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Dr. Kenneth Holland
The President of American University of Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan
November, 2018

Disclaimer:
The content of this report was produced entirely by TWC and does not reflect the view of donor.
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### ABBREVIATIONS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKU</td>
<td>Afghanistan Center of Kabul University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIHRC</td>
<td>Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPRO</td>
<td>Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUAF</td>
<td>American University of Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRG</td>
<td>Conflict Research Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDI</td>
<td>Gender Development Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEM</td>
<td>Gender Empowerment Measure</td>
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<tr>
<td>GII</td>
<td>Gender Inequality Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDPA</td>
<td>People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAWA</td>
<td>Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOAS</td>
<td>School of Oriental and African Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TISS</td>
<td>Tata Institute of Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTP</td>
<td>Tahrik-e Taliban of Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWC</td>
<td>The Women’s Center, American University of Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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</table>
INTRODUCTION

On September 24-25, 2018, The Women Center at American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) organized an academic symposium on gender studies, in Kabul, Afghanistan. The first of its kind in Afghanistan, “Gender, Beyond the Limits” was an attempt to widen the debate on gender in the country, inviting presentations from various fields of research, and by creating a space for interaction between scholars, prospective scholars of gender studies, and practitioners to discuss challenges and prospects for gendered research in Afghanistan.

This report is organized as follows. The first section provides background on the symposium, and an overview of symposium proceedings. The second section provides a historical perspective on gendered studies in Afghanistan through a review of selected literature. Section three outlines some of the key outcomes from the discussions held during the two days of the symposium concerning the status of gendered research in Afghanistan, placing it in a historical perspective of research conducted to date. Section four discusses some of the challenges faced by academic and research institutions in Afghanistan to further knowledge and research on gender within the country. The report concludes with recommendations for strengthening and renewing gender studies within Afghanistan's academia.

ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM

Background and Rationale

Since 2001, Afghanistan has been the scene of the largest gender-focused aid intervention, with women's rights and the inclusion of a gender perspective in development programs being pre-requisites for releasing or allocating development aid throughout the country. Terms such as “gender”, “women's empowerment” and “violence against women” have become central in the interactions between foreign donors, the Afghan government, and civil society organizations.¹

The politicization of gender issues and sensitivity that surrounds them are not new in Afghanistan. Throughout the 20th century, women's investment of, or seclusion from, the public scene, have been at the center of political discourses and struggles over identity. Social reforms under the modern monarchies of Amanullah and Zahir Shah, and later on under Daud and the Communist regime, were closely associated with claims of “women's emancipation” among the urban elites, and strongly contested by other segments of society. In the aftermath of the fall of Najib's government in 1991, oppressive measures against

women fostered by the Mujahideen directly answered emancipatory measures from the previous era.²

In 2001, with abuse of women’s rights under the Taliban invoked as a rationale and justification for the military intervention, the status of Afghan women acquired a central position in the discourse of international donors, the political elite, and development actors. At the same time, political and development practitioners paid limited attention the endogenous evolutions of gender relations in the Afghan society and the sensitivities, both positive and negative, that had developed as part of Afghanistan’s turbulent history. The concept of gender itself further remains largely misunderstood, associated with processes of “women highlighting” rather than social construction of roles and identities.³

As new discourses on gender emerged and evolved in subsequent years, academics increasingly paid attention to the construction of gender norms and ideologies in Afghanistan, how they interact with policy and development discourses of Western and non-Western actors, how they shape behaviors and gendered identities, and how these are renegotiated, generating new hybrid forms of feminist and rights’ discourses.⁴ Research on gender carried out by academics or as part of academic institutions worldwide, however, is seldom discussed or debated within Afghanistan. A few Afghan institutions of higher learning have started to incorporate gender studies or gender perspectives in their curricula, but these remain largely initiated and funded by Western donors. To date, there has therefore, in Afghanistan, been limited space for discussion on gender between scholars or prospective scholars within and outside of the country on the one hand, and between academic research and development or policy practitioners on the other.

Against this backdrop, “Gender, Beyond the Limits” intended to create a platform for researchers, prospective scholars and practitioners to exchange ideas and perspectives that contribute to academic discourse on gender in Afghanistan, and to open up a space for dialogue and collaboration that will support further development of gender studies in Afghanistan.

