous society. Johansson also considers the ideology of the Swedish nation state through how, in the construction of the 'west', groups connected with Islam are constructed as different and in contrast with what the 'west' is. This shows how different groups connected with Islam are discriminated against in the practices of Swedish migration politics and are singled out as being difficult to integrate.

The reception of individual asylum seekers is framed within these structures and discourses of immigration control. Eva Norström (2004) examines the 'logos' and 'praxis' of the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden. She discusses how the reception of asylum seekers is framed at both the macro and micro level, from the nation states' need to control its borders and the people living there to the decision-making process in the official's office. How a decision in an individual case is made goes on in something of a 'black box'. It is not really known what happens.

Norström examines the process of one man's application from application to decision and the context in which the process was handled. She discusses how, technically, the Swedish system can be viewed as having a well-developed system for receiving asylum seekers with access to a fair application process. The asylum seeker can enjoy not only a process including investigation and decision, but also legal aid and is guaranteed free housing, food, clothes, occupation, access to emergency health care and more. On a practical level though, the case is different. The discrepancy between 'logos' and 'practice' is too big. On paper Sweden takes its obligations to the asylum seeker seriously, but what happens in practice? On paper the list of conventions on the rights of refugees is quite long, but in reality the politics towards migration is restrictive, among other things, as we have seen, hindering people from even coming to Europe and Sweden. This is done in the light of the official view that only real refugees are subject to protection and that the normal position is for a refugee to want to return.

The individual asylum seeker is dependent on the competence and interpretations of the decision maker and is very exposed in this situation.

The reception of refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden includes a time of waiting during the investigations into their applications and for the final decisions on them. This period has, as it is for this study, been the focus of reports and research. An official report from the Swedish government (SOU 2009) points to the goal of the reception of asylum seekers being twofold: to prepare for integration in the host country (Sweden) if granted a residence permit, but also to prepare for return. This means that efforts to integrate the asylum seeker should be weighed against efforts to prepare the asylum seeker for return. The developments in the reception of asylum seekers have, from the 1990s, moved towards 'normalisation', meaning for example that the asylum seekers have the possibility of arranging their own housing or can live at reception centres, situated mainly in ordinary housing areas, organised by the Migration Board.

The heterogeneity and different experiences of the asylum seekers are acknowledged in the report, stressing the importance of taking care of the potential of the asylum seekers. Information is also stressed as an important component of a good reception of refugees. The report stresses the importance of meaningful activity, both towards integration and repatriation. Sometimes this activity can be a regular job, but more often job training and Swedish language classes. Asylum seekers should have better and more alternatives for jobs and job training and Swedish classes should be more individualised to fit the needs of the asylum seeker. The asylum seeker should be asked early on what he or she can do to become self-supportive while waiting. The report argues that it is good for the asylum seeker as he or she is, from the beginning, introduced to what is expected from people living in Sweden. There can, according to the report, also be a political and pedagogical point to demanding the same from asylum seekers as is asked of residents in Sweden regarding occupation and self-sufficiency. However, the demands have to be put in relation to the difficulties the asylum seekers may have in entering the Swedish labour market.

The report points to the level of occupation, taken as preparation for integration or later return, as low among the asylum seekers. Very few have a job in the regular labour market and only a few asylum seekers take part in job training. A relatively larger part of the asylum seekers are studying Swedish, but altogether not more than just about one quarter of the asylum seekers who are supposed to be offered organised activities participate in Swedish language classes. This passivity, they argue in the report, is a problem as the goal is to make the asylum seekers self-supporting. According to the report the time of waiting is '*…according to all experience strongly negative for the possibilities of later successful integration*' (SOU 2009: 77, my translation). In passivity lies also the risk of ill-health and suffering

among the asylum seekers because of, for example, difficult memories of being a refugee and the uncertainty of waiting. The report also relates these problems of passivity to greater costs for the host society, arguing that they lead to difficulties for society at large with higher costs of health care. The report also points to complications in the process of repatriation if the decision on the residence permit is negative.

According to the statistics of November 2008 only 31% of the asylum seekers participated in organised activities. As a note to these numbers the Migration Board asses that they offer activities to each individual adult asylum seeker, thus making the report conclude that most asylum seekers decide not to participate. The report concludes, drawing on the reports from Brekke (2004) and Lennartsson (2007), that the period of waiting for asylum seekers is characterised by inactivity, isolation and anxiety. These reports on the situation for waiting asylum seekers also state that organised activities and occupation are seen as something valuable. Waiting in uncertainty is characterised by being inactive and isolated, which lead to ill-health. Everything points to asylum seekers faring badly at the hands of the Swedish system of receiving them.

Jan-Paul Brekke (2004) asks the questions of how asylum seekers perceive their situation while waiting for decisions on their application and what consequences this waiting will have for future integration or repatriation. On the issue of empowerment Brekke points to how the situation is one of powerlessness, based on the lack of control to influence the circumstances surrounding the asylum seeker. Brekke describes this situation of powerlessness as being confronted with the perception that one's time should be put to use. It comes down to getting rid of surplus time by wasting it. As will become evident I have made another complementary analysis of the time spent waiting.

Brekke's main findings are that returning was just not an option for the asylum seekers in his study; they were not well informed about the handling of their cases and the asylum seekers in general had a low sense of coherence. Importantly, though, speaking of a sense of coherence, the sense of meaningfulness was quite intact. He also finds that, in relation to his starting point of looking at the consequences of the waiting period for both integration and repatriation, the ambivalence between preparing for both integration and repatriation affects both the asylum seeker and the authorities.

That return is just not an option also comes to the surface in Rebecka Lennartsson's (2007) study: the option of return is seen as a threat, never as a real option. Like Brekke she also paints a picture of uncertainty and passivity, pointing to how, if people are kept in this situation and are also supposed to prepare to leave Sweden, they are isolated from Swedish society

and exposed to the temporality of living conditions, and feelings of stagnation, meaninglessness and resignation are strengthened.

Lennartsson's study focuses on asylum seekers who have organised their own living accommodation and thus chosen to live outside the care of the Swedish authorities. The answers as to why they have chosen to organise their own living vary. The main reason though is of a practical nature, about making choices for a better alternative, which include having their own place of living for their family and preferring to live in larger towns rather than in the smaller and distant towns where the reception centres are often situated. Other reasons are being more independent and less watched over and being close to family and friends. The possibility of finding work is another reason. She concludes that their own living place feels more like a home than the reception centre. The feeling of home reminds them less of the unstable and uncertain life they have as asylum seekers.

Coming back to passiveness and lack of meaningful activities, Lennartsson, as well as Brekke, discuss how resignation is a common theme in the stories of their everyday. She says that the informants describe waiting as empty, characterised by stagnation, difficult memories, anxiety, bewilderment and nervousness. Lennartsson also finds that organised activities such as Swedish classes and job training are appreciated breaks and distractions from thoughts of the asylum process.

The passiveness found in these studies will be targeted and nuanced in this thesis, as the main argument of my discussion is that there is not only passivity, but also activity characterising the everyday of the asylum-seeking refugees while waiting. Zoran Slavnic (2000), in his study of Bosnian Croats with temporary residence permits, points to a turn to action in search of empowerment.

Slavnic describes a situation of temporality but also resistance for the Bosnian Croats who in 1995 received temporary residence permits. The temporary residence permits followed a period of protest against the refusal to grant Bosnian Croats asylum in Sweden. The protests had been individual, such as going into hiding from the Swedish authorities, as well as collective. As more voices were raised against the treatment of the Bosnian Croats' claims, and as the security situation in Croatia worsened dramatically they were granted temporary residence permits. The situation is somewhat similar to that of the asylum-seeking male participants from Afghanistan who received temporary residence permits in 2006, although the number of people was larger in the case of the Bosnian Croats in 1995. With the focus on repatriation, which was then already on the agenda, the Bosnian Croats with temporary residence permits were subject to a programme of repatriation. In short, they were subject to a programme with a focus that was meant to prepare them for their 'return'.

Slavnic in his field work finds processes of resistance to the discourse of repatriation, pointing, for example, to the view that they had the right to live anywhere in the world that they wanted to and that there was resistance to the system of repatriation introduced by the Swedish authorities. At the same time, Slavnic found that the informants in his study used parts of the repatriation programme that they viewed as promoting their own cause, to help themselves. The situation of temporality thus creates a search for empowerment. In other words, my words, the asylum-seeking refugees, in this case with short temporary residence permits, are not passive victims, as is often proclaimed in the general discourse on asylum seekers in Sweden.

Concluding remarks on the background

This chapter focusing on the background to the field of study, asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden leads us to understand that international migration is still the exception and that most people do not migrate internationally. Only an estimated 3% of the world's population is international migrants today. This fact is a bit confusing considering that international migration is debated so much and in focus for different political policies and decisions, and when considering the gap between the 'rich' and the 'poor' in the world. Considering this gap between the 'rich' and the 'poor', it is even more surprising that so few migrate to the riches of the 'North' (at least 'rich' according to the ethnocentric image of the 'North' being so much more developed and desirable).

Considering these numbers does not take away the fact that international migration and refugee migration have had a larger impact than the numbers might imply and that international migration and refugee migration are important aspects of understanding global processes. Refugee migration to the 'North' can be discussed from the point of view of understanding how the relatively few refugees coming to the countries of the 'North', compared to how many seek refuge in other countries of the 'South', are treated as a big problem that needs to be solved supranationally. The 'North', as exemplified by the European Union, makes efforts to solve the problem by supranational cooperation between the member states of the union. Refugees are not, in these solutions, welcome in the 'North' where policies and politics of containment and repatriation are most common in treating the refugee 'problem'.

The refugee population of Afghanistan visualises the dynamics of and the reactions to refugee migration. Globalising processes are involved in creating a situation from which there is a need to flee and also demonstrates how the refugee population from Afghanistan is mainly found in other countries of the 'South' (Pakistan and Iran), while only a few find their way to the countries of the 'North'. The situation for the refugees from Afghanistan in

the 'North' also shows how the policies and politics of containment and repatriation are implemented towards them.

The reception of refugees in Sweden is closely related to the general reception of and policies towards refugees in the 'North'. Sweden's reception is characterised by policies of containment and repatriation. At the same time there are considerations about the right of protection, the process of deciding on their applications and on the treatment of asylum seekers while waiting for these decisions. In the treatment of asylum applications, individualisation and fairness are stressed as goals in the reception and treatment of these applications. The Swedish reception of asylum seekers is also characterised by a fluctuation in both the numbers of asylum seekers coming to Sweden and in the numbers of how many are granted protection and residence permits in Sweden. During the period that this research took place a new Aliens' Act replaced the old, and a 'temporary law' was implemented which played a big role in the reception and treatment of the applications for asylum made by the participating asylum-seeking refugees in this study.

By referring to these changes I wish to point out that Swedish asylum and refugee politics is not static, but an ongoing process that cannot be set apart from wider international politics and discourses of asylum and refugee migration. Still, Swedish asylum and refugee politics keeps its uniqueness of economic, social and cultural relations of domination and subordination, for example through a specific construction of Swedish nationality and the Swedish nation state. In addition, Swedish asylum and refugee politics cannot be seen as having clear characteristics. This makes it hard to describe, theorise and understand, not only for the researcher, but more importantly also for the individual asylum-seeking refugee.

Reports and research into the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden point to how the long period of waiting together with the uncertainty inherent in the situation create a situation of passivity and ill-health. The uncertainty of the situation is, for example, marked by ambivalence in reception between efforts towards integration versus efforts of preparation for repatriation, the difficulties of overseeing the process and not knowing when to expect decisions on applications. It is also pointed to how occupation and meaningful activities are worth striving for to alleviate the situation of the asylum seekers while waiting. The focus on the uncertainty of the situation and passiveness of the asylum seekers described is also contrasted by discussions of a more empowered and active asylum seeker. The argumentation of this study focuses on the actions and the seeking of empowerment among the participating asylum-seeking refugees.

As we have also seen in the sketched background to the global and local situation for refugees in the contemporary world, there are also severe constraints to their seeking of empowerment that they have to deal with.

Indeed the emphasis on seeking empowerment in this study clearly implies a situation from which to seek empowerment. Relating to other studies made of the situation and experiences among asylum seekers it is shown that asylum seekers view themselves as pushed into inactivity by the situation they are in. These disempowering factors will also be described in relation to what the participants in this study express.

What this research does differently is to look closely at the actions taken in the management of the situation, which I argue promote their own empowerment from within the situation. Actions which might not normally be understood as extraordinary or empowering will be analysed as actions of empowerment.

While putting this emphasis on action, the research process is also charged with issues of powers limiting the actions the asylum-seeking refugees are able to choose from. The question is what are the limitations to the spaces of actions that trigger the need for seeking empowerment? What are the disempowering structures and discourses surrounding the asylum-seeking refugee?

The questions are based in the empirical findings of the research that in turn are constructed through the choice of methodology; a methodology based on a constructionist grounded theory pulling and being pushed around the postmodern turn, with an emphasis on action, practices and agency in relation to structure and discourse; and with a research process steered by sensitivity, theoretical sampling and openness to constructed data of different kinds.

Methodology and Research Process

By employing a theoretical discussion on the study of social interaction, inspired by symbolic interactionism and considering contexts of power relations, I wish to study both the particular situation of being an asylum-seeking refugee in Sweden and their management thereof. The empirical work is based in field work, initially focused on participant observations and conversations, but also including other material as it fits with the emergent model. The research process is based in a grounded theory tradition, based on the readings of Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978; 1992; 1998; 2001; 2003) and Strauss (1987) with insights from Kathy Charmaz (2006), Adele Clarke (2005) and Antony Bryant (2009) on Grounded Theory and constructionism, situational analysis and pragmatism respectively.

From the very first steps towards the field of study I knew that it would be a process of 'learning by doing', but little did I know how much I would learn and how much there still is for me to learn. Little did I know how involved or how complex the relationships between theory, methods and the empirical world are. Still, the journey into the methods of Grounded Theory has given me some tools to achieve some sort of construction of a description and theorising of the management of the situation of being an asylum-seeking refugee in Sweden and the context in which this management takes place.

I stubbornly started out on the journey of research process with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) '*Discovery of Grounded Theory*' and Glaser's further work, (1992; 1998; 2001; 2003) and made continued efforts to keep the approach of Grounded Theory pure by mainly looking at *'Theoretical Sensitivity*' (Glaser 1978), while somewhat unwillingly setting my approaches to uneven globalisation, my interest in power relations and discourse and my social constructionist world view to one side. I knew that I would come back to them at some point. I did, but through a detour of running into methodological dilemmas in my analysis and my approach to data.

Today I am firmly convinced that some of the ideas of Grounded Theory as it was conceived in the 1960s are still very much up-to-date and useful in the inquiry into actions, structures, narratives, discourses or whatever comes ones way. This conviction has only been strengthened by my reading of Charmaz's (2006) work pushing Grounded Theory towards constructionism and Clarke's (2005) work pushing Grounded Theory firmly around the postmodern turn while at the same time showing how a symbolic interactionist version of Grounded Theory pulls social science around the postmodern turn. In retrospect I have also used a symbolic interactionist's (Blumer 1969) and George Herbert Mead's (1934) theorising on the self and

society as the approach behind Grounded Theory. And I have also found the tools for the research process described by Glaser as invaluable for analysing the field.

I have used different perspectives to get around a fear of not contextualising the field of study and given issues of power due consideration by including Burawoy's (1998; 2000) discussion on relating the field to theories of globalisation, Thomas J. Scheff's (1990) theorising on abduction and Clarke's (2005) methodological discussion on situational analysis.

In what follows, some basic assumptions and theoretical directions behind the methods and research will be presented, as well as the chosen method in more detail, and these will be related to the research process as a whole. Considerations of power, context and ethics will also be presented. This to try to answer the questions of what assumptions lie behind the research, what motivated the choice of methods and procedures and how did the research process evolve?

Before going on to the different sections on the issue of methodology and its importance for this presentation of theoretical and methodological assumptions, I should say that I see theories, not so much as models of how the world actually is constituted, but rather as tools for our understanding of the same. The world and what is going on in it is too difficult to grasp, but theory gives us the tools to try and understand it or parts of it. Therefore theory is methodology; it is a tool rather than a 'true' understanding and explanation. I also treat scientific knowledge as knowledge of a second order, based on an imitation of acquiring knowledge of the first order, common sense knowledge. Research is just doing this in a more systematic way than we, as people, do in ordinary everyday life.

The chapter on methodology introduces discussions on how 'reality' is constructed in everyday lives through action and interaction and how everyday interaction can be linked to other levels of theorising on society. Grounded Theory will then be presented and I will discuss how, by turning to a constructionist version of Grounded Theory more thoroughly, I can introduce issues of power by, for example, introducing the concept of discourse. The more hands-on work with these methods will be presented through how the research and analysis was made and how it can be evaluated. One way of evaluating the process is to consider how power, context and ethics were considered throughout the research process. How field work was done and under what circumstances will also be presented in this chapter on methodology and research process.

The social construction of reality in everyday actions

> It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances. (Marx 1845 - 1846a: (3))

I read this quote from Marx as quite a simple statement, but also as an important insight into the relation between agency and structure. The circumstances in which we find ourselves create who we are, and at the same time who we are creates the circumstances. Marx makes this point in relation to historical stages, which he means are '*...a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another*" (Marx 1845 - 1846a: (3)).

Another important statement in the materialist approach to the making of history is on the production of human consciousness. The base for human consciousness is in human action and in the interplay with other human beings. Knowing world history cannot be based on theorising on abstract self-consciousness, but needs to be understood through everyday empirically known actions. History is not made in the abstract, from self-consciousness, but from materially and empirically demonstrable actions by individuals as they '*...walk and stand, eat, drink and dress*' (Marx 1845 - 1846b: 165, my translation).

In other words we need to look at actions in everyday life to know the world. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) argue that the sociology of knowledge is that the basis of all knowledge lies in everyday life. It is in the social interaction of everyday life that reality is constructed. Some telling quotes underlining this view are:

> ...the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one.
>
> ...the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity.
>
> What remains sociologically essential is the recognition that all symbolic universes and all legitimations are human products; their existence has its base in the lives of concrete individuals, and has no empirical status apart from these lives.
>
> (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 61, 60, 128)

From this I take the assumption that the relationship between the individual and society is dialectical, and that situations, at any level, are humanly-produced constructed realities. Thus it is possible to research the constructed reality of the situation and the world, in the relationship between individuals and society.

A link between the actions of the human being to society as a whole can be made through a discussion on the creation of the human self. For Mead (1934) a self can only develop in a social environment which means that the

social comes before the individual self. In this sense we are not born with a self. A self can only develop in social relations and through actions. The self comes into action when the person can become an object to him/herself by taking the attitudes of others. Through the medium of language, and through different phases of taking the attitude of others, the child learns to take the united attitudes of others in society and maintain a reflection of these within him/herself in what Mead calls 'the generalised other'. The generalised other is central to the phases of the self, which Mead divides into an 'I' and a 'Me'. These are phases where the 'Me' represents the internalised generalised other in the inner conversations with the more unpredictable and creative 'I'. The 'I' is the phase of the self (in its relation to the 'Me') which is creative and where freedom of initiative comes from. At times this 'I' is also described as impulsive and naive. Change in society happens when the self, through the phases of the self, adjusts to the social situation just as the social situation (group) will be affected and adjust to the individual, as highlighted in the following quote:

> As a man adjusts himself to a certain environment he becomes a different individual; but in becoming a different individual he has affected the community in which he lives. (Mead 1934: 215)

Following the same kind of reasoning on the theorising of individuals' actions and interactions, Herbert Blumer (1969) gives a general introduction to symbolic interactionism for which the social interaction is constructed through the fitting of actions in relation to other actors in a process of interpretation of these actions. Out of this interaction people are able to give meaning to objects around them and as people with selves, also allowing the individual to be reflective, thus:

> …human action is constructed by the actor on the basis of what he notes, interprets, and assesses; and the interlinking of such ongoing action constitutes organizations, institutions, and vast complexes of interdependent relations. (Blumer 1969: 49)

This construction of human action, based on what people '*…note, interprets and assesses',* and the interlinking between these acts creating '*…vast complexes of interdependent relations',* I take as a starting point for the fact that at any level of society, the world is created/constructed through individuals' actions in interdependent relationships. Blumer on how research should be done:

> The question remains whether human society or social action can be successfully analyzed by schemes which refuse to recognize human beings as they are, namely, as persons constructing individual and collective action through an interpretation of the situations which confront them. (Blumer 1969: 89)

What I want to do is to study society by studying the lives of individuals as actors. I theorise on this as the link between self and society. By looking at the individual and/or group's actions and thoughts it is possible to say something about society. I concentrate on how society is manifested in the individual's self and actions. By actions I also take to mean spoken and written language, perhaps the most commonly used data in research.

The self is also a balancing act between, on the one hand, committing to others and on the other hand being true to oneself; we see that each personal narrative involves both the uniqueness of the 'I' and a reflection of the public 'good self'. For Jerome S. Bruner (2003) making stories is a way for us to make sense of the world around us and making sense of who we are.

> A self-making narrative is something of a balancing act. It must, on the one hand, create a conviction of autonomy, that one has a will of one's own, a certain freedom of choice, a degree of possibility. But it must also relate the self to a world of others – to friends and family, to institutions, to the past, to reference groups. But the commitment to others that is implicit in relating oneself to others of course limits our autonomy. We seem virtually unable to live without both, autonomy and commitment, and our lives strive to balance the two. (Bruner 2003: 78)

Central to our understanding of interpretation is language and the way in which we represent ourselves and the world around us. One central question is whether we as individuals are intentional, implying that meaning lies with the 'author', or whether we recognise the social character of language and collectively construct meaning through our representations. To explore this I use Stuart Hall's (1997) discussion on the production of meaning through representation as a correlation between the levels of the material (and immaterial), the conceptual and the signifying – which are linked together by cultural and linguistic codes. We can further say that by interpreting individual representations, we might also say something about the culture and society in which the representation was produced.

The power of the social is clearly visible in Hall's (1996) discussion of Foucault's theories which can be highlighted with this quote:

> Ruthlessly attacking 'the great myth of interiority', and driven both by his critique of humanism and the philosophy of consciousness, and by his negative reading of psychoanalysis, Foucault also undertakes a radical historicization of the category of the subject. The subject is produced 'as an effect' through and within discourse, within specific discursive formations, and has no existence, and certainly no transcendental continuity or identity from one subject position to another. (Hall 1996: 10)

Hall continues, from stressing the importance of the social to looking for the contents of the subject, by saying, again about Foucault, that by being pushed by his own research he moves towards recognition of the need for an attention to the 'practices of self-constitution'. On this note Hall says that:

> The question which remains is whether we also require to, as it were, close the gap between the two: that is to say, a theory of what the mechanisms are by which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. (Hall 1996: 13-14)

In this reasoning we find that the subject has choices in the positions he or she is summoned to, thus creating a space for willed action in these choices of resisting, negotiating or accommodating, although within quite limited spaces of action.

People in all exposed situations and disempowered positions can act in resistance. Referring to Michel Foucault (1984), a person is always 'free' or has the power to act in resistance, even if in the extreme of taking his or her own life or that of another. In all power relations there is the possibility of resistance.

In making sense of the world I also propose to discuss abduction in terms of interpreting the world around us, both from the point of view of everyday knowledge and of scientific knowledge. The concept of abduction (Peirce 1955) seeks to resolve the question of deduction versus induction. Scheff (1990) introduces the concept of abduction for its use for researchers as a means to understand meanings in context. Abduction is '*...the **rapid** shuttling back and forth between observations and imagination*' (Scheff 1990: 31, emphasis in original) in which one constantly checks observations and imaginations against one another. This way of thinking effectively contrasts the more conventional ideas of induction (observation) and deduction (imagination). For people's understanding of meaning in context Scheff (1990: 31, emphasis in original) proposes that '*...abduction is the process which enables participants to accomplish the incredibly complex process of understanding meanings **in context***.'

Scheff (1990: 180-181) goes on to say that abduction addresses the problem of context by relating '*...the specific to the general, the part to the whole*'. His thesis is also that human action is deeply rooted and only understandable in context. The way to relate the specific to the general and the part to the whole is to go 'up the ladder', which implies that '*...any part implies a larger whole, which is in turn a part of still a larger whole, and so on, up the ladder. Applied to discourse, this idea suggests a movement back and forth between small concrete parts and ever-larger abstract wholes*' (Scheff 1990: 190). He describes this movement between the small and concrete and more abstract wholes in levels from the concrete level to the societal level and says, '*Practical intelligence in the lifeworld appears to involve abduction, that is, the rapid, effortless shuttling up and down this ladder*' (Scheff 1990: 190). He states that contemporary scholars and

scientists have a hard time showing these relations between the parts and the whole and advocates a move away from what he calls overspecialisation. By acknowledging abduction, the researcher can act as a generalist and as a specialist at the same time *'Otherwise, one gives up too large a part of one's self, the part that is the most emotional and brilliant'* (Scheff 1990: 195).

I have found that applying the concept of abduction as the means to interpret the world has meant a lot of comparing both between incidents and levels, and many of these comparisons have been made through dualisms. Comparisons through dualisms can be quite unfortunate, but when they have surfaced I have tried to employ a critical discussion to problematise these dualisms. It is perhaps not so much a case of problematising the understanding of the world through dualisms, as it is problematising tendencies to treat dualisms as dichotomies. Massey (1994) critiques dichotomous dualisms from the perspective of critiquing Laclau's formulations of the dualism between temporality and spatiality. She engages in the following debate:

> First of all, this manner of conceptualizing space and time takes the form of a dichotomous dualism. It is neither a simple statement of difference (A, B, …) nor a dualism constructed through an analysis of the interrelations between the objects being defined (capital: labour). It is a dichotomy specified in terms of a presence and an absence; a dualism which takes the classic form of A/not-A. As was noted earlier, one of Laclau's formulations of a definition is: 'temporality must be conceived as the exact opposite of space'. Now, apart from any reservations which may be raised in the particular case of space and time (and which we shall come to later), the mode of thinking which relies on irreconcilable dichotomies of this sort has in general recently come in for widespread criticism. All the strings of these kinds of opposition with which we are so accustomed to work (mind-body, nature-culture, reason-emotion, and so forth) have been argued to be at heart problematical and a hindrance to either understanding or changing the world. Much of this critique has come from feminists. (Massey 1994: 255)

I agree with this critique of dichotomising dualisms and want to see dualisms as relational by looking at the relations between them.

For my results to meet, challenge and strengthen theories of globalisation and for my results to be put into a larger context I have also used some of the insights from Burawoy (1998; 2000). With Burawoy I acknowledge that globalisation theory is often way too distanced from the everyday lives of people not belonging to the cosmopolitan elite. He uses a method for this, which he calls the 'extended case method', in which the researcher 'extends' into the world of the participant, makes observations over time and space, going from 'micro processes' to 'macro forces' and 'extends theory' into the area of study (Burawoy 2000). I have mainly used important insights from this method including considerations of power and reflexivity for theorising on the relationship between what Burawoy refers to as micro processes and macro forces. Grounded Theory is my methodological starting point, and

even from a constructionist and situational point of view, this will mean that I take a somewhat different approach towards the relationship between theory and the empirical world. Although we cannot go into the field without a theoretical lens and we need to improve on the lenses we use, we can use different ways to relate theory to the field; in my case this means taking an abductive stance, going up and down the ladder all through the process and trying theories out or using existing theory to give processes in the field meaning. Importantly, though, Burawoy's (2000: 5-15) criticism of what he calls the 'introversion' of the Chicago school and Blumer's symbolic interactionism, which he calls '*...the study of negotiated order within bounded spaces*', should be taken seriously, which the next section on constructionist grounded theory after the postmodern turn deals with.

Ending here with the issue of power coming into the picture I wish to conclude with a quote from Donna J. Haraway relating to the social construction of reality and to the 'discovery' of reality, which also, in my interpretation, connects to the social construction of reality and to social interaction and the importance of action and actors in research:

> Actors come in many and wonderful forms. Accounts of a 'real' world do not, then, depend on a logic of 'discovery', but on a power-charged social relation of 'conversation'. (Haraway 1991: 198)

Haraway's insistence on situated knowledges is one of several influences behind the theorising by Clarke (2005) on a constructionist grounded theory after the postmodern turn.

Constructionist grounded theory after the postmodern turn

There are now authors in the grounded theory tradition to refer to in regard to some of the criticism that Grounded Theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss together and individually, has been subjected to. I am thinking primarily of Charmaz (2006), Clarke (2005) and Bryant's (2009) efforts to break away from the lack of epistemological considerations in the use of the grounded theory model, which at its best shies away from epistemological issues or takes on an objective standpoint towards data and analysis. The insights from the authors mentioned has strengthened my own critique and developed my use of the grounded theory methodology throughout the research process.

I will present my methodological points of departure from a constructionist grounded theory after the postmodern turn, as discussed by Clarke (2005) in her book '*Situational Analysis – Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*' in which she wishes to push Grounded Theory towards a *...more densely analytic constructionism*' (Clarke 2005: 291). Before that a short introduction to Grounded Theory is necessary.

Grounded Theory focuses on generating theory from empirical material and was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and has since been developed by the original authors separately (Glaser 1978; Strauss 1987; Glaser 1992; Strauss and Corbin 1997; Glaser 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Glaser 2001). Glaser (1998) describes what Grounded Theory is and is based on, in the following quote:

> Grounded Theory accounts for the action in a substantive area. In order to accomplish this goal grounded theory tries to understand the action in a substantive area from the point of view of the actors involved. This understanding resolves around the main concern of the participants whose behaviour continually resolves their concern. Their continual resolving is the core variable. It is the prime mover of most of the behaviour seen and talked about in a substantive area. It is what is going on! (Glaser 1998: 115)

Although I will later argue that there is not something like a 'main' concern or one 'core' category to be found in a substantive area, I think that the tools and pacing Glaser presents for the research process is fruitful. With these tools and recommended pacing it is possible, from an open phase of the research via selective and theoretical coding of the material, to construct categories and possibly a core category to be explored in a more selective and theoretical phase where important categories are more thoroughly investigated and relations between categories can be constructed.

Following Glaser's (1978) recommendations there are some important steps in the research process; the ones that I would like to emphasise here are constant comparison, memoing and theoretical sampling. Constant comparison goes on all the way through the process, from comparing incidents to incidents (by coding), codes to codes (categorising), categories to categories (theorising) and substantive theory to existing literature and theory (theoretical integration). This constant comparison distils the data into a thick, full and distinct description and hopefully a more abstract conceptual model. Writing memos is an important step in the analysis and creative process towards a grounded theory. It starts out from the very beginning of the research process and continues to the very last word put into the final report. The memos can be very different in content and form, from description to conceptual discussions. In general the memos go from simpler descriptions of codes and categories to theoretical discussions and theoretical integration. Later the memos make up the basis for the final written report. The constant comparison and memo writing allows for the possibility for theoretical sampling, in which the research is more and more focused on one (or more) categories. Theoretical sampling means that sampling is made from the emergent theory and focuses on the emergent model or theory. A prerequisite for this is that the analysis starts immediately from the first day in the field and that the collection of data is always immediately followed by analysis of the same.

The empirical work is always the base and both the start and end point of the research process. To the question of what data are Glaser (2001) answers that 'all is data' in a field, and:

> …usually an interview-observation in field notes. […] But conformity of data is not required for comparing. Diverse data from other emergent sources can be compared. By diverse I mean whatever may come the GT researcher's way while theoretically sampling: documents and current statistics, newspaper articles, questionnaire results, social structural and interactional observations, interview, casual comments, global and cultural statements, historical documents, whatever, whatever as it bears on the categories. (Glaser 2001: 146-147)

Academic literature is also treated as data and Glaser (1978: 33, emphasis in original) means that we should '*…remember when reading that what the author presents as his knowledge is, for the grounded theorist,* ***data*** *in perspective*'.

As Grounded Theory according to Glaser is to base the analysis in the empirical work and not in theory, the reading of literature and theory should only be made after a core category has been found and conceptualisations made. Theoretical integration should be steered by theoretical sampling. To a certain extent I have followed these guidelines, but in line with the discussion on abduction, I have related my analysis and my 'sensitising concepts' to theory. Over time a more constructionist reading of Grounded Theory has been adopted, both from a sense of being more aligned with my theoretical assumptions, and, importantly, from not being able to solve the problems arising from using only the guidelines as they are framed by Glaser.

Going beyond Glaser's traditional Grounded Theory is to take a pragmatist approach to reading the literature of the field of study. In the original recommendations made by Glaser, reading the literature related to the field is discouraged, but in Bryant's (2009) view there is no reason why literature related to the field cannot be considered data. If applying the theoretical sensitivity of abduction to the research process and not the inductive, the problem also disappears. As Bryant claims:

> One can never enter a research area with an empty head; one can try to do so with an open mind, but sometimes it is precisely one's prejudices – in the sense of prior judgements – that provide a basis upon which innovative insights can be developed. (Bryant 2009)

Another important influence from the pragmatist position presented by Bryant is that there can be no fixed points from which reality can be observed and that the development of ideas about the world can never be completed and '*…the focus is on* ***knowing*** *rather than knowledge*' (Bryant 2009, emphasis in original).

To start the discussion on constructionist grounded theory Charmaz (2006) makes a distinction between 'discovering' theory and 'constructing' theory, in which she argues that Glaser and Strauss in their original works present theory as discovered and emerging and separate from the observer. Charmaz, on the other hand, states, and I agree with her, that:

> …assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We **construct** our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. (Charmaz 2006: 10, emphasis in original)

Another distinction is between what the discovered categories and models do. In Charmaz' words:

> Raising categories to concepts includes subjecting them to further analytic refinement and involves showing their relationships to other concepts. For objectivists, these concepts serve as core variables and hold explanatory and predictive power. For constructivists, theoretical concepts serve as interpretive frames and offer an abstract understanding of relationships. Theoretical concepts subsume lesser categories and by comparison hold more significance, account for more data and often are more evident. We make a series of decisions about these categories after having compared them with other categories and the data. Our actions shape the analytic process. Rather than discovering order **within** the data, we create an explication, organization, and presentation **of** the data. (Charmaz 2006: 139-140, emphasis in original)

In this way constructionism takes the focus away from discovering order in the data of the empirical world towards empirical and theoretical discussions from the viewpoint of presenting them as possible organisations and representations of this world, as constructions and presentations that are dependent on the situation and circumstances in which they were constructed. Turning to constructionism takes away the straitjacket of trying to find one basic social process in the material. One problem remains, though: the issue of contextualising the presentation, a problem that is partly solved by taking an abductive stance, but which needs more thorough discussions on the assumptions made in symbolic interaction and its view of the actor and on its relation to structures and discourses of power.

I will, in my discussions on the situation the asylum-seeking refugees are in, use both the concept of structure and of discourse. For the purpose of the presentations in this thesis, structure relates, for example, to what laws and regulations there are, while discourse in this thesis is discussed from the point of view of how these structures are legitimised and naturalised and how discourse can help us understand contradictions and contingencies in practices and structures. Structure in this sense relates to what is or at least seems ordered, while discourse relates to how structure is made to seem ordered.

