

Here, There, In Between

A collection of creative writing by members of the
Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre Writers' Group
2018



This project was supported by Cork City Libraries for Cork World Book Fest 2018

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Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre Writers, Group*

2018

Poetry and stories by members of the
Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre Writers' Group

Cork World Book Festival 2018

Edited and compiled by

Kathy D'Arcy and Paul Casey

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Image courtesy of Izzeddeen Alkarajeh

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Members of the Kinsale Road Accomodation Centre Writers' Group

Zoya Zoya

Asad Mahmud

Noman Sattar

Izzeddeen Alkarajeh

Abdiaziz Mussa

Foreword

This publication emanated from a series of creative writing workshops directed by Paul Casey and I, as a project supported by Cork City Libraries for World Book Fest 2018.

It has been an incredibly moving journey working with this group of writers, some of whom are here in what this country euphemistically calls 'Direct Provision' because they have previously called for a better world with their beautiful words. We are honoured to have these writers here in Ireland, and we are honoured and lucky to be called on by every person who comes to this country seeking refuge. In my view, we tarnish that honour when we close our eyes to the unfair, institutionalising system we use to warehouse these people while they endure a seemingly endless rigmarole of processing and interviews and waiting to start living again.

We need to open our eyes. We need to speak up for our fellow men, women and children. I hope we can all be brave enough to read these stories and to keep our eyes open.

Some of the pieces in this book speak to better times, happy memories, dreams, goals. Others reflect on realities. All come directly from the heart. I am grateful to have read each one, and to have met and worked with the people who created them. I hope that this is the start of a more meaningful cultural interaction for Cork city and all its inhabitants. Well done to Eileen O'Sullivan and Breda Hassett of the Access and Inclusion Group, Cork City Libraries for taking this first step during Cork World Book Fest 2018.

Kathy D'Arcy

Asad Mahmud

My right to question on the day of human rights

To question is the beginning of the learning process. To question is proof of a healthy and curious mind which has analysed some situation initially and developed a sense of curiosity about it, and wants to know further. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights also recognises this right as a right to seek information under article 19 of it. Questioning is something which starts the process of development of thoughts, otherwise human civilisation would never have developed into forming a charter of rights of this kind. On this auspicious day I want assert my right to question to anyone who wants my allegiance in any form.

There is no authority which can bereave me of my rights as an individual, the freedoms I hold, the liberties I have, no one can. If someone wants to put constraints on my rights then I have a right to question that authority whether it be human or divine.

Why am I told when I am born that this way of life will lead to eternal good and this will not? A standard of good, but established by who – who is the ultimate fixer of the standard of good or evil? What is good and what is evil? Should I accept something as a standard of good because it has been told to me since my birth, or should I analyse the world around me, make an impression of good and evil, when my intellect is developed to analyse for myself? What if my intellect tells me something otherwise than what I was told to believe?

And if am not believing what I was told, am I causing offence to someone? Apparently in the current time I observe that I am. By questioning the dogmas around me I always cause offence to someone.

But I want an absolute authority to question everyone, even God – to ask Him why He created evil, if he was not happy with it. Why He created sinners if He wanted to punish them, why He chose some people to be superior to others and called them prophets. Why He cannot communicate with people directly without prophets. Why He wants so badly to be worshipped, to feel like a God. Why is He so insecure. Why He never listens to the prayers of those who die of hunger in the famine stricken areas. Why even any famine stricken areas exist. Why God is short of food for them and not for the others. Why He never comes to rescue the people who are murdered in His name –

after all it's a matter of integrity for Him. Why is He so anti-social and never shows up to His people. I would like to hear if He is suffering from some sort of Social Phobias. I might be of some help in this matter.

Yes, I have a right to question and I also expect some answers from those of whom I have asked the questions. On this day of perseverance of Human Rights I have this message for everyone; let's stop taking offence and start building bridges by starting a discussion. Let's start talking before it's too late to take offence even. Let not our offence lead the world in chaos towards a path of destruction. Let's stop taking offence and start a discussion – I have a question for you.

Noman Sattar

I Am Not Whole

I am not whole
For parts of me stay behind
In the streets I roam
In the paths I tread
There I am
All around the world
A huge chunk of me
Left in the street # 3
In that old small house
Where I first saw light
And a mother oh so loving
With that old red Orion TV
With a sister I used to fight a lot
With the stairs I used to climb
To see the room of my parents
Those old wooden doors
That decor still stays in me
The moonlit night
Oh that all ... so stays with me
For I am not whole

Abdiaziz Mussa

The first night of her wedding, she faced screaming and crying

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but where there's no medical reason for this to be done. It's also known as "female circumcision" or "cutting", and by other terms such as *sunna*, *gudniin*, *halalays*, *tahur*, *megrez* and *khitan*, among others.

Once upon time I and my cousin went to a Nomad area in Ethiopia, when I was 12 years old. Before we reached our destination we slept the night with Nomadic people who were having a wedding. I witnessed a Somali women on the first night of her wedding. She cried till morning. It was late night and we were preparing to sleep, but unfortunately we could hear screaming and crying from the bridechamber room, till we stopped chatting and listened to what was going on. My cousin knew the culture of the rural or Nomad area and he said that the women was FGM, and that was probably the reason she was screaming and crying on the first night of her wedding, because her husband must open with his penis where her genitals had been mutilated. When the woman starts screaming and crying they call this is sign of victory of men, and it must continue over the following nights and days until the wound stays open. This is traditional practice.

The people used this tradition in Islam, but Muslims and Christians define the first night of a wedding as the first night that a man and a woman come together as husband and wife. It is not a normal night to the bride or to the groom. It is the most important night for the couple's marital life. Both spouses should remember that they are completely starting a new life. Naturally, they are both nervous and anxious because it is a night when two people who lived in two different worlds meet together. At the same time, they are excited and eager to get to know each other to start a marital life with happiness. It is important for both the husband and wife to try their best to make matters for them easy. They should treat each other with extreme gentleness, tenderness, and compassion.

Every woman feels preoccupied or shy on the first night of the wedding. Of course, it is a very important event for a young lady to be together with a man for the first time, to

separate from her family in which she found shelter for many years, and to enter a new family life. At that time, she is in need of the man's wide wings of kindness and love. A woman usually does not forget the man whom she meets on the first night of her marriage. If the woman experiences pleasurable excitement on the first night, if she is shown love, patience, politeness, and a broad understanding, she feels grateful to the man all her life. This first experience is an unforgettable memory for women. But in many families living in the Horn of Africa women didn't get this mercy, and on their first night have faced crying and screaming. It's Hell, not a wedding.

Enacting a law against FGM, making it a criminal act, means you have to have enough prisons to hold every mother and every grandmother in jail; that's not what you want to do, so the strategy we can use is education. Get the people to give it up, not because there's a law and they are afraid of Imprisonment, but because they understand; it is against Islam, it's against health, it's against women, it's against childbirth. You can give them examples, and use the religious argument, the medical argument, the reproductive argument.

FGM is usually carried out on young girls between infancy and the age of 15, most commonly before puberty starts. It is illegal in Ireland and is child abuse. It's very painful and can seriously harm the health of women and girls. It can also cause long-term problems with sex, childbirth and mental health.

Izzeddeen Alkarakeh

Rescue of a Palestinian family: status in Ireland

Being born under military occupation makes one's life full of difficult experiences. How can you deal with people who use their religious scripture as a real estate ownership certificate to confiscate your lands and resources? Having to access your medical services, schools, markets or any other demands during a curfew are just normal experiences which we develop the skills to overcome until we no longer consider them "difficulties". They simply become our life norms. We no longer think that people in other places of the world practice their lives normally.

Living under foreign military laws that treat indigenous race as invaders, and their own race as a supreme one, fills your life with challenges. It blocks access to many human rights, and makes accessing most other rights so hard. Although I lived my first 28 years trying to avoid being a victim to any of these laws, unfortunately I was trapped by a law that restricts Palestinians from being united with their spouses if they live out of Palestine, even if both are originally Palestinians. That trap turned out to be my worst experience, and let me end up an asylum seeker in Ireland in order to protect my family unity.

Since Summer of 2005, we kept waiting for Israeli authorities to process our family reunification application. We tried to bribe Israeli officials, or get a visitor's permit that we could break and stay in Palestine: unfortunately, all attempts failed. I was sponsoring my wife and children in Saudi Arabia under a work visa that used to be renewed annually. We used to monitor Israeli media to learn about any progress about family reunification processes. We realized around that time that Israeli politicians look at the family reunification process for Palestinians as a demographic threat to their state. By the time we realized that, our family unity was directly related to my work visa lifetime, which is temporary anyway.

