The concept for the online writing center is modeled on the writing centers that are offered at many universities in the U.S. These writing centers are typically staffed by university students. To help with the staffing needs, Star and ROYA have partnered with the Iranian Studies Initiative at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) to secure student interns. The internship program matches two accomplished undergraduate student interns with the online writing center for the summer semester. Shirin Enayati is a second-year student at UCSB.

During Star’s early partnerships with Lozier, it became apparent that the need for writing support services in Afghanistan is great. Our experience with the Interstellar Bulletin has also highlighted the demand for such support.

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A message from Ali Reza Yasa, Chairman and Founder

Star Educational Society (Star) is pleased to announce another new collaboration with Kara Lozier and her organization, ROYA-Resources of Young Afghans. Lozier is an experienced student advisor who has been working with international students for over ten years—focusing mainly on Afghan students since 2007. During Star’s early partnerships with Lozier, it became apparent that the need for writing support services in Afghanistan is great. Our experience with the Interstellar Bulletin has also highlighted the demand for such support. The idea to create ROYA Online Writing Center was born after our extremely successful collaboration with Lozier for our joint Fulbright advising services in early 2016.

The concept for the online writing center is modeled on the writing centers that are offered at many universities in the U.S. These writing centers are typically staffed by university students. To help with the staffing needs, Star and ROYA have partnered with the Iranian Studies Initiative at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) to secure student interns. The internship program matches UCSB undergraduates with non-profit organizations. You can find and other resources to support the writing team will provide English writing support in the form of coaching, feedback, editing and other resources to support the writing projects of interested Afghan individuals and non-profit organizations. You can find ROYA Online Writing Center’s website here: https://roya-owc.com/ or follow them on Facebook here: https://www.facebook.com/roysaowc/.

If you want to contact them to use their services, you can send an email to royawowc@gmail.com or click the tab on their website that says “Request for Writing Support” to complete and submit a short online form.

ROYA Online Writing Center: Star’s newest partnership

The impacts and challenges of civil society in Afghanistan

Despite many challenges, civil society in Afghanistan has an effective role in community mobilization and policy making in Afghanistan. It also helped.

Russia: Turkish president ‘sorry’ for shoot-down of Russian military jet

Muhammad Ali (1942-2016) was an American former heavyweight champion boxer and one of the greatest sporting. Page 4

One Child’s Harrowing Journey From Afghanistan to Sweden

Nasima was doing a mathematics assignment when her mother informed her of the journey.

"You are leaving tonight."

"I did not know how to react," says the 14-year-old Afghan girl, who now lives with a legal guardian in...
Appreciating the sacrifices made for one’s success

About the author: Shaista Langari is a Star alumna and a current teacher. She graduated with a degree in educational psychology from Kabul University and is a program assistant at a Kabul NGO. Shais
tu is currently building a career as a new professional artist and recently had her first art exhibit.

Shams was an academically excel-

Any scholarships in school? “The youth answered “none.”

The director asked, “Did your father pay for your school fees?” The youth an-
swered, “My father passed away when I was one year old, it was my mother who paid for my school fees.”

The director asked, “Where did your mother work?” The youth an-
swered, “My mother worked as a clothes cleaner in a house.” The director asked the youth to show his hands. The youth showed a pair of hands that were smooth and perfect.

The director asked, “Have you ever helped your mother wash the clothes or do house chores before?” Shams answered, “Never, my mother always wanted me to study and read more books. Furthermore, my mother can work faster than me.”

The director said, “I have a request. When you go home today, go and clean your mother’s hands, and then come to see me tomorrow morning.” Shams felt that his chance of land-

The Director noticed the tears in Shams’s eyes and said, “Tell me what you did and learned yesterday when you went home.” Shams answered, “I cleaned my mother’s hands and also finished cleaning all the remaining clothes.”

The Director requested, “Please tell me your feelings.” Shams said, “First, I know now what is appreciation. With-

I can feel the brightness of sun; it’s difficult to open my eyes. The bright-

You cannot guess what my pass-

My mom knocks on the door then

The Director requested, “Please tell me your feelings.” Shams said, “First, I know now what is appreciation. Without my mother, I would not be the successful person I am today. Second, by working with and helping my mother, now I realize how difficult and challenging it is to get some-

never fall in love but always rise with it

About the author: Parisa Ahmadji is a Star alumna and a teacher. She is in the 12th grade and plans to be an engineer in the future.