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SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

The symposium took place over two days, with the first day dedicated to presentations by scholars and prospective scholars, and the second day to a closed discussion on prospects for gender studies on Afghan society and within Afghan institutions.²

On the first day, researchers from institutions in Afghanistan, India, Europe and North America were invited to present research papers grouped under two thematic areas. Presentations were discussed and served as the basis to open up discussions on how gender is and could be addressed through academic research in Afghanistan. As an introduction to the symposium itself, Dr. Nandita Mondal from the Center of Labour Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, provided a theoretical overview of gender as a constructive element of social relationships, and significant of relations of power in relation to development, and some of the key concepts mobilized by researchers.

The first session on “Contextualizing Gender: Representations and Discourses” invited papers focusing on an epistemological perspective on the concept of gender in Afghanistan and South Asia through an analysis of discourses surrounding gender, prevailing approaches in the academic and development fields, and the current status of gender studies in the Afghan context. Participants included:

- Ananya Chakraborty, TISS (Mumbai), with the presentation of a paper co-authored with Dr. Sandhya S. Iyer, on the nature and level of human development progress of women in South Asia in relation to Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the institutionalization of discrimination against women across a large range of rights and issues. Her paper was discussed by Shahrazad Akbar, Senior Advisor on the National Program on Culture and Creative Economy, UNESCO Afghanistan.
- Dr. Sarvarasa Rafizada, Rana University (Kabul) presenting findings from her doctoral research at Ferdowsi University, Mashhad (Iran) on the role of women in contemporary Afghan literature in Persian. Her paper was discussed by Emran Rateeb, Independent Researcher.
- Seyedeh Paniz Mousawi-Natanzi, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS – London) who provided a presentation on the war mode of visual production in Afghanistan through a gendered lens, based on her doctoral research. The paper was followed by a discussion by Dr. Nandita Mondal, TISS.

Presentations were followed by a panel discussion focused on the possibility offered by comparative approaches to gender in South Asia, and the opening up of a dialogue between institutions, countries, and across disciplines.

² A full agenda of proceedings can be found in Appendix 1 to this report.
The second session on “Rethinking Gender in Afghanistan: Societal Perspectives and Gendered Identities” included presentations and discussions of papers covering societal and cultural aspects of gender, looking into how gendered identities are evolving and are being renegotiated in Afghan society, addressing intersections between gendered identities, Islam and tradition. Presenters included:

- Dr. Sonia Ahsan, visiting fellow at the Salzman Institute at the School and International and Public Affairs, Columbia University (United States), with a presentation on “Pedagogies of Womanhood in Afghanistan”, drawn from a chapter of her doctoral research, focused on the formation of a distinct space for feminism, resistance and agency in Afghanistan, and the ritualist inhabitations of gender norms by Afghan women. Her paper was discussed by Ali Abdi, doctoral candidate at Yale University (United States).
- Lucile Martin, Conflict Research Group (CRG), Ghent University (Belgium), presented findings from her doctoral research on the transfer of social and gender norms through return migration, looking into how gendered identities are negotiated by return migrants in the public space. Her paper was discussed by Mohsen Jalali, University of Massachusetts (United States).
- Dr. Weeda Mehran, a post-doctorate fellow at Global Studies Institute, Georgia State University (United States) gave a presentation on the depiction of jihadi women in jihadist rhetoric through a comparative analysis of ISIS, Tahrik-e Taliban of Pakistan, Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. Her paper was discussed by Annika Schmeding, Boston University.

The second set of presentations concluded the first day. On September 25, presenters, discussants and representatives of Afghan Academic institutions were invited to a closed door session to discuss and explore prospective areas for gender studies in Afghanistan, and possibilities for strengthening access to, and development of, research on gender within the country. A total of 19 individuals attended the session (see table 1 below).6