In 2015, Saudi Arabia faced an economic recession due to the drop in oil prices. This caused a lot of projects to stop, a lot of companies to terminate contracts with foreign residents. My company sent us a memo early in 2016 to say that they were going to terminate our contracts after we delivered the latest project. For all my colleagues it meant simply a return to home – which, if it is not desirable, at least is possible. For my family, we looked at this memo as an informal family split order. My kids started anticipating their situation after few months. They must accompany me to West Bank, and leave their mother with her father in Jordan. They would join schools in

Palestine, and miss their mom's hugs and kisses when they came and went from schools. They started imagining their daily life without the mom who used to help them with their homework, prepare their meals, iron their clothes, send them to bed, wake them up, prepare their lunch boxes and be with them in every single activity. They started thinking of themselves as orphans to be. Orphans who needed to experience a sad moment in every celebration, for the memory of their beloved mom. It was even more bitter to think that they might be made orphans while their mom was at the other side of the border.

Overcoming this fear, and bringing peace back to my family, has become my biggest challenge. All other options that I was working on, like immigrating to Canada, Australia or New Zealand as a skilled immigrant, or finding a "bribe-able" official, or getting a breakable visitor's permit, had become impractical by virtue of the length of time needed. I found myself short of time, and I had to act before our residence in Saudi Arabia got terminated.

I spent around 5 years working on solutions that would maintain my family unity, and avoid seeking protection in any state or entity. Unfortunately, due to the short notice, I found myself obliged to seek asylum in one of the countries. None of the neighboring countries provided for an asylum process. My wife and children applied for a Canadian visit VISA in order to travel with me and apply for asylum there, but they were rejected. We started researching Europe. We excluded all non-English speaking countries to find ourselves limited to Ireland, after excluding the UK for other reasons.

From the time of shortlisting Ireland as the destination for our asylum application, to the time of landing here, I spent 6 months researching the protection law, and identifying our prospects under the Irish justice system. I learned the specifics of my family's situation, and collected all the relevant information from human rights watch, UN organizations, the Geneva convention and other resources and reports. I put myself in the shoes of the judge or the official who would process my application, and tried to assist him/her to identify my family's problem easily and quickly.

Before flying to Dublin, we prepared ourselves to look like real tourists. We booked to visit some tourist attractions and a wonderful apartment to the south of the city. We spent the first week exploring the city and learning about housing, jobs and other aspects of life. We thought that we should give an impression to the immigration officials at the airport that our purpose of visit matches our Visa types, or they could return us from the airport.

We spent the first week in Dublin in a high quality, tourist-class apartment. It was booked for two weeks. We started searching for a longer term residence, thinking that we would spend 3 to 6 months waiting for our asylum application to be processed. Before finding one, we visited the Office of Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC), to lodge our asylum application. We thought that it would be a matter of hours, and we would go back home to continue searching online for an apartment, after we learned from the office about how long they would take to process our application.

The day of the application turned out to be our worst nightmare. We were directed to other staff members who were responsible for taking us to a reception centre. There, we learned for the first time that Ireland has a reception system for asylum seekers called direct provision. When we asked if it was possible to live independently while waiting, we were told that we could do so, but without any right to social welfare or other services. When we asked about a time estimate, they answered that it could take years to process the application.

We found ourselves obliged to accept direct provision as it wasn't possible to live independently without the right to work. We were taken in two taxis to Baleskin reception centre to the north of Dublin. Then we were taken by a staff member to two detached rooms, whose view was disgusting, and shocked all my family members. For me, the dirt, the brown spotted pillows and mattresses and the disgusting bathroom brought to my memory the Israeli prison cells. Accepting admission to these two rooms was fairly possible to me. I could count myself imprisoned for a temporary time until they dispatched us to another direct provision centre. But when I saw my wife collapsed and crying, and my kids silenced by the shock, I realized that I had committed a sin by missing out on learning about the direct provision part of the asylum process. I tried to empower my wife with a few words, and let her recover her strength. We decided to go back to the apartment, which we hadn't checked out from yet, to rethink the whole thing and to decide what to do.

The centre admin allowed us to leave for 24 hours only, or we would lose our right to live there. We spent a whole night reviewing the options we had. We realized that we had only two: either being split into two different countries (wife to Jordan, the others to Palestine), or accepting the dirtiest rooms ever in Baleskin. We decided to sacrifice for the sake of living together. None of us can live without the other! We started thinking positively. We thought that changing the furniture of the rooms, and enhancing

their situation, can help us resist the situation, even if we had to buy our own furniture items.

The next day, we checked out of the apartment and returned to Baleskin reception centre, willing to talk to the management about the miserable situation in the rooms that we had seen the previous day. Fortunately, upon arrival, we were told that we had been given two different rooms. When we accessed them, we jumped for joy, as if we had been moved to a 5 star hotel. They were decent rooms, with new bed sheets, pillows and mattresses. The rooms were connected to a small room in the middle, with a tub, sofa and a TV. We thought that the admin might have noticed the shock of my family the previous day, and had decided to avoid our complaints when we returned. We spent one month in that centre, and we were delighted to be dispatched to the Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre. It seemed to us as if the staff of direct provision in Cork belong to another state or another system. We hoped that the staff of Baleskin would be taught the same manners, and follow the same standards. The staff in the Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre are respectful, and do beyond enough. Their smiles alone were enough for us to feel relieved after a month of nervousness.

We started our life in Cork recovering, teaching ourselves to look at the positive things in the new life, and that it was a temporary stage that we could easily accommodate ourselves to. My kids still live under the shock of losing the luxury of having their own spaces, toys, desks, car, outings and independence. But I had to treat them like adults and explain to them that we are living under the mandate of a justice system that we approached; they didn't bring us from the Middle East. We must be thankful to the state and the people who gave us access to their system. At least they have a system that we can use to express our fears. Even if the system has limitations, its sole purpose is to protect us. We had to teach our kids that we are victims of the racist Israeli laws, not of anyone else. We may blame Jordan who do not give us the right to live with their mother although she is Jordanian. We may blame Saudi Arabia which ignores our situation and does not give us the right to stay together.

We were disappointed by the cancellation of our first interview of 1/12/2016, which extended our stay in direct provision for a minimum of eleven extra months. We started realizing that direct provision was a great integration opportunity that we could miss if we lived in the community. My wife's language ability was greatly enhanced due to the daily English classes. She had an opportunity to demonstrate her skills to people in the centre, and receive a lot of praise for things that she used to do routinely, having never realized their real value to others. My youngest son became a fluent English

speaker due to the preschool classes. After-school clubs developed my daughters' language and life skills a lot. We had an opportunity to meet many Irish people on a daily basis, who helped us to get an idea about the traditions, the good and the generosity of Irish people. Summer holiday weekly outings were a generous initiative, and a great opportunity for the whole family to explore different locations around Cork. If we had to wait for the asylum application in an independent home in the community, we would have been isolated from all these services and benefits.

After 14 months of living in Ireland, I thought of myself and my family as a practical example of the Quranic verse that says: "But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not." If my research about Ireland before coming had led me to direct provision, to see the horrible photos and the exaggerated reports that we found later, we could have chosen another option that could have been worse. If we were able to live independently in isolation, out of direct provision, we would have lost the great opportunity to meet the wonderful people who we met here, and who helped us to become ready to integrate into the community automatically when we left direct provision.

When we decided to consider direct provision a life station, and a transition into Ireland, it turned into our paradise. Heaven is not a luxurious place that puts all your desirable things under your control. Paradise is to be grateful to the people who spare you a room to be united with your kids, despite having a severe homelessness issue. Paradise is to be grateful to the people who admit you, and listen to you, when all your neighbors fail to protect you. Paradise is when you become faithful to the nation which normalized you as a citizen, at a time when your invaders are enjoying your lands and resources. Paradise is in self satisfaction, and confidence in the people around you.

Thanks to Ireland for the protection of our family.

Izzeddeen Alkarajeh

The myth of return

This morning is the most joyful in our lives. The noise of celebration from people in the refugee camp has awakened everyone. People are running down to the streets to celebrate. The United Nations has just unanimously adopted the long-awaited resolution that all Palestinians who were displaced from their homes in 1948 and 1967 must be allowed to return to their own places. The third generation is entitled to live in the lands that have been occupied and used by Israel for 70 years. Israel is ordered to facilitate the return of the indigenous people by all means, and any resistance to this resolution will be met with force.

Israelis are panicked. Their military forces are not blocking our city entrances, we can't find them in our sight! People run into their cars, leaving their homes in the camp open and unattended. They are running to kiss the soil of their grandparents.

I drive the car, taking my brothers and sisters to our abandoned city of Beit Jibrin. We start dancing and singing the national anthem. For the first time in our lives, we are crossing street junctions, passing one village after another without seeing any Israeli soldiers. Oh my God, the breath of freedom is exciting.