Clarke (2005) describes a way of using Grounded Theory, which supplements the traditional generation of basic social processes. With a situational analysis based on Strauss's work on social worlds/ arena/discourse framework she wishes to give an alternative analytic structure to that of searching for basic social processes of action. Although I have not used Clarke's analytic structure of situational analysis, many of the assumptions behind the same analytic structure and the discussion on how Grounded Theory can take on constructionism and push us as well as, at the same time, pull us along the postmodern turn are made possible by an introduction of structures and discourses of power. Taking her starting point in Straussian formulations of Grounded Theory and in symbolic interactionism, which in her interpretation supports constructionist interpretations and analysis, she pushes Grounded Theory even further around the postmodern turn, beyond 'the knowing subject' and towards studies of narratives and discourses.

Clarke also finds that constructionist grounded theory presents analysis and theorising rather than building formal theory. As I have found in this study, to look for a formal theory or even a substantive theory in the field is not the aim. Instead to present an analysis and theorising of the asylum-seeking refugees' management of the situation they are in I have concentrated on how with Clarke (2005: 293) '*...theorising invokes sensitizing concepts*'. Further and further into the study, realising that I would not be able to find any basic social process or substantive theory, I turned to analysing what was going on in the field using the sensitising concept of seeking or searching for, which opened the way to a theorising on the more specific concept of seeking empowerment.

In Clarke's view, Grounded Theory and symbolic interactionism have pulled us through the postmodern turn through emphasis on perspective, a materialist social constructionism, deconstructive analytic interpretations and multiple readings and interpretations, its emphasis on actions and processes anticipating instabilities, and its emphasis on variation and differences and its relational forms of analysis.

The realisation of perspective in Mead's sense leads to a social constructionism in which we are capable of taking on the perspective of others, taking on their attitudes and seeing their point of view. Following this in Clarke's words:

> At its simplest, constructionism assumes that the only realities possible are those that we construct, which we must do through shared language, and that we must agree about, however unstable those meanings and agreements may be in linguistic and related practices. (Clarke 2005: 7)

The materialism of this social constructionism is related to sociality and relationality of the material in the way we make meaning of embodied parts

of the material world. The deconstructive analysis can be traced to the tool in Grounded Theory of open coding, making possible multiple readings of the material. Again in Clarke's words:

> All readings are temporary, partial, provisional, and perspectival – themselves situated historically and geographically. There are no essences – we are postessentialist. (Clarke 2005: 8)

With an orientation towards action, processes and negotiations in Strauss's formulations, Grounded Theory can represent instabilities and contingencies and it is always possible to see '*...how things could have been otherwise*' (Hughes 1971 in Clarke 2005: 9). Variation has also always been central to Grounded Theory.

The relationality towards the situation also has its roots in the symbolic interactionism of Blumer and Strauss's works. Through, for example, Blumer's conceptualisation of race as collective positionality and Strauss's work theorising on 'universes of discourse', Clarke can go beyond the usually conceptualised bounded concepts of organisations, institutions or social movements towards a more open and fluid framework based on a discourse framing action. Such a view opens up to a more problematically-bounded situation.

Analysis of the situation needs to be made in a Foucaultian tradition in the way discourse:

> ...not only sets limits and restricts that which can be said about a phenomenon but also, in the positivity of power, empowers certain agents to speak and make representations, while also disempowering others from doing so. (Clarke 2005: 160)

Discourse in this sense sets the conditions of possibility for the agents participating in it and is produced as a representation of social worlds and by the conflicts and contradictions within them. The realisation about how the situation was described by the participants in this study and from reading documents, news, reports and academic literature pointing to conflicts and contradictions in the interpretation of the situation has meant that such a definition of discourse is needed. To understand the situation there is a need to see what interpretations are empowered and which are disempowered.

Clarke also points to how traditional Grounded Theory is struggling in some ways against being pushed around the postmodern turn through a lack of reflexivity, oversimplifications and a search for purity. The lack of reflexivity stems from a naïve notion of giving voice to the informants by presenting their perspective, while the researcher should be invisible in this process. Relating to oversimplification there is also an orientation towards emphasising commonalities and coherence, striving towards a single

characterisation of a phenomenon and talking about variations as negative cases.

Clarke wishes to push Grounded Theory around the postmodern turn by acknowledging, for example, how all knowledge producers are situated, how there should be a turn towards complexities, differences and heterogeneities instead of the normative and homogeneity. By deconstructing the assumption of objective emergent discovery of classical grounded theory towards a grounded theory and grounded theorists bounded by the situation she also states that studying action is not enough.

> We need analytic maps to plot positions taken and their relative locations and power. We need improved methods for grasping the constructions of terrain – altitudes, topographies, scales, textures, and so on. We need methods that can simultaneously address actors in action and reflection and discursive constructions of human and nonhuman actors and positions and their implications. We need cartographies of discursive positions. (Clarke 2005: 33)

In her advancement of situational analysis Clarke plants new roots for constructionist grounded theory. One of them is to introduce the ideas of Foucault in dialogue with Strauss and other interactionists. In this dialogue Clarke partly focuses on their relation to discourse and how identities are framed through relations in the social worlds they participate in. She points to Blumer's (1958) work on meaning making, boundary making and group positioning in a study on racial prejudice and to Strauss's theoretical focus on social worlds as 'universes of discourse', which can be traced to Mead (1934). Blumer and Strauss, relying on Mead, understand individuals as constituted through social collectives and collectives as constituted in interaction with other collectives. What Foucault does is to situate matrices of power into the discourses.

> For Strauss, both individuals and collectivities are *produced* through their participation in social worlds and arenas, including their discourses. While Foucault's language of disciplining and the constitution of subjectivity(ies) is more insistent and decenters "the knowing subject" much more thoroughly, these productions are accomplished through routine practices. (Clarke 2005: 55, emphasis in original)

The matrices of power are visible in this thesis, which sticks to viewing the acting asylum-seeking refugee as a reflective actor, but also acknowledges both the matrices of power in their actions and search for empowerment and, in particular, the collective practices of the discourses of migration and immediately connected to these discourses.

Concluding the section on methodological assumptions and starting points in which constructionism and questions of situation, power and

discourse have been added to a more traditional employment of Grounded Theory, I wish to make a few concluding remarks on the presentation.

First it points to the methodological, analytical and meaning making features of abduction, those of constantly comparing and searching for knowledge by comparing between different levels of information, from the very concrete to the more abstract. The second point made is that the constant comparisons are also related to comparisons between objects, incidents and categorisations, which are very much focused upon in the tradition of grounded theory. These comparisons are related to both methodology as well as to everyday life. The comparisons are often made in dualisms. There are many such underlying dualisms in the presentation so far and to follow. The dualisms that appear are relational, but in the presentation might seem to be dichotomous dualisms. Some of the dualisms which I have already touched upon and compared are in a sense objective versus constructionist approaches to social science in the specific case of Grounded Theory.

There is also a presentation of the empirical findings and the theorisation around them, in which the situation for the asylum-seeking refugees in Sweden and how they manage this situation will be discussed from the point of view of a dualism between disempowerment and empowerment and from the point of view of agency and its limitations or, if you will, agency in relation to structure and discourse.

Thirdly my discussions in this thesis are on the searching for meaning that goes on in the asylum-seeking refugees' management of their situation, as they are seeking empowerment. This seeking to understand and explain needs to be considered through the whole research endeavour. Methodologically this is also what goes on, to try and understand by interpreting actions in context: what goes on in the situation of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden and how they manage it. The field notes are notes of constructions of such meaning in the meeting between researcher and informant. They are constructions of interpretations of actions taken and about to be taken by themselves and the actions of others and how different statements and actions can be interpreted within the situation. In that way the search for meaning goes hand in hand with the research process, in which I interpret the situation and actions related to it, using methodological and theoretical tools to make this comprehensible.

Following this presentation of theoretical and methodological assumptions and starting points I will now present the research as it has progressed, looking at issues of entering the field with a description of the field, data construction, coding procedures and memoing for analysing the material, as well as the pacing of the realisation of the research process.

Realisation of the research

How to do research has to be learnt while doing it, which became all the more clear as I started out doing field work and started to analyse. This short presentation of the realisation of the research process will not be able to touch upon all the issues, thoughts, decisions and ups and downs in this process. The presentation is here to give a taste of what has been going on during the six years of research into the field.

The field of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden has its own characteristics and entering the field has proved challenging in many ways and more generally it has been important to realise that:

> To understand the mechanisms behind certain phenomena we have to understand the world from the participants' points of view. Their actions have to be related to their experiences and the social context that surrounds them. This implies knowledge about "the field" e.g., people's everyday life, the social structures, the specific culture and the norm systems that surround both our informants and ourselves. (Dahlgren, Winkvist et al. 2004: 98-99)

A crucial step towards the field is to gain access, for which Robert G. Burgess (1991) argues that to get acquainted with the field, key persons and potential gatekeepers need to be found and the project needs to be legitimised and trust found from the level of local authorities down to the individual informants. Gaining trust from the individual asylum-seeking refugees and from the community of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan has of course been crucial. To gain this trust from individual informants and the group as a whole, though, it has been important to emphasise my role as a researcher/student and to distance myself from the controlling Swedish authorities.

Participant observations and informal interviews in the form of conversations took place in different settings where the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan were and I could meet and spend time with them. The field work revolved around three reception centres, of which all of my informants had experience. I had been living within the location of one of the reception centres for a few months while teaching Swedish at the reception centre school. This was before the start of actual field work and the formal taking of notes as part of a study into the management of the situation of being an asylum-seeking refugee, although it was at the same time as the aim of the study was drafted.

With the research aim drafted I already had my way into the field, through asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan I had met and initially spoken to during my period of teaching Swedish. The research process started formally in the autumn of 2004, but in my mind it started with the first meeting with asylum-seeking refugees in the autumn of 2002.

Initial data collection was based on these contacts with asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan with whom I had contact through my earlier job as a Swedish teacher at a reception centre in the north of Sweden. The contacts slowly evolved from these initial contacts with a family (husband and wife), to their friends and later also to contacts made through Swedish classes at a reception centre and through Swedish classes at municipal level. In all cases except one (the Swedish classes at the reception centre) the contacts came from the personal networks of my informants and thereby it was easier to gain trust with new informants. As a result of the close connections and information sharing between asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in the area in which I did my field work, my name and work became known and this has also made it easier to approach people in the field.

To gain trust in the field has been of immense importance from the start of the field work and continued to be an issue throughout the progress of field work. Many steps have been taken not to compromise this trust and sometimes this might have led to slowing down the pace of data collection. I do, however, feel that my patience in the field has proved fruitful and the trust built up was a strong resource in the field work.

I had to make choices about how to carry out my observations and informal conversations in the field. I started out with a plan to make observations with informal conversations, interviews and biographies. The plan was to use the observations and informal conversations to get acquainted with the field and to start the analysis of field notes to make more focused questions for an interview situation possible. I noticed that the interview situation was not the best way to approach the field and the questions arising from the initial field work. The formality of conducting interviews did not feel at all comfortable in the situation the asylum-seeking refugees are in, in which they are exposed to tough interview situations during the investigations into the grounds for applying for asylum. Instead, situations where I have my agenda presented as a researcher, but behave more like a visitor, and participate in informal conversations on a wide range of things, have been preferable. It has been easier to gain and keep trust in that way in order to be able to ask the questions I needed to ask and to observe parts of their daily life. Another problem with the interview situation has been getting 'rich' answers to questions I have asked, due to a language barrier. I had to decide early on not to use interpreters, as the informants did not trust interpreters or like being interpreted. Nor has a tape recorder been used, as it would also have conflicted with the concentration on informality. This has led to a somewhat slower but necessary pacing of data collection.

I have 38 separate field notes comprising approximately 90 written pages of about 177 hours of conversations and observations. The first field note is dated 2004-11-16 and the last 2008-08-14. The field notes are different in

length and the number of people included. Of the people included in the field notes, 5 persons can be defined as key informants.

The analysis of these field notes has been continuous from the first notes until the last with open coding the main form of coding through the first notes, followed by selective coding of the same and of new collected data from the field. All through the study, I have, following Glaser's (1978) recipe for the research process, kept writing memos at varying analytical levels, from mere descriptions to more theoretically integrated memos. Over time these memos in general have gone from description to theoretical integration as the research process evolved. The keeping of memos has been instrumental for the emergent concepts of this study. Looking at the memos it is also visible that I have complied with Glaser's strongly emphasised constant comparisons. Making comparisons constantly to interpret what I see and hear has been central to constructing an understanding of what the participants in the study do, why and in what situation. I have described this in field notes. I have reflected on them through coding and categorisations and memos and I have made interpretations based on these.

Coding the material, as part of the process of constantly comparing incidents, proved not to be so easy. The coding procedure was time-consuming and I produced/constructed way too many codes. As was said earlier, Grounded Theory has to be learnt while doing research, which can be demonstrated in the progress of coding procedures, which revealed that, if I coded my material as action, 'verbifying' the codes, it made the process much easier. Using verbs to code the material also made it easier to relate to categories using the gerund form connoting ongoing action (Clarke 2005: xxxi - xxxii), which is common to theorising on basic social processes in traditional grounded theory. The codes came alive and it was a lot easier to see how the informants manage their situation. It was easier to see connections between codes and how they could be categorised.

In the research process the idea of sensitising concepts has been important in the way I have tried to be sensitive to my data. The realisation of using active codes and the gerund form made it easier to find the sensitising concept. The concept used has been seeking or searching, which has been used to open up and analyse the material in the later stages of analysis.

The slow pace of data collection has given me time to consider closely the different steps of the research process as described by Glaser. In hindsight the research process could have been faster had I started to be more selective in my coding earlier and had I been able to be more thorough in my theoretical sampling. Assumptions behind theoretical sampling do not always take into account the difficulties and demands of accessing the field and the continuous negotiations needed to keep trust and do not consider how power and ethics come into the picture.

> Remember that human beings are unlikely to relish being treated as objects from which you extract data. Reciprocities are important, and listening and being there are among them. Some researchers may command access on the basis of their authority and the prestige of their projects. Many other researchers cannot. Instead we gain access through the trust that emerges through establishing on-going relationships and reciprocities. Ignoring such reciprocities not only weakens your chances of obtaining telling data but, more over, dehumanizes your research participants- and yourself. (Charmaz 2006: 110)

Gaining access to the informants in this study was dependent on the trust and the close relationships created with them during field work. As theoretical sampling not only involves finding the 'right' people to speak to and observing the 'right' arenas, but also being able to pose the questions that emerge in the analysis, this trust and the close relationships with the informants were essential. One of the questions that would have been difficult to explore were it not for this trust and the close relationships was that of how the informants as a group handled the situation they were in.

At the same time there is clearly a possibility that the research process could have taken other routes had I had access to all emerging lines of inquiry (for example had I had easier access to asylum-seeking women from Afghanistan). This would, in Glaser's eyes, be a serious problem as his aim is to find the single main concern and basic social process of the people researched. Charmaz and Clarke have a different approach to this specific issue and more clearly see that it can be possible to follow more than one line of research and emerging conceptualisations.

Glaser's assumption that 'all is data' is a useful tool and starting point for theoretically sampling for new arenas for collecting data. The sampling for complementary data from sources other than the notes from the participant observations and conversations could be seen as triangulation. This triangulation, the use of multiple methods, should not be seen as a way to validate one's findings, though, but rather:

> The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 5)

That 'all is data' and triangulation in the sense described above serves to give me both an opening to use whatever material that finds its way into my theoretical sampling and, at the same time, a tool to make an emergent theory more explicable and able to meet different evaluative criteria. The theoretical sampling of data related to the construction of a sensitising concept has come from the field notes together with reflections from representations of the situation and actions of asylum seekers described in the media, reports and books, as well as following written contributions

published by an Afghan association in Sweden. Academic literature and theory have also been treated as data, in line with it being data in perspective.

More practically, the process of field work and analysis has led to a construction of the main concept used in this thesis: seeking empowerment. The concept has been constructed based on the dual relation between disempowerment and empowerment. Through the use of my sensitising concept of seeking or searching and purposely looking for action in the material, I discuss actions of empowering as opposed to passivity in resistance to a mainly disempowering situation. This situation and the actions taken in it have then, in the analysis, linked up with theory in which theorising on agency and structure has been one such important meeting between the data and theory. By joining with theories of agency and action, the material has met theories of the self in contrast to theories of the subject and to theories of emotions. When speaking of structures and discourses and the limitations upon choices and actions in the situation, the analysis of the situation has touched upon theories of domination based on nationalism and racism in relation to gender.

The meeting in the analysis between the data and theory has become more and more evident along the way and the important realisation that this can be understood through introducing the concept of abduction has proven to be a way to understand how people make meaning of the world, as well as pointing to how theoretical analysis works. It has also been a way to try and connect different levels of analysis by putting the part in relation to the whole. Constantly comparing incidents, codes and categories to each other, to literature and theory between levels of analysis has been a guiding tool.

The importance of writing memos can be highlighted in the way I used the memos to build the first text by sorting the different memos in to different piles, creating the first outline for writing up the constructions made around the category of seeking empowerment. Since then, though, through more writing, the outline has changed somewhat to what it is today.

A few words on the trustworthiness of the study might be appropriate before considering the context, power and ethics of the research further. When Charmaz (2006: 182-183, emphasis in original) discusses the evaluation of how well the constructed theory interprets the data, she mentions the criteria of '*credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness*'. Credibility deals with questions such as: '*Are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis?*' and '*Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment-and* ***agree*** *with your claims?*' Originality speaks of what is original and new in the presented theory. Perhaps the most relevant question on resonance is whether the Grounded Theory makes sense to the participants of the study and/or to people in

similar circumstances. And lastly, is the Grounded Theory useful? As a test for 'being useful', Charmaz asks if people can use the knowledge in their everyday lives, how it has contributed to knowledge and to make the world better.

For the criterion of credibility to be met in accordance with Charmaz' evaluative criteria I present quite a thick description of the analyses I have made, visualising the analysis by using excerpts from field notes. I also try as much as possible to show how the analyses were made and in what circumstances, situating myself as a researcher in the field and in the analysis. For originality I point to how action instead of passivity has been analysed in a field that to a large extent has previously been seen as a situation of passivity, how participant observations and constructionist grounded theory is able to analyse the field in this way and how the field can be situated through analysing more theoretical layers of the situation. Hopefully the study also gives resonance and makes sense to the people involved, although I have chosen to concentrate on how actions can be empowering and how it is possible to speak of empowerment in the situation. Choosing to speak of actions of empowering and seeking empowerment might for some give a simplistic image of what is going on in the field. The usefulness of the study is difficult to evaluate at this point. It cannot be said to be directly useful for the asylum-seeking refugees in the study, although it might be useful for altering the image of asylum seekers and presenting a situation from which the asylum-seeking refugees' management of their situation makes sense.

Considerations of power, context and ethics

When considering issues of power and context I find Burawoy's (2000) discussion of four dimensions sensitising the researcher to questions of power and reflexivity useful. The first dimension is on '*…the extension of the observer into the world of the participant*'. This extension of the observer into the world of the participant is common to all participant observation. The most important problem when carrying out research in the field is in the relations of domination distorting the mutuality of exchange between researcher and informant. The second dimension concerns the '*…extensions of observations over time and space*' by which he means that ethnographers '*…spend extended periods of time following their subjects around, living their lives, learning their ways and wants*'. With this dimension one has to be attentive to the power relation of silencing in which some informants are stressed at the expense of others. The third dimension is about '*…extending out from micro processes to macro forces*'. That is to connect the findings of the site to the '*…geographical and historical context of the field*'. The face of power to be attentive to in this dimension is that of objectification. Objectification means that by describing these forces in context, we give

them a sense of durability that they do not have. On the other hand 'extralocal determination' is a dispensable part of the research process and connected to this Burawoy stresses the importance of leaning on prior theory. The fourth dimension following this reasoning is in '*…the extension of theory*'. Burawoy emphasises the importance of relying on previous theory to be able to revise and reconstruct them and he points to the fact that we cannot go into the field without a lens, a lens which he wants to improve.

> As social scientists we are conventionally taught to rid ourselves of our biases, suspend our judgements so that we can see the field for what it is. We cannot see the field, however, without a lens, and we can only improve the lens by experimenting with it in the world. There is an element of power here too, the fourth face of power – *normalization*. We are in danger of straitjacketing the world we study, disciplining it so it conforms to the framework through which we observe it. (Burawoy 2000: 28, emphasis in original)

When he talks about the use of previous theory in the quote above he speaks of a fourth face of power, being that of normalisation. The issue of normalisation is relevant because of the danger of straitjacketing the world so it suits our own understanding of it.

The dimensions described and the faces of power to be attentive to in each dimension are as relevant for this study as for the extended case method described by Burawoy. There are important differences as well though. The fourth dimension on the extension of theory into the field of study is treated somewhat differently according to the methods I use. I agree with Burawoy that we cannot see the world, the field, without a lens and we can only improve the lens by using and trying it out. I hope that I have not tried to hide the fact that I also use a lens of sorts to analyse the field, the field of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden. I have gone into the field with my theoretical assumption, which basically assumes that there is both structure and agency within this field and that this relationship can be made more transparent by looking at the everyday lives of people living an extreme form of uneven globalisation. I assume that the world is humanly (socially) constructed by the people living in it now, who have lived in it and who will live in it. On the agency side of the agency–structure relationship I assume that people in every situation and especially in difficult situations are active and reflective in and of their situation. This means that they are also at some level 'aware' and can express how structure constrains them. Scientifically we can speak about these structures constraining people in some situations and enabling them in other situations as power relations, which are sometimes described in categories as class, gender, race, sexuality and so forth and the intersection between these. I assume all this and I think in Burawoy's words that it gives me a lens to 'experiment' with and improve. The difference that there might be in these approaches is that I have not so

much chosen one or several more specific theories to use in my approach to the field and in my analysis, but rather used a methodology which I hoped would bring new understanding both to the field of the management of the situation of asylum-seeking refugees in Sweden, but also as an example of global power relations at work. Looking at the results of my study in this sense, the methodology used was quite appropriate to reveal at least some of the processes for managing the situation and also to demonstrate certain structurally-constraining relations.

However, the connections between the model of seeking empowerment and the structural relationship between disempowerment and empowerment need to be sorted out in the light of some, or a few already existing theories on uneven globalisation in order to be explored further. This is where the insights from Burawoy's extended case method come in to discuss the possibility of empirical data (results) in the daily lives of people living globalisation to 'ground' and/or to improve our knowledge and our visualisation of this knowledge of processes of uneven globalisation. This is where my approach runs the risk of straitjacketing the world through the face of power of normalisation.

The faces of power of domination, silencing and objectification related to participant observation and contextualisation of the field are also related to the research process in this study. There are certainly problems with my approach in many aspects, both in relation to faces of power of both domination and silencing. My control over the material and what I write down or note in my field notes of informal conversations and observations is unquestionable. That I take part in the construction of knowledge, in that I write down my interpretations of what has been said and done is clear. The way I try to deal with this problem is to implement a grounded theory that realises the constructionist approach to data and analysis, in which I the researcher am co-producer of knowledge in the field. On the other hand, to be credible in my analysis I try to show the links between data and theory and provide enough 'evidence' to make my analysis credible.

As this research also stresses the importance of the situation, there is a danger of objectification, in the sense of giving durability to structures and discourses that I propose are related to this situation. The danger of dichotomising dualisms instead of showing the relationality between the concepts discussed in a dualism is one such example. A research project such as this also runs the risk of strengthening the division between an 'us' and 'them': between the Swedish, non-refugee such as myself, and the studied asylum-seeking refugee coming from somewhere else, in this case Afghanistan. It might strengthen the idea of the refugee as different to non-refugees. I hope that this report will show that although the lives and backgrounds of the asylum-seeking refugees are definitely very different from the lives of those of us who have been born and lived most of our lives

in Sweden, it is the situation, the structures and discourses around this situation that make their lives different. It is not that they are essentially different. It is the situation they are in which shapes a picture of difference. This should not be read as if I am reaching out for something essentially and universally human in our responses to the world, but to the conclusion that asylum-seeking refugees are no less different from each other than non-refugees are. There are no common characteristics of what a refugee is. If there are commonalities in what they do, it is the situation that causes this, not something inherent in the category of being a refugee.

Alongside the theoretical considerations of power and context are those of political and ethical considerations and principles of research. Lars Dahlgren, Maria Emmelin and Anna Winkvist (2004) present these principles in the research process and more specifically in interview and observation studies. The four basic principles are those of autonomy, no harm, beneficence and justice. The principles of autonomy and no harm stem from the rights of the individual being researched and from the right for the individual to make an informed choice (informed consent) and relate to confidentiality and the privacy of the individual, and to the obligation of not doing harm to the individual participant, thus respecting his or her integrity. The principle of beneficence relates to a utilitarian view of doing as much good as possible to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks. The other more collective principle of justice is related to human beings being treated equally in research, to always aiming at greater equity implying an obligation to favour the 'worst off' in society.

These principles are based in a canon of views traced back to the enlightenment project on the autonomy of the individual in relation to nature, society and science (Christians 2005). The ethical basis for the autonomy of the individual in value-neutral science and empiricism in a utilitarian sense is not neutral, but is in itself a representation of ideas, a presumed model of ethics in which it is assumed that '…"*a morally neutral observer will get the facts right*" *ignores* "*the situatedness of power relations associated with gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, race, and nationality*"' (Christians 2005: 148). The power of the researcher backed by the scientific community is visualised in the principles supporting a view that the researcher can, with an informed research design, avoid infringing upon informants' integrity and avoid invading their privacy. And if their integrity and privacy are infringed in some way it can be done by weighing in the benefits for society in the pursuit of value-neutral science. In such a view the power stays with the researcher and research community. The agency of the researched and the humanity of the researcher, as well as the situatedness within power relations, are hidden behind a blanket of 'objectivity'.

A co-constructive approach to both the data constructed in the field, analysis and theorising, as well as to ethical issues relating to field work, analysis, theorising and reporting would be preferred. Realising the situatedness and context of power relations, the research process in a co-constructive dialogue between the researcher and the researched would be a way to 'really' deal with issues of power and ethics. In this research, while keeping the dialogue on issues of respect and ethics in meetings with people during field work, the dialogue within the analysis and theorising has been a construction in the mind of the researcher.

Whilst realising and trying to stay humble towards my position of power, it is true that I have also been positioned in less powerful positions in relation to my informants and the situation. In saying this I do not want to imply that the overall power position has not been mine, but only point to the fact that informants in this study having agency enough to change the course of research at the same time as situational factors, have both favoured and disadvantaged me the researcher.

As much as I believe it important to scrutinise the assumption between research and the assumed autonomy of participants in research, I have asked myself and the study questions which are related to the principles of what are the beneficial consequences of the study, how informed can consent be in the research process, how can the identities of the participants be disguised, what are the consequences for the participants during research and after publication and how will I be able to 'truthfully' present a world view, result and theory, which the informants can feel comfortable with (adapted from Dahlgren, Winkvist et al. 2004)?

On the individual level, participation in the study, hanging out with and speaking to me might have given them an important break from their everyday actions while waiting and a vent for their engagement in thoughts about their life while waiting. Sometimes I have also functioned as a source of information and discussion partner on both their individual cases and politics of asylum more generally. On a very few occasions I felt that I was intruding upon their privacy, but more commonly I felt that I sometimes put too much consideration into not intruding upon their privacy, making it a balancing act between intrusion and disinterest. Making a point of meeting people on several occasions also meant that I could wait and put my questions as they came up in conversation, not force them upon my informants. The research process thus might have been beneficial for the participants of this study on the individual and group basis of having someone taking an interest in their situation. The report itself is perhaps more beneficial through promoting a critical discussion on the impact of globalisation and the politics of international refugee migration and, more specifically related to Swedish circumstances, showing the agency of the asylum-seeking refugees at the same time as it presents the limitations to their agency in the situation they are in.

On the issue of potential harm, the participation of people in difficult situations needs to be considered and demands consideration throughout the whole research process. In a study by Kari Dyregrov, Atle Dyregrov and Magne Raundalen (2000), though, beneficial results were found for the participants involved and the refugees in their study rated participation as generally positive. My feeling is that, in my research, the participants are generally positive, which was proved by their willingness to meet up with me and help me with my questions.

The issue of informed consent has been difficult to deal with in this research as data is based on both informal interviews and participant observations. I made my key informants aware of the fact that I was a research student researching how asylum-seeking refugees managed their situation as asylum seekers in Sweden and that I had chosen to write about asylum seekers from Afghanistan. There are at least three problems with informed consent in this study. One is methodological, while the other two are directly related to the process of field work. As Grounded Theory is based on such notions as emergent design and sampling on the ground of analysis of data, it means that the questions evolve as the research evolves, which has meant that not even I was informed about where the research would 'end' and what questions would be asked along the way. The other two are related to the meetings with the participants on several occasions in different situations. This meant that I could not be sure of how aware they were of me taking notes on my every meeting with them and if they remembered that my role was that of a researcher. I made no effort to hide this fact, but as in most cases I took notes only after speaking to them it might have been concealed from them. The fact of meeting them at different places also meant that people other than my key informants appear in my notes and are part of my later analysis.

I have treated the problem of informed consent and its relation to the integrity and privacy of the individual by trying to keep the information as confidential as possible. Even so it is possible that people involved in the research are able to point out who I have been talking to and on publication be able to at least guess who is behind the excerpts presented in the thesis. Their names are not in any field notes, just initials or made up numbers and letters for each of the informants on each occasion. I have also chosen not to present my key informants' biographies or extended excerpts pointing to details on their personal background. I have not made a note of the ethnicity of the informants or of the group to which they belong either, although at times such information is visible in presented excerpts.

From these considerations of power, context and ethics as part of the research process I now go on to present in what circumstances the participant observations and informal conversations took place.

Field work

To start this section and to give a feeling of the context in which data was constructed with the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan I refer to this excerpt from an informal conversation which I described like this in the field notes:

During the interview I spoke mostly with one man, but there were more people present. During the conversations there were between three and seven people in the living-room. The TV was on during the whole conversation. He who presented me to the group was also there and actively participated in the conversations. A lot of the conversations and discussions between the people present were in Pashtu. Conversations and discussions I for obvious reasons did not participate in.[6]

This hopefully gives a feeling for how I described the construction of data in the field, of how the context of the conversations were, as I describe them here, very informal and often with a group of people, how the conversations were often (almost always) accompanied by the TV, how I was presented to new people by people I knew from before (people from the 'collective' of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan), and how language played a crucial role in how much information I could get and in the pace of the construction of data. In this particular conversation I was able to ask the question of what life as an asylum seeker is like, for example what is good and what is bad and from the answer we can see that it is mostly bad.

It is a bad life, not to get permanent residence permits, it gets bad. Waiting, nothing to do… Go to the doctor, they don't do anything… The have to wait for a long time… They are treated differently before and after getting residence permits…They cannot travel, they have to inform the Migrations office if they want to travel.

Life is problematic… To always be nervous… To not know what is going on… To all the time think of one's family… To not be able to sleep… To think of the situation in Afghanistan.[7]

At the same time the man I spoke mostly with earlier in the same conversation described life in the small town where the reception centre was located in other words:

6 Field note 12, 2006-07-18

7 Field note 12, 2006-07-18

It is good in [small town]. There are trains, apartments… He compares it with a town in Afghanistan where there is war; in [small town] there are no bombs. He feels good in [small town] and in Sweden overall, Swedes are good. He has got many Swedish friends.[8]

In this short exposition of excerpts from one of my field notes of a conversation with a group of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan living in a reception centre in a small town somewhere in Sweden I want to relate to a couple of things.

The last two excerpts describe, in a way, the tension between what is good and what is bad or what I refer to as empowering or disempowering. In this conversation shown in the excerpts both aspects come up. There are aspects of the situation at the reception centre which are better and, as I interpret them, empowering. In this case, as shown in the conversation, it is empowering to have the trains (possibility of travelling), somewhere to live where you do not have be concerned about your most immediate safety, to like Sweden and the Swedes and have many friends, both fellow asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan and people from the local area, described as Swedes.

At the same time, the situation is really bad. More bad than good, the way I interpret it. Although there are things in the situation of being an asylum-seeking refugee from Afghanistan which are empowering it is mostly a disempowering situation. This does not mean though that they are passive victims of this situation. They are resourceful and active in their resistance to the disempowering situation: seeking empowerment.

The conversations and the observations made in the field work took place in different settings and in different ways. As described above, at different times it was with a group of male asylum-seeking refugees at the reception centre, at their apartments in town, on an outing, in the pool hall and at a demonstration. On other occasions I spoke to informants individually over a cup of coffee, strolling around town or accompanying them on their way home from school or on the train. At other times I met with a couple at the reception centre, normally over dinner, many times accompanied by my family. What characterises the conversations and observations made during field work is how, as described above, they swung between the disempowering and the empowering and between hope and despair. The conversations were filled with emotions, with expressions of both hope and despair, of humour, and with respect but also with outrage. And always there was hospitality; I cannot remember any occasion when I was not invited for

[8] Field note 12, 2006-07-18

dinner, or a cup of tea with biscuits or asked if I wanted a cup of coffee at a café or restaurant.

For the main part, field work took place in three reception centres. These were situated in sparsely populated areas and some way from the main towns of the region in the mid-north of Sweden. In all cases the asylum seekers were housed in housing areas in apartments in the village/small town, which had been standing empty since people had moved out of the houses. In the two smaller reception centres the asylum seekers to a large extent were living side-by-side with the people already residing there. At the larger and older reception centre, around which a large part of the field work would take place, although living in existing apartments the asylum seekers were more isolated from the rest of the small town in a housing area with only a few so-called Swedish families. All the reception centres were referred to as camps by the asylum seekers themselves.

We communicated as best we could in Swedish, as interpreters were not a choice in this field work. The observations I made, supported by Öberg (2007), are on how Swedish is spoken between the asylum seekers and, in this case, also with me. We created a simpler version of the language, for example using only the present tense and many foreign words from other languages, making it a form of 'asylum-Swedish'. In many cases just facial expression and gestures would suffice. It is quite amazing in both Öberg's and my case how we have been able to construct stories together with the asylum-seeking refugees without having a common language to base them on. And these constructions of communication and constructing a common language go on all the time at the reception centres among the waiting asylum seekers. Language has not been as much of a limitation as I thought it might be. Although I realise that thicker narratives and biographies from my informants were difficult to construct, for the purpose of following everyday conversations and what they do in their day-to-day life it was not much of a limitation. Actually the efforts made to seek a common way of creating meaning using the Swedish language as a base is a way of seeking empowerment to be able to communicate with people outside the immediate group.

Why it came to be that informal conversations and participant observation came to be the main form of constructing data in the field was that the informality of the situations described above was key to answering the questions I had. The dialogue and meeting with them in their everyday and slowly getting acquainted with the processes and thoughts of the informants were the ways that I was able to construct the descriptions and the theorising on seeking empowerment that follow. As I mentioned before, the formality of the interview situation could not produce the same information as the activities taken by the asylum-seeking refugees in this study either individually or as a group. The excerpts from my field notes exemplified in

this thesis show the strength of informality and participant observation in constructing data around what they do to fill their time while waiting, data that would not have come through in interviews.