Table 1: Participants to Closed Session, September 25, 2018 (by alphabetical order of name)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad Shah</td>
<td>Herat University, Acting Provost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ananya Chakraborty</td>
<td>TISS, Mumbai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annika Schmeding</td>
<td>Boston University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arif Yousofi</td>
<td>Bamyan University, Chancellor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 The list of questions addressed is available in the Agenda, Appendix 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution/Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hazrat Mir Totakheel</td>
<td>Kandahar University, Chancellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jeffrey Belnap</td>
<td>AUAF, Provost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Julie Holland</td>
<td>AUAF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khalid Hatam</td>
<td>Kardan University, Dean of Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khudadad Bisharat</td>
<td>The Women Center, AUAF, Program Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucile Martin</td>
<td>Ghent University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam Safi</td>
<td>DROPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohsen Jalali</td>
<td>University of Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nandita Mondal</td>
<td>TISS, Mumbai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasima Rahimi</td>
<td>Gawharshad University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samina Ansari</td>
<td>The Women Center, AUAF, Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarvarasa Rafizada</td>
<td>Rana University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyedeh Paniz Mousawi Natanzi</td>
<td>SOAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Sima Samar</td>
<td>AIHRC, Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziarahaman Roein</td>
<td>Alberoni University, Chancellor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As for other fields in social sciences, academic research on gender has remained overall scarce in Afghanistan over the past five decades. At the same time, the construction of gender representations and norms, and the ideological debates surrounding the political investment of women's bodies in 20th century Afghanistan has generated heated discussions among scholars. This overview provides some of the key debates that have emerged on issues relating to women and gender in Afghanistan from the 1970s to date. It proceeds against a historical background of political interventions to invest representations of gendered bodies and social norms, particularly as they relate to the role of women in society. Broadly, four periods can be distinguished. From the 1920s to 1978, relatively gradual, periodic attempts made by the State at “modernizing” Afghanistan were rooted in formal legislative arrangements aimed at reforming the status of women in society and the family. From 1978 to 1991, reforms took another turn, with the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)'s forced agenda to bring about social change, including through reforms aimed at women's empowerment. Reforms during both periods, led by a (primarily male) urban elite, were met with strong contestation, particularly among rural communities which the State failed to engage, and where patriarchal forms of authority were dominant and based on a strict hierarchy of gender roles. In the case of the PDPA resistances to a socialist agenda perceived as contradicting traditional and religious values led to the Afghan-Soviet war, the rise of the Mujahideen and the rolling back of the status of women.7 The period that follows, 1991 to 2001, is thus marked by a backlash against any and all interventions aimed at improving women's status in society, and the emergence of a new discourse on “Afghan traditions” rooted in fundamentalist conceptions of gender roles. The political investment of women's bodies took a new turn in 2001, with the Western invasion of Afghanistan mobilizing a rhetoric of women's liberation and the centrality of women's rights and empowerment as part of the reconstruction project of Afghanistan.8

Against this backdrop, the overview of selected literature, below, proceeds chronologically, from ethnographic and anthropological gendered research which flourished in the 1970's and 1980s, focusing on social norms and their interaction with notions of honor and modernity in rural and urban Afghan societies, to the deconstruction of political discourses surrounding women's role in society by feminist scholars and social scientists as of the 1990s and in the aftermath of the 2001 invasion, and the recent emergence of studies on masculinities. Given the importance development discourse on gender, it further provides background on applied research looking into the outcomes of development interventions.

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aimed at inducing changes in gender-relations as part of the reconstruction project of Afghanistan.

**Social norms, honor and modernity**

In the 1970s and 1980s, gendered research in Afghanistan was primarily illustrated in the work of ethnographers and anthropologists studying social construction of gender roles, and particularly women's roles, in relation to social institutions, the notion of honor, Islam and modernity (Dupree 1978, Tapper 1982, Boesen 1980, 1983, Grima 1986). In “Behind the Veil in Afghanistan” (1978), Dupree contests the cultural bias in the representation of Afghan women by Western observers as oppressed, with the chadori upheld as a symbol of their oppression. Retracing the political history of Afghanistan since the 19th century, she provides a critical account of the history of women's dress in Afghanistan in relation to cultural identity, value systems, and modernity. 

Boesen (1980, 1983) challenges the strict division of public and private spheres as being essentially male and female, respectively. Analyzing gender role arrangements in the Kunar valley through the institutions of marriage, family and kinship, and value systems of honor, she argues the equation of honor with male control over women is reinterpreted, negotiated and sometimes questioned by women, notably through oral poetry (landai) – though not to the extent that it challenges male domination or the notions of honor an family honor in which patriarchal arrangements are rooted.