I can feel the brightness of sun; it’s difficult to open my eyes. The bright-

I had a big problem; my pride. Even I didn’t let him speak in the class. I was serious with all and more with him. Sensitive against his homework, pro-
nunciation, and lesson till he decided to change his time. I didn’t want to show how I feel. One day he mentioned that he wanted to change his time, and I re-
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row I saw that he had not come neither in my class nor others. My pride didn’t let me show anything. It was very dif-
ficult for me to forget him after eight months. I loved, but I had to forget.

On that time my cousin was send-

I am beautiful because of my eyes. I act as I am sleeping because of me to forget him after eight months. I loved, but I had to forget.

It is beautiful to have someone that he/she be kind with you. To have some-

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I am beautiful because of my eyes. I act as I am sleeping because of me to forget him after eight months. I loved, but I had to forget.
The impacts and challenges of civil society in Afghanistan

If civil society did not exist in Afghanistan, the rule of law could not have been promoted and establishing friendly relations between nations could not have been possible. The civil society activities carried out during the past fifteen years have succeeded in making national policy changes and have impacted citizens’ attitudes and behaviors. As a result, the country has experienced more civic and media participation.

Due to the influence of civil society programs, new laws, regulations and policies were drafted and presented to the executive and legislative bodies to be ratified/endorsed. Examples which have been drafted by civil society organizations and then ratified by parliament or endorsed by president’s include: the draft of the Family Law (pending within the legislature, department of Justice Ministry), Eliminating Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law (endorsed by former president Karzai), Access to Information Law, Social Organization Law, Non-governmental Law, Media law, Election law, Anti-sexual Harassment Regulation, Afghan National Youth Policy. Civic activities are supported constitutionally and by law, expressing a commitment to an ambitious reform agenda which will advance national development and strengthen democracy.

In addition, civil society has acted as an independent monitoring body of government performance and, most crucially, as a partner in Afghanistan’s peace and state-building efforts. The most critical achievements of civil society in Afghanistan include: improved responsiveness and accountability of government; increased empowerment of community members, especially women, through civic participation; advocacy for policy-making to confer legitimacy on policy decisions; increased pool of policy ideas; supported less powerful governments; countered a lack of political will; helped the state put nationalism aside; promoted development in terms of civic participation and civic engagement; community mobilization and; social change.

On the other hand, the sustainability and success of civic activities are threatened by traditional barriers, armed opposition groups, warlords, religious actors, community leaders, and other challenges. Meanwhile, the central government has created obstacles to civic and media participation in spite of the legal provisions which allow such participation. Still, the concerns of religious and ethnic minorities are often unheard and women’s meaningful participation is ignored by authorities. If the this pattern continues and the Taliban are integrated into the government through the peace process, the voices of civil activists and media activists will not be heard and their concerns will be intensified.

Moreover, the likelihood of extremist agendas and tyrannies increases if the current approach continues. The most crucial challenge facing civil society activism is the lack of a specific agenda followed by civil society activists. Some NGOs and CSOs follow a mostly ethnic, religious or political agenda. Other problems include a lack of accountability and transparency within the NGO sector. Dependency on foreign donations is a threat to the sustainability of the government.

In summary, more than nine million girls and women can access their rights to education. Health care, sanitation, employment, freedom of speech and other basic rights have been achieved as a result of funding from the international communities and the establishment and empowerment of civil society in Afghanistan. Despite many challenges to civil society, enormous changes have occurred and civil society has succeeded in realizing visible impacts in different levels of the society-state relationship.

Theory of Change (ToC) is a specific type of methodology for planning, participation, and evaluation that is used in the philanthropic, not-for-profit and government sectors to promote social change. Theory of Change defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions.
From President on Down, Argentines Clamor for Lionel Messi’s Return

Source: ASSOCIATED PRESS
Written by: NATACHA PISARENKO

BUENOS AIRES — The President of Argentina, Mauricio Macri, said Tuesday that he hoped to meet Lionel Messi next week and to persuade him to return to the national team.

Macri said he had spoken by telephone with Messi, who announced his shock retirement from the Argentine national team after the loss Sunday to Chile on penalty kicks in the Copa América final at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J. Messi returned to Argentina on Monday, but has not spoken publicly.

Macri said he told Messi to “ignore some of the nonsense” because Argentines were happy with how Messi has played. Messi, who moved to Barcelona when he was 13, has often faced tough criticism in Argentina because he has failed to deliver a major title — in contrast to his repeated success for the club Barcelona.

