

SEEKING ASYLUM AFTER THE TALIBAN REGIME ROSE TO POWER



*“For there is always light
If only if we’re brave enough to see it
If only we’re brave enough
To be it”*

- *Amanda Gorman*

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a qualitative in-depth geopolitical and historical analysis of past and contemporary Afghanistan to provide context in which readers can understand the current situation of the Republic. Through interviews, biographies and first-hand testimonials I have met the objectives previously established of illustrating how relentless colonisation, war and internal conflict have impeded durable peace in the state and I have raised awareness of the enduring sorrows Afghans face daily.

This study is the product of my desire for global justice and equality, and my firm belief in the importance of human rights for all.

RESUM

Aquest estudi presenta una anàlisi geopolítica i històrica qualitativa i en profunditat de l'Afganistan antic i contemporani per proporcionar un context en el qual els lectors puguin entendre la situació actual de la República. A través d'entrevistes, biografies i testimonis de primera mà he assolit els objectius establerts anteriorment d'il·lustrar com la colonització implacable, la guerra i els conflictes interns han impedit una pau duradora a l'estat i he conscienciat dels suplicis als quals s'enfronten els afganesos diàriament.

Aquest estudi és el producte del meu desig de justícia i igualtat global, i de la meva ferma creença en la importància dels drets humans per a tothom.

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Most importantly, thank you to the speakers. Laia Marsal, Nawzadi Ahmad Jan and Najib Afghan. It was an absolute pleasure learning from you. I will continue to spread your stories so more people understand the pain you have endured and the hope you have despite it all. I cherish your appreciation for my work and the kindness with which you have always treated me, even before we met.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Dictionary defines “fate” as “*the development of events outside a person's control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power*”. I beg to differ. I believe a more accurate definition of “fate” would be “*the development of events outside a person's control, regarded as predetermined by their birthplace*”.

Since my youth, I have always been enthralled by history and politics. After reading and studying contemporary and past events I began to understand how our lives are determined based on our homeland. I began to comprehend that I have more opportunities than a girl born in a turbulent country, just because I was born in peaceful Spain. The understanding of this began to make me feel sceptical about Oxford's definition of fate, however, it was not until the 15th of August 2021, when the Taliban took over Kabul, that I completely disagreed with it.

The images of Afghan citizens flocking into Kabul's airports and blocking aeroplanes, or even, climbing on them, deeply impacted me. The despair of families trying to escape during this pandemonium and the unfairness of this situation are what motivated me to devote my project to all the Afghan refugees.

This research project is divided into two sections, the theoretical and practical groundwork, and it encompasses a thorough geopolitical and historical background of Afghanistan, to better understand the significant repercussions the Taliban's rise to power had on the already volatile and weakened country, and, most importantly, its citizens. It also includes the logistics of my conference and a detailed testimonial of the event, which, ultimately, is the main premise of this study. The documentation of this demanding endeavour includes my opening speech, the publicity previously disseminated, a photo compilation, and two articles published by *El Punt Avui* and *El Diari de Girona* about my conference.

Furthermore, this paper contains two interviews and three brief biographies of the speakers, which enriches the project by providing the first-hand experiences of Afghan refugees living in Catalonia and a social activist helping asylum seekers flee the country. Finally, the last part of my work comprises the conclusions drawn from the previous investigation and a bibliography of the pictures, websites and books used.

Before I started this project I was already interested in the topic, hence I had prior information. Nonetheless, all the knowledge I had acquired was about current Afghanistan and its situation after the Taliban overthrew the pre-existing government.

My main source of information before was the TV3 news channel, any facts beyond that, I learned them through reading social media educational accounts, such as @rukshanamedia (a grassroots news channel from Afghanistan).

The goals I intended to accomplish with my research project were to prove how years of incessant colonisation and exploitation of Afghanistan by more powerful empires have impeded the development of the state and are responsible for their struggle to obtain a stable government. Another objective is to spread awareness of the harsh reality of modern Afghanistan in addition to educating people of the sorrows and tragedies Afghans face because of this unjust reality.

The methodology I adopted in order to achieve both goals was, first and foremost, a rigorous research study of Afghanistan's political and social history, drawn mainly from websites and books, to provide an in-depth analysis on it and present the readers with the current dilemma facing Afghans nowadays. Moreover, I organised my conference by first contacting potential speakers, interviewing two, and planning ahead to ensure I was prepared for any eventuality in the organisation of the event. Ultimately, I documented the event and drew conclusions from it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The economic, geopolitical, and democratic turbulence caused by incessant domination by foreign conquerors which have impeded durable peace and progress in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, dates back centuries, even millennia. From Darius I of Babylonia circa 500 BC to the most recent coup d'état with the Taliban regime.

This background is how I framed and understood the Afghan historical and socio-political experience and how I portrayed the unjust conceptualization of it being the “failed country”, or as it is more informally referred to “the graveyard of empires”, that further affected the international notion of the Afghan state.

1. THE MAKINGS OF MODERN AFGHANISTAN

1.1. British Colonisation and the First Anglo-Afghan War 1808-1842

The area now known as Afghanistan did not assume its present form until the end of the nineteenth century, when its political borders were delineated by neighbouring British and Russian imperial powers. While important dynasties previously emerged from the area, including the eleventh-century Ghaznavids and the fifteenth-century Timurids of Herat, as well as the Lodhi rulers of Delhi and the 1747 Durrani Empire under Ahmad Shah’s rule, this description of its history will start with the period following the fall of the Durrani



Fig. 1. Map of the Punjab and countries of the western of the Indus (1809), the lands which formed modern day Afghanistan.

Empire since this period marked the beginnings of the colonial encounter between the Afghans and the British which largely shaped the region’s subsequent history.

The British colonisation period starts in 1808, after the Durrani Empire began to disintegrate and with the dispatch of the first British diplomatic mission to the court of the Afghan Shah (king) Shah

Shuja, and concludes in 1880 with the British victory at the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

Afghanistan was an extremely fluid political domain during the first half of the nineteenth century, especially since its bilateralism with British India. During that time, the British incubated an understanding of Afghanistan which formed the foundation for their later actions and policies. That creation of the country, based upon the European colonial empires, brought about massive re-alignments in social, cultural, political, and economic patterns, significantly impacting the history of Afghanistan.

Under the leadership of Mountstuart Elphinstone (a young Company administrator), the first British mission began in November 1808, when Elphinstone and his large retinue left Delhi. After signing the BEIC Treaty (British East India Company) with Shuja on the 14th of April 1809 to secure mutual defence treaties in the event of a French invasion of India, he and Shuja spent the next five months working together.

When Elphinston's diplomatic mission concluded, Shah Shuja's territory had expanded to include present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan's border provinces, Balochistan, and a tenuous hold on Sindh. In 1818, the Durrani Tribes declared a civil war against this considerably smaller political entity.



Fig. 2. In 1839, the British invaded Afghanistan and restored Shah Shuja to the throne as Emir of Afghanistan.

British relations with Afghanistan during the 1820s and 1830s are known for imperial hubris, initially by some European countries and later by the Russians for utilitarian interests. By the late 1820s, the British understood Afghanistan was the 'highway of conquest' through which the gathering Russian menace would launch its inevitable invasion of India. This great Anglo-Russian rivalry to colonise became known as the 'Great Game'.

The British "opened" the Indus River to commerce in 1837 in order to flood the Afghan market with British produced products with the aim to establish their dominance in the Afghan regions as quickly as possible. They even attempted to forge closer commercial ties, but when their efforts failed and more extreme action was obviously required.

Additionally, the warm welcome given to a Russian spy in Kabul put the political balance in danger. As a result, the British opted to invade Afghanistan on October 1st, 1938, becoming caught up in a mess that swiftly devolved into a disaster. With their defeat in 1842, the British decided to abandon, for that moment, attempts to integrate the Afghan political entity into their imperial framework and instead concentrated on the chaos in their own territories. This decision profoundly influenced the Afghan state under Abdur Rahman Khan's rule in the late nineteenth century.

1.2. The Second Anglo-Afghan War 1878-1880

In 1878-80, British-India was part of the war to prevent Russian interference in Afghanistan. While the British eventually succeeded in controlling the country, they suffered several complications during the campaign.

A real threat to the British Indian domains was perceived by the British government in the nineteenth century as the expansion of Russian influence over Central Asia. This led to the aforementioned invasion by Britain with disastrous consequences.

In an uninvited Russian diplomatic mission in 1876, the Soviets visited the Emir¹ of Afghanistan, Shir Ali, once again raising the menace of Russian interference. The British too sent an undesired envoy. When Ali then refused to accept the British mission, the Viceroy of India (Lord Lytton), decided to act and launched the Second Anglo-Afghan War on November 21, 1878, orchestrating a British invasion.

Shir Ali fled his capital and country, dying in exile early in 1879. The British army occupied

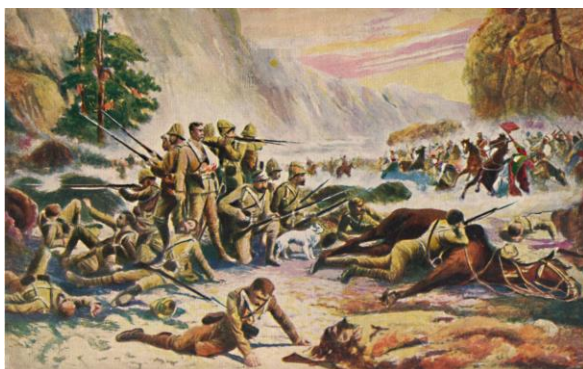


Fig. 3. In the 1880 Battle of Maiwand, during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, Afghan forces destroyed British and Indian troops.

Kabul, as it had in the first war, and a treaty was signed at Gandomak on May 26, 1879, recognizing Shir Ali's son, Yaqub Khan, as Emir. He subsequently agreed to receive a permanent British embassy in Kabul. In addition, he agreed to conduct his foreign relations with other states in accordance "with the wishes and advice" of the British government.