Now, we are in front of the apartheid wall gate. The scene is amazing! The gate that used to hold us for 3 hours before letting us pass is collapsed. Soldiers who used to persecute tens of thousands of people every morning are no longer there. We are seeing the whole world through this collapsed gate that used to block our dreams and our vision.

A few hundred meters beyond the apartheid wall, the domain of our beloved abandoned town begins. Israelis had a huge investment in altering its Palestinian identity and converted it to a tourist attraction. But the town recognizes us. We feel like it is opening its arms to welcome us back.

"Where are your grandparents?" the town asks.

"Oh my love, these are 70 years, do you expect them to live this long?" I answer.

"So sad, I miss you all my descendants, life is meaningless without you!" the town replies.

“Don’t worry my love, finally justice has been enforced and we are back. My parents passed the house keys and title deeds to us. Where are our properties?” I asked.

“Come on in. Forget about the keys, they didn’t leave doors for you. Here is your grandparents’ house, and here is your farm. You will find the well at its corner, full of grass and rubbish.”

Every one of us is walking in a different direction. We can’t believe we are being allowed to walk around on such a vast piece of land. For three generations, we were left to live in a house of 150 square meters, that was build to replace the United Nations tent. The family has grown to become 25 men and women. Finding ourselves claiming back our 20 acre piece of land is just like taking us from prison to freedom. I step into my grandparents’ abandoned house. Although we could keep rust away from the key, the door is too rusty. The door is half open, and it seems as if it used to be a shelter for wild animals. Grass has grown into the wall cracks and between the tiles. Wind blows and passes through the windows freely; the lean years have eaten the glass and most of the woody frames. The remains of the bathroom and kitchen tell the story of my grandparents’ lifestyle. The authenticity of our indigenouness is being proved by every stone, and everything that remains.

We spend the whole day looking around the farm. Every time we finish navigating the place, we start from the beginning as if we have just started. We look liked children who were lost, and have just returned home. The sun is setting and we must leave. The place needs a lot of rehabilitation to become habitable. Although we are keen to spend our night lying on the grass, we decide that it isn’t safe to stay overnight. Although we were born and raised in the refugee camp, we feel so scared to return to it. Who likes to return to the prison after serving a life sentence?

I start the car, hoping it won’t start. Drive away slowly, hoping it won’t drive. No one is singing or celebrating this return route. The closer to the refugee camp we get, the sadder we become. We feel the sadness covering the whole town.

“There are no colonizers anymore, why are you leaving, descendants?” says the town.

“Don’t worry my love, we will be bringing our tools and coming back tomorrow”, I reply.

We arrive at the refugee camp, just realizing that we didn’t lock the doors in the morning. None of us touch the door handle to enter the house. Our neighbors gather to

chat about their experiences during the day, and how beautiful they found their towns as well. People no longer want to enter their tents that developed into houses, as if the United Nations want to lock them in again.

My mother awakens me to have my breakfast before I go to work in the camp's UN school. I ask her, "aren't we going to Beit Jibrin?"

"Beit Jibrin? Huh, what did you dream last night?" said my mother.

"Oh mom, don't say I was dreaming!" I reply.

"If it was Beit Jibrin, then it's a dream, my son. A return to Beit Jibrin needs you to awake, needs our people to awake, needs international conscience to awake, and needs international laws to be enforced equally on the powerful and the weak. Son, what was taken by force, can't be returned by dreams".

Izzeddeen Alkarakeh

The fantasy of asylum-seeking

Our long awaited family reunion application in Palestine is 11 years old. Our temporary work permit in Saudi Arabia is about to be terminated. We became a family of 4 children while waiting for our enemies to approve our family status. Their media is preaching about the demographic threat of the family reunification process, and that the temporary halt on the process is becoming an absolute ban.

In moments of desperation, we start thinking that our family project, and even our initial marriage proposal, is an uncalculated risk that is about to fail. Our temporary annual work contract, which has allowed us to stay as a family, is set to expire within months. Our aims to immigrate to Canada or Australia as skilled immigrants are no longer feasible due to the short notice. Now, we are left with one option only, which is knocking the door of asylum in the 'refugees' paradise,' Ireland.

All we needed to solve our embroilment was a phone call to the Irish Embassy in Riyadh. We explained that we had to leave Saudi Arabia, and that Israel was not approving us as a family, which would split my family between two different countries. The Embassy showed great sympathy to us, and invited us to apply for visas. Visas were processed within one week, after which we sold our car, furniture and belongings and flew to Dublin.

In Dublin, we rented an apartment and stayed in it. After one week, we lodged our asylum application. We were told that the application would take from two to three

months to be processed. To avoid having any financial issues while waiting, we were given a work permit.

We spent the next few weeks exploring the city and applying for jobs. I found a 6-month contract job as a software developer. The job was exciting, and gave me a great opportunity to be introduced to Irish colleagues and to know the traditions and different aspects of life in the country. We developed family-to-family relations and had the opportunity to share our traditional foods and our background stories. We were given access to different refugee integration services like language training, arts and crafts, food processing, heritage sessions and others. My family enjoyed them all.

During our stay in Dublin, we met people who came to the country as refugees long years ago. We were told different stories about their experiences. We were surprised to know that there used to be a different system for processing asylum applications, in which asylum seekers were taken to live in direct provision centres, which limited their access to the community and restricted their work. The worst thing about it was that asylum applications used to take more than 5 years for the majority of applicants, and about 10 years in many cases. Many people got trapped by the system and failed to transition into the community after those long years of waiting.

We were told that NGOs had united to replace the direct provision system with another, fairer system which they named "Direct Integration". Their efforts were successful, which caused refugees to have access to the labor market from day one. The system lifted a lot of burdens from social welfare, and gave asylum seekers the opportunity to be productive and to participate in the community, and maintain their mental health, physical abilities and most importantly, their dignity.

Thank God that we came to Ireland in the era of the "Direct Integration System."

Asad Mahmud

My Dilemma as an Asylum Seeker

Starting a new life as an asylum seeker seemed very thrilling in the beginning, because during my own fight for uplifting human rights in my own country of Pakistan, as a practicing lawyer, I had this encouraging view of western countries as places where it was all hunky dory – liberal, western, human rights loving countries. I thought that it was only Pakistan which had an extreme censoring ideology and culture. But here, since the time I have arrived, I have seen the impacts of censorship and blasphemy laws sprawling across the plane of western societies. In Pakistan there are many elements and factors which accumulate to censor your thoughts on many levels. Sometimes you feel insecure in expressing them, and sometimes you are forced to shut your mouth. In Pakistan, a simple question like, ‘who made God?’ can put you in life-threatening situations. People like me try to look for safe spaces in Pakistan to vent the steam of left-over intellect which refuses to die down even after facing such harsh muffling by the culture, government and religion. It’s a crime to stand out from the crowd, and to have a bit of an opinion. But you are completely safe if you become like everyone else, hypnotised by the extremist religious clergy, in a trance caused by state-owned media and surrendered to your government in power. None of them is gonna feed you, but on the other hand will try to snatch every last loaf of bread from your mouth and last shred of money from your pocket. They know very well that they own you completely, They are the masters, and they behave like them. On the other hand, masses clearly brainwashed by these elements know and recognize their place and never try to retaliate against their masters.

The situation is not that bad in western societies, but it’s not very good either when people like me who are considered criminals and blasphemers in places like Pakistan still feel suffocated in western societies; when we come here and find the same religious extremist fanatics being protected by liberal western Governments. If they don’t have blasphemy laws they have hate speech laws, but the point is the same. We cannot ask questions which can offend anyone. Here, extreme leftist liberals shut down any voice of dissent in the name of securing safe spaces for so-called minorities. Speech is not free at all. It is bound, shackled, confined, contained, and muffled. I am still looking for a safe space to vent my thoughts. Let’s analyse in detail what the heck I am talking about.

I have had a knack for human rights and public interest litigation. My passion took me into many dangerous endeavours which compromised my security many times, but I

was relentless. There was nothing that could stop me from following my passion. In the stream of passion I challenged ruling government and sitting ministers many times through Public Interest Writs in the high court of Lahore.

I enjoyed the power and authority which came with my stepping into the profession of Law. But I never knew then, that one day this power was also going to be used against me as a weapon. Through Public Interest Writs, I challenged the nomination papers of Nawaz Sharif, by then two-time Prime Minister of Pakistan. I challenged the sitting Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Hina Rabbani Khar, due to a default of 10 Million Rupees in electricity bills by her husband. The High Court did not hear me out on this. I sent the petition to the HR department of the Supreme Court, and after that the Foreign Minister had to settle the dues. I also challenged corruption in the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Laptop Scheme. All these cases were highlighted by the media in Pakistan and I got a few threats from various corners now and then, here and there, but I gave no heed to them.

