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***Travelling, trading, and storytelling:
Narratives of entrepreneurial selves of Afghan migrants in Pakistan***

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship research is mainly led by a Western emphasis on groundbreaking discoveries tied to innovative ventures and technological advances portraying a rather heroic view of entrepreneurs. This does not do justice to people acting entrepreneurially across the world being engaged in more 'replicative' activities and businesses. Entrepreneurship is – often primarily - a way to sustain the own livelihood through business creation. In an attempt to broaden the horizon to incorporate lived experience, this paper explores entrepreneurs in a developing country. The ethnographic study focuses on entrepreneurial identity construction through the life histories of Afghan migrants in the city of Peshawar. Three stories tell us about multiple negotiations of individual identity in context. Different 'anchors' are deployed to lend coherence to entrepreneurial selves and do not reflect a shared dominant narrative. Emergent stories espouse both a strong identification with the collective dimension of societal codes of conduct *and* its more blurred nature on the ground. Whilst the experience of migration stresses a 'self-in-transition', storytellers maintain a sense of agency and voice, being adamant to make their mark as to how their lives should be read.

Keywords: entrepreneurship; narratives, identity construction, ethnography, developing countries

Today, entrepreneurship tends to be seen as key for the economic progress of nations (e.g. Baumol *et al.*, 2007). It enables individuals to be self-employed through the creation of value on the basis of novel combinations of ideas and events (Minniti *et al.*, 2006). However, there is neither a consensus about the definition of entrepreneurship (Bruyat and Julien; 2001; Garland *et al.*, 2004) nor a universal blueprint to explain an 'entrepreneur' (Gartner, 1988). Several academic fields have contributed to the study of entrepreneurship but the concept is academically rooted in economics. The term 'entrepreneur' stems from the French 'entreprendre' which means "to undertake" and was first used by a French banker Richard Cantillon in 1756 (Van Praag, 1999) to describe agents who 'buy at a certain prices' and 'sell at uncertain prices' in anticipation of a profit. Yet economic theory had no real relevance for entrepreneurship until Joseph Schumpeter (1934) came up with a fully-fledged economic theory of entrepreneurship. He proposed that economic change is exogenous but an entrepreneur could bring about endogenous change in five different ways: introducing a new good; introducing a new method of production; exploiting a new market or new source of raw material, or new way of organizing the business. He further shed light on underlying motivations for an entrepreneur to 'go through uncertainty willingly', which would coincide with the dream to find a 'private kingdom'; the joy of creation, of getting things done, and an ambition to conquer.

Such original conceptualisation of what it means to be an entrepreneur has later been interpreted and distorted in many ways by authors. Mostly, it has been used to project a heroic image of the entrepreneur. This is evident from how entrepreneurs are perceived among the general public today. Academics, the media, and government policies have been instrumental in co-constructing such image. In a nutshell, to 'qualify as an entrepreneur', it is necessary to offer a service or a product which can produce unprecedented profit while remaining within the law of a country. This view has narrowed down the scope and understanding of entrepreneurship in the sense that any creative service should reach and pass the market test 'with flying colours'. But the conditions governing the journey of an invention to a groundbreaking new combination

yielding profit (legitimately) in the market varies in different contexts. Thus, there is a need to broaden the horizons of entrepreneurship research beyond the economic sphere. Many segments of a society use the economic sector for balancing resource need and availability, *and* for valuing worth (Porter, 1998). Crucially for this paper, that ‘worth’ coincides also with identifying a person or a business venture as ‘entrepreneurial’. Individuals in a variety of settings should be encouraged to take up a so-called ‘entrepreneurial identity’, at least to varying degrees (Jones et al., 2008; Murnieks and Mosakowski, 2007; Ram and Jones, 2008; Warren, 2004). It can thus be said that the notion of an entrepreneur is tied to a larger social context and that the entrepreneur is not purely an ‘economic being’.

Value addition and ‘the human potential’

Distinctions regarding who exactly can be identified as an entrepreneur are often drawn either on the basis of the kind of contribution made to particular business or societal sectors or in relation to specific activities one engages in. An example of the former is a ‘social entrepreneur’ contributing to the social sector through a social enterprise; the latter is characterised on the basis of who leads with ideas or rather follows and puts ‘things to use’ (Baumol et al., 2007). Specifically, innovative entrepreneurs are those introducing an original idea and making a groundbreaking discovery. Replicative entrepreneurs exploit an innovation in terms of reaping its best benefits. Thus, replicative entrepreneurship, at the individual level, can become a source of self-employment – a fundamental motivator for an entrepreneur.

Replicative entrepreneurs play a crucial role in the economy although they are less ‘glamorous’. “Replicative entrepreneurship is important in most economies because it represents a route out of poverty a mean by which people with little capital, education or experience can earn a living” (Baumol et al., 2007: 3). Attention towards entrepreneurship thus gains momentum globally, and particularly in the context of developing countries such as the one addressed in this paper (Pakistan). Entrepreneurship can so rather be seen as an inherent ‘human potential’ which has always been present in

societies, being allocated to societal sectors for which it would bring the best payoff (Baumol, 1996).