¹ Emir: A ruler of particular countries in the Muslim world.

This British triumph didn't last long, however. Sir Louis Cavagnari, the British envoy to Kabul, and his escort were murdered on September 3, 1879. British forces were again dispatched, and before the end of October, they, again, occupied Kabul. Yaqub abdicated the throne, which remained vacant until July 1880, when Abd al-Rahman, Shir Ali's nephew, became Emir. During the reign of Abd al-Rahman, the boundaries of modern Afghanistan were drawn by the British and the Russians.

2. TWENTIETH CENTURY MONARCHY

After a century of European imperial colonisation and rule, Afghanistan attained political independence early in the 20th century. As the country emerged from isolation, it started to grapple with the social and economic changes that were occurring everywhere in the world. Nonetheless, the slow progress of modernization and the widespread hostility to



Fig. 4. Engraving of King Habibullah Khan in 1893.

government reform programmes meant that the lives of the majority of Afghans were still closely tied to traditional patterns at the time the monarchy was abolished in 1973.

2.1. The Reign of Habibullah Khan 1901-19

With his throne secure since 1901, Habibullah Khan (1872–1919), was able to devote most of his time to achieving policy goals, reforming and modernising the territory, and maintaining careful neutrality.

Habibullah gave the local Khans and Chiefs (two different dynasties) a surprising amount of autonomy in local governance and relaxed military conscription since he did not have his father's strict authoritarian personality and had, instead, inherited a state that had already been forcibly pacified.

Habibullah established significant legislative reforms, abolished merciless punishments, and dismantled his father's espionage network. He also permitted many notable exiles to return to the nation and politically oppressed notables to become active. He oversaw a period of increased internal commerce, which was facilitated by new roads, various enterprises constructed with foreign technical support, and better communications.

In addition to founding the renowned Habibia School, a military academy, and a teacher training facility, Habibullah also had a cutting-edge hospital constructed and several significant schools modelled on European institutions.

Many of the country's aristocracy began to acquire Western values, but such cultural changes did not arrive in the rural areas where most of the population was amassed.

During World War I, Afghanistan remained neutral since Habibullah was naturally reluctant to begin hostilities against the two superpowers, with no likely support on the ground from the Central Powers. Upon the war's end, the Emir expected Britain to affirm Afghanistan's full independence in foreign policy. But Britain was too preoccupied with a renewed northern threat posed by the Russian Civil War.

2.2. The Reign of Amanullah Khan 1919–29

Afghanistan shared the passion for revolution and change that engulfed most of the world after World War I. The third son of Habibullah Khan, Amanullah Khan (1892–1960), led the nation to independence from British rule and fought against tribal uprisings while attempting reforms until a violent traditionalist backlash forced him to flee and abdicate in 1929.



Fig. 5. King Amanullah Khan, in the center and his cabinet dressed in European styled business suits, in 1928.



Fig. 6. King Amanullah Khan (left) with King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy in 1928 for his world tour.

Amanullah

expressed at an assembly in Kabul that his father's dream of total independence was his main priority. Viceroy Chelmsford's unclear response to the Emir's letter announcing independence prompted the Emir to declare a jihad² and dispatch troops to the border, surprising the British. The Afghan War of Independence, preceded by an insurrection among a

² Jihad: A struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam.

handful of the border tribes, began shortly after the British also pushed forces toward the frontier.

At the time, India was afflicted by anti-British rioting, pro-independence enthusiasm, hunger, and influenza. The Indian army had been devastated by the combat in Europe, and the remaining British forces in India, were demoralised and in the process of demobilisation.

After the feared Indian uprising did not happen, Amanullah expressed his wish for a peaceful ending, which benefited the weary British (some troops had refused to move to the front). The viceroy approved a cease-fire on June 3, 1919. He sent a negotiating delegation to Rawalpindi in July, where they sealed an armistice agreement that strengthened the Durand Line and put a stop to British funding for the Emir.

Amanullah was lauded as a hero both at home and abroad when the British appended a letter to the agreement declaring that his country was "officially free and independent in its internal and foreign affairs."

It wasn't until November 1921 that a definitive treaty allowing for the exchange of ambassadors was finalised; at that time, the Emir and his foreign minister, Tarzi, had long been pursuing an independent foreign policy.

When Shinwari³ tribesmen led a rebellion in Jalalabad in 1928, Amanullah's reform effort started to fall apart. Many of the soldiers in the king's bodyguard deserted as the armed tribal warriors pressed into the capital. A Tajik⁴ rebel group was also leading another tribal uprising that was heading toward Kabul. Amanullah's term as king lasted just three days until he fled to safety in India due to a lack of other options. He left the throne in the hands of his brother Inayatullah. Amanullah had gathered a small fleet of soldiers in the meantime to return to Kabul and retake the capital from the Tajik conqueror Habibullah Khalakani. His efforts to reestablish order to his dream of reforming Afghanistan into a modern state were futile, and he fled to Italy and lived there in exile until his death in 1960.

The Tajik ruling endured ten months, from January to October 1929, beneath a defiant pioneer and Tajik outlaw. A few of the Pashtun tribes briefly assisted him to topple

³ Shinwari: An ethnic Pashtun tribe of Afghanistan. Pashtuns are an Iranian ethnic group who are native to the geographic region of Pashtunistan in the present-day countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

⁴ Tajik: A member of the Iranian ethnic group that speaks Persian

Amanullah, but since he was not Pashtun, he would not be permitted to govern in the position of authority for long. In fact, the Musahiban brothers were the heirs in line for the throne, as the relatives of Dost Mohammad⁵, and Nadir Shah was the oldest. After a few months dedicated to gaining tribal support and popularity, the Musahiban brothers were able to cross the border into Afghanistan. The large force defeated the Tajik ruler and seized Kabul on October 10, 1929. Habiballah Khalakani fled but several days later, early in November, he was captured and executed. Soon after, Nadir Shah was proclaimed the King of Afghanistan.

2.3. The Reign of Nadir Shah 1929–33



Fig. 7. Picture of King Nadir Shah. Date is unknown.

Mohammad Nadir Shah (1929 - 1933) became King of Afghanistan and quickly began to reassert traditional Islamic values in support of a more gradual approach to modernization.

He quickly eliminated most of Amanullah's reform programmes. Despite his efforts to rebuild the army, religious and tribal leaders in Afghanistan grew strong in 1930, such as the insurgence of the Shinwari Pashtuns, and instigated a rebellion on land that same year. Ultimately, by the end of 1931, many of the rebellions had been put down and the country had moved from a time of extremism to a more stable central rule.

⁵ Dost Mohammad was the son of the Barakzai Pashtuns dynasty's chief and one of the rulers of Afghanistan.

As part of his reforms to enhance the previously installed changes, Nadir Shah appointed a cabinet of 10 members and approved the constitution of 1931. The government became a royal oligarchy as part of the new doctrine.

His reign was used not only to undo previous reforms, but he continued to promote his cousin Amanullah's philosophy of what a good government entails. King Nadir Shah continued to modernise Afghanistan with roads and communication networks. Moreover, he promoted regeneration initiatives by maintaining diplomatic relations with foreign states and ameliorating the country's economy.



Fig. 8. The assassination of King Nadir Shah, 1933.

Nonetheless, in spite of the positive reforms, Nadir Shah limited the rights to free speech, leading to the imprisonment and murder of thousands of Afghan intellectuals who did not adhere to the law.

In November 1933, King Nadir Shah was shot and killed by an Afghan teenager, Abdul Khaliq Hazara, who as a Kabul student was displeased with the state of Afghanistan under the new legislation and rule of King Nadir. As punishment for the assassination of the King, Khaliq was tortured to death. After Nadir's assassination, his 19-year-old son, Zahir, succeeded to the throne.

2.4. The Last King of Afghanistan: The Reign of Zahir Shah 1933–73



Fig. 9. King Zahir Shah after his recent ascension to power in 1933.

From King Zahir Shah's accession to power in 1933 until his deposition in 1973, the country of Afghanistan underwent a range of social, economic, and political changes. King Zahir's reign saw Afghanistan embrace modernization in a bid to meet the challenges of surviving in a modern world.

The modernization drive of the royal family certainly succeeded in improving the nation's economy and enhancing the state's capacity, but its policies also unleashed a backlash that would ultimately play a part in the monarchy's downfall.

For the first three years of his ruling, King Zahir exercised very little authority, due to the power being actually succeeded by his three uncles, Sardar Hashim Khan, Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan, and Sardar Shah Wali Khan, who tried to uphold their brother Nadir Shah's vision of a slow-paced modernization program which would not upset the traditional elements of society.

During the tenure of the eldest uncle Hashim Khan as prime minister, the government concentrated on a modernization program that almost entirely revolved around seeking to increase its potential for state-building, primarily by trying to boost military dimensions. This was beneficial in two ways: First off, the military modernization permitted the royal family to guide the evolution that was starting to emerge among the growing number of graduates from contemporary institutions in that direction. As a result, neither modernists nor traditionalists could protest. Second, because the army was a tool of the government's power, it would boost its legitimacy.

Subsequently, the expansion of communication between the capital and the rural areas took place. This allowed the government to have a more direct role in those areas since the establishment of roads would enable the freer movement of troops which could then be used in the event of an uprising or revolt.

By focusing on material rather than social modernization, the Musahibans rose to power because they were able to bring order to a chaotic environment. Their power base was not underpinned by ideologies so much but by their ability to offer social stability and prosperity.

The pro-Amanullah faction began to fade away as the 1930s went on, leaving the government more time to focus on economic development. But, by 1939, Afghanistan was genuinely afraid of being invaded by the Soviet Union, hence they accepted military assistance as long as it did not turn into intervention. They did the same with Britain but received insufficient response and due to that Afghanistan looked to the axis countries, Germany and Italy, for loans and assistance because of their prior experience with Imperial Britain and Russia.