Messi is often compared unfavorably with Diego Maradona, who led Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title. Macri said he did not understand the criticism of Messi.

“The truth is that it’s good fortune, a joy, a gift from God to have the best player in the world in a country like ours that is so football-crazy,” said Macri, a former president of the Argentine club Boca Juniors.

Macri’s lobbying could be helped by a gathering planned for Saturday at the obelisk in central Buenos Aires, the city’s most famous landmark.

Support for Messi has been overwhelming on social media as sports figures, artists and politicians urged him to return. Billboards and signs also had messages supporting Messi. In the midst of the turmoil, a statue of Messi was unveiled at Buenos Aires city hall — with a soccer ball at his feet — alongside other national sports stars. In another show of support, some members of Argentina’s 1986 World Cup team posed for a photograph with the caption: “Don’t Go Lio.” Maradona, the biggest star on that team, was not in the photo. Television commentators have speculated that Messi spoke out in frustration after Sunday’s 4-2 loss on penalties to Chile after a scoreless draw. “The national team is over for me,” Messi told the Argentine network TyC Sports. “It’s been four finals, it’s not meant for me. I tried. It was the thing I wanted the most, but I couldn’t get it, so I think it’s over.”

It did not help that Messi himself lifted Argentina’s first penalty kick over the crossbar, setting the stage for another final defeat. Messi and Argentina lost to Brazil in the 2007 Copa final and to Germany in extra time in the 2014 World Cup final in Brazil. They also lost last year’s Copa final to host Chile on penalty kicks after a 0-0 draw.

Russia: Turkish president ‘sorry’ for shoot-down of Russian military jet

Source: FoxNews.com

The Kremlin reported Monday Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent a message to Russian President Vladimir Putin saying “I am sorry” for the downing of a Russian jet last November, an incident Putin had called a “treacherous stabbing in the back.”

Erdogan expressed his “sympathy and deep condolences” to the family of the killed pilot and “asked to be forgiven,” Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. The letter added that Turkey had called on Putin to restore the traditional friendly relations between Turkey and Russia and work together to address regional crises and jointly combat terrorism. "We are pleased to announce that Turkey and Russia have agreed to take necessary steps without delay to improve bilateral relations," Erdogan spokesman Kalin said.

The downing of the plane reflected simmering tensions between Russia and Turkey, which had backed opposing sides in the Syrian conflict. Russia’s air campaign, which began in Septem-ber, helped shore up Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose foes have been battling rebels and the Russian, Syria’s air force had been the largest destination for Turkish exports, mostly textile and food, and also the biggest source of Turkish imports.

The Russians responded by halting package tours to Turkey, banning most agricultural imports from Turkey and introducing other measures restricting bilateral trade. Before the plane’s downing, Russia had been the largest destination for Turkish exports, mostly textile and food, and also the biggest source of Russian imports.

The downing of the plane reflected simmering tensions between Russia and Turkey, which had backed opposing sides in the Syrian conflict. Russia’s air campaign, which began in September, helped shore up Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose foes have been backed by Turkey. Lifting the crippling restrictions was essential for Erdogan, who has found himself under pressure both at home and abroad. Since the incident, Erdogan and his ministers have continuously spoken in favor of normalizing ties with Moscow, but Putin made it clear that he expected a formal apology and a compensation of damage.

Erdogan’s office also said that the Turkish leader called on Putin to restore the traditional friendly relations between Turkey and Russia and work together to address regional crises and jointly combat terrorism. “We are pleased to announce that Turkey and Russia have agreed to take necessary steps without delay to improve bilateral relations,” Erdogan spokesman Kalin said.

Scholarship Opportunity:

The Embassy of the United States of America in Kabul, Afghanistan and the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) are pleased to jointly offer a limited number of Scholarships for qualified Afghan applicants and for the male alumni of the U.S. Embassy Exchange Programmes (YES, YSEL, USAPEF and English Access Micro-Scholarship) to study undergraduate degree programs at AUAF starting Fall 2016.

