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MAZAR-I-SHARIF, Afghanistan — Sara Bahai's decision to become Afghanistan's only known female taxi driver was motivated less by ideals of equality than by the need to support an extended family — and a love of driving that has confined her conservative detractors to the rear-view mirror.

She still remembers her first time behind the wheel, shortly after the Taliban were driven from power in the 2001 US-led invasion. "I felt like I was in the sky, and I totally fell in love with driving," she said. There was no turning back.

Bahai, now about 40 years old, had already spent much of her life defying taboos in Afghanistan, where women are widely regarded as inferior to men and discouraged from working outside the home.

She never married, she said, because she had to support her parents and siblings and feared a husband would prevent her from working. With no children of her own she adopted two boys, now both in high school. When Taliban insurgents shot and killed her brother-in-law, she took in her sister and seven nieces and nephews. She now supports a dozen people.

To put food on the table, she drives around the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif in a spotlessly clean yellow and white Toyota Corolla with sparkly woven seat covers and a good luck talisman in the front window.

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In Afghanistan's Mazar-I-Sharif, Sara Bahai became the only known female taxi driver to support her family, driven by her love of driving and ignoring critics.

She still remembers her first time behind the wheel, shortly after the taliban were forced out in the 2001 US-led invasion. "I felt like I was in the sky, and I totally fell in love with driving," she said. There was no turning back.

Bahai, now around 40, has spent most of her life breaking taboos in Afghanistan, where women are often seen as less important than men and not encouraged to work outside the home.

She never married, she said, because she had to support her parents and brothers and sisters and feared a husband would prevent her from working. With no children of her own she adopted two boys, now both in high school. When Taliban rebels shot and killed her husband's brother, she took in her sister and seven nieces and nephews. She now supports a dozen people.

To provide for her family, she drives a clean yellow and white Toyota Corolla around Mazar-i-Sharif, a city in the north, with fancy seat covers and a lucky charm on the windshield.