

IDENTITY CRISIS AND SOCIAL NAVIGATION IN HOST COMMUNITY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF (RE)CONSTRUCTION, (RE)NEGOTIATION AND (RE)CONTESTATION OF IDENTITIES OF SECOND-GENERATION AFGHAN REFUGEES LIVING IN CAMPS

Humera Manzoor¹, Ayaz Ahmad²

¹ Institute of Business Studies, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Pakistan

² Department of Management, COMSATS University, Islamabad, Wah Campus, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the identity crisis of second generation of Afghan refugees in camps, and the way they (re)construct, (re)negotiate and (re)contest their identities. It views identity as a social construct, which is dynamic, fluid and evolutionary. This study employs narrative methods to gain access to the lived and embodied experiences of the respondents. Data was collected from twenty-one participants and analyzed through thematic narrative analysis. Findings reveal that the respondents have a shattered identity due to incomplete sense of belongingness, their identity is threatened due to the way 'muhajir/refugee' has become an ugly narrative discourse, and the way they avoid and (re)define situations to (re)negotiate their shattered identity. This study contributes to the literature on identity and refugee/migration studies by unfolding the identity challenges faced by the second generation of refugees and the way they manage their identity, despite sharing similar Pashtun culture.

Keywords: Identity crisis, re(construction), re(negotiation), (re)contestation, Second generation, Afghan refugees.

1. INTRODUCTION

The refugee crisis has become a matter of global concern. As per UNHCR 2022, there were approximately 27 million people registered as refugees across the globe who were mainly displaced due to war and conflict. "(A) refugee is a person who has fled his/her country to escape any kind of conflict, violence, or persecution and has sought safety in another country" as per Article 1 of the 1951 Convention of UNHCR. It is a period marked by exposure to extreme hardships (Guler & Berman, 2019) that affects one's psychological health and well-being. Over time, the refugee crisis has increased worldwide due to war, violence, and famine. This includes Syrian refugees due to Arab Spring, Palestinian refugees due to war, African refugees due to famine, Afghan-Soviet war, and so forth, which has repercussions for both the refugees and the host countries.

The Afghan-Soviet War that spanned for almost a decade (1979-1989) with subsequent civil unrest, triggered one of the most extensive and enduring refugee crises in the modern history, followed by successive migration of Afghan refugees since Saur Revolution of 1978 that got intensified further after the U.S attacks on Afghanistan in 2001. Pakistan is the principal neighboring host country that served Afghan refugees more than four decades. There are around 1.35 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan, with an additional 600,000 since the events in 2021 in Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2023), out of which 265,000 have approached UNHCR for registration. It is estimated that around 1.5 million Afghan refugees are living in Pakistan without any documentation. This has added to the socio-economic challenges both for the Afghan refugees and Pakistan. UN data reveal that most refugees are young, underscoring a population largely detached from Afghanistan and more socially aligned with Pakistan. According to United Nations data (2007), about 79% of these refugees represented the second generation, who were under the age of 28 and might have entered the third generation by now. The second generation of Afghan refugees is born in Pakistan and remained largely disconnected from their home country of Afghanistan (Saito and Hunte, 2007; Wadood, Khan and Khan, 2020).

Research shows that forced displacement has a tremendous effect on the lives of refugees. It is a traumatic period marked by extreme hardships since they face uncertainty about their survival. They have financial worries and find themselves in a new environment that has a different culture, climate, geography, and so forth. It disrupts family and friendship ties, and the way individuals define themselves, their community, relationships, home, and possessions (Zulueta, 1993; Wilcke, 2006). Thus, forced displacement caused extreme anxiety and stress, (Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009), and the way they talk about themselves and their identity (Hack-Polay, Mahmoud, Kordowicz, Madziva, & Kivunja, 2021) that has a profound impact on refugee's psychological health and wellbeing (Thornton & Spalding, 2018)

Moreover, the literature review shows that there has been a growing interest in understanding the factors that influence the construction of identity along with the perception of self (Shahimi, Block, & Alisic, 2024); however, only a few studies demonstrate the complexities of the way an individual's perception is (re)shaped by multiple layers of interactions in a given socio-cultural context (Mijic, 2022; Shahimi et al., 2024). Also, there is less research on the second generation of refugees (Shahimi et al., 2024) who face more problems with the continuity of their self, that is, identity, as compared to the first generation of refugees (Brance et al., 2024). The second generation means the children of the immigrants who were born in the host country (Kertzer, 1983; Rumbaut, 2004). Thus, this study aims to bridge the gap in the current literature by shedding light on the experiences of identity crisis and the (re)construction of the identity of the second generation of Afghan refugees living inside the camps. In doing so, this study provides useful insights and answers the following research questions by revealing the way they (re)negotiate and (re)contest their identities.