Applicants must successfully complete the Pre-Test and TOEFL test offered on AUAF campuses in Kabul on the following dates:

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>3-Jul-16</td>
<td>Pre Test</td>
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<td>5-Jul-16</td>
<td>TOEFL - Test for Female Scholarship</td>
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<td>11-Jul-16</td>
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<td>12-Jul-16</td>
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Eligibility: Applicants are required to adhere to the scholarship eligibility guidelines provided by the U.S. Embassy, as listed below:
- Be an Afghan citizen
- Meet all AUAF admission requirements
- Have not been admitted to AUAF degree programs
- You are not eligible for the scholarships, if you
  - Are a U.S. Government employee (including locally employed staff) or spouse or dependent child of U.S. Government employee.
  - Are at any time a beneficiary of the U.S. Government (or become the spouse or dependent child of an employee of the U.S. Government), if you are an AUAF employee.
  - Have already been admitted to AUAF degree programs or other institutions.

Please note: It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all self-employment status after receiving the scholarship to the Office of Admissions and any changes of US employment status after receiving the scholarship to the Office of Finance. Failure to do so will result in sanctions and it may lead even to revocation.
Afghanistan’s dwindling Sikh, Hindu communities flee new abuses

Written by: By Hamid Shalizi

KABUL (Reuters) - On a bright day in downtown Kabul, Jagtar Singh Laghmani was in his traditional herb shop when a man turned up, drew a knife and told him to convert to Islam or he would cut his hands off. The bystanders and other shopkeepers saved his life.

The incident earlier this month was the latest attack on a dwindling community of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan, a deeply conservative Muslim country struggling with growing insecurity caused by an Islamist insurgency and economic challenges.

Over a century, only a handful of Sikh and Hindu families remain. Many have chosen to flee the country of their birth, blaming growing discrimination and intolerance.

"This is how we begin our day - with fear and isolation. If you are not a Muslim, you are not a human in their eyes," said Jagtar Singh, speaking in his tiny shop in the bustling centre of Kabul. "I don’t know what to do or where to go."

For centuries, Hindu and Sikh communities played a prominent role in merchant trade and money lending in Afghanistan, although today they are known more for their worship rather than in trade.

According to Avtar Singh, chairman of the national council of Hindus and Sikhs, the community now numbers fewer than 220 families, compared with around 250,000 members before the collapse of the Kabul government in 1992.

Once spread across the country, the community is now mainly concentrated in the eastern province of Nangarhar, Ghazni, and the capital Kabul.

Although Afghanistan is almost entirely Muslim, its constitution, drawn up after U.S.-led forces drove out the Taliban government in 2001, theoretically guarantees the right of minority religions to worship freely.

But as the conflict drags on, Avtar Singh said conditions were worse than under the Taliban, which imposed strict Islamic laws, staged public executions and banned girls from schools.

Hindus and Sikhs had to wear yellow patches that identified them asatable, but were otherwise seldom bothered.

"The good old days have long gone when we were treated as Afghans, not as outsiders," Avtar Singh said from a temple in Kabul, all the while keeping an eye on visitors using monitors linked to security cameras.

“Our lands have been taken by powerful figures in the government, especially by the warlords. We are facing threats, and this small community is getting smaller and smaller every day," he added.

Last week, dozens of Hindu and Sikh families left Helmand, where Taliban insurgents, who have a presence in much of the southern province, sent a letter demanding 200,000 Afghans ($2,800) a month from the community.

HOSPTILITY

Tensions have surfaced in Qalacha, an area on the outskirts of Kabul where the Sikh and Hindu community owns a high-walled crematorium.

As the capital has expanded in recent years, the neighbourhood has become densely populated and some newer residents oppose Hindu and Sikh cremations, a practice foreign to Muslims, who bury their dead.

"When they burn the body the smell makes our family sick and we don’t want this to happen here," said Ahmad Timor, a Muslim resident in Qalacha.

The Sikhs say local Muslim hardliners have stirred up hostility against them, and the community now requires police protection for their funeral rituals.

"They throw stones and bricks at us, at the bodies of the dead, whenever there is a funeral," said Avtar Singh, pointing to a newly built house next to the crematorium.

Dahi-ul Haq Abid, deputy minister for Haj and religious affairs, said the government had done what it could to improve the livelihood of Hindus and Sikhs.

"We agree that conflicts pushed them out of the country, but their condition is not as bad as they claim," Abid added.

"We have allocated them a place to burn their bodies because inside the city people complained about the smell, but they did not agree," he told Reuters.

Harassment is also common.

The parliament ratified the Afghanistan’s membership in WTO

The parliament ratified the bundle of “Afghanistan’s membership in World Trade Organization” by majority on Monday’s meeting. Though some minor members of parliament disagreed with this membership, considering the current situation of Afghanistan, the bundle of Afghanistan’s membership in World Trade Organization was ratified by majority in parliament.

