

Wounded in Kabul, Dying in Germany.

A Short Story of a Wandering Immigrant

To live happily and safely is one of the biggest notions of life. No one has the idea where their faith takes them since life is always turning the tides for better or worse. Life is hard and eventually peculiar as an Afghan. It's not only a story but also a sentiment about how things get worse when various realms of life hit someone hard and how someone can survive with the last bits of remaining hope. By Bahis Delawery

Die deutsche Version dieses Artikels findet ihr auf unserer Homepage www.hinterland-magazin.de

Kabul is a very beautiful place on earth, but at the same time a place full of misery and agony. One can experience bliss and abyss at the same time, sometimes even in a matter of seconds. It's not only limited to Kabul City, but the whole country. Having a good job and good education is not enough in life, we need more than that. For me the priority of my life has always been safety and a normal life, which unfortunately couldn't be found back there.

After being tired of too many suicide bombings and blasts, losing close friends and families in bomb blasts, and being under threat for a long time, it was not

bearable anymore. There was a day when I survived a bomb blast and suicide attack, but luck was not in the favor of my two close friends, and I lost them in it. There were times I felt the waves of blasts from far distanced areas. I witnessed people floating in the air during bomb blasts while their limbs were shattering into pieces. I pulled through many dangerous situations. Moments were full of tragedies, intimidation and shocks. My mind was literally exploding from them. It was draining my energy and becoming unendurable. These experiences have had bad consequences. My mental wellbeing started disrupting my daily routine tasks. Death was approaching me at every blink of my

eyes when I was outside home. I was in a paradoxical situation. I wanted to work and earn money for survival but, at the same time, I didn't want to. I was scared and frightened all the time. I started getting depressed and anxious. At the same time, thinking about moving or immigrating to another country was a very fearsome phenomenon as well. It would add more qualm and dubiety to my dicey life. I was in vacillation. But I couldn't do it anymore. It was time for me to make one of the most tenacious decisions of my life. A time to go for what I have always wanted, safety and life.

Leaving Things behind and Migrating

Deciding is not easy, particularly when I had to move to another country. I had to leave lots of things behind. The memories, the feelings, everything I had, everything. It's painful, distressing and afflictive. Memories will always live with you. Memories never go away. I still remember walking late nights on the streets of Kabul through potholes and mud while feeling overwhelmed by terror and torment. I would have to leave the people who cared about me, the friends circles, colleagues, families, family circles, job and office. I can still feel the taste of the food I would have sometimes inside a small muddy restaurant, in a muddy alley, in the central part of the city. The taste of the Uzbeki Palaw I would eat with my cousins in a classic restaurant in the outskirts of the city. Everything I would leave behind. I may never experience them again. I may never have the same feeling again. The decision was hard enough and would blur everything around me.

I finally got a chance to fly to Germany. I decided to apply for asylum after I arrived. I couldn't look back anymore even thinking about getting back to my homeland and living there had dire consequences. Germany, an economically, culturally and historically rich country. A beautiful place where one can enjoy delicious meals and having one of the highest qualities of life. As immigrant, one assumes that life will move facilely to amelioration particularly when the person has flown from a war-torn country. I finally decided to immigrate. I applied as an asylum-seeking immigrant from Afghanistan in Munich. The center, called Reception Facility, was surrounded by fences, but I had the freedom to move within the country. I would spend some nights outside. I would meet friends who lived far from the city. No restrictions on my movement, nor on my stay. I had a better feeling about it. After some bureaucratic process, they decided to move me to Ingolstadt and work on my asylum application

there. I have never heard of the city before. I started digging information and found out that it is the city of Audi. My interest in the city resurged, and the idea of moving to the city of Audi was exciting.

A So-Called "New Home" in Ingolstadt

I got transferred to the city after a couple of days. For the sake of comparison, the city seemed smaller and quieter than Munich. Just getting into the city, I was already wondering about my new living place all the time. How it would be? Where would it be? Will it be better? Will things be better? What things am I allowed to do? What things am I not? I was looking for a change, a home where I have my freedom. A home where I can freely decide about my future.