Although the country remained neutral during World War I, The Great War forced pivotal awareness among the Afghans.

The war placed drastic financial burdens on the populace which triggered certain debates. As a result, World War II convinced Afghan modernists that reform was a matter of survival. And, although the misfortune Afghans experienced was not necessarily because of the monarchy, it did raise questions about the royal family's ability to provide for the people's needs.

At the same time, the Soviet Union and Britain demanded that relations with Germany and Italy be severed as of October 31. They had made this demand in response to war threats against Iran and Iraq in the previous year. The idea that the nation's independence was in danger as a result of this, would have undoubtedly led the Musahiban to abandon their cautious modernization plans out of fear of the looming threat of civil unrest.

In 1946, the uncompromising Hashim Khan stepped down as Prime Minister and was replaced by his more open-minded brother Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan to offset a potential power grab by the country's intelligentsia who were agitating for greater social and political reform, the monarchy decided to delegate a degree of authority to some form of representational democracy that incorporated the intelligentsia. This led to what has been referred to as, "The First Democratic Period".

The most prominent political movement that came about in "The First Democratic Period" was the *Wikh Zalmiyan*⁶. It was formed in 1947 and most of its prominent members were recruited from major literary institutions. The movement was united by a liberal outlook that sought to enact political and social reforms. In 1949, the government announced that there would be parliamentary elections, but as is often the case in less-developed countries, the transition from an absolutist government to a representative one was not well handled. The Members of the Parliament's (MP) newfound power saw them try to introduce a series of changes that the political establishment was not willing to tolerate.

⁶ *Wikh Zalmiyan* translates to Awakened Youth

In 1951, liberal MPs ratified a law that ensured the freedom of press, meaning that journalists could have complete freedom as to what they wrote about. Naturally, this led

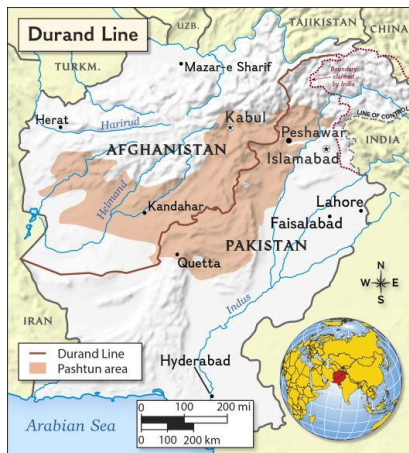


Fig. 11. Durand Line outlined in red.

to disagreeable discussions and by 1953, due to this mayhem of disputes, the government ended the parliament and started to criticise the royal family itself. In order to assert its presence and stabilise the political situation, the royal family elevated the King's autocratic cousin Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan to the position of Prime Minister in 1953.

Within a brief period of time, the *Wikh Zalmiya* fractured into various groups due to the movement's official support for Pashtunistan.

Pashtunistan is a reference to calls for an independent state in the area of newly created Pakistan that was dominated by the Pashtuns and was separated from Afghanistan by the Durand Line in 1893. For this reason, the *Wikh Zalmiya* was criticised for having a Pashtun ethnic-nationalist tone by some of its non-Pashtun members. This criticism has similarly been levelled at the Afghan royal family as well, who besides being Pashtuns themselves, patronised and cultivated the Pashtunistan idea.

For many liberal Afghan politicians and intellectuals, the Pashtunistan issue was used as a vehicle for undermining the autocracy of the Afghan monarchy.

For the Musahibans, the Pashtunistan issue was used as an opportunity to enact their vision of modernization in a tribal nation. The primary form of opposition to the monarchy had always been the forces of conservatism epitomised by the tribes and the *Ulama*⁷. With the Pashtun tribes proving to be a formidable counterpart to a government authority, the Pashtunistan issue was utilised by the Musahibans as a means of gaining the support of the powerful Pashtun tribes within the country whilst distracting those

⁷ Ulama: The interpreters of religious knowledge in Islam.

same conservative elements of society from the social and political modernization methods that they wanted to introduce.



Fig. 12. King Zahir Shah (left) and President Kennedy (right) greet the crowd in September 1963.



Fig. 13. US-President Kennedy with his guest, King Mohammed Zahir Shah in a limousine after the Shah's arrival in Washington, D.C. on 6 September 1963.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Afghanistan benefited economically from the Cold War rivalry between the USA and the USSR. Even before the 1950s, these two states were competing with each other to gain the support of the non-partisan less developed countries. This led to the advocacy of a notion called “Developmentalism” which posited that it was the moral duty of well-developed states to help the least ones in the form of developmental aid.

From 1950 to 1965, Afghanistan applied for and received more than 80 million dollars in loans from the export-import bank. In 1955 when Soviet Prime Minister Krushchev announced his economic offensive, Afghanistan was going to be the benefactor of more than 100 million dollars in credit. The country's rulers were obligated to utilise their historic location on the crossroads to find the best deal for their country by playing a game of accepting aid from both superpowers but not preferring one over the other, over time this proved to be a dangerous game which helped lead to the Afghan-Soviet war of the 1980s.

The desire for a constitutional monarchy, which was originally made at the beginning of the 20th century, was eventually fulfilled by the constitution of 1964.

The constitutional alliance, which was made up of the King, the traditional elite, and the educated elite, made it possible for this significant piece of law to be passed. However,

the alliance broke up, and a rising feeling of anarchy persisted throughout the constitutional decade as the terror of Darwood's political dominance receded.

Amid the increased political upheaval there were four main schools of thought that could be detected amongst the newly active parliament: The Traditionalists, who favoured a strong emphasis on Afghan culture and the retaining of Islamic principles; the Adopters, wanting to fuse western technology with Afghan culture; the Democrats, who sought a democratic republic; and the Marxist-Leninists, who were theoretically compelled to the revolutionary overthrow of a non-communist government and established the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965. These ideological viewpoints became more widespread thanks to various publications that came to the surface as a result of the 1965 press law.



Fig 10. Activists of the Kabul University Students Union (1950) who were part of the (at the time unconsolidated) pro-democratic, reformist opposition movement.

The confusion was heightened by the Marxist-Leninists whose publications were shut down accused of embracing anti-monarchic views. They subsequently used their support amongst university students of Kabul to utilise obstructionist tactics that included more than two thousand strikes, demonstrations, and protests.

The rise of communist political activity drew a conservative reaction from the *Ulama* as well, a trend that would reach its peak during the Afghan Jihad in the 1980s.

As a further complication, a plethora of climate disasters occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which further undermined the government's credibility. Consequently, citizens could predict a revolution within a decade of 1971. Within five years the first abortive coup occurred; most likely it emerged from the left. In 1973, whilst the king was abroad for medical treatment in Italy, his cousin and ex-prime minister Daoud staged the bloodless coup that toppled the monarchy and replaced it with a republic that had him at the helm.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN

3.1. A Coup and a Revolution 1973-1978

In the early 1970s, Afghanistan was on the brink of crisis. As a result of a severe drought, Afghanistan's economy collapsed and corruption charges were levelled against the government. On July 17, 1973, under these circumstances, Prime Minister Daoud seized power via a military coup and forced the Shah into exile in Italy. The rebellion had been planned for more than a year and was aided both financially and militarily by the Soviet Union, an alliance that did not please the increasingly outspoken Islamic activists. In 1976, Daoud established his own political party, the National Revolutionist Party, which would be the crux of all political interests.



Fig. 14. Portrayed of Mohammed Daoud Khan in 1977.

The stability that King Zahir had strived for under his “New Democracy” was not achieved, and in one swift move, the rule of the monarchy, as begun by Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1747, was abolished.

Daoud reignited a rivalry with Pakistan that was largely focused on his irredentist desires to reclaim territory which Pakistan subsequently inherited upon its creation in 1947. Daoud’s subversive activities in Pakistan enraged the Pashtuns, the politically and demographically dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan, and led the ISI (the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan) to start funding prominent Afghan Islamists in their anti-government activities. Furthermore, Daoud’s coalition with the communists disintegrated when he called a new cabinet that was devoid of members of the PDPA and tried to minimise the influence of communist members that helped him in his 1973 coup.

By 1978, Daoud had placed himself in a precarious situation where he faced opposition from a wide spectrum of groups, including Islamic extremists and liberal university students, and had no support base. A communist regime was founded in Afghanistan as a result of the Saur Revolution, which was started in April 1978 and resulted in the death of Daoud and his family as well as the perfect chance for communists to topple him.

3.2. The Afghan-Soviet War 1979–1989 and the birth of the Taliban Regime 1994-2001

The PDPA immediately set about bringing widespread changes to Afghan society. These changes were intended to rapidly modernise Afghanistan, something that other rulers in the twentieth century had tried to do, such as King Amanullah. But the PDPA went further, attacking practices and traditions they considered feudal. This antagonistic approach was extended to Islam as well. The PDPA's outlook seemed to be rooted in a desire to vindicate the Marxist statement "religion is the opium of the masses".

The socio-cultural makeover of Afghanistan meant that the new leadership was on a collision course with the majority of its citizens. Ordinary Afghans resented and resisted what they viewed as a forced attempt to change their identity.

This led to the expansion of an Islamist rebel movement called the Mujahideen⁸, which was formed by a significant number of defecting soldiers. They portrayed themselves as being the opponents of the "un-Islamic communists".



Fig. 15. Mujahideen rebels in 1987.

The rising anti-government movements plus some bad decisions the PDPA made worried the Soviet Union, the key ally of the Afghan communists. In September 1979, there was a power struggle within the communist faction and President Muhammed Tarakai was removed from power and later executed. But the USSR continued their alliance in fear of how losing a communist partner could negatively influence the outcome during the ongoing Cold War.

It was because they only viewed Afghanistan in the Cold War context, in their decision-making process, hence they deemed the Mujahideens as U.S.-sponsored allies, thus not acknowledging that most citizens disagreed with the PDPA's perspective. This key failure, not American encouragement, was what gave rise to the Mujahideen's overthrow of power, according to Britannica and EUAA.

