

Feel-good stories

SAHAR GHUMKHOR

Last month the film *Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone* (if you're a girl) won the Oscar for best documentary (short subject). The film focuses on Afghan girls who learn to skate through a programme run by Berlin-based NGO Skateistan which purports to "give children the opportunity to become leaders for a better world" by combining "skateboarding with creative, arts-based education".

At the Oscars ceremony, director Carol Dysinger described the film as a "love letter to the brave girls of that country" and praised the work of Skateistan, which, in her words, teaches "girls courage, to raise your hand, to say I am here and I have something to say". With this win, *Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone* joins a long list of Western-produced, critically acclaimed films, books, articles, photos, etc about Afghan women and girls in distress who – often with the helpful hand of a Westerner – find their way to empowerment.

In recent years, we saw Barry Levinson's *Rock the Kasbah* (2015), in which a young Afghan singer (played by Palestinian actress Leem Lubany) is "discovered" by a struggling American music manager (Bill Murray). There was also Angelina Jolie's animated feature *Breadwinner* (2017) about a girl who disguises herself as a boy to support her struggling family during the Taliban rule in Kabul. The film is based on the award-winning trilogy of books *The Breadwinner* (2001-03) by Canadian author Deborah Ellis who got inspired to write them after interviewing Afghan refugees in a camp in Pakistan in the late 1990s. Articles about "Afghan girl empowerment" also regularly make it to Western media outlets. There have been a myriad of stories about "Afghanistan's first female graffiti artist who is risking it all for her murals"; about Afghan girls learning to play Coldplay and Bob Marley songs on a guitar; about an all-female orchestra telling the Tal-



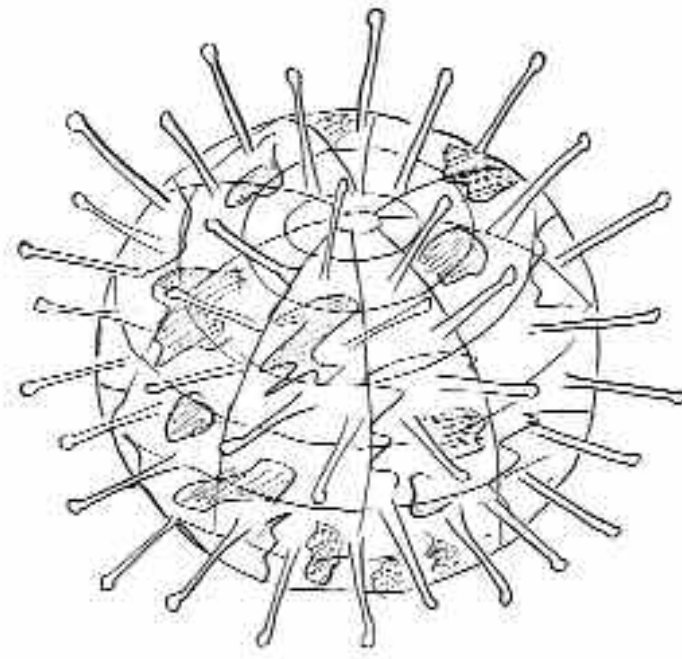
iban "we won't be silenced" and so on.

In all of these stories, Afghan women and girls who pursue their interests are presented as seemingly breaking the gender norms of their society. They are artists, hipsters, rebels with a cause, who are often introduced as trailblazers, the first-of-whatever social experience that is "unheard of" in their natural landscape of violence, poverty and misfortune. So why does the West love to tell stories of Muslim girls doing edgy or artsy things in Afghanistan? Why do these stories matter so much to Western audiences?

These stories decontextualise the lives of these girls, presenting them as ideal victims for pity and ideal heroes for admiration. Their feats make Westerners feel good about the war in Afghanistan, that unlike the Iraq war was the "good" war, which "liberated" girls and women and gave them opportunities their own society would have never afforded them. After all, the "liberation of Afghan women" was one of the declared noble causes of the 2001 US-led invasion named Operation Enduring Freedom. Apart from evoking white saviour emotions, such stories also serve well to cover up the complexities of economic and political realities in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world. Indeed, it is much more soothing and gratifying for a Westerner to believe that girls and women suffer because of the "inherent backwardness" of their soci-

