



A response to
"Sustaining the good man:
Re-authoring when belonging is conditional then withdrawn"
by Janet Pelly

by Abdul Ghaffar Stanikzai

I found this paper very touching to read. The themes are very much related to most unplanned refugees/migrants who are forced to leave their countries. Unplanned means those who must leave their country, their relatives, their families and escape for their and their immediate family's safety, as distinct from planned migrants, those who are coming for study, work, and so on – they are planning their journey, they have a clear goal coming here, and importantly, they have a future, a family, to return to.

I first heard the term "bad man" when I was interpreting for a client at the STTARS (Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service) office in Adelaide about three years ago. I think he was on a Bridging Visa, something like that, and his visa had recently been cancelled. He was going through a lot of mental health issues caused by this news. He had been in Australia for more than 10 years on this visa and had never visited his family since he arrived here. In that counselling session where I was interpreting for him, he described himself as a "bad man". The reason he brought this up was that when he was leaving his family all those years ago, his son was a few-month-old baby.

He said, "Now he is 15 years old, and I haven't been at his side while he was growing up". He described this all to the counsellor and mentioned, "This is the most stressful thing, together with my visa cancellation and uncertainty. I have never been a good father and a good husband". The counsellor was very experienced, and she reassured him: "You sacrificed your whole life to your family, and I am sure they are very grateful and understanding of your struggles and the hard work you are doing day and night for them." I still see this man from time to time in Adelaide, and unfortunately his visa issue is still unresolved, and he is awaiting some court decisions, something like this. Sometimes, when I see him in the community, he is a very active member and contributes a lot to the community activities that take place from time to time.

While I was in my country of origin and before I fled and sought asylum in Australia, I was an active and very useful person in the community. I contributed through my profession as a doctor working in a hospital emergency department and also actively advocating for human rights for those who hadn't had a voice or whose voices were not being heard by the authorities, so I could see the

contribution and effects of my work on people's daily lives. Since I am here in Australia, I am safe, my kids are receiving a good education, and I am hopeful for their future. But despite all the efforts, I haven't had a chance to serve the community through my professional knowledge and the capacity I have. Although I am an Australian citizen now, sometimes I feel like I am not the person I used to be; sometimes I feel like I am a useless person. My energy and capacity to serve the community have been wasted day by day as I am getting older here. Thus, I can feel Yasin's feelings, and his identity as a person with all the trauma he experienced throughout his journey of detention.

Janet Pelly's article documents "Yasin's efforts to reclaim his identity from institutional definition, both as a member of a persecuted minority and as a detained asylum seeker" (Pelly, 2026, p. 50). After he was released after nine years in closed immigration detention, "his identity questions shifted away from bad and good towards how to make use of small but significant freedoms" (2026, p. 51).

Yasin fled his country, left his childhood and childhood places, his family and friends, due to uncertain, unimaginable situations and life-threatening conditions. He sought asylum, peace, security, prosperity and a brighter future in a country like Australia, but he ended up spending in his young life in closed detention where instead

he was given the feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and despair and the constant feeling of being a "bad man". At all times, he was seeking even small opportunities to reclaim his identity as a good man by doing good things in the community.

All of these experiences are beyond the imagination of most people. For most, reading Yasin's story may only be like reading a daily newspaper. But for people who somehow went through similar experiences and for those who have worked with and helped such people, this is beyond an ordinary story. Yasin is a human being who came to a country and sought asylum and he had to spend nearly all his young life in closed detention where only powerlessness, hopelessness, despair, and the fences of detention could be seen and felt during all those years.

Our family can't thank enough all those who are involved with Yasin and have helped him throughout this journey. People are busy to get profit and money through their business, work, etc. Towards the end of the day, everyone is tired and planning how to get more money the next day, but people like you who have helped or are helping Yasin and others like him, I am sure you will not be tired. As you have heavily invested in your life for being a kind, helpful and compassionate human being, you will always feel happy and energetic whenever kindness and compassion are discussed.



After graduating from Kandahar University in 2004, Abdul Ghaffar Stanikzai worked as a medical doctor in Afghanistan for 10 years. He also has considerable experience as a human rights activist. During his time as provincial program manager at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, he achieved several professional goals including the establishment of the Women and Youth Civil Society Organization in a remote and conservative area of Afghanistan (this was particularly to support women who were suffering domestic violence); the foundation of the first women's refuge in Afghanistan for women escaping domestic violence; the foundation of a rehabilitation centre for youth in Afghanistan; and the implementation of policies and procedures whereby local Afghans could present grievances to international military forces and local police, and the forces and police be held to account. Dr Stanikzai is now a faculty member at Dulwich Centre where he works on a range of community projects. drcricket@dulwichcentre.com.au

Stanikzai, A. G. (2026). A response to "Sustaining the good man: Re-authoring when belonging is conditional then withdrawn" by Janet Pelly. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, (2), 58–59.