My real crime, which became the turning point in my life, was to launch a project to raise awareness for the young students of the Madrasahs (religious schools) who would become victims of the unsatisfactory desires of their teachers, during their religious education. Me and my friend, Waheed, decided to highlight the issues of sexual abuse of religious students through a novel. I researched the material on the issue and wrote a concise analysis of the issue in our society on factual planes, which became the preface of book, and Waheed wrote the novel.

After publishing the book, all hell broke loose. There was no respite for us anywhere; we were threatened, harassed, and subjected to murderous attempts, which we escaped. Apparently, it's a more sensitive issue than politics. It hits at the dogmatic image of the piety of religious clergy, which is a very offensive and sensitive issue for people in Pakistan. We were not wrong to point it out, but as I mentioned earlier, our society does not like the one who stands out and talks sense. As a society we know vice and depravity is rampant in our society, but we blame the one who points it out. As a society we feel safe in our safe zones where whatever we think, we keep to ourselves. But as soon as someone decides to criticize the dogma and speak out, we start the victimization of the sane voice.

Questioning is something which has brought human civilization to this epitome of scientific and social revolution. If the process of questioning is stopped, for the sake of saving some soft-hearted, perpetually offended, ever demanding snowflakes, then sooner than later humanity will be suffering in the darkest pits of human devolution.

The West is suffering from the same disease of virtue signalling, social media bashing and victimization. The Western public is largely a user of social media, and every other firm or individual is promoting its views or business through it. But now these social media services are pandering to the demands of extremists governments and groups. For instance, Facebook blocked all the pages of liberals in Pakistan at the request of the Pakistani Government. Facebook is also playing its role at the request of Angela Merkel in shutting down the voices of dissent which do not cater to the demands of the current government. The same kind of process of shadow banning by Twitter has been exposed by the project VERITAS, and similar issues have surfaced in the google administration.

And this is not all. The UK does not like hate speech, and there are no proper criteria for hate speech. When the Mayor of London advised Londoners to get used to terrorism because it's part and parcel of living in a big city, why was he not prosecuted for hate speech? When he expressed his inability to control knife crime and played the blame game by blaming the alt right for that, why did hate speech laws not apply to his speech? Why is his speech protected, but not that of the public at large who want to live safely and want him removed from office? When he puts the interest of the UK in a bin and becomes the sole reason for stranded relations with the single most powerful ally of the UK, The USA, just because of his hateful speech, why is he not prosecuted under the treason laws? Why has the labour MP Naz Shah not been prosecuted for telling the victims of grooming gangs to shut up for the sake of diversity? Seemingly, hate speech laws are applied selectively.

So I would say it's not hunky dory over here, but even so the situation is considerably better than in Pakistan. Here we have some room to play with our ideas. Here, humanity is not dead at all. Here, there are people who understand dissent and consider it a right. Here, there are people like Kathy, Eileen and Paul, who want me to express myself and are willing to publish the same. Here we have some hope, and we cling to that in the expectation of new dawn of enlightenment for Humanity.

Asad Mahmud

How I struggled in the Direct Provision System

My journey of seeking refuge started much earlier than reaching Ireland. But I only made a proper request of Asylum to the state of Ireland, which is still working on it. I have been very active in my country of origin regarding human rights and social issues. I liked the idea of standing firm and fighting for one's rights. As a lawyer, I had many achievements. Other than the struggle for human rights through public interest litigation, I was also appointed by various governmental institutions to represent them in the courts of law. To name a few, I was on the panel of the National Bank Of Pakistan, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd and a few more. Side by side, I was also a designatory for the various fragments of the Pakistan Peoples Party. For the People's Lawyers' Forum, I performed my duties as Secretary of Information for Lahore and for the Human Rights Wing of the Party I was designated as Legal Advisor for the province of Punjab. And this was not it: I was also head of the Jail Committee and the Human Rights Committee of the Lahore High Court Bar.

Don't worry, I'm not bragging. I have submitted most of the appointment letters along with my case file to the International Protection Office. In the Life of Law nothing is admissible without proof, so I had to provide them.

My point is, with this kind of dynamic past life, when you then have to put up with an environment of complete inactivity or dullness it almost kills you, I am talking about the direct provision system.

I am not saying that the idea of direct provision as a system is completely flawed: no, it's not. But it has some drawbacks. The general idea of the direct provision system relates to taking care of the people seeking refuge, and directly providing them with basic human necessities like food, shelter, medication, and education on primary levels which is a very good concept, a very humane concept, but it has also its minuses. Asylum seekers have to survive on a meagre amount of – now – 21 something euros per week, which was previously 19.10 and was increased due to the humongous generosity of the current government. On hearing the news of the incredible increase in the weekly allowance, we, the asylum seekers, were flabbergasted, dumbfounded, surprised and also confused whether to celebrate it or mourn over it; anyway, we decided to stay calm. Another big drawback of Direct Provision which seems insurmountable

considering the amount of time an asylum case consumes before its ultimate decision, is the prohibition on work and higher education.

I am a victim of both. Since the time I arrived here, I have contacted the many NGOs which constantly visit the Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre to seek help in getting me a higher education than the Bachelor of Law i.e. LLM, but to no avail. A guy named Mike Lyons, who is education coordinator of Cork ETB Adult Basic Education Service, advised me to send my educational degrees for accreditations, and I did that but got no response at all. I tried twice to contact the accrediting bodies then lost interest. I thought I would visit UCC and inquire about any NGO supporting postgraduate students. I went to the admissions office there, but they flatly refused me and said, firstly, that there was no such NGO to their knowledge and, secondly, that if I wanted to apply for a postgraduate course they would charge me the non-EU fee, which is almost double the normal fee. In despair, I collected the remains of my shattered integrity and came back to my accommodation. I pondered over the matter and thought, maybe there might be some governmental Institution set up to help postgraduate students. I searched online and found one, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland): yet again asylum seekers were excluded from seeking assistance.

So my prospects of seeking postgraduate education ended there and then. I was left with no other option apart from doing self-guided study or seeking some scholarship, an idea I kept in my mind. I started studying web development. I studied website creation processes using the WordPress platform, and I developed some beautiful websites, like Funmag.uk, Adsuggests.com and a website in my own name asadmahmud.com, whose hosting subscription is going to end this coming February or March. We might get that extended, if we would be able to afford the second year. In the meantime, scholarships from DCU came up and I applied to the IT section because there was no scholarship provided in the field of law. Despite my practical work which was available online in the shape of running websites, I was denied the scholarship because it did not relate to my previous area of qualification. This really made me disappointed – but the hard-learned life lesson of firm determination kept me going. During all this time my love, my wife, also remained a ray of encouragement for me.

At last, the University of South Wales offered me an LLM on scholarship and I jumped to grab the opportunity. They required 150 euro monthly for the LLM, which lasts up to 18 months. My lovely family is helping me with the fee, and I have started the LLM and am doing my second module now.

This struggle is not over yet. Ireland has a rule for Law Graduates of Non-EU descent that they have to take a Final Examination usually called FE1. They are not required to

take the preliminary examination, so I sent my Law degree to a respectable law society and they were pleased to exempt me from the preliminary exam, so now I am also preparing for FE1. I will not forget to mention the name of Issac of the Star Society of UCC who guided me for the FE1 and also provided a few books. This is a summary of my ongoing struggle on the front of education, but my struggle has also been on many other fronts.

I have been politically very active in my homeland, so how could it have been possible for me to sit indolent on the issue of the rights of asylum seekers? By a quirk of fate an opportunity arose for me to represent my fellow asylum seekers, but this opportunity was born out of a tragedy.

A Korean lady, living in our centre, The Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre (KRAC), committed suicide. It was really tragic incident which shocked everyone at the centre, including management. Though it was partly due to her understandable medical condition, as she was under treatment for psychological issues, the shackled environment of Direct Provision also played its part. Residents of KRAC also considered the lengthy asylum procedure and the restrictive policies of the government as causes for her suicide. It's not uncommon for residents of the Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre to drown in depression due to the longevity of the indolent wait which they have to endure. The restriction on entering salaried occupations or getting some higher education causes a lot of inactivity which leads to depression.

Everybody here suffers from some kind of depression at times, depending on varying individual circumstances. I also feel depressed due to being forced to lay back lethargically, which is actually taking the shine off of my abilities, making me used to a way of life that is very lazy, inactive, slow, passive and quite contrary to my actual self. I am unable to earn good money and am still dependent on my family for my LLM – what a shame. I am interested in web development and software development courses, but the government does not have a scheme to support such intentions of asylum seekers who are not allowed to earn. I have encountered some Irish citizens who have this idea about asylums seekers being really well fed and kept, just like them. But the reality is a bit different: life is quite different and restrictive in direct provision centres, bereft of enjoyment of full human selfhood and rights. I have an international driving licence, but I cannot get any insurance company to recognize it as one because they also want my passport, which is in the possession of the International Protection Office. Even if you get insurance somehow, it will last only for one year after which you have to acquire an Irish Licence by law.