Having said this about field work, though, it has not been a smooth journey without its obstacles and disappointments. I for example encountered problems on occasions when I visited the married couple but could only speak with the man. This was due to him also entertaining other male friends from Afghanistan. In these situations the woman was not supposed to participate. Normally, when it was only us, the couple and me, we would sit and talk together, the three of us, but when other men (from Afghanistan) came, she would no longer participate.

We then went over to his friend, where his wife had prepared supper. It is starting to feel really weird that she prepares supper, but has to stay in the background. This time I did not even get to meet her, as he was there all the time. I am more and more becoming a part of the male circle of friends, which seems to mean that contact with her gets all the more difficult.[9]

This, which I interpret as isolation, was unfortunate because she seemed to like our conversations and was as much a part of them as he was on the occasions I met with them alone or with my own family. We, the couple and I, also created situations where we could meet as families. I made efforts to visit them with my family and they made efforts to invite us. We thus created a space in which we could all meet. I could also still occasionally meet the couple by myself, when the situation allowed it.

This is an example of how field work is constructed by negotiation. I had to negotiate my role as a researcher and how I could get as much out of my visits for my research as possible, at the same time as considering ethical issues and also methods in the longer run. Being male and an outsider helped me to get close to the male circle of friends, asking questions that only an outsider might ask, such as questions on culture, religion, traditions and so forth. I was probably also given more room to act in strange ways according to their frame of reference, as I supposedly did not know better, but also because my role was that of a researcher, thus also giving me some authority. In this way I was probably given more room to act in ways which were not correct or respectful in their eyes, as for example I at times talked to women from Afghanistan alone or in couples, spoke to individuals and groups that were not considered as friends and also moved quite freely between groups of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan that did not normally get on with each other that well.

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9 Field note 16, 2006-11-02

At the same time, being a man put me in a more difficult position to approach women informants. This was due partly to having to negotiate my way around the field, as I described above, but also because there were not that many female asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan at the reception centres I visited. There are not as many female asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in Sweden as there are male asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan. Although there were female asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan staying in the reception centres, mainly together with their families, I was not able to approach them more than on the one occasion when I met a grown-up daughter of a family at the school. More importantly though than for my research I found that the situation of a minority of women also led to their isolation, an isolation which the efforts of the couple show that they contend and seek to change.

Another example of negotiation during field work was to do with privacy and integrity in the social community of the group. It is clear that when speaking about other asylum-seeking refugees the conversations have been somewhat held back. I have not wanted them to know to whom I have spoken and how much I have spoken with other people and I never discussed anything said to me in confidence by another informant. It seemed as though the informants were also holding back for the same reasons, out of respect for each other. In some instances, when I have got to know some of them better, they have been more outspoken, though, and when I have got to know a group of friends they have found it easier to relate to each other in conversations. At the same time as they keep to their privacy it is also clear that the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan have quite a clear picture of who they are, where they are and what they do, at least those I have been in contact with through the reception centre.

Coming back to the limitations of the field work and of not being able to approach women in the same way as men, the key informants in this research are usually young men with other young men being noted in the field notes. Although the married couple described above, who after years of waiting actually received their permanent residence permits under the 'temporary law', are an important part of the field work, the young men who only got temporary residence for one year and other young men arriving after the 'temporary law' and getting negative decisions constitute the main part of the field work and accordingly the field notes. Appearing in the field notes are also young men who have been granted residence permits in Sweden, but for most it is a struggle for recognition of their claims. It would not be easy to categorise the informants in this study and no efforts to do so have been made. Although I acknowledge the importance of personal and group background and a background of experiences for an individual understanding of where the asylum-seeking refugees can draw strength to resist from and are thereby empowered, I have not made an effort to

describe such backgrounds. There are two reasons for this. One is the anonymity of the participants in this study and the other is the focus on categorising actions of managing the situation and on what they do rather than on what they do not do and on who they are. It is not the population as such that I have wanted to study, but what they do. Again, realising that part of the understanding of what they do, from the point of view of personal and group background, will not be achieved, I can, however, mention that the participants in the study come from different educational, geographical, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds with different first languages.

Also related to the field work are the moods at the reception centres and the moves between reception centres. During my time as a Swedish teacher and during this study I have found a great difference between the environments in the reception centres. In the autumn of 2002 I was part of starting up such an environment, as an employee of the firm in charge of Swedish education and new to this situation. The migration officers were also mainly new to the situation, as were the asylum-seeking refugees. There was motivation and good will all round. A year after this the reception centre was already closed down as the number of new asylum seekers to Sweden decreased and, continuing my work in the other village where another reception centre had started at the same time, the environment had already changed. Already, after a year the motivation and mood among the asylum seekers had changed for the worse as many of them had then waited for a year without decisions or had received negative answers, with a few exceptions. The mood of the migration officers also seemed more cynical and disappointed with how things worked out and how the system works and with constantly having to relate to the negativity of 'always' saying no. The whole village had also changed from positive to having more racist expressions made. Although these directly racist expressions were few and people in general were happy with the asylum-seeking refugees, they were still present. Later this smaller reception centre was also shut down and the asylum-seeking refugees moved on to yet another, bigger, older and even more depressing reception centre.

Concluding remarks on methodology and research process

The chapter on methodology has presented both the theoretical and methodological assumptions behind the research, as well as presenting the more practical realisation of the research, taking as a point of departure how reality is constructed in everyday interaction and how these actions in the everyday can be linked to processes at other levels of analysis through the concept of abduction. Abduction in this case is concerned with relating the part to the whole.

I also argue for the implementation of constructionist grounded theory sensitive to issues of power. Through presenting the basics of Grounded

Theory and pointing to developments of the same methodology towards constructionism and situational analysis, I discuss how the research process went from a more objectivist implementation towards a constructionist implementation. I also discuss how a constructionist grounded theory sensitive to issues of power by introducing the concept of discourse was necessary to accomplish the analysis in this research. In that way not only the analysis itself has been emergent, but also the implementation of methods has been emergent and changed through the research process.

I present how the research was done more practically, emphasising field work and field notes, making a special note on the importance of memos in analysing the data. I also emphasise the importance of trust in gaining access to the field and how I had to negotiate my way around the field and how I, for example, found that participant observation was the better method and dropped the plan to do interviews. Further I discuss how realising that 'verbifying' my coding of the material, concentrating on action, made the analysis easier. For the analysing and theorising I would like to point to the importance of pacing and creativity, which were achieved in the process of coding, both to open up the material but also to put it together again in constructing a sensitising concept, making sense of a part of what is happening in the field of study. In the pacing and for creativity, the writing of memos was perhaps the most striking and fruitful effort made in the analysis, with a freedom to explore ideas that saw their way into the final report. All the explorations made in this presentation come from ideas initialised in memos taken in the process of research. I also discuss how data and theory meet through sensitising concepts leading to the concept of seeking empowerment. In the realisation of the research I also point to the evaluative criteria of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness.

Considerations of power, context and ethics have also been discussed and introduce how power and context are involved and affect the research and the world through issues of domination, silencing, objectification and normalisation. I also discuss ethics through issues of autonomy, no harm, beneficence and justice and how these criteria can be criticised, but also how I have related to them in this research by discussing issues of the difficulties of informed consent in the field work as well as addressing the question of doing no harm.

The importance of issues in the field work was presented as part of the realisation of the research process, but also separately from the point of view of how and under what circumstances I met the asylum-seeking refugees participating in this study. I stress the importance of the informality of these meetings, the variation of places and circumstances in which these took place and how communication worked well although there were language problems. Important also were the negotiations that had to take place to gain and maintain access and trust during field work, and I note how this trust

was gained through respecting the issues raised by the participants in the research process.

The analysis made through the methodology used will now be presented in the following chapters of the thesis, first by situating the situation with the aim of getting closer to an understanding of the refugees' situation, with a focus on their difficulties of making sense of it due to the temporality of the same but also due to structures and discourses of globalisation framing the disempowering situation.

Situational Frame

The aim of this chapter is to frame the understanding of the situation that the asylum-seeking refugees find themselves in by introducing how the situation is perceived by the asylum-seeking refugees and by showing, from the analysis, how I interpret the situation as one of temporality. So far the situation has been contextualised in the chapter on the background and it will later be discussed in terms of disempowerment, but to come closer to a situational analysis of the circumstances in which the asylum-seeking refugees in this study find themselves I want to point to how the asylum-seeking refugees try to make sense of the situation. Trying to understand the situation has been a continuous effort throughout the research process. It has been crucial in my attempts to take the role of my informants as well as for the presentation of the situation in my research.

I argue that the situation is one characterised by temporality and, to get closer to an understanding of the difficulties of making sense of the situation, most importantly for the asylum-seeking refugees but also for analysing the situation in research, we need to approach the situation from a point of view of discursive fields related to this situation. The difficulties in understanding the situation and the temporality and contingency found in it point to there being other forces affecting the situation identified in the analysis. I will point to how the role of a national discourse with a preferential right of interpretation and, in the case of Swedish migration politics, tendencies towards paternalism, would be able to construct a frame situating the field of study and the outlined background to the same.

Such an approach to situating the circumstances in which the asylum-seeking refugees find themselves will add to the understanding of the field of study as presented in the background. The situational frame as it is presented here relates both to the background to the field of study presented earlier and to how the analysis of the situation is constructed as disempowering. The connection to more abstract theories of national discourse, racism and paternalism, together with the outlined background, frame the understanding of the situation as temporal and disempowering.

In this way the chapter sets the stage for the presentation of the empirical findings presented in this thesis.

Understanding the situation

To try and understand and explain the situation one is in and to look for one's place in it is central to making the situation comprehensible. There are many instances and examples where through reflection, trying to describe their situation and through comparisons the asylum-seeking refugees have made visible their desire to interpret the situation they are in. The category

of searching to understand and explain through interpretation is presented through reflection, description and comparisons.

To try and interpret the situation and to try and make it comprehensible are part of the management of the situation. To act is one thing, but these actions need to be placed in relation to how these actions give and are given meaning to what goes on to make the world comprehensible and to how the actions and emotions in the situation fit with their identity through the known self. This interpretation continues by seeking to understand and explain, through reflecting, describing and interpreting the situation and trying to make it comprehensible, and through actions of self-representation. Making sense of the situation in this sense goes hand in hand with actions of empowering. In the case of self-representation as described here, we can speak of actions which give meaning and a base for a known identity. When I speak of a known identity I refer to a situation in which the person feels comfortable within his or her actions and thoughts. The constructed meaning can be a base for actions related to the situation they are in. That way the actions of self-representation also seek to empower the self to be able to seek empowerment in other actions.

To interpret one's situation and act on it in ways that make the situation comprehensible and coherent is also a way of seeking empowerment. To make sense of the situation the asylum-seeking refugees in this study are in is not easy because of how complex the information and discourse on migration and refugee migration is. We have to recognise that it is no easy task for the individual asylum seekers or anyone else for that matter. To know their place in all this, they have to interpret the situation the best way they can with the information at hand. The uncertainty of the situation and the contradictions the asylum-seeking refugees find in the information and practices of the situation make it all the more difficult.

Making comparisons is one way of searching for understanding and explanations through interpretation, as can be seen in some of my informants trying to compare their own situations and their reasons for applying for asylum with those of other groups. Often the conversations on this issue concern the question of who gets to stay in Sweden and who does not. An example of such a conversation is this excerpt.

Concerning the question of who gets to stay many comparisons came up. One example is that they compared their situation with those coming from Iran. Iran has got a good economy. And in Azerbajdzjan…

People from Afghanistan do not have to lie about their situation. Everybody knows how the situation is there.

The Migration Board has a 'law' on who gets to stay and who does not. For example Iranians get to stay but people from Afghanistan do not. It is that 'law' that decides who gets to stay and who does not. Sweden has looked a lot to the political situation.

Concerning asylum-seekers from Afghanistan it is very difficult to get away from Afghanistan. People have fled for example over the Aegean Sea, where many have died on the way. They speak of broken families. They mean that it is more difficult to cheat about their origin or come back [to Sweden] if they have to go home. It is not like with the others, for example from the former Soviet Union, who can come and go.

They cannot understand why people from Afghanistan do not get asylum.[10]

In this excerpt we see the need to understand and to explain their situation, through description and comparisons. They compare their situation with other groups they do not think have the same need (or at least not no more need) to be granted permanent residence permits. They have made observations and interpretations of these groups' needs from the information and experience they have. They have compared them with their own to be able to understand and explain their situation. At the same time they also consider the role of international politics on Swedish policies on asylum in commenting that '*Sweden has looked a lot at the political situation*', showing that they also process information and interpret at the international level. To me this shows the importance of discussing these issues on a more knowledge-based level with the asylum seekers so as not to patronise them when challenging these issues openly. They do observe, and through the asylum-seeking process understand and map how different things are connected.

This is another example showing that the asylum-seeking refugees follow the Swedish debate on asylum.

We talked a lot on who gets to stay and who does not. Who should be allowed to stay and who should not. I mentioned apathetic children. They said and had heard from people from former Yugoslavia that when they got negative decisions they made themselves ill, took pills… They also talked about other nationalities. One of them said that if apathetic children get to stay, more children will get ill.[11]

[10] Field note 12, 2006-07-18

[11] Field note 4, 2005-06-19

This reasoning is close to the official view of the Swedish government at the time, which argued that children showing symptoms of apathy were likely to have been put in that state by their parents and if these children were given residence permits in Sweden more children would be used in this way. This shows that the asylum-seeking refugees are informed and follow debate and that their views are also formed by the dominant discourse as well as a tendency to compare in the way that is shown above.

The use of comparisons to create meaning does not only come from comparing one's own reasons for applying for asylum with those of other groups, as we have seen earlier. The search for understanding and explanations is done through trying to describe and to compare. There is a need for understanding and explaining the situation and this is shown through description and by trying to solve the puzzle by making comparisons to see where the pieces might fit. The importance is that they also do this in relation to the bigger picture.

Although efforts are made to make the situation comprehensible, there are many obstacles to actually constructing a coherent presentation of the situation. It is difficult to solve the puzzle and it is easy to get caught in description and a comparison on the basis of what one perceives is happening. The situation is filled with uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions, leading to a situation of temporality.

The temporality of the situation

The uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions of the situation, lead me to point to the temporality this situation creates for the asylum-seeking refugees.

Brekke (2004) points to a situation that is full of ambivalence and uncertainty, not only for the asylum seeker but also for the Swedish authorities. According to his report the Swedish Migration Board has had the double role of both preparing the asylum seekers for integration in Sweden and for repatriation. This ambivalence in the treatment of asylum seekers is because it is not known in the beginning whether the asylum-seeking refugees will get to stay or not.

This ambivalence I treat as contradictory. In my analysis of the situation this ambivalence has been that the concentration has been on repatriation and more unwillingly towards integration. In my experience of working with asylum-seeking refugees from different backgrounds and through this study, it has been quite clear from early on that it is difficult to get permanent residence permits in Sweden. Individual officers of the Migration Board have also stressed this and therefore the efforts of my informants from the start have been to deal with a situation in which one is not welcome. It is this disempowering situation they need to manage and seek empowerment from, with a background of doing what they can to get to stay. They still see the

project of staying as meaningful, although the emphasis on repatriation is high from the Swedish authorities. Despite the meaningfulness of the project, they all the time have to consider other possibilities. Brekke also addresses the issue of the threat of being repatriated as always with them even if it is not talked about. He also describes the efforts of working towards integration on the part of the Migration Board as being half-hearted, except from some individual migration officers.

What this ambivalence and uncertainty by the authority in power does to the individual asylum seeker is to create a dependence on this ambivalence and uncertainty in the system, leading to a situation in which the asylum-seeking refugee is dependent on the whims of the system. More generally the system and migration policy are disempowering, but open up for empowerment when, for example, the official interpretation of the situation and of the individual's reasons for staying changes. These changes, made on a 'whim' are connected to the uncertainty of both the outcome and the time frames to be expected, leading to a situation of temporality.

The asylum-seeking refugees in this study are exposed to a life which is only temporary, which makes it all the more difficult to manage life because the conditions and situation are changing all the time. One example of this is that their status as 'real' refugees changes over time, both as the situation in Afghanistan changes and is interpreted by the international community and the Swedish authorities and because of changes in asylum and refugee policy and law. These changes in the status attributed to them create a situation of temporality that is the frame in which seeking empowerment takes place. The dependency of the asylum-seeking refugees on the decisions of others makes them exposed to changes in these decisions. When seeking empowerment they have to consider the temporality of the immediate situation.

Temporality and discontinuity are important factors in the disempowered situation. They show in several ways. The most telling is how the 'official' interpretation of the situation for asylum seekers changes due to new policies and, in this instance for example, by two new laws during the research period. One was the new Aliens' Act (from 2006-03-31), while the other was a political compromise, the temporary law on impediments to the enforcement of refusal of entry (from November 2005 to March 2006). Some of my informants have lived through all these changes and their cases have been administrated through them. The policies towards asylum seekers from Afghanistan and the assessment of the situation in Afghanistan have also changed over time. Although the emphasis both from the international community and from Sweden has been one of repatriation, there have been some instances suggesting that for the individual refugees it has been possible to get permanent residence permits.

The refugees are also dependent on geo-political changes in the world. In this case there was a change in the attitude and concentration on the repatriation of refugee men from Afghanistan, as the number of refugees from Iraq increased and made it urgent for Swedish politicians (the Swedish government) to 'protect Swedish asylum politics'. According to this logic it is as important to send away those not deserving our protection, as it is to protect those deserving it. As the numbers of refugees from Iraq increased it was also a question of limiting the amount of refugees, as many refugees from Iraq were refused asylum in Sweden.

Central to what I interpret as disempowering is not knowing what the time frame is while waiting. In most cases the asylum-seeking refugees have no information on how long they have to wait for the next step in the process. This is apparent from the very start when they are interviewed: when does a decision come, how long does an appeal take? It is not only that the waiting times often are very long (for the informants in this study), but also the not knowing when changes in their status might come that makes it very difficult to plan life and makes it difficult to stay motivated, and the informants often express feelings of frustration.

The temporal aspect of not knowing what time frame to expect becomes even clearer in how they seek to understand and explain their situations. It is easy to relate to a situation where not knowing what comes next limits your options for future action, reflection and how to feel. Not knowing what comes next and what the process looks like is another visualisation of being dependent, strongly contributing to the disempowered situation of temporality.

As a note on the temporality of being an asylum-seeking refugee, I borrow this quote from a boy, 17 years old, from Afghanistan as retold by Brekke (2004):

> Even in prison they operate with a time limit! "This is when you are going to be free", they'll tell you. But here they only tell you to wait, just wait... (Brekke 2004: 21)

Related to this quote Brekke discusses how this not knowing '*...gives a draining feeling that increases as the waiting period is prolonged*'. What was worse, though, was if the asylum seeker had been led to believe that an answer would come at a certain point but it did not. Both these situations led to a state of being lost in time.

Another issue of temporality taken up by Brekke (2004: 23) is that his informants reacted strongly to how '*...the timing of decisions seemed to be random*'. The informants in his study could not see the logic behind why some decisions came before others and this made the system seem unjust. Brekke speaks about how it felt as some persons 'jumped the queue', and this was felt to be all the more unjust when the informants compared with people

whom they interpreted as having similar backgrounds. Something else contributing to this temporality, or as Brekke describes it 'being lost in time', can be seen in another quote borrowed from an interview with a young man from Afghanistan:

> Even in school I suffer. I have been here for 10 months now, but when someone new arrives, he is put in the same class as me! There is no progression! They should separate us. When I tell them this, they tell me to wait until I get my residency. 'Then you will attend a bigger school'. (Brekke 2004: 24)

The temporality of not knowing when to expect the decision on residence permits and waiting for other decisions on whether and when one can expect to see a doctor, whether and when one can expect to get a work permit, whether and when one can expect a place in school, or whether and when one can move to another apartment, is dependent on decisions from the authorities. Brekke makes an important contribution to this analysis of temporality when speaking of the relativity of waiting. The relativity of waiting points to the fact that their experience of waiting is also dependent on comparisons with other asylum seekers.

Making comparisons of one's own situation to that of others, both with people in similar situations but also with people in general, including comparisons between oneself and native-born Swedes, is an important part of making sense of the situation. I have found that comparing situations between people with seemingly similar backgrounds is sometimes talked about with reference to being more worthy of having one's reasons for staying taken seriously than others and that others even cheat and lie to get ahead in the system. This would be disempowering for the group of asylum-seeking refugees. In this instance the interpretation of the comparisons made of the period of waiting, the relativity of waiting, also leads to a feeling of being dependent on an unjust system.

Temporality and being limited in planning and preparation are shown in an excerpt taken from a conversation with a woman who had received her permanent reception permit together with her husband, but who was now waiting for somewhere to live.

It was good to speak to her again. But she is not having such a good time; it is hard for her in [the small town] now. She has no friends. The last time I spoke to her, she could be together with her neighbour (from Afghanistan), but they have moved on to the municipality where they were placed (they have received permanent residence permits). Now she has got nothing to do.

I asked her if she sews anything now and she had actually bought a sewing machine at the supermarket with a discount (cheap), but she has not

unpacked it yet. She plans to unpack it, when they have moved where they are going to move. She cannot afford to buy material and such, to be able to sew.[12]

The unopened sewing machine box could symbolise the temporality of waiting, in this case waiting for somewhere to live after receiving the permanent residence permit: the waiting for solid ground on which to build plans is lacking while waiting for decisions. Although the project of seeking asylum is very meaningful, planning for an unknown future is difficult. Still, as we have seen, they make plans, and do things in preparation for their future.

The fact that reception centres are opened and closed down is partly because the number of asylum seekers coming to Sweden goes up and down. This occurs in relation to the present situation in the world at the time and how the processes of forced migration look at that moment. Politically the situation also changes as opinions within Swedish society change, as was the case with the 'temporary law', applied between November 2005 and March 2006, which had consequences for the informants in this study. There is something temporary about the whole process and timing is extremely important for the situation and how it works out for the individual asylum-seeking refugees. The time they happen to come to Sweden is important for what will happen in their future. Although the restrictions and general politics of containment and repatriation are current policy and most asylum seekers are not granted permanent residence, the fact is that for some groups at some points in time it is quite likely that they will be granted asylum. So the fact that some asylum seekers, and among them many of the informants in this study, grasp at straws of hope is not irrational, as changes of heart in Swedish politics happen and there might be openings for them in the future. So hiding and waiting might not be that irrational, even from the point of view of later being granted permanent residence status, although the main reason for hiding from being forcibly repatriated is that going back is not an option.

Looking at temporality in this way demonstrates that it is difficult to find the logic behind the practices in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden. To understand where the uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions leading to a contingent situation of temporality come from, I will now tentatively propose a filter through which this situation can be understood. I propose, with the introduction of a discussion on Swedish migration politics and practices from the point of view of a discursive field of nationalism with a right of interpretation expressed in paternalism, to create

[12] Field note 18, 2006-11-12

an understanding of how the temporality and disempowerment of the situation can be situated within more global theories of domination and racism.

Globalisation and the postcolonial condition

Although it is argued that through globalising processes the world is getting better for many people, uneven economic, political and social processes of globalisation are maintained and are naturalised by discourses legitimising and naturalising these uneven processes of globalisation. Through discourse, in practice and in text, the global economic, political and social systems and the uneven positions that follow within the global system are created, maintained and transformed. Postcolonial studies strengthen our understanding of uneven globalisation. By deconstructing practices, symbols and texts used by dominant groups, analysis of discourse can bring forth an understanding of postcolonial conditions and give a platform for subordinated groups to resist dominant discourses. The goal is to visualise practices of domination between the centre and periphery and undo the 'binarisms' of colonial thinking (Hoogvelt 2001).

Postcolonial studies do not only concentrate on the post-colonial conditions of the subordinated in subordinated places in the world, but is also important for the understanding of the dominant in dominant places in the world. In this sense, the field of Swedish migration politics is connected to the construction of a Swedish national identity, an identity constructed in relation to 'others', that is, a construction of an 'us' as opposed to a different 'them' and in relation to different theories on racism in Sweden (see discussions in Jonsson 1993; Pred 2000; Mc Eachrane and Faye 2001; Brune 2004; de los Reyes, Molina et al. 2006).

Such distinctions, as they are central to an understanding of the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden. Actions, through practices and discussions, taken towards migrants coming to Sweden can be discussed through discursive elements of Swedish migration politics as they relate to European and international discourses on migration. One central question related to discourse concerns the preferential right of interpretation. Who has the preferential 'right' and the power to interpret and set the agenda for those who come to Sweden to seek asylum? And more importantly what does it do to the space of action of the asylum-seeking refugees? What limits their struggle, their seeking empowerment?

References to linking the field to a context of uneven globalisation and post-colonial theory can be found in Linda Helgesson's (2006) research on life-strategies of town youth in Mozambique and Tanzania, Erika Sörensson's (2008) research on making a livelihood in backpacker tourism in urban Indonesia and Ulrika Schmauch's (2006) concentration on post-colonial theory and theories of racism in her research on the invisibility of

everyday racism in Sweden. Their research has shown the strength in relating their specific fields to a context of structural and discursive theories of globalisation and/or postcolonialism, both as a means for contextualising the field, and visualising processes of uneven globalisation and postcolonial conditions.

In theorising on globalisation the nation state is central. The position of the nation state itself, though, is questioned in the contemporary global system. The power of the nation state undergoes different processes of change. The sovereignty of the nation state is in question, as it becomes mixed up in global networks of power. Nation states become dependent on these networks of power to exercise authority and power. This dependence does not make them irrelevant, though; Manuel Castells (2004), for example, speaks of the continued relevance of the nation state, as one of collective identity. The nation state will also continue to be an important player economically and politically. It will find itself in a contradictory situation, though, due to being, simultaneously, a community looking for a national identity and a participant in the global power system of nation states as one player among many. Leaning too much towards creating a community of nationality will weaken the nation state in its efforts to promote its political power in relation to other nation states and vice versa.

Globalisation in terms of time-space compression and the transformations mentioned above gives very different outcomes for different people depending on where in the time-space compression they are placed. In Massey's (1991: 26) terms, '*The time-space compression of some groups can undermine the powers of others.*' There are differences in mobility and communication, as well as in the degree of control people have over their own mobility. This means that some people are in control of their mobility, while leaving others behind or doing a lot of physical moving, but not always through their own choosing. At the global level the mobility of a cosmopolitan elite can be contrasted with the restricted mobility of refugees.

Using the insights from Bauman, Castles (2003) states that, '*…mobility has become the most powerful and coveted stratifying factor'* and that while '*…the riches are global, the misery is local'* (Bauman 1998: 9, 27 in Castles 2003: 16). Castles discusses inequitable participation in the global economy, drawing on Beck, Castells and Hoogvelt on the selective inclusion and exclusion of regions and people. Castles says that:

> Understanding that forced migration is not the result of a string of unconnected emergencies but rather an integral part of North-South relationships makes it necessary to theorize forced migration and link it to economic migration. They are closely related (and indeed often indistinguishable) forms of expression of global inequalities and societal crises, which have gained in volume and importance since the superseding of the bipolar world order. (Castles 2003: 17)

On the social transformations in the 'North', Castles speaks of how forced migration has increased the social and cultural diversity of these societies and the growth of transnational communities. With the coincidence of the growth in forced migration to the 'North' and the downturn of the economy (marked by the oil crises of 1973) resulting in economic restructuring, deindustrialisation, privatisation and deregulation, all, in his words, resulting from globalisation, refugees have been seen as unwelcome threats to '*...jobs, living standards and welfare*' (Castles 2003: 20). This has resulted in a competition among political parties for who is toughest on 'illegals'.

This link between refugee migration and global economic development shows how migration and also refugee migration are connected to global forces of inequality. It also shows how global economic processes have led to transformations and restructuring of the economies of the 'North' as well as transformations in people's opinions about immigrants, including refugees.

National discourse, racism and paternalism

Looking at the situation of the asylum-seeking refugees in a context of national discourse with preferential right of interpretation and tendencies towards paternalism, it also means that we go from sets of structures that are uncertain, ambivalent and contradictory and at most times disempowering but with openings for empowerment, to a world view that makes it harder to see these openings for empowerment. In what follows we run the risk of objectifying the forces of nationalist discourse and paternalism, thereby giving them durability at the same time as we run the risk of straitjacketing the world so it suits our purposes. Anyhow, despite recognising the individual's and the group's opportunities for empowerment has already been considered, there is also a need to put the limitations of the situation in relation to theories of global forces that legitimise and naturalise the situation refugees finds themselves exposed to.

To make the connection between the temporality of the situation to national discourse is to show the link between the disempowerment through dependence and inhospitality through the temporality of the situation to the discourse of Swedish asylum policy and nationalism. This is as important or more important for the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan than, for example, what 'really' happens and the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. Quite arbitrarily, the situation for the asylum-seeking refugees can be changed by speaking of and defining the situation in Afghanistan differently over time. The question of what the situation is really like in Afghanistan is disputed and there are reports interpreting the situation quite differently from the Swedish migration authorities and government. Even if the Migration Board uses the same reports, describing the situation in much the same way as for example the UNHCR do in their reports, or the Swedish

Ministry for Foreign Affairs in theirs or even the Human Rights Watch in theirs, the interpretation of what this means according to the obligation of Sweden to give protection to people coming from different areas of Afghanistan is contested by the Migration Board with reference to Swedish law.

Starting with the national discourse and the nation state in relation to the situation of the asylum-seeking refugees, Johansson (2005) writes in her thesis on the discourse on Swedish migration politics that Swedish politics on migration are built on a discourse of the nation state, a result that contrasts with earlier research studies where it is stated that the restrictive policies on immigration and giving asylum to asylum-seeking refugees are based on socio-economical relations. She discusses how the restrictive policies towards the immigration of refugees, with its focus on repatriation do not come from nowhere, but have a logical development over time.

Johansson builds her argument on the logics of the discourse of nation state. She speaks of civic and ethnic constructions of nation states and that although Sweden is often seen as an example of a civic construction of the nation state it has clear, key ethnic signatures. She says that on a theoretical level of discourses of the nation state, the ethnic as well as the civic contain tendencies of homogenisation. A discursive construction of the nation state with a civic base is about a wish for well-integrated citizens with a job, somewhere to live and a certain level of education. In the Swedish discourse on repatriation such constructions of the nation state can clearly be found, but it is also quite clear that the wish for well-integrated citizens also has key ethnic signatures. She concludes that there are arguments on politics of integration, rather than only economic arguments, which are forwarded as arguments for the Swedish politics of repatriation. It is also obvious that discourses on migration politics include images of what is Swedish, what Swedish nationality is and on what is 'best' for Sweden. The expression of this nationalism comes to the surface in that larger groups of asylum seekers are quickly seen as belonging somewhere else and that large groups of refugees are difficult to integrate. In the discourse of Swedish migration politics, Johansson found that Somali refugees were for example seen as being too 'different'.

In this study, a discussion like this, on relating Swedish migration politics to the construction of the discourse on the Swedish nation state, can be used to explain better why certain groups of asylum-seeking refugees and specifically those from Afghanistan are not welcome in Sweden. The situation of not welcoming refugees from Afghanistan and refugees in general is contested, though, by many groups and individuals in Sweden that argue for a less restrictive system in general and support individual asylum-seeking refugees in their claims for protection. The main structures (practices) fed by discourse, however, are constructing a reality in which

these asylum-seeking refugees are subject to repatriation, for example to Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan. These are also groups that from a point of view of nationalist discourse are seen as difficult to integrate into Swedish and European society. In this perspective Swedish migration politics that focus on repatriation and thus being unwelcoming that the informants in this study are subjected to is given an explanation on the national level, but also on a European and international level, which leads us into a discussion about global unevenness based on racism.

Against this background, feelings of not being welcome in Sweden can be understood at the individual level, but they can also be related to what is going on globally using globalisation theory. The feelings of not being welcome can in this way be related to both socio-economic factors of globalisation, including class relationships between nation states, and discursive factors related to race and gender. The preservation of the construction of the Swedish nation state can thus give an understanding of why the asylum-seeking refugees are not welcomed to or in Sweden and of what creates dependence and a situation of temporality. In this way the inhospitality of the situation and not feeling welcome can be theorised at national and global levels. The experiences of not being 'worth' as much can also be traced back to colonialism using post-colonial theory.

Following the context of the situation as embedded in nationalist discourse, Ed Mynott (2002) discusses class and race in relation to nationalism and immigration control. The conclusion is that immigration controls are always racist.

> Although controls *formally* discriminate on grounds of nationality, racism has fundamentally informed the construction of immigration controls. The ideological justification for control has been a racialised nationalism, and the practice of control by the state has been directed at racialised groups. (Mynott 2002: 13, emphasis in original)

Historically the strengthened immigration controls of the US and the EU can be traced centuries back in Western Europe, of which Mynott says:

> In western Europe, the process of racialisation of particular groups of immigrants which was pioneered in the late nineteenth century and reforged in relation to black and third world peoples during the long boom, is occurring anew with refugees and asylum seekers as its core subjects. (Mynott 2002: 20)

The point here is that the idea of the nation state to this date has always been racist, building on images of others of different races both within the supposed common nation and outside the borders of the same.

The nation state as being racist needs to be understood from the point of view of situating racism historically through capitalism and colonialism. At the same time as the economy of capitalism took hold of large parts of the

world, and the European states expanded territorially as well as economically, the segregation or classification of race was promoted by colonialism, not only as a rationalisation of but also as an accelerator behind the oppression and exploitation of the people and territories the European colonial powers imposed. The classification into different races with different values was necessary for the exploitation of people for labour. A devaluation of people was necessary for the cruel exploitation and violent use of power upon the peoples that the Europeans carried out.

David T. Goldberg (2002) finds two major forms of racial expressions, namely those of racial naturalism and racial historicism used during and after the period of colonialism. The naturalist expression of race is about the inherent superiority of Europeans (white) over the inferiority of others, while the historicist expression calls on the superiority of Europeans through claims of historical maturity. Historically the brute naturalistic expression, which was dominant through the seventeenth century and into the nineteenth century, in which the '*...engagement with the racially subjugated is one of strict, unmediated exploitation. The racially inferior are seen as surplus value, both as usable labor and discardable detritus*', was later superseded by the historicist expression from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, in which '*... the racially immature are inserted into historical development. They accordingly are promised progress, a promise at once undermined by racial imposition in being progressively postponed to a future never quite (to be) achieved*' (Goldberg 2002: 96). The historicist expression of racism through maturity and development is closely connected to discourses of how migrants from the 'South' are difficult to integrate in the more developed democratic states of the 'North'.

In relation to the construction of a national discourse in Sweden Ylva Brune (2004) describes a situation in which the media helps the construction of a supposed Swedish 'we'. News about the 'other' reconstructs a 'we', which is connected to the nation state as an imagined community, a constructed 'we' created in media texts, which creates an advantage over the construction of the categories 'asylum seeker' and 'immigrant'. The advantage partly comes from the media allying itself to discourses of the authorities, transforming them into 'truths', and partly from its contrasting of the refugee or immigrant to an undefined 'Swedishness'. The immigrant or refugee only becomes a 'subject' as much as he or she takes on the role of the victim or the exception.