Given such background, recently some authors (e.g. Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006) call for broadening the horizons and search for the ‘entrepreneurial potential’, especially in developing contexts. Implications can have diverse effects on the ground like providing practical frameworks for filtering out entrepreneurial businesses while doing research (Davidson, 2004) or promoting self-employment also in the most disadvantaged parts of the world. A renowned example of the latter is Muhammad Yunus’s Grameen Bank supporting very poor people through micro-financing. As the Nobel winner (1997) points out, researchers have a role to play in the dynamics between economics and development; research practices in developing countries should be scrutinized as they are far from fruitful currently:

“We got too much bogged down by abstract theories...And models and things, and we started thinking that's the reality - and if it doesn't match the outside world, then we start blaming the others. So they're inefficient or they're bad or there's something wrong with their culture. We don't try to find out what the reality is and how to explain that reality.”
(Worldfocus, 1997)

We would like to extend this comment to entrepreneurship research because of a strong tendency to reduce the concept of entrepreneurship either to some traits (e.g. Gartner, 1989; Bird, 1989; Baron, 1998; McClelland, 1961) or characteristics of entrepreneurs or to exogenous effects and economic contingencies, and to do so in a predominantly Western fashion. Current approaches can thus only capture part of the complexity of entrepreneurship as they reduce the rich phenomenon to the mere mobilisation of resources or to a value addition exercise (Steyaert and Bouwen, 1997). This paper attempts to redress the balance looking at entrepreneurship as a complex and dynamic phenomenon in terms of the lived experience of ‘being an entrepreneur’ in a situated context of a developing country. That ‘being’ is part of an enacted and projected entrepreneurial identity as it perpetuates the entrepreneurial process – one that does neither dismiss the ‘human-in-the-being’ nor its inhabited socio-historical environment.

Identity construction and entrepreneurial selves

Research on entrepreneurial identity has not necessarily started within the area of entrepreneurship studies which rather focus on understanding entrepreneurial networks in which entrepreneurs are socially and contextually embedded (Granovetter, 1985). This view of entrepreneurship is consistent with Fletcher's (2003) concept of “fifth movement in entrepreneurship research”. Thus, entrepreneurship is not a static concept but a dynamic phenomenon that is socially emergent (Fletcher, 2003). Moreover, “there is clear resonance between the conceptualization of entrepreneurial identity as a reflexive journey and the conceptualization of entrepreneurship as a networked social process” (Warren, 2004: 26) which has generated a growing interest in entrepreneurial identity (e.g. Cohen and Musson, 2000).

Definitions of identity abound in literature but express different epistemological positions in line with theories stemming from different disciplines. Individual identity, the focus here, is still seen as a matter of social categorisation most of the time (e.g. with reference to age, race, ethnicity, etc.). The fundamental question of ‘who am I’ has thus been answered differently, depending on the theoretical stance. Stryker and Serpe (1982), for example, define identity as a reflexive cognition. It is a journey of self-definition which becomes the basis to explain behaviour. Identity would motivate behaviour (Burke 1991). As an implication, it can be said that entrepreneurial identity is the basis for entrepreneurial action when entrepreneurs behave ‘entrepreneurially’. But personal and social identities are in a state of constant tension at different levels; that is, different selves of an entrepreneur do not just refer to mere role-identities (e.g. being a father, a mentor, a friend) or cognition (e.g. ‘how I perceive myself to be’). Instead, they point at different modes of identification with oneself, others, the dynamic situation as well as dominant discourses and practices in society.

The departure point in this paper is that entrepreneurial identity can ontologically be seen as a continuous process of becoming which is created and enacted through different selves in a specific context. Such take on identity is mainly inscribed in a constructivist perspective (Down and Reveley 2004; Johansson 2004; Downing 2005) linking the individual to a social group and its actions (Giddens 1991). In addition, here

identity construction is conceptualised through the narrative approach. Different senses of ‘being an entrepreneur’ are thus generated by and expressed in narratives of the self (or self-narratives); they are neither treated as a ‘fact’ nor as given. Narratives are “interpretative devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others...” (Lawler, 2002: 242-3). As such, we can speak of a narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991a:32; Polkinghorne, 1991; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002) which demands a certain structure to lend coherence to our sense of self. Narratives also draw boundaries as to what is included or excluded from identity construction. This can serve to legitimise action and personal experience (De Certeau, 1984). In every case, “in the process of identity construction, narrative is constitutive, not just a medium for the expression of a selfhood which lies somewhere ‘inside’” (Nocker, 2006: 76).

A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though it is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going... it must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing story about the self. (Giddens, 1991: 54)

Background and contexts

The stories presented in this paper are derived from the first author’s field work carried out in 2009 for his doctoral study on entrepreneurial identities. The main context is Peshawar, the first author’s home-city and capital of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan (NWFP). Geographically, it is the gateway between the Indian Sub-Continent and Central Asia. It provides access from Afghanistan to Pakistan through the narrow Khyber Pass which is the only path through the far south-eastern extension of the Hindu Kush range. Since the age of Alexander the Great (356- 323 BC), conquerors and traders alike have used the Khyber Pass as access route to the fertile grounds of the Sub-Continent. Peshawar’s unique location developed the city into a crucial marketplace and a resting point for traders. The old market is known as Qissa Khawani, which literally means the “market of storytellers” in the local language. Traders used to come to this market from near and far to sell their goods, retiring in its ancient inns. In the evening, they would sit in tea houses and sip traditional green tea, while never-ending sessions of storytelling would take place about traders’ journeys and their goods. Most of the 40

stories collected for the doctoral study by the first author were told to him in the same geographical area although the paper presents an initial analysis and only one from the “market of storytellers”. The other two highlight how the researcher had to dynamically adapt to the context using serendipitous opportunities and kinship ties in different situations.