Afghanistan received this member last year in month of Qaws. The authorities had said at the time that by the membership of Afghanistan in World Trade Organization a lot of easies will be created for the inner merchants and artificers of Afghanistan and the trade of Afghanistan will be standardized to the world’s standards. The authorities have also said that by the confirmation of boards, Afghanistan will be membered formally.

Humayun Rasa, the minister of Commerce and Industries said in today’s meeting for the declaration of the bundle of Afghanistan’s membership in World Trade Organization that about 30 proposals and one reform or the condition of reform are included in this bundle that Afghanistan must prepare itself according to them to achieve the World Trade Organization’s membership.

Mr. Rasa also included that by attest of this bundle by the parliament and due effect, many problems of Afghanistan on transitions with neighboring countrys will be solved, because, applying of the principles are compulsory for every member of this organization. The World Trade Organization had given time for Afghanistan to traverse all the necessary steps for the membership until June 2016. The conditions of this organization are for Afghanistan to apply all the necessary rules on itself to standards of the world and build capacity.

Moreover, this organization has given five years time for Afghanistan to apply all the necessary rules on itself needed for the membership in that organization. Of course, this organization will help Afghanistan in capacity building.

Mozammel Shinwary the deputy minister of Ministry of Commerce and Industries, said in today’s meeting that until now four of the rules are confirmed from the 28 rules needed for the membership of this organization by the parliament and 12 other rule drafts are under work.

According to Shinwary, solution of transitions’ problem, export to the world’s market, foreign investment attractions, applying the standards on imports, technical help attraction, capacity building, solving the problems on the right way and achieving world’s credit are the benefits of the membership to this organization.

The efforts for getting the membership of this organization were started in 2004. By the membership of Afghanistan in this organization, the members of this organization reached to 164 countries in its 20th established year.

Afghanistan sells fruits to Russia

Afghan Commerce and Industries Chamber says that merchants are trying to use the custom exemption of Russia in order to export fruit and vegetable. Therefore, the officials say, “about 300,000 tons of vegetable and fruit will be sent to Russia next year.”

Khan Jan Alokozay, the assistant of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, said that recently they held meetings to persuade their merchants to take an active part and increase their export through land and air transportation.

In this case, the economists say that they have to use this opportunity and accordingly they have to export fruits and vegetables to some other countries as well. Besides, Nabi Sadaat, one of the economists, has the same idea, and says, “If government pays attention on this process, on marketing and related issues, there will be more chances not only to export to Russia but also from Russia to other countries.

According to two months’ circumstances, about 57000 Ton fruit and vegetables were exported to Pakistan and India.

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One Child’s Harrowing Journey From Afghanistan to Sweden

About the author: Nazifa Alizada of Afghanistan is a graduate of the Asian University for Women. She is also a 2016 Young Connectors of the Future fellow at the Swedish Institute and has worked as a research assistant for the Family Empowerment Study since 2013.

Nasima was doing a mathematics assignment when her mother informed her of the journey.

“You are leaving tonight.”

“I did not know how to react,” says the 14-year-old Afghan girl, who now lives with a legal guardian in Stockholm.

Nasima entered Sweden from the Mediterranean region in 2015—one of 35,369 unaccompanied children to do so. Similar to most other children making their way to Europe alone, Nasima had no decision-making role in the journey.

“Everything happened in the blink of an eye,” she says, with teary eyes, her voice shaking. “I had no time to say goodbye, even to my sisters and brothers.”

Nasima is a rarity in Sweden. Most Afghan families do not allow unaccompanied women—minors or adults—to undertake such a perilous journey. According to data from the Swedish Migration Agency, girls and young women constitute less than 10 percent of the unaccompanied minor refugees. In 2015, only eight unaccompanied girls entered Sweden per day, compared with 90 unaccompanied boys.

Migration is a gendered process, and with each new immigrant, a set of beliefs, stereotypes and capabilities move to the new country. Lack of personal security, the fear of rape and loss of family honor are the main concerns that prevent families from sending a daughter on such a hazardous journey.

Nasima comes from a conservative background, so sending her away was not an easy decision.

“The neighbors, relatives and friends accuse me of being an irresponsible parent and disgracing the family,” says Nasima’s mother.

