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COLLECTIVE^{ME}

ISSUE 45

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DEFINING
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TO ASK YOUR
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SOPHIA AMORUSO

On losing (and rebuilding) a \$350M empire

Tahmina Saleem takes pictures on Nadir Shah Hill, also known as Kite Hill

CHANGING VOICES

After noticing a lack of FEMALE representation in Kabul's international PRESS CORPS, one journalist set out to get more JOURNALISTS on the FRONTLINE.

WORDS LEAH DAVIES // PHOTOGRAPHY JOEL VAN HOUTT



First class in the Sahar Speaks classroom, Kabul

Good things come out of anger," says Amie Ferris-Rotman, founder and director of Sahar Speaks. Amie is a British-American journalist with a decade of experience as a foreign correspondent. She's reported from more than a dozen countries and, from 2011 to 2013, worked as a senior correspondent for Reuters in Kabul, Afghanistan, where she became increasingly disappointed by the lack of female journalists in the country.

"I tried in vain to hire women, but was met with fierce opposition by our local male staff," explains Amie. "It soon became clear to me that the entire system was flawed – these women were not being hired across the board, and never had been."

While the local Afghan press corps – a relatively free press of around 9000 reporters – contained about 2000 women, there were no female reporters at international news outlets in Kabul. Not at the BBC, *The New York Times*, Reuters or the Associated Press. None, that was, until Amie created an entrepreneurial news program, bearing one of the most common female names in Afghanistan: Sahar.

"It also means 'dawn', heralding the beginning of a new era, where Afghan female reporters can tell their stories to the world," says Amie.

In 2013, Amie was selected as a John S Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University, where she developed Sahar Speaks, which offers the mentoring, training and publishing opportunities necessary to give a voice to women in Afghanistan. It is the first program of its kind to produce consistent and high-quality journalism from female Afghan correspondents in the global media.

"We hope to change the paradigm that has contributed to the marginalisation of women's voices," says Amie, adding that Afghan men and foreign men and women are the ones telling the stories of Afghan women, despite their lack of connection to the reality of women in Afghanistan. Strict cultural customs that prohibit most Afghan women from speaking to Afghan men pose further barriers.

"Without having Afghan female correspondents, access to these stories is near impossible for men, and difficult for international women."

One of the reasons for the absence of women at foreign news outlets was related to the way foreign news media established themselves in Afghanistan after the civil war.

"Most of the bureaus [and] offices were established during and after the November 2001 ousting of the Taliban. They were set up by foreigners who employed the same male fixers and translators they had used to cover the

civil war. Many of these men became established in the news organisations and often hired their relatives and men they knew. Women were never part of this," says Amie.

"Things that we take for granted are enormous hurdles for them, such as walking down the street [without being harassed] or going around town at night. But these impediments do not mean they're not worth hiring."

Refining her idea during her 12 months at Stanford, Amie says her fellowship taught her she had to be tougher; she needed to appear more firm in what she believed in and self-promote. The following two years she lived mainly off savings, with a few freelancing gigs on the side, while trying to create Sahar Speaks. It was rejected "from just about every grant-giving body out there", and Amie, who now wishes she had brought on an advisory group, had moments of anxiety and despair before the UK's Kestrelman Trust provided seed funding.

Officially launched to the world in December of 2015, Sahar Speaks' pilot round took place in March 2016. During this time, 12 women received training in pitching, writing, interviewing,

Without having Afghan female CORRESPONDENTS, access to these STORIES is near impossible for men, and DIFFICULT for international women.

promoting stories and creating multimedia, and worked with their mentors to each write a story that would be published on The Huffington Post, giving them "the world-class

attention they deserve", says Amie.

Each aspiring journalist was paired with an international correspondent.

"I was amazed by how global the response was, which just underlined the importance and necessity of this project.

Women are half of the world, not just of a single country, and Sahar Speaks' purpose shone a light on issues surrounding women across the world." >



Sahar Fetrat speaks to another journalist in Kabul

Alia Rajai reports from a hill on the outskirts of Kabul where many victims of a bombing, July 23 2016, are buried. Two explosions during a demonstration (about an electricity project) of mostly ethnic Hazaras killed more than 80 people in Kabul's Deh Mazang's area. Some say 97 people were killed and 260 injured.



Amie Ferris-Rotman, founder and director of Sahar Speaks (right) with graduate Sparghai Basir (left)

I've learnt how, as a GROUP, female JOURNALISTS can bring about MORE CHANGE than one person alone.

Some of those reporters have since been invited to work for the Associated Press, Al Jazeera, German newspapers and *The New York Times*.