This paper is structured as follows: it begins with the literature review that also incorporates the way identity is defined and conceptualized followed by the methodology of the study. Thereafter, the findings are discussed. Discussion and conclusion comprise the last section of the article.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 An Overview of Research on Identity Crisis Among Refugees

Research on refugees and forced migration mainly concentrated on the causes and consequences of war and conflict (BenEzer & Zetter, 2014; Wilcke, 2006). It reflects and highlights the challenges that refugees face when they are forced to leave their homeland and relocate to another country. Often, they escape from life-threatening situations and arrive in the host country unprepared (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2017).

Apart from the socio-economic challenges, research shows that refugees are confronted with the questions of belongingness and identity as they navigate through the challenges that arise in the host country whilst establishing and rebuilding their lives (Hack-Polay et al., 2021). A review of the literature on refugees and forced migration indicates that it largely ignores the process of 'becoming' or 'being' a refugee (BenEzer & Zetter, 2014). This unseen effect of forced dislocation plays a fundamental role in helping or hindering them to readjust and reintegrate into the host community. The lack of social integration of refugees results in ill health, skills erosion, and poverty (Thornton & Spalding, 2018). Extant research on refugee identity concentrates on identity challenges that arise due to dislocation, the way identities are constructed to adjust to new realities, and the way it affects psychological health and wellbeing (Brance et al., 2024; Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Guler & Berman, 2019; Hack-Polay et al., 2021; and Wilcke, 2006).

Individuals develop a coherent and stable sense of self over time as they refine their worldview, based on experience, language, cultural norms, and values. Their "assumptions that the world is an orderly, predictable, and meaningful place are shattered, along with their sense of affiliation and sense of self" (Wilcke, 2006, p. 32), as people are forced to migrate. The change in situation disrupts the meaning that individuals give to their identity (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Thus, the loss of former identity is often traumatic for the individuals. A positive sense of identity along with a supportive environment is crucial for refugees as it promotes their resilience, psychosocial well-being, and improved assimilation and embeddedness in the host society (Shahimi et al., 2024).

2.2 Conceptualizing Identity

Identity has been approached in different ways: as a concept, construct, process, experience, phenomenon, and so forth (Brown, 2015; Vignoles et al., 2011). As per the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'identity' has its Latin root *idem*, which means "the same". It is the individual sense of "Who I really am?" (Willeke, 2006). According to Jenkins (2014; p.18), it has two basic meanings: (i) first, the sameness of objects, (ii) second, the consistency or continuity over time that is the basis for establishing and grasping the definiteness and distinctiveness of something. It implies the criterion of comparison i.e., *similarity and differences* (Buckingham, 2008). Fearon (1999), defines identity in terms of two linked senses – personal and social. The personal aspect makes an individual distinct from others and the social aspect of identity refers to a social category to which an individual belongs, based on some shared attributes with a group. Thus, identity construction is a complex process since an individual is both unique and similar to other people (de Valverde, Sovet, & Lubart, 2017), and the interplay of self and external categorization is involved in the construction of one's identity (Jenkins, 2000). Hence, refugee identities are complex due to the interplay of internal feelings and externally oriented factors that this study aims to explore.

Accordingly, identity can be viewed as a 'state of being' with unchanging features or 'dynamic', 'fluid', 'emergent', and in a 'contingent state of becoming' (Leitch & Harrison, 2016 (de Valverde et al., 2017)). It is the latter view of identity that is of interest in this study since it allows identity to be viewed as situational, subjective, and relational, which is helpful to understand the shift in identity of forced migrants.

Underpinned by the social constructionist view, at least a part of identity is constructed in interactions, situations, sociohistorical, and cultural contexts. Hence, the Self is not seen as a 'thing' but rather a reflexive process (de Valverde et al., 2017). In line with

this view, refugee identity is also multi-layered and multi-faceted, which is related to others, contested, imagined, power-driven, and constituted by social practice (Chao, 2019), where they can question their own identity as they encounter various interactions and their established way of doing things is challenged. Consequently, it creates a tension between an individual's definition of self and the ones imposed by others.