The nation is also constructed through racism in relation to gender. In the media the 'other' man is constructed as steered by irrationality and confusion and the 'other' woman is constructed as oppressed and ignorant, in which the 'other' woman can be saved by us. This is a construction of nationalism that works to include the 'other' woman and aggressively expel the 'other' man. Globalisation and identity politics seriously challenge the

idea of a particular, chosen and superior identity. It is clear, however, that it is precisely such a utopian Swedish identity which is recreated in the media. Muslim and Swedish are constructed as opposites, the Swedish girl threatened by the 'dark' man. The media thus creates a nationalistic expression based on ethnicity, which can be perceived as a resistance against globalisation and hybridisation (Brune 2004).

The challenges to a perceived national identity are also met by symbols directed to xenophobic voters, in the words of Harding (2000):

> Refugees are at the mercy of disabled governments with stern faces – and so is the anti-immigration voter, who regards cuts in cash hand-outs to asylum seekers as a sign that the party of power has his interests at heart. But that is all that it is: a sign. (Harding 2000: 59)

My interpretation is that this symbol is in line with maintaining the discourse of the nation state as legitimate. The nation state needs to respond to the threats of globalisation, and such an attitude to strangers signals that there is still some capacity to decide what happens inside the borders of the nation state in response to the transformation of state power in the global system.

In her discussion on globalisation and the crisis of postcolonial conditions, Minoo Moallem (2005: 155-156) speaks of '*...a war over representation and position between dominant and dominated ethnicities as well as hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininities*'. In patriarchy and the dominant power of masculinities today, femininities seem to need to be even more emphasised. In the dominant's struggle to remain in power in the hierarchies of class, race and gender, emphasising both masculinities and femininities seems to be one way of achieving continued dominance.

Starting from a global level, the imperialism of the West as the dominant class needs an image of the 'other', Muslim men, as a foe to justify and to rationalise both armed struggle against terrorism and the civilising mission of the ideology of free democracy of capitalism and neo-liberalism. To make this image stronger it uses the image of Muslim women as victims of Muslim men. Many Western feminists are complicit in the discourse of the victimisation and pacification of Muslim women.

> The tropes of the Muslim woman in general and the Afghani woman in particular as the ultimate victims of a timeless patriarchy defined by the barbarism of Islamic religion and in need of civilizing have become very important components of Western regimes of power and knowledge. (Moallem 2005: 161)

The importance of gender analysis in the study of modern imperialism is underlined in the following quote by Moallem:

> Any project that analyzes the phenomenon of modern imperialism must address the relationship between colonialism and the postcolonial, masculinist, cultural, and religious nationalisms that are invested in the institutionalization of gender power, since colonialism is the residual content of postcolonial nationalism. (Moallem 2005: 37)

To give an example from this study visualising the intersections discussed briefly above I can relate gender and race to most of my informants being young, male and Muslim. An application of the Western discourse of the 'other' would give the connotation of aggressive suppresors of women. The stories and problems of Afghanistan are related to male repression of other males, but also and perhaps mainly to the repression of women. This picture of the suppressed and the suppressor seeking refuge in Sweden at the same time could create ambivalence in the treatment of the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan. Another picture of the male and the female is that the young male is supposed to be an agent able to make a living in Afghanistan although he might be completely disconnected from family and friends (a social network that is). This picture is not the same for female asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan (although there are instances when women are not granted permanent residence permits either).

A comment such as this on gender should not, of course, overshadow the fact that women as a group are suppressed in Afghanistan society, but just point to what disempowers the asylum-seeking refugees in this study. What could have been a privileged position in Afghanistan and is also a privileged position in the group of people from Afghanistan in Sweden might not prove to be a privileged position in Swedish (western) migration discourse.

In defence of the superiority of whiteness in today's global society, concepts of racelessness and colour-blindness are used to describe the situation and racial power structures under neo-liberalism. In the words of Goldberg (2002):

> Racelessness is the neoliberal attempt to go beyond – without (fully) coming to terms with – racial histories and their accompanying racist inequities and iniquities; to mediate the racially classed and gendered distinctions to which those histories have given rise without reference to the racial terms of those distinctions; to transform, via the negating dialectic of denial and ignoring, racially marked social orders into racially erased ones. (Goldberg 2002: 221)

There seems today to be a privatisation of race. Privatisation implicates that it will be harder to make a charge of racist discrimination because, as in the name 'racelessness', race does not exist in dominant discourse as a structuring factor. This is clearly articulated in another quote from Goldberg.

> Not only does it supposedly sweeten racial structure by diluting it in the substance of class formation; it renders individuals personally responsible - and so the agents of state-fashioned social structure literally irresponsible – for whatever racial distinctions linger. (Goldberg 2002: 233)

I see a connection between this process of racelessness and privatisation of race and the individualisation of the asylum-seeking refugees, and the national discourse of fairness and individuality. This is a discourse which means that, in connection with the quote above, the asylum-seeking refugees are rendered responsible for proving themselves to be 'real' refugees and literally frees the Migration Board of all responsibility by pointing to a system of individuality and individual justice, disregarding the subordination of asylum-seeking refugees as a group. Marfleet (2006) also concludes that from the 1980s refugees have been confronted with the contradiction between having to prove their cases individually on the one hand and on the other being treated as a group. In addition they are seen as a threat to the countries of the West and treated on the assumption that most asylum seekers are inauthentic and evade migration controls and therefore should be seen as 'illegals' and opportunists.

One of the results of these discourses of nationalism through racism in relation to gender is paternalism. To be able to convincingly keep the discourse on repatriation, one cannot directly relate it to the interests of one's own society, as that would be against an image of solidarity or caring for others. There needs to be a discourse of repatriation in which repatriation is also beneficial for the asylum-seeking refugees themselves and the country they have come from, if not immediately, at least in the foreseeable future. Paternalism, though, does not necessarily have to be related to being beneficial for the asylum-seeking refugees themselves or their own country. We have already touched upon discourses of bogus and illegal asylum seekers and there is also a tendency today to relate the problems of the asylum-seeking refugees applying for asylum in Sweden to the problems of the 'ordinary' man and woman from Afghanistan who have not fled the country. If those who stay can make it, why cannot those who have decided to leave? At the very least, Sweden cannot be expected to let people come just because they are poor and because they might get into trouble because of the extremely dangerous situation in Afghanistan. Again there is a contradiction between being treated as a group while the system says that each case is handled individually.

However, from whatever angle one considers this discourse it is always aimed at the problems of the 'other'. The 'others' are problematic and both they and the ones following the debate need to be reminded of this. The right to make these interpretations is never in the hands of the asylum-seeking refugees, but in the hands of other people deciding on their status as refugees. There is paternalism in this, which in the view of this study the

asylum-seeking refugees themselves seek empowerment from. The paternalism related to the national discourse, together with a discourse of repatriation at the international level, disempower the asylum-seeking refugees as a group and as individuals. Their ability to shape their own future and decide what is best for themselves and their family is made difficult. From this difficult and challenging situation the struggle for empowerment begins.

Paternalism as an outcome of global power relations can be fruitful for understanding the connections between the global, the national (state), the local and the individual. Paternalism works its way from global power relations to a disempowering situation for the individual asylum-seeking refugee. It is this disempowering paternalism that they have to resist and that they, in my analysis, have to seek empowerment within and from. Inherent in the power relations between states, as in all situations of difference in power between two parties, is paternalism. Often this paternalism is shown in an attempt to try and help and perhaps bring the other party to the same level as one's own, as has long been the view upon aid to developing countries and a background to the concept of developing other countries. It was a part of late colonialism and is still quite apparent today in relations between the nation states having most economic and political power and those nation states and peoples with less of such power. On a global scale, and related to racism, this could be discussed in relation to Goldberg's (2002) discussion on historical racism, (cultural racism) which is more about the education of less-developed peoples and areas, than outright racism in the form of natural differences.

With such a background to the discussion on paternalism in relations between nation states, it could easily be argued that those in power see other people as culturally backwards, too culturally backwards to let in to developed societies, at least en masse. Historically, though, a moral dimension has developed to giving protection to those who really need it, those called refugees, for whom there is a Convention. Who is to be considered a refugee changes over time, but the depiction of most of them as backward people coming from backward places does not so much. Not having to deal with too many refugees in Sweden has been a condition achieved by a restrictive interpretation of the Convention and national laws based on it and also by looking at solutions in the places which produce forced migrants, in so called containment. If and when refugees reach our part of the world, repatriation is stressed as the best way for not only developed societies, but also for the refugees themselves and their societies.

In this way containment and repatriation are constructed as a win–win situation in the long run in the development of the whole world, for global development. Those who have come to the developed part of the world from their backward world are not prepared for this level of civilisation and are

thus hard to integrate. On the other hand they are also needed to develop their own world. With a little bit of help from development assistance, they should develop their world in and from where they are in the image of the developed world.

The preferential right of interpretation gives Sweden, as part of the developed world, the power to exercise paternalism over those who apply for asylum and protection. Swedish migration policy, which I describe as disempowering, breaks down and constrains the asylum-seeking refugees' possibilities to exercise power over their own lives. The asylum-seeking refugee is treated as a nuisance, whom one wants to get rid of, sometimes to prove him or her to be a liar and thief, but if that is not possible then to prove that the asylum-seeking refugee interprets his or her reasons for staying as not objectively correct. The disempowerment of the asylum-seeking refugees is thus, among other things, based in our, the rich world's, preferential right of interpretation, an interpretation whereby Sweden, as a country in the rich world, can both 'objectively' interpret international conventions and as 'objectively' describe and decide on the situations of the asylum-seeking refugees. This preferential right of interpretation provides the possibility of exercising authority and patronising the refugees.

The discussion on preferential right of interpretation and paternalism are based on the 'objective' truth being presented by the Swedish Migration Board as standing against the 'subjective' truth of the individual refugee. The contradictions perceived are based on the Swedish authorities' preferential right of interpretation and the asylum-seeking refugees not having the right to define the situation. The example here is that the Swedish authorities argue for the possibility, according to both Swedish and international law, to send people back to Afghanistan, while at the same time this interpretation is contested by the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan themselves, as well as many organisations and individuals taking the side of the asylum-seeking refugees.

Repatriation, as the main part of the politics of immigration, also uses symbols, directed at the Swedish public, to describe the Swedish reception of refugees as humane and fair. In an example given by Johansson (2005) in regard to repatriation, of the distinction between voluntarily leaving Sweden after negative decisions and being sent back by force, there is a symbol of repatriation as being a voluntary option in the repatriation efforts of the Swedish state, in an attempt to legitimise repatriation. There is nothing voluntary about leaving Sweden if you are not granted residence permits: the choice can only be between leaving Sweden without the use of force or being removed from Sweden by force. Another example from my study is the word interview. When described to me the interview sounds like more of an interrogation than anything else, thus giving the word interview a new meaning. Such imprecise wordings used by the authorities might lead to

misunderstandings and distrust as the language used cannot be directly translated and understood, but needs to be interpreted from a base of knowing the system. The asylum-seeking refugees soon see through this, and it is treated as another contradiction and builds on the growing distrust of the system.

The use of symbols to give a façade of humanism in immigration policies goes hand in hand with Sweden viewing itself as a solidaric nation. For a long time Sweden has had the image of itself as a kind and hospitable nation regarding the acceptance of asylum seekers and refugees. Now, negotiating internationally and especially within the EU, a discourse on the justice (fairness) and legality of the Swedish system has become dominant, a system in which its fairness is in focus. The system is seen as fair in its workings through the Migration Board and migration courts, treating the asylum cases individually and objectively from a reading of the law passed by a democratic parliament. This legality and impersonality make it possible to speak of 'illegals', meaning those who stay in Sweden though it has been decided that they should not, and it is quite impossible to demand responsibility from the Swedish authorities for the decisions made, as the process is individualised, but still impersonal. The individualisation of the process can be understood from the point of view of individualisation of racial discrimination.

To make the situation comprehensible and, in a sense, coherent, I feel that it is necessary to filter the situation of the asylum-seeking refugees in this study through discourses and practices of racism, here expressed in nationalist discourse and paternalism. The discussions in this section can only be seen as opening things up towards a more thorough investigation and research situating the disempowering and contingent temporal situation of refugees.

Concluding remarks on the situational frame

The situation is interpreted by the asylum-seeking refugees in this study much in the same way as I, the researcher, interpret it through description and comparisons. The interpretations of the situation can be understood through the process of abduction as described by Scheff (1990), by how we understand meanings in context through comparing our observations and imaginations. Abduction is also related to how we contextualise the world through comparing the specific to the more general.

In these descriptions and comparisons, the asylum-seeking refugees in this study interpret their own situation through description and comparisons with other asylum seekers, especially when it concerns the question of the reasons for being granted residence permits. The comparisons presented point towards a situation which is difficult to grasp and in which the framework used is that of describing and comparing reasons for staying, much from the same point of view as the Swedish authorities, thus relating

to a situation of regulated and restricted immigration for which only a few of the asylum seekers can be viewed as real refugees.

I, in my interpretation of the situation, point to the difficulties there are in understanding the situation. There are many obstacles to understanding the situation and although there are efforts made to make sense of the situation, it is difficult to construct a comprehensible and coherent understanding and presentation of it. The uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions found within the situation lead me to address the situation as contingent and as one of temporality.

The temporality of the disempowering situation created through dependence and inhospitality is not sufficient for an understanding of the situation though. The contingency of the situation of temporality which contains uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions also needs to be situated. I chose to situate the situation by introducing a discussion on national discourse, racism and paternalism as a way to understand more about the global process involved in creating the situation.

This chapter has also situated the field within a context of globalisation, introducing the concept of postcolonialism to better understand how structures of uneven globalisation are maintained discursively and how the postcolonial condition also underlies the process of migration and the reception of immigrants and asylum seekers in Sweden. Uneven globalisation and postcolonialism present how wealth and mobility are distributed unevenly among people in the world and how the privileges of some undermine the powers of others.

I point to how the connection between nationalism and racism is historically situated in relation to European domination and colonialism and how asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants are subject to these discourses of nationalism and racism and also to discourses of gender. I make a special point on the individualisation of racism, in which the discourse of treating every asylum case individually could be understood as a way to individualise the discrimination against individual asylum seekers by pointing to weaknesses in their individual argumentation for their need of protection, instead of speaking of arguments made by them as a group. This is a way to keep it from being race- or group-orientated through discursively treating each person's reasons for asylum individually.

The domination of Swedish nationalist discourse subjects asylum seekers and refugees to paternalism. Paternalism is reflected in the way Sweden has had a self-image of providing a humane, solidaric and fair reception to asylum seekers and refugees. This self-image is harder to keep today with repatriation being the main method for dealing with refugee migration. At the same time repatriation is legitimised through speaking of voluntary return and the fairness of the Swedish legal system in treating asylum applications. Preferential right of interpretation gives the Swedish

authorities the opportunity to decide objectively on the subjective reasons for each individual asylum seeker's reasons for seeking asylum in Sweden. In this way Sweden exercises paternalism on the asylum seeker, using its dominating position in the world system to interpret the situation.

In this chapter I propose that to understand the situation the asylum-seeking refugees in this study are in, and asylum seekers and refugees in general for that matter, we need to situate this situation more thoroughly within the frameworks of nationalist discourse, racism in relation to gender and paternalism.

From this frame, aimed at an understanding of the situation the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan are in, I now go on to present how processes of disempowerment take shape in their everyday life. What is it in the Swedish reception of asylum seekers and refugees that makes the situation so disempowering?

Disempowerment

What is waiting? To wait implies action. At the same time it is not action, but rather inaction while waiting for something to happen: something to happen which makes waiting stop. The things one does while waiting are not waiting in themselves, but actions to make the waiting worthwhile, tolerable and/or actions to make the waiting stop. I have found that with the asylum-seeking refugees' wait for a decision about whether they get to stay in Sweden or not, only a positive answer is acceptable in reality, as return is not an option. The waiting period will be filled with actions managing this situation of waiting and actions to try and strengthen one's position regarding the possibility of staying and avoiding being sent back. Waiting thus has a beginning and an end, but no content in itself. It needs other activities, thoughts and feelings to fill the void. Waiting, though, is important as it sets the conditions in which other activities can take place, what thoughts can be thought and what feelings arise. Waiting sets an unstable and temporary base for possible actions. It also creates a dependence on circumstances out of reach. If there were no dependence there would not be any need to wait. The conditions while waiting can be very different and the importance of what one is waiting for can be very different, but generally the inactivity of waiting can be perceived as disempowering in relation to what one waits for which in this case is for the whole of life's situation.

Not knowing what to expect, not knowing from what base to plan the future and waiting for decisions out of one's hands: such waiting is the essence of the disempowerment of waiting, waiting for something as essential as decisions on what future life will give in terms of where to live and safety for oneself and one's loved ones. Such waiting is disempowering, but also the base from which seeking empowerment comes. I wish to show how waiting can be seen as a void that needs to be filled with something, with actions, thoughts and feelings. Waiting also implies anticipation and in the case of the asylum-seeking refugees, hope. Linked to the emotion of hope is despair, and life while waiting is filled with hope as well as despair. Hope is built on the fact that the waiting is worthwhile and meaningful in view of the circumstances. Even if permanent residence permits cannot even be anticipated, they are hoped for with the aim of living a better life.

The relationship between the disempowering and empowering structures and actions is no easy one, where different actions and spoken words can be easily related to either one or the other. One described incident can hold many different interpretations on what is disempowering and what is empowering. Therefore the headings based on the categorisations made according to the method used, include incidents described in excerpts from the field notes, which might point to a certain interpretative category, but

hold information on others. The different discussions following the demonstrations of the empirical constructions will try and nuance the category they have been made to visualise.

Before continuing with the disempowering situation of being an asylum-seeking refugee from Afghanistan in Sweden and focusing on the period after making the application for asylum and permanent residence in Sweden, I will present a brief look at the history behind their flight to Sweden and what happened while they were fleeing.

Anyway, he started to tell the story of the escape from Afghanistan, through Iran, Turkey, Greece, Italy and onwards. He told me: how they had to walk long distances at night through Iran, paddled a very small boat (made for one, but with five or six persons onboard) where they had to sit with one leg in the water to paddle, how he had climbed to the top of lorries not to be seen, how he was captured in Italy, sent to... and imprisoned there. How he anyway managed to get back to Italy. How they were packed together in lorries on the floor (as I understood it under a 'extra' floor) with lamps turned on to cheat the customs thermo cameras. There was no talk of going out for a pee.[13]

Connecting back to the situation that is being studied here, the waiting and struggle to get to stay in Sweden and to have one's application for asylum granted, the same young man from the last excerpt earlier in the same conversation had said that:

There were many problems and very hard during the escape. Then it was good for about three weeks after coming to Sweden. Then it all started again.[14]

I interpret this as meaning that the difficult situation of being a refugee continues after coming to Sweden. After a short period of being good, it all starts being difficult again.

In another excerpt from a conversation with husband and wife on how tired they are of waiting and how they do not understand why some get to stay and others do not and on what reasons for staying are needed, the situation back in Afghanistan and of their flight is expressed.

The woman on that: She has seen a lot of difficult things in her life. Among other things she tells me of two assaults. One where her family was robbed

[13] Field note 27, 2007-05-30

[14] Field note 27, 2007-05-30

of everything they owned and their house was burnt down. Another time they were robbed, but the house was not burnt.

The two months long flight using smugglers was also very difficult. To travel in overcrowded cars at night in closed cars so that they could not be seen from the outside, locked in rooms (where they at one point had to give their cup to a small boy to pee in), sleep outside in cold weather (August, September, October), change of smugglers in every country.

Fleeing probably through Russia (they heard Russian spoken). They do not know what other countries they passed through.

The man had to carry her on his shoulders as they passed a river. It was during the escape that the man for the first time got problems with his heart. It was very unpleasant she says.

On all the difficult things she says; to be sent back does not really matter. Die or not to die (she shrugs her shoulders). It is easily noticeable that she is really upset by all this, for him too. It is really difficult for them to tell this story.[15]

These are only some stories of life before and during the escape, a period that is imprinted in the stories of the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan I have met and as such something they always carry with them during their waiting.

This chapter takes as its starting point the situation after coming to Sweden and applying for asylum, while waiting for decisions. The situation will be presented as one of disempowerment. Disempowerment will be discussed through dependence, inhospitality and through the emotions of hope and despair. It will deal with dependence on the Swedish authorities and different officials involved in the process, as well as dependence on other asylum seekers. Dependence will also be discussed from the point of view of forced inactivity, isolation, dependence on allowances and of not knowing what happens. Inhospitality deals with the asylum-seeking refugees meeting a restrictive immigration policy and policies on repatriation, the contradictions they find in the system, comparisons they make with others and how they perceive that they are not treated fairly and are treated as inferior. The emotions of hope and despair contain several emotions related to the disempowering situation.

15 Field note 4, 2005-06-19

Disempowerment through dependence

They had all been in Sweden since the summer of 2004 and lived at the reception centre where I have my contacts from before. One of the persons had also lived at another reception centre for six months. They were all given negative answers to their applications for asylum, both from the Migration Board and the Aliens Appeals Board. They then were considered within the framework of the temporary law and got temporary residence permits. They could then leave the reception centre and were placed in this town and are now going to Swedish classes.

It is almost a year since the decisions for temporary residence permits, which means that they soon expire. They have applied again, but do not really know what is going to happen now. They do not know for example if they can stay in the municipality or if they have to go back to the reception centre. They do not know where their cases are at. They said they knew of a case decided in the Migration Court which were positive and another which was negative.[16]

In the decisions on temporary residence permits from the summer of 2006, it was stated that the situation in Afghanistan was such that no repatriation with force could be done. Therefore they were given temporary residence permits. A year later, when applying anew for asylum and permanent residence permits, with, in their (and many others') eyes, no real change and rather a change for the worse, it was decided that it was now safe to return, leaving these asylum-seeking refugees in a situation of despair.

The excerpt and descriptions describe how the situation developed over time from the first excerpt from a field note made in March 2007, to August 2008. The excerpt above comes from the first time I met three young men from Afghanistan. At the time of the first meeting they had temporary residence permits. I was to follow them through the process of what happened after their temporary residence permits expired. This first excerpt gives a brief background to their statuses as asylum seekers and refugees.

This excerpt also shows a starting point to the situation after the temporary residence permits had expired, a starting point showing that they do not really know where they stand and what will happen next, a disempowering situation in itself of dependence and not knowing what to expect, making their stay in Sweden and life in general extremely temporary.

This is one way of showing how dependence is manifested in the lives of my informants. Their dependence will further be described through their

[16] Field note 24, 2007-03-18

dependence on others, such as migration officers and administrators, solicitors and interpreters. Dependence will also be discussed as inactivity, isolation, having no or only little control and not knowing.

Back to the situation for the young men with expired temporary residence permits. Four months later the situation for these young men was driven to an extreme when one of their friends phoned me to ask when I was coming to his town next.

I said I was thinking of going there next week and asked if he was free. He said he would be free from work [work practice] Monday or Tuesday, he did not know.

That is, if he was still there… The police had begun fetching Afghans with deportation orders…[17]

We decided to meet the same day instead as he was close by. We met at one of the friends' apartments to have some tea and to talk about their situation, before doing some errands and waiting for the train. It came to be quite an emotional, as we thought then, last meeting.

We went down to the park, where [A] took a picture with [B] and me, with a view over the lake. As it was perhaps the last time we would meet. It was also because of this that, [B] said, that he phoned to ask if we could meet. It could be the last time.

When we came back to the train station, it was still some time before the train would leave, so they asked if we should have a coffee. I said I did not need to, but they wanted to. [A] offered me coffee as I had forgotten my wallet in my hurry to get the car. We drank our coffee and they had a bun with it. And we spoke. We said good bye, a little extra this time, as [B] stepped on to the train.[18]

At this point it really felt as if we were not to meet again. The situation of being sent out of the country was now one of extreme exposure. They therefore had started making their plans to avoid being fetched by the police and sent to Afghanistan. In the time leading up to this, there had been a lot of not knowing what was to come. This made them look for information on what had happened to other fellow asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan to try and figure out what was going to happen to them, as early

[17] Field note 31, 2007-07-31
[18] Field note 31, 2007-07-31

on they imagined that the situation would come to this. They had seen cases and decisions going this way and they had also started protesting against this situation.

In the conversation, over first tea at the apartment and then coffee at the railway station, we also spoke of what they would do now, a conversation showing a readiness and a resourcefulness to do something, but also showing their exposure to migration policies in the form of the processes of seeking asylum and the limitations to their being able to live a 'normal' life.

Later in the conversation it became apparent that they were planning what to do now. [B] did not say much more than that he would leave Sweden and already now could not sleep at home. [A] talked a little bit more of different possibilities in Europe, if the situation in Sweden were to become intolerable. He said he had some contacts, but that it was a bit difficult. In the country he mentioned they are to take care of themselves, as best they can. He had these contacts from asylum-seekers from Bangladesh who had been in Sweden. Apparently there were many people from Bangladesh in that country, but he did not know if there were so many people from Afghanistan.

[A] said he would probably not sleep at home. He had somewhere else to live. When I gave him a ride home, he said he would collect some of his things and bring himself up-to-date on the latest on the situation. He would leave the apartment as it was and let other people get his mail.[19]

Speaking about the situation set off emotions, and while part of their talk, as indicated above, was concerned with action and what to do next, there was also an atmosphere of resignation and despair about their difficult situation.

Speaking about their situation, they both said they would be better off, or at least as good, dead. [B] said concerning different options, that suicide might be one way. He did not say it completely seriously, but the feeling was that there was a lot behind the resignation. [A] later said that life is difficult, it gets better on the other side, in a hundred years.[20]

More than a year later [A] appears in my very last field note made on the 14th August 2008 saying that he had left the country.

[A] has now left the country. Earlier, in July, he had been called by the police for a meeting. He spoke with them but did not change his position;

[19] Field note 31, 2007-07-31

[20] Field note 31, 2007-07-31

that he could not go to Afghanistan. When I spoke to him in July, he did not know if he would still be there when I came home (I was on vacation when I phoned him).

[…]

I phoned him last week, without any answer and a couple of days ago I got an answer by text message that he no longer was in the country. He excused himself for not answering, sent his regards to my family and wished me good luck.[21]

This story does not end on a happy note, as the stories of many of my informants have not. There are exceptions, where they have got permanent residence permits and as such reached that goal, but many problems still followed them. What this 'ending' clearly shows is that it is not an ending. Whether the decision is one of permanent residence in Sweden or its opposite, a deportation order, the situation of being a refugee continues. For this study, though, I focus on the situation of waiting while being an asylum-seeking refugee.

What this story has shown is how exposed and dependent the asylum-seeking refugees are at the hands of the Swedish Migration Board and at the hands of a restrictive Swedish asylum policy. Over the year in which the asylum-seeking refugees in this story were temporarily allowed protection in Sweden, the situation altered in that interpretations, policy and practices of the Swedish authorities changed from allowing them to stay to finding ways to send them back. In this story we have also seen that dependence can be found in not knowing what will come next or what will happen to them. We can also see the control they are under in the way they try to avoid being caught by the police and also feelings of resignation are expressed. The story also shows a strong resistance to this situation.

Dependence on others is connected to the process of applying and waiting for decisions, and I take excerpts from the field notes showing how the uncertainty of the process of applying for asylum in Sweden can been compared with a Kafka-like experience (Öberg 2007). On the question of information from the Migration Board on the processes, this is what I was told by one of my informants:

Information on the asylum process, they get in the interviews. They can read a book on the Swedish asylum process, but in the information it says that it should take a maximum of four month for the interview… The

[21] Field note 38, 2008-08-14

decision-making process should take a certain time, but it takes a long time, the administrator of the case does not know.[22]

From this not knowing how time things will take and the perceived mismatch between the information and how it really is I, in the following excerpt, describe quite an extreme case, even relative to other asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan, of being exposed to a long period of waiting for the Migration Board's decisions.

He told me he had had to wait for 3,5 years to come to an interview and when he came to the interview there were problems between the administrator of the case and the solicitor. Apparently the case has been for both him and his friend that, when they have come to the interview, the have met the solicitor there, without meeting him or her before.

[…]

After the interview the administrator (the Migration Board officer) and the solicitor had argued and spoken loudly to each other, but he had not understood what they had said to each other.

Afterwards the solicitor had said that the administrator had told him that he was not capable of taking care of his case as he (the solicitor) did not know the Aliens' Act properly. The solicitor had become angry and said that of course he knew it, as he was a solicitor. The solicitor had asked if he wanted to keep him as his solicitor and he had said yes. He had signed a letter saying that he wanted to keep his solicitor.

After this it took a long time and he did not get any answer. Later a notice came saying he was provided with a new solicitor. He had said ok to this, as he did want his case to go forward. After this interview he pretty 'quickly' got two negatives and (approximately 6 – 8 months). And then after the second negative his case was tried in accordance with the temporary law and he got a temporary residence permit.[23]

At the time of this conversation he was awaiting what would happen after his temporary residence permit expired. I met him at a demonstration against sending back other asylum-seeking refugees whose temporary residence permits had expired. The above excerpt also shows how the relations

[22] Field note 12, 2006-07-18

[23] Field note 30, 2007-06-13

between and the activities of other parties in the process play a role in the situation for the asylum-seeking refugees, which in this case was a disempowering role.

The role of the solicitors and interpreters and how they are sometimes perceived is described in the following excerpt.

On the asylum process: The solicitor does nothing. He receives information from them and passes it on (to the Migration Board), but does not write anything of his own.

At the first interviews they did not get an interpreter in Dari or Pashto, but in Farsi. Therefore there were misunderstandings. They are angry with the officer handling their case for telling them that there were no interpreters in their language. The first interview was very long. First for him and then for her, who was very tired and got an head ache from waiting.[24]

This excerpt is taken from a conversation on how they had received a negative decision on their application and had seen many mistakes and misinterpretations in the basic data as referred to in the decision. This does not seem to be an exception to how the investigations are handled, having both difficulties with solicitors not doing their job and a lack of good interpretation and translation. However, there are also many highly competent solicitors and interpreters working within the system, but as this excerpt implies there are problems with this situation and an answer to why that may be:

Then they in the same breath said that the solicitors do not do anything! They are the Migration Board's solicitors.[25]

The difficulties in the process also point to the problem of not understanding what is going on in the process due to language. Although many of my informants have quickly learnt basic Swedish, it is still difficult. It is especially difficult in situations where they need to understand quite difficult information, for example in interviews with the administrators of their applications. In these they normally have interpreters, but the informants are not satisfied with them. There are very few interpreters in their language or dialect, and they feel that it is difficult to communicate and be understood. The informants also describe how the interpreters have problems

[24] Field note 4, 2005-06-19

[25] Field note 14, 2006-10-24

interpreting. There are also examples of language problems in other contacts with authorities.

On many occasion my informants described dissatisfaction with interpreters. They say that the interpreters do not understand their language. They get irritated when the interpreters ask for meaning all the time and get angry when the interpreters say that they are qualified to interpret their language/dialect, when in fact they are not. This comes from the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan speaking a dialect of Persian, Dari, which is not the same as the Iranian Farsi. Most of the interpreters come from Iran, and therefore speak Farsi, rather than Dari. For the informants who speak Pashtu as their native language, it has been even more difficult to find appropriate interpreters and they have also had to use Iranian Farsi-speaking interpreters. Asking for a new interpreter could take a very long time and prolong the process even further. This irritation concerning the interpreters came up several times during my field work and, as I discuss in my methodology section, made me choose not to use interpreters for doing interviews. The lack of competent interpreters could also make the waiting time even longer, which can be seen in the following excerpt on the irritation with incompetent interpreters.

He had also gotten irritated with the interpreter who did not understand. An Iranian interpreter, who said he understood Dari, but did not. He (the interpreter) just asked; what did you say…, all the time. They usually do. Lie about knowing Dari, when they do not.

But to ask for a new interpreter could take several months. A friend had done that, when he did not understand the interpreter and had had to wait for one and a half years for his first interview. Therefore there is no point in asking for a new interpreter, because then you do not know when it will be.[26]

As can be seen there is dependence on the Swedish authorities. At the same time there is also a dependency on other asylum seekers, which is connected to the situation of waiting at the reception centre. At the reception centres many asylum seekers with different backgrounds, ideas and ways of life are gathered together. In this respect dependency is related to having to consider others all the time. Often many people live together in the apartments and they have to consider how to negotiate this situation; for example how to entertain guests or where they can go to be by themselves. One example of having to negotiate with other asylum-seeking refugees can be taken from an

[26] Field note 28, 2007-05-31

occasion in which my informants wanted some privacy to be able to show hospitality towards me as a guest.

In my contacts with a married couple where I was the guest, it is clear that they were not comfortable if they could not be good hosts. When they shared the apartment with a woman and her child, they had to negotiate with them to be able to have the apartment for themselves during my visit.

They now live by themselves after the woman and child they shared the apartment had moved. She said that this time they would not give up. They are now going to live by themselves and they do not want anyone else moving in there again.

They have themselves also had to move earlier because the woman they were living with had visitors during the night.

She thought that it was difficult to always have to think of others… When it comes to watching TV, cooking.[27]

This excerpt shows some of this dependence on others: always having to consider others and not getting to be alone as a family, as in this case with a couple living together with others. As there is a lot of movement at the reception centres, sometimes they might also get to live with someone they really do not like and some combinations do not work.

Outside the home this was also expressed when we, the couple together with my own family, went off to make kebabs and have a picnic. It took some time to look for somewhere where we could be by ourselves. This might seem normal for any family outing, but the difference is that in such a small place and with quite a lot of asylum seekers, they felt that they had to be hospitable to those they knew, and to be honest there were some they did not like very much.

Another example of the difficulties of being put together with other asylum seekers, apart from different dislikes and differences in ways of living, is possible conflicts between individuals or groups as described in the following excerpt.

He talks about living at the 'camp' that some combinations do not work. People from Afghanistan cannot live together with certain other groups, because then there are conflicts. He tells me that he helped a friend change apartment, when the friend did not like where he lived. He and his friends

[27] Field note 13, 2006-08-06

at his apartment had let him stay with them, although it made seven people to share an apartment.[28]

This enforced sharing of living quarters and being made to live with people with whom they have not chosen to live limits their possibilities of living the life that they want and also causes conflict. Together with the fact that the apartments at the reception centre are normally very worn down, it creates a disempowering atmosphere and limits their space of action. That the apartments are run down can be seen in the lack of repair and maintenance, with running taps, smelly bathrooms, dirty walls and old stoves, and often the apartments' exteriors are dilapidated, symbolising 'abandoned' housing areas ready for demolition. On the other hand, as the stories and excerpt above tell us, they do something about it, negotiating and helping each other, as well as making their places of living as pleasant as possible.

In this situation there might also be a dependence upon and pressure from people they owe. For example owing reciprocity to the family back home and/or owing money to smugglers or other criminal gangs where they came from.[29] In at least one case the dependence on the situation where they came from was also characterised by isolation from their family and also made them uncertain and suspicious of their contacts with fellow asylum-seeking refugees.

He later told me that he, on the issue of contacts with the country back home, was not in contact with his family now, because there were problems. When he had contacted his mother, 'people' had come to ask where he was and he said that if they were told where he is, they would come and 'hit him' (he made the movement of hitting and I interpret this as killing him). Therefore he is no longer in contact with his family. It is better they do not know where he is.