⁸ Mujahideen translates to "those who engage in Jihad".

The Soviet-Afghan War officially started on Christmas Eve of 1979, when a combined air and land invasion of Afghanistan initiated. The Red Army⁹, quickly seized many urban areas, roads, and communication lines. When President Amin was captured and executed, disputes swiftly erupted internationally on whether this was an intervention or an invasion; naturally, the West and many Muslim countries under the USSR's control decided on the latter.



Fig. 16. U.S. President Reagan meeting with Afghan mujahideen at the White House in 1983.

The tribal warlords had been repulsed to the mountains by the invasion, but this would only spell a new stage in their struggle. The foreign atheist/orthodox invader gave credence to this being a Jihad or Holy War¹⁰ and the warlords were quickly united as the Mujahideen, committed to combating the Soviets.

The U.S took the ensuing mayhem as an opportunity to intervene and try to win, therefore they began funnelling equipment through Pakistan to the Mujahideen, knowing this would benefit all three parties.

However, despite all the support, the Soviets still held a clear upper hand under the guidance of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Mujahideen indulged in guerilla warfare and initiated a repeated effort to drive away the fighters which would prove useless as they always struck back and more fiercely. The Red Army's constant successful search and destroy missions were also in vain, as no matter how many battles they won, they continued to lose the war.

⁹ Red Army: The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, often shortened to the Red Army, was the army and air force of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic.

¹⁰ Holy War: A Holy War is a war which is primarily caused or justified by differences in religion.

It was not until 1985, that this pattern had noticeably weakened and diminished the Soviet forces and therefore the citizens' hopes to win. The illusion of grand communist power began to disintegrate before them. The next year the war effort was only further degraded as missiles began to be supplied to the Mujahideen, accurately downing Soviet helicopters and crippling the army's ability to scale behind mountains.



Fig. 17. Soviet helicopter and tank operations in the Afghan War, Afghanistan, 1984.

Finally, an exit strategy would be put in place and the fighting would be directed only against the Afghan army itself. This would be increased further in 1988 when

Gorbachev officially signed off on the Geneva Accords, an agreement that would see the USSR begin to withdraw, and no further intervention from any superpower was supposed to continue.

The Afghan-Soviet era officially ended in 1989, when the last of the Red Army left Afghanistan, but the mujahideen continued to resist Najibullah's government and receive aid from the USSR until 1991 when the latter was dismantled.

Najibullah disbanded the government in 1992 when the warlords of the Mujahideen finally surrendered the capital, Kabul. At the gates of victory, they sought to reach an agreement on how things would move forward, and they all except for Mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who sought sole rule, agreed on Ahmad Massoud's proposal that they rule an Islamic coalition government. Owing to that, the war continued for several years between Massoud's alliance and Hekmatyar's Pakistani-backed army.

It seemed that in 1994, Massoud had bested Hekmatyar, until a man by the name of Mohammed Mullah Omar rallied his followers to further the fight against Massoud. They called themselves the Taliban.

Pakistan's favour transferred to this new group, and in 1996 the Taliban seized control of the majority of the country, winning Kabul. After brutally murdering former president Najibullah, they declared themselves an Islamic emirate and continued to fight in the north of the state against Massoud who was unwavering in his resistance. Their confrontation abruptly ended when Massoud was assassinated on the 9th of September 2001 by Taliban members who had claimed to be reporters. Merely two days later, the terrorist cell

Al Qaeda attacked New York's World Trade Center, and its leader, Osama Bin Laden, was offered shelter in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.



Fig. 18. The September 11 attacks after the first plane crushed World Trade Center.

The attacks led U.S. President George Bush to declare the “War on Terror” and demanded the Taliban surrender Bin Laden. This decision was especially ironic since formerly in the war they had provided an arsenal to the Mujahideen group (in order to help them win the war), and thus the Taliban and Al Qaeda, their successors.

3.3. The Taliban Era 1996-2001

The era from 1996 to 2001 under the control of the Taliban can be considered the least democratic and most despotic period in the history of Afghanistan. During this time, only three countries offered diplomatic recognition: the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. The majority of the other surrounding countries opposed the Taliban and associated themselves with the Northern Alliance.



Fig. 19. Taliban members after reaching Kabul in 1996

In a bloodless yet powerful manner, the Taliban swept across Afghanistan, segregating and eliminating the Mujahideen in all cities. Adding the growing support from the Islamic students, the Afghan people welcomed them as they helped eradicate the “plague” of Islamic warriors without much violence. It was therefore an upsetting shock to the citizens when the Taliban took over Kabul and violently demonstrated how the Taliban would punish enemies and offenders of the Islamic faith.

Mullah Omar and the advisers he was surrounded with had no experience in government, let alone eagerness to acquire it. The institutional structure of the country was never enhanced and had completely collapsed through war and lack of unity, their only interest was to implement a radical Islamic state. When, as a consequence, most government services ceased to operate, the authorities, ironically, appeared unconcerned and invested their resources in military needs or to provide the minimum infrastructure needed to support the military, the opium trade, smuggling, and the shipment of goods. After installing a repressive, extreme application of Islamic laws, all women were dismissed from employment outside their homes. Since women were the mainstay of the education system and a key component of health care, such services were decimated. Among many, these were a few of the laws ratified by the Taliban:

SOME OF THE LAWS RATIFIED BY THE TALIBAN REGIME

1. A ban on playing or listening to music.
2. A ban on women's activity outside the home unless accompanied by a *mahram*.¹¹
3. A ban on nail polish. The punishment for transgression will be the mutilation of fingers.
4. Compulsory painting of all windows, so women can not be seen from outside their homes.
5. A minimum beard length for men.
6. The institution of stoning, amputation, and public execution as punishments.
7. A ban on education for girls even in private homes.
8. Anyone who converts from Islam to any other religion will be executed.
9. A ban on certain games including kite flying.¹²
10. Ordered that all people with non-Islamic names change them to Islamic ones.
11. Whipping women in public for having non-covered ankles.
12. A ban on women talking or shaking hands with non-*mahram* males.
13. A ban on women's presence on radio, television, or public gatherings of any kind.

¹¹ Mahram: A close male relative such as a father, brother or husband.

¹² Kite Flying is deemed as "un-Islamic" since the Taliban consider this activity distracts believers from practising "religious duties".

14. Forced haircuts upon Afghan youth.

In principle, the Taliban leaders were not against the idea of establishing good relations on their own terms with the United States, the United Nations, or any other foreign power. Nevertheless, their commitment to the pan-Islamic cause outweighed any other foreign policy aim, guaranteeing their isolation and eventual defeat. This defeat would take place on the 6th of December 2001, a day after anti-Taliban Afghan delegates approved the Bonn Agreement and the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) was formed, which was the first administration of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban and would lead to the development of Afghanistan during the next decades. Subsequently, Mullah Omar surrendered his remaining troops in Kandahar to local chiefs to the U.S., effectively ending the Taliban's five years of rule.

3.4. The Following Decades to Current Afghanistan 2001-2022

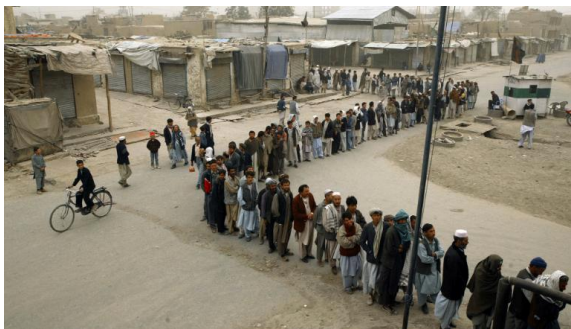


Fig. 20. Afghans in Kabul line up to vote in the country's first democratic election in October 2004.

After the Taliban's rule ended, Afghanistan's previous social and political structures had been completely dismantled and the nation had reverted to its pre-1995 situation. However, balanced against these negative aspects, were two positive factors: the people's exhaustion and their eagerness to rebuild their country, and the U.S.'s intervention.

A gradual, yet uneven process of stabilisation took place in the following years, starting with the 2004 elections for a new President. After Hamid Karzai was elected, parliamentary and provincial elections took place in December 2005. The new government said they'd sought to restore the state and fight its pivotal problems: the influence of drugs in the country, the mass exodus of Afghans that upset its previous ethnic and religious group structure, and the Taliban's attempts to rise to power again. But, as it is widely known, Karzai won both of the elections, the 2004th and the 2009th after he and his associates committed electoral fraud.

During the next decade, overcoming the challenges of nation building and Karzai's evident kleptocracy, Afghanistan was able to advance and achieve stability.

Thanks to the billions of dollars of economic assistance and opium money¹³ the country's economy recovered and it barely faltered due to the return of the majority of refugees who re-entered the state's labour market.

Education was also reinstated, however, due to the existing misogynistic patriarchal mindset in society, some women, especially in the outskirts of cities, were still deprived of school and had to attend clandestine schools for girls. Nonetheless, there were still milestones in women's rights, such as the granting of equal rights to women in the 2004 constitution, the presence of three women in the new cabinet, and the naming of Habiba Sarabi as the governor of the Bamiyan province.



Fig. 21. Governor of Bamiyan province, Habiba Sarabi, makes remarks at a ceremony in 2011.

Finally, safety skyrocketed since the Afghan military was the U.S.'s main investment and the foreign troops' key role in extending Kabul's control over the country, especially in the context of trying to reconstruct and secure the country. The United Nations provided



Fig. 22. Children watch a Canadian soldier conducting a dusk patrol in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in October 2009.

needed legitimacy to U.S. and NATO intervention was active in several key fields in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

The U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan was, as aforementioned, the result of the declaration of the War on Terror, officially known as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). This operation's aim was to overthrow terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and capture Al Qaeda leader

Osama Bin Laden. During the time it lasted, the Taliban regime was cornered, allowing the rebirth of democracy in the state.