Nevertheless, identity (re)construction is a social process that works at the individual (*what goes on in their heads*), interactional (*what goes on between people*), and institutional (*established ways of doing things*) level (Jenkins, 2000, 2014). Identity will therefore change as the context and with the shifting relations with individuals (Hall, 2006). Besides, identities become negotiable since it is achieved through the interplay of the definition of self and the definition by others. Moreover, Identity becomes contestable during this process as identities may become disputed or challenged by others during the process of negotiation. Thus, the social context of meaning and practices in the age of migration (Taylor, 2015), becomes important to understand the way identity *is* (re)constructed, (re)negotiated, (re)contested, and experienced.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study takes an interpretivist approach to create an in-depth understanding of the experiences and the way the second generation of Afghan refugees give meaning to their experiences in relation to their identity crisis. The epistemological view is subjective since there is no single social reality and is created through social actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Creswell, 2007) and the ontological stance is relativism (Smith, 2008; p. 750). Thus, reality is subjective and multiple as per the research participants. Within the interpretivist paradigm, this study takes a social constructionist lens which defines reality as a social construct. This means that reality is constructed in social actions and interactions (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, the social constructionist lens helps to gain access to the complexities of the identity crisis by collecting data that are “meaningful to the research participants” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 141).

In line with the subjective view of identity, this study takes a qualitative approach to understand the phenomenon in depth. It further takes a narrative approach to gain access to the experiences of the second generation of Afghan refugees concerning identity crisis and the way they (re)construct, (re)negotiate, and (re)contest their identities. Narratives involve shaping and ordering past experiences in a temporal fashion that helps to understand the actions of oneself and of others, and the way individuals give meaning to events, objects, actions, and so forth (Chase, 2005, p. 656). Thus, narratives can be seen as one of the best methods to study identity since it “emerges in and through narratives” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xviii). Further, it helps to understand the subjective and processual experiences (Kleres, 2011), which is important to study identity particularly when it is conceptualized as dynamic and emergent.

3.1 Data Collection

This study adopts a purposive sampling for data collection. It is important for the researcher to reflect more on the sample in case of narrative research (Creswell, 2007). As discussed in the introduction part and to answer the stated research questions, this study aimed at second-generation Afghan refugees as respondents, living inside the camps i.e., Ghamkol Afghan Refugee Camp Kohat, with Pashtun origin. The second generation of Afghan refugees are those young Afghanis who are born in Pakistan and brought up in Pakistan with no or little experience of Afghanistan (Wadood et al., 2020). The ages of the respondents varied from eighteen to thirty-five, to obtain information regarding their wider experiences and interactions, however, the demographics to define the second generation were re-assured through preliminary informal questions, to validate the collection of information from the true respondents who actually aged between 18 to 35 years.

Data were obtained in the form of semi-structured interviews with a narrative approach that generated several narratives in relation to the identity crisis. Twenty-one interviews were conducted from 11 male (52%) and 10 females (48%) with the help of a ‘topic guide’ that kept on refining and assisted in data collection. Respondents were interviewed both in Urdu and Pashtu. Several kept switching between the two languages but were more comfortable with Pashtu. Participants were encouraged to speak in their desired language to get quality data.

All interviews were recorded with permission and were immediately transcribed. Any interpretation was recorded, and a separate reflexive journal was maintained by both authors that later helped in in-depth analysis. Participants were explained the nature of the study and the topics before the interview. The consent form was shared with the participants beforehand. Those who refused to participate in the study were allowed to do so. It was also explained to them that they can withdraw from the study at any time during the research process. In addition, their names and details were kept confidential; therefore, fictitious names are assigned to the participants. Express Scribe software was used to aid in transcription.

3.2 Data Analysis

The interviews generated several narratives that varied in length. A thematic narrative analysis was used to understand the narratives that were shared or not shared among the research participants. Following Reissman (2008), all narratives were identified in the text and were shared between the coauthors for agreement. The narratives were then coded, and higher-order codes were

assigned. The higher-order codes were then merged into themes followed by thematic categories. Figure 1 presents the themes and thematic categories that were obtained from the analysis.