So on a factual plane we are existing, not living. To live a life, there is a lot more to add to it than mere shelter and food. I've become distracted: let's get back to the topic of the pitiable Korean lady whose death sent shockwaves far and wide through the country. The incident got the attention of the media, NGOs and locally based politicians. Our centre was visited by all of them. During that time the Management of MASI (Movement of Asylum Seekers Ireland) also visited our place. They decided to nominate and appoint a body to represent the asylum seekers of the Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre (KRAC). I took part, and was nominated and appointed as secretary of the "Action Committee," which was what our body was called.

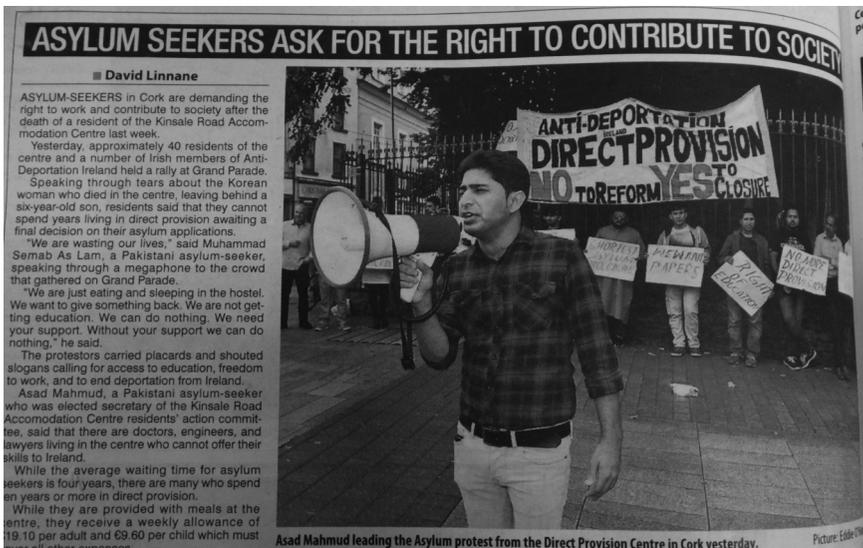
Soon after the appointment, my friends started to push me to conducting a protest in the name of the deceased Korean lady and against the oppressive system of asylum. I happily agreed: this was what I was meant to be born for! I discussed the idea with the president of the "Action Committee," who was a woman, but she disapproved of the idea due to fears of being politically incorrect and of the consequences which could ensue.

At that time, my "Just Friend" (now wife) Zoya and best friend Noman stood by my side and encouraged me. My whole group, who were mostly of the Asian descent, supported me. So the whole accommodation centre was divided into two groups, one in favour and the other against. I took the challenge upon me, and fixed a date for the protest. Now half of the residents were not willing, and we were only left with the other half – and remember, a large number of the residents who were not present at the time of the appointment of the "Action Committee" were neither in favour nor against, they were totally indifferent. Basically, they were not interested in any kind of protest. So we were left with a group of very few people. But we did not lose heart. We were determined to do something for the deceased Korean lady, who was the victim of this oppressive system. So we started our campaign for the protest. We got pamphlets printed and went to every room of the Accommodation Centre to distribute them and push everyone to participate in the protest. Noman and Zovi were by my side all the time.

Other than our accommodation, we decided to call to the Glenvera Accommodation Centre too. With the help my group members, Asim, Sunny and a few others, we were able to contact some friends in Glenvera. We also campaigned over there, and distributed "call for action" pamphlets. I emailed the newspapers and the media about our impending activity. It was very first time for me to do such activity in Ireland, though I had arranged many successful protests on my native soil as Secretary of Information of the People's Lawyers' Forum: I was not sure about the outcome of our activity here.

One night before the protest I wrote all the placards displaying our slogans, “Right To Work”, “Right To Education” and “Quick Asylum Procedure”. My lovely wife (still then “Just Friend”) Zoye gave the designing touches to the placards, and made them attractive and bold, able to be seen from farther distances.

On the day, 6 September 2016, our protest proved to be a huge success. Many friends from our centre and from Glenvera participated. People from the media, NGOs and the local council were all there. On some TV and radio channels, we were broadcasted live. We made the headlines in the Irish Examiner, the Evening Echo, the Red FM website and other local newspapers.



7/09/2016 By kind permission of the Evening Echo

I would not forget to thank all of my friends including Zovi, Noman, Asim, Sunny, Sultan, Alamgir, and everyone else who participated in the protest with us and made it a success. This protest sparked discussions again in media studios about the restrictive approach of the government regarding asylum seekers. I can't take credit, but the government changed the policy and brought in a quicker asylum procedure after that, changed the old ORAC (Office of the Refugee Application Commissioner) and developed the IPA (International Protection ACT). Now the procedure is a bit faster than the previous one.

But on the front of a right to higher education, there have been no developments. As far as the right to work is concerned, it's being assessed by the government in the wake of the Supreme Court's favourable ruling in a case initiated by an older asylum seeker who spent eight years in the system without any job or activity. The Supreme Court was pleased to recognise the right of asylum seekers to work, and directed the government to devise a policy accordingly. The policy which the government has revealed so far as its "Right To Work" initiative does not seem to be very friendly: for instance, they want asylum seekers to apply for work permits which cost 500 euro for six months duration and 1000 euro for one year. But the key point is, the application for a work permit should be accompanied by an offer letter for a job with a starting salary of 30k euro per annum. There are many issues with this policy: first of all, generally not all asylum seekers are from well-off families, so how would they be able to pay this amount of 500 to 1000 euro? Who would cover their travelling expenses for attending the asylum interviews in Dublin? Who is gonna provide a job offer letter to an asylum seeker with a starting salary of 30k per annum. I don't think many Irish are doing such jobs. To equate asylum seekers with general applicants for work permits is not a workable solution.

Anyhow, my struggle continues as I await a decision on my asylum case. I am short of money, but not of determination and devotion. Other than the websites I have developed, I have also published two books on Amazon: one in my name, and the other with my pseudonym or pen name. I am preparing for Law Society Exams, completing my LLM Modules, and studying some online free web design and development courses. I am doing my bit in the hope of a bigger, brighter, better tomorrow.

Zoya Zoya

A memorable person from my childhood

I've lots of people in my mind. My childhood was very happy and colourful. I spent my childhood in a joint family. In a joint family you have to share your life with lots of people like uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents. Our house was full of people, and lots of guests visited us very often. In a big house, there is lots of work to do all the time.

I was maybe 5 or 6 years old. I still remember this person, who was a carpenter. A very old and poor man. I can still remember the wrinkles on his hands and face. He was always there when we needed him to fix our furniture, and especially our old wooden chairs. He was a very skilled man. His age was between 75 and 80 years.

During his fixing work, I always stood in front of him and saw his brilliant interesting work. He always travelled on his terrible old bicycle. Sometimes I would think to myself, "I wish I could help you uncle, you are very old and poor, I don't want you to work like that but I don't have money to give you."

He always wore old and messy clothes. He would sit on the floor whenever he came to our house. I felt bad, but I really liked to do one thing to do for him: whenever he asked for water I ran and got him a glass straight away. He would take that glass of water with his old shivering hands and drink it immediately, and then he would smile at me, pray for me and give me back that empty glass.

I really admired his skills and wished I could learn from him. After a few hours he would finish his work, take a very small amount of money from my aunt and be ready to start his journey in search of more work – but my aunt always gave him extra money to help him. I can't forget his trembling voice and wrinkly shaky hands. He was a Master of his work. But I don't remember anyone who admired that old man, maybe because he was poor or because people were more interested in readymade furniture. It's a mechanical world now, and I can't see carpenters on the streets looking for work.

I think he might have died by now. I do remember and miss him. May his soul rest in peace. People might forget him but I can't, because he was the best at his art. His poverty and hardworking ability left a long lasting impression on my tender childhood heart. Why would anyone remember a poor, skillful soul in such a mechanical and busy life?

Zoya Zoya

A mythical journey

I love travelling and I do travel a lot. I have taken memorable and unforgettable journeys. So today I'll share with you the tale of my favourite journey: the beautiful journey which changed my point of view about life. I was travelling from London to Cork by sea. I went to the seashore to start my journey and there were lots of ships with colourful patterns on them.

You know what? It's one of my dreams to breathe under the water like fishes, and learn all kind of animals' languages. I boarded the ship and then my interesting journey began. Big waves and splashes of water made me happier. While staring at the water, I was thinking about the other world, the world that is under the sea. "I have to see things before I die," I thought. I love fishes and would love to learn their languages.