Looking at this place has already started terrifying me

After the "Identity Check Interview" with the immigration department, I was taken to the so-called "New Home", the Anker Center. This place they have taken me is still surrounded by fences. I can't believe my eyes. This is far from what I imagined. Reaching the area, I stood there with a wooden face for minutes. Drowning in my own thoughts. Thinking to myself: this can't be true at all. Suddenly, thousand questions rushed through my mind. Where is this fenced area? Why am I relocated here? It looks like a prison. What's this place for living? Is asylum seeking considered a serious thing here? Maybe they have thought I might feel safer in this surrounding than being in a war-torn country. Do they even care that I have flown because I was living in fear and terror? This is what they have decided to put me in? Looking at this place has already started terrifying me. Where should I go now? Can I go somewhere else? Please don't take me here. I don't want to live here. This place isn't for me. I am human. But why is this even happening? Because I am an Afghan? Because I am an immigrant? Do I deserve this all? I wanted to question everything, even about my own existence. But then I realized: I am just in my head. It was too late.

After a couple of minutes, I was led inside. Entering the area, security guys greeted me. I was overwhelmed with emotions. I was still in my head. I couldn't stop it. Why are these guys here? Are they here to protect me

jung sein



„Please don't take me here. I don't want to live here.“
Innenansicht eines AnKER-Zentrums in Bayern I

from society or to protect society from me? Why am I isolated? How can I integrate if they put me in such a place? It's unapt. I had to sign in and sign out every time I was in or out of the place. The whole security personnel reminded me of my school times. We had security guards to watch us for not leaving the school during study hours. But this was different. It has a different feeling. It doesn't feel right. I signed in and was led to the administrative office. Walking in the corridor inside the container, surrounded by security personnel standing in different parts of the corridor, already give an imprisonment feeling.

Am I a Prisoner?

Getting into the administrative office, I was registered in the Center and assigned a room. But still, I can't get out of my head. Thousands of unanswered questions and thoughts were floating in my mind. I was feeling like a criminal. A guy from the office guided me to my room and on the way, being curious, I asked him how long would I stay in this place? He smirked at me and said: you just arrived; it's too early to answer the question; and to be honest no one knows. What? Why the uncertainty? I asked. He replied that he was just working for the administrative office and didn't have any clue. So, this is how things work here. My fate is in the hands of others now. They play an active role in determining and defining it. I can't decide for myself. I can't resolve my situation on my own. This can't be real. I was overwhelmed with emotions. I couldn't believe such a thing happening here. All my eighty-six billion neurons were on fire. I was nervous. I was trembling and shaking. My palms started sweating. I was full of sweat and looked like I just had shower. My mind was literally screaming for help.

Eventually, I was taken to my assigned room. Walking up to the huge two floor container, I looked at the sky. Thick dark clouds were moving swiftly, the cold breeze was flowing over my face, the air was full of desperation, distress and despair. I turned around and looked at the kids playing in the so-called "playing ground" full of sand and dust, they looked happier. They were having fun. The poor kids didn't have any idea where they were. My heart was shattering into pieces. I was hoping for a magical storm. A storm which flashes everything I was experiencing. I desperately needed it. But nothing happened. I am gradually losing myself in the moments. I was still thinking to myself how was this even possible when

suddenly I heard the guy from the office calling me, "Hey, let's go!" My assigned room was on the second floor, so we started climbing the stairs to the second floor. All I could think about was how I would be able to live here. They showed me my room and said, it's yours. It doesn't look like a room, I thought. This place looks terrible. There are just partitions. Walking to my room I already felt the gigantic container shaking.

While entering my room, I saw three other people from my homeland. Looking at their eyes, they seemed more pessimistic, hopeless and miserable than me. The guy from the office introduced me to my new roommates and left. We greeted each other and they welcomed me to the room. After making a short conversation, I found out that they have already lived for some time in uncertainty and they were told to wait and wait sequentially. No one knew what would happen next.

A Matter of Privacy and Meals

One of them showed me my bed and my cupboard. Everything is made from metal here. The noise of sitting on the bed and opening the cupboard already annoyed me. They looked old. They looked like they were there for many years. So, lots of people have already lived here. They must have had more stories to share. I am not alone even in the partition. I will live with three other people at the same time. How will I spend time here? I can hear my neighbors, very loud and fine? I

can hear their telephone conversations. What about my privacy? Who cares about my privacy? Maybe there's no need for it now. I asked one of them if I can relocate myself outside the Center, but he replied, "Good luck! Try your best. It hasn't worked for anyone here so far, but it may work for you. I have tried to get out of this place for the last six months. I wanted to reunite with my pregnant wife and two small kids who need me at their side but was unsuccessful so far." I arranged my stuff and organized the bed and started getting prepared for my new life.