Grima (1986) examines representations of Pashtun women's identity and sense of values, questioning the equation between women's performance of honor through its expression in folklore, and their own sense of identity and positioning towards romance narratives developed and preserved by men to depict an honorable woman.

**Politicization of gender and the “women’s question”**

In the context of debates on and resistance to the reform of the institution of marriage initiated by the government of Nur Ahmad Taraqi in 1978, the discussion on gender arrangements is placed within the historical context of legislative reforms undertaken throughout the 20th century in relation to women's status and the institution of marriage in Afghanistan, the confrontation between State policies aimed at reforming social order, and existing social arrangements, particularly as they relate to the institution of marriage and gendered relations (Dupree 1981, Olesen 1982, Tapper 1982). Efforts by the Afghan State to regulate marriage practices emerged in the late 19th, early 20th century, as part of attempts

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to “modernize” Afghan society. Two lines of rhetoric have been used by reformist politicians: an economic one, grounded in considerations of marriage indebtedness of grooms, and one focused on the status of women. These were in turn part of a broader discourse on the modernization of Afghan society. (Dupree 1981, Tapper 1982). Drawing on her ethnographic work among Durrani Pashtuns in the 1970s, Tapper underlines the centrality of the idiom of honor in shaping relations of power and control over resources, and highlights the unlikeliness that objectives to remold gender arrangements in Afghanistan upheld by the Communist State would be realized – but rather, in a context of scarcity of resources where control over productive and reproductive resources is expressed through patriarchal social arrangements, that they would reinforce discriminatory social institutions towards women.\(^{12}\)

Analyzing the implications of Decree no. 7 on “Dowry and Marriage Expenses” issued in October 1978 by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) with the express intention to liberate women from patriarchal customs and rooted in a discourse on emancipation of women, Dupree and Tapper, for instance, show the decree was based on an inadequate understanding of the social drivers of bride price, and its bearings on the construction of gender roles, overseeing the role of tuyana/ walwar/ qalin as compensation for the bride's family, and considerations of prestige and honor which affect the bride's status.\(^{13}\) Centlivres-Dumont further warns about the generalization implied by the use of the terms “the status of women” in political discourse, failing to capture the heterogeneity of roles and status and in the division of productive activity between men and women.\(^{14}\)

With the collapse of the Communist government and the defeat of Marxist-led reformist policies aimed at changing the status of women in 1978, and the continued centrality of “the women's question” in the 1980s and under the Mujahideen, feminist researchers discuss the preeminence of gender politics in 20th century Afghanistan – with a sense of emergency as fundamentalist ideologies increasingly gain political ground (Moghadam, Centlivres-Dumont, Tapper, Dupree). Moghadam (1992), for instance, analyzes the salience of gender in politics, social movements, and struggles surrounding cultural identity, with women's inclusion or seclusion from the public realm, their veiling or unveiling, at the center of political debates between reformists, revolutionaries, and conservative elements of society.\(^{15}\) In practice, Dupree shows the politicization of ‘the question of women’ and reforms initiated by the state resulted in limited changes in gendered social arrangements - the family remaining, including in urban areas and for women engaged in public activities, the main institution through which their lives were framed. The visibility of women in Kabul was not accompanied by qualitative changes in decision-making and power sharing and women's political


\(^{15}\) Moghaddam V, M. (1992) “ Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernising Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan”
movements were subordinated to male party members. While pervasive patriarchal attitudes generated frustration among the small minority of urban women, Dupree argues, the vast majority of rural women were satisfied with gender arrangements, benefitted from social networks of solidarity, and retained individual influence through expertise in a variety of activities. At the same time, and with the politicization of women’s issues, opposition to the government was manifested primarily through conservative predications contesting reforms aimed at changing family and women’s status undertaken by the Communist regime as immoral and calling to a new social order obsessed with women’s morality, and expressed in terms of re-invented ‘Afghan traditions’.16