He does not know where his father is either. He disappeared when the Americans came and removed the Taliban. He has not heard anything from his father in five years.

[…]

It seems as if he trusts his friend and that they know of each other's situations. He otherwise said that he did not trust everyone, not at once, because he does not know who they are.[30]

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[28] Field note 34, 2007-08-29

[29] Field note 21, 2006-11-29

[30] Field note 28, 2007-05-31

This excerpt also shows how they are empowered by social contacts, in this case a good friend he met at the reception centre, someone to share things with. In many cases, though, my informants said that they did not tell each other about the situation or reasons for applying for asylum, but that they always helped out as much as they could with what they have experienced and know about the process.

The woman of the married couple that I was in contact with expressed how she did not have many friends. Sometimes she made friends, but as their situations and statuses changed they moved. She did not have any stable social life at the reception centre. She was in contact with families in other parts of Sweden and in Finland who came on occasional visits and she could visit them. For her, visiting was difficult though due to the cost of travel from the north of Sweden to the south. When they got their permanent residence permits they wanted to move south, to both get away from a place of bad memories and get closer to her friends. It was easier for her husband, who both had prospects for a job and had friends both at the reception centre and in the region. Together they decided to wait for a place near families they knew. They got to know these families at the reception centre. Again, regarding being isolated when waiting for the process to run its course, the story above shows how the asylum-seeking refugees could make friends and how they created a network of social contacts under limited conditions, networks which are then useful in planning for the future.

Another story is of a young woman, who was closely checked by her parents. She was allowed to go to school, but not to involve herself with men. She went to school for the morning session, but stayed in the afternoon as well as she did not want to go home.[31] This can be seen as a strategy of both the young woman herself, creating a space of action and independence outside the home, but also of her parents, who gave her this opportunity without jeopardising their need to feel in control, as one of the teachers at the school had said she would see to it that their daughter stayed in school.

As a source of recreation some of the informants drank beer or other alcohol and at least on one occasion isolation was also indicated by this, as one informant told me that he liked to drink beer occasionally, but as his friends/co-habitants did not like it, he had to go out and sit in the woods to drink.

He tells me that he sometimes drinks beer and that he likes it. He cannot drink at home, as the others do not like it. Instead he goes to the woods to drink. He tells me that he has been drinking until he got drunk and by the way he tells me this it seems as if he liked it.[32]

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[31] Field note 21, 2006-11-29

[32] Field note 28, 2007-05-31

With this excerpt I wanted to show how he was isolated by this activity, but it also has another aspect connected to it, which is killing time or occupying oneself. Being dependent on circumstances and others is also shown in inactivity.

When I had the opportunity to ask what he does all day, the answer was a stressed NOTHING… just thinking and thinking about one's situation and war. Difficult situation. Just go buy some food, watch some TV. Nothing to do.[33]

It is certainly true that what most asylum-seeking refugees can do is very limited, especially when speaking of decisions on where to live and how to make a living, making them dependent on the living arrangements and allowances of the Migration Board. The experience in my analysis, though, is that saying that one has nothing to do and just sitting and thinking are also outlets for feelings of frustration and resignation and not an expression for actually not doing anything.

On the other hand the activities organised by the reception centre have been phased out to concentrate on Swedish education and job training. Earlier, at the reception centres I have visited, there have been activities on a small scale, such as swimming school, study circles, visits to museums, sports days and food days. These activities were welcome interruptions to everyday life. Today it is mostly up to the school and outside interests to arrange activities. Apart from the organised activities in the form of Swedish education and job training there are only a few facilities sponsored by the Migration Board at the reception centres. These facilities are not big and at the reception centres I have visited, where the largest comprised about 400 people, there was one pool table, one table for table tennis and a room for playing cards and watching TV. There was also a small exercise room.[34]

On the subject of forced inactivity, the case for some of the informants is that following changes in their status in the asylum process, there are changes to their possibilities of occupying themselves through regular work. One person had lost his work permit, due to negative decisions on at least two occasions, making him lose his job. As his situation changed with the 'temporary law', he got a new job, but after the end of the temporary residence permit, whilst waiting for the final decision, he lost his job again.

His temporary residence permit has also expired and because of that he had to stop working, as they no longer have working permits. Now instead,

33 Field note 16, 2006-11-02

34 Field note 17, 2006-11-10

he is going to go to some courses, one on computers and one in something else. He does not want to be inactive. He has because of different decisions on the way (he came already in September 2002) lost his jobs due to the different negative decisions lost his working permits.[35]

Similar situations were shared by others as well, but what was showing in these cases was that they tried to get a new occupation or turn to other activities so as not to be forced into complete inactivity, which I will return to under Actions of empowering and more specifically under Keeping oneself occupied.

Keeping oneself occupied and possibilities for keeping oneself occupied also entail disempowerment arising from being exploited and feeling exploited in job training. The informants who were on job training had to balance the feeling of being exploited and that of coping with the situation by seeking empowerment through having something to do.

Yesterday he spoke of a friend who has got a temporary residence permit and does job training at a restaurant and he has a difficult time. He has had his temporary residence permit for seven months but has not been offered a place to live outside the reception centre. He has got his family in Afghanistan and thinks a lot about them. He does not like doing job training at the restaurant. The boss is no good. They work for long hours every day and only get to eat once and only pasta. But he continues to do job training to have something to do.[36]

This negotiation between the good and the bad of what is offered or supported by the Migration Board returns in many field notes, both concerning the school and, as in this case, job training. For the most part, due to the situation they are in, these things (in principle any activity) are empowering, but never completely so as, for example, in the school they might have to negotiate a negative atmosphere, conflicts and boredom as described in the following excerpt.

He said that he had stopped going to school, because it did not suit him anymore. It was only ABC and then new people came all the time. He thought it was too slow, he already knew that part. He studied at home now instead. He does not do anything else, he does not do job training for example. He just sits at home, and as it turned out plays some pool.[37]

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35 Field note 30, 2007-06-13

36 Field note 20, 2006-11-28

37 Field note 28, 2007-05-31

Quite interestingly, and supporting my later discussion on both the importance of being occupied and the fact that they seek to be occupied, is that the same informant later went back to school to have something to do. This same informant was quite creative in his search for ways of killing time to get away from the thoughts and feelings about the situation. He had turned to both beer and later to prayer to kill time or at least forget about the situation for a while.

The environment in the classroom in the Swedish classes at 'school' itself can be a safe place and a break from life at the reception centre: somewhere to get away from the boredom of the reception centre, to meet friends, to learn something new, speak to Swedish people who are sympathetic with their situation, get access to the internet and a number of things which create an escape from waiting passively. Speaking of the school as an oasis apart from the difficult situation and finding a break from it, there were also those who did not go to school because they did not like the atmosphere or because it did not feel meaningful to go. One woman, for example, did not like the disrespect that was shown to her from some of the other students and on another occasion a man told me that he did not feel it was meaningful as he did not learn anything new, as can be seen in the excerpt above.

Built into the system of dependence is also, in the case of my informants living at the reception centres, their dependence on the Migration Board for their living situation and the basic needs for somewhere to live and money for food. The economic dependence of the asylum-seeking refugees living in the reception centres is based on the daily allowances given by the Swedish authorities and the obligations tied to these and of course on having somewhere to live. The asylum-seeking refugees are obliged to take part in the organised activities, show up for interviews, and not delay the investigations into their cases, in order not to have some of the allowances withdrawn. In an undergraduate essay (Rondahl 2007) the results show that there is no desire to spend money on activities for the integration of these asylum-seeking refugees. The Swedish authorities are afraid of creating too generous a system, which might attract more asylum-seeking refugees to come to Sweden. The essay shows that this reasoning lies behind the more restrictive policies towards activities and enforcing of the rules relating to the allowances.

This spending less on activities for integration or, in the words of the official line from the Migration Board, concentrating the activities organised by the Migration Board on schools (Swedish education) and job training, which one of the Migration Board officers told me about,[38] was introduced between the time of my first experience as a teacher in 2002 and the later

[38] Field note 17, 2006-11-10

experiences doing this study. As I said earlier, the extra activities were welcome interruptions to the otherwise struggle to keep themselves occupied by finding their own activities, and at times these activities during their time in waiting could be useful. At the beginning there were more leisure activities organised and/or sponsored by the Migration Board at the smaller reception centre where I worked as a teacher than I later found during the study, especially at the larger and older reception centres. If this was due to changes over time and/or between places and people I am not sure, but in the area in which I have been meeting the asylum-seeking refugees and in general activities initiated by the Migration Board have been decreasing. Importantly, though, there are exceptions, for example a project involving the Red Cross and university students meeting younger asylum seekers is one.

On the agency of refugees Halleh Ghorashi (2005) writes that restrictive refugee policies of the welfare state, in this case those of the Netherlands, have made the asylum seekers dependent and passive. She writes on the relationship between the refugee and the state that their dependence on the state for their subsistence:

> …creates a hierarchical relationship between the giver and receiver. It also develops a strong sense that refugees should be 'grateful'. The one who do not fall within this category are considered manipulators. In this context, these negative images of refugees become part and parcel of the dominant discourse of the society in a way that seems almost impossible to change. (Ghorashi 2005: 186)

This hierarchical relationship is what the dependence on allowances and somewhere to live shows. Related to the quote is that, in general, the asylum-seeking refugees are seen as being 'grateful' and behaving as can be 'expected' from a refugee. I later return to this and will describe this as an empowering factor for these asylum-seeking refugees, as they seem to have the 'right behaviour'.

One of the more direct visualisations of dependence is the control they are under during their stay as asylum-seeking refugees in waiting. This is manifested in the rules of what the asylum seeker needs to do to get the allowance and in their duty to report before travelling somewhere. In its extreme form the control is manifested in the police coming to fetch people who have been refused entry or who are going to be sent to the first country of entry in Europe. The asylum seekers' finger prints are recorded at entry into the EU and therefore they are also controlled over borders. Even for those not directly threatened, the symbolic threat of the police is visible in the community of asylum seekers. The control and threat of expulsion also makes the asylum-seeking refugees reflect on what to do if they are rejected.

It was understandable that he was not himself. Earlier the same morning the police had come to get his friend, who lived in the same apartment and taken him to another town and from there probably to the border police. The police said that they had found his (the friend's) fingerprints in Germany.[39]

The threat of being sent out of the country and getting negative decisions was with most informants from the very beginning, if for no other reason than that this is the information they got from the Migration Board personnel on arrival.

He said that when he arrived at the reception centre, one of the supervisors from the Migration Board had told him that he would receive two negatives.[40]

Being controlled as part of the dependence takes its most extreme form in the incarceration of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan, who refused to be 'voluntarily' repatriated. The fear of the police coming to get them and the urgency of finding ways out of that situation was very strong. They had to be on their guard and ready to hide and/or leave Sweden for somewhere else. Remember the earlier story of the threat of expulsion and going into hiding and how we had to say goodbye as if it was the very last time we met, how they were waiting for more information and how they were on the phone with other people from Afghanistan in different parts of Sweden for information. After the threat of immediate deportation one of the informants describes how he was very stressed and upset with the situation.

He said that he was very much under stress and upset. He jumped every morning as the post came. He was waiting for a decision with a date for deportation. [41]

Disempowerment through dependence points to a dependence on others to make decisions, which forces them to a situation of waiting and into passivity. It points to a situation of isolation through limited contacts with friends, family and with Swedish society at large. It also points to an asylum process with a lack of information about what happens and how long the process will take. It also points to feelings of resignation and despair.

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39 Field note 16, 2006-11-02

40 Field note 34, 2007-09-29

41 Field note 33, 2007-08-09

Emphasising the situation that the asylum-seeking refugees find themselves in as disempowering, I will now also present how the situation can be perceived as disempowering through inhospitality inherent in the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden.

Disempowerment through inhospitality

Inhospitality can be seen in the light of restrictive asylum policies and the concentration on containment and repatriation. In this sense the asylum-seeking refugees are met by a system wanting to restrict their right to immigrate and resettle. It is easy to see how this leads to talk, thoughts and feelings of not being welcome. Coupled to this is also a strong sense of contradictions in how the system works.

On the subject of not being welcome there has been a tendency in Europe, the EU, to see asylum seekers as not really refugees. Refugees have been spoken of only as either 'economic' migrants or as a threat to stable societies by introducing criminality and even terrorism, while the 'real' refugees have been seen as passive victims of circumstances. As the discussion in this thesis shows, refugees are neither economic migrants nor passive victims. Rather, the pictures painted of asylum seekers and refugees are produced for our own purposes.

> Restricted entry and reception policies are introduced to protect the society from 'bogus' asylum seekers. The effect of these policies is that refugees in general are seen as untrustworthy, until otherwise proven. (Ghorashi 2005: 193)

The asylum-seeking refugees have to manage a situation in which they are not welcome. They have to prove themselves to be 'real' refugees in the interpretations made of the refugee conventions and even so it is commonly felt that it would be preferable if they were somewhere else and that some other country should deal with their applications or arrangements should be made so that the refugee can 'safely' return. These are the contradictions inherent in the reception of refugees: the right of protection should be maintained while at the same time emphasising repatriation leads to a situation of not being welcome.

The informants are supported in their assumptions of contradictions in this quote by Marfleet (2006):

> Since the 1980s all refugees wishing for recognition in countries of the West have been confronted by an apparently contradictory asylum regime. On the one hand, they have been required to demonstrate *individually* their fear of persecution. On the other hand they have been treated increasingly as collectives – as groups to be aliens who pose a general threat to their potential hosts. (Marfleet 2006: 154, emphasis in original)

In this case the asylum-seeking refugees' cases should be treated individually, which is strongly stressed within the Swedish system. At the

same time they are treated as a group of people who should not be in Sweden, but rather somewhere else.

I noted that one informant also expressed, in view of being treated as a group that:

...it was possibly to deter people from Afghanistan to come here (Sweden) that they were in such a hurry to catch people from Afghanistan. This was because Sweden could not afford all the refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan...[42]

Here this informant also touches on another aspect of not being welcome which is how the issue of receiving refugees is sometimes described as an economic burden to society. This burden to society is referred to as a socio-economic reason for a more restrictive policy towards refugees described by Hammar (1999), but could just as easily be described as a 'cultural' cost to the Swedish national project as it is by Johansson (2005).

It is quite clear how the asylum-seeking refugees themselves reflect over contradictions in the process, for example in decisions by the Swedish Migration Board and in Swedish asylum policy. For some time, some of my informants' applications were turned down and they were refused residence in Sweden. At the same time the situation in Afghanistan was too dangerous for them to be sent back, unless they went back voluntarily. They could not understand why they were turned down, if the situation from where they came was evaluated as too dangerous. What then would it take to get permanent residence permits?

The same day as they got their negative decision, another asylum-seeker from Afghanistan got a positive decision (on permanent residence permit). In the two decisions, the situation in Afghanistan was described differently. For them the situation was described as good and getting better.

They are tired of waiting. They do not understand why some do not get to stay, while others get to stay. What reasons do one need?

They do not understand the situation of waiting in Sweden, although they have a negative decision. If the situation is bad and Sweden cannot send people back, why then can they not stay?[43]

There is also a perceived difference in how their cases are handled and differences in the background to the decisions. These perceived

42 Field note 31, 2007-07-31

43 Field note 4, 2005-06-19

contradictions are hard to understand and lead to feelings of frustration and despair.

To give another example of perceived contradictions and not understanding why they are not treated as real refugees, the next excerpt shows how they make sense of their situation[44], compare it to how other groups are treated and what reasons they might or might not have for seeking asylum.

Concerning the question of who gets to stay many comparisons came up. One example is that they compared their situation with those coming from Iran. Iran has got a good economy. And in Azerbajdzjan…

People from Afghanistan do not have to lie about their situation. Everybody knows how the situation is there.

The Migration Board has a 'law' on who gets to stay and who does not. For example Iranians get to stay but people from Afghanistan do not. It is that "law" that decides who gets to stay and who does not. Sweden has looked a lot to the political situation.

Concerning asylum-seekers from Afghanistan it is very difficult to get away from Afghanistan. People have fled for example over the Aegean Sea, where many have died on the way. They speak of broken families. They mean that it is more difficult to cheat about their origin or come back [to Sweden] if they have to go home. It is not like with the others, for example from the former Soviet Union, who can come and go.

They cannot understand why people from Afghanistan do not get asylum.

[…]

Why do they do not get to stay? It is about politics, the involvement of the US…

And what does it mean that the situation in Afghanistan is no good, and that they cannot be sent back, but still they do not get to stay? [45]

44 See also how this excerpt was used to understand how the asylum-seeking refugees understand the situation.

45 Field note 12, 2006-07-18

The informants in this sense perceive that the Swedish Migration Board treats their cases differently. They cannot see why some are interviewed and that this starts the process earlier than others', or why the process for each case takes a different amount of time although the cases in their view are similar. Most importantly they do not understand why the cases perceived by them as similar are met with different decisions, different decisions on whether the reasons to stay are enough to be granted permanent residence in the country or not. They also feel that different groups of asylum-seeking refugees are treated differently as are their reasons to stay. These comparisons are normally made from the standpoint that other individuals and groups are treated better.

The asylum-seeking refugees also tell stories of how they are approached differently before and after a decision on permanent residence permits. One example is of contact with the Migration Board personnel when, after being granted residence permits they are greeted and welcomed. This has also been observed in contacts with other authorities, for example health care provision.

His health is a little better. He can work without any bigger problems. He stills goes to controls regularly and takes the same medication. He has not made any bigger check-up after the operation.

In connection with this [the talk about health] he also tells me of one asylum-seeker, who when he was an asylum-seeker did not get a check-up, but after receiving permanent residence permit had got a check-up within a couple of weeks.[46]

Lack of health care services is a common complaint. When compared to the services the residents get in Sweden, the informants see contradictions in that they do not get the same treatment. The possibilities for treatment are there, but not for them. Health is also a more general problem as many of my informants and their friends were all treated for something or needed to be treated for something. For many this was a big issue.

Then he told me about disease. Of how he in Turkey had got symptoms of gastric ulcer and when in Sweden sought treatment for this, but he told me how it had taken a really long time to get to see a doctor and how he had not been examined properly. It had taken months (9) and now he has got medicine, but it does not work. He still has got problems, among other things a bad smell comes out of his mouth.

[46] Field note 7, 2006-04-09

During his time in Sweden he has also had a down period, could not sleep. He got medicine against that, but taking it made him feel drunk. He does not remember anything and everything gets strange when he takes it. He has still got that medicine.

He has been thinking of taking many pills (as I understand it implying taking his own life), but his thoughts go to his younger brother and younger sister who are still living in Afghanistan with their aunt. What would become of them?[47]

Health and health problems, both physical and psychological, are common and, as described here, also very much present in the stories of the people I have met.

There are signs of inhospitality and outright hostility showing that they are not wanted or welcome by some in Sweden.

She mentioned, talking about the cold weather, that when she spoke to a woman in the queue at the supermarket about how it was cold, a man standing behind them in line had said something like: 'now if it's so cold, go home'.

In connection with this she said that of course she would want to go back to Afghanistan if and when it gets better. She misses 'home'.[48]

On an occasion like this she was reminded that she was not wanted in the country where she had applied for asylum, yet another demonstration of not being welcome as hers and her husband's applications for asylum had been rejected twice. At the same time as this example of not feeling welcome, which ought to lead to feelings of resignation and despair, hope was expressed. Hope was based on expectations of being granted permanent residence permits after making a new application in accordance with the 'temporary law': that they would also be granted permanent residence permits, as it were. At the time of this conversation, though, hope was based on an expectation, however uncertain. The uncertainty was at this time expressed with hope, but with despair just around the corner. The fact that they had felt unwanted in Sweden for some time and were not able to go back had left them in a situation between hope and despair. A feeling of hope at this time is always accompanied with an expectation for worse, for despair. In that way, these emotions go hand in hand. Until this moment

47 Field note 27, 2007-05-30
48 Field note 7, 2006-04-09

they had had their moments of both hope and despair along the way, at the time of the excerpt above, but also both before and after the joy of actually receiving their residence permits.

Another excerpt showing an inhospitable environment is the one below from a conversation with the teachers at the school teaching Swedish classes to the asylum seekers.

At a break, the teachers were talking about the view of refugees and immigrants in [small town]. It was about how they chase shoplifters at the supermarket. That as soon as there is a foreigner in the shop, the hunt begins.[49]

The conversation continued in this way and later I made the observation that, in this small town and in other small towns where I visited reception centres, there was an atmosphere of at least racist tendencies and suspicion. For example at one of the towns where reception centres were placed there were racist slogans sprayed on walls, and using a search engine on the words 'refugee' and the town's name, links to forums spreading racist remarks about the asylum seekers could be found. At the same time, and this must be said: there were in these communities many people, both Swedish and not Swedish with whom they made friends and who helped them out. It must also be said though that much of the time there were few points of contact between the asylum seekers living at the reception centres and the population of the small towns I visited, which is also an observation made by Öberg (2007) after her stay at a reception centre for a year.

Contradictions were also found in the treatment of the asylum-seeking refugees meeting with individual administrators. For example in interviews, where an understanding of the difficult situation was expressed, there was even, as one informant describes it, an administrator who was to inform him of the negative decision and repatriation, who said she could not understand why he did not get to stay. In his first interview he also got the impression that they understood his situation and that he ought to be granted a residence permit. But in the event he got two negative results and a temporary residence permit and now he is threatened with expulsion.

When he came back from the meeting with the administrator he was very upset and his feelings were showing. He made a 'high-five' and started talking. He spoke fast and loudly and it seemed he had spoken a lot with the administrator. She had said that she understood his situation, and she could not understand why he had got a negative… They had said the same

49 Field note 26, 2007-05-29

thing during the interview, when he told them about his situation. There they had said that they understood his situation, that it was difficult and that he ought to be allowed to stay, but that did not happen,... two negatives.[50]

The contradictions here seem to be between the official juridical mechanism and that of individual officers where the individual officers show a personal understanding of the problems of the asylum-seeking refugee in a personal meeting with him or her (in this case him). In those cases not showing the hard, cold face of the bureaucracy, which is one part of a bureaucratic process, where it is obvious that the migration officers are not to be mistaken purely as representatives of a bureaucracy. They are people as well, and as such they might show an understanding of individual situations without it being the point of view of the bureaucratic legal system. For the asylum-seeking refugee between hope and despair such a contradiction might leave him or her even more disorientated about how his/her case is handled and how to understand the decisions which result. This kind of disorientation can be seen in Norström's (2004) discussion on differences between the 'logos' and 'praxis' of the reception of refugees and how a decision in an individual case goes on in something of a 'black box'. What the excerpt also shows quite clearly is that these feelings were displayed more vividly than usual.

Contradictions such as the contradiction of not getting permanent residence permits and being told to go back, while repatriation could not be enforced by the Swedish authorities are part of the disempowering situation of the asylum-seeking refugees. In many cases repatriation had to be voluntary as the situation in Afghanistan was interpreted as not allowing the Swedish authorities to send people back to Afghanistan against their will. The asylum-seeking refugees came back to this contradiction of not getting residence permits although the situation in Afghanistan was deemed too dangerous to send anyone there.

This contradiction of not getting permanent residence permits and the inability to send them back was resolved with the 'temporary law', giving some of my informants' one-year temporary residence permits. About a year after these asylum-seeking refugees were granted temporary residence permits, there was a change to the interpretation of the situation in Afghanistan, making Sweden able to start forcing people back to Afghanistan, relying on an agreement (2007) with Afghanistan and the UNHCR, which the Swedish migration authorities interpreted as allowing the possibility of sending people back by force. They could do this by relying

[50] Field note 34, 2007-08-29

on areas within Afghanistan being alternative safe areas for refuge. In this case the contradictions resulted in outright inhospitality as the Swedish authorities found ways to repatriate by force asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan denied residence permits in Sweden.

The contradictions between repatriation and the descriptions of the situation in Afghanistan can be seen in decisions on residence permits in Sweden made by the Migration Board. On the refusal of entry of a male Afghan citizen, denying him residence and work permits, refugee status and travel documents, the situation in Afghanistan is described as having deteriorated in recent years, that women are especially exposed and that in the south of Afghanistan there is open warfare between insurgent forces and the International Security Force. In other parts of the country attacks have become more common. Security is best in the capital of Kabul, where the Afghan government, the international security forces and the international community have their headquarters. The building up of Afghan police and military is supported by the international community. Any improvement to the security situation in the country is not to be expected in the near future.

The negative decision, though, is based on no new circumstances having arisen in the case and that the security situation in the part of the country he came from is not to be considered as in armed conflict or severe conflict (Migrationsverket 2007a). In his application, the asylum-seeking refugee had applied for asylum on the basis of being threatened by people who kidnap children and that he cannot turn to the authorities, as police are involved in these actions. This is a good example of how weak governmental control and the allowance of exemption from punishment is described as leading to human rights abuses, as for example reported by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

In a decision on another case on the refusal of entry of an Afghan male citizen later in the same year (Migrationsverket 2007b), the part of the country where the applicant was from was considered to be in armed conflict. In this decision the situation was much more thoroughly investigated and reported and the conclusion was that the applicant could not be forced to return to the part of the country he came from. With this background the Migration Board went on to try the possibility of internal solutions for return to Afghanistan based on a decision made by the Migration High Court. The UNHCR advised the international community not to use the option of internal flight possibilities, pointing to the bad security situation and lack of human rights and the lack of possibilities for making a living. The UNHCR also pointed to the fact that the protection that Afghans normally get from family connections has proven not to be as strong in cities (in this case Kabul) as in other parts of the country. In the decision from the Migration Board it made a point of disregarding this advice from the UNHCR, pointing both to other sources and to the tripartite agreement

made between the governments of Sweden and Afghanistan and the UNHCR on support for asylum seekers returning from Sweden. Regarding the man's original claims of threats to himself and his family in the home province, the Migration Board now saw no reason to decide on that, as the threats were connected to circumstances in the home province and the Migration Board saw no reason why the family would not find protection from these threats in another part of the country. This reasoning was also based on the assumption that the family still in the home province in armed conflict should move to the capital, thereby disregarding the dangers involved for them.

The lesson learned from the decisions of denying these two asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan residence permits is that the Migration Board in these cases makes quite some effort in its elaborate decision-making process so as to deny them taking up residence in Sweden and to be able to repatriate them.

The asylum-seeking refugees' struggle to get recognition for their claims for protection in Sweden is thus negated by an authority that goes to some lengths to keep them out, not surprisingly creating a situation of not being welcome. The Swedish policies on refugee migration are related to and embedded in international policies on refugee migration and in particular in discourses and practices of refugee migration within the EU.

Responding to these contradictions and inhospitality, the asylum-seeking refugees who are threatened with deportation on many occasions ask the rhetorical question: *Why did we flee in the first place, if we did not have to?* It is also self-evident to them that they cannot return: they have fled from a situation to which they cannot return.

From disempowerment through inhospitality we take with us the contradictions perceived and felt and the situation of not being wanted, not being welcome. The asylum-seeking refugees respond to this inhospitality in actions to try and change their situation.

Between hope and despair

The situation described so far, which is mainly disempowering, creates a mix of emotions of being unwelcome, disappointment, resignation and frustration. Although these emotions are the easiest to find that perhaps could be summarised as emotions of despair, the related emotion of hope is, however, constantly present. This leads me to introduce the section on emotions as being something between hope and despair. Hope, because they still believe in the meaningfulness of leaving Afghanistan and seeking asylum in Sweden and to despair of their situation of waiting for decisions and receiving negative decisions.

To be between hope and despair is connected to the temporality of the situation, the way the situation changes over time, for example depending on

where they are in the application process, be it having just arrived and having had their first meeting with the Swedish society/bureaucracy, to their first decision, appeal, temporary residence permits, second negative decision, appeal, and having their cases handed over to the police to be sent back by force. In this quite depressive and disempowering process, for many of my informants there have been many moments of hope.

Sometimes this hope has been like grasping at straws, but at other times their hope has been built on something quite solid, like friends with a similar background being granted permanent residence permits, or verdicts from the Aliens Appeals Board or later the migration courts in similar cases. But also the hope relating to those granted temporary protection on the grounds that it was too dangerous to send them back was quite real as they thought that as the situation had not changed for the better in Afghanistan they would be granted permanent residence permits. But that hope was taken away from them as one after the other they got negative decisions on their new applications. The emotions of hope and despair are always present.

Disappointment is always present in their lives in and living between hope and despair. Several times during the process their expectations are not met and they are disappointed with how they and their cases have been treated. Disappointments come, for example, from not being listened to when speaking about their living situation in the reception centre, their health problems not being taken seriously, the poor Swedish education, the expected time frames of the process not being met and of course from receiving negative decisions to their applications. At the group level there are also disappointments towards how they perceive that the group has been treated.

Talking about hope and despair, fear is an emotion seldom expressed, but certainly present. The more direct expression of fear has been indicated to me by a person working with refugees, relating to a situation in which this asylum-seeking refugee expresses fear of being sent back. In my meetings and conversations the subject of fear has not come up directly, but needs to be looked at through their actions and to what extremes they go not be sent to Afghanistan. Fear and anxiety are related when exposed to a reality in which they are threatened with expulsion against their will.

For a visualisation of being between hope and despair I have, in my meetings with a couple from Afghanistan, followed them through both ups and downs and seen them between hope and despair. Since the day I met them at their first reception centre in the autumn of 2002[51], their mood has changed on several occasions. I can see this going through the field notes of the study, but also tracking my memory back to when I first met them. They have lived between hope and despair from day one. I remember them,

[51] The contact was made when I was a Swedish teacher at the reception centre and they later went on to be two of my most important informants for this study.

together with many of the other asylum-seeking refugees from different parts of the world, filled with expectation and motivation to learn Swedish and about Sweden. On many occasions these ups and downs have had to do with decisions being made by or being awaited from the Migration Board. Both waiting for decisions and receiving negative decisions on their application have led to moments of despair. This despair they have been trying to avoid showing to me, although as their share of disappointments grew, they also showed more resentment against some aspects of the process.

There has also been hope, as when the 'temporary law' came, together with decisions regarding cases of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan being given residence permits. Finally the couple also got their positive decisions, enabling them to stay in Sweden as permanent residents. This expectation of a positive result and the actual positive result gave new energy and motivation to learn more Swedish, go to school, and move to another place in Sweden with better possibilities for a social life and better prospects for the future. Unfortunately, even after receiving the positive decision, they went into a new period of despair and disappointments while awaiting help with being placed somewhere in Sweden as it took a long time. During this waiting period, staying in the reception centre run by the Migration Board, they had to move to a more depressing (bigger and older) reception centre with lower living standards, and less and not such good contact with the migration officers at that reception centre.

Other emotions related to despair and the inhospitality described in the last section, such as feelings of being unwelcome, come from feeling misunderstood and that Swedish authorities do not understand their difficult situation. They feel that the lack of understanding is manifested in the refusal of their applications for asylum. Some of the asylum-seeking refugees, especially those in job training, feel used. They feel that they are doing regular work and that the employer uses their cheap labour.

Most of the time, such emotions are not expressed. There are exceptions, though, which a story by one of the teachers at the school for asylum seekers told me, of a young man from Afghanistan, who tore down the map of Afghanistan, illustrates.

The teacher told me of a young man from Afghanistan who they had as a pupil, who, when he saw the poster of the map of Afghanistan had torn it down from the wall. The teacher thought he had done this to be mean to his friend, but when he was confronted with this, it showed that he was ashamed of his country, whilst crying and upset.

Sometimes feelings come to the surface, even if the pupils (asylum-seekers) are very good at hiding their problems at school. They are most often quite

happy and nice on the surface (not all, but the most). This even though there are many thoughts and problems.[52]

These are exceptions at school and normally the day passes without any major incidents, as does life in general at the reception centre. Thinking of their backgrounds, their difficult situation and the frustration among many of the asylum seekers it is quite amazing how well things work. It is very obvious how they try to create a liveable environment.

Summing up, though, in times of despair there are expressions of emotions of resignation and frustration towards the situation. There has, for example, been talk of taking one's life as an option to living the life they live and expressions like 'life is no good' and how they would be 'better off dead' have been quite common. The asylum-seeking refugees who shared these thoughts with me were really in despair when expressing these feelings, but on other occasions these same people also spoke more hopefully and engaged in activities to better their situation and make life liveable and worthwhile.

Concluding remarks on disempowerment

The situation in this chapter has been described as one of disempowerment, a disempowerment showing the exposure of the asylum-seeking refugees through dependence and inhospitality. Dependence is discussed through how the asylum-seeking refugees are dependent on Swedish asylum policies and on the decisions regarding their waiting in Sweden and on their application for asylum. Dependence is related to dependence on Swedish authorities, as well as individual officials and on other asylum seekers. I also show how dependence is related to inactivity, isolation, and economic dependence and how not knowing and being kept in uncertainty increases their dependence.

I also present how disempowerment can be understood through the inhospitality of the situation. Inhospitality is related to restrictive immigration policies, policies of repatriation and to the contradictions that the asylum-seeking refugees find in these policies and in the treatment of their applications and their stay while waiting in Sweden. Contradictions are also found when comparing with other asylum seekers and in comparing with other people in Sweden. They feel they are treated unfairly and seen as inferior.

The situation of disempowerment through dependence and inhospitality leads to emotions of despair, among them feeling unwelcome, disappointment, resignation and frustration. At the same time as despair is

[52] Field note 20, 2006-11-28

expressed in many ways, so is the emotion of hope. The temporality of the situation involves being between hope and despair.

Writing the sections on disempowerment through dependence and inhospitality and on the emotions of hope and despair and the simultaneous reading of Öberg's (2007) account of life for asylum seekers living at a reception centre have made me feel the same resignation I felt when I wrote this memo:

Memo written at approximately 23.00 and after bedtime.

Coping, a new code!? To just barely manage one's situation. To create strategies (or not) to cope with an 'impossible' situation.

This is also linked to the fact that I do not find any specific Basic Social Processes…, which seems to be the mark of good GT. I rather find marks of the situation itself, like for example this code. For that matter maybe this code could be a process? To cope-coping…

The feeling for the time being is that they do not do anything, that the situation is hopeless. Obviously that cannot be it as they precisely cope with the situation.

Coping could be a part of what they do while waiting.[53]

In my interpretation, this was a decisive point in my research, leading me to questions of from what aspects could the situation just described be coped with and resisted? What do they do to achieve this? And also what could possibly be empowering in this situation?

53 Memo 37, 2006-11-06

Actions of Empowering

It is through the meeting between disempowerment and empowerment that actions of empowering can be constructed to make meaning of the actions taken while waiting. I have found four sub-categories, which are characteristic of empowerment. They are 'to be occupied', 'to have a social network', 'have access to information and communication' and also 'to have the "right" behaviour'.

The relation and separation between the two main categorisations used to describe the situation is no simple one. They describe both structure and action, as can be seen in the lexical meanings of the words made here into concepts. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that disempowerment and empowerment are in a dualism that is relational. This means that although they are described as opposites, the concepts of disempowerment and empowerment are relational and situational. The relation between the two depends on the circumstances of the situation and there cannot be one without the other.

