

ENGLISH: *THE RUGMAKER OF MAZAR-E-SHARIF*

Prompt: In the midst of conflict, peace is still possible.

Death, disaster and defeat; it is a culture that many humans across the world must accustom themselves to. Conflict, being a situation where there are two opposing views and hence disagreement, is a common cause of this destruction and havoc. Warfare, such as a civil war, frequently arises from a difference in religion, beliefs and desires. This often makes a state of tranquillity difficult to obtain, until resolution is found on the behalf of both parties. However, in many situations individuals are able to find moments of peace, while the conflict endures.

Conflict can range from a simple dispute, to a mass scale war or political debate. These diverse levels of conflict cause its effects and what occurs whilst it is proceeding to also vary. In the modern world, the concept of conflict is often perceived negatively as many events in history show that it has provoked violence and trauma. However, some individuals are strong enough to overcome this, and in the midst of the turmoil and confrontation are able to free themselves from the disturbance and find peace. Factors such as distance, isolation and detachment or lack of opinion on the conflicting matter can assist in achieving this state of calmness. In saying this, there are definitely exceptions, where any attempt to find peace is futile.

In the inspirational retelling of Najaf Mazari's tough life, *The Rugmaker of Mazar-E-Sharif* shows us that in the depths of despair, peace can be found. In the country of Afghanistan, its civilians have learnt to adapt to the hostile environment. The ongoing conflict between groups such as the mujahedin, the Taliban and the Russians, means that suffering is forced upon the lives of the innocent Afghans. However, through Najaf's humble eyes, we see that throughout his life and within Afghanistan, he has experienced moments of serenity. During his childhood, he worked as a shepherd boy in the mountains of Northern Afghanistan. Although he may not have fancied it as a profession, when he reflects on the countryside of Shar Shar in retrospect, he thinks 'of the silence' and 'of peace.' This seclusion allowed him to experience stillness, although the conflict of his country was still amongst him. After moving to Mazar-E-Sharif, Najaf finds peace through his passion, rug making. He describes how the weavers and apprentices have good relationships with one another, and whilst working, they 'chatter and joke and sing.' It is a calm place for Najaf as he loves his work and the people surrounding him. Although Afghans have become programmed to anticipate bad news, Najaf explains that they are able to continue on with the balance of everyday life, through plain hard work. Najaf had no direct role in the war; he did not belong to either side. Hence, amidst the conflict, he is still able to find peace in the joys of everyday life.

The Cronulla beach riots, a racially motivated confrontation, occurred in December of 2005 and took place in New South Wales. Over 5000 people, locals and others, gathered to fight for 'Australians' right to 'reclaim their beaches.' Many 'ethnic' individuals, such as those from a Middle Eastern descent, were attacked and assaulted, and discriminatory and offensive statements were displayed on t-shirts and signs. 'Between the Flags,' by Jayce White, tells a story of a local man and a Lebanese man who both unintentionally go to the wrong beach on the day of the riot. Although they arrive at the beach intending to fight the opposing side, they end up playing beach cricket and discussing their common interests. Despite the fact that they are at the centre of the conflict occurring, caused by cultural differences, the short film shows that when people relate as individuals this prejudice can be overcome. The two men are able to find peace in the midst of conflict, by separating themselves from the mob mentality and acknowledging each other on a personal level.

'The White Ship,' written by Jackie French, combines elements of fantasy, historical religious persecution and the current issue of refugees, into a captivating novel. The tale begins in 1572, with the with a young Huguenot boy, Michel, living on a small island off the French coast. Threatened by religious exile, a sea captain offers to take the children of the protestant community across the waters to find a safe haven. As the story unravels, the journey moves into a realm of fiction as those aboard the ship cease to age, until reaching the shores of modern-day Australia, four hundred years

later. The children and the captain are a product of conflict that has been brought about due to differing beliefs, but more importantly, partiality. However, their search for refuge, although prolonged, proves to be a peaceful one. Although the conflict prevails, they are able to distance themselves and are hence free from disturbance. After a while, 'the children no longer cried for home. Their life was the White Ship and the ocean.' Their worries and fears were silenced by the belief that they would find a new place to call home. Peace for them was found in the stillness of the ocean and in the form of hope, despite knowing that the conflict encompassing them would persist.

By exploring Najaf's life from a different perspective, it could be argued that due to the Taliban's discriminatory and brutal domination, a state of tranquillity was unattainable for Najaf. In his memoir, we see that although Najaf is not a violent person, nor does he choose to involve himself in the conflict, he cannot avoid it, due to his ethnicity. Primarily consisting of individuals from the Pashtun ethnic group, the Taliban were particularly hateful towards Hazara; a minority group. In line with their oppressive restrictions and literal interpretation of the Koran, they brutally tortured and killed large numbers of innocent Hazara. Being Hazara makes finding peace impossible for Najaf, as he is constantly running for his life and violence is thrust upon him. Not only is he desperately avoiding the Taliban, but he must also flee from the recruiters that are recruiting for the mujahedin and the communists. Najaf explains that recruitment will most certainly result in death, and so avoiding the recruiters became the 'national sport of Afghanistan.' These aspects of Najaf's life must generate a persistent feeling of paranoia within him, and so internally, Najaf is unable to feel calm and at ease. This, alongside the fear of an explosion occurring or a loved one being killed, makes his life stressful. Najaf states that 'war had become normal in Afghanistan, peace was strange,' exhibiting the extreme rarity of serenity in his life. In many ways, Najaf is unable to find peace in his life, as his ethnicity and his country placed him in the centre of deep and historical conflict.

Conflict is an inevitable yet complicated aspect of everyday life, varying in size and in intensity. Globally, many individuals find themselves struggling, as they have been placed in the centre of ongoing conflict that has resulted in violence or discrimination. Although liberation from this disharmony can often be difficult to achieve, some individuals can bravely conquer it and amidst in the conflict, are able to find peace.