Sitting on my bed trying to distract myself from reality. I start using my smartphone, but nothing seems fun here. I have this empty feeling about everything around me. It's time for dinner. One said, Let's go to the kitchen. I asked, "Kitchen? Oh, it's dinner time. I didn't notice it. So, what are we cooking?". He smiled and said that we were not allowed to cook, we can't

We were not allowed to cook

bring raw food from outside and we would only get ready made meals throughout the day. I was curious. Ready-made food sounded good to me. At least I didn't have to wash dishes afterwards.

Entering the kitchen, I saw a very big and loud area. The procedure was to register ourselves for every meal we would have. After signing in, I went to the serving area. It looked like a buffet, but it was not a real buffet. We had only one option: the cold meal. I have never had such a meal in my entire life particularly for dinner. The meal looked as cold as my surroundings. I couldn't live without hot and oily food. At least I wouldn't get full. What else could we have in this surrounding without a good meal? Well, I didn't have any other option. Either I should feed myself or remain hungry till breakfast the next day. I took my portion and was looking for a quieter location to sit.

Later, I found out that Germans eat cold meals for dinner. Different cultures and different values. It was one of my biggest cultural surprises in Germany.

Residents in Despair

While I was busy looking at different directions for a quieter location, I heard two guys brawling. They were from my homeland and I didn't expect things would get physical at least here in Germany. But since it was an Anker Center, which already looked like a prison,

It was almost midnight.

No one was sleeping

just after a minute, they started punching each other. Security personnel rushed to the situation. It was not easy to separate them. They were hitting each other like they have had enmity since they were born. It was a hardcore fight. When I asked a guy, what did just happen, he told me that it is an everyday story here. "Don't worry. What can you expect when hundreds of people are put together in such a place? Maybe they also have personal problems back home, maybe they have already spent some time here and don't get along with each other that well. It's not their first time fighting each other. No one is allowed to work. No one is allowed to move out. No one is doing anything here. Many people suffer from mental disorders. No one is completely safe and sound." Looking back to my plate, I had no more appetite for the dinner. I

moved to the corner of the room and sat in a quieter place, tried a little toast and that was it. I couldn't eat further. It was difficult for me to even swallow it. I was stressed. So, this is what I will have for dinner for the rest of my time here. I was not used to the food. How would I survive this?

I went back to my room later after dinner and felt like time had stopped and it wasn't moving at all. It's hard to be alive in this sort of situation. Seconds felt like hours and minutes like days. I had a chat with my roommates; it was already dark, and it was time to sleep. Not only the darkness would haunt me, but also the place I am in. I told my roommates that it was time to sleep and I needed to sleep badly. I was so dog-tired of the first day here. One of my roommates told me that it's too early for sleeping. No one could sleep here with so much noise. Many people didn't sleep till dawn. I ignored him and asked him if I could turn off the lights. I did it and laid down in my bed. It was almost midnight. I was just trying to sleep. But it was difficult. I couldn't shut my mind nor my eyes.

It turned out that he was right. I could hear a group of guys talking loudly and screaming and yelling at each other just in the corridor. Kids were still playing, jumping, crying and shouting. Every jump in the gigantic container felt like an earthquake and each shouting felt like a thunderstorm in a rainy season. It was almost midnight. No one was sleeping. Why isn't anyone sleeping here? I heard every step of people walking inside the corridor. Some people were singing and screaming aloud out of despair. They needed to be in bed; it's too late. I couldn't sleep till dawn that night. The place already felt like hell. No way out. People have gone nuts. What's happening to people here? No one could sleep, even the children. Everything became real. It was a completely new experience for me and a very bad start for living in Germany.