I was thinking about lots of things, when suddenly I saw group of dolphins, they were coming towards me. One of the dolphins came to me and started conversing with me. I was surprised that a fish could talk in a human language. She said, "Oh sweet Zovi, jump on my back and enjoy the underwater world." I felt very happy, so I jumped on his back. One of the oldest and very bold dolphin came near me and mumbled some magical spells; suddenly I felt that I had grown gills, and the next moment I was under the deep blue sea. I was mesmerized by the beauty of the sea. Colourful and different kind of fishes and plants made me amazed.

Suddenly I saw a very big beautiful castle made of pearls, colourful plants and flowers. "That castle must belong to the king of the sea," I thought. I saw beautiful mermaids who were dancing for me. Then my jaw dropped, when the king of the sea came to greet me and welcomed me into his castle. He hugged me and took me to the dining room. There was a big table with lots of foods and drink on it. I was starving, so I started to eat.

"I never tasted delicious food like this before," I said to the king. He replied, "This food is especially for you, my precious Zovi."

After I finished, I asked the directions for ladies room from a mermaid and she showed me the way. I cleaned myself after the food, and joined the big party the king had thrown especially for me. Every single species in the sea came there to meet me and welcome me. Then the king announced that he wanted to give me a gift. This rare

gift I still have with me now – it was the gift of a kind and positive heart. He said, “Oh lovely Zovi, be positive,” and then he cast his magic spell on me and my heart was at peace.

After that he showed me his entire kingdom. I was very happy but also very tired. So I asked him if I could go back to my ship. He insisted that I should stay, but I was really tired and excused myself. After that, he ordered the dolphins to take me back safely to the ship. With lots of gifts from him, I jumped once again on the backs of the dolphins, and then next moment I was above the water. They dropped me back onto the ship and said one thing: “Oh beautiful Zovi, we are always there for you, just trust yourself and be positive.” Now these are the words which are helping me in all stages of my life. This is the best and most unforgettable journey of my life. I visit the sea sometimes, and enjoy the beauty of these two worlds.

Zoya Zoya

An adventurous incident from my childhood.

I have many memories from my childhood. My memory is not that good, but there are a few incidents carved on my mind and today I'm going to share them with you. It was a very pleasant, light, breezy evening. Birds were singing songs on trees. Butterflies were flying around flowers.

After school homework, I was sitting in my favourite spot – the veranda stairs. My brother's friends and all the children from the neighbouring area were playing in front of me in the beautiful park facing our house. I was playing with my new toy, the piano geometry box. I was so lost in playing with that new toy that I didn't realise what the other children were doing.

Suddenly, all the children started running from the park, screaming, “run everyone!” I was like, what is going on? When I lifted my head up, all the children were laughing and running towards their houses.

Before I could assume something, my brother came to me, grabbed my arm and ran towards the house door. “What happened, brother?” I asked, astonished. He replied excitedly, “bees are coming, bees are coming!” I became very excited: what could have happened, and how come bees were chasing all of them? Then suddenly one of our friends announced loudly, “no, they are not coming, Ilyas missed the target. So we have to throw the stone again to hit the beehive.” All the children came back and collected pebbles and small stones for the second strike.

My brother and I came out from behind the door. So my brother started to collect the pebbles too. I stood in the veranda and watched what they were going to do next. Ilyas was the naughtiest boy among all of us, so I knew it was his idea to irritate these innocent bees. All the children gathered again in the park to see what was gonna happen next. Ilyas was ready to start the interesting game, and everyone else ready to run. Ilyas threw a big stone at the beehive, and this time he hit the target. All the children screamed and ran as fast as they could. My brother and I hid behind the door. There were angry bees all over the park. The sound of the “buzzzz, buzzzz” of angry bees was making a terrifying atmosphere. I was very scared. Deep down I didn’t like what they were doing, but I was very young, so didn’t know how to stop them, or advise them not to play that dangerous game.

After a few hours, I came to know that a few bees had stung Ilyas’s arm, and he was in severe pain. When I heard about his pain I felt bad, but I also felt the anger of these bees. So what they did to him was right, I thought.

It was a very good lesson for me, not to irritate nature but to admire it. I love nature, so I always admire it. This is one of the memorable incidents I remember from my childhood. There is fun in it and a perfect lesson. Love nature, and enjoy being loved by it.

Noman Sattar

I have been missing

A translation of the original poem by Mashal Khan

I have been missing
for a few weeks now
Police were informed
Right from that day
I go to the police station everyday
asking the officer on duty
Have you found me?
He gestures no in despair
His quavering voice says
You're not found yet
He then consoles me
Someday...
You will be found
Unconscious
On a roadside
Or Badly injured
In a hospital
Or as a dead body
In a stream
My eyes become tearful
I go to the market
To prepare for my welcome back
purchase flowers from a florist
And for my wounds
from the chemist
some bandages
some cotton
and some pain killers
For my funeral
a coffin from the mosque
and for my remembrance
many candles
Some say...
We should not light candles

on the death of loved ones
But they don't mention
where to find light
when the apple of your eye goes missing
What to ignite
when you've lost your light

This is the reality of life for hundreds of activists, bloggers and so called “missing persons” in the Land of the Pure. Awaiting their turn to be killed or kidnapped... Everyone knows what happens to these people, yet, no one dares speak against the dominant powers... Their crime? Perhaps writing a post on Facebook, or a tweet? Hundreds more like me, are forced to live their lives away from their loved ones and the streets they grew up in. The western world is fast losing its sense of morality amidst a flood of white noise generated by shallow thinkers and self-loathing ideology and promoted by huge media empires. Pakistan has become a land of tyranny, where merely giving your opinion on social media is enough to get you vanished without any hope of justice. The same is being done in parts of the western world using a different set of tactics, where speaking the truth is no longer allowed merely because it can hurt other people’s feelings. We progressed out of the dark ages and our society agreed to do away with feelings-based, blasphemy-like laws, only to now see a rather bigger set of laws based on a farce of hate speech. Completely arbitrary and undefined hate speech can be taken as such, by anyone at will... and this is actively being used to curb notions of free speech and free society. Western Europe, once a bastion of freedom, secularism and democracy is fast becoming a hellhole authoritarian superstate.

In Pakistan, people like Ayaz Nizami, Rana Noman etc. are being kidnapped by the state without any hope of release and many other bloggers & activists are on unwritten, state-sponsored hit lists. They all receive very serious threats every now & then. What is the west doing? Bashing those who dare speak the truth? I came to Europe looking for freedom and I found it here, but I see the future of this freedom darker than most realise. Principles of enlightenment and secular democracy are now on sale, dirt cheap and are being bartered for ignorance and outright stupidity. Great nations like Britain, France & Germany, once leaders of the free world, now lead the downfall of this great civilisation. With British police making the excuse of having limited resources for actual violent crimes like burglary and robbery etc, while dedicating hundreds upon hundreds of personnel and vast amount of resources on policing the wrong thinking and actively censoring the opinions of certain critics and activists.

Since when is having a different political opinion a crime so harsh it needs immediate and severe punishment? Society as a whole is being infantilised by the false use of

terms like racist, xenophobic, islamophobic etc. Whereas people like Mashal Khan are mercilessly being lynched under the pretext of blasphemy. In this case, his actual crime was criticizing the university administration and he was portrayed as a blasphemer only to facilitate his killing by a purposefully assembled mob. His case is highlighted because his killing was recorded by many onlookers with mobile cameras. If these recordings had never been made, his death would probably have been just part of some statistics... to be announced at some events and then, equally easily, forgotten.

The superpowers of today wield a huge amount of political power but the priorities of those in authority are very different. For example, feminists who are bent on finding rape everywhere and in every civilised male, conveniently forget the millions of rapes shamelessly brought upon British children by gangs of majority Pakistani, muslim-origin thugs. The muslim community has as yet not disowned one such criminal... why would they? They are told they are always right, thanks to their skin colour. Clerics that don't blink an eye declaring any muslim a *filthy kaffir* have not yet said one word about these child groomers. These criminals are still proudly part of the muslim community. There are claims muslims are oppressed in the west, I don't see one person trying to migrate out of the west into muslim lands. Politicians in the west are actively rewarding ISIS jihadists and thus facilitating future terrorist activity with huge sums of public money. Those who have never read one line of actual Islamic religious text come out claiming things about islam that are demonstrably false and absurd. Those who are trying to bring a reformation to the muslim world are sought after, increasingly in the west too. But why?

