

BACKGROUND

I spent six months in Mashad, Iran to do an intensive Farsi course at Ferdowsi University and to conduct research among Afghans living in Mashad. Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the city is home to a large exile community of Afghan people.

My research was kindly supported by the Amayesh research institute as well as different Afghan cultural clubs.

BEING MOHAJER

(„migrant“)

is a legal status as well as a subjective experience

METHODOLOGY

I am using grounded theory to explore the subjective meaning of being *mohajer* in Iran and migration to Europe among Afghans living in Mashad. I joined cultural and leisure activities, conducted qualitative interviews, collected documents (poems, stories, video clips, religious writings) made or shared by my contacts and discussed the situation of refugees in Germany with them.

LAW



SUBJECTIVITY



Kart-e Amayesh

Card that grants temporary refugee status in Iran. Card holders are subject to mobility restrictions and cannot own property. Currently, card holders have access to Iranian schools and can purchase a work permit, but are limited to menial labor.

"Being mohajer means, that you always have the fear that you will have to return one day. That nothing belongs to you. And that everything you have in possession is just for a few days. And we cannot plan for the future with courage, because there is no future there for us at all."

– Woman, 38, born in Afghanistan, who came to Iran when she was one year old

Two Afghan pupils at a festival of an Afghan school in Mashad, Iran. Their hands and faces are decorated with the flags of Iran and Afghanistan. (Picture: Anna Degenhart)

RESEARCH QUESTION

How are migration imaginaries of Afghans living in Iran related to their refugee status there?

Part of a generation of Afghans having grown up in Iran, they demand the right to inclusion, recognition and personal growth in society but experience daily exclusion as legally and socially marginalized refugees and non-citizens.

They imagine going to Europe, in the hope of gaining first asylum and finally citizenship, as a means of escaping their existential sense of "conviction" in Iran and thereby opening up a future.

But migration is also seen as morally ambivalent because they deem it to be fundamentally uncertain, dangerous, coming at the cost of tearing apart families and cultural and religious estrangement.