The lexical meaning of 'disempowerment' is: *'A state of powerlessness; the act of depriving a person or group of power'* (Oxford English Dictionary Online 2009). In my interpretation and use of the word the state of powerlessness relates to the seemingly static and structural disempowering factors putting refugees in a state of powerlessness. The asylum-seeking refugees are not powerless, although they are very limited in their power to change the circumstances of the decision on their applications for asylum. They are in a situation which greatly limits their powers, but where there are both empowering factors and actions taken in the direction of more empowerment: seeking empowerment.

The act, or acts, of depriving a person or group of power, though, can more easily be related to a situation where the acts of others limit the powers and space for actions of refugees. Acts in this sense should not be thought of as willed actions by individuals or groups, but rather point to the idea that it is in the practices of human beings through discourse that structures are reproduced and changed. We also have to take into consideration that seemingly disempowering practices can have empowering consequences and vice versa.

The lexical meaning of 'empowerment' is the opposite of disempowerment: *'The action of empowering; the state of being empowered'* (Oxford English Dictionary Online 2009). The case of a state of being empowered must be questioned on the same ground as the state of powerlessness, and in the case of refugees a state of being empowered is quite farfetched. The action of empowering, on the other hand, is very much in line with the discussion to come. Again, though, the actions need not be

related to willed action in every case, but can be related to practices in the reproduction and change of structures. In the discussion below, however, the actions of the asylum-seeking refugees will be discussed from the point of view of being willed actions, as it will be from a point of view of agency and space of action that they will be discussed.

In the presentations below, these categories of structures or states of empowerment will be translated into the actions they are. There is not so much a question of being occupied, of having a social network, access to information and communication, and the 'right behaviour' as there is a question about acting and reflecting towards these ends. These actions and reflections will be discussed through the meaningful project of the waiting period and for the improvement of the life situation. The actions taken and reflections will be discussed as keeping oneself occupied, searching for and maintaining social contacts and representing the self.

Some of the actions of empowering are based on structures such as structured activities, a social network with fellow asylum seekers from Afghanistan that they build on as a base for social contacts, information technologies such as the internet and mobile phones to be used for contacts and getting information and finally they base their presentations of themselves on experiences. They have somewhere to live, money for food, access to emergency treatments, access to school or job training, solicitors and interpreters, organisations and associations working for the benefit of refugees. These structures actually create a base for empowerment. As we have seen this is not always the case, but there are scraps of empowerment in them.

On empowerment, Brekke (2004) also stresses the importance of information as giving predictability to the situation, which would lead to control and a better understanding. He sees information as the key to empowerment. And, yes, certainly information is necessary and gives a basis for control, which is highly visible in how they themselves seek information from as many sources as they can. In my view the informants that I have talked to are quite informed on the situation, the way it is described in the media and by the Migration Board through their website. The problem does not seem to me to be the lack of information on the general practices of the asylum process, but the lack of a credible and predictive system and misinformation on what the asylum process looks like and what to expect. This goes back to the 'logos' and 'practice' of the asylum process (Norström 2004). It is possible to be informed about the 'logos', but the 'practice' of the asylum process is not credible and predictive.

Talking about empowering factors, the purely physical conditions empowering the asylum-seeking refugees need to be mentioned. In Sweden the most basic living conditions of somewhere to live and having food are fulfilled, even if dependence accompanies this. Still, these physical

conditions, which also include not having to be afraid that anything life threatening may happen to them, make it possible to at least have a base from which to be able to be reflexive about one's situation.

Other empowering structures which have already been mentioned earlier are activities organised by others than the Migration Board aimed at the asylum seekers, such as activities organised, for example, by adult educational associations, organisations like the Red Cross, or, in one case, student groups at a university.

These organised activities are very important in the lives of the asylum-seeking refugees I have met. My observations are strengthened by Brekke (2004) when he looks at the daily life of the asylum seekers. Their activities are often connected to the project in which he makes his study. Some of his informants create routines through their participation in the project, while others come up with other things to do through their contacts with the project. On social contacts he also writes that although the informants in his study seem to spend a lot of time on their own, they all have social networks. Teachers and administrators in the project become contact points with Swedish society. Another point he makes is that they live in isolation from Swedish society. Except for the activities within the project, Brekke draws a picture of quite passive asylum seekers. I have found that, although projects and organised activities are certainly good, the asylum-seeking refugees also create activities outside these. They are not totally dependent on them for activating themselves.

I would like to launch this section on actions of empowering with a story of a celebration of Ramadan. Perhaps it is an exceptional story in the day-to-day lives of the asylum-seeking refugees in this study, but still it points to things also activated in their day-to-day lives.

I will use an excerpt from my field notes to describe this. It is from notes taken on a visit made when they were celebrating the end of the fasting during Ramadan. The festive occasion lasted for three days of which I stayed for a day and half, staying overnight.

I first visited the couple, husband and wife. I came at about three in the afternoon. As usual I was greeted with a lot of little things to eat and a dinner and now as it was a celebration, there was even more. We sat and spoke together until about seven in the evening, when the husband and I went to his friends (who I had met before) where I also stayed overnight.[54]

Although this is a very special occasion, repeated once a year, apart from creating a break from the situation they are in it also shows how they do

54 Field note 14, 2006-10-24

things and keep themselves occupied, in this case using the month of fasting and the celebration of Ramadan as a time for reflection and for living life a bit differently and perhaps more festively than in everyday life. Öberg (2007) also mentions this in her book. This celebration is also a time when the social contacts and bonds are strengthened between friends and relatives and, especially during the three days of festivities, there are a lot of visits to each other's places. Normally an important thing in everyday life and even more underlined during this festivity. Öberg makes this remark and an interpretation of the importance of food and cooking in a life of uncertainty as something to hold on to.

> The commonplace and known give security. To this belongs food. I have gained several kilos since the winter. This was not something I had expected when I decided to move to a refugee camp. But wherever I come I am offered food and cookies – and there is almost without exception an extravagance of fat and sugar in what is standing on the table. Sometimes I actually even hesitate to go home to people for the simple reason that I cannot eat any more. (Öberg 2007: 167, my translation)

As I have mentioned earlier I have had the same experiences during my visits to the living places of the people I have met. The quote above points to the importance of food and cooking and to what is empowering. I would also like to mention how the commonplace and known give security in a difficult situation, as well as giving the refugees the opportunity to be hospitable and take on the role of giving rather than receiving.

Coming back to the excerpt, I started on being occupied and having social contacts; I go on to also show something of what I mean about having the 'right behaviour', in this case shown not just in their offering food but in other hospitality.

Also at the friends' house I was treated with food, small things to eat and tea. I could not eat more food and the difference compared to how it was with the couple, they did not press me to eat more, even if they frequently filled my mug and invited me to help myself from the snacks. In the evening when it was time to sleep, I was 'of course' offered a bed (...'s bed, he instead slept on a mattress in the living room). I offered to sleep on the mattress, but he said that he used to do that anyway, so it did not matter and I was his guest.[55]

This hospitality and 'right behaviour' seem, all through my field notes, to be important parts of how they want to present themselves.

55 Field note 14, 2006-10-24

Access to information and different means of communication are also important empowering factors for keeping in touch with what is going on and to search for and maintain social contacts.

The TV was on as usual, both at the couple's place and at the friends', with a constant jumping between the channels, mainly between the Afghan channels, especially a private channel transmitting directly from Afghanistan over the whole world. So far it is free to watch, but it will cost money in the future.

One of the friends said that with the new channels they get much better information on what goes on in Afghanistan. News is given in both Pashto and Dari (and English) every hour. It is easier to keep up with what is happening in Afghanistan. It was more difficult with only for example BBC.[56]

The last part of the excerpt shows one way of how my informants keep in touch with what is happening in the world, but also in Sweden, as many of them also follow Swedish TV and news. The internet is another source of information and recreation, as well as being used for communicating with others. The asylum-seeking refugees have access to computers and the internet through, for example, the school and the library and one or two have access at home, which they share with their friends. The internet as a more direct tool for communication with other people is also used to create e-mail accounts to be able to keep in touch with people all over the world. The most important means of communication, though, seems to be the mobile phone. Öberg makes this observation.

> The mobile phone is one of the most important belongings for the people at the camp. There is a phone box in the area, but only one box is not enough for six hundred people. Especially for the young men the mobile phone is central. They always carry it with them, they are always accessible. Their mobile phones for the most are out, beside the ashtray on the table, and kept under constant watch. It is as if they all are watching out not to miss even the smallest breaks – a text message or a phone call – in the monotonous everyday life. (Öberg 2007: 25, my translation)

The observation made in the quote above on the use of the mobile phone as a tool for a break from the difficult and dull everyday is certainly true. The mobile phone, though, also serves as a very important communication tool, both between friends at the reception centre and between the asylum-seeking refugees and friends and relatives in Sweden and the rest of the

[56] Field note 14, 2006-10-24

world, including Afghanistan. The significance and centrality of the mobile phone in daily life is certainly not something that is only distinctive of asylum seekers, although the importance of the breaks and the meanings given to these breaks is different. The reason for always staying close to the mobile phone is also often because of the difficulty of knowing when it is possible for their loved ones to be able to phone them. A missed call from the family somewhere else in the world might mean a long wait for the next possibility they get to phone again.

With these excerpts and the discussions around them I want to show how they have social networks, keep themselves occupied, the importance of representing themselves as being, for example, hospitable and how these activities take place within the frame of a meaningful project. I will discuss these as actions of empowering under the subheadings of The meaningful project, Keeping oneself occupied, Searching for and maintaining social contacts and Representing the self.

The meaningful project

The discussion on the meaningful project takes its starting point from the observation that the asylum-seeking refugees I met were constantly in search of improving themselves and changing their situation. It is from this point on that the actions of empowering in search of empowerment start. The meaningful project refers to the meaningfulness of leaving Afghanistan, coming to Sweden and applying for asylum and how it is strengthened by how return is just not seen as an option and in how they resist and protest against not being allowed to stay in Sweden.

The most obvious activity to point to a meaningful project is the effort they have made in leaving their home, living through difficulties during their escape and while living in Sweden waiting for decisions. This search makes the whole situation of waiting meaningful (see also discussion in Brekke 2004). The difficulties entailed clearly indicate a strong will to improve one's situation and that of one's family.

One immediate form of group resistance for the betterment of their situation was demonstrations against the decisions to repatriate (by force, if not voluntarily) those who were refused permanent residence permits. Many of the young male informants, who had got a one-year temporary residence permit, which had expired, took part in these demonstrations. In guiding decisions it was decided that it was now safe to deport people to safe places in Afghanistan. There were many reactions to this, initially from the asylum-seeking refugees themselves, channelled through the Afghan Association in Sweden, and these were later supported by other organisations and individuals. Individual resistance through appeals of decisions not to grant residence permits and through questioning decisions and debating decisions with their administrators is continuous.

Brekke (2004) brings up an interesting discussion on 'return – just not an option', in which the thought of repatriation is always there, not as an alternative, but always present. This is an important finding, both in the way he finds it as something always present in the stories of his informants, but also as something that they do not readily speak about. In my study 'return – just not an option' was very apparent. Some of the asylum-seeking refugees, when receiving negative decisions and exposed to being forced by the police to leave Sweden for Afghanistan, either prepared to go to into hiding or to leave the country. And some I know also had to follow this through. Also in the group of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan there are those who have been transported to Kabul in Afghanistan after the decision that some areas of Afghanistan were safe and that there were internal alternatives to seeking refuge outside the country.

On being sent back to Afghanistan and on the question of whether he knew anyone who had been sent back to Afghanistan from for example Germany or Norway from where Afghans are being sent back he says that he does not know of anyone and that nobody returns to Afghanistan. One looks for some other place to flee to. Nobody returns. Why would one flee the first time if one did not need to!?[57]

In this excerpt it is made obvious that nobody returns. This is a thing which is spoken about as something that goes without saying. 'Nobody returns' is stressed on several occasions when asked what they are going to do when they get negative answers on their applications for asylum and are threatened with being sent back at some point. For them there is no question that they have fled from something that they cannot return to. But what happens when the Swedish view is that the person is not in need of asylum, protection and a better place to live, at least not enough to grant the person permanent residence in the country? On such an occasion the person and his or her choice to seek asylum can be viewed as being declared incapacitated in his or her capacities to choose where and how to live, a situation which ought to damage the meaningfulness of the project to get to stay in Sweden, but instead it leads to more activity and resistance, as for example in demonstrations for their rights as asylum seekers, to try to change the mind of the authorities.

Participating in demonstrations arranged by different pressure groups for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees in general was one way of searching for the meaningfulness of the project and joining others in the resistance. These demonstrations could be followed on the website of the

57 Field note 28, 2007-05-31

Afghan Association in Sweden and were on many occasions directly organised by the same organisation. The engagement with the issues of the rights of the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan took up a large part of the discussions on the website and a lot of effort was made by the members of the association to enable protests by the asylum-seeking refugees and sympathisers with their cause.

Phone call with … (30th) [August 2007]:

He phoned in the evening after the demonstration. They had stayed on until about 19.30 and he had joined the hunger strike. When I asked him how many people they were, he started counting, but did not conclude on how many they were. As I understood it, they had permission to for a certain number staying there overnight, so they had to coordinate who would stay there.

He said he was hungry and laughed a little.

Apparently someone at the Migration Board had agreed to meet with them again. He did not know when this would be. He asked his friends nearest to him, but they did not know either.[58]

There were several of these kinds of demonstrations and also a march to try and influence and change the minds of the Migration Board and the government. Some political parties, party youth organisations and individual politicians also joined in the resistance and the questioning of the treatment of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan, which, together with the demonstrations, also created a discussion in the Swedish media, both nationally and locally.

The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, which has also been a long time partner to Afghanistan with many projects there over a long time, came to take a great part in the work for acknowledging the right for protection for the asylum-seeking refugees, based on their knowledge of the situation in Afghanistan. Local committees of the same organisation and other organisations and, importantly, individuals, were also to take part in the protests. In that way many people supported and still support the cause of giving protection to the asylum-seeking refugees in this study.

As much as this shows another side to the reactions from Swedish society, one arguing for a less restrictive immigration policy, it also shows a dependence on the circumstances being right for creating a basis for

58 Field note 34, 2007-08-29

empowerment. In this case empowerment stems from the structures of having an association dealing specifically with issues of people coming from Afghanistan and from having an organisation like the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan with a long history of cooperation with the country of Afghanistan. But also, from what has appeared in the media and from me speaking to people involved with asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan, asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan are also seen as nice hard-working people by many people. This last remark lies behind me speaking of having the 'right behaviour' as an empowering factor.

During the protests I talked to some of the young male asylum-seeking refugees I was in contact with about the agreement (2007) on repatriation between the governments of Afghanistan, Sweden and the UNHCR was questioned.

We spoke about the agreement between Sweden, the Afghan government and the UNHCR which said that it was ok to send people from Afghanistan home (voluntarily as they and I had understood it). In the agreement the Afghan government and the UNHCR say that they can take care of those who come back. One of them thinks this means that this is a lie. He was very irritated. They have not had time or been able to take care of those who have already been made to go back. He mentioned the number of 70,000 (from the neighbouring countries). He said to this that the Taliban would now receive 400 new followers if those being exposed to forced repatriation were really deported.[59]

The four hundred new followers of the Taliban would then be those, in his calculation, asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan who were at the time threatened with being forcibly repatriated from Sweden, pointing to the contradiction of sending him back to the uncertainty of making a living in Afghanistan, and he commented that the only way to make a living in Afghanistan for returnees was to join a criminal gang, deal in drugs or join a mob of some kind. This was a situation that in his interpretation would lead to repatriates joining the Taliban, thus creating an even more difficult situation in Afghanistan than already existed.

In an attempt to resist this situation and the agreement between the governments of Sweden, Afghanistan and the UNHCR, some of the asylum-seeking refugees had also written to the government in Afghanistan to get an answer from them on the deportations. At other earlier instances I know that some asylum-seeking refugees had written to the Swedish government and

59 Field note 31, 2007-07-31

that groups of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan had met in support of their claims for asylum.

He had joined the demonstrations for amnesty for refugees in [town] and been at meetings with other people from Afghanistan about their situation. At different meetings representatives for the people from Afghanistan at different reception centres meet up. There is also a man who has written to the Minister for Migration and been to the parliament a couple of times. Sometimes they meet different political representatives.[60]

At the same time as they resisted the decisions made by the Swedish authorities and tried to change their minds, they were also searching for other ways out by seeking asylum somewhere else or by going into hiding somewhere, continuing their search for a safe place to stay.

They wondered (asked me) if it was possible to send an application to Canada directly to apply for asylum. They had heard that Canada had received some refugees from Afghanistan from neighbouring countries to Afghanistan.[61]

The preparedness to and the actual going into hiding to resist being sent to Afghanistan in this example, shows openness to other ways of continuing the meaningful project.

On the train he told me that he was wondering about moving on to Switzerland, Austria or Norway, if there was no change after the trip to Stockholm. In Norway in that case he was planning to live in hiding, because his finger prints are registered. But even if he was found it would take a while to send him back to Sweden (perhaps seven months). He had also been to the library to make a drawing of the map of Afghanistan to see what escape routes there were from Kabul to Iran, Tajikistan or Pakistan.[62]

These two last excerpts point to the resourcefulness of the asylum-seeking refugees. Monsutti (2008) questions the assumption that mobility ends somewhere and that mobility is something temporary. The three solutions to the refugee problem that the international community through, for example, the UNHCR use as their starting point, voluntary repatriation to the country

60 Field note 5, 2005-10-02
61 Field note 4, 2005-06-19
62 Field note 34, 2007-08-29

of origin, integration in the host country or resettlement in a third country, assume that mobility ends and that it is only temporary. This assumption, Monsutti says, is not correct: instead mobility can be a life strategy. A point made in Monsutti's article is that we should look at the asylum-seeking refugees not as mere victims, but also as people having access to different kinds of resources. These are resources, which in my analysis might empower them. *'The refugees are not mere victims, they have social, economic and political assets that they are able to mobilize. Mobility is one of them'* (Monsutti 2008: 72).

In view of the meaningful project the observation that the refugees have resources to mobilise is also shown in the actions taken towards not giving up hope of some day getting to reside somewhere safer and not being sent back to somewhere they do not want to be. The main asset relating to the quote above in my analysis is the asset based in social relations stretching from the closest friendship group to friends and relatives living in different places around the world, friends and relatives from before they left Afghanistan and friends and relatives they have met and/or communicated with while in flight and while waiting in Sweden.

The asset I have found most useful in the situation as described here is the use of their social network and actions connected to that. Mobility in the sense of this situation is mostly seen as an emergency plan, to be used if everything else fails, at least when it comes to continued international migration. Within Sweden they are sometimes able to move around, using their network of friends and family, for longer or shorter periods of time. The ability to hide from the Swedish authorities is built on social contacts.

With reference to Antonovsky and the concept of a sense of coherence, Brekke (2004) discusses the asylum seekers' situation through incomprehensibility, which points to the fact that the challenges that were met were random and chaotic, which made it difficult to comprehend the asylum process. Regarding manageability, the asylum seekers were not in a position to influence the outcome of their application for asylum, and in their everyday life they felt that they were not in control, so they felt powerless in contact with the Swedish system. Brekke writes that to regain control his informants had to act as if they already knew the decision on the application. On the concept of meaningfulness Brekke states that:

> On the one hand the basis of their situation, the flight and following existence in exile was highly meaningful. They presented their stories as if they had little or no choice but to flee. Getting away from their homeland and seeking protection and residency in Sweden was absolutely a meaningful project. This made the potential for a strong motivation to cope with their situation and integrate in Sweden. However, for many it seemed to remain a potential due to the prevailing uncertainty.
>
> A negative decision would drain the meaningfulness of their project. (Brekke 2004: 56)

This would remain true also for the informants in this study. With regard to manageability, although they are not in a position to influence the outcome of the decisions on their application, they remain active in the struggle to influence these decisions. They do this via their solicitors, administrative officers of the Migration Board and other contacts within Swedish society, as well as organising themselves as a group to resist the negative decisions on their applications on a group basis. The powerlessness in this regard is not as marked in this study as in Brekke's, although there are, as I describe, a lot of mainly disempowering processes surrounding their efforts to empower themselves and change and improve their situation.

Some of the informants in this study at some point actually knew the outcome of their application and in that way knew the direction the end result (via appeals) would take. In that way they were in some control over in what direction they would put their energy. The meaningfulness of the project is strengthened in my findings in that after receiving negative decisions they still continue their struggle to get their reasons for staying recognised. The meaningfulness of the project is not in question, even though they do not get asylum. What are questioned instead are the asylum process and system, and the inhospitality of them.

However meaningful the project and therefore also the waiting are, they still have to fill the time of waiting with something. The time while waiting needs to be filled with actions and reflections. The things mentioned in this section are mostly related to improving their situation.

With the meaningful project of seeking a better life through seeking asylum as a base for seeking empowerment, the time while waiting is filled with actions and meaning making. I now go on to discuss some of these actions of empowering, starting with keeping oneself occupied.

Keeping oneself occupied

The activities offered by the Migration Board, which is in charge of the reception of the asylum seekers, do not offer that many possibilities. Occupations mainly include obligatory school attendance or job training, which are the organised activities that they have to participate in so as not to have their allowances reduced. Most of my informants participated in either going to school or doing job training or were looking for something new to do. Even if they participated in these activities, there was still a lot of time to kill, as time spent with no activity, illustrated in many of the accounts, leads to more time to think and reflect on the difficult situation.

Therefore they look for other ways to keep themselves occupied. The informants in this study perceive themselves as people who work hard in their efforts to create a living or study. All the informants in this study have participated in the organised activities, taking Swedish classes and in most cases also doing job training. Neither of these organised activities has always

felt meaningful. Going to school gives them something to do, but the level of education is not that good and they do not feel that they make progress. Doing job training, on the other hand, also gives them something to do, but to get job training one has to find a place on one's own, which is not that easy, and when taking part in job training many express how they feel used as cheap labour.

There are few meaningful activities to participate in, so to kill time the men I met and spoke to might play some pool or table tennis at the meeting place for the asylum seekers at the reception centre, watch TV and listen to music, drink and smoke and hang out with friends. Excerpts from the following field note can describe what a day can be like.

I came to the school at around nine. There was an unusually large amount of participants at the school. It later came to light that both the morning and the afternoon groups went in the morning. There was no school in the afternoon.

[…]

I contacted [A] and [B] by text message and asked if we could meet.

[C], [D] and [E] from Afghanistan were at school. I spoke quite a lot with [C] after the lessons were finished. He sat with his book that he translates page by page and he has now got to about page 70. He is really persistent and the book he reads is not the easiest. He even finds typing-errors here and there.

[…]

…He [C] means that he no longer can describe himself as a practising Muslim, as he does things which are forbidden in the Koran, like drinking alcohol. He earlier for example said that today, this sunny summer's day would be perfect to go down to the waterside and have a couple of beers.

[…]

[C] had gotten three days off from the job training at a neighbouring small town, because there were not that many people around because it was a national holiday.

[A] came by the school on his way to the solicitor. He said he would phone when he was done, but he never phoned.

After the lessons [D] and [E] went to check the Internet. [D] seems to know his way around the internet and showed [E] how to find different things. It seemed like music mostly.

[B] also came to check the internet. He had not gotten my text message; he had his other phone card in the phone, the one he used to phone his friends who have the same one. It was his other number I had got. Also [B] started to look for music with help from [D] and [E]. He was not that good at listening to their advice and got it wrong several times. They looked quite a lot at a 'hazar webpage', with different contents. Among other things, one could add pictures. [C] had added a picture of winter in the small town, which he showed. I must check that page out, it seemed to be in Swedish.

[…]

After a while, we ([B], [C], [E] and I) went home to [C] and [B]. [B] and I spoke a lot about swimming. He really wanted to go swimming, as one needs to make good use of the little time it is warm in Sweden. He has learnt to swim at another reception centre in another small town and he swam quite well it would show later when we went down to the waterside.

[…]

[B] takes the bike to the super market to buy some things for the dinner. He asks me, as the good host that he is, if I want something and if there is anything special I need. I say no and he is on his way to the super market.

The rest of us continue walking towards the 'camp'. Some school youth play rounders at the open space nearby the 'camp' and I ask them if they do that sometimes with the school or the Migration Board. [C] says that the school sometimes arranges outdoor activities.

When at [C]'s place, he has forgotten the key, so we go down to the pool room, which is situated at the bottom floor of the same entrance as their place. There is not that much people, but [D] and [F] are there. This time [f] says hello.

By the way, it is noticeable that they play quite a lot of pool at that table. Many of them play really good at a table which is perhaps not the best.

We played a little. I was also invited to play. I usually get to play, even if I play really poorly. (Worse than usual, I wonder if it is the pressure…) This time they did not change to so called Swedish rules.

When [B] gets back from the supermarket we go up to their apartment, where [C] and [B] share a room and [G] from Zimbabwe has his own room and [H] from Russia sleeps in the living room.

[B] starts cooking and [C] and I speak for a while. They have a keyboard in their room and I ask if it is he who plays, but no it is [B] who tries to learn how to play. He wants to learn how to play the guitar.

After a while [G] comes home.

[…]

[B] and [C] are finished preparing dinner. [G] stays to eat.

[…]

[B] for some reason is trying to learn to eat with chopsticks.

After clearing the table we go down to the pond, where [B] wants to go swimming. The rest of us stay out of the water. He jumps into the water and as I said he swims quite well. The others cannot swim. One of them says that he can swim if the water is only a metre deep. He immediately pulled out his book and dictionary to read a little. He always brings a book and dictionary so that he can read. [G] finds a ball and someone to play with. I take out my note book, but do not get to write much before it is time to play some volleyball. I have time to play for a short while, but have to go to meet [I] at the restaurant where he works. [B] joins me to show me the fastest way to the station.

[B] once again says when we leave that he must find a job for the summer when there is nothing to do. The school is closed… When we go [C] and [G] asks if they should join us, they have nothing to do either…

I leave them with the aim to go to the restaurant, but change my mind. There is not enough time to go see [I]. Instead I walk directly to the station, tired and with a headache in the 'heat'… [At about 17.30][63]

In one way or the other this excerpt contains details about most of what they do to occupy themselves. This was one of the first days of summer in early June and energy might have been higher than usual. Still, I argue that these

[63] Field note 29, 2007-06-05

things, these activities related in this excerpt have been referred to as doing 'nothing'. This is not 'nothing', it is something. Even if these activities are not seen as meaningful as, for example, going to a 'real' school to get a degree or working for a salary, they occupy the asylum-seeking refugees in their everyday life while waiting. If you will, the activities 'kill time', but not only this, as they learn things along the way and create and maintain meaningful social networks. Learning things and developing social networks are meaningful activities in the light of the meaningful project.

Action is visible through this desire to be occupied and activated with something, a desire to self-improve and better one's life, and through a need to develop one's social contacts. In the excerpt above we see these efforts to self-improve in seemingly mundane activities like reading Swedish, learning how to swim, learning to play instruments and even trying to learn to eat with chopsticks. Developing their social contacts goes on both within the group of people coming from Afghanistan, but also, as we can see above, with people coming from other parts of the world. There are definitely moments of passivity and resignation, as we have seen earlier, but mainly I have found that they try to keep themselves occupied in different ways, try to improve themselves and their situation and seek a social life. I would say that they are active, using their space for action as much as possible.

A search to occupy oneself and actually be occupied is thus central to taking up the time while waiting and for seeking empowerment through actions of empowering. This takes different forms, as we have seen, of which some are more obvious and clearly stated than others, from taking part in the organised activities provided at the reception centre, like Swedish classes or job training, to getting together and watching TV with friends. The importance is not so much what they do or want to do, but that they keep themselves occupied. The fact that they occupy themselves is not in itself a ground-breaking result from the study, but it stands out from statements made by the informants themselves, as well as from reports and earlier research, on passivity and that they do nothing and that there is nothing to do. The actual common sense result of this study would be that they act as people do 'normally', not only in regard to occupying themselves, but also when it comes to a search for social contacts and to an improvement/change in their situation. But an important distinction from what is considered 'normal' is that the situation is difficult and very temporary, so that the asylum-seeking refugees are challenged in many ways.

I have found the use of media in different forms (TV, DVD, internet, radio) to be important in the everyday lives of the asylum-seeking refugees, both for information and recreation. They are important partly to create a diversion with films, music and surfing the internet and partly to find information and keep in contact with friends and relatives. Many of the asylum-seeking refugees get satellite TV to watch channels in their own

language and to get the latest news from different sources in addition to watching Swedish cable TV. Another use of the TV is that the TV is almost always on as a diversion in the background. They all also have CD players and radios. Some go to the school or library to surf the internet. Other sources for recreation and diversion are playing sports, going swimming, playing pool and for some smoking and drinking are sources of recreation and a diversion, as we have seen in the excerpt above. It is important to note that when I speak of these things to do as observations made when in the company of the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan, it is for the most part men I am speaking of as I was able to be a part of the male circle of friends and their activities, but was not able to follow women and their activities.

For most of the informants learning is very important, in the provided school as well as from other sources. Except for a wish to learn more Swedish they want to learn, for example, English, to play the guitar, the piano and more. This is also a way to self-improve, but, I feel, just as much an indicator of wanting to have something to do, to have projects running all the time. To occupy time by having things to do is often also described as a way to break off from thoughts on one's own situation and the process one is in.

In order to speak of the importance of keeping oneself occupied, we need to get back to participation in the organised activities as an important activity. Going to school to learn Swedish is the first activity they get engaged with and most of my informants take advantage of this opportunity. From going to school, many later do job training or express a wish to do job training. Although many take part in these organised activities it is not as straightforward as to think that they are always empowering for the asylum-seeking refugees. In their activity though, they can divert their attention to something other than their own situation and can learn new things.

There are drawbacks, as we have seen, which they have to negotiate. When it comes to school, the working environment is not always the best and is often not suited for each of the individuals. The job training is most often, with a few exceptions, working in a restaurant/pizzeria. At first they learn things, but later they do the normal work and even do long and late hours, without pay. Many prefer to do job training, even with this background, to have something to do. The informants also stress the obligation for people to work, although they also feel used and in principal feel that the use of free (cheap) labour is wrong. In the negotiation there might also on occasion be smaller benefits, like eating some meals at the restaurant, getting cigarettes and perhaps being able to use the job training to negotiate for further benefits and in the end a paid job. Doing job training and the wish to do job training, to get a regular job and the drawback of doing job training are discussed in many field notes.

He wants to go to a town where there is work. He has got no connections at the moment.

He has previously done job training at a restaurant in another small town for a year and knows 'everybody' in that village. He lived there and commuted weekly to the other small town and the reception centre.

He has during the spring done job training at a restaurant at still another small town for six months. He does job training as a pizza cook. In this small town it was seasonal work.

He has also been to school for two months.

Now he wants to work and is tired of doing job training.[64]

As I said earlier, on many occasions the asylum-seeking refugees I spoke to resented having to work for nothing that they do not get a job that pays and that they feel used as cheap labour. As the following excerpt shows though, and as was also seen before, is that they, even if not getting a salary, get some advantages from their job training among them the most obvious is the already discussed advantage of being occupied.

He had been out looking for a job or job training. He was now trying it out at a pizzeria, but said he wanted a job, not job training. But that was difficult in the small town where the reception centre was situated. At the restaurants in the small town there were already between three and five people doing job training. They did not really need to employ anyone, as there are so many at the reception centre that want to do job training. They (at the restaurants) say that they only have to phone ... at the Migration Board and he will send a new person to do job training. He thought that instead of offering job training they should offer jobs, as the restaurants cannot manage without the labour. He thought that it was bad how they escaped salaries and taxes that way.

It would show later in the conversation that he, even though not getting a salary, had had some benefits from doing job training at different places. He had received cigarettes, some trips, living quarters.[65]

64 Field note 12, 2006-07-18

65 Field note 16, 2006-11-02

The conversation upon which this excerpt is based also partly took place at one of the restaurants in the small town. At this restaurant he knew the owner and the people doing job training there and therefore could offer me coffee and a biscuit for free. As such the involvement in job training through the contacts made there at least gave him some benefits and a somewhat enlarged space for action.

In relation to how the situation of asylum seekers is described as one of passivity, my interpretation also says something about and concentrates on the activity in their management of the situation. In Brekke (2004) it can be seen that our analysis on the management of the situation differs. Partly this is related to the material at hand, but also partly related to how data has been collected (constructed). Where he has interviewed his informants on separate occasions, I have talked and spent time with my informants over time. Where he has seen reflectivity, passivity and waiting, I have also seen action and a search for acting in resistance to passivity and just waiting. His view can be visualised in the following quote:

> In the interviews I asked the asylum-seekers what they did during a normal day and on weekends. The stories they told naturally included the organized courses that were the focal point of this study. These were central elements of activity in day-to-day lives dominated by reflection, passivity and waiting. (Brekke 2004: 26)

The importance of organised activities and having something to do, which are also stressed in this study, is clear in this quote. It is also clear that if I had not taken another route than that of 'just' interviewing I would have got the same answers indicating a life of doing nothing. But when following them and speaking to them in their daily life and of situations in their daily life, it has been made clear to me that they also resist this situation of passivity and 'just' waiting. The concentration on passivity and activity is probably a result of different approaches to the lives and situation of asylum-seeking refugees, but probably also a methodological difference.

The importance of activity and to be occupied can also be discussed in relation to time. In a study on asylum seekers living in reception centres in the Netherlands the importance of time is presented. Time is discussed through long waiting periods, restrictions, insecurity, uncertainty and boredom. In the study they also relate to past trauma and to the difficulties faced in the reception of asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Dupont, Kaplan et al. 2005).

> As a result AZC residents must develop elaborate coping strategies in order to "kill time", past, present and future. (AZC – "Asielzoekercentra", Asylum Seekers Centre.) (Dupont, Kaplan et al. 2005: 28)

The authors find that although the asylum seekers had different psychological expectations and different cultural and religious backgrounds, alcohol and drug use largely had the same function. This function was mainly to 'kill time'. Reasons and factors influencing this behaviour were to deal with trauma from the situation before they sought refuge, the time spent waiting and the difficulties of applying for asylum and boredom.

In this study it has not been found that alcohol and drug use has been one of the major activities seeking to kill time and manage the situation. The concept of 'killing time', though, we have already touched upon, is a concept which took its inspiration from the study presented here. What we can take with us from this study is that many of the activities are just that: activities to 'kill time'; activities to get away from the boredom, emotions and experiences coming up to the surface when not occupied with something; activities to provide a break from disempowering factors of waiting, including uncertainty, not knowing what is happening with one's family or with one's application for asylum; health problems including difficulties sleeping; memories from the hardships that made one flee and while fleeing; and importantly also memories from the hardships faced in Sweden after applying for asylum, which are not always spoken about, but come up in conversation now and then.

This is why I have also found that to be occupied with something is extremely important for the asylum seekers' possibilities for seeking empowerment in and from the situation. Smoking and the use of alcohol is not so openly spoken about in my conversations, but something that some do for recreation, to get away from the situation and because it calms. As well as creating a break from the situation and creating something to do, smoking can also have more physical calming effects.