eties rather than because of centuries of ruthless Western military and political intervention in their countries leading to constant conflicts. These stories set the scene in Afghanistan and elsewhere as a clash of values – modern vs tradition, women vs patriarchy, individual desire vs community norms – and conveniently drive attention away from the horrors of the global "war on terror" and the havoc it has wreaked on the lives of Afghan women and men. The experiences of Afghan (and more generally Muslim) girls and women are thus commodified into what media scholar Gillian Whitlock calls propaganda "soft weapons" – narratives from the third world which serve the political and military agenda of Western powers. In this sense, all these stories of empowerment are mediated for the purposes of Western intervention. One could trace Western obsession with women's and girls' victimhood in Afghanistan to one iconic image – the 1985 National Geographic's Afghan girl cover. For decades, the image of eight-year-old Afghan refugee Sharbat Gula was published, reprinted and displayed many times without her name or true story. It was accompanied by a single deceptive caption "Haunted eyes tell of an Afghan refugee's fears". Her eyes, however, were not full of fear but rather anger at a white man – American photographer Steve McCurry – who had barged into her all-girls class and made her teacher order her out to pose for a photo she did not want to pose for. Fifteen years later, Sharbat was dragged out of her village and made to take a nine-hour journey so she would again be forced to show her face to that same white man and his white crew from the National Geographic. Her body would be objectified and commodified again. "Time and hardship have erased her youth. Her skin looks like leather. The geometry of her jaw has softened. The eyes still glare; that has not softened," declared the magazine.

Excerpted from: *'Skateboarding won't 'save' Afghan girls'*. Courtesy: *AlJazeera.com*



Corona virus grips the world-Report

Coronavirus is curable infection

MUHAMMAD NADEEM BHATTI



An infective agent that typically consists of a nucleic acid molecule in a protein coat, is too small to be seen by light microscopy, and is able to multiply only within the living cells of a host. Most viral infections, treatments can only help with symptoms while you wait for your immune system to fight off the virus. Antibiotics do not work for viral infections. Corona viruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). Corona virus disease (COVID-19) is a new strain that was discovered in 2019 and has not been previously identified in humans. Corona viruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people.

Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans. Several known corona viruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, and cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death. Standard recommendations to prevent infection spread include regular hand washing, covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, thoroughly cooking meat and eggs. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing. Severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East respiratory syndrome corona virus (MERS-CoV) are two highly transmissible and pathogenic viruses that emerged in humans at the beginning of the 21st century. Both viruses likely originated in bats, and genetically diverse corona viruses that are related to SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV were discovered in bats worldwide.

Corona virus continues to spread around the world, prompting governments to step up efforts to contain the spread of the disease it causes, officially known as COVID-19. More than 5,700 people have died globally from the disease, while more than 152,000 infections have been confirmed in dozens of countries, according to the World Health Organization, which has now declared the outbreak a pandemic. New coronavirus outbreak, which originated in Wuhan, China, a global pandemic. The United States and countries across Europe are closing schools, entertainment venues and all but essential services, as they step up efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic. Governments are limiting travel - both inward and outward - to curb the movement of people. South Korea and China, both wary of imported infections, have tightened re-

quirements for international arrivals. More cases are now being reported outside China, where the virus first originated late last year, than inside. Schools in New York City are shut and classes moved online, while entertainment venues have been ordered to close from Tuesday, as officials increasingly turn to quarantine measures to tackle a virus that has now killed more than 6,500 people around the world.

2020 was already going badly for most South Asian countries. Growth was slowing across the region, Afghanistan was mired in political uncertainty, and communal violence had rocked India. Now the region is bracing for the spread of COVID-19, which could further depress economic activity, damage supply chains, and stress already weak public health systems. The latest numbers show a pronounced jump in the number of confirmed cases of the new corona virus across the region since this time last week, from 13 to 92. India has the most, with 56 cases. Experts say that an epidemic there is likely, given a shortage of testing kits and poor reporting practices because of low literacy rates and weak health care infrastructure. If the experience of countries such as Italy is anything to go by, things will get worse before they get better.

Misinformation makes crises worse, and flawed guidance is particularly dangerous during a potential pandemic, as India shows. There, some legislators have falsely claimed that cow urine and cow dung could combat the corona virus part of an ongoing trend to promote Hindu nationalist pseudoscience, as Bhavya Dore reports for FP.