Tapper-Lindisfarne, Centlivres-Dumont and Moghadam underline the centrality of patriarchal norms in a predominantly rural society, with instituted hierarchies based on gender (and age), subordination of women, and controls over women’s mobility and sexuality rooted in conceptions of honor and virtue, traditions and customs (Tapper 1994, Centlivres-Dumont 1994, Moghaddam 1999).17 In a comparative study of the trajectory of gender politics in revolutionary Iran and revolutionary Afghanistan since the late 1970s, Moghaddam underlines the strength of patriarchal models of production and reproduction, and its resistance to reforms imposed by a weak state. She concludes to an opposite trajectory of gender politics in Iran and Afghanistan, with the progressive exclusion of women from political, economic and social activities by armed religiopolitical movements in Afghanistan, while in Iran, women increasingly invested the public realm. With the internationalization of politics during the Afghan civil war, she argues, Western supports of the Mujahideen (politics and scholars alike) ignored the gendered implications of the Mujahideen’s politics and the restrictions on women’s rights, mobility and visibility in refugee camps under their control in Peshawar, neglecting gender politics in their approach to Afghanistan.18

In “A History of Women in Afghanistan’ Ahmed-Ghosh builds on research conducted by Dupree, Tapper and Moghadam, calling for the need to take into account the broader historical context of Afghanistan in analyzing gender arrangements, notes the highly politicized and symbolic “situation of Afghan women” is not simply the result of Taliban policies. Rather than using the ideological formulation of ‘before and after’ the Taliban to analyze the situation of women, she calls for taking into account a broader historical perspective to grasp the historical, political, social, economic and religious factors that that have shaped gender dynamics in Afghanistan. Moghadam, Ahmed-Ghosh, Kandiyoti, and Mann contend gendered hierarchies in Afghan society have to be understood in the context

of a conflictual relationship between State attempts at modernization throughout the 20th century, including through reforms of the status of women, mostly led by an urbanized, predominantly male, elite, and rural power structures which uphold patriarchal, kinship-based arrangements. Carol Mann (2006) argues the defeat of reformist policies undertaken as early as the 1920s, hardline Islamic radicalization in the aftermath of the fall of the Communist government, and the reconfiguration of an Afghan ‘tradition’ invented in the refugee camps in Pakistan produced a unique form of ‘reactionary modernity’, whereas social transformation does not, as in most centralized state, emerge from the capital to spread to the rest of the country, but rather resistance from the rural periphery to the policies of a weak Afghan state continue to shape the models and stereotypes according to which women negotiate their position in society.

**Saving Afghan Women?**

The justification of the Western military invasion in 2001 through a rhetoric of women’s liberation brought the politicization of women’s issue to a new level. “The situation of Afghan women” was put at the forefront of international mediatic and political debate. Pressure from international donors and UN agencies generated sharp internal debates involving parliamentarians, clerics, bureaucrats, local NGOs and the media, considering the extent to which women’s rights agenda should be carried out to expend women’s constitutional, political and civic rights. The rhetoric surrounding the “liberation of Afghan women” in Western political discourse, its linkage interlinked with rights discourses presenting ‘Western’ modernity and universal human rights as essential for Afghan women and reflected in a “women’s empowerment” rhetoric in development intervention raised important critique among feminist scholars and others. (Abu-Lughod 2002, Arat-Koc 2002, Delphy C. 2002, Lindisfarne 2002, Hunt 2002, Kandiyoti 2005, Stabile and Kumar 2005, Ayotte and Husain 2005, Daulatzai 2008).

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Taking a critical stance against the expressed justifications of the military intervention in terms of liberation or saving of Afghan women, Abu Lughod (2002) and Ayotte and Husain (2005) highlight the continuity of a colonialist and missionary rhetoric reifying ‘Muslim women’ and building on a reductive interpretation of veiling as the symbol of women’s oppression.\(^{23}\) Abu Lughod further argues women have different interests and aspirations – which are not necessarily in line with Western ideals of feminism, but, at least in part, through an Islamically oriented feminism or alternative hybrid models.\(^{24}\) Delphy (2002) criticizes the hypocrisy behind the sudden discovery in Western political discourse of the “plight of Afghan women” under the Taliban, a plight willfully ignored under the Mujahideen government, and embedded post 2001 in a moralistic discourse portraying the military intervention as necessary and altruistic, in the footsteps of colonialis
t disourses on a supposed “mission” of the West to bring civilization to “others”.\(^{25}\)

