

The background of the entire image is a stylized map of Afghanistan. The map is composed of several overlapping, semi-transparent shapes in various shades of brown, tan, and beige. The top half of the image has a lighter tan background, while the bottom half has a darker tan background. The map itself is centered and covers most of the frame. The title text is overlaid on the map.

Misconceptions of AFGHANISTAN

By: Summer Safi

The Afghan Perspective

Afghanistan is known for being a war torn, impoverished country. With the Taliban and the Afghan government constantly in disagreement, having to seek help from other countries to tame the situation. This is how the world mainly views the country of Afghanistan. We see the suffering, the war, the pain, the struggle to function,

but we never see what is actually happening from an Afghans point of view. The perspective we get is always from Westerners, who tend to think that they are the saviors and heroes by helping out poor countries filled with grief and loss. It erases how actual Afghans feel and are dealing with the reality of the situation. This also causes a lot of misconceptions to be had on the country as a whole. After talking to Rishina Hakimi,





Parliament Building taken by Rishina Hakimi

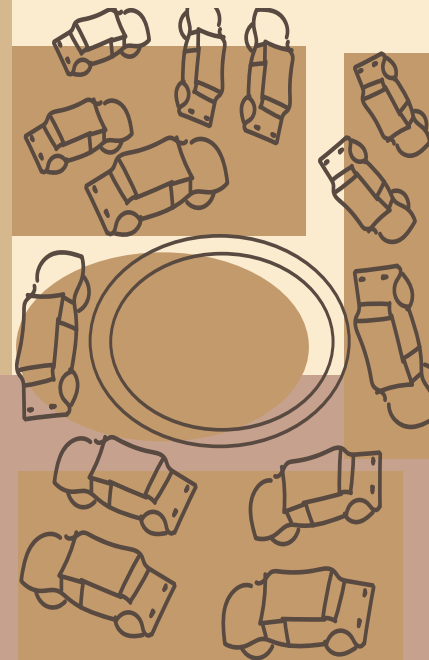
an Afghan who later came to America after the Russians invaded Afghanistan, it became more clear on what Afghanistan was like before and how it is now, which is nothing like the

Western portrayal of it.

Rishina Hakimi is currently a lawyer living in Southern California. She grew up in Afghanistan until she was 10 years-old, having to leave the country as it was turning into the warzone we now consider it as. She visited Afghanistan a couple years ago, volunteering

and visiting her old home. Now, it has been 30 years since she has lived in the country, but she has seen how it has evolved and transformed since she left.

One of the main things that has noticeably changed, Hakimi mentions, is how crowded Afghanistan is. Kabul, which is the capital, is now filled with



more opportunities, causing more people to move there from the impoverished cities of the country. These new economic opportunities cause there to be no room on the roads as cars are packed beyond belief. "If you get stuck in traffic, you will be stuck in one spot for like hours," she laughs. There are also more opportunities for women as well, as they are able to get jobs that they wouldn't have been offered before. Women are now able to drive themselves, which in the

beginning of the Taliban rule, wasn't possible as women weren't allowed to go outside by themselves. Although these are slow changes a, it's these little freedoms that show how the country is evolving. From a Westernized point of view, this information was pretty shocking. What most people know, or think, when they hear about Afghanistan isn't cars or some sort of normalized civilization. Seeing how the capital of Afghanistan is more urbanized than what

people think shows how these misconceptions affect the little things that we think are normal, like cars and traffic.

Before the Afghanistan we know now, it was what some people would consider a fashion capital. Kabul was filled with people wearing the latest fashion trends, doing their hair, shining their shoes, etc. "They literally called it like a fashion capital because you would see people in mini dresses and people, like my cousin, every morning she would have her hair done," says



King Amanullah Khan's grave taken by Rishina Hakimi

Hakimi. Now, however, because of the Taliban, that has changed. Women now have to cover up, wearing hijabs and burkas, fitting into these more modest rules of the country. People may think that this is a “bad” thing and takes away these women’s freedom, but on the contrary, it allows for the women to feel more safe. By covering up, these women to have their own sense of freedom and a sense of security. Following these rules causes them to not



have to face the violence of the Taliban, and has ultimately causes the Taliban to not take such violent actions against them, or the country in general.

In regards to the Taliban, the situation with them is significantly better than before. When they first took over, they would beat up people, mostly women,

over simple things such as laughing in public and going out alone. Now, looking at it and seeing how the American soldiers are said to be leaving on September 11, 2021, Rishina states how her biggest fear for the country is the Taliban taking over. However, we are looking at it in an Americanized lens, as she then also states that

the people of Afghanistan feel more secure with the Taliban as they won’t have to fear suicide bombers if they follow their rules: “If they find somebody, like the strict rules that they bring, if they find somebody



Aschiana Foundation taken by Rishina Hakimi

stealing, they will cut their arms. So people are so scared of that, that they won't do it. So, they think of that as a good thing, because it's going to make everything secure".

When Rishina lived in Afghanistan, she said that she would only leave the house in order to go to school or to a relatives house. It wasn't necessarily that it was unsafe to go out, but there wasn't a need to. In Kabul, she had a house that had most of everything she needed, not really having a reason to go out. She

was also really young when she lived there, so it was a common safety measurement that parents took to watch over their children. There was also this aspect of sexism as her being a female that played a part in her not being able to go out. "If we wanted something, Nabil (her older brother) would go bring it or somebody would bring it to the house. They looked at it as whatever you guys want, we'll bring it, just don't go out kind of thing," she explains.

She talks about how if she or any of her other female friends wanted to go out, their older brother would have to take them. She also mentions how the men of the family would be the ones to run errands and get groceries etc. if they needed them to.

Hakimi states the hope for Afghanistan

comes from the new, younger generation. She explains how smart the kids are, and how especially street smart they are. In Afghanistan, after third grade, genders get split



Aschiana Foundation taken by Rishina Hakimi



Aschiana Foundation taken by Rishina Hakimi

into different schools. However, when Hakimi went to help out in one school during her visit, she saw how the boys and girls interacting with each other will allow

for more progression in the country. "Every kid you talk to, what do you want to be? I want to be a doctor. I want to be the president," she explains, as these kids have big goals and dreams that they are striving for that allows for her to believe that the future of Afghanistan could

be bright. She doesn't believe that Afghanistan will ever be that safe place it once was in her lifetime, but maybe in these kids' lifetime, there will be a transformation for the greater good of the country and the world in general. It seems as though a country that mixes religion and government together will never necessarily be modernized, but the country doesn't need that separation to be industrialized. Ignoring that Western ideal of that separation, Afghanistan might be able to become

industrialized in their own way.

As an Afghan American, I always wonder if I would be able to visit Afghanistan without that feeling of fear. With everything that we are fed to know about the country in the states, it seems like it is the worst place to be, however I crave that knowledge of knowing where my family comes from. After talking with Hakimi, the country, or at least the capital, is way more "normal" than you think. Hakimi explains the situation

well, “I think the unfortunate thing with our people is that we’re very power hungry”. With this in mind, it helps us see how and why Afghanistan is currently the way it is. With that, there is this narrative that Western countries place on third world countries: that they need saving and that only we (these white western countries) can save them. Yes, there is war and poverty all over Afghanistan, but there are still modernized elements to the country as well. These major

economic differences and displacements throughout the country is what most third world countries face, but with this constant narrative, it causes us to turn a blind eye in the face of reality.