Meanwhile social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, have been a hotbed of hokum home remedies and incorrect advisories. In a sense, most South Asian countries have the perfect storm for a mass outbreak. High population density, generally poor hygiene practices, and large numbers of people on the internet but without high degrees of digital literacy. Even if South Asia still has relatively few corona virus cases, the region is already feeling the economic repercussions. India sources 70 percent of its pharmaceutical ingredients and a quarter of its car parts from China. Chinese smart phones the top sellers in India—are reportedly selling out as stores run out of supplies. And it comes as India was already reeling from its slowest pace of growth in years. If there's one small fiscal consolation,

South Asia's economies are all net importers of energy, and a sharp drop in crude oil prices may be beneficial. A \$20 fall in the price of crude saves India annual import costs worth as much as 1 percent of its GDP.

Pakistan has recorded its biggest single-day spike in corona virus infections, taking the tally to 107, amid reports of ineffective quarantine procedures as 61 of those are reported to be among those who had been held at a quarantine camp at the country's Taftan border crossing with Iran. No deaths due to the corona virus have been recorded, according to government data. They had been quarantined there, and then we moved them to our own facility where we tested them." People currently in the Taftan camp told Al they were not being adequately screened for corona virus or treated for existing conditions.

According to my medical research from the evidence so far, the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in ALL AREAS, including areas with hot and humid weather. Regardless of climate, adopt protective measures if you live in, or travel to an area reporting COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. There is no reason to believe that cold weather can kill the new corona virus or other diseases. The normal human body temperature remains around 36.5°C to 37°C, regardless of the external temperature or weather. The most effective way to protect yourself against the new corona virus is by frequently cleaning your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or washing them with soap and water. Taking a hot bath will not prevent you from catching COVID-19. Your normal body temperature remains around 36.5°C to 37°C, regardless of the temperature of your bath or shower. Actually, taking a hot bath with extremely hot water can be harmful, as it can burn you. The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. To date there has been neither information nor evidence to suggest that the new coronavirus could be transmitted by mosquitoes. The new corona virus is a respiratory virus which spreads primarily through droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose. Hand dryers are not effective in killing the 2019-nCoV. To protect yourself against the new corona virus, you should frequently clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Once your hands are cleaned, you should dry them thoroughly by using paper towels or a warm air dryer.

The writer is an entrepreneur and

Coronalization

ZILE HUMA

I coined the term 'Coronalization' considering its multi-dimensional and global effects. The word 'coronalization' is a combination of 'corona' from coronavirus and 'lization' taken from globalization.

The fatal effects of the coronavirus started from the Wuhan province of China and has spread to more than 150 countries till now. Travelling is the main reason making it a globalized emergency. Coronavirus attacks are non-discriminatory, affecting politicians and celebrities across the globe. The UK health minister and the Canadian first lady tested positive for the virus. An Iranian ambassador to Syria died of coronavirus, while a large number of members of the Iranian parliament are affected by the coronavirus.

The deadly effects of the coronavirus are not limited only to health but many other sectors too. President Trump announced a 30-day ban on travelling from Europe to the US. Qatar also banned entry of citizens from 14 countries most affected by the coronavirus. Many airlines have been suspended, incurring a huge loss for the safety of humanity. The travel ban has badly affected the tourism industry and

businesses all over the world. According to a report in Aljazeera, up to 90 percent of hotel and travel agency bookings have been cancelled in Rome and up to 80 percent in Sicily. The global import export business is another sector which is severely impacted by the outbreak of the coronavirus. China is not only the second largest economy but also the biggest oil importer. The impacts of the virus have shaken the prices of oils, LNG and other products.

The demand and supply curve of some important preventive products of the coronavirus have been changing and shifting; these include masks, gloves, sanitizers and detecting apparatus. The demand of all these products has increased, thus increasing prices. Pakistan has announced to close all its borders, some of which are main routes of trade and transit trade. This can also produce certain problems like hoarding and shortage of food and other items which requires advance concrete strategy. Similarly, the government of Pakistan has announced a ban on all public gatherings like cinemas, weddings and conferences. This will negatively impact the businesses of wedding halls, cinemas and similar places. All these steps though are the need of hour to prevent the spread of this

virus. The effects of the coronavirus have also changed the dimensions of official work and focus of governments. Governments all over the world are spending their resources to develop and implement strategies to overcome this deadly virus. Many international conferences and seminars have been postponed to contain the spread of this fatal virus. The outbreak has also affected the education sector. Prestigious institutions like Harvard and MIT have shut down for now. The government of Pakistan has also announced closure of all public and private education institutions for a limited time period. The pandemic has impacted sports events also. World indoor championships in Nanjing from March 13-15 have been postponed to March 2021. The PSL matches in Pakistan are being played without spectators in the ground. Moreover, the virus has also affected our religious obligations. Saudi Arabia has banned Umrah for all countries.