Reflecting on the response of feminists to the military invasion of Afghanistan as a “humanitarian war”, Arat-Koc (2002) draws attention to the pitfalls of gender essentialism and gender reductionism on one hand, and cultural essentialism and reductionism on the other, rooted in conceptions of a “Third-World difference” exemplified in the obsession about the bodies of women in Third World Countries as the site of feminist politics, in isolation from an understanding of the social, economic and political conditions of these countries, or other dimensions of women's lives.\(^{26}\)

In “The Discursive Occupation of Afghanistan” Daulatzai (2008) warns the notion of “gender” in Afghanistan remains not only understudied and misunderstood, but that, as “culture” and “religion”, it narrows our understanding when used as the underlying epistemological axis through which Afghan society is to be approached, and not as an object of study incorporated into analysis. Gender, she contests, is not the only dimension of women's lives, and the over-determination of gender in addressing the suffering of Afghans (primarily through the scope of the restrictions imposed by the Taliban and making an impasse on 20 years of armed conflict and geopolitical considerations that propelled Afghanistan in to the Cold War) made it impossible to acknowledge this very suffering. Prioritizing of Afghan women by the international community notably ignored repercussions of gender programming and political rhetoric on society as a whole – notably men, often portrayed as misogynistic and anachronistic – structural forms of violence, and the articulation between

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large-scale contingencies and the subjective experiences of Afghans.\textsuperscript{27}

A recurrent comment (Arat-Koc 2002, Abu-Lughod 2002, Delphy 2002, Moghadam 2002, Thrupkaew 2002) is the marginalization of statements by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in feminist response to the fall of the Taliban.\textsuperscript{28} Brodsky (2003) provides a detailed account of the struggles of RAWA, its organizational culture and structure, and contestation of the dichotomy between a “Western” and an “Eastern” model of feminism.\textsuperscript{29} Fluri (2008) As a woman led organization intersecting feminist and nationalist politics and operating outside of the control of male-dominated political groups, RAWA constitutes an exception in the political landscape of Afghanistan, redefining notions of citizenry, nation, gender norms and relations form a feminist and nationalist perspective.\textsuperscript{30}

**Gender and the Reconstruction Project**

The post-2002 reconstruction project was characterized by the centrality of women's rights, which became an explicit policy goal, with women's bodies symbolic of the reconstruction project itself, at the intersection of local, national and global politics (Kandiyoti 2005, Burki 2011, Fluri 2011, Billaud 2016, Wimpelmann).\textsuperscript{31}

Kandiyoti (2005) replaces the discussion on women's rights in Afghanistan with in a broader context of transitions affecting the country as part of the reconstruction process post 2001: security, political and socio-economic transitions. In a context where’s the state’s interface with civil society has historically been limited, and marked by tensions between state elites and rural communities, she argues analyzing women rights from the perspective of state policies only is insufficient to bring about gender equitable development, and insists on the need for a better understanding of the deep transformations brought about by years of conflict. She argues the routine violation of women's rights is not simply a factor of instituted patriarchal arrangements inequitable to women, but also of by a combination of pressures including a fragmented polity, erosion of livelihoods, rising poverty, a criminalized economy, and insecurity due to the predation of local strong men. Finally, she draws attention to disjuncture between formal changes for women's rights achieved through legal reforms, and the time required for societal relations to change in the framework of security and development transitions.\textsuperscript{32}

More recent studies explore the reconstruction project through the prism of performance

\textsuperscript{29} Brodsky (2003). *With All Our Strength: The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan*, Routlidge.  
and everyday life, analyzing the tension between the desired gendered outcomes of international aid and geopolitics, and their translation in the practices and daily lives of those they intend to affect (Fluri 2011, Billaud 2015 and Wimpelmann 2017). Fluri (2011) adopts a feminist perspective to analyze gender geopolitics in Afghanistan examining bodily interactions among and between international workers and Afghan recipients of international aid. She notes representations and conceptualizations of modernity linked the universal conceptions of human rights are associated with behavioral performance and perceive ‘modern’ gender roles and norms. She uses the term ‘corporeal modernity’ to refer to the body as the contested site of socio-political representations and the place where ‘western’ ideals of liberation and freedom and illustrated and expressed – through the covering/ uncovering of women’s hair, expectations linked to dress and behavior, representations of male and female bodies, masculine and feminine performance of international aid workers.33