¹³ Opium trade was one of Afghanistan's main sources of income. The export value of the 2007 opium harvest was \$3.1 billion, according to the UNODC.

On the 22nd of June 2011, President Obama announced the prediction of a withdrawal from Afghanistan after the killing of Osama Bin Laden and the end of the Taliban momentum. Later, on December 28, 2014, after 13 years of combat operations, President Obama announced the end of OEF and the beginning of a follow-on mission: Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS), which consisted of training and assisting Afghan security forces.

During the summer of 2021 the U.S. withdrew a massive number of soldiers, and taking advantage of their military situation, the Taliban carried out their most important offensive, winning Kabul on the 15th of August. Fifteen days later, on the 30th of August, the U.S. troops completely pulled out of the country allowing the complete take-over of the Taliban Dictatorship which became the country's de facto authorities.

3.4.1. The Impact of the Taliban's Arrival to Power

Since the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan has faced intersecting and overwhelming humanitarian and economic crises, a result of challenges both pre-existing (such as natural disasters and Afghanistan's weak economic base) and new (such as the cutting of international development assistance).

To be more precise, the current humanitarian crisis can be summarised into three big catastrophes:

a) The collapse of the economy:

Afghanistan is the most foreign aid-dependent country and due to the rise of the Taliban, their economic needs have been frozen, creating a domino effect that gave rise to the breakdown of the bank system, which was pivotal to sustaining the country's economy. Moreover, restrictions on women's access to work have cost the country 1 Billion dollars, sending 97% of its population below the poverty line by the end of 2023.

b) The deadly famine:

Widespread hunger is a side effect of the economic downfall. The steep rise in food prices and massive inflation have impeded millions of afghans' meeting nutritional needs and access to food and forced them to spend 90% of their income on it. Citizens have no option but to skip meals, starve and store their scarce resources. The World Food Programme reported in June 2022 that global food price increases and supply chains

have been delayed due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, and UNICEF estimated that 1.1 million Afghan children are expected to need treatment for severe acute malnutrition.

c) The oppression of women:

All progress for the emancipation of women was completely demolished with the re-emergence of the Taliban. Women's rights, enshrined in the 2004 constitution, were torn apart and replaced with the systematic, institutionalised oppression of women.

The Taliban have closed the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which had been a part of the former Afghan government, and have

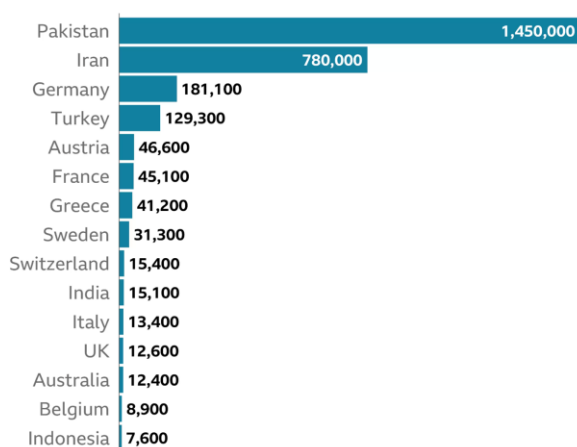
reinstated the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which enforced the Taliban's interpretation of Islam in the 1990s. The ministry has issued guidance that seeks to impose new restrictions on Afghan women, including directing that women should not be allowed to travel long distances without a male guardian and that male relatives of women who do not wear a *burqa*¹⁴ that fully covers their bodies should be punished.



Fig. 23. A girl sitting in a crowd of women in Kabul, Afghanistan, January 2022

Neighbouring countries took in the highest number of Afghans in 2020

Countries with the most Afghan refugees and asylum seekers



*Source: UNHRC data for 2020

This disastrous mix of tragedies has been silenced by the biggest issue in Afghanistan: The refugee crisis.

Although Afghanistan has always struggled with displacement and been on top of the list of exile-producing countries, the Taliban's claim to power and the violence they unleashed have caused a massive exodus from the state. By the end of 2020, Afghans already made up 10% of the global refugee population (fleeing mostly to their neighbouring countries) and

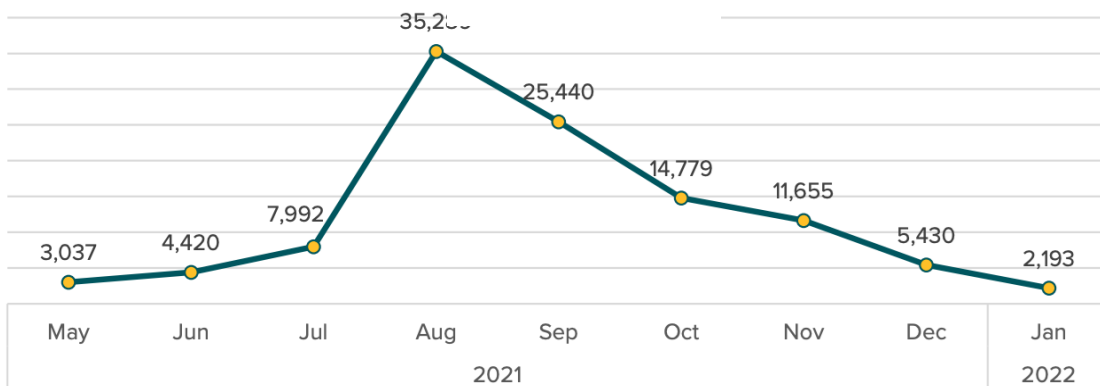
¹⁴ Burqa: A burqa is an enveloping outer garment that covers the body and the face. It is worn by women in some Islamic traditions.

had driven significant internal displacement, but after the 30th of August 2021, those numbers soared.

By the end of 2021, there were 3.5 million internally displaced Afghans and, by April of 2022, 2.6 million were hosted as refugees, accounting for one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world. Neighbouring countries Pakistan and Iran saw the highest numbers of Afghanistan’s refugees and asylum seekers last year cross their borders.

At the moment, however, refugee flows have largely ceased because vulnerable Afghans find it very difficult to leave the country. Iran and Pakistan, collectively hosting more than 2 million Afghan refugees before the Taliban takeover, have resisted accepting more Afghans. They and other neighbours, including Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are using security forces to prevent Afghans from crossing their borders, and are detaining and in some cases abusing and repatriating those that are caught evading the border controls. The states consider these drastic measures need to be taken to stop the overflowing influx of immigrants.

Number of newly arriving individuals, trend since May 2021



*Source: UNHR January 2022

This chart portrays, by illustrating the trend of newly arriving Afghans in Pakistan between May 2021 and January 2022, the soaring immigration figures from August last year when the Taliban entered Kabul. The gradual diminishment of the numbers can be observed and, this is due to the aforementioned drastic measures Pakistan is taking to prevent the entry of more refugees.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

ORGANISING A CONFERENCE

1. PROCESS

Tuesday, August 16, 2022:

First and foremost, I wanted to find a moderator for the conference, who would guide the debate. Jordi Grau, Former Head of Punt Avui, has in-depth experience as a moderator since, as a famous journalist, he has been invited to numerous conferences as both, a speaker and a moderator. Fortunately, Grau is an acquaintance of my mother and I could contact him directly via telephone with a view to request his services as a moderator/assessor to the conference. After the call, Grau confirmed he would take the role of the moderator at my conference.

Wednesday, August 17, 2022:

Secondly, I started to find speakers since I planned on having at least three spokespeople at the event. Among them, I wanted two Afghan refugees who could explain their stories and one person, either working alone or with an NGO, who could explain the process of exiling refugees. Fortunately I had one contact, Isabel Segura, a family friend who works with the grassroots NGO "A Cry for Afghan Women ". Although this NGO is related to the country's conflict and its impact on the citizens, its purpose is not to exile refugees, hence I did not ask Segura to participate in the conference, but to kindly send me the contact of anyone who helps Afghans flee the country. She sent me the contact of Sílvia Sala, Coordinator of People Help, and I contacted her via telephone with a view to invite her as a speaker at the conference. She has formerly been interviewed by TV3 to explain how her NGO helps Afghan citizens flee the country, hence she was perfectly qualified for the task explaining her experiences. She confirmed, agreeing to be an active speaker at the conference and a helper during the process of organising it.

Friday, August 19, 2022:

Sala told me that one of the Afghans she rescued, Nawzadi Ahmad, was living in my hometown Girona. I asked her if he would be willing to participate in my conference and she said he would, since he already wanted to organise an awareness campaign in Girona. Following these events, I contacted Nawzadi Ahmad via Whatsapp, to encourage him to

talk at my conference. He confirmed his presence at the conference and said that he would not attend only if he was sick or had an emergency.

Owing to the fact that I already had two confirmed speakers and a moderator, I started working on my invitation using the program Canva. The invitation would be used to disseminate the event through social media.

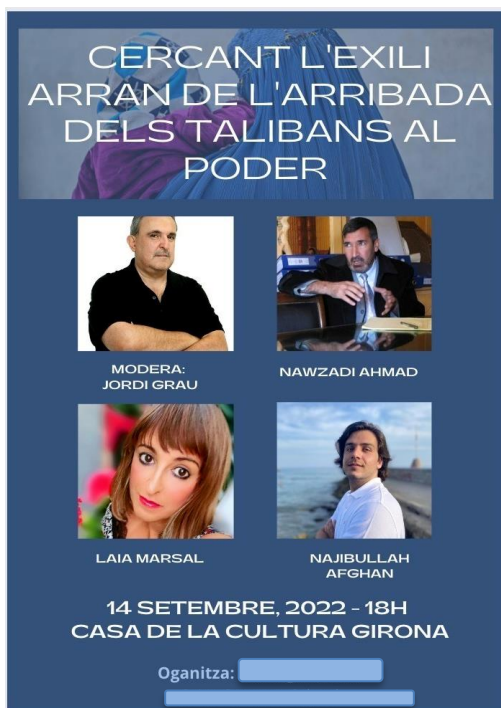
Monday, August 22, 2022:

Now, only needing one more speaker, I decided to contact Najibullah Afghan via Whatsapp and convince him to speak at my conference. I met Najibullah through Laia Marsal, a social activist who works individually to help rescue Afghan refugees and is an acquaintance of my family.