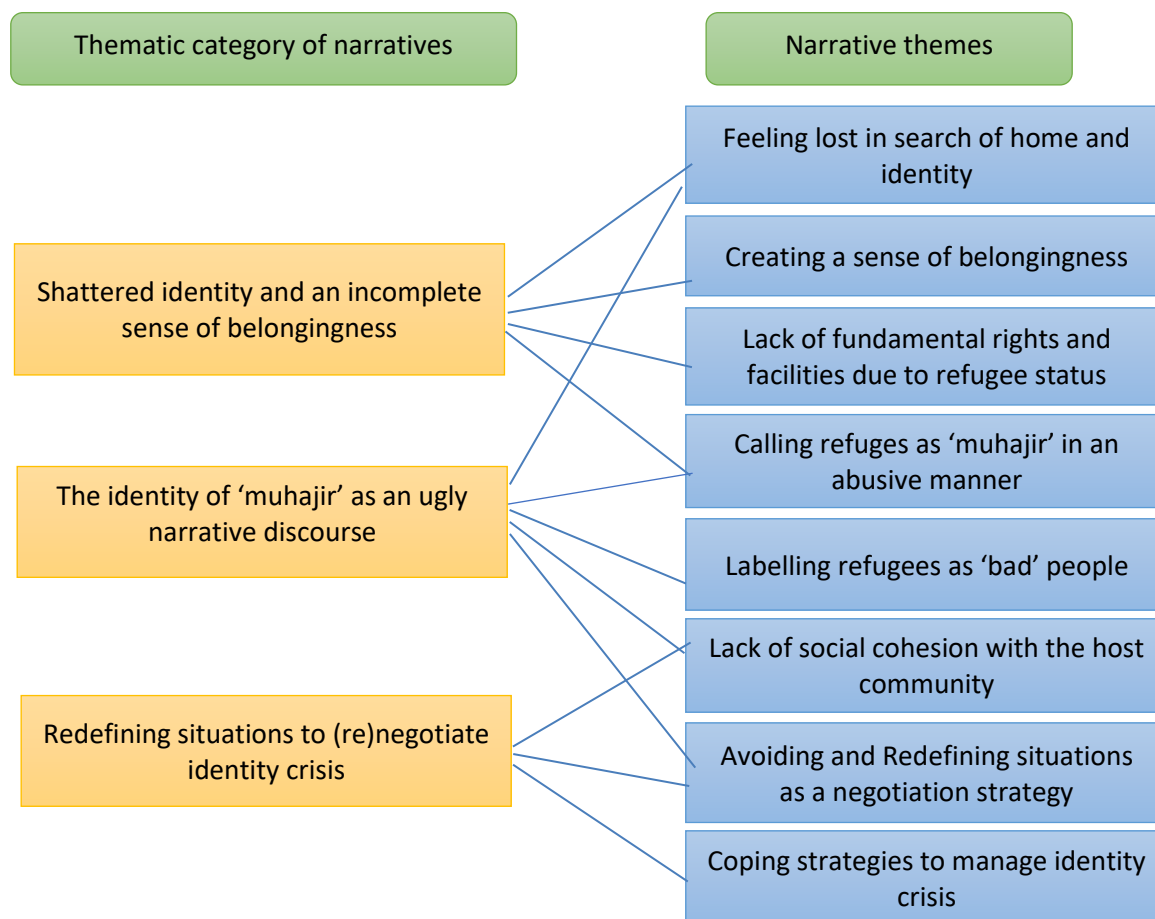


Figure 1. Narrative Themes and Thematic Categories.

4. FINDINGS

Findings are organized into three thematic categories. It shows that the second generation of Afghan refugees have a shattered identity and an incomplete sense of belongingness, their identity of being a 'muhajir' (refugee) is being used as a tool for abuse that contributes to identity crisis, and the way they (re)define situations as they (re)negotiate and (re)contest their identities.

4.1 Shattered Identity and an Incomplete Sense of Belongingness

The second generation of Afghan refugees has a shattered identity since they are lost between their sense of belongingness with the home and the host country. Their imagination and description of *watan*, that is, homeland hardly fits in either of the countries. They related *watan* to a mother who would own and protect her children under all circumstances. For them, *watan* is a place where there is freedom, a sense of ownership and belongingness, dignity and respect, a sense of security, and harmony, and where no one will ask them to leave. The lack of ownership in the host country prompted some of them to construct their identity with their home country, that is, Afghanistan.