In Afghanistan, a vast majority of women still don’t have adequate freedom of movement. During the reign of the Taliban, women were prohibited by law from traveling without a mahram, a man they are forbidden to marry, such as a father, brother or son. Since the fall of the Taliban, women have made significant sociopolitical and economic gains, but old stereotypes and residual Taliban beliefs still affect women’s freedom. As a result, fewer Afghan refugees are female. Moreover, in traditional Afghan society, women are considered physically weak and emotionally unstable. Such discriminatory beliefs lead traditional Afghan families to doubt whether their daughters are capable of overcoming the hardships of the journey.

Investing in sons, who are deemed physically and mentally stronger, seems like a more secure and rational option for traditional Afghan families. Teenage Afghan boys also tend to have more interest in undertaking the journey in order to prove their manhood. The ideals of masculinity are applied through peer pressure both within Afghanistan and among their social networks in the destination country.

Isah, a 17-year-old unaccompanied Afghan boy living in Stockholm, acknowledges that one reason he agreed to undertake the journey was that his school friends in Afghanistan challenged him, telling him to “do it if you are a man.”

While Afghanistan’s deteriorating security, dire economic conditions and uncertainty about the country’s future are common driving forces for youth migration, traditional attitudes skew toward masculinity and reinforce stereotypes.

Nasima’s mother and her four children live in a suburb of Ghazni, one of the most unstable provinces in Afghanistan. Nasima’s father has been an opium addict for almost 15 years and started injecting heroin and other substances three years ago. He was heavily indebted to his friend and promised to exchange Nasima for the debt.

“I couldn’t give away my daughter,” says Nasima’s mother. “Am I an irresponsible mother?”

Child marriage, forced marriage and paying off family debt with daughters are commonly practiced in Afghanistan.

“Girls are people’s property,” Nasima’s neighbor says. “The sooner they leave their father’s house with dignity, the better it is for the family.”

But Nasima’s mother resisted the norm. A friend of hers was leaving for Sweden with her family, and she decided to entrust Nasima to their care.

Nasima began her journey in Ghazni, then traveled through Iran, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Hungary, Austria, Germany and Denmark, until she reached Sweden. Although she started out with her mother’s friend, due to the grueling and sometimes dangerous circumstances of the trip, they did not always travel together. Nasima was essentially on her own.

The journey took two months, during September and October, when the migration crisis was at its peak. As she traveled through Afghanistan, Nasima lived in fear of the Taliban. While the Afghan unity government has influence over the bigger cities, the Taliban still exerts power in the suburbs and controls the highways. “They would kill me if they see a girl traveling alone,” she explains.

The war between the Taliban and the unity government was still underway while Nasima crossed Afghanistan.

“They were throwing rockets and firing at each other, and we were stuck in between,” she says.

From the Afghan province of Nimruz, Nasima traveled to Pakistan in a truck, with 35 to 45 other men and women. Because the border between Iran and Pakistan was closed, Nasima and the rest of the travelers had to wait in Pakistan for eight or nine days.

For Nasima, crossing the border between Iran and Turkey was her worst experience, one that made her feel like giving up the rest of the journey. For six continuous nights, the smuggler asked her group to walk from sunset till sunrise.

“We had to climb a very steep mountain,” she says. “The smuggler used to beat us up if we walked slowly or were tired.”

As they prepared to cross the Mediterranean, Nasima slept in the jungle for six nights straight due to stormy weather and police surveillance. She thought she was going to die from the cold, rain and hunger.

“For six continuous nights, we were burning wood in the jungle to warm ourselves, but when the police were approaching, we had to put it off and bear the cold.”

The horrors of the journey continue to haunt her.

“The way from Iran to Turkey, I have seen dead bodies lying around,” Nasima says. “The people who were with me wanted to help, but the smuggler did not allow it.”

Although she grew up in a war-affected area and had experienced hardships, her two-month journey to Sweden left her with distressing memories and lingering psychological effects.

Asylum-seeking is a highly stressful process, and it leaves unaccompanied children with grave concerns about their future, especially after experiencing challenging journeys.

Once they arrive at their destination, they need more than a guardian, food and shelter in order to move securely forward.

Five months after her journey, Nasima feels a lack of support.

“I cannot share these experiences with anyone,” she says.

A program to help unaccompanied Afghan children deal with the psychological toll of their journeys would help, she says, but Sweden will never be able to fill every void.