Monday, August 29, 2022:

Sala informed me that unfortunately, she would not make it to the conference due to schedule problems. Owing to that I contacted Laia Marsal through Whatsapp to encourage her to take Sala's place.

Tuesday, August 30, 2022:



I finished the invitation and called Casa de la Cultura Girona and requested one of their rooms to host my conference. The spokesman on the phone informs me all renting of rooms must be done through the local's official website, and recommends me to choose "Aula B" since it is perfectly suited for these kinds of events. Once inside the website, I completed a form requesting to rent "Aula B" and after that, my request was confirmed and I was provided with the space. Finally, since the conference is an interdisciplinary cultural project the secretariat of Casa de la Cultura decided to exempt the cost of renting their room.

Wednesday, August 31, 2022:

Organised the conference report to structure all the information and finished the timetable for the act.

DATE	14/09/2022
TIME	18:00
PLACE	Casa de la Cultura - Aula B - Diputació de Girona

ROLE	NAME	BIO	CONTACT	CONFIRMED
Moderator	Jordi Grau	Former Director of El Punt Avui	Via Whatsapp	16/8/2022
Speaker	Laia Marsal	Works individually to help refugee Afghans	Via Whatsapp	28/8/2022
Speaker	Najibullah Afghani	Former Spanish teacher	Via Whatsapp Message	22/8/2022
Speaker	Nawzadi Ahmad Jan	Former academic advisor	Via Whatsapp and in person	19/8/2022

WHEN	WHAT	WHO
17.15	Arrival	
17.30	Reception of speakers	
17.45	Reception of the audience	
18.00	Start of the conference- Welcoming	<i>Marsha P</i>
18.05	Opening of the act	Jordi Grau
18.10	Contextualization	Laia Marsal

18.25	Experience #1	Najibullah Afghan
18.40	Experience #2	Nawzadi Ahmad Jan
18.55	Round of questions	
19.15	Thank you and farewell	Marsha P

Contacted Jordi Grau to meet and explain to him the organisation of the conference.

Thursday, September 1, 2022:

Met with Jordi Grau and discussed the procedure of the conference. We together did an overview of all aspects already established, such as the place, the audience, the timetable, etc., and asked each other questions about how to spread the event and how to document it properly in my project.

Visited Casa de la Cultura to see the room rented and ask for equipment such as cameras and microphones. Unfortunately, Aula B was occupied at the time and I did not have the opportunity to see it nor could I ask for any equipment since the reception was closed.

Sent all speakers the conference timetable and ask for a brief description of who they are, since Jordi Grau needs to yield the floor to them by introducing them to the audience.

Friday, September 2, 2022:

Worked on the brief description of Nawzadi Ahmad Jan after Jordi Grau asked me for a short biography of the speakers and asked the remaining orators for more information, so I could write their introductions too.

Discussed with Nawzadi all issues involving the translation of all questions that may be directed to him in any other language but English. Informed speakers that the conference would be a trilingual event due to the preferences of the orators and the pluralism of languages on the board.

Saturday, September 3, 2022:

Started to disseminate the conference through social media. Firstly, I published the invitation in my Instagram story next to a brief description of the event, afterward, I called friends and family to ensure their presence and ask for help to spread the word.

Sunday, September 4, 2022:

Met with Nawzadi to discuss what he would like to talk about so I could translate it for him. We, in the end, decided that I would only be giving a summary of what he said in Catalan, so people can at least know the most essential parts of his speech.

After conducting research, I found an application that translates live conversations: iTranslate. Although it isn't free, it offers a month's trial without payment. Before the conference, I will inform the audience of this tool, in case they want to use it regardless of my translation.

Monday, September 4, 2022:

Nawzadi sent me his document including all of his speech. I read it and carefully translated it.

I finished Nawzadi's description and started to work on Najibullah's, so I could send it to Grau as soon as possible.

Tuesday, September 5, 2022:

I began to think about how to document the event. Realising the practical part of my project is hard to report in the paper, I decided to film all the conference and do a photo collection. I would also keep the video for the oral presentation at the end of my project.

I began to choose a camera to use. After thorough research, I found the most suitable camera was the "SONY HANDYCAM DCR-SR67". This camcorder has a large capacity of storage, with an 80 GB hard drive that can save up to 56 hours of footage, this was of paramount importance for me since the



event was calculated to last approximately 1 hour. Furthermore, this camera includes an image stabilisation setting which prevents camera movement. On top of that, the camera has a screen the holder can flip and rotate 360° if they want to see what the lens is recording. Last but not least, we can also find a high-speed USB port for transferring video to a compatible computer, which would be incredibly useful. Convinced, I purchased the camera.

Subsequently, I messaged Mónica Casanova, who is an acquaintance of mine and is deeply passionate about photography, which led her to have great expertise. I believed asking her to be the “photographer” at the conference would be beneficial to both of us since she would enjoy taking pictures and I would have a photo collection.

I also called Laia to interview her so I could further understand her work and know what she would say at the conference.

Thursday, September 6, 2022:



After yesterday’s interview with Laia I decided to do a Google Meet with Najib, so I could know what he would say as well. This was important since, after reading and translating Nawzadi’s speech, I wanted to make sure no orator would repeat each other’s words.

Sunday, September 11, 2022:

As the event was approaching, I wanted to publish it on a more widespread scale, hence I contacted two journalists from different Newspapers letting them know about the event. I thought that a mention would allow the event to reach more people. Jordi Camps works for “El Punt Avui” and Jordi Roura works for “El Diari de Girona”. The emails ¹⁵ I sent them included a brief description of the conference and its goal, the names of the speakers, and key information such as the time and place of the event.

¹⁵ The emails are attached in ANNEX III

Monday, September 12, 2022:

Jordi Grau, the moderator of the conference, tweeted the event as we both previously agreed to share with social media the invitation.¹⁶



Jordi Grau Ramió
@jordigraur

Dimecres, a la Casa de Cultura de Girona una interessant aproximació a l'Afganistan i a la seva gent, des del punt de vista de l'exili. Una idea de [redacted] e pel seu treball de recerca. @ [redacted]



I was delighted to see “El Punt Avui” published an article about my conference. It read:

Afghan exiles by the Taliban regime, in Girona.

A year has passed since the Taliban seized power and many exiles have fled Afghanistan. The Casa de Cultura de Girona will receive two exiles tomorrow (6 pm) who will give their testimony as part of a round table entitled Seeking exile following the Taliban's rise to power. Moderated by journalist Jordi Grau, Laia Marsal, a Catalan social activist who has already rescued more than 500 refugees from that country, will also take part. The conference, open to the public, is organised and presented by Marsha P, a high school student at [redacted]. The act, as Marsha P highlights, aims to contribute to "opening the audience's eyes to the unjust situation of more than 38 million people through the memory of exiles who had to flee their homeland".

¹⁶ In the picture we can observe Jordi Grau tagged my mother's Twitter username, this is due to me asking him to do so since I do not have a Twitter account and if someone has a question they could reach my mother and she would redirect them to my personal contact.

Tuesday, September 13, 2022:

Tuesday was the day before the conference. I wrote and studied my introductory and ending speeches. I also contacted Najib and Laia to ask them if they needed transport since they came from Barcelona.

2. THE DAY OF THE CONFERENCE

This section contains a description of how the conference unfolded. Its aim is to convey the emotions and work behind that day so it can be accurately documented.



Seats in Aula B.



My father helping me with the sound check and adjusting the camera to film in Aula A.

I arrived at Casa de la Cultura at 5 pm sharp, so I could see beforehand the room and assure myself everything was as planned. Once inside, I realised it would most probably be too small, bearing in mind the extent of the publicity and the number of individuals who had contacted me to confirm their assistance. Due to that, I asked reception if they had a bigger room I could use, fortunately, they told me Aula A was available. Realising the attendees would be going to Aula B, I asked my brother to stay there and guide the audience towards the newly assigned room.

Around 5:15, Laia Marsal and Najib Afghan arrived at the venue. Together, we went over our speeches since we ought to avoid repeating the same words and bore the audience. Furthermore, we decided on the speakers' seating plan, and I reserved two front seats for my teachers. Twenty minutes later Nawzadi Ahmad Jan entered the room, Najib asked to translate his speech, since it was part of his job back in Afghanistan, hence he has

experience in this field. I adjusted the camcorder in a tripod to film the event and started doing sound checks.



Table of Speakers in Aula B.

At, approximately, 5:50, a photographer working for El Diari de Girona asked us to pose for photos in order to have an image in tomorrow's article about the conference. The cameraman also informed us that a journalist would be attending the conference and writing down our words since they believed the event should be published.

The attendees started arriving but the room was not complete until 6:05 when I decided to give my opening speech¹⁷ which lasted about 5 minutes. In this speech, I explained what awakened my interest in Afghanistan, especially the ongoing refugee crisis; the goal of my conference, and I express my gratitude to everyone involved in this project.

After I delivered my speech, Jordi Grau took the floor and gave a brief historical background of Afghanistan. Subsequently, Laia Marsal gave her speech. She covered her personal relation to the conflict and explained how we can help from here.

Unfortunately, we lost track of time and instead of 15 minutes, her speech lasted 20 and Grau had to cut her mid-speech. Consequently, Najib Afghan took the floor. Najib began describing life before the Taliban regime, he wanted us to understand the drastic turn Afghans suffered with the occupation. After he had explained society pre and post-



Laia Marsal explaining how she helps rescue asylum-seekers.



Najib explaining life before the Taliban.

¹⁷ The Opening speech can be found in ANNEX IV.

