

I'm sitting here, alone, feeling mortified. Talking and thinking to myself. Nothing can help me. Even thinking of my beloved ones cannot ease the excruciating pain I am experiencing. Not because I am weak. But rather the great losses in my life, the memories of torment and torture have come back to haunt me. In this situation even stubbornness and resilience cannot help. The appalling treatment that the Bakhtiyari family has been put through and the brutalities, which refugees are regularly, subjected to in Australian detention centers brings back feelings and memories of my pain.

The two young brothers, Muntazer and Alamdar are on my mind. I am trying to comprehend Australia's detention laws for refugees. The emotional detachment that the Minister for Immigration and the Australian government has displayed towards refugees is one that I cannot make meaning of. I am bothered by the attitude of indifference that is so pervasive amongst our politicians and unfortunately many Australians. I am anxious about the insensitivity and apathy of 'ordinary' Australians.

The tears of a father, Mr. Bakhtiyari, who so helplessly, in his exhausted posture, begged us for help. This image will not fade from my memory. My tears are streaming down for Mr. Ali Bahktairi. This name is so familiar to my ear. It is such a Persian, such a Dari and such a Hazzariti name. "How on earth could they think he is not Afghani?" I ask myself, in silence.

It is absolutely tragic. It is immoral to sit and watch these pained people go through this. Where has the notion of our collective moral and ethical responsibilities to help the helpless been placed? I'm in pain. I want to gently remind you, that there are thousands and thousands of us amongst you, who have come from destructive places where torture, war and displacement are raging. We live with painful memories and try as hard as we can to reestablish our lives and to contribute to this country.

Watching how this government treats the detainees rekindles our painful past. It brings back nightmares of trauma and our tragic losses. And a deep sense of displacement takes over our bodies. I think Australians have to dig deeper into their hidden sensibilities and to remember the people they are living amongst. Perhaps this could allow Australians' to relearn to care for those that are displaced in their midst. One way to achieve this is by not allowing families like the Bakhtiyari's suffer more amongst us.

I wonder what history will say about Australia and Australians? Have we forgotten what happened in Europe? It was only half a century ago, that people watched idly when the minorities were being systematically eliminated. And we behave as if we don't know this. We watch daily those less fortunate than us in this world be humiliated and even eliminated. Who is responsible for creating this mess? What are our politicians doing to the democracy and freedom they claim we have to protect and enjoy in this country? And why do they think they are the right people to select those who should live amongst us? How can these leaders be democratic when they are full of distrust, fear and bugged by ignorance? Where is our empathy for those who come from real tragedies?

Mr. Bakhtiyari and his family are Dari speakers. They are Hazzarti. The majority Pashtun Afghans, who dominated the Taliban for a long time, has persecuted them. They are still fearful and distrustful toward the Pashtun people and do not have any confidence and trust to live with them. I wonder if a victim of rape would feel comfortable to live in the neighborhood where the rapist lives?

Mr Bakhtiyari's tears, as shown in our media, are the tears of all of those who have come from hell. We cry in our solitude about what we have lost and are still losing. I wonder how much a human being has to suffer in order to gain our sympathy, our humanity and trust. We seem to have mercy towards those who steal our public assets and some times even destroy other peoples' lives once they have shown remorse in public. Our attitude is so rigid and inhuman towards mostly innocent refugees whose crime has simply been to seek a safe sanctuary for themselves and their children. They searched for somewhere safe and far away from the brutality of war and violence. When they arrived they were treated with disdain and demonized.

Mr Bahtiyari and his family came from poverty and he is desperate to live with dignity and respect. What kind of lies and fabrications could he and his family concocted? What could you expect from a poor and illiterate mother who could not give precise information for gaining a visa? Ask my 75 years old mother about my birthday or her mother's birthday and she would give you a wrong answer. So does that mean she is a liar? We must understand that she simply does not know. Poor people, from my part of the world, are like that. Do the meticulous and dutiful bureaucrats who interviewed her and people like her, know this? Have they ever been to a remote and isolated village in Afghanistan or Middle East? If they had they would know that this woman is not lying or fabricating her identity.

It is tragic to reject a temporary refugee protection visa to a woman, because she could not detail the currency of her divided and brutalized country. In her homeland the warlords, have set their own laws for killings, rape and the destruction of innocent and defenseless people. She comes from a destitute and isolated village, out of reach of any modern facilities. This poor woman, like many could hardly venture out during the Taleban. Many are still fearful in the current chaotic environment of Afghanistan. Do we need to remind our officials, our politicians and an Australian public that is so easily manipulated by politicians, who see themselves as demigods, that there are no human rights for women in Afghanistan?

The treatment, which families like, the Bahtiyaris have been subjected to by our government reveals how far our liberal and democratic traditions have been desensitized and detached from the lives of the poor, the destitute and the vulnerable. It also shows how far the populace is removed from its own deep sense of collective responsibility towards the traumatized, the less fortunate and those that are at risk of danger. This is a drastic situation for us as a nation. For people like me the world and in particular Australia is an uncertain, terrifying and heartless place.

Mr. Bakhtiyri speaks a language that I speak. He has lived with the culture in which I was born and raised in. He is a Hazzarti and not a Sunni Muslim (Pushum Afghanis, the Talaban and their best friend Osama-Ben Din are all Sunni majorities, like the majority of Muslims in Pakistan). The Hazzarti people have always been despised, mistrusted and persecuted by the majority, Pushum, in that country.

No, Mr. Bakhtiyri is not lying about his background and he is not Pakistani. We have to believe this fact rather than punish him and his family.

Have mercy Australia. You will regret it, if you don't. It will haunt your conscious. Help the helpless, and give the displaced a chance, and please feel safe about them. Trust a little more in this distrustful world. Do it for your children, for a better future and for the enrichment of your democracy.

I urge you to think of us, who are amongst you, who are trying to cope with their aping experience. Remember, our nightmares and endless sleeplessness nights are ignited any time this kind of tragic news breaks out and we hear, see and read about it. We need your support to heal.

Mr. Ali Bakhtiyri and his family members, and others like them, who are in Australian detention centers, have to stay and live amongst us. They have to share their stories with us in order to remind us of our weaknesses and strengths. And most importantly so that we may reflect to further enrich our humanity towards the less fortunate. The challenge they pose for us is huge. I wonder if we are ready?

Mammad Aidani

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