“I am happy, but it does not feel home.”
Stories
My Grandmother Told Me

In the year when the black disease came to the village, eight babies were taken to the cemetery at paass-e-gardo. Before them there was only one grave at the new cemetery. The old Ghulam Ali Kakai had fallen ill and passed away. The old cemetery was full and too close to the path of the spring floods. For Kakai, the villagers picked paass-e-gardo as the site for the new cemetery - the land there was barren, abandoned and beyond the view from any point in the village. Kakai was taken there one late afternoon, and there he rests today. He left behind a daughter, Gul Chaman, and nobody else.

The next year, the specter of the black disease, whooping cough visited the village. Within a few terrifying months, it killed most of the babies in our small village, 8 of them. Two died on the same day. The babies coughed for months, and eventually coughed their lives out.

The villagers called it a curse. They cursed the late Ghulam Ali Kakai:
That cursed bastard died and dragged all these kids behind him.

In the later years, cough, rash and disease killed even more children. The rash appeared small and ordinary, then it quickly spread all over their bodies and disfigured their faces and bodies. It killed them. The dead would be so disfigured; their families couldn’t even give them a final bath before burial. Leprosy was a merciless killer.

When I last visited paass-e-gardo, it appeared as if the whole village was there - my brothers, your maternal grandfather, my friends, and relatives. It appears to be full.

*Paass = Beyond
*Gardo = Pass; Paas-e-Gardo = Beyond the Pass

The Wide Ocean
From: ‘Canto General’

Ocean, if you were to give, a measure, a ferment, a fruit of your gifts and destructions, into my hand, I would choose your far-off repose, your contour of steel, your vigilant spaces of air and darkness, and the power of your white tongue, that shatters and overthrows columns, breaking them down to your proper purity. Not the final breaker, heavy with brine, that thunders onshore, and creates the silence of sand, that encircles the world, but the inner spaces of force, the naked power of the waters, the immovable solitude, brimming with lives.

It is Time perhaps, or the vessel filled with all motion, pure Oneness, that death cannot touch, the visceral green of consuming totality. Only a salt kiss remains of the drowned arm, that lifts a spray: a humid scent, of the damp flower, is left, from the bodies of men. Your energies form, in a trickle that is not spent, form, in retreat into silence. The falling wave, arch of identity, shattering feathers, is only spume when it clears, and returns to its source, uncorrupted. Your whole force heads for its origin. The husks that your load threshes, are only the crushed, plundered, deliveries, that your act of abundance expelled, all those that take life from your branches. Your form extends beyond breakers, vibrant, and rhythmic, like the chest, cloaking a single being, and its breathings, that lift into the content of light, plains raised above waves, forming the naked surface of earth. You fill your true self with your substance. You overflow curve with silence. The vessel trembles with your salt and sweetness, the universal cavern of waters, and nothing is lost from you, as it is from the desolate crater, or the bay of a hill, those empty heights, signs, scars, guarding the wounded air. Your petals throbbing against the Earth, trembling your submarine harvests, your menace thickening the smooth swell, with pulsations and swarming of schools, and only the thread of the net raises the dead lightning of fish-scale, one wounded millimetre, in the space of your crystal completeness.

Pablo Neruda
Diplomat, Poet (1904–1973)

Pablo Neruda was a Nobel Prize–winning Chilean poet who was once called "the greatest poet of the 20th century in any language." Born in Parral, Chile, on July 12, 1904, poet Pablo Neruda stirred controversy with his affiliation with the Communist Party and his outspoken support of Joseph Stalin, Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro. His poetic mastery was never in doubt, and for it he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. Neruda died on September 23, 1973, with subsequent investigations exploring whether he might have been poisoned.

About the author: Hadi Zaher was the first graduate of Quetta’s branch of Star Educational Society in the year 1999. He has an MA from the University of Wollongong in Australia and is currently a post-graduate student at the University of New South Wales.
The War on Terror and the protracted conflict that it has given rise to have produced a lot of commentary, news coverage, and statements from officers and leading politicians. At times, it seems as if book deals are routinely distributed to Generals, heads of the Joint Chiefs, and other notable military personnel as if post-retirement memoirs were Standard Operating Procedure. An often unreported story behind that is that of the soldier on the front lines (when those lines actually exist). In the following interview, held in Kabul, and not named in this article, I had the chance to chat with one such soldier who recently returned from an extended tour in Afghanistan. The soldier in question is still on active-duty, and has asked to remain anonymous.

What made you want to join the Army?