Taliban, he gave a memoir of his journey to Spain, reminiscing on his struggles and blessings from the last 5 months.

We encountered a problem we did not predict, the attendees sitting at the back of the room informed us it was hard to hear the speakers. Unfortunately the microphones were not working so I asked Najib and Nawzadi to speak up, hoping this could address the issue.

After Najib had finished, Nawzadi began to talk. Sadly he did not have the 15 minutes I had promised him since we were already short of time. His speech was accompanied by Najib's much-appreciated translation.

At 7:30, after all the orators had finished, I gave my final speech, again thanking them for giving us insight into their lives. The conference had ended and there was a round of applause.



The audience clapping at the end of the event.

3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SPEAKERS

Nawzadi Ahmad Jan

*“Let us praise the position of our daughter
Let us support women to build a wonderful life
This dove of peace and freedom
Let her build a new cradle let her build a new world
A world free of violence and A world free of fears”*



This is an extract from a poem written by Nawzadi Ahmad Jan, who defines himself as an “Afghan patriotic poet and writer, who expresses the love and pain of the country in every word of his writing and calls for unity, brotherhood, and cooperation in every message.”

Nawzadi has spent his whole life in the warm embrace of his homeland and has dedicated every day to honouring it.

Nawzadi, apart from an incredibly touching person, is also an outstanding professional. He worked supporting the government as the academic advisor for the Ministry of Higher Education, academically assessing all public and private universities -at the time there were 40-. His work also included aiding the civil service commission by training commissioners, deputy ministers, provincial and district governors, and general directors. Moreover from 1997 to 2002, Ahmad was managing a large mine clearance operation in his country with over a thousand staff and, and since his time here, he has assisted 30 Afghan experts and successfully introduced them to the labour market basically establishing a youth network for UNICEF Afghanistan.

Currently, Ahmad lives together with his wife in Girona, since he took refuge roughly 5 months ago. His wishes are to continue aiding his people from Catalonia in any way he can.

Najibullah Afghan



Najibullah Afghan, Najib, was born in Gardez, a city in the south of Afghanistan. He studied in his hometown and completed his Spanish Language degree at Kabul University in 2017, he's also fluent in six languages including Spanish, English, Arab, and Hindi. In the following year, he began teaching at the same university until 2021. When the Taliban took over.

That October, due to the dangerous Taliban dictatorship, he had to leave his country. He currently lives in Barcelona as a refugee and since his arrival, Afghan has been working with Laia Marsal, both volunteers with two NGOs, Warrior Angels Rescue, and Afghan Innovation, to rescue citizens in danger. Fortunately, his family also took refuge in Spain months after Najib's arrival.

Laia Marsal



Laia Marsal Ferret is a Catalan activist who has dedicated all her time and efforts to exiling Afghan citizens in danger since the Taliban took over.

She formerly worked in the marketing field but after contacting Nilofar Ayoubi, an afghan woman seeking asylum, through Twitter, her life changed. Rapidly she started completing documents and requesting visas to exile as many Afghans in danger as possible. Up to now, she has saved 509 people, which has led her to work with two different NGOs: Warrior Angels Rescue and Afghan Innovation. She has been interviewed multiple times and appeared in newspapers, and every time she can, she takes the opportunity to explain what is going on in Afghanistan and show people how we can help.

CONCLUSION

This project was truly rewarding and enriching as a learning experience. Initially, I was able to learn first-hand about all the logistics involved in the makings of a conference. Something I believe was a demanding yet worthwhile effort. Another thing I learned from this eye-opening experience is the importance of having contacts, without my family's acquaintances the event would have been far more difficult to organise. Moreover, by writing the theoretical part, I was exposed to a vast amount of information about Afghanistan's history which further expanded my knowledge on the topic. During the process of writing it, I perfected my research skills, overcoming biases and interpreting multilingual academic content, by reading Catalan, Spanish and English websites and books. This study also provided me with the necessary tools to understand the similarities and contrasts between tumultuous and peaceful countries, which would stand me in good stead in my future education.

Based on the qualitative information gathered, I can safely say that the turbulent conditions are the result of the power play between the invaders and the invaded. Afghanistan has undergone so many wars and conflicts due to it being the buffer state between many superpowers for centuries, for example, the Soviets and British India, the U.S.A. and Russia, China and Pakistan, etc. This conclusion confirms my first idea.

Regarding my second goal, taking into consideration I have filled Room A of Casa de la Cultura (a larger venue than the one I had reserved) and the event featured in local press, I can confidently affirm I have achieved my second and most important goal, to raise awareness of the harsh reality Afghans face nowadays. What I am most proud of is having given a voice to two refugees.

The main problems during the process of coordinating the event was arranging the personal preferences of the speakers, for example one spokesperson did not want to participate in the same platform as another, hence I had to change one person from the floor. Two minor issues encountered the day of the conference was time management, and the fact that the microphones were not working, which made it difficult for the audience to follow what the orators were saying.

If I were to continue my research I would dig deeper on the democratic backlash caused by the Taliban's ascension to power, especially how it further jeopardised women's rights

in a legislative and social context, to be able to demonstrate to what extent this dictatorship disproportionately affects women and girls. I would also analyse the international community's response to the Taliban's occupation of Kabul, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council and all Arab governmental-bodies to better understand how parties cooperate, or not, to avoid and/or put an end to such hardships from their home nations.

On the other hand, if I were to restart my project with the knowledge that I now have, I would invite more refugees to speak their truth, giving more asylum-seekers the opportunity to share their stories.

Regarding the future, I think there are two scenarios for Afghanistan. One where, ideally, the Taliban are overthrown and another, where they persist. If the first case scenario were to happen, I feel Afghanistan would revert to its 2001 situation, after the first Taliban regime was defeated and the state began its nation building process. However, due to the enduring international crisis, to reconstruct a governmental body and revive the economy would require much more effort than in 2004. The other scenario would lead to a total dearth of human rights in the state. The weak economy would obligate parents to exploit their children to gain some income, and buy food to fight the overwhelming famine, which would only grow. The immigration crisis would completely overwhelm neighbouring countries, which would perhaps eventually support anti-Taliban movements, this is of particular interest when it comes to Pakistan, which is currently a key player in maintaining the regime. However, as Nawzadi Ahmad Jan stated at my conference, "It is the duty of Afghans to rebuild Afghanistan."

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3. IMAGES

- Figure 1.
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Contributor: British Library.
- Figure 2.
Author: Lithograph plate 3 from 'Afghanistan' by James Rattray. Image ID: 2B00NAE. Contributor: CPA Media Pte Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo.

- Figure 3.
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Source: CNN & Getty Images. Author: Chris Hondros.
- Figure 23.
Source: Foreign Affairs. Author: Ali Khara.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I

Interview to Najibullah Afghan.
06/05/2022

“If you don’t know your rights, how can you claim them?”

MARSHA P: Could you briefly describe yourself?

NAJIB: My name is Najibullah and my last name is Afghan. I started studying Spanish at Kabul University in 2014 and finished my Spanish Language degree in 2017, and the year 2018 I was assigned as a Spanish teacher. That is normally how it goes, we pass all the exams and win the position of teacher. I worked as a teacher from 2018 until the arrival of the Taliban.

MARSHA P: How was education before the Taliban?

NAJIB: During that time, when I was both a teacher and a student, the situation for women and men were equal. Both could study the same, to any degree, during the day, and during the night, because we had three different timetables: morning, afternoon, and night. There weren’t any hurdles to study, not even for women.

MARSHA P: Would you say there was equality, not only in education but in other aspects too?

NAJIB: During the second republic, which started with the US's intervention, in 2001, until 2021, we started to modernise. This progression included all aspects of the country: education, society, economy... It was growing progressively. We had a concept of a destroyed Afghanistan, because of the former years, the late nineteen hundreds. But we also hoped that now, Afghanistan could be like any other developed country since we started to advance. Freedom of the press, freedom of speech, we had all our rights, and

we believed women could do whatever they pleased. If we take out politics, Afghanistan was developed. It again was a very advanced country. Women could dress however they wanted, could run businesses, create NGOs, anything.

Big cities in Afghanistan are where our rights were enshrined, where you could tell there was progress. These cities influenced the dwarf ones, and 5 years ago, in small towns, where people did not know their rights, little by little they were all positively impacted by these big cities and started to acknowledge their rights. In Afghanistan small towns live uncommunicated, they are less aware of the modern world, it's like they're blind.

MARSHA P: So you could say that small towns, because of their history and detachment, metaphorically had a blindfold, which makes reference to their ignorance; and thanks to these big cities that evolved because of the U.S.' intervention, Afghanistan flourished during the next two decades?

NAJIB: Sure, yes. 50 years ago, people in Afghanistan lived like they do in Europe. We had universities, freedom, and people were educated, but what happened is wars started, and these wars are what made Afghanistan go backward. Women and families who knew their rights were killed. That's what happened in our wars, a lot of people were killed. Some people took refuge in Canada, the USA, and Europe, and these educated people are now outside of Afghanistan, they cannot educate and teach the new generations. This hampered the progress of the country. People who stayed here and didn't take refuge to another country were robbed of books, university degrees, everything, and ended up hiding in towns, away from the city. That's why people in towns didn't know their rights, and if you don't know your rights, how can you claim them? People in power manipulated all forms of communication. But when the USA arrived and brought peace, everything got better, first in the cities, and later in all the provinces.

MARSHA P: Afghanistan is distributed as Spain, right? In provinces.

NAJIB: Not exactly, the political division in Afghanistan is hard to explain, it's not like Spain's provinces, they're called like that too, but they are not communities.

MARSHA P: OK, thank you.

Also, a lot of people assert Afghanistan has always been a troubled country due to two reasons: Its locality, between many empires, and its great ethnic and religious diversity. Is it true?