Ask yourself this question when you go to sleep tonight. Ask yourself, what kind of world are you leaving for your future generations? Authoritarian regimes are the worst place to live and this is being brought in by any and all means possible. Instead of being proud of western civilization, I see lots of people feeling guilty about it and pressuring others to feel the same. Legislation to systematically ruin western civilisation is increasingly being pushed onto the public. I don't want to see Ireland and the west become like my country of birth. I am sure you don't want that too... You don't want your children writing such poems, predicting their own death and then being brutally murdered in the same way... The mother of Mashal Khan said: "When I tried to kiss his hand, I was heartbroken to find even his fingers were all shattered". Say no to the culture of appeasement and self-loathing, Say no to the tyrannical idea of hate speech. Religious tyranny and authoritarian states are my nightmares, what keeps you awake at night?

Noman Sattar

Asadullah 'loved' his daughter

My name is Lareeb Khan and I am a dental technician. My family belongs to ahmadiyya muslim community and my parents are from Pakistan. Our sect is considered the most peaceful one because we have an explicit ban on all offensive Jihad, but, this did not stop my father from doing what he had in mind. My family lives in the city of Darmstadt in Germany. I was 19 when I had the audacity to stay a few nights out of home and remove my headscarf. One fateful day, my parents received a letter from the police stating that I was caught trying to shoplift some condoms. That was enough for both to be so angry that they got together, planned it and strangled me to death and wouldn't even let go after I was dead... then they got together and threw my body off an embankment and returned home. Yes. This happened because of one routine letter sent out by police. The title of this article bears the words of my father as he said in the court... I wonder what kind of love he had? I suspect the same kind of love is available to many others too, thankfully, to a somewhat lesser extent in most cases...

Today, more than 63,000 muslims live in the republic, and though it is mainly a Pakistani muslim community issue, it is by no means exclusive to this community. Imagine an innocent teenager, probably a minor, who had almost zero sex education, finds herself vomiting for some reason. She goes into a health service facility to find out what's going on. Panic strikes when her worst fears are confirmed. This can't be true... I would rather kill myself... only to find herself confined in a mental health facility against her will as was done with another Irish teen in 2016. Doctors talk to her parents and inform them of her condition. What do you think the parents would do? She may well become one of the 5,000 confirmed killed around the globe every year for reasons of "Honour". Thousands of such crimes are never reported or recorded. If you think this does not happen in Europe, you need to think again. The UK alone sees 12 honour killings every year. Many more young women are taken out of the UK, mostly to countries like Pakistan, under the excuse of a visit and they never return. Nobody knows how many of them die there under questionable circumstances. But political correctness dictates that you cannot speak the pesky inconvenient truth. You are not allowed to state the bitter truth that the roots of this problem lie mainly within Pakistani muslim culture.

The decision to terminate a pregnancy is not easy for anyone. It is never taken lightly. It is by no means celebrated or wished for... People who think there will be abortions performed at every opportunity, live in self-righteous la-la lands. Probably a sort of religious utopia where child-molesting religious leaders do not exist. And yes, child molestation is not just a catholic church issue, the islamic madrassa system also has

this issue, on a much larger scale. And therefore, I think religious institutions have lost the moral high ground from where they used to dictate how we go about our personal sex lives. We must address the new realities.

Today's discussion around the issue of repeal lacks a few words, "reasonable" is one such word. So-called pro-life, for the most part don't care if the foetus is not viable or if the pregnant lady can't carry it to term without severe health consequences. It does not matter if the woman could be killed for bringing shame to the family. We must address the elephant in the room. It is a ploy put forth to make sure women don't engage in physical relations without the approval of a religious leader and this is all about religious control and authority. Extremely exaggerated pictures of foetuses are used to purposefully mislead the public into thinking of a foetus as a full blown human life instead of premature potential life.

Pregnancy and birth are very risky business for women, not long-ago, a huge number of women died in the process, a lesser number of women still die in this process. But forcing medical staff to not do what is required is not a wise thing to do. Qualified medical staff should be able to make decisions without fear of judgment based on theological or ideological reasons. They should be set free to do what is the best way to deal with a crisis. It is completely absurd to consider life of a foetus equal to an adult.

For reasons mentioned above, I support allowing abortions in a reasonable manner. This is of particular importance to people coming from minority communities that have deep rooted honour-based culture. We must not wait for someone to be brutally killed before we start serious action. With the population trends we see, it is just a matter of time before this becomes an ugly reality...

Abdiaziz Mussa

Asylum Seeker - Ethiopian-Somali journalist

I was born in Jijiga, Fafan Zone. I was the fourth child of my parents. As I was told by my mother I was born under a tree in the jungle in eastern Ethiopia, when there was a war between Somalia and Ethiopia. The Somalis were supported by the government of Somalia, so my father and my family fled from Ethiopia and went to Hargeisa, Somalia. Now this is the capital of Somaliland. I grew up in Hargeisa with my family, as a refugee, because of the war. Three more siblings were born after we moved to Hargeisa, Somali republic.

Then in 1991, when the civil war started in Somalia, my father and my family fled back to Ethiopia and we settled in Hart Sheikh, near Jijiga (as internally displaced people). I studied primary and intermediate school in Hart Sheikh. Then in 1996 my father, myself and my two younger brothers went to back to live in Hargeisa, in Somalia, because he wanted us to go to secondary school there. I finished my education there in 2000. My mother and the rest of the siblings stayed in Hart Sheikh, near Jijiga. Hart Sheikh was a village, but when the Somali Civil War broke a lot of Somali refugees fled there. The Ethiopian government set up two refugee camps and it became a city.

When I finished my secondary education, my father and I went back to live in Jijiga. Then my father sent me to India to study for a Bachelors of E-commerce, and Mass Communications and Media. I was living in Pune, I attended University of Pune and I finished these studies in August 2004. In January 2005 I travelled back to Jijiga and worked as a freelance journalist for Faana Radio, reporting on social issues. In April 2005 I stopped working there and I started my own business, Kaah Magazine. On the 18th of September 2005 the government arrested me because of some things I wrote. I was writing about and highlighting human rights issues among the Somali people & Ogaden, the Somali region in eastern Ethiopia. Harassment and jailing of people. Killings of people. Innocent people being accused of supporting the ONLF guerrillas. There were mass arrests of people. Sometimes they arrested everybody in two or three villages. It continues to happen to this day and this is very well recorded in human rights reports.

They alleged that I wrote falsely about war and caused a misunderstanding between the community and the government. I was jailed for three months in Ethiopia and after being released without reason, I decided to run away to Somaliland as an exile. In 2009

I moved to Wajale, Somaliland, for protection and peace because I knew it was better to live protected & peaceful in Wajale, Somaliland, so I started working there, designing magazines. I worked in web design, computer networking, repairing computers, etc. Eventually I met some journalists in my profession so I started working with them. I worked with Haatuf journal as a graphic designer. Sometimes I wrote articles. I worked at this from 2010.

In 2010 I set up my own magazine in Wajale, Somaliland, called "African Age Magazine". It contained articles on business and sometimes on political issues. From 2010 to 2015 I was the editor and owner of African Age Magazine. But I was living in fear, I was afraid of the Ethiopia military, that one day they would cross the border, kidnap me and take me to an Ethiopian prison. Sometimes I stopped publishing the magazine for security reasons, because we were always afraid of the Ethiopian government, we feared that they could cross the border and arrest us. This had happened before. The Ethiopian opposition lives inside Somaliland.

Our magazine was always talking about business relations between Ethiopia and Somaliland. But sometimes we reported on incidents which occurred at the border, when Ethiopian forces would take the property of Somali people at the border. We would write about abuses committed by the Ethiopian forces against the Somali people in the border region. In April 2015, the government of Somaliland sent me a letter, from the Minister of Information, Guidance and Culture informing me that I was no longer authorised to publish the African Age Magazine in Somaliland and they asked all the printers of Somaliland not to print the magazine. I stopped publishing the magazine in July 2015. In May 2015 I got an invitation from Oxford University, UK to attend a Media Policy Course. I had applied for it in March 2015. The course was a three week course, from June until July. I represented human rights and conflict in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Also a group of journalists including me wrote a case study about human rights in Ethiopia.

In Somalia and Ethiopia where I was living, the worst human rights abuses and arrests of journalists took place. The Human Rights watch list shows Ethiopia as having the second highest amount of jailed journalists in Africa, Somalia having the most killed journalists in the world – and I was one of the journalists who worked over there. I did not apply for asylum in London because I like it here in Ireland. I came in August 2015 and I asked for asylum in the state and still I live in direct provision.

Abdiaziz Mussa

I am a journalist

I am searching for protection, including freedom of expression
and freedom of speech –

I am an asylum seeker who needs protection
Who is searching for freedom to live & freedom to travel

I am an asylum seeker who needs protection
Who is searching for freedom of work & freedom of tranquility

I am asylum seeker who needs protection
Who is searching for freedom to work & the freedom to be housed

I am journalist who never did anything wrong, was forced from his home while searching
for freedom of expression and freedom of speech.