Since I was a kid I always wanted to join the military. I knew that eventually I would serve, but I originally wanted to serve as an officer. I even went to see my lego so I had to make the choice between going to school for four years and becoming an officer or enlist right off the bat. As a student I didn’t necessarily do it for the real world, you know, the one that is fallow and has a government and things. I went to school and I thought college was a scam and I originally chose the military because I was really more interested in the capabilities to fill. They fulfill a purpose; they get paid ten times more than me. I’ve never had a problem with them besides that.

Did you ever encounter any troops or paramilitaries during your tour overseas? As a soldier, how do you feel about them? Security Detail contractors are everywhere in Afghanistan, especially the capital. I have never had a problem with them besides that they get paid ten times more than me. I’ve talked to a few of them, and most of them are contractors who previously served in the military and they are hired to protect the interests of other contractors firms transporting supplies and equipment to bases throughout Afghanistan or as PSD elements for other contractors working for NATO. I am not aware of them participating in combat unless they are attacked. Contractors fill a security void NATO forces don’t have the capabilities to fill. They fulfill a purpose; so therefore I didn’t mind them.

How did the civilian population treat you?

The attitudes of civilians toward us varied with ethnic groups and location. In Herat, the Tajiks and Hazara’s seemed genuinely friendly and respectful because not thirteen years ago they were being massacred by the Pushtun dominated Taliban based on their ethnicity. Overall, the people of Afghanistan seemed friendly towards us; however, that does not mean they didn’t resent us. Afghan would normally put on a smile and although this seemingly friendly demeanor did not last for very long, it would be an insurgent planting IED’s at night or even relaying intel on our movements to the Taliban. On certain occasions though, depending on the area, we would get dirty looks from the Afghans, we would have certain gestures waved at us, or even have rocks thrown at us. It was very mixed in the west. It was very mixed in the west.

People often say how, depending where you are in Afghanistan, you feel like you’re traveling through time, with life in Kabul like the late 20th century, and other areas resembling the Middle Ages. Did you get that feeling yourself? Outside the major towns or cities, in the villages it was like the middle ages: no running water, no electricity, no sewage system. I didn’t have much experience seeing remote villages because we stuck to major routes but we would pass through towns that resembled the 13th century nonetheless, where the poverty is really apparent. Even in Kabul, in a lot of areas, it was like traveling 500 years in one day. In the more affluent areas of Kabul, women would be dressed normally, although wearing a head scarf, but with their face still showing. The buildings looked modern and it looked as if the city was a cross between a “normal” city and 5 miles away still inside Kabul and you’ll hit mud huts, women in bungalows, chickens pecking around, seaweed ditches, wild dogs and dirt roads. It was unbelievable.

When you were under fire, what thoughts ran through your mind? The first time I was shot at, I got so startled, I practically jumped back into the vehicle even though I was mostly protected in my seat. I was crouched and my adrenaline was pumping and I felt the blood rushing to my face while I was perched on the little windows on the sides of the turret looking for the shooter. What I was honestly thinking was that first time was “fuck, I’m going to get my head blown off.” It was all over probably within 45 seconds as we drove off. That first time I didn’t return fire, I almost didn’t know what to do. After that though, when the bullets started flying it was mind over matter, I had to be confident in my equipment and I let my training take over. After I got the initial shock of while taking fire for the first time, my thoughts would soon race in this form: where is this son of a b*tch and how many of them are there? Distance, direction, and description etc. I would also pray that these guys weren’t trying to blow us up with an IED at the same time as the small arms attack. We took contact in more rural areas so I would return fire in the general direction/area of the shooter to suppress him and give us time to roll through. We were lucky and didn’t encounter too much danger out there.

You say you wanted to “real world.” With that in mind- after your first tour abroad, what effect has this experience had on you? There is a remarkable amount of suffering in Afghanistan. I’ve grown numb to a lot of tragic things here, because it could always be worse. I’m glad I’ve experienced these realities, because now I am more aware of the fate of those granted here in the United States. When I see people’s Facebook status’s complaining about how tough finals are, how much their lives suck, or how terrible a day they are having. I don’t care. I have no sympathy for them, not because my life is tough or I’m better than them in that respect, but because it’s all trivial. People all over the world don’t even have the opportunity to go to school and be come educated, instead they fight hunger, poverty, and the cold. They constantly risk being in the wrong place at the wrong time where some fanatic might detonate a car bomb and kill them. That’s a bad day, it’s not something you can just sleep off over a weekend of partying.

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me here, and thank you for your service. Well, it’s always a pleasure reflecting on my experiences as a whole. Thank you.