Official statistics are a rarity in Pakistan, representing a major obstacle for gathering data in this study. As from statistics of the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, more than three million Afghans are counted to be settled in Pakistan and most of them have no immediate plans to leave (AREU, 2006). In Peshawar, one out of every five people is Afghan, which is more than 0.6 million out of a total population of 2.4 million. It is the largest proportion of Afghan migrants in any city in the world. The reason is that no Afghan government has ever recognized the Durand line (border between Afghanistan and the NWFP) maintaining a dormant claim on the NWFP (ibid.). The cultural bond is clear as the NWFP is a Pashtun province and the majority of Afghans are also Pashtuns (ibid.). All three storytellers in this paper belong to this ethnic group. Some of the most successful entrepreneurs among Afghans in Peshawar were businessmen who were involved in large-scale cross-border trade (ibid.).

One of the characteristics of Pashtuns is the language (Pashto); the other is that they are (supposed to be) living according to the practice of Pashtunwali – a code of conduct and honor. Social development has changed its importance for the urban dwellers but it is still dominant in rural areas of the NWFP and most of Afghanistan. Pashtunwali is a ‘philosophy of life in practice’ before Pashtuns became Muslims. In a social context some of its tenants gain primacy over religion (Caroe, 1958)¹. It also maintains a working legal code of practice. This is drawn from the collective wisdom of people and is based on reciprocal agreements as a social contract. A Pashtun himself, the first author was born in Peshawar in 1978, a year before the former USSR attacked Afghanistan. His forefathers share a long history of migration of Afghan people, crossing

¹ Some tenants of Pashtunwali are: Khpelwaki (self authority), Sialy (Equality), Jirga (Assembly), Mishertob (Elders), Ezaat (respect of all people), Roogha (reconciliation or compromise), Badal (revenge), Barabari (equivalence), Teega/Nerkh (Law), Aziz/Azizwale (clan, clanship), Terbor/Terborwali (cousin and tribal rivalries), Nang (Honour), Ghairat (Pride), Oogha Warkawel (to give a lift to persons in need), Nanawati Warkawel (to offer asylum), Ashar (shared co-operative work), Zhamena (commitment), Melayter (patrons), Chegha (call for action), Soolah (truce), Nanawati (protection) and others (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pashtunwali>)

from Afghanistan in a wave about 300 years ago to settle in the NWFP. Living among Afghan refugees in Peshawar, the first author saw them settle down, first in refugee camps, then expand into settled areas. Afghans are commonly considered very tough, mentally as well physically when compared to their hosts-Pashtuns. Since he was a child, the first author observed that Afghan refugees established themselves as traders and became very successful compared to 'locals', setting up more and more businesses. He later decided that it was worth studying how successful entrepreneurs were 'going about their business', especially because Afghans were commonly portrayed as 'poor refugees' due to the 'cruel communists' and thus, in need of immediate financial assistance. The multiple vested interests of all political parties involved in the 'refugee matter' and in the constant flow of international funding never ceased but remain almost not documented².

Most of the entrepreneurial ventures and businesses in the NWFP and Pakistan are not officially registered; the taxing system is highly corrupt, and tax evasion is a norm. The first author observes Afghans 'with sacks of money' inside a multinational bank on a regular basis. In fact, there were no multinational banks in Peshawar before Afghan businesses raised to undeniable success. Car manufacturers like Toyota and Honda, for example, have outlets in Peshawar mainly catering the Afghan customers. Thus, the ability to create successful ventures in the given conditions can only be termed as 'entrepreneurial'. However, conventional measures of entrepreneurship cannot be used to assess the phenomenon. No governmental mechanism has helped Afghans in financing or running their ventures. Afghan entrepreneurs are mainly illiterate, and the ones who are literate have certainly not studied business.

A major obstacle in this research when carrying out fieldwork was the worsening law and order situation of the NWFP and Peshawar. As kidnapping for ransom is becoming more frequent, nobody wants to be seen as being rich or a successful entrepreneur. Afghans tend also not to be open to questions, especially about their business and money matters, out of fear of having to leave Pakistan or being exploited for

² It is not in the scope of this paper to describe the complex political situation that opened up the flow of funding towards Pakistan. Non-governmental organizations have been a major channel of distribution. Some research carried out by these organizations provides basic statistics. One such study (the only one accessible to this research) has been conducted by an independent organisation set up by the EU and the UN, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) (<http://www.areu.org.af/>).

bribes by the tax authorities. Thus, the nature of entrepreneurship and the difficult realities on the ground were given priority in deciding about any methods to proceed during fieldwork. The first author's raw questions were given the current mould with expert opinion of his supervisor (the second author here) who at times was rather concerned about her student's safety in the field. Some streets and gathering places of Peshawar had to be avoided although caution was required anywhere. It was a case of doing 'fieldwork under siege'.