“Watan is our homeland - our ancestral land, from where my parents and my grandparents belong. Afghanistan is our homeland. We call it homeland because it is our own land – meaning that we own it. It means that we consider it ours and there are issues of various types, but still, no one can ask us to depart or leave that place. If we go there, there is no issue of such thing that anyone or the government will ask us to leave – like the state of uncertainty over here.”

The ambiguities with their sense of belongingness as they constructed their identity were due to the difference between their ancestral land and the place where they were born. Afghanistan is the land of their forefathers whereas Pakistan is the land where the respondents were born. However, several others tried to associate themselves with Pakistan and considered it as their *watan*. They have adopted the cultural norms and practices of Pakistan, and have friends and relatives who live in Pakistan, which reinforces their sense of belongingness to the home country and/or helps to create a coherent sense of self.

“Watan or homeland is very sweet- beloved, ‘khoog’ (close to heart), it means a lot to me because Watan or homeland is our own homeland. But Pakistan is our Watan or homeland too. Actually (Afghanistan) is our fathers or forefathers’ homeland, and we have been born here. Now it (Pakistan) is our Watan or homeland. Because our language, values, and norms are now adopted from this society. Even our sad and happy moments are now all with these people. Now we have friends and relatives here. We now share all the rituals of this society like other Pakistani friends or community.”

Mainly, women were more interested in associating themselves with Pakistan. This is because they are more concerned with their freedom of movement, education, employment, and so forth. They feared the incidences of throwing acid on women who left their houses alone. In addition, their families had kept their values intact since women had to get prior permission from their elders before leaving their house for any reason.

“I would say that we do not like our country or homeland. We cannot go to school or market freely, so we do not like it. Earlier when women used to go outside, they used to be victimized by acid throwing, etc. You cannot do anything freely or according to your own wish. But we can freely move outside in Pakistan. I feel Pakistan is my country because I feel free to do whatever I want to but only permissible for elders. Over there, it is problematic that you must be accompanied by someone if you want to go outside. You do not have the freedom there.”

Despite being born in Pakistan, the second generation of Afghan refugees live with the refugee status that affects their fundamental rights as well. For instance, they have limited freedom of movement outside the camp, lack of reserved seats or quotas in higher education institutes, lack of ownership of property and business, lack of sanitation and water, and so forth. Though the government of Pakistan has issued them with POR (Proof of Residence) cards, it restricts them from availing several rights. As an example, several respondents faced problems in opening and maintaining their bank accounts as shown in the following narrative.

“I feel very bad. When I went to the bank, the bank asked us to go to some other banks, when I went there, they said that I should go to the other bank, and so on. Our bank account was opened but later we were told that our cards had expired. We face such difficulties. Every time we are informed by the banks that due to the expiry of the POR cards, we are told that our accounts will freeze. So, we face such difficulties.”

Findings show that the second generation of Afghan refugees preferred to live in camps despite the lack of basic facilities. Also, the families have expanded, and they need more space, but they feel more secure to live in camps. They live in a form of a community with other Afghan refugees which helps them to overcome their feelings of ‘otherness’

“We prefer to live in the camps if the house is wider and open. We like the camps, but we cannot build new houses. Our requirements have changed (kids have grown up now). We have good relationships in our community. We have a social setup to get together on several occasions. If we go outside, it will not be possible to get the benefit of the social setup.”

Nevertheless, the second generation of Afghan refugees suffers from an incomplete sense of belongingness due to a feeling of ‘otherness’ both in the home and the host country. Not only are they refugees in Pakistan, but they are also seen as ‘guests’ of ‘refugees from Pakistan’ in Afghanistan.

“That time we get sad and disappointed, and we think that our identity has been lost between Pakistan and Afghanistan. We are neither Pakistani nor Afghani. If we had any identity not nationality then it would be good for us because we fail to get the label of Pakistani here, and the label of Afghani there. In Afghanistan, like my own country, we are not accepted. We neither belong to Pakistan nor Afghanistan. When we go there, they call us ‘Gul Khan’. (It) is a name or terminology Afghanis in Afghanistan used for the people who migrate or move back to Afghanistan from Pakistan. We are Pakistani-born Afghanis. Then, we feel very sad.”