Billaud (2016) examines the reconstruction project through the political category “woman” to address broader questions surrounding sovereignty, nation/state-building and democratization in Afghanistan. As women and the political construct of their identity is placed at the center of the reconstruction project and are caught in the tension between expectations to conform with social norms by their community, and demands for gender equality and women’s visibility by international forces on the other, she looks into women’s micro-practices of resistance to maintain a sense of autonomy for themselves. The imposition of a Universalist framework inspired by Western liberal tradition, she argues, rather than providing women with the tools to emancipate themselves, has hampered their capacity to speak for themselves and the possibility of developing alternative normative framework. At the same time, through their everyday practices, women are able to maintain, widen or create a space for themselves, and reconfigure social norms.34

Examining attempts to define and regulate acts of gender violence, and the institutional infrastructure intended to effect regulatory reforms, Wimpelmann outlines the effects and limits or reconstruction politics. She points to the importance of transnational coalitions and political agendas in shaping the outcomes of interventions on gender violence, reconfiguring state institutions, immersed in transnational politics in which women's security became a global concern ultimately guaranteed by international funds and pressure. The intersection of global politics and local dynamics, the compromises and tensions that it bore, produced outcomes specific to Afghanistan.35 Which were....?

**Gender and Masculinities**

Though masculinity and manhood have been dealt with as part of gendered ethnographic studies (see for instance TAPPER 1991), specific research on constructions of masculinity emerged recently. Among those are Monsutti (2007), and more recently Manchanda (2015) and Chiovenda (2018).

Focusing on the case of Hazara male migrants to Iran, Monsutti (2007) describes the process of migration as a household survival and coping strategy through economic diversification and spreading of risk, but also, for young male migrants, as a rite of passage from childhood into adulthood through which a man proves his masculinity.

Manchanda (2015) provides a critical account of representation of Pashtun masculinities as constructed by the Western imaginary, and shaped by orientalist, homo-nationalist frameworks. He underlines representations of the Afghan male (and specifically the Pashtun male) as “deviant” and “queer” are to be understood as part of narratives of deviance and naturalness to confer distance to an Orientalized “other” and discredit him.

In a recent article, Chiovenda (2018) studies how principles of masculine behavior have evolved, are negotiated and interpreted by generations of men born during the decades of war. Drawing on field research in Jalalabad, he shows that in a war context which brought exceptional necessities and provided the ground for abusive behaviors, principles of honor and manhood underwent significant modification and were renegotiated by young men to be reconciled with the behaviors they witnessed. Institutionalized overtime, these renegotiated principles, rooted in power, military prowess and aggressive behavior, have come to compete with pre-war dominant cultural idiom.

**Gender and Development: Perspectives from Applied Research**

In the aftermath of 2001, applied research, funded mainly by Western donors, focused on the implications of development aid focused on women’s empowerment, rights and gender based violence. “Gender” became one of the main areas of programming by the international development aid entities in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, and commitment to gender equality has been a major feature of post-2001 reconstruction and development programming in the country. This commitment was first made in the Bonn Agreement (December 2001), followed by similar commitments in the Constitution of Afghanistan (2003), Afghanistan Compact (2006), National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA, 2008 – 2018), Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS 2008

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Academic Symposium: Gender, Beyond the Limits

– 2013) and Afghanistan’s National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions (2015). In addition, Afghanistan is signatory to the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 2003), has made specific commitments to meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including Goal 3, “Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women”, and endorsed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among which SDG 5 on gender equality. In December 2011, the Bonn Conference renewed the commitment of the international community to support Afghanistan in the post-2014, during Afghanistan’s “Transformation Decade”, underlining gender equality and the rights of women as key areas of focus.39 These were renewed in 2014 during the London Conference, and in 2016 at the Brussels Conference. Afghanistan's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 was approved in June 2015. Addressing commitments made under UNSCR 1325, it recognized women’s status as a social and economic minority and the importance of a robust framework for the implementation of measures supporting women's active participation in society. The Brussels Conference in October 2016 reaffirmed the commitment by the Afghan government and its international donors to continue support for gains made for Afghan women.