Last but not least, the role of relatives and acquaintances was of utmost importance in this study in order to be able to enter and 'stay' in the field. Pashtun society consists of a wide group of tribes and clans. We will see evidence of it in the stories. A range of actors were also crucial for being introduced to those that would become the storytellers. For example, stories espouse the role of the first author's father who is renowned paper technologist running his own printing business in Peshawar. Others were friends, neighbours or 'the elders' in business and society. The researcher had to 'show respect' and follow tradition in whatever circumstance. A 'low key' attitude and the management of the own identity were paramount in order to interact with relevant participants in the field.

Narrating entrepreneurial selves

In this paper we take the view that narratives "do not reveal an essential self as much as a preferred one selected from the multiplicity of selves." (Kohler-Riessman, 2003: 8). The "production of chosen identities takes place... through a series of performances, or occasions in which identity processes are played out" (Hetherington, 1998: 19). "Even if there are limits to how selves can be intentionally placed because of unconscious processes" (Nocker, 2009: 151) the performance of self-narratives "becomes part of an ongoing negotiation in a particular context of interaction, both with oneself and with others" (Nocker, 2006: 77).

The present analysis reveals a particular kind of story – the life history narrative- which was being told repeatedly in the field (with or without prompting by the researcher). "The life history is important as a subjective document. Conventionally, it is

used to provide a finely detailed account of an informant’s life, to study connections between personality and culture, and to document a "slice of life" as experienced by a member of another culture” (Luborsky, 1987: 367). Here, it starts with the past and ‘ends’ with the current experience of being an entrepreneur; the future is not featuring prominently or not at all. The narration of the past is very much situated within specific historical moments that link one’s personal life with the history of the own country such as the war or conditions of being a refugee. The actual telling of migration from Afghanistan to Pakistan and related experience is seen as a ‘watershed’ in one’s life. Yet very different meanings and ‘weightings’ are given to it. Some storytellers narrate about that time in terms of an explicit transition; others speak more of a turning point or even just an ‘episode’ in their lives. The end of the story tells about the current feelings and representation of entrepreneurial selves but also of oneself as a human being through different facets. It also contains the ‘morale of the story’. The title chosen for each story is taken from there. It is the text passage conveying the main message as to how one wants to be seen. Table 1 shows the stories’ narrative structure. Each story is told through embedded other narrations referring to the past, the transition and the present.

Table 1: Structure of life history narratives.

Narrative structure/ life history	Embedded narratives (story 1)	Embedded narratives (story 2)	Embedded narratives (story 3)
Story	“Death and food is your weakness”	“I can make it work again”	“Today I stand tall”
Part I (the past)	The travelling trader	I am going to die anyway	Elder brothers become bad after marriage
Part II (transition)	Becoming wiser	The refugee camp	The perils of the book of magic
Part III (the present)	Natives and migrants	I have no capital	Seven sons, two daughters
Preferred entrepreneurial self-narrative	Collective/strong	Individualistic/ struggle	Individualistic/ progressive

Next, we present the stories. The immediate context is rendered through a snapshot of the researcher's voice as recorded in field notes. The stories were gathered in three different settings which create the main scene for interactions and narration.

“Death and food is your weakness”

The first story is by Suleman Kheil, an Afghan who came to Pakistan after the communist revolution in Afghanistan. He belongs to a tribe called Dosto-Kheil which has a long history of being sheep herders. Almost 50 years ago, this tribe turned towards trade. Suleman has been a partner and a sole owner in a variety of business ventures since. He is acquainted with the first author's father and there is basis of good relationships between families. Suleman is a grandfather of five children now and has given most of his business responsibility to his three sons. His eldest lives in the UK while another one in Germany, both with refugee status.

***Researcher:** When I arrived home (for data collection) after spending the first two years of my PhD study in the UK, he was standing in front of my house to welcome me. I asked him in a straightforward manner if he would want to be my first respondent and he agreed. Although being busy, he called me one afternoon. I went to his house (he is my neighbour) and I was seated in a drawing room where I had joined several meals in the past. We sat down on hand woven carpets which had a soft cushion underneath. The drawing room was large. Suleman has an extended family living in this house and the drawing room is considered as a male area. So his sons and their friends were also sitting there in the other parts just off the drawing room, discussing their own issues. At one end, his younger brother was given a big plate of rice and dried meat to eat his lunch. Suleman and I sat in one corner of the drawing room and his younger son brought us fresh raw sugar and green tea. We first talked about the situation surrounding the area and of some general things, and then I plainly asked Suleman to tell me his life story with his entrepreneurial venture as a central consideration. He was very elaborate and had a very sharp memory. I only had to encourage him or give him subtle direction while he narrated.*

Suleman constructs his past firmly as part of the tribe to which he belongs – one of traders travelling together to find new business routes and markets. Initially, they were trading only in the local area but the political change of the own country is taken as the opportunity to expand business. This is a start of a narrative with a view of closely-knit relationships upon which one can fully rely.