Thus, the second generation of Afghan refugees live with shattered identity and keep on (re)constructing their identity as they try to create a sense of belongingness with either the home country or the host country or both.

4.2 The Identity of ‘Muhajir’ as an Ugly Narrative Discourse

Over time, the term ‘muhajir (refugee)’ has taken the form of an ugly narrative discourse since the refugees are labelled as ‘bad’ people. The term bad refers to all sorts of criminal acts in society ranging from theft to abduction, and so forth. The narratives of the second generation of Afghan refugees indicate that they are othered based on the characteristics attached to them as reflected in the dominant narratives that circulate widely in the host community. For instance, the following narrative shows that they are seen as filthy and would damage public property and would throw trash on the streets and roads.

"In fact, if someone calls us other names or uses abusive language, it is okay for us, but if they call us 'muhajir', we feel very bad because they do call us muhajir with bad intentions and implied meanings. They consider muhajir or associate the word muhajir with bad things. For instance, if Pakistanis hire a shop for 15 thousand and a muhajir hires it for 25 thousand. They will say that Muhajir has done wrong. In other situations, like if a wall is broken or any temporary construction is demolished, they will blame Muhajir because our Afghanis usually do business of Kabaar (Scavengers) and they think that it must be done by Afghanis."

Such associations have resulted in various kinds of abuse and discrimination by law enforcement agencies, institutions, individuals, and so forth. For instance, one of the respondents narrated a story of being abused by a traffic police officer when he parked his rickshaw in the wrong place. He felt singled out because the traffic police officer ignored other rickshaws that were parked wrongly.

"I have a rickshaw. I drive a rickshaw. Once I was taking a lady (Pakistani) to her home and charged a fare of only 250 rupees. On the way, she asked me to buy her some groceries. When I stopped on the side of the road to pick up groceries from the shop, a policeman came to my rickshaw and asked in a louder voice whose rickshaw is this? I went to him and said: 'It is mine', and he replied rudely: 'If you didn't have a beard on your face then I would have made you understand where you are supposed to park a rickshaw'. I thought that so many other rickshaws were in the line too, but he didn't say anything to them. I felt very sad and emotionally broken. I came back home, felt very sad, and had tears in my eyes."

Similarly, a female respondent narrated her story of an intense abusive language by a local boy when she went with her aunt to cut wood. The following story also reveals that Afghan women are labelled as prostitutes, which is quite distressing for them.

"Once more time when I was going with my aunty to jungle khel to collect some wood and bring some plants when I was very young or teenage, a boy passed remarks "mahajiro in a very abusive language -Kanjara (prostitute)" I turned back, and I said: "why you are calling like this? I can answer you and reply very harshly but if I respond to you in the same manner, what would be the difference between you and me". After a few moments he realized and said: "don't mind."

All the respondents expressed intense emotional pain for being called 'muhajir' due to the way it has evolved into an ugly narrative discourse. Due to this, they were also aggressively searched by the police or denied access to certain spaces. They wanted to get rid of the word refugee and were desperate to have some sort of sense of continuity in the host country. The same was raised with GIZ and UNHCR several times. Respondents worried for their children and grandchildren who were the third and the fourth generation of refugees living in Pakistan. They did not want them to suffer due to the ugly discourse of being a 'muhajir'

"We have spent a lot of time here, whenever we sit with organizations like GIZ, UNHCR, and others, whenever we have meetings with UNHCR and other organizations, we request or big them to at least eliminate or remove the prefix of Muhajir/Refugee from our identity or names. My father has the same prefix, and my brother, my daughter even born here, carry the same name tag of muhajir. We as elders may be able to face and manage but our kids cannot, and again they will be called Muhajir!"

However, respondents believed that the distance between the host and the home community was created due to the lack of cohesion between them. There were fewer opportunities for interactions between the two due to the preconceived notions from both sides. Thus, the second generation of Afghan refugees wanted to detach themselves from the identity of being a muhajir as it has become humiliating for them.