Life in Slow Motion

My dreams were hanging in the air. Nothing is going forward as expected. There's no consideration of human rights. Boys, girls, men, women, kids, mentally unstable people all have been locked into the same place. Looks like a real prison. Even a sane person would go nuts here. I don't know. I am bewildered. Life is getting harder. I never thought I would end up in such a misery. I was threatened back home and now this. I feel the government has already felt threatened by us, immigrants, and decided to put us here. They have never walked a day in my shoes and don't even know how hard it is to be an immigrant here. I am not evil. I also want to live a normal life. Is



„Looks like a real prison. Even a sane person would go nuts here.“
Innenansicht eines AnKER-Zentrums in Bayern II

jung sein



„Life became a slow motion. There's no movement.“
Innenansicht eines AnKER-Zentrums in Bayern III

it wrong to live normally? My anxiety is getting worse here. I have a heavy chest, every breath I take is full of desperation. I feel like dying. No hope is left anymore. Maybe I stop expecting too much, but I am helpless, weak and impotent.

The sleepless night passed, and we had breakfast. A breakfast one would never expect to have in such a place. There were different options one could choose. But I didn't have appetite for any of it. I couldn't eat. I was under strain, anxiety and stress. My thinking and questions were piling up. I went back to my room and slept for some hours. I didn't have that kind of deep sleep in my entire life. It was one of the feelings one can rarely have. I woke up and headed for lunch. The lunch was not cold and better than dinner. Rarely, we had good food for lunch, but most of the times, I couldn't eat the food. Sometimes due to the food option, sometimes due to the smell, sometimes due to the taste and sometimes due to the repetition of the same rotten food.

Slowly and slowly days and nights were passing. Life became a slow motion. There's no movement. Everyone had a hard time. Some people were already on some type of medication and some were not able to understand why things were like how they were. My hobbies changed to overthinking and sleeping all the time. I had no job, no life and nothing was going in favor for me. I wasn't allowed to do anything. I couldn't get a job, couldn't leave the place and couldn't do anything I wanted. I was only allowed to do an orientation course in German Language. Except that, I had to just wait and wait.

Agony Leading to Drugs

I gradually got used to the situation and the environment. Things started changing significantly. I got used to many things in the place. I didn't crave for my hot dinners anymore. The cold food tasted delicious. The place and environment had become more enjoyable. The place changed me a lot. I couldn't have imagined it. I was losing my sanity. It has already been a long road. I tried all my best to get out of the place or even try to find something to get busy with. Nothing I was successful.

All I could do was taking care of myself; taking shower, dress nice and clean; go for long walks; go to the city center. All things I did was to distract myself

from my reality; nonetheless, I would still feel numb and like I was breaking down inside. I made some acquaintances and friends inside the Center. It just felt like we shared the same desperation. I started avoiding them since it would add up further to my worse situation. All I could hear sitting with them was how life sucks in the Center. Nothing was enjoyable anymore. Almost every day, there would be a brawl or physical fight. People were fighting about anything here. They were fighting each other; they were fighting security personnel; they were fighting for different food in the kitchen; they were fighting with administrative staff for no reason; they were fighting because of their internal conflicts back home; they were bringing their inner hates here; everyone wanted to be free. To experience life in Germany. Nothing was working in their favor in the Center.

I had to just wait and wait

I turned to drugs. It was more fun when I was not sober. That was the only time I would not care what's happening to me or to my life or around me. I started drinking beer during the day with

some friends. I had never drunk it before and I gradually became a hard drinker. That was the only way out of the reality I had. I would be drinking a lot particularly on the weekends outside in a quieter part of the city with my acquaintances from the Center. That's how we were trying to distance ourselves from the place. Sometimes the alcohol would lead to rage, fight and violence between us and other times to emptiness and sadness. Sometimes, our tears would start falling desperately. We would try to enter clubs and discos, but most of them would treat us like we didn't belong there. They would look at our documents, they would refuse to allow us inside. One night one of them looked at my document and ridiculed it since it was not a normal plastic ID. We would then go to a park; dance and listen to the music till dawn; until everyone would gradually become sober again. We would start walking back to the Center because we didn't have enough pocket money for hiring a taxi. We would walk many kilometers.

Survival and the Eye-Opening Experience

At times, I would go for a walk alone in the middle of the night. I spent many nights in the middle of the city. Sitting, watching people, watching everyone having fun, I would try to do the same but couldn't. My mind was numb. All I was thinking was how to have my normal life back. Later on, I would walk around the

fields, cry and scream. I desperately needed help. There was no helping hand anywhere. I was not able to understand my situation. I was almost done. I would experience only the ocean of sorrows and frustrations. The feeling of not having control on myself and my life would haunt me lots of times. Sometimes, I would think the way out of my situation is to contemplate suicide. My bad condition got worse in the Center. The waves of anxiety and depression were almost always there. I finally decided to go to a psychiatrist. After going to the clinic, I was prescribed with antidepressant and sleeping pills.