The Travelling Trader

Our people were already acquainted with travel and they used to trade some small items like dry fruits so they knew the routes. So tea was brought from India (United India then) and that was the start of our import activity; before that we used to only export items like pomegranate, dried grape and other dry fruits like almond and pine seeds. All of this used to come to Peshawar about 70-80 years ago. My elders bought back items like clothes, tea, spices and raw sugar from Peshawar. They sold it in a local wholesale market of Kabul. After the separation of India and Pakistan, our people started trading from India. At that time, the camel as transport vehicle was abandoned in favor of newly arrived trucks and cars. When some traders would go to India, others would give them some money to buy tea for them. They had a trust relationship.

In the next part of the narrative the tribe remains the vehicle for identity construction; it also is seen as enabling the growth of business acumen as a collective achievement. What changes in the text, however, is the use of increased comparison between the own and the others' identity via affiliation to the tribe. Whilst recognising that the 'competitor' too is learning from business experience in the tea trade, it is interesting to see how the storyteller emphasises the lasting close nature of relationship between families in the own tribe. The portrayed image is of unity but there is no description as to how it is possible to keep that unity going once relationships multiply exponentially. Everybody would still know each other: dozens or thousands of families would not make any difference in terms of trust.

Becoming wiser

My forefathers shifted to new locations, sold old lands in villages and bought new ones in cities, including Kabul. In the winter we used to come to Jalalabad (which is a hot place) and in summer we used to go back to Kabul (with a cold climate). In cities, we settled down and bought shops and commercial properties. One of our tribal elders, Haji Allah Nazar, bought a Sarai (a neighbourhood). He was a famous man known to all of Afghanistan. At the time we were only about 50 to 60 families, now we are about 5000 families. In our tribe of Dosto Kheil, we are still known to each other completely. I went to school for 7 years and my brother got separated as families became large, so I started helping my father in trading tea. I have only done tea business and nothing else for a long time. However, when we moved here, all types of goods started being traded. Presently only 30% of our people would be doing tea business. Hazarbus tribe followed us in tea trade as they thought that they have progressed and we would be left behind, however we are the pioneers in tea trade. They were in similar in number and now they claim to be more than us and we claim we are more. Hazarbus do the same type of businesses like tea, clothing and nowadays marble tiles. They have become wiser, e.g. no one will pick up junk from London; they collect the junk and put it into containers and send it over here. Sometimes it fetches double the cost price and sometimes even three times. Items like compressors and freezers are brought from Germany. My friend's son has got a visa after eight and a half years and now will be back home after such a long time. He is also doing the same business.

In the last part of the story the comparative element is pushed further to define the storyteller's own understanding of difference. The 'natives' are now seen as 'those that worry and fear' unnecessarily whilst Afghan people would be unfaltering in their approach to life and death. The storyteller stresses that he cannot really explain in words the origin of such strength although it is mostly seen as a matter of belief and faith. What counts at the level of text is the positioning of natives as 'weak' compared to oneself. Humour is used to make this statement more acceptable to the audience (after all, the researcher's father as one of the actors in this story belongs of the 'weaker people' ...) but the self-narrative is not changed.

Natives and migrants

You native people are fearful and afraid, for example from death! I remember that, last year, when you were not here, there was an operation against a local criminal Zahir Shah. A few rockets fell some twenty streets away from here and one watchman was also killed there. Your father and other natives gathered and talked about where to flee. I told them not to worry and just to sleep well; there would be no danger. [R: he says this whilst laughing about natives; I smile and so he speaks more about it]

They were not taking me seriously; I told them: "If you were in Kabul and had gone through a rain of rockets there, you would have fled across many countries." They were afraid and asked: "What will we do and what will we eat?" I told them: "We came in one pair of clothes and God took care of us. We have houses, cars and money, better than in Kabul; do not take stress, God is gracious. He will take care." They answered "No, you people were brave and had courage but what will we do?" And I laughed and was unable to say anything. So, you natives are very fearful of death and also worry too much about what you will eat. **Death and food is your weakness.**

[Coda: When we crossed over to Pakistan we came through tough mountains and I, along with my wife and children, did not eat anything for one day and one night, and we never complained about hunger. We came through snowy mountains. Some family members came later. One of my fellows who crossed over with us is now martyred.]

The main story told here is one of a strong 'collective identity' which is unquestioned. The crucial 'anchor' for identity construction is the sense of belonging to the own tribe and ethnicity. It defines, in absolute terms, both an affiliation and a destiny. The storyteller positions himself as highly empowered through that sense of belonging which also serves as demarcation point for difference. The narration implies that the 'one who belongs also believes'. The 'native' is excluded from such fortunate state of affairs and is ridiculed for the incapacity to keep a coherent self-narrative going (the native man 'fears'

and ‘indulges’ unnecessarily; he is not sustained by indomitable belief). These are the features of a heroic story. Afghans, belonging to specific tribes like Dosto-Kiehl, would be capable of sacrifice, and moreover, without any tragic undertones. One might even speak of a certain ‘lightness of being’ as believers will always be helped by god *and* the tribe, against all odds. There is no narrative tension between past and future or with reference to particular moments in life. Identifying strongly with kinship ties would render possible ‘to be brave’ in the face of enormous hardship. The morale is clear: if the individual follows the ‘right path’ set out by group tradition, success will be guaranteed. It will be a good life. In a metaphor, this is ‘the phoenix rising from the ashes’.