One of the friends smokes and when he was out on the balcony the others told me that they all three also drink at home sometimes (the other two do not smoke though). One of them had only tried it a couple of times, while the other had started at the reception centre. They had started drinking in Sweden. In Afghanistan it would have been impossible. To drink or play cards would (explained by a gesture) mean death.

[…]

When the friend later came in he said that he started smoking in Sweden and started smoking cheap Russian cigarettes at the reception centre.[66]

66 Field note 24, 2007-03-18

It would perhaps be strange to call this empowering, but on the other hand it gives a break and it is a way to kill time. Killing time can also be understood through the organised activities, as in the following excerpt.

I asked him why he had started school again. He said that it was good, to have something to do. It is not good just to sit and having nothing to do, and to think. One got so tired from that.

He also said later that it is good to have a lot to do. The best he said, was to work a lot. Work and sleep. If one worked a lot, one did not have to think so much. When one works there is no time to think of anything else.[67]

Here it is quite clear how he uses having something to do, to forget about the situation: it results in not having to think so much.

The importance of keeping oneself occupied points to three functions, which have been touched upon. Firstly there is the importance of keeping oneself occupied, to kill time, to get a break from the situation for a while. The other is to try and learn things by keeping themselves occupied.

They both had started to learn a little English. They had photocopied a Swedish-English book on grammar and took sentences from there. So they learnt English from Swedish. One of them, it showed, had learnt some.

The other also tries to learn to play the piano, but it is difficult when one does not know the songs in the exercise book. He asked if there was any DVD on how to play.

At their home there were a number of books on how to learn Swedish and dictionaries that they had borrowed from the library.[68]

This is a picture of the eagerness to learn new things, although it is also expressed how difficult it is to learn in the situation they are in. Although the situation at times seems desperate, they still try and improve their situation by learning. This says something about the desire to stay above the surface and not drown in their difficult situation. These learning activities, such as learning languages, showing interest in the world and playing instruments, among other things, are all meaningful as well as a way of staying occupied.

The third aspect is the importance of keeping oneself occupied through social contacts. One meeting point for the asylum-seeking refugees was the

[67] Field note 33, 2007-08-09
[68] Field note 28, 2007-05-31

room for playing pool. The room was seen with somewhat mixed feelings by the informants, as some did not like the atmosphere there, but anyway most of them went there to play.

After lunch we went to the poolroom. Two friends sat outside and I said hello to them. One of them said he did not feel so well. We played some pool and I played some table tennis. There were not that many in the poolroom, but there were some people playing cards in the room next to it. It was a good atmosphere in the poolroom with a lot of joking around and kind laughs when strokes were missed.[69]

At this time the atmosphere was good and it was relaxing to be there. The meaningfulness of this occupation can be questioned, but anyway it was a place to meet, to play and share information and go on to do other things.

As we have seen, to be occupied is not only important in itself for taking up time while waiting, but also as a way to seek and maintain social contacts, communicate and to stay informed and to help them understand what is going on and to improve their situation.

Doing job training can visualise the importance of these functions as a way to stay occupied with something for the time being, relieving some of the disempowerment in the situation. Apart from killing time it is also a way to make and maintain contacts with other asylum-seeking refugees, immigrants and 'Swedes' and a way to enhance the possibilities of getting a job later by making contacts and learning a trade.

Searching for and maintaining social contacts

Social contacts are central to seeking empowerment. They do not come by themselves though, therefore I have called it searching for social contacts. A search for social contacts and interaction with other people, both within and outside the group are very important. The group of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan (with further divisions within the group) has created an environment in which they take care of each other and work together.

When newcomers arrive at the reception centre, it is the custom to go and visit within the first week. The Migration Board personnel normally also inform the group that there are newcomers. The group of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan also keeps itself informed by asking if there are any new asylum seekers coming and if so if there are any asylum seekers from Afghanistan among them. Keeping themselves informed and taking care of newcomers is one way of creating and maintaining a social network of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan.

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69 Field note 34, 2007-08-29

One of the things going on in the social networks is that they help each other out. Although not talking about their individual circumstances concerning their application for asylum, they help each other out with advice and information about how an interview is conducted and how they can prepare. They also help each other out when it comes to living quarters. If someone is placed in an apartment he does not like, it is possible to get help to move. The best source for information about the asylum process is through friends and acquaintances. Help with translations and interpretation is sometimes also provided within the group, when it does not concern the more official contacts with the Migration Board.

Before the interviews they speak among themselves about the interviews. But not regarding their own cases, which might be very different and personal and one does not speak to each other about what one says about one's situation in the interviews.[70]

It would later be revealed that among closer friends they are more open about their situation and what they said in their applications, but the observation that they are still reluctant to share the information with the bigger group was still there. Regarding these social contacts it seems as if many of my informants want to keep their integrity and privacy even amongst their closest friends at the reception centre. In the excerpt above it is shown that they keep a distance between themselves to protect their integrity. Keeping integrity intact seems to be an important part of their presentation of themselves, but as I later discovered, among closer friends too more delicate information concerning their situation and activities is shared. Although reluctant to share the most private information, they still help each other to prepare for what would be asked in the interviews, what documents to take and what the process is like.

Help is also given on more day-to-day issues like helping each other out with living arrangements and cooking. A simple example of this is the following excerpt.

At their place it was very nice, neat and tidy with TV, internet and stereo. As usual they were very hospitable with tea with snacks and later on dinner. As always I asked them how they learnt to cook, as they all say that in Afghanistan they could not cook. In Afghanistan it was the women who cooked. One of them said that they learn from each other; those who have been in Sweden longer teach those who have recently arrived. He himself learnt from others who had been in Sweden longer than him, and now he

[70] Field note12, 2006-07-18

teaches others who have come more recently to cook. Jokingly he said that he had planned to cook tonight, but decided to allow his students to do that.[71]

The group of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan at the reception centre is one of the social networks that individuals have access to in different degrees. Important contacts within the group of people from Afghanistan are also friends and relatives who have come to Sweden earlier as refugees, people whom they have met at the reception centre and who have got permanent residence permits and/or are quota refugees. The longer I have observed and conversed with people in the group, the clearer it is that extended social contacts within the group of people from Afghanistan outside the asylum system are important to them.

Social contacts outside the group of people from Afghanistan also exist, for example through job training, meeting other asylum seekers at the reception centre and the school, meeting the teachers at the school, in the case of this reception centre meeting university students in project activities and in individual cases meeting people from different organisations working for the rights of asylum seekers.

In this group of people outside the group of people from Afghanistan I have to include myself, as a contact not to be disregarded as contacts outside the group are quite limited for many. The experience I have, that many of them knew who I was and what I did before they even met me, is for me an example of the social networks and information channels created between them. As a social contact with inside knowledge of Swedish society I was often 'used' to discuss Swedish and international politics and especially asylum policies and the situation in Afghanistan and for information on the view of asylum seekers in general and those from Afghanistan in particular as, for example, presented in the media.

About his temporary residence permit and what was going to happen next, he still did not know anything. At the Migration Board when they had issued his temporary residence permit, they had told him to come back when the date expired. His administrator had told him to come back later… The administrator now only referred to the Migration Board's web pages for further information.

I said I would check the web pages for information on how the process for the people from Afghanistan with temporary residence permits would be handled. He said that one of his friends had said that the new Minister for

[71] Field note 30, 2007-06-13

Migration had made a statement one could read at Migration Board's homepage. I said I would look that up as well.[72]

As special cases, and related both to within the group of people from Afghanistan and those outside, are the organisations working for the rights of asylum seekers. With the decision by the Migration Board and migration courts that it was safe to repatriate (by force if not voluntarily) to Afghanistan there have been many protests and demonstrations, including hunger strikes, which have been supported by both organisations particularly concerned with refugees from Afghanistan and others, including political parties.

Within the group of people from Afghanistan (either asylum seekers or not) smaller groups of friendship networks are formed. In these groups they seem to have closer connections and for example know more about each other than within the bigger group. At times these groups seem to be substitutes for the closer family lost or left behind. An example of this is the activity around a medical emergency for one person in a group, where his closest friend took it upon himself to arrange for the friend to get medical care and for other persons close to the friend to get the relevant information. In this special case he also used a contact outside the closest group, me. He knew that I was sometimes in the town where the person was hospitalised and asked whether, if that were so, I could visit him there. Unfortunately I was not there at that time. This same person also visited at the hospital later. This case was also taken up outside the closer group, as other acquaintances went to visit at the hospital.

He phoned me this morning. Apparently [A] had to go to [big town] urgently yesterday. He had first gone to [another big town] and then on to [the big town]. He says that parts of the body do not work and that [A] cannot speak. He spoke to the doctor, but they did not know really.

He asked if I was in [the big town], but I am not.

He said that his wife was not at home either, she is down south or abroad, he did not really know. But she knows what has happened, according to him.

He was coming to my town later, but was in a hurry. He would perhaps go to [the big town]. He promised to phone and tell me how things were.[73]

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72 Field note 16, 2006-11-02

73 Field note 22, 2006-12-18

Another case showing 'family substitution' is when one of the informants together with his girlfriend (also from Afghanistan) decided to get married and thus got engaged. There were traditions surrounding the engagement in which the families met and had a ceremony. As he did not have any family in Sweden, chosen male friends substituted in the role of his family on this occasion. As he and most of his friends are young and not so well-informed about the traditions concerning a decision to marry, other older (female) acquaintances were invited to participate.

These social contacts, including both close friends and more distant acquaintances, are the most important empowering structure and activities to maintain and create new contacts are among the most important actions of empowering. The strength of even the more distant social contacts was seen in a situation of crisis.

As it showed also he had been together with the others to visit him at the hospital after him becoming ill. He said that the wife had been crying when they talked to her and they had gone there to show their support. The wife had earlier told me that they had been to visit, so I knew that from before, but I did not know that he had been one of them.[74]

In this case some of the less close friends (as I understood it) still showed their support when things got even tougher. In this case the man in question was rushed to hospital because of a life-threatening condition.

The importance of making friends as a break from isolation is also expressed. This is for example expressed in a field note made with a female asylum-seeking refugee from Afghanistan.

She said that she was having a better time now in [small town], where she has friends (other women) she could meet. They phone on the mobile phone so that they can meet and for example go down to the shop.[75]

This shows the importance of having friends and how it makes the situation much better. Talking to the same woman on another occasion, when she did not have friends who she could be with, she was not as happy. Being a female asylum-seeking refugee from Afghanistan is more difficult than being a male asylum seeker in the light of having personal social contacts. For one thing there are fewer female asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan coming to Sweden (compared to male), and dispersing them between different

74 Field note 24, 2007-03-18

75 Field note 10, 2006-06-03

reception centres makes them more exposed to there not being any other (or very few) women to be with at times leading also to inactivity.

She says that it is like being in prison to be in [small town], as it is now. She has got nothing to do. She does not feel like going out to just to take a walk, without having something to do. To the question if she could go to second hand shop (Red Cross), she said that it is not nice there. It is just going in there to watch, one just wants to leave again. She does not have any other contacts in the small town.[76]

Although the situation for the men is better, still the number of fellow asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan only amounts to between 10 and 20 persons at the reception centres I have visited. Other things exposing the women more to isolation from a network of social contacts are some of the traditions, where they do not participate in the same social spaces as men.

The organised activities provide both meeting places and people to create social networks with. The teachers at the school are such an example of giving support to their pupils, the asylum seekers. At the school I visited this was shown in their open door policy and their readiness to answer questions and explain different things to them, but also by caring and listening to their different problems.

The teachers seem very involved with the students and ask them if there is something bothering them and such. Like in the example with the woman teacher and a young woman from Afghanistan, who she asked today in the afternoon how she was, when she thought she looked tired. The young woman did not want to talk then, it was a 'woman's' problem of some kind. She (the young woman) said that maybe she would to talk on Monday.[77]

They also get help from the teachers in other ways, for example through asking for translations of prescriptions or of letters from their solicitors or from the Migration Board.

Some of the asylum seekers come with small notes, asking for translations. The teachers have plenty to do during breaks or when the students work by themselves. Some ask, but it seems that many more have questions, but keep them to themselves. There are not many occasions to get the attention from the teachers (who do what they can, but with more than 100 students

[76] Field note 18, 2006-11-12

[77] Field note 21, 2006-11-29

it is difficult to find time and answer all), so some people help themselves more than others.[78]

Earlier I discussed language, or rather the lack of language, as something disempowering through the lack of language skills in Swedish and problems with interpreters. I have also found how for many asylum-seeking refugees in day-to-day life it was quite empowering to at least know basic Swedish and be able to communicate passably with others in Swedish.

He is very concerned that his Swedish is no good. He thinks that some words he ought to know. He is also very inquisitive and sensitive to new words. He speaks Swedish well and is easy to understand and he also understands well. It is noticeable that he is accustomed to be in the company of Swedes.[79]

To be able to communicate with others in Swedish is an empowering factor. Another is that many, if not most of the asylum-seeking refugees I spoke to, also understand and can make themselves understood in several more languages and are very skilled in how to create ways of communicating with few words. This way of communicating with few words and/or using many different languages to communicate (I describe how this was done in field work) is essential for not only understanding how we were able to construct meaning between researcher and informant, but also, in this case, from the point of view of creating a common ground for communication within the reception centre among asylum seekers with different language backgrounds and towards the society around them.

In relation to the importance of a social network and the dependence on others, negotiations within these dense social contacts are necessary. One such negotiation which seems to have been quite successful is that in most cases, and in visits to where my informants lived it has been clean and tidy (also on spontaneous visits) and the cooking and kitchen arrangements seemed to work. Some cooked by themselves, while some got together and cooked in groups.

Supporting structures need to be mentioned in connection with searching for and maintaining social contacts. Language and communication skills have been mentioned, as well as negotiation skills. Supporting them there are also the organised activities and the activities of empowering initiated by them. Information technology, mainly in the form of mobile phones, but also

78 Field note 21, 2006-11-29

79 Field note 29, 2007-06-05

the internet, supports their communication with a wider social network. The initiative though comes from them.

The importance of the social network cannot be more stressed. It is difficult to know the extent to which the social network is used and supports them while waiting and in their actions of empowering. Both the empowerment and disempowerment of social contacts needs to be looked into more than has been done in this study. What I would like to stress in summing up the importance of the social network is the importance of both close friends and relatives and more distant friends and relatives. I am not only stressing the access to these social networks, but perhaps even more so the actions to search for new contacts and maintain old ones.

Related to the search for and maintaining of a social network is the representation they make of themselves as individuals and as a group. Some of these aspects have already been discussed through the evaluations they make between community and integrity in their evaluations of how much to tell different people of their own situation and that of others. I have also discussed how I have interpreted the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan as having the 'right' behaviour and we have seen how they relate to work and occupation. These things and more on the representation of self will be taken up in the next section.

Representing the self

On hospitality: Giving protection to a guest, even if it means risking one's own life. Rather die, than say where the person is.[80]

I discussed earlier how disempowerment was related to inhospitality. The above was said when someone received a negative decision on their application. This was perhaps the most striking action of representations of themselves, a representation made in direct opposition to the inhospitality of the situation. The conversation took place during the time between a negative decision on their first application and an announcement about the decision on their appeal that they, husband and wife, were now waiting for. Most of the conversation at this time was around trying to understand why they did not get to stay and that they were really tired of waiting. As we can see this relates directly to not being welcome in Sweden. In the same quite emotional and open conversation the following statement was also made.

A yes is always a yes and a no is always a no, even after death.[81]

[80] Field note 4, 2005-06-19

[81] Field note 4, 2005-06-19

This was said in reaction to the contradictions that they felt arose from the fact that they did not get to stay, although the situation was evaluated as too dangerous to send them back and they could appeal after a negative decision. How could an appeal change anything? These two direct representations in direct response to the interpreted situation can lead the way to describing the representation made of themselves and to searching for meaning through interpreting the situation and searching for the known.

The representation of themselves also related to showing strength despite the difficult situation, for example through the importance of keeping up appearances, taking pride in what one does and not letting oneself be completely put down by the situation. Most of the time expressions of emotions are held back but sometimes the façade breaks down and some of the feelings are more directly displayed, which was the case in the example in which a young man from Afghanistan tore down a poster, showing a map of Afghanistan on it, from the wall. Although I have never experienced such a visual display of feelings I have nevertheless seen how feelings have had to be negotiated and expressed in other ways, through, for example, the use of humour or smaller gestures and speech.

Humour is used as an action of empowering, to seek a common understanding and for seeking empowerment. Humour can be empowering in this sense. The field note on the conversation over lunch is an example of how in reality very difficult matters are treated and discussed between the friends.

They finish making food. Their friend [from Zimbabwe] stays to eat. The friend says grace and we eat. The friend and [A] joke around a lot. One example is that they started a discussion on how every day is a new day. The friend started out saying every day is a new day, one does not know what the weather will be like... [A] fills in with, no, and one does not know what will happen... are we still here, has [B] got positive or maybe been sent back... or.[82]

Through joking about the misery of the situation they express feelings that they have in common. Questions of uncertainty are treated in this way: waiting for a yes or a no, of what will happen tomorrow. Behind this use of humour is a need to give vent to things that are trying. This way of speaking and relating to one's situation and feelings I have seen on other occasions. In a way this seems to provide an outlet for feelings connected to the situation and thus is important for resisting disempowerment.

82 Field note 29, 2007-06-05

Using humour in this way to create an understanding of the situation and as a way to communicate uncertainties among friends is empowering, strengthening the social contacts and finding a vent for closed-in feelings. The situation of temporality and the feelings of uncertainty in themselves though are disempowering. But relating to these feelings in this way can create a base for empowerment.

The use of humour is often cynical, related to disagreement with and disbelief about the situation they are in. I have also found that some of my informants use religion and other personal beliefs to cope with the situation, thus creating a base from which to search for meaning. This base and search for meaning have also resulted later in actions to control the situation and challenge it, seeking empowerment. In all this there is a search for the known, that is, to look for something one recognises and knows in one's self and one's experiences.

The representations of themselves are reflections of how they want to be and be seen, as well as a source for searching for meaning. In the search for the known there are examples of seeking tradition and religion, and both these things can be demonstrated in the following excerpt from the field notes.

Yesterday and today there was a lot of secretiveness and closed doors so as not to mix men and women. The woman had to stay in the kitchen. I could not even say thank you and good bye, because there was another man there for lunch.

We, the couple and I, talked about Islam and the Koran, which they defended against the Bible. It seems as if they have become more religious (especially the woman), or is it just that they show more now.[83]

The first part of this excerpt points to actions that were identified as being in line with their traditions. Traditions that meant that men and women did not eat together and that the woman should not be present when the man entertained guests. The second is a comment on the fact that during the time I had known this couple it seemed as if they resorted more to religion than they had when I first got to know them, which can also be seen in an excerpt from a later conversation with the couple.

A comment about the meal is that now and a few times earlier on he prayed after the meal, earlier in the company of another man, but now also when it

[83] Field note 14, 2006-10-24

was only us (the couple and I) they did a 'quick' prayer. I cannot remember that they have done that before.

If I have not written this earlier she has also started wearing a veil when I visit them. She has done that for a while, but she has not done that all the time since she came to Sweden.[84]

Another example of turning towards religion can be seen in this excerpt.

After lunch he went to pray. He said that he prays three times a day. I asked if he prayed together with his roommate, but he prays alone. I asked him because I saw that the friend had a prayer schedule on the wall, although with five prayers a day. He said that it is good to pray, and leave one's problems up to God to decide on. He became calmer. It helped him to forget his situation for a while.[85]

In this we can see an example of searching for the known by resorting to the religious tradition of prayer which has the function of being able to forget the situation and find refuge for a while at least. These examples could be interpreted as a way to search for meaning in the difficult situation through following traditions. In chaotic and difficult times it is a way to search for something known from which to create a base, which can give meaning and action, ways to be.

There are examples of the opposite also, of distancing oneself from religious traditions, as one cannot relate to them, as shown in the example below. I see this distancing oneself from religious traditions as a dimension of searching for the known, something to relate to which feels comfortable and known. This excerpt from the field notes is a description of a wish to resort to something which feels known and feels comfortable for the person's individual character. Or in other terms fits well with the structure of identity, built on experiences, both old and new.

He himself no longer considers himself a practising Muslim. For a while he prayed three times a day, as prescribed, but not now. Now he thanks God when he goes to bed and when he gets up in the morning. He says that he cannot describe himself as a practising Muslim, because he does things which are forbidden according to the Koran, like drinking alcohol.[86]

84 Field note 18, 2006-11-12
85 Field note 33, 2007-08-09
86 Field note 29, 2007-06-05

A central point in the self-representation as mentioned above is to be hospitable. Self-representation is strongly related to presenting a polite, reliable and hospitable face, so much so that today I take these traits for granted in my informants and also in approaching new informants. I now 'know' that it is not a good idea to eat a big meal before a visit. In all but a few cases there have been meals and/or snacks offered and it is 'mandatory' as a gesture of politeness to enjoy this hospitality. When I have asked about these things they have stressed the importance of this hospitality. To be polite, reliable and hospitable seems to be something they are comfortable with and is described as something they know from traditions back home, which are sometimes described when they talk about this.

Despite the fact that they presented themselves as not being very good cooks, they still offered a meal. This, because, as one of them said: This is the way to do things, one does not feel good if a visitor leaves without having had something to eat and drink and one serves the best the house has to offer. Otherwise it feels shameful. It does not feel good.[87]

On being reliable and being polite and the management of feelings I refer this excerpt from field notes:

Earlier in the morning we had talked about showing feelings. I said that I felt like people from Afghanistan kept their feelings on the inside and said that they were ok, when in fact they were not. He said that this is true. They are taught as children not to show feelings. He does not think that this is good. Although he does not think that it is good, he is that way himself. Most often he is able not to show his feelings, but sometimes it shows. Once at a meeting with a municipal integration administrator he was asked how he felt. He had said that he was all right. She had said that, it shows that you are not. He had answered her: No, but what can we do about that… Why show, so that others also get sad?[88]

To manage one's representation of self in the management of difficult situations could perhaps be seen as stoical and a way to take pride in one's acts towards others.

Although it is expressed as disempowering to have one's psychological powers lowered, the way it is talked about is a way to dissociate oneself from such a self and to relate back and take pride in a known self, which has a better grasp on things. The problem of not being at one's best is expressed

87 Field note 24, 2007-03-18
88 Field note 34, 2007-08-29

when one man describes how he easily forgets things, like remembering appointments, to contact people or even forgetting pots on the stove.

[…] I say that I will come Tuesday next week and that we can talk then. Sure that is good, but I must not forget to text or phone him, because he forgets things very easily. I have taken both [A] and [B]'s numbers, so that I can contact them when I come.

[A] tells me that he often forgets things. If [B] had not phoned him, he would have forgotten that we were to meet at twelve. He forgets many things…things on the stove.[89]

This shows lowered ability to think properly and is expressed as something which is not known to the person's understanding of himself. He does not know himself as someone who forgets things. He blames this on the situation he is in. The difficult situation and its consequences are sometimes expressed by saying that they have a lot of thoughts, which hamper learning capabilities and even lead to absent-mindedness and forgetfulness. This kind of lowered capacity is also expressed in that many say that they have difficulties learning the language due to too many thoughts and the situation, which hinder learning. For the representations of themselves, this is not a way that they want to be seen. In a 'normal' situation they are not like this. Normally the informants give a picture of themselves as reliable and good students.

At the same time as these traits of reliability and politeness can be seen, there are also moments of resistance and representations of oneself reacting to inhospitality. This excerpt from a field note is an example in which a co-worker at the factory makes a patronising remark suggesting that the asylum seekers use (abuse) Swedish kindness, but he gets answered back immediately.

They now also feel that Swedes do not want them in Sweden… It is not easy being a refugee in Sweden. If the situation in Afghanistan were ok, they would return. He gives an example from the factory, where a man says that he (as a Swedish worker) works and that he, the refugee, eats. He replied though that had been working for free for a long time (two years).[90]

Self-representation and integrity, not working on the side, not thinking that it is okay to be used by employers, resisting decisions made by the

89 Field note 28, 2007-05-31

90 Field note 4, 2005-06-19

authorities, and sticking to one's principles are other ways of representing oneself in searching for meaning and relating to the known self.

Another important part of self-representation and of the meaningfulness of the project is justifying one's own reasons for applying for asylum, often by a comparison with other groups. In the comparisons made between themselves and other groups of asylum-seeking refugees it is clear that they try and justify their own reasons for getting to stay. This is sometimes done with the same misunderstandings or disqualification of others' reasons that they feel that they themselves are victims of. Instead of pointing to a restrictive system towards immigration, they point to people taking advantage of the situation. In that way they reinforce the image of asylum seekers as bogus, not really in need of protection, protection that they themselves are in need of but do not get. This reasoning I see as taken from the general discourse described earlier in which it is with suspicion one should look on people who seek refuge in Sweden and the rest of the EU. It seems as if the asylum-seeking refugees in many aspects have picked up on that. When they make these comparisons, though, it is much more urgent than for most, as for them it can be seen as a fight over the scarce resource of refuge. Asylum is what only a few get and therefore one needs to prove one's situation is worse than others.

Self-representation has a lot to do with how the person searches for the known self and how he or she wants to be seen by others. It is clear that in many examples of how they present and represent themselves, they take pride in what they do and in their meaningful project. In their representations they respond to the situation they are in and it is perhaps not so strange that I have found that they want to relate to themselves as hospitable, reliable and polite in the face of an unwelcoming and contradictory asylum process. It is also made obvious that they, through their representations, take pride in themselves and that they are not letting the situation get them down that easily.

I want to turn the effect of the situation on its head and relate this element of not letting the situation get them down that easily to this quite exceptional content from a conversation.

On the train he had said he knows all the people from Afghanistan (and many others for that matter) at the camp. He has helped when they have come. With interpretations, guiding through shops and such. He also helped some people from Kurdistan and Iran with interpretations.

He also said that he had many good memories from the camp and the small town, in the form of friends. But it was mixed with memories of the bad situation with the Migration Board and his own situation. He had felt good in the small town in the beginning.

He spoke of how he had grown as a person in Sweden, by being forced to do things by himself. It was best to get to know oneself and get to be friends with oneself, as this was what one would live with for the rest of one's life. He meant that in Afghanistan he had been helped with everything, but in Sweden he had had to manage more by himself and in that way developed as a human being.[91]

This was said by a young man in his early twenties. At the point when this conversation took place he was able to interpret his own situation in these terms. This was an exceptional interpretation that I only heard at this one instance. On the other hand, and supporting the fact that this could be seen as something empowering, on more occasions than this young men coming to Sweden by themselves were proud that they could manage by themselves. For example this was expressed through at least some of them being able to cook decent meals, but in these instances when pride was taken in being able to be decent hosts it is not spoken about as openly as in the excerpt above.

Concluding remarks on actions of empowering

In this section I have shown how the asylum-seeking refugees respond to the disempowering situation through actions of empowering. In reaction to uncertainty and not knowing, they try to find information and communicate among themselves in social networks. As a reaction to forced inactivity and to get a break from the disempowering situation they activate themselves and keep themselves occupied. By representing themselves in different ways they seek empowerment from and within the situation.

The meaningful project of seeking asylum is an important background to these actions of empowering as the starting point for making their waiting worthwhile. The searching for and maintenance of this meaning is thus essential for maintaining the meaningfulness of the project. Through discussing how return is just not an option and how the asylum-seeking refugees resist and protest against decisions not to grant them residence permits and to repatriate them by force, I exemplify how young male asylum-seeking refugees act through an understanding of the meaningful project of seeking asylum in Sweden.

The importance of keeping oneself occupied is discussed through how organised activities of Swedish education and job training create possibilities to keep oneself occupied and how also other everyday activities, such as playing pool, watching TV, listening to music, surfing the internet and hanging out with friends kill time and relieve some of the tension of the difficult situation. Keeping oneself occupied is also discussed from the point

[91] Field note 34, 2007-08-29

of view of the importance of doing something they find meaningful, like learning different things and growing as persons.

While engaged in activities the asylum-seeking refugees engage in social contacts, both searching for new contacts and maintaining old. The importance of these social contacts as a source of empowerment is clear through how they help each other out in different ways. To keep in touch and to create new contacts the internet and the mobile phone are important as they and their friends and relatives are on the move or live far away.

The activities that the asylum-seeking refugees engage in also demonstrate how they represent themselves. These representations are visualised in how they are eager to understand the situation they are in and in their search to represent themselves from the point of view of what feels comfortable and known to them. They do this, for example, through humour and by engaging in traditions. The representation of the self involves representing themselves as hospitable and reliable, as well as demonstrating a strong resistance and integrity towards the situation.

In what follows I will discuss questions such as: What is the relation between these actions of empowering and seeking empowerment? How can the concept of empowerment be deployed to understand these activities? And how can we understand seeking empowerment through agency, change and the limitations of spaces of action?

To do this I will integrate the empirical findings of the situation as disempowering and the management of it as actions of empowering with theories that can illuminate how the disempowering situation leads to activity in the form of actions of empowering and how I interpret this as seeking empowerment.

Seeking Empowerment

I argue that the situation described creates the need for seeking empowerment from and within the situation. Seeking empowerment in that sense is born out of the situation the asylum-seeking refugees in this study are in. In that way there is a need to discuss how the mainly disempowering situation can lead to actions of empowering and seeking empowerment from the point of view of empowerment and how agency, in this case referred to as seeking empowerment, is related to resistance and change and to emotions as triggering the actions and thoughts of the situation.

Bengt Starrin's (2007) presentation of the attitude of empowerment in contrast to paternalism gives me an opportunity to apply the concept of empowerment. The paternalistic way of thinking builds on the assumption of subordination. It assumes that people in general and people in exposed situations in particular are not capable of knowing what is best for them and that this is for experts and authorities to know and decide on. In short this could describe the situation the asylum-seeking refugees are in: a situation which is studied in academia (the experts) and decided on among officials and politicians (the authorities). This situation has been discussed within a framework of forces driving towards this paternalism, visualised with a preferential right of interpretation, with a background in national discourse on migration, refugee migration and asylum seekers and in a wider context of nationalism and global forces of racism in relation to gender.

The empowerment way of thinking distances itself from the assumption of subordination and instead concentrates on the horizontal relations between people. The empowerment way of thinking deals with the difficulties of resolving a situation where a person is violated, humiliated or otherwise reduced (Starrin 2007). It is the resolving of this situation that has been discussed as constituting actions of empowering and will be put into context here.

The relation between disempowerment and empowerment contains structure and agency, as well as discourse and practices. Even though structure and discourse is there beforehand, so to speak, action is needed to maintain and/or to change it. And at the same time all social actions create structure and discourse. This means in this presentation that the situation of disempowerment versus empowerment contains structure and agency, as well as discourse and practices. What is disempowering or empowering is dependent on the context of when, where, what and how. This is also why seemingly obvious situations of disempowerment at times hold possibilities for empowerment.

The issue of change, in this case in relation to empowerment, will be approached through the individual's ability to change circumstances in

which he or she finds him or herself. I propose to do this by discussing the 'power' of the individual subject or self in relation to willed action. I will call this power to act towards change, agency.

Through the theoretical assumptions on the social construction of reality in everyday lives I have argued how there is a possibility for willed action, agency of the individual in relation to society. There are also strong limitations to this agency, as the individual is influenced by a myriad of sources in its choices to, for example, adjust or resist. The space of action, which each one of us has at our disposal, would then be decided according to the pressure from each of these different sets of limitations and possibilities found in structures and discourses. This would then be true for all of us, but importantly the space given is unevenly distributed among people. On a more practical political point the idea of empowerment would then be to make possible an enlargement of this space for more people.

To visualise this focus on the relationship between agency, structure and discourse I now introduce a discussion on this same issue by another researcher and relate it to my own findings. Using a symbolism of coping, Ruth L. Healey (2006: 260) writes that asylum seekers and refugees use different strategies to cope with the situation, '*...such as taking drugs, being proactive in education, or by adopting a positive outlook that things will change for the better*'. These strategies could be put into my own frame where taking drugs would be seeking to forget and to occupy oneself or to kill time as well as feelings, being proactive in education would be seeking to keep oneself occupied and seeking to improve one's situation, and adopting a positive outlook would be to search for meaning by searching for something known. More importantly, though, Healey (2006: 259) also states that: '*Coping strategies are attempts by asylum-seekers and refugees in the host country to regain agency in their "new" society.*' This I interpret as very close to my analysis of what seeking empowerment is aimed at doing: to gain more space to use their agency to change and improve their situation.

Theoretically Healey also rests on an approach of using the agency-structure through Anthony Giddens' (1984) 'structuration theory' when dealing with the relationship between agency and structure, of which she says that:

> The relative importance of 'structure' and 'agency' varies, as structural forces are a part of every action of human agency. Asylum-seekers and refugees respond in different ways to the opportunities and constraints available to them within the structures they face. (Healey 2006: 260)

Healey's analysis is permeated with the relationship between agency and structure in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees. She also finds a relationship between what she calls internal and external coping strategies, in which the internal strategies include the internal belief system and the

motivation to act, while the external means firstly that they seek education and secondly help from others. In this sense the external coping strategies correspond to what I discuss as actions of empowering, that are related to internal processes of emotions and through the meaningful project. Another of her findings is that '*Externalised coping strategies indicate the actions participants took in order to re-establish a higher level of agency through their different coping strategies*' (Healey 2006: 267) .

In relation to this space of action and the creation of it we have to look at what triggers this creativity in the individual. What makes change possible from the individual's point of view in relation to society? What triggers the actions of empowering?

To do this I will present how the concept of empowerment in reference to empowerment as the establishment of power to resist relates to the struggle for recognition from a subordinate position. Seeking empowerment will then be discussed through how challenges to the act trigger reflexivity and changed actions and how, when perceived legitimate expectations and claims are refused, a struggle begins. Emotions will then be discussed as playing an important role in all social relations and it will be shown how emotions are stirred by inhibitions to the act, triggering reflexivity and actions of resistance. Finally emotions will be related to stress, coping and appraisal of the situation and to the relation between the emotions of hope and despair and shame and pride found in this research.

Empowerment

Empowerment expresses both the aim and the means behind resisting the disempowering forces that keep the asylum-seeking refugees subordinated and gives them more influence over their lives and a bigger space of action. Actions of empowering help the asylum-seeking refugees to resist the mainly disempowering situation. I have called this seeking empowerment, following my sensitising concept of 'searching for': searching for ways out of the situation and managing the situation while suffering it. Empowerment came up as a word in one of my memos and I thought that it was not based in any previously read theory or rather there was no direct link to such a theory. In retrospect, revising the literature, I now acknowledge that the link to theory was closer than I first realised.

The concept of empowerment is often connected to the American civil rights movement, the women's liberation movements, liberation movements in the third world and different self-help groups. Today the concept is associated with groups which are seen as weak in society. Empowerment as described in the literature (Askheim and Starrin eds. 2007) seems to be something carried out by professionals and researchers upon people in difficult situations. It is focused on the participation of the sufferers of a situation and on empowerment as a working tool to help 'them' from the

professionals' points of view. This might be admirable and worthwhile work, especially if, as in line with this study, there is establishment of power to resist from a subordinate position, which can be made with reference to authors like Paulo Freire (1972). Seeking empowerment does not work in this way. It was never the intention that the study should work with the concept of empowerment from the beginning and it has not been done to empower the asylum-seeking refugees in this study. It has, rather, followed the unfortunate 'normal' way of researching the 'other'. Those parts of my involvement in the field which have been empowering have been quite coincidental. With this said, nothing prevents this study being used as a stepping stone for such work.