Shougofa, one of the Sahar Speaks participants, says she had always wanted to be a journalist. "I want [to] try to help people and raise their voice. I write about women in my country and their issues. I want my stories to finally be heard, because currently they're not."

"Through Sahar Speaks, I've learnt how, as a group, female journalists can bring about more change than one person alone."

Amie, now a senior correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal* in Moscow, is currently making plans for round two of the program this year, funded by the Sigrid Rausing Trust.

"I want to see Afghan women working for foreign news outlets in Kabul," she says. "I want people across the world to read and see their stories and learn something about Afghanistan's women that they didn't know before. I want their lives to become part of a global discussion. I do not want them to be forgotten." 📷



Mariam Alimi takes photographs of graffiti artists in downtown Kabul



CLASS OF 2016

MEET THE FIRST GRADUATES OF SAHAR SPEAKS.



NADIA ZAHEL
NEWSREADER AT
ZHWANDOON TV

Role model: Herself, for continuing to work despite Taliban threats
Mentor: Antonia Mortensen, field producer for CNN International, London
Article: 'Beaten and Tortured for 24 Years to Pay for Her Father's Mistake'
🐦 @nadia_zahel



TAHMINA SALEEM
FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Role model: Afghan photographer Farzana Wahidy
Mentor: Sayli Udas, research fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, Mumbai
Article: 'Female Trailblazers Shatter Stereotypes in Afghanistan'
📷 @tahmina_saleem_turkmany



SHOUGOFA ALIKOZAY
WRITER AT AFGHAN WOMEN'S WRITING PROJECT (AWWP)

Role model: Her mother, for her constant support
Mentor: Leah Davies, founder and director of Paper Planes Connect, Sydney
Article: 'What it's Like to be Married at 7 Years Old'



ZAHRA JOYA
WRITER AT JOMHOR NEWS

Role model: Iranian poet Simin Behbahani
Mentor: Sanam Shantyaee, international affairs commentator for France 24, Paris
Article: 'I Dressed Like a Boy So I Could Go to School'
🐦 @zahrajoya



SITARA SADAAT
WRITER AT AWWP

Role model: Afghanistan's Queen Soraya
Mentor: Lisa Clifford, independent journalist and filmmaker, UK
Article: 'Female Musician Makes Waves in Male-Dominated Afghanistan'
🐦 @sadaat_sitara



SAHAR FETRAT
DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER

Role model: Khola Zainab, a 55-year-old formerly illiterate woman who taught women in her village how to read
Mentor: Roberta Staley, editor of the *Canadian Chemical News* and freelance writer, Vancouver
Article: 'Combating the Misery of Menstruation for Afghan Girls'
🐦 @Sahar_Fetrat

THESE PROFILES FIRST APPEARED IN THE HUFFINGTON POST



SPARGHAI BASIR
RESEARCHER/INTERPRETER

Role model: Her illiterate grandmother, Bibi Gul, who challenged the Red Army during the Soviet occupation
Mentor: Lauren Bohn, Middle East correspondent for the Ground Truth Project, Istanbul
Article: 'Kabul in 1979 and 2016: A Mother and Daughter Reflect on Change'
 @1989Basir



PARASTOO SAQIB
WRITER AT AFGHAN WOMEN'S NEWS AGENCY

Role model: Iranian poet Forugh Farrokhzad
Mentor: Najiba Feroz, broadcast journalist for the BBC, London
Article: 'Why the 'Barbaric' Practice of Stoning Is Still Used in Afghanistan'
 @parasto0saqib

ZAHRA NADER
NEWS ASSISTANT AND FREELANCE JOURNALIST

Role model: Simone de Beauvoir
Mentor: Vivian Nereim, reporter for Bloomberg News, Saudi Arabia
Article: 'For Afghan Women Seeking Divorce, a Wild Goose Chase'
 @zahrayusufi



MARIAM ALIMI
FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Role model: My mother, who insisted on my education despite her own illiteracy
Mentor: Monica Campbell, editor at Public Radio International, San Francisco
Article: 'Photography Project Lets Young Afghan Girls Share Their View of the World'
 @MariamAlimi1



ALIA RAJAI
FREELANCE JOURNALIST

Role model: Sima Samar, Afghan human rights advocate
Mentor: Danielle Moylan, freelance journalist, Kabul
Article: 'Woman-Owned Businesses On the Rise in Afghanistan'
 @rajaialia



SONIA AZATYAR
FOUNDER OF DEDGAH JAWAAN FAAL WEEKLY

Role model: Foreign women who help Afghan women
Mentor: Rossalyn Warren, senior news reporter at BuzzFeed UK, London
Article: 'Internet Helps Afghan Women Find Their Voice in Battle for Equality'