“I can make it work again”

The second story is about Abdullah D. - a supplier of dental equipment. The first author is a dentist’s family friend and so the meeting is scheduled to take place in the dental practice where he is undergoing urgent treatment.

R: The dentist examined my teeth. I was suffering all the time... When I came out of the examination room into the waiting area (which was empty in these after-hours), I found Abdullah sitting there. I was introduced by the dentist as a friend who is writing a book. I told Abdullah that I was collecting life stories of Afghans with main interest in their entrepreneurial ventures. At first he was a little shy, but I encouraged him by saying that his biography would be important. So he opened up, anticipating that his story would be long and very interesting.

For AD, the highlight of the past is being a soldier fighting in the desert of Kandahar. He tells about his fear of life in those times which is characterized by a single sentence prompting the whole story: “I am going to die anyway.” It is on the background of viewing the own circumstances as leaving no room for alternatives that AD decides to flee from the army. He crosses the dangerous terrain of landmines. At the level of text, these difficult moments, not personal traits, are seen as the origin of courage.

I am going to die anyway

Then I went to my uncle’s house in an area of Kabul; some security forces checked my ID there and took me with themselves. They trained for four months and recruited me in the army. They sent me to a village side where a tough fight was going on; it was in a desert of Kandahar (a province of Afghanistan)... One day I thought “I am going to die anyway, so let’s flee from here.” This story is really hard and interesting. So when I decided to run away among

the soldiers, I found one of them was my father's friend. He was serving for the last years. I consulted him on my plan to flee but he told me to be careful and not to talk about running away as the area is wholly mined and there is nowhere to run. He also told me that our commander would be very cruel because once a soldier tried to run away but he stepped on a mine and one leg was severed. The commander collected all the soldiers and threw him onto the mines; he was divided into pieces. Then I asked other colleagues and one of them told me that a soldier ran away a few days ago and was successful, and that they were aware of the safe path in-between mines.

One day we prayed at sunset and fifteen or twenty of us started to cross the mines. Some mines were hidden; others were more visible as the wind had blown the sand away which covered them. Some of them were highly sensitive. We successfully crossed the mines, however one of our colleagues who was walking two meters from me, almost touched a mine trigger. The other walking behind us started cursing him, so some of us returned out of fear and nine of us were able to cross successfully and flee.

The story continues with recounting exceptional experiences and dangers triggered by historical moments that link an individual's life to a country's fate. In the next part of the story, AD describes how he became a refugee. The episode is set in a refugee camp. The storyteller portrays a caring image of his 'countrymen' who helped him to survive what unquestionably was one of his worst life moments. Being a refugee is a difficult condition but only a temporary one. Family members come to the rescue.

Reaching the Refugee Camp

We were taken to a mosque (by Mujahedeen) and people in the village brought food to eat. However, we were unable to eat anything as our stomachs were unable to accept food. An elder understood our condition as he came to know that we have not eaten for three nights and days. He made us eat semi-liquid food such as milk and yogurt and forbade us to eat any solid food. We were taken to a training camp of Hizb-e-Islami (Mujahedeen group) we lived there for a month; they made us stay as they were waiting for a group to come that we could join for the journey. The group came after one month... I came here to a refugee camp in Jalozai (near Peshawar) and met a relative there; he hosted me for a week.

On this background, the present carries forward the story of struggle which is now transposed to the everyday life as an entrepreneur. It sketches a man struggling to work and do business with no capital of his own. AD continues to appreciate life but his narration is not free of tension. He complains somehow sarcastically: 'this is how life is'.

I have no capital

Yes it is good, but I need capital as I can get hold of good equipment from foreign countries. I do not have any capital but, still, I am able to run the business... When you will come to my shop you will be able to see my condition there. I have a huge variety of faulty equipment.

I can make it work again; I know how to repair it. In the last ten-twenty years I got good expertise from it. I come in at 9am and work on this equipment for up to 5pm; I then get a buyer and sell the item.

AD's sees himself as a risk-taker because of circumstances. This is far from any conventional idea of entrepreneurs having such trait as fundamental feature that would distinguish them from other less-business oriented people. The main identity is individualistic in nature. Firstly, it refers only briefly to significant others at particular junctures in life, but not as crucial actors in the own life history. Here, there is no real sense of belonging. Secondly, the storyteller emphasizes individual struggle as a predicament from which one hardly escapes. One is left wondering about how business 'is done' in the absence of capital. What features prominently is the 'narrative treatment' of others in the present; if they feature at all (i.e. the storyteller does not see a buyer of his products as a client). The story ends with an image of a man having survived incredible situations who now acts in a rather solitary manner. There is no sign of trust in others; no strong belief. In this sense, the equipment traded is both the source of business *and* a metaphor of how 'to make it work'. The rather sad undertone of this narrative is partly glossed over through the suppression of emotions in order to tell a 'rational story' which lends some stability to the own view of life and sense of identity.