Even with lots of sufferings, there was still a little hope left in me. I was optimistic before getting to Germany. I am gradually holding on to what's left. I turned to reading a lot and watching lots of motivational videos to recharge my inner state. One day I read an article where I saw a quote from Rūmī, the famous 13th century Persian poet and philosopher. He said: "You must keep breaking your heart until it opens." And his other quote was: "Don't feel lonely, the entire universe is inside you." It hit me hard. I gradually started feeling a little bit positive about the change in my life. In my

Why could I not even get a volunteer activity?

head, I knew it was not the end of the world, but it was hard for me to believe it. I was looking forward to many good things which were still waiting for me. I just didn't want to stay in the place all the time.

I tried everything. I went to different offices and asked them for a volunteer activity. I went to one of the offices working with immigrants, but they gave an excuse and said they can't give anything for an immigrant who lives inside the fenced area. I was shocked. Why could I not even get a volunteer activity? I just wanted to socialize, make friends outside of the camp. It wasn't possible. One of them told me that they aren't allowed to go out with their clients when I asked her if we can have coffee outside sometimes. This is the height of isolation. We were disconnected from the outside world. Nothing was possible. I think even for the outsiders the place looked like a prison.

My Wandering Resulted in Meeting Julian

As they say, one who wanders will eventually get to something. One day, a friend needed some advice and information regarding an official paper. I heard about *InfoBus*, that they help immigrants and refugees process their official papers. I went with him as an interpreter. I met this cool guy, called Julian. When I greeted him, I somehow knew that this was my lucky day. This man would at least help me in this chaos. We went inside this beautiful old model pink bus, my friend got some consultation, and after I finished interpretation, I wanted to ask him for help. I was in such despair and almost didn't want to even try anymore. I was thinking no one is helping anyone here. Regardless, I asked him for a volunteer activity anywhere around Ingolstadt. At first, he replied that he doesn't think there's an opportunity like that available for me when I am in asylum seeking procedure and in the city of Ingolstadt. Maybe I would find more opportunities when I was in Munich. Looking at me, I think he felt something. He asked me if I can join his team. He said he needed an interpreter for the bus. I told him I speak several languages (Persian, my first language, Pashto, Urdu, English, a little German and a little Arabic) and he agreed that we would start working in the upcoming weeks.

I was excited to get busy with something finally. It was a great cause. I would not only help myself but also it was an opportunity to help others having the same situation. At least be a helping hand for them somehow. That was the first turning point of my life in Germany. Julian is a cool guy. We gradually became friends and got closer. I was part of the team. I got introduced to many other great people who are volunteering and working for the same cause. To help others. To help refugees in need. I gradually made a social circle I would never think of before that. Through the circle, I met lots of cool people working with the bus and in the projects helping immigrants.

A Better, but still not a Normal Life

Life started getting better, but I am still struggling getting my normal life back here. I think it needs more time than I expected. Hopefully, the future brings more opportunities. I believe that in life you have hardships and you struggle, but darkness is always trailed by light. As Rūmī says: "Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom."

Although my asylum application is still in the process,

my life is getting better. I got off antidepressants recently but still have a long way forward till my full recovery. In addition, I am enrolled in an integration course where I learn German language through the support of government. I am thankful to the government for providing food, shelter and support. I believe Covid-19 is one of the most terrible things that happened in human history, but at the same time it's an eye-opening experience. It has proved to everyone how difficult life is when one is living in isolation and being confiscated from their freedom, working or having a job, a normal life.<

I am Bahis Delawery, an immigrant from Afghanistan. Before I left, I had studied Business Administration at the American University of Afghanistan and I had worked for the Ministry of Public Health Afghanistan. After arriving in Germany, I spent nine months in one of the Anker Centers and currently live in a community residence. I believe the whole immigration process, i.e. the Centers and camps, are dehumanizing and they lead to more problems. They are costly to the government and a waste of taxpayers' money. At the end, they produce nothing but people with more mental health issues and illnesses.