4.3 Redefining Situations to (re)Negotiate Identity Crisis

Respondents use various strategies to cope with unwanted situations that lead to identity crisis. This includes (re)defining situations to alter the way difficult situations threaten their identity. Additionally, they tend to avoid situations, seek help and support from family and friends to share their grief, sadness, and sorrow, and be patient in difficult times. For instance, the following narrative reflects the underlying emotional pain as the respondent suggests that they do not have any other alternative rather to be silent and ignore unwanted thoughts about situations that cause an identity crisis. This is important to proceed with their life else they will keep thinking about their misery.

"What can we do? We have to live with this. We try not to think of such incidents again and again because it is our life, and we face situations like this again and again. So, we remain silent. If we do not forego such thoughts, how will we proceed in our daily life? If we keep on thinking about this every time and every day, then how can we proceed with our lives? This is how we stop to think such incidence."

“Mostly family members support us to overcome such thinking and sad feelings. Like mother and wife mostly (suggest us) to remain patient in such instances. Additionally, we in person, feel and think that life does not end with such instances. So, we usually forego and move onward rather than thinking about it several times.”

The support of family and friends is paramount, particularly of a mother and a wife, who support men in their emotional pain as they are more prone to identity crisis due to their frequent interactions with the host community. Women, on the other hand, try to hide their Afghan identity by wearing a white or black veil that the local women wear. This helps them to protect themselves from situations that threaten their identity.

“If we go to the bazaar, and if we wear a black veil, they comment that these Afghanis want to become Pakistani. When go in our own blue color veil they also comment like: ‘Be careful of these Afghani women’. They used to stare at us, and comment: ‘Why are they here or why they have come here and for what? Mostly when we go outside, we wear the white color veil to protect ourselves.’”

The second generation of Afghan refugees also tend to redefine the term ‘muhajir’ and to think about the positive side of their lives as they try to (re)construct the damage done to their identity. They try to compare their life if they were in Afghanistan where there is no peace. However, not everyone can overcome their depression and sadness, and hence suffer from negative thoughts and feelings that affect their lives. The following narrative also reveals that an identity crisis tortures a person’s inner self irrespective of whether a person has been able to renegotiate his/her identity and manage the negative feelings.

“We overcome our grief and sad feelings by re-defining the word Mahajir. We tell our inner selves that though we are refugees, we lived a good life here. We got the education and at least a peaceful place where there is no bloodshed. Being an educated person, we manage by making ourselves understand but there are people who suffer from such sad feelings, they think over and over and get depressed because such things torture your inner self.”

Thus, redefining situations and the widespread narrative discourses that lead to identity crisis can help the second generation of Afghan refugees reconstruct their identity. In doing so, they renegotiate with themselves to manage their identity crisis.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this research has been to investigate the lived experiences of Afghan refugees as they try to (re)construct, (re)negotiate, and (re)contest their identities in everyday life. This study defines identity as a social construct that is dynamic and emergent (re)shaped by a situational and relational context. It employs a narrative approach that has assisted us in gaining access to the lived experiences of the second generation of Afghan refugees in relation to their identity crisis. The narratives have been revealing and provide rich insights into their emotional pain as they experience identity crisis, and as they try to re(construct) it. Moreover, the findings present a nuanced reflection of the lives of the second generation of Afghan refugees who feel lost between their ancestral land and the place where they were born and have lived their entire lives.

The second generation of Afghan refugees revealed various identity challenges faced by them over time. The main challenges include lack of acceptance or their permanent status, social exclusion from the host community, discrimination in various public and institutional spaces, challenges with cultural identity and integration due to similarities and differences of cultural practices with the host community, legal constraints since they could not own their property and lived with a sense of fear and insecurity of being displaced again. This is line with previous research that shows that identity crisis is still a major issue for the second generation of refugees, which affects their needs, attitudes and perceptions (e.g. Wadood et al., 2020; Shahimi et al., 2024).