“Today I stand tall”

The third story takes place in Peshawar in an area called Old Peshawar where the famous Qisa Khawani Bazaar (QK) is located. It literally means the “Bazaar of Storytellers”. Qahwa (green herbal tea) is the drink of choice. The QK bazaar is known for its Qahwa Khanas (green tea houses) and for traders from around the world relaxing at these tea houses telling each other stories. These were the only communication abundant as well as free (though some may contain secrets and would be sold). Everything else on the market was for price. One part of the QK bazaar has now been transformed into a printing press market. The first author's father runs a business there and supplies paper for printing machines. There are different clusters of entrepreneurs in the same area selling a variety of products.

R: I went to the publishers' market. Most of them have good relations with father as they are customers and he expects that they would agree to participate. Our family business employs an office manager, NM, who is responsible for the day-to-day business. He accompanied me and introduced me to the publishers. The streets were narrow but the business was active. NM told me to enter a shop and we sat on the floor. Two children were there (aged about four and seven); they were browsing piles of books which were arranged in order in the small shop. A rather young, fresh looking man came into the shop and greeted us, asking us to make ourselves comfortable. This was Seelab (S) the owner; he is 35 years old. NM introduced me as the son of Haji Sahib [my father; it is a title of respect for elders in the local language].

The first part of the story starts with recounting the relationship with the storyteller's older brother. He is depicted first as a role model and then as perpetrator of violence. However difficult, this is a story of obedience and a 'struggling self'. Family features strongly but not in a positive way.

Elder brothers become bad after marriage

Yes he (my brother) went to school and college, twelve years in all. But I am illiterate. Afterwards I joined my brother. I did not go to school much, may be two years, but I was really a flop at it. It was hard as my father was very old then and my elder brother – well, you know, older brothers are good but sometimes when they get married everything changes. When I was a child my elder brother was like a father to me but after marriage he changed. So after marriage my elder took me to the shop; he used to beat me on pity issues. Everyday he would beat me and I was helpless. I was with my brother until the age of seventeen. He got me married and it cost him Rs. 25000. It was 1993.

The next part espouses how an entrepreneurial identity starts to express itself, though still under the shadow of family identity. We can see the storyteller taking some risks to render himself independent while still being obedient to the family. He does not choose to liberate himself abruptly though circumstances could push him to do so. He chooses the gradual approach to 'stand on his feet' and whilst learning from the ups and downs of the market, his family identity dims away. He tells of several occasions which bring to the fore his identity as a learner and an optimistic person who does not give up.

The Perils of Book of Magic

After one and a half years, my brother told me that I have to serve him properly for Rs. 40/- per day or leave the shop. In 1994 my first son was born. I used to get Rs. 40/- from my brother and in-between lunch breaks I would start a project and was able to print a book called Yaseen-e-Maghribi. This is a small book. I gave Rs. 150/- to the transcriber...

I did not know what Yaseen-e-Maghribi exactly was. It was bought by a professor who found out that it was a book of magic, actually. So the professor registered a case to the police against all of us: me, Qari Waseem, and Arif. He claimed that it is an attempt to change the

religion. So one day I was bringing a book for my brother from Haqqani Kutub Khana, who is an important businessman. He told me that he had come to know that a book called Yaseen-e-Maghribi will be confiscated by the police, so we should remove it from shops. When I arrived back to my shop, I saw that police officials had arrived in front of my brother's shop, but they were in plain clothes. They enquired about the book Yaseen-e-Maghribi, I was just entering the shop and my sixth sense indicated me danger. My brother said that it will be available and looked at me, but I said it would not be available. The police (in plain clothes) went to Noorani Kutub Khana; Arif was not present personally but his son was there. Arif had meanwhile printed 500 copies of the book that originally belonged to me. Arif's son told the police that this book is available in large quantities. The police found the book and arrested Arif's son sealing his shop. So I was saved from that trouble, and the case against that book was heard in court...

My brother kicked me out of his shop. I had almost Rs. 8000/- worth of books but no one was buying them anymore. I didn't know what to do. I was very depressed, so I went to a daily wages market in the morning, to earn something for my children. After some time many people were hired but no one hired me. I cried for half an hour there. A person came in a car and told me that he had a task but it was a very tough job. He took me to his home and told me that I have to clean his sewage water. He showed me that dirty water and gave me a bucket to fill it with filth to take outside and throw away. I started just before noon and finished at 7pm. The daily wage rate was Rs. 75; the person gave me Rs. 130, but his wife gave me an additional Rs. 100/-. I went back home.

In the following end, we can see that the storyteller's entrepreneurial activity is reaping the fruits of success, for which he is very grateful to god. He is very proud of himself as his business is growing rapidly. Yet he deflects the narrative from previous issues, preferring to stress his current identity as a father. He does so in two ways. On the one side, he is a father of nine children; on the other he sees himself as an entrepreneur who, in the manner of a 'good father', nurtures the livelihood of his employees (at the age of 35).