The strength of this study is that it did not have the intention of working for the empowerment of those suffering from being refugees in the world today. Instead the study actually found that in a lot of what the asylum-seeking refugees do, they themselves work for their own empowerment. So what this study does not have in common with how empowerment is discussed in Askehim & Starrin (2007) is that it is not a professional and/or research tool to help other people who are suffering. In my study seeking empowerment is a process through which people in a difficult situation and position are already managing their lives, without the involvement of professionals and researchers.

Empowerment as a concept is very popular in general and in scientific writing as it relates to something good by relating to strength, power and force and to control over our lives. The word empowerment also relates to phenomena and qualities such as self-reliance, social support, pride, involvement, self-control, competence, citizenship, autonomy, cooperation and participation (Askheim and Starrin eds. 2007). Ole Petter Askheim (2007) presents different positions in thinking about and defining empowerment. Empowerment from these different positions shares a positive view of the human as essentially active and as a creature who knows what is best for him or herself if the right conditions are created.

Before presenting the different positions concerning how to define empowerment, it is important to place the above statements describing some authors' outlooks about people in relation to the assumptions behind this study. The asylum-seeking refugees I have met are active, but that is more of an empirical finding. It does not necessarily have to be so, and concerning the statement that people know what is best for them if the right conditions are created, my reflection is that this gives rise to other considerations. To define 'best' is extremely difficult and may not be possible or even desirable. The same goes for 'the right conditions'; what can they be and how should they be defined? More importantly from my point of view and through the theoretical assumptions presented earlier, people are active and can interpret situations and act upon them. The process of interpretation and the

actions that can be taken can be more or less constrained by conditions and circumstances, and whether people know what is best for them or not, is not the issue: the power and space of action needed to be able to interpret, make choices and act on situations, are.

The different positions described by Askheim are empowerment as the establishment of the power to resist, as a market-orientated approach or as a therapeutic position. The position of empowerment as the establishment of the power to resist breathes the same air as my own definition, in that the focus is on the relationship between the individual and the structural conditions of society. It is about raising consciousness among people about the structural conditions limiting their power. People's place in the world is not taken for granted, but is a result of human activity and as such can also be changed. The position more closely linked to a market-orientated view takes as its starting point the independent free individual. The individual is seen as the one who is the most competent to act rationally and choose among services offered in his or her own best interest. The market's mechanisms are, in this view, the best to provide for these needs. The therapeutic position limits empowerment to an individual psychological process of consciousness rising.

Interestingly there is a convergence in the focus on the individual as the person who can know what is best and choose in his or her own best interest between the neo-liberal market-orientated view and the radical left's concentration on the establishment of power to resist. From the neo-liberal point of view it is about a focus on the consumer, with the market as the best service provider. From the left it is about a critique of an over-paternalistic state in favour of pluralism.

My use of the concept of empowerment is in line with the view of establishing power to resist and about the individual's efforts to challenge the powers limiting their space of action. However, in my use it is not about raising consciousness among the asylum-seeking refugees, but about their own actions from a subordinated position. I will now discuss the efforts to challenging the power limiting their spaces of action and what triggers such actions of empowering.

Seeking empowerment through emotions in and of the situation

The creativity in seeking empowerment arises from the emotions that the challenges from the relation between disempowerment and empowerment evoke. To support this reasoning I rely on two theoretical assumptions. One is that challenges and obstacles to a person's 'normal' activities start a process of reflection, and the other is that emotions generate a need for knowledge. These help us to understand the creativity behind the actions of empowering and why searching and seeking is so fundamental for managing

the situation as an asylum-seeking refugee. What are searching and seeking, if not reflections on the challenges and obstacles they need to overcome and the consequent emotions they need to deal with?

Mead's theory of the self, society and agency and change was discussed briefly in the section dealing with theoretical assumptions leading into methodology. Elin Lundin (2008) describes Mead as explaining reflectivity and how actors contribute to change, without seeing the actor as acting regardless of structures or being constantly reflective. She states that Mead follows a view of human existence as the continuous interplay between habits and reflectively solving problems. This means that the actor can be reflective of her or his responses, but to be able to do this one has to have developed a self and a consciousness of self as an inner representation of reality. Reflectivity and the processes of change are possible when there is resistance and inhibition of the act. Lundin describes how Mead helps us understand social everyday life as continuous interplay between the actor acting more or less unreflectively and, when experiencing resistance and inhibition, being 'forced' to reflect over what happened in the earlier situation and act in a new and different way. The experience of resistance and inhibition makes it impossible to act habitually and leads to a contextualisation of habits in a structurally framed situation. Agency in this sense is a process that is bounded by the situation with an orientation to the past in habits, to the future through the ability to imagine alternative possibilities and towards the present with a capacity to evaluate and contextualise habits and future projects within the given situation.

With this in mind, we take a look at the situation and management thereof of the asylum-seeking refugees followed in this study. We do not need to go very far in the description of the situation they are in to see that in many and most situations the 'option' of acting habitually or in accordance with the thus far developed self is resisted and inhibited in their communication with this situation.

One part of the management of this situation is the search for recognition through seeking empowerment. When people experience refusal to their legitimate expectations and claims a struggle begins (Lundin 2004). These experiences trigger emotions of not having one's claims recognised.

These expectations are presented through how the project of seeking asylum in Sweden is meaningful and at the same time how seeking asylum is perceived as a legitimate claim. The expectations of seeking a better and safer life in Sweden based on 'return – just not an option' make the project and struggle to get their claims recognised meaningful. The struggle is marked by the efforts made to get their own claim for asylum recognised through getting the information on their individual cases through to the Migration officers in charge of handling their application and, in a wider scope, to get the information on the legitimate claims of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan as a group through to political decision makers.

The stories of trying to get the right information through to the Migration officers in charge are marked by their dependence on these individual Migration officers' competence when handling their asylum application, the competence of interpreters and solicitors and in many cases on support from contacts with other people coming from Afghanistan, asylum-seeking refugees as well as people granted residence permits and other contacts within the Swedish community. To get the information on the situation of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan as a group through to the Swedish authorities are visualised through the participation in demonstrations against the repatriation of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan. The demonstrations are also based on contacts made between the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan themselves, supported by the Afghan community in Sweden, and Swedish associations and politicians supporting their struggle.

The search for recognition can in this sense be understood through the importance of social relations. To have a social network is discussed as something empowering within the situation and I have found that the asylum-seeking refugees search for and maintain social contacts. The creation and maintenance of a social network empowers the individual asylum-seeking refugees and make the struggle for recognition and seeking empowerment possible. I have shown how the informants in this study search for and maintain social contacts through how they help each other out within the group of asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan at the respective reception centres, how they seek contacts with people outside this community, both within the Afghan community and the Swedish community, as well as how they search for and maintain contacts through their transnational networks. The importance of the social network is especially important in a crisis and for security in a situation where one is apart from family and friends.

At the same time as the social relations through these networks are presented as empowering, the asylum-seeking refugees are dependent on quite restricted possibilities to search for and maintain social contacts as presented in the disempowering factor of isolation from family, friends and the Afghan and Swedish community. Also problematic are the relations with Swedish society in the form of authorities represented through immigration politics and the Migration Board, upon which they are dependent and which they find inhospitable.

People react when coexistence is problematic and threatened. Looking at emotions can give us clues as to how the individual relates to other people and to society. Emotions play an important part in all social interactions (Dahlgren and Starrin 2004). As we get clues on how people relate to society, we also get clues on how society relates to the individual. Again, looking at emotions gives us the possibility of connecting the individual to society as

the individual reacts emotionally to what society is constructed as being. It also gives a reason as to why people think and do things and, so to speak, tells us what triggers the search for meaning and the actions of the individual, in this case the actions of empowering.

Emotions are related to agency and action; Emma Engdahl (2004) states that:

> ..., in the beginning there is no mind, self, and society. In the beginning, there is the act – co-existing human organisms that are dependent on each other to enable an individual membership of a society of minded selves. (Engdahl 2004: 70)

That *'in the beginning, there is the act'* follows my own logic of using theory and methodology. Human action is the physical basis of what the individual human being, as well as society, is. However, as these actions are given meaning, as symbols in communication with the other (society) and with oneself, structures for this communication take on a form. One important conclusion related to structure, experiences and agency is that:

> When we become an object to ourselves by taking the attitude of the thing and the other towards ourselves, our joint travel back and forth in space enables us to travel forth and back in time – to plan our future, guided by our past, in our presence within the act. (Engdahl 2004: 78)

Engdahl continues with a discussion on the rise of emotions, speaking of the inhibited act. In her interpretation of Mead she says that:

> Without an inhibition of the act there would simply be an experience of "a bare thereness of the world." According to Mead, this experience belongs to the act in the sense of our habitual reactions to the outer world or others. Generally, we could talk about those habitual reactions as the manner in which we exist unemotionally and unreflexively within the act. (Engdahl 2004: 78)

This means that for an emotion to arise there has to be an inhibition of the act, which is in line with the argument that for creativity to step in there has to be a resistance to the act. It is this felt inhibition of the act that in Engdahl's (2004: 79) words '*...transforms social behaviour into social interaction*'. Emotions are the 'magic' that do this.

When emotions meet thinking they strive towards changing society:

> A person may reach a point of going against the whole world about him; he may stand out by himself over against it. But to do that he has to speak with the voice of reason to himself. He has to comprehend the voices of the past and of the future. That is the only way in which the self can get a voice which is more than the voice of the community. [...] That is the way, of course, in which society gets ahead, by just such interactions as those in which some person thinks a thing out. We are continually changing our social system in some respects, and we are able to do that intelligently because we can think. (Mead [1934] 1967: 168 in Engdahl 2004: 92)

This could be the link between the emotions stirred by inhibition of the act, leading to emotions then thinking which can lead to actions of change and resistance. In view of the actions taken by the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan in this study they do *'reach a point of going against the whole world'*, the world in this sense being the disempowering situation of dependence and inhospitality, framed by temporality, Swedish national discourse, racism and paternalism. The going against the whole world in this case refers to seeking empowerment from the point of view of establishing power.

The emotions I have found in this study of disappointment, fear and anxiety, resignation and frustration, resentment and feeling unwelcome I relate hope and despair to disempowerment. In such a discussion I have found it useful to look at Richard S. Lazarus's (1999) definition of the emotion hope in which despair is always lurking around the corner. Before filtering down to the emotions of hope and despair, let us take a look at Lazarus's conceptualisation of emotions and to coping and stress. Stress and emotions he relates to challenging situations.

> It should be obvious that certain emotions – for example, anger, envy, jealousy, anxiety, fright, guilt, shame, and sadness – could be called *stress emotions*, because they usually arise from stressful, which refers to harmful, threatening, or challenging, conditions. (Lazarus 1999: 36, emphasis in original)

Lazarus also stresses that although we think of many emotions as positive, they are connected to stressful situations. For example, of the emotion of hope, he says that '*...hope, more often than not, stems from a situation in which we must prepare for the worst while hoping for the better*' (Lazarus 1999: 36). I find that stress is a part of the asylum-seeking refugees' everyday life arising from different emotions within the individual. Importantly, which is also implied here, emotions can cause stress. Thus when, in my material I find the informants hopeful about their situation, in Lazarus's definition this emotion in itself can be stressful as it involves preparedness for the worst.

The preparedness for the worst also corresponds to how the informants in this study are prepared for taking alternative action if and when they are refused residence permits and threatened with expulsion. Hope lies in the project of seeking asylum and the actions of empowering taken to achieve this end and to manage the situation while waiting being meaningful.

In connection with the concepts of stress and emotion Lazarus also discusses coping as creating a unity for analyses. He says that the three concepts create a conceptual unit, in which emotion is the super ordinate concept because, as he says, it includes both stress and coping. Another important concept is appraisal. In Lazarus's reasoning emotions are products of reason. This he explains as being emotion that arises in accordance with how we appraise an event. He says that: '*In effect, the way*

we evaluate an event determines how we react emotionally' (Lazarus 1999: 87).

Again, emotions are discussed as reactions to events and to how the events are appraised. Emotions thus arise from how we appraise and, to continue the reasoning from before, the inhibition to the acts taken within a situation.

The emotion process includes appraisal together with stress, emotion, coping and motivation, creating a conceptual unit. Coping and appraisal are mediators of the emotional reaction. Coping, he continues, is about '*...how people manage life conditions which are stressful*' (Lazarus 1999: 102). Lazarus & Folkman (1984) define coping as:

> ...constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. (Lazarus and Folkman 1984: 141)

With such a definition, seeking empowerment would be coping, in my view, as a way to manage a stressful situation, a stressful situation which I call disempowering in which resources are taken from the person. In my view, or rather from what I analyse, this coping process is how the asylum-seeking refugee relates to the 'demands' from the external world. Relating to the demands of the world, the asylum-seeking refugees in this study cope with the situation based on the meaningful project and supported by their social networks. As actions of empowering keeping oneself occupied and representing the self are ways of coping with the situation so as to create a base from which to seek empowerment.

The asylum-seeking refugees in this study keep themselves occupied in resistance to the situation dragging them down. They keep themselves occupied as a means to an end in the struggle for recognition of the claims for asylum and as a means to improve oneself, to learn new things and to search for and maintain social contacts. Occupying themselves, they also 'kill time' while waiting. Keeping oneself occupied can be just as much about killing time as improving one's situation. Being occupied can mean a break from the thoughts and emotions provoked by the situation. Keeping oneself occupied can also be about looking for the habitual and creating routines in the everyday, in which actions are not inhibited.

Going to school, passing time in front of the computer, doing the daily shopping, asking for mail at the reception centre reception, going to the library, shooting some pool with friends, watching TV, cooking and praying are all examples of habitual actions that might become routine.

Through the representations of themselves there are examples of how the informants manage their situation, interacting with each other through, among other things, the use of humour. Through the use of humour they share ideas and views on the situation among themselves, as well as venting

how unhappy they are with their situation. By interacting with each other there are also examples of resorting to traditions and religion and resorting to things that feel known and comfortable to their individual character and also in their interactions with others.

Coming back to the role of emotions in social relations, Scheff (1990) points to the emotions of shame and pride being particularly connected to the quality of social relations. Just as with hope and despair, where there is pride there is also shame. According to Scheff (1990), shame is the dominant emotion and signals threatened social relations. These threatened social relations are discussed here through the important but ambivalent social relations with the Swedish immigration authorities. These social relations are immediately threatened by the inhospitable reception the asylum-seeking refugees get when arriving and applying for asylum. Social relations are also threatened by dependence on the authorities as well as the community of asylum-seekers, the Afghan and Swedish community. Taking pride in how they represent themselves is thus related to social relations in the way that these representations are achievements managing a difficult situation, as described above. Often these representations of the self relate to being able to be giving, hospitable and reliable in this difficult situation.

Perhaps the most striking representations of the self expressed in resistance to the situation were the representations against the inhospitality and temporality of the situation, shown by them taking pride in protecting a guest even at the cost of their own life and commenting on how *'a yes is always a yes and no is always a no, even after death'*. Taking pride in themselves as being hospitable and reliable was a way in which pride was shown in the situation.

Pride can also be taken from the fact that they have managed to live through many difficulties before coming to Sweden to apply for asylum and from the fact that they manage the difficulties entailed in waiting for decisions on their asylum applications in Sweden. The memories and experiences from before and after coming to Sweden can be both disempowering and empowering. To leave one's country to seek a better future is showing force and taking action to better one's life and gives meaning to the whole project, however difficult it is.

Generally, many of the situations described by refugees are viewed as trauma and are generally seen as not beneficial for psychological health. On the other hand, in my meetings with asylum-seeking refugees they also seem to draw strength and pride from the fact that they have lived through and been able to reach so far in the process of seeking a better life. Such emotions of pride could be viewed as empowering, just as much as many of the experiences of, for example, disappointment are disempowering. The fact that experienced trauma can have both good and bad consequences was also found by Akram Omeri, Christopher Lennings and Lyn Raymond (2004) in

their study on coping. To have experienced trauma can give strength in coping with a situation, which might be the answer to how and why people seem to cope in the worst of situations. One can draw strength from having lived through and having been able to manage an earlier difficult situation.

Shame is sometimes also discussed through inferiority, as for example Sighard Neckel (in Dahlgren and Starrin 2004) discusses how the making of shame comes in two different forms. The first comes through a public ritual of degradation, with the example of the modern welfare state's institutions' evaluations of recipients of social welfare, recipients who, to qualify for assistance, have to agree to have their shortcomings evaluated. In this situation the possibilities of defending oneself from the stigma of changed status are severely limited. A more informal way of creating feelings of shame is in competition with others, presenting oneself as superior and others as inferior. The feeling of inferiority becomes the source of shame and therefore shame does not have moral but social reasons associated with it.

In these studies shame is reflected in self-evaluation as inferior in relation to a common norm. However I have found that feelings of inferiority are talked about in relation to structural difficulties, both of international relations and the workings of the Swedish asylum system and decision makers within the same. A sense of inferiority in this sense is related to feelings of resignation and frustration in that they cannot get through to the decision makers or the community in general to communicate that their problem is real. In this sense inferiority is just another thing leading to a struggle for recognition.

Concluding remarks on seeking empowerment

In this chapter I discuss how seeking empowerment stems from the challenges, resistance and inhibitions that the asylum-seeking refugees face through the limitations of their spaces of actions in a disempowering situation. That I have termed this form of agency as seeking empowerment is also discussed from the point of view of the asylum-seeking refugees in this study being in a subordinate position, a subordinated position that is resisted and where this resistance is discussed as a form of establishing power. The concept of empowerment deals with resolving a situation in which a person is violated and reduced, and how, through the establishment of power to resist, this entails a struggle for recognition. When perceived legitimate expectation and claims are refused a struggle for recognition begins.

This struggle is discussed, with particular attention on the idea that it is when there are challenges, resistance and inhibitions to the act that reflexivity and creative actions take place. Emotions can help us understand how this process of reflexivity and creative action takes form, triggering this process.

Emotions in this sense play an important role in social relations and I discuss how the pairs of emotions, hope and despair, and pride and shame, can help us understand how the asylum-seeking refugees in this study seek empowerment through reflection and through their actions. Hope and despair are discussed through looking at how even though there can be hope, hope also comes from a situation where one has to be prepared for things not turning out as one hoped for. That way the emotions can be related to the situation being stressful and needing to be coped with.

Pride and shame are emotional responses to a situation where social relations are threatened. The social relations of the asylum-seeking refugees to the Swedish authorities are disempowering through dependence and inhospitality and in that sense threatened to begin with. Such weak social bonds should, according to the literature, lead to a situation of inferiority and shame on the part of the asylum-seeking refugees, but in my analysis I focus instead on from where pride can be drawn. Pride can be found in the way they represent themselves as giving, hospitable and reliable and through how their experiences of difficulties before coming to Sweden and after mean that they can draw strength and pride from the fact that they have managed and still manage this situation.

The main finding of this chapter is that the actions taken by the asylum-seeking refugees in this study can be understood through interactionist theories pointing to the importance of social relations and emotions. That they seek their own empowerment through their actions of empowerment can be understood as reactions to a situation which limits their space of action. In this way I show how the difficult and disempowering situation leads to activity through the challenges involved rather than to an assumed passivity.

Concluding Discussion

The contribution of this thesis to the understanding of how asylum-seeking refugees manage their lives and under what circumstances has been presented as being a case of seeking empowerment from a mainly disempowering situation. Seeking empowerment comes from resisting a situation which limits the asylum-seeking refugees' spaces of action. The challenges, resistance and inhibitions of the actions taken by them result in emotions triggering actions of empowering. The concept of empowerment is discussed from the point of view of establishing power to resist and is related to resistance from a subordinated position in which the person is violated and reduced. From this inferior position a struggle for recognition arises when perceived legitimate expectations and claims are refused.

The management of this situation by seeking empowerment takes its starting point in actions of empowering. The actions of empowering are discussed through the categories of keeping oneself occupied, searching for and maintaining social contacts and through representing the self. To keep oneself occupied involves killing time but also engagement in meaningful activities. Searching for and maintaining social contacts involves the importance of these contacts for empowerment and how these contacts are found and maintained face-to-face, by mobile phone and through the internet. Representing the self involves the importance for the asylum-seeking refuges of understanding the situation and their place in it. It also involves representing themselves as hospitable and reliable, demonstrating resistance to and integrity in the situation. These actions of empowering are discussed with the meaningful project of applying for asylum in Sweden as a background. The meaningfulness of the project is discussed through noting how return is just not an option and through looking at the activities of demonstrating and resisting decisions denying them residence permits.

The study thus presents a management of the situation that is active and not passive. The presentation of the asylum-seeking refugees as active does not contradict earlier research presenting a picture of passivity in the situation and management of the same, something that I also identify as disempowering in my description of the situation in this thesis. Instead of contradicting such findings, this presentation's main emphasis on activity and how the situation demands activity is complementary.

Reports and research into the reception of asylum-seekers in Sweden presented in the background to this study have for the most part concentrated on a situation leading to passivity. An assumed passivity is, for example, based on the low level of occupation in the regular labour market, but also on the somewhat low level of participation in the organised activities by the Migration Board. The official view is that asylum-seekers should be

prepared for both integration and repatriation. It is pointed out how, for integration, it is important that the asylum seeker becomes self-supportive and is introduced to what is expected from people living in Sweden. It is even pointed out how such an emphasis in the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden can be made a political and pedagogical tool by pointing to how demands would be the same on asylum seekers in relation to occupation and self-sufficiency as they are on residents in Sweden.

The observation of passivity lies partly in the low participation in these organised activities and by research pointing to a situation characterised by inactivity, isolation and anxiety. While everything points to a situation in which the asylum seekers fare badly and which is most certainly demanding and stressful it does not negate activity among them. To understand these activities, though, there is a need to go beyond seeing activity as participating in organised activities which can be measured. It is also necessary to look beyond assumptions that such demanding and difficult situations must lead to passivity. There is a need to see that the difficult situation can hold empowering processes as well as disempowering ones.

The strength of this complementary presentation of how asylum-seeking refugees manage their situation and the situation's role in this management is based on the methodological assumptions of the study.

The presentation in this study is characterised by a methodology emerging throughout the research project. Writing memos related to the field notes and coding, as well as to context, theory and methods have made it possible to construct the analysis presented in this thesis. In other words the research process has had an emergent design, in which decisions about methodology have been taken along the way as the research process progressed. One important implication is how evidence has met theory in the research process and how this has been done through memoing. The interplay between the data and theory can be visualised through action. Theoretically, actions of individuals are assumed, and the empirical data constructed through participant observation (rather than interviews) are able to show action. The importance of doing fieldwork through participant observation and informal interviews has to be emphasised for the analysis of action in this study. Constructing active codes also makes possible an analysis of action. The methodological focus on constructionist grounded theory makes possible a focus on one representation of the active management of the situation rather than discovering one basic social process that could describe every aspect of the situation.

Based on the assumption that asylum-seeking refugees are social agents and pointing to the importance of everyday actions, a methodology and research design was formed that was able to construct an understanding of the asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan participating in this study as active. This activity I discuss as actions of empowering, actions in resistance and a struggle for recognition, as ways of coping with the situation. Together

these actions are constructed through an understanding of them as seeking empowerment.

By using interactionist theories for analysing the creation of a self and how this self and society itself change through how challenges (inhibitions) to one's actions stir emotions, I want to show that the disempowering situation triggers action. Some of the actions are about keeping oneself occupied even if only to kill time, to make time pass while waiting, to try to relieve the stress arising from thinking of what has happened and what will happen with family and friends, whether one will get a residence permit or not, how one is struck down, with bad health and so forth. That is, trying to relieve a situation which is disempowering leads to feelings of resignation, frustration and despair. Other actions are related to emotions of hope and pride. The emotions of hope and pride, together with the empowering structures of being able to keep themselves occupied, having access to information and communication and being supported by a social network make possible activities by seeking empowerment from and within the disempowering situation.

Another contribution of this study is the focus on the situation which creates the challenges and inhibitions to one's habitual and routine practices leading to the creative action of seeking empowerment. In other words asking the question of what they are seeking empowerment from. Alongside the emphasis on activity, then, is the importance of the situation related to these activities. I show how it can be seen as a mainly disempowering situation of dependence and inhospitality characterised by temporality. This situation needs further situating through a more thorough study of the discursive formations framing this situation. At the same time as the management of the situation is presented as one of resistance through seeking empowerment, the situation itself, although described and discussed in this thesis, is difficult to make sense of. There are many uncertainties and temporalities in the situation, making it necessary to see it in the light of discursive processes related to the more visible structures of global refugee migration. By performing a situational analysis, including discourses related to nationalism and racism resulting in paternalism, I take a small step in the direction of understanding the situation more thoroughly.

Seen in this way the study does not give any easy answers on how we might improve the situation of the asylum-seeking refugees waiting for decisions or support their seeking empowerment through, for example, making their interpretation as valid as that of the Swedish authorities. Sweden could spend more money and use more resources on keeping the asylum-seeking refugees occupied in meaningful activities, helping them to improve their situation by learning something new, creating meeting places for the asylum-seeking refugees to meet among themselves and with people residing in Sweden and by creating a transparent and predictable system for

handling the applications for asylum. These conclusions for improving the lives of the asylum-seeking refugees while waiting are not controversial.

It is also not controversial to accept the results in this study showing that it is important to look at the activities of people in heavily constrained circumstances and not take for granted that people in these situations are passive. The meaningfulness of these actions needs to be understood within the frame of people exposed to difficult situations. This might seem obvious, but it is especially important to focus on the actions of exposed groups as they seek their way out of constrained situations and understand how these actions are made meaningful in each situation.

What is more controversial is my conclusion that the biggest problem would still remain: that many of the asylum-seeking refugees will not be permitted to stay and anyway not without waiting for a long time for decisions and having to struggle to get their claims recognised under the migration policies of today. For many of the informants in this study, asylum-seeking refugees from Afghanistan, this means that they are forced to continue their lives on the run and in hiding, or, if found, be put on a plane to a place where they do not want to be. The meaningfulness of leaving Afghanistan and seeking asylum in Sweden is basic and going back just is not an option. This stands in direct opposition to migration policies of repatriation and decisions made from the interpretation of the Refugee Convention that they are not in need of protection and thus not allowed to stay. This contradiction needs to be discussed. It is not a problem that is easily solved and it needs to be morally and politically debated.

Instead of asking what right asylum-seeking refugees have to reside here, which is currently done, we might ask ourselves what right 'we', as a collective of Swedish citizens, have to turn them down and not let them reside here? What is the basis for decisions not to let people reside here within the borders of this, 'our' nation state? What gives 'us' the right to decide who gets to stay and who does not? Is it not for our own sake rather than for the asylum-seeking refugees, that we deny them the same possibilities that we allow ourselves? My conclusion regarding these moral and political questions is that they need to be looked at by thoroughly examining 'our' roles in this, for example by looking at the role of nationalism, the right of interpretation and paternalism. What remains now, perhaps, is to ask: what's wrong with us?

Sammanfattning

Den här studien tar sin utgångspunkt i möten med internflyktingar i Angola och asylsökande flyktingar i Sverige. Ur dessa möten har frågan om hur de hanterar sin situation vuxit fram. I de asylsökandes fall får de inte omedelbart skydd genom permanenta uppehållstillstånd. De måste istället få sina skyddsbehov prövade och är därigenom beroende av andras beslut. I Sverige kan asylsökande få vänta i åratal innan de får sina definitiva beslut. Det är denna väntan som står i centrum för denna studie. I mina möten med både internflyktingar i Angola och asylsökande flyktingar i Sverige har jag blivit medveten om hur människor i utsatta situationer fyller sina liv med strategier för att förbättra sina liv.

Centralt för den här studien är också att den poängterar de asylsökande flyktingarnas aktiviteter och aktörskap i motsats till en förmodad passivitet. Vad som framkommer är att latenta stärkande processer som möjligheter att hålla sig sysselsatt, ett socialt nätverk, tillgång till information och kommunikation och ”rätt beteende” tillsammans med det meningsfulla i att överhuvudtaget söka asyl skapar en bas varifrån de asylsökande flyktingarna söker ”empowerment”.

Syftet med studien är att ge ett bidrag till förståelsen av hur asylsökande flyktingar hanterar den situation de befinner sig i. Detta görs genom en fältstudie av hur asylsökande flyktingar från Afghanistan i Sverige hanterar sin situation. Frågor som lyfts fram är: I vilken kontext sker de asylsökandes handlingar? Hur upplever de sin situation? Vad gör de för att hantera sin situation? Hur kan deras handlingar förstås genom teorier kring individen i förhållande till samhället och dess förändring?

En bakgrund till studien visar att afghanska flyktingar kan illustrera dynamiken och reaktionerna kring flyktingmigration i ett globalt perspektiv. Bland annat visar bakgrunden på att det endast är ett fåtal ur den totala flyktingpopulationen från Afghanistan som överhuvudtaget tar sig över gränserna till ”Nord” för att söka asyl. De flesta flyktingarna blir kvar i närregionen, i detta fall Iran och Pakistan. När flyktingarna väl kommer till länderna i ”Nord” och mer specifikt till EU och Sverige möts de av en återvandringspolitik. Länderna i ”Nord” har dessutom en politisk agenda vilken prioriterar att flyktingarna ska stanna i sin närregion hellre än att söka asyl i ”Nord”.

När de asylsökande kommer till Sverige möts de av en politik och en idé om individualisering och rättssäkerhet i Migrationsverkets hantering av deras asylansökningar. Trots detta kan sägas att det svenska mottagandet av asylsökande och flyktingar karaktäriseras av förändringar beroende på hur många som söker asyl olika år, men också av förändringar som gäller hur många som lyckas få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige. Under den period som

denna undersökning gjordes, mellan 2004 och 2009, ersatte en ny utlänningslag (2006-03-31) den tidigare. En tillfällig lag om verkställighetshinder, som gällde mellan 15 november 2005 och 31 mars 2006, påverkade också de asylsökande flyktingar som deltog i den här studien. Rapporter och forskning kring asylsökande och flyktingar i Sverige visar på hur långa väntеperioder, i kombination med den osäkerhet som asylsituationen för med sig kan leda till passivitet och dålig hälsa.

Metodologiskt tar studien sin utgångspunkt i hur den verklighet vi upplever skapas i vardaglig social interaktion, i mötet mellan människor i vardagen. Denna sociala interaktion i vardagen kan sedan kopplas till andra analysnivåer i en process av s k abduktion. Abduktion i det här fallet hänvisar till tanken om att relatera det specifika till det generella och det konkreta till det abstrakta. Centralt i studien är genomförandet av en konstruktionistiskt grundad teori vilken öppnar upp för analyser av maktrelationer. För analysarbetet understryks vikten av att analys pågår hand i hand med fältarbetet. Detta möjliggör ett s k teoretiskt urval av vad man frågar vidare om och får studien att utveckla sig genom att hela tiden jämföra empirin (data), mot analys och teori. Fältarbetet utgick från deltagande observationer och informella konversationer, som nedtecknades i fältanteckningar. I fältarbetet har tillit och förhandling varit ytterst centralt i mötet med de deltagande asylsökande flyktingarna.

Den situation de asylsökande flyktingarna befinner sig i karaktäriseras av osäkerhet, ambivalens och motsägelser. Situationens tillfälliga och temporära karaktär relateras i ett vidare perspektiv till nationell diskurs, rasism och paternalism. Det svenska mottagandet karaktäriseras av en dominerande svensk nationell diskurs som utsätter de asylsökande och flyktingarna för ett bemötande präglat av paternalism.

Efterhand pekar mina data på processer av ”disempowerment”. Disempowerment definieras här som en situation som utsätter de asylsökande flyktingarna för maktlöshet och ett starkt begränsat handlingsutrymme. Situation karaktäriseras av beroende och ogästvänlighet. Beroendesituationen baseras på att de asylsökande flyktingarna är beroende av svensk asylpolitik och myndigheter som dels beslutar om deras ansökningar om uppehållstillstånd, och dels ansvarar för hur deras väntan på dessa beslut ska se ut. De är beroende av enskilda individer i det svenska mottagandet av asylsökande, såsom handläggare, tolkar och advokater. Samtidigt är de också beroende av och måste förhandla kring sin situation då de lever tillsammans med många andra asylsökande på en förläggning. Detta beroende är relaterat till passivitet, isolering, ekonomiskt beroende och av att inte veta, att vara satt i osäkerhet.

Situationen kan också förstås utifrån ogästvänlighet. Denna ogästvänlighet handlar om en restriktiv asylpolitik, en återvandringspolitik och till de motsägelser som de asylsökande flyktingarna finner i det svenska

asylmottagandet. Ogästvänligheten kännetecknas också av att de asylsökande flyktingarna i studien ofta upplever att de behandlas sämre än andra asylsökande och som mindre värda än dem som redan bor i Sverige. Situation karaktäriseras av disempowerment och leder till känslor av förtvivlan, men samtidigt också av hopp.

Samtidigt som situationen beskrivs som disempowering, så framgår det tydligt i studien att de asylsökande flyktingarna hanterar denna situation genom att handla utifrån den. Jag kallar det de gör för möjliggörande handlingar. I relation till osäkerheten kring sin situation söker de information och kommunicerar sinsemellan i sina sociala nätverk. Som ett svar på passivitet söker de möjligheter att hålla sig sysselsatta, och genom att representera sig själva på olika sätt söker de empowerment inom ramen för den utsatta situation de befinner sig i. En vikig bakgrund till de möjliggörande handlingarna är det jag beskriver som basen i det meningsfulla projektet, det vill säga det meningsfulla i att lämna Afghanistan och söka asyl i Sverige, givet att återvändande inte är något alternativ.

Begreppet ”söka empowerment” analyseras utifrån de utmaningar, motstånd och hinder som de asylsökande möter och som begränsar deras handlingsutrymme. Begreppet visar också på hur de asylsökande flyktingarnas handlingar kommer av den underordnade situation de befinner sig i. Det motstånd som sker från denna begränsande och därmed underordnade position analyserar jag som ett sökande efter ett större handlingsutrymme. Ett utrymme som gör det lättare att göra motstånd i den utsatta situationen.

Teoretiskt diskuteras hur detta motstånd, sökandet efter empowerment, baseras på hur människor när de upplever utmaningar eller ett motstånd mot sina handlingar reflekterar kring dem. Nya och alternativa sätt att agera utarbetas utifrån detta. Jag diskuterar också hur emotioner kan hjälpa oss att förstå varför människor handlar, även i de mest utsatta av situationer. De emotioner som jag diskuterar är känslorna av förtvivlan respektive hopp, och skam respektive stolthet.

Slutsatsen av detta blir att de asylsökande flyktingarna söker empowerment genom sina möjliggörande handlingar, och att dessa kan förstås som reaktioner på en situation som begränsar handlingsutrymmet. Jag försöker visa på hur den utsatta situationen leder till handlingar och aktivitet - inte till passivitet.

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