I am a journalist who never did anything wrong
I want to find to get a place to express my views

I am journalist who never did anything wrong
I love my work in journalism

I am journalist who never did anything wrong
I love my profession, I love to do it,

I am journalist who never did anything wrong
As a journalist I was imprisoned a number of times

I am journalist who never did anything wrong

As a journalist I was intimidated a number of times by trial

I am a journalist who never did anything wrong, I was a journalist
who worked in war zones for many years living fear morning and night

I am a journalist who never did anything wrong, who worked in one of the world's most
dangerous reporting situations in Somalia & Ethiopia

I am a journalist who never did anything wrong
Reports have helped many people in civil war, drought and disaster situations

I am a journalist who never did anything wrong
I love the peace and tranquility of the Irish nation

I am a journalist who never did anything wrong
I live in direct provision in the republic of Ireland

I am a journalist who never did anything wrong
I want to find asylum & protection in the Irish state

My experience as a journalist

Journalists worried whenever they published anything about human rights issues, armed robberies or militia loyal to the governments in Ethiopia & Somaliland, where I come from. For example in 2010, when these gunmen used to visit the magazine headquarters and threaten the journalists saying; "How dare individuals who didn't fight alongside (our Heroes), write anything that smears their names and discredits the Movement?"

Two of the most serious incidents were when gunmen visited the office of our magazine "African Age Magazine" and opened fire from an automatic gun – indiscriminately. Luckily no one was hurt. The other incident was when two young, drunk gunmen carrying a hand-grenade tried to blow us up while copying that following day's paper. I and my colleagues were fortunate because one of the paper's staff was a kin to one of the gunmen.

Detention of journalists for writing anything criticizing the government was a part of life of journalists. This trend reached its climax when the government confiscated all the copying machines and typewriters of the three private newspapers and put ten journalists in Jigjiga main prison in 2008. They were held in custody for between three months and one year. Journalists are abused or threatened and sometimes detained for months in Ethiopia, but there are some who have been jailed for years,

In Somaliland some journalists were arrested for either articles in the public opinion section or editorials; but the strange thing is that if those arrested are not released, when they appear before the judge, they are told their case is pending in court. This is the new trend.

How I contribute my journalism skills to my community life in Ireland

I am journalist Abdiiaziz Mussa, a journalist living as an asylum seeker for a number of years at Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre Cork, in Direct Provision. My efforts helped to start up the first Somali media entity in Ireland, Radio-Somali Ireland. By using modern and effective technology we introduced its programmes and news to listeners through the internet. Therefore any individual who has access to internet will be able to access Radio-Somali Ireland programmes, no matter where he/she is in the world. By creating a sophisticated home page (Multimedia Platform) we enabled our service users to access: news and programmes, written text, important images and pictures, music and TV and video programmes.

Since I came to Ireland in 2015, I have been working as a voluntary freelance journalist for the Somali community in Ireland. I established a website called somaliradio.ie. We translated the 1916 Irish Proclamation into Somali and have also produced videos in our language about St Patrick's Day and the Easter Rising 1916 history. We also translated Irish news items such as, press releases, news reports and events happening in Ireland (since 2015), into Somali.

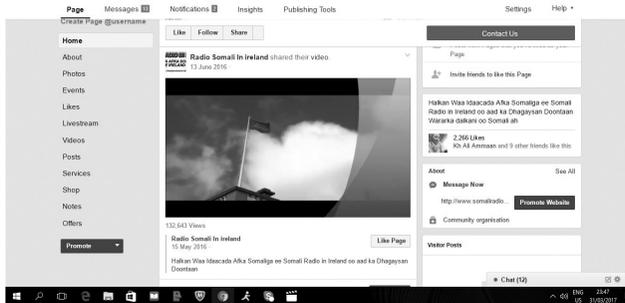


Here I am, speaking to BBC Somali, about Gerry Adams' resignation, his personal history including during the Troubles and the future of Northern Ireland .

Somaliradio.ie -- is the main resource you can get information about the Somali community in Ireland.

The main points I wrote about include the following:

- In the interview, BBC Somali asked Abdiaziz Mussa on 11.02.2018 for Gerry Adams' personal history, about the resignation of his position in Sinn Féin and Irish politics as well as the history of Northern Ireland
- It was good news for Somali people to hear about Gerry Adams and his personal History on BBC Somali, because for the past 35 years, Somalis have been interested in his struggle in Northern Ireland.
- A translation of the Irish Proclamation of 1916 into Somali, watched by more than 132,000 on Facebook.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBRTaFcPTq4>

- A DFA Press release was translated into Somali in order to show Somali people Irish generosity and kindness, and I sent this press release to a number of Somali media outlets both inside and outside Somalia to broadcast. The biggest TV station in the Somali language is Universal TV, who also broadcast it. This is also available on You Tube.



- Tánaiste Simon Coveney, TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with responsibility for Brexit and I. The we met at Cork City Hall in 2017, I said “Congratulations on your ambition to become the next Taoiseach of Ireland and I hope you will be successful.”



Graduation: Green Party Leader Eamon Ryan TD awarding me the certificate for my Irish Politics and History course.



The Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr. Tony Fitzgerald and I.

Zoya Zoya

My infinity

after a photograph by Martina Gardiner

The vastness inside me
As a deep dark night.
The endless journey of Galaxies
flaming my plight.
Is it like a game we play?
Or is it walking on a flexed rope very tight
Hope, Opportunities, Positivity and Attitude
Leads me to discover the Universe's gratitude
These doors are calling my name, as I'm the only one
Oh you, yes you, just you are the spectrum of life's flight.
The rebel inside me pushes me forward
Don't look back, run only onwards
You are a man of your own words.
As I look high, I see an endless sight
Up above the sky so high I discover how life flies.
So now I decide to start
A new journey with little on my cart.
The universe opens its wings
Hoping to see unseen things
In the world of infinite skies
But I can't ignore the ship of my life
As time passes by, I'm giving up
My old fragile ship has come to an end.
I'm losing my time and age
I have to leave my bodily cage.
Dark wide galaxies call my name.
Things I see in the dark can't appear in light
Leaving myself to believe insight.
But if the sunlight rises
Belief strengthens instead of surmises.
The rising sun gives me a chance to fix my ship
This is unstable like the whim of a whip.
The rising sunlight and the barriers of my old age
Can't stop me travelling across the stars of Milky Ways.

Asad Mahmud

The pen

I was very joyous and innocent on the day I was born. I was shining like the sparkle of nickel and was comfortably placed in a very beautiful and attractive pen case. I knew my purpose in life as if it was engraved somewhere in my subconscious that I was the conveyor of knowledge, information, communication and civilization. Keeping this commitment in my mind I endured a long journey from the manufacturing factory to the stationer's shop where I was displayed in a beautiful glass showcase to every prospective candidate who was willing to convert my mere existence into a meaningful life. My desire to be something and achieve my destiny was soon going to come true. The day came when my new scholarly and literate looking owner bought me from the shop. I was thriving with the idea of dancing on the paper under the light of a table lamp. When I arrived at my table, it was a complete projection of my dreams, placed in a room with a cupboard full of books, with neatly stacked papers and a golden and beautiful table lamp. Just under the lamp there was my gilded, shiny, expensive pen holder.

Everything was just as I dreamed. I was on the top of the world (on my table) as I always wanted to be under the light of the lamp. I just could not believe my destiny, how it brought me to my purpose. Since then I waited for my owner every single day and night. My owner would look at me with love and smile, but never tried to touch me again. My days felt dark and nights were even darker. My desire to be something grew into desperation and started affecting my physical health. I started to lose my shine and my ink was getting dry. I tried to cheer myself up but all efforts proved futile.

Then a time came when my owner stopped visiting me. I became depressed, lost all of my health and was totally covered in dross. I was thrown away in bin and was sent to a recycling factory. Just before my last moment I was unsure whether it was the death of me, or of civilization.

Asad Mahmud

Freedom Of expression

While living in my country,

I was totally free, totally free to express my appreciation for the laws of blasphemy and control,

How beautifully our government curtailed speech and effectively punished offenders.

I was totally free to express my praise for the ruling party which was very good at crushing dissent.

I was totally free to express pride for my army which was very good at covert Jihadi operations against infidel nations and blaming politicians for their own corrupt actions.

I was totally free to appreciate the expertise of my politicians for their scot free malpractices.

I was totally free to admire their prowess in steering nations into the hole of total destruction and deception.

I was totally free to revere the ideology of my bureaucracy of crushing the masses with intimacy.

I was totally free to adore the clergy who were fuelling the divide in the public with sectarianism and religionism.

I was totally free as you can see, I was totally free.



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