Pakistan also banned the Raiwind tablighi gathering, and visitors to Kartarpur from as a precautionary measure. So we can safely call the coronavirus a global challenge which requires collective efforts at the individual, local, national and international levels to beat this threat.

Letters to the Editor

The era of isolation

Humans are complicated creatures each person has their own way of dealing with trauma or Problems. Some go into isolation and some just bury it all inside like the trauma never happened. Isolation is seen as the state of having minimal contact with others. Everyone in their life goes through this phase or you can say that somehow they are stuck in this. Some people become a part of isolation, they may be physically able to go out and meet people but are inhibited from doing so by factors such as depression, social anxiety, losing a loved one, or grief and that leads to a person feeling vulnerable, needing some comfort.

We humans make a lonely crowd, and it's killing us. I would like to focus on isolation and how in isolation people can ease their process of healing instead of suppressing their emotions or turning towards negativity in isolation. In isolation, you can become a target for both positive and negative thoughts, it depends on your will.

The majority of peoples in our society are somehow in isolation and not on the good side of isolation they are on the negative side.

That's why we are divided today, instead of being united. If we want to take a step forward and think about how we can make this world united or less isolated than we can focus on how to control the negative thoughts that come in isolation, mostly they overcome by reading books especially self-help books. Because every book carries a message with itself, a motivational purpose and a value to give.

I myself have been the target of isolation. And I know it is hard to recover from a huge trauma that has changed your life that is why they say: "Time heals every wound." I read a lot of self-help books. I have learned and still learning a lot from them and not just books by being my own advisor and having faith in me instead of depending on people. I learned that isolation is not just a process it's a phase and a necessary phase. And everyone goes through this phase the question is: Do you want to divert towards the negative or Do you want to divert towards the positive. The choice is yours. Talk to people interact and share your thoughts and feelings with your family and friends as isolation is not for everyone as I mentioned before some people suppress their emotions instead of suppressing them talk about them.

Work your way through and heal. If we stay like this forever with the amount of depression and anxiety in our youth, we will always remain stuck under this title: "we are a sad generation with happy pictures".

Iqra Faisal LAHORE

Some year

Since the day we greeted each other 'happy 2020', we've been seeing and hearing all about chaos. World war III on the verge of breaking out, kashmir issue, and political stress around the world to state a few. All this happening in 2020. The most familiar phenomenon around the world is 'CoronaVirus' which risks everyone's lives. Italy is completely locked down, and other countries shut their institution and other general places to save their lives. This unhabitual things or diseases makes world agitated. However, this is just a March of a year and we people go through from many tragedies. Still many more to come as according to predictions of 2020, hope that after this all trial

there should be some wondrous things happen to the world. Now we are just sitting in our homes and praying well for the world. Still thinking that this 2020 has a good start for us? or this year will give us more adventurous things.

Yusma Tanveer KARACHI

Being alone

I have been a big admirer of reporters and the media houses almost right from my college years like 1997. In that particular year, I had started peeping into various English news reports even as I was studying my undergraduate degree [first degree] in Physics at college in Tiruchendur in Tamil Nadu. In fact, the sad news of the death of Princess of Wales, Diana in an unfortunate car crash in 1997 had so saddened me that I had started discussing that piece of news with my classmates in Tiruchendur and other familiar people in my native places like Korkai, Tuticorin, Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. Like this, loss of life in family is

irreparable, not easy enough to fill that vacuum. I can feel the depth of such unfortunate loss of life even as our family had been recently bereaved through the death of my beloved and talented father [being a great speaker, a writer especially in Tamil, a political crusader] – we all shed our tears and my lovable mother has still been mourning the loss, unable to come out of it. Just interestingly in the same fashion, the recent news tidbits of the separation of Prince Harry [the late Diana's son] from the royal status/tag have been creating a lot of interesting yet emotional stories out there the world over. Having been fondly termed Megxit by the British media, the latest family event involving Harry and his wife Meghan besides their kid Archie has taken dramatic precedence across the media houses both from the East and the West. In a nutshell, Harry's separation, his relocation to his wife Meghan in Canada and their deep-rooted family bond in the UK have almost become the talking points, sending some positive signals about family values and the bond of greatness/togetherness at the world stage.

P Senthil Saravana Durai