Seven sons, two daughters

I am happy now. I have rented a house for Rs. 15000/-, a shop for Rs. 15000/-. I have 21 workers now and about four huge stores. I have also a shop in Kabul and I supply books to Tajikistan. This is how I have made it to this level. The expenses nowadays are huge, and I have about Rs. 200000/- expenditure monthly. So I have to keep the wheel turning. Thanks to God, **today I stand tall** among entrepreneurs here and now my business runs in about Rs. 20 million. I have seven sons and two daughters. My elder son is sixteen years old and studies. My second son is having a religious education he is fifteen. I am thankful to God for the life he has bestowed upon me now. This is how all of it is.

Hence, the storyteller depicts himself as a learner who has overcome all obstacles on due time. The latter are minimized (not without humility), in order to achieve the narrative coherence of attained goals and a fully-fledged entrepreneurial identity. This is a

progressive story of development from the past to the present. It entails learning the ropes and being appreciative. Any account of possible ongoing contradictory relationships (e.g. with the brother) is suppressed and is portrayed as ‘resolved’ in the narrative unfolding. The life hi(story) is constructed as a ‘great leap forward’ in very testing times. Although grateful to divine intervention, the storyteller claims most of the credit for himself. He is ‘self-made’ and proud of it.

Final remarks

The stories analysed in this paper represent the way three Afghan entrepreneurs construct their entrepreneurial selves *in situ* through the narration of their life histories. These convey some commonalities. Most importantly, the entrepreneurs have all gone through a major and rather traumatic transition when migrating from their own homeland to settle in Pakistan. They survived difficult situations and have subsequently established themselves, being successful or at least earning their livelihood from their ventures. They tend to have a strong sense of entrepreneurial identity as they convey their ability to reconstruct their own life stories, being capable also of attending to the outside world (Sennet; 2000). This kind of entrepreneurial identity is both fluid and stable due to how it is fixed or rendered more malleable in stories through particular ‘anchors’. The present analysis suggests positioning of selves through ethnicity, faith and kinship; the collective vs. the individual; risk-taking and opportunism; serendipity and necessity.

Storytellers do not use the same narrative strategies and anchors. Let us take a look at the three stories in turn. The first story emphasises ‘the tribe’ in which ethnicity plays a crucial role. Although it has strong bearing upon narrative construction, there is a need to reconsider its nature beyond categorisation and especially in relation to common views of entrepreneurship theory. Firstly the three stories stress a non-Western component which features more prominently and needs to be acknowledged. The strong element of kinship and the influence of faith cannot be erased. These aspects are rather neglected in current theories of entrepreneurship which still emphasise the entrepreneur mainly as a ‘product’ of (successful) traits and individual action. Further, ethnicity is depicted more dynamically than conventionally understood. The first story is not ‘just’

about having the opportunity to draw on shared resources. For example, ethnicity is a source of pride as well as a feeling of shared experience and of ‘growing together’. It has led actors to undertake risk in a fruitful manner. In this sense, ethnicity is constructed like a “network [that] can be better understood not as morphological entities but rather as spaces in which subtle yet powerful re-negotiations of entrepreneurial identity are played out; at network level with an impact far beyond that of the individual” (Warren 2004) while not denying its opportunistic use as a resource (Weinreich Saunderson, 2003).

However, the anchor of ‘collective identity’ does not feature as strongly in the other two stories which are more individualistic in nature. Still, the own experience remains strongly connected to the shared social space of either a family or beliefs. The ‘others’ became either the source of struggle (story two) and/or redemption (story three). Certainly, ‘becoming an entrepreneur’ does not come to the storytellers as a matter of choice or convenience, or of a policy incentive as portrayed in much entrepreneurship literature. Moreover, crucial changes force people to develop a more complete view of themselves as they look inwards to give more importance to their inner voice (Lindgren and Wallin 2001). The second and third story particularly invite empathy and provide a space (for readers/ the audience) to sympathise with the storytellers’ conditions of existence. In this sense, individual identities are unique as they are always a product of the interplay of individuals in social interaction (Giddens; 1991).

Both the context of experience *and* that of its telling count for identity construction. The entrepreneurial self is stressed but not in the same way in all three stories. One might indeed like to emphasise personal selves more (e.g. ‘being a father’ in the third story). Unlike dominant views of (heroic) entrepreneurship, religious faith leads some storytellers to dynamically tell instances that shape the self by downplaying the own contributions to outcomes (story one). Yet, there is also self-positioning that resonates with more conventional Western views of entrepreneurship. In story two, tensions within the individual are never resolved, faith is not an issue, and the collective anchoring is marginal. To a larger extent, the entrepreneurial self thus is a product of seeking opportunities for business in an uncertain environment where one remains ‘alone’ with the own predicament.

In sum, the stories in this paper highlight the relevance of narratives for accessing lived experience (Bruner, 1990) but also the dynamic constitution of a social space of difference (Hetherington, 1998). The storytellers have expressed many selves due to various movements taking place on the one hand, between shared spaces of life and work which are highly situated and historically determined and on the other, the textual movements for self-positioning within a narrative space. It is such strong interweaving of spheres that becomes crucial in this paper for understanding better what it means and feels to become an entrepreneur in a developing and 'troubled country'. As such, it is hoped it will open up further discussion on the merits and limits of entrepreneurship approaches and ethnographic research alike.

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