NAJIB: It is partially true, one of the reasons is because of our locality but our diversity has not been a reason for trouble, that's what other countries' media always say. The ethnicities are not against each other, politicians use our differences against us, but the citizens are not confronted. And, again, about our locality, Afghanistan is amongst many superpowers: Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and Russia, and they all have nuclear weapons. In the borders of these countries, there aren't national soldiers but Russian soldiers, because these countries are protected by Russia, the soviets see their interest in our countries. Those powers can all attack each other and use Afghanistan as a "battlefield", they consider it their own land.

MARSHA P: Before the Taliban, did people have any adoration for the Afghan President or the U.S.?

NAJIB: A few people liked him, but most of us didn't. This President had a lot of plans and projects for the country, and the people thought this man could do good so they voted for him, but during his governance, there was a lot of corruption. And little by little people stopped liking him. And during the next election, he won again thanks to the corruption he created. He swindled a lot of people, for example, Ministers.

MARSHA P: So the country was evolving but not thanks to the politicians?

NAJIB: Yes, it was thanks to the people and the U.S. intervention.

MARSHA P: How were you and your closest peers affected, personally, by the Taliban's arrival?

NAJIB: At the beginning, I thought that we would enter hell and the Taliban would kill whomever they pleased. But when they entered Kabul, they weren't as violent as in the previous war, they were calmer. This was because all authorities and politicians fled already. They just needed to install and rob the arms. The chaos was in the airport, it was crammed. People were there for days to see if they were lucky enough to leave.

MARSHA P: Were you already here?

NAJIB: No, I left afterward.

People started saying they were part of the Taliban for their own benefit. The Taliban then began to tell lies to the citizens, claiming they wanted the best for all and they'd establish a fair government, and the people believed them. But, obviously, the Taliban demolished democracy and killed innocent people: Musicians, journalists, etc. Everybody lost trust and hope.

My friends, who were Spanish teachers, were in contact with the Spanish embassy in Kabul and received aid. They went to the airport, which was hard due to the millions of people there, and got a plane ticket to Dubai and from Dubai here to Spain. I didn't get the aid but I got out later.

ANNEX II

Interview to Laia Marsal.

05/09/2022

“The ones in true jeopardy are hidden, and the Taliban are looking for them door by door.”

MARSHA P: When and how did you start helping exiled refugees?

LAIA: I started last August when the Taliban entered Afghanistan. It was an impulsive decision. I saw that a woman was seeking help through Twitter and I asked her how I could help. Then I started to complete many many documents, and finally, I deported her. Afterward, I did the same with another person, and then another, and another. I began to have more contacts and I finally established a network in which I deported many people. From this point on I began to work with NGOs.

MARSHA P: You have exiled refugees in Spain, Pakistan, India... What does it depend on where each person ends up?

LAIA: There are some refugees that collaborate with Spanish people, and so they contact the Spanish embassy through emails, but the embassy doesn't respond to their emails because naturally, they have tons. So what I do is, I create an excel sheet and put in all the to-be refugees' information and send it to the embassy.

There are other cases, for example, that end up in Spain because they have family there, but these people have to apply for the authorization of temporary residence for family reunification.

And then there are the people who are employees of Spanish business people and get out through them.

Most people who ask for international protection are people who really are in danger, For example, judges, politicians, ministers, etc. And they can ask for international protection if they have proof of a threat. These people are hidden and are personally targeted by the

Taliban. In the news, we can sometimes see people protesting but they're not the ones who are really in danger, because the ones in true jeopardy are hidden, and the Taliban are looking for them door by door.

MARSHA P: When you want to exile someone, how do you reach that person?

LAIA: It depends. Normally I don't look for the people, they look for me. I receive about 500 SOS messages every day. Sometimes it feels as if all of Afghanistan has my number. I even receive threats.

MARSHA P: And how long does it take to deport someone? Because someone would think a lot of time but in a year, you've saved 509 people!

LAIA: Yes, that's right. Every week I'm exiling people. But it is not easy, I scarcely sleep. And the Spanish government doesn't pay them for the plane ticket. I have to pay for it. There's a big lack of resources, all of it has gone to aid Ukraine.

MARSHA P: Do you have any lawyer that helps you through all the legislative documents?

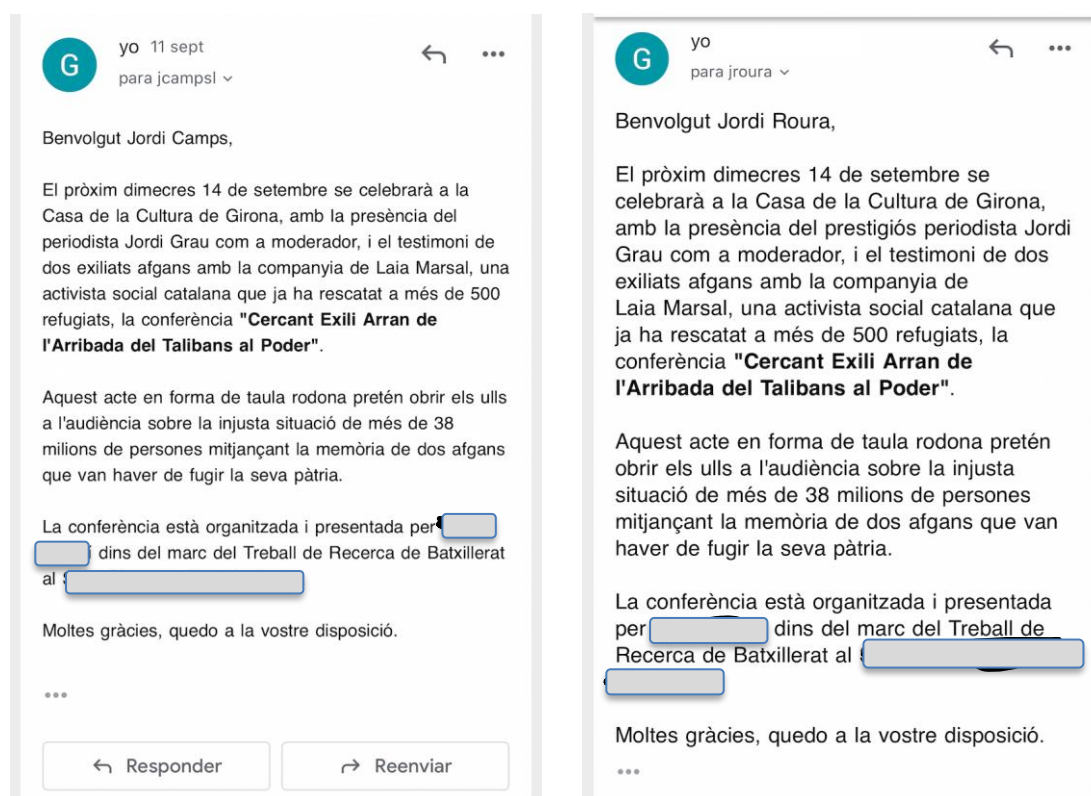
LAIA: No, well there's a friend of mine who sometimes helps me, he's a lawyer, but almost everything is done by me. Inside the NGOs there are lawyers, but you have to pay for their service.

ANNEX III

Emails sent to Jordi Camps, and Jordi Roura the 11th of September, three days before the conference.

Camps works for El Diari de Girona, and Roura works for El Punt Avui.

In these emails, I wanted to formally provide both journalists with the key information about my event, hoping they could publish a mention or an article of it.



ANNEX IV

This ANNEX includes the translation of the original script for my opening speech. This speech lasted approximately 5 minutes.

OPENING SPEECH DELIVERED BY ORGANIZER MARSHA P¹⁸

Welcome Ladies and Gentlemen. First of all, thank you very much for taking time out of your schedule to be here today, the audience is the most essential part of any event.

In 2021, as you already know, the Taliban rose to power, dismantling the entire democratic process carried out in Afghanistan in the previous years. All the broadcasts made on television about the event, especially how the citizens tried to escape the country however they could, even by hanging from moving planes, deeply affected me hence I decided to raise money to help. But the organisation [AfghanAid] I created the fund with was British and required donations to be in sterling to be accepted, so I wasn't very successful, in fact not at all. I didn't collect anything. Not even a pound. But I tried!

Since then I have been following the subject which is greatly encouraged by my restlessness and desire to know about other cultures around the world and what is happening everywhere and above all by my will, very firm, from youth for fighting for justice, peace and the improvement of human conditions for anyone, wherever they are.

As part of my TdR, I have called you here today so that you can learn first-hand the experience of two exiled people who now live among us and a Catalan activist who has helped more than 500 people go into exile. I think that today, we will all leave with a different and more sensitive look at these people who live among us.

So without further ado, I'll start by thanking the people who worm this round table. Thank you so much Jordi Grau for moderating, it was super fun meeting you, thank you so much Laia Marsal for taking a minute off your busy schedule to come to talk here, I greatly appreciate it; thank you so much Najib Afghan, I already interviewed you and know your story but it makes me joyous knowing you can now share it with more people, thank you so

¹⁸ Please bear in mind that, unlike the interviews written above, it is not perfectly accurate of what was said at that moment, there were minor changes the day of the conference.

much Nawzadi Ahmad Jan, your words of wisdom never cease to amaze me, it is an honour to have you here this afternoon.

Last but not least, thank you Mrs.XXX for your help all this summer, I hope you are proud.

Thank you so much.

ANNEX V

Compilation of pictures of the event¹⁹.



Figure 1. Me standing up after I gave my final speech, and the audience delivering a round of applause.



Figure 2. Me giving my final speech.

¹⁹ All pictures were taken by Mónica Casanova, who is mentioned in page 33, due to this, all information of the content featured in this Annex does not appear in the image bibliography. Please bear in mind the pictures are not in order.



Figure 3. From left to right: Jordi Grau, Laia Marsal, Nawzadi Ahmad Jan and Najib Afghan.



Figure 4. The audience.



Figure 5. Jordi Grau mid-speech.



Figure 6. Me thanking Najib Afghan at the beginning of the event.