Fundamentally, the identity of the second generation of Afghan refugees has been shattered since they have an incomplete sense of belongingness to their ancestral land as well as the host country in which they are born. Previous research on refugee identity indicates that displaced youth are a vulnerable population who are lost and are forced to adapt to new changes (Guerrero and Tinkler, 2010; Hack-Polay et al., 2021)

Their strong sense of ‘watan’ does not fit in either of the countries as their imagination of how a homeland should be, does not fit into both the countries. They feel lost as they try to create a sense of belongingness to either of the countries. The feeling of otherness intensifies due to being labelled as muhajir, which has become an ugly narrative discourse over time. Such discourses as identified in the extant literature that view refugee as violent and unwanted, which has a significant impact on the way they are treated in the host community (e.g. Siapera, 2019; Clark, Haw, & Mackenzie, 2024). In this study, the term muhajir has created alienation in the host community which had once welcomed the Afghan refugees since they were fighting the Holy War. Muhajirs are now seen as ‘bad people’ who are affiliated with all sorts of crimes, including theft, drugs, and terrorism. They are seen as filthy and

untrustworthy. This has resulted in all sorts of insults, bullying, and harassment of the refugees in various spaces, such as hospitals, police stations, schools, streets, parks, etc, which is more painful for the second generation of Afghan refugees.

As they face humiliation, abuse, lack of acceptance, and discrimination, the second generation of Afghan refugees tries to renegotiate their identity by redefining unwanted situations. They recontest their identity by assuring themselves that they live in peace and do not face terrorism and bloodshed as in Afghanistan. Also, the Afghan refugees have a strong sense of community as they prefer to live together in camps despite the lack of basic facilities. Social support from family and friends helps them cope with situations that emerge because of their distorted identity in the host community.

In the future, more research is needed to understand the identity crisis of the third and fourth generation of Afghan refugees. Our study indicates that the identity challenges of the third and the fourth generations would be more profound as compared to the second generation. Also, an ethnographic study will be more useful to understand the dynamics of identity as they emerge in their daily refugee lives. It will give closer access to the research participant and will help us to get an insightful and rich dataset as they experience identity crisis in their daily lives. It will give first-hand information on the way they (re)construct, (re)negotiate, and (re)contest their identities.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In everyday life, the way identities are experienced, practiced, and crafted has implications for relevant groups and institutions (Brown, 2015). The identity crisis faced by the second generation of Afghan refugees, living inside the camps in Pakistan, exhibits significant implications for all the policy makers. A nuanced and in-depth understanding of these challenges presents interesting insights in terms of internal and external factors that spark identity crisis. The implications derived from this study are essential to foster integration, ensuring social inclusion and cohesion, and addressing the way these challenges can be fostered. Below are the key policy implications drawn from this research study.

Fundamental to the identity crisis as found in this study, was the legal status of the Afghan refugees who were born and brought up here in Pakistan while carrying a tag of Muhajir. The lack of legal recognition results in feelings of lost and/or lost identity. Policymakers can provide a clear pathway to any form of residency permit that can truly protect the human rights of these Afghan refugees. UNHCR is providing legal support and is cooperating with offices in Pakistan and Afghanistan to remove the hurdles for the return of voluntary repatriates. However, repatriation creates an identity crisis, particularly for the second generation of Afghan refugees who are born in Pakistan and have been living here since childhood. The provision of a POR card or proof of Afghan identity or registration was found to be a mere solution to the identity crisis that is also witnessed by the extant literature e.g., (Polay et al., 2021; Mielke & Etzold, 2022). In this connection, all the stakeholders are recommended to take viable steps for the dignified repatriation and/or legalize the refugees particularly the second generation, in such a way that they can have access to the basic facilities and necessities of life.

As found, the identity is beyond the POR cards, all the institutions working for refugees should help and facilitate intensive social inclusion programs to help in the transformation of the refugees into dignified human beings in society. This will help them to develop a coherent sense of belongingness to the place where they are born and live their lives. Also, this is important for their well-being so that they can utilize their full potential for their own socio-economic development and the benefit of society at large. This is of mutual benefit for both the Afghan refugees and the host community in particular, and Pakistan in general.

Besides the legal, social, and societal part, organizations like UNHCR and GIZ, etc., carry a burden on their shoulders for devising plans to facilitate countries like Pakistan to ensure access to education for Afghan refugees, which is very limited when compared with the huge number of Afghan community children. Ensuring one curriculum, vocational training programs, skill development programs, access and facilitation to higher education can enhance socio-economic prospects that will enable the Afghan refugees to compete in life that will lessen the identity crisis and may result in a happy repatriation to their country as well. Currently, they only imagine the dark side of repatriation which is full of hardships on either side of the border.

Last but not least, media and public awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in understanding the refugee status and challenges associated with it. A wide range of communication tools should be used to increase the harmony among refugees, the host community, and the law enforcing authorities.

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