The outcomes of the policies, however, have been mixed. Studying the “politics of presence” of women Larson (2011), for instance, questions the use of the statutory reforms introducing a reserved seat system for women in the Parliament established during the Bonn process. One of the key issues, Larson contends, was the assumption by international and national policy makers that women form a homogenous group sharing similar interests. Instead, she argues that in practice, ethnic and qawm based identities are often prioritized over gender identities – female candidates remaining under tight control of parties who instrumentalize the policy to ensure their presence in Parliament. Affirmative action itself was misinterpreted, the minimum of 68 seats becoming a glass ceiling above which women were not allocated parliamentary space, with remaining seats referred to in Parliamentary discourse as “men’s seats” (reserved for men), diverting the initial intention of the policy.40

Studies on the implementation of women and/or gender programming in Afghanistan show that strategies and programmes are often reduced to “requirements” issued by donors to include a gender component or perspective in all programming with undefined capacity requirements and without concrete guidance, earmarked funding, or systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.41 At the same time, the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies and policies by the international donors has consistently fallen short of meeting their objectives.42 Several reports have pointed to the lack of understanding

42 For a critical self-assessment confirming this, see, for example, Norad (2012), Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation with Afghanistan (2001 – 2011).
of the concept of gender and of the process of gender mainstreaming in the Afghan context within the donor community and among implementing organizations. Poorly informed policy design, inadequate implementation plans, and a general lack of capacity among the many international gender specialists and their Afghan counterparts combined with inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have rendered many of the myriad of gender policies of the international donors and their Afghan institutional counterparts superficial and on-paper-only statements. In many instances the inclusion of a “gender perspective” in programming, a consistent requirement by the donors, has not gone beyond being an item to tick on the checklist used for releasing development funds. Similarly, while the preparation and adoption of the Afghan Government’s NAP on WPS stirred significant mobilization from both national NGOs and the donor community, there has been little reflection on new means of engagement on WPS and gender mainstreaming. UNSCR 1325 has become for many an additional on-paper requirement to justify women-centered programs which have changed little in their content and implementation.

A major concern highlighted in several reports is the lingering misunderstanding of what gender mainstreaming entails. Gender mainstreaming in Afghanistan has been consistently equated with promoting women’s rights, which, while an essential component of gender mainstreaming, is only one of key components. This approach has been described as “women highlighting”. Similarly, advocacy for gender rights and gender mainstreaming has become, in practice, women’s rights activism. While rights activism is and should be an integrated component of advocacy, advocacy should also have elements of engagement and awareness changing through dialogue, incentives, and education. Though acknowledged in theory, the inclusion of men and boys in gender programming remains minimal, or poorly formulated. To date, there has been no evaluation of impact of gender programming several years after implementation, to allow to understand the actual effect of initiatives taken to affect gender relations in Afghanistan.


45 See, for example, Wordsworth, A. (2008).

46 Other components notably include an understanding of people’s values and beliefs about gender, gender partnerships and men’s involvement in promoting equality for women.


CONCLUDING REMARKS

Recent academic studies on gender in Afghanistan underline the preeminence of the development agenda and the politicization of women's bodies as part of the rhetoric surrounding the invasion of Afghanistan and the reconstruction project. While the 1970s and 1980s were first and foremost characterized by anthropological and ethnographic research, initiated by the seminal work of Centlivres-Dumont, Dupree and Tapper in the 1970s, Grima and Boesen in the 1980s and 1990s, and grounded in long-term field work, post-2001, much of the scholarly work on gender focused on discourse analysis and the reformulation of gendered identities in primarily urban settings (mostly Kabul), including through the encounter and occasional confrontation of multiple discourses. The rhetoric of liberation of Afghan women deployed by Western forces and aid/development interventions that ensued generated a host of feminist reaction and analysis, with a strong focus on how the local national and global interplay to shape representations and practices of gender in Afghanistan. Much of the later research points to the politicization of men and women's bodies and behavior as site of contestation of power and socio-political representations throughout the 20th century, the internationalization of “Afghan women’s issues” post 2001, and representations of gender in geopolitical and development discourses.

In the context of a high politicization of discourses on gender in Afghanistan, the place of social aspects of gender, and gendered identities, their construction and representations in different segments of Afghan society has been partly eluded. Over the past decade, studies conducted outside of Kabul, and to a lesser extent, other urbanized centers are rare. Fieldwork conducted by Billaud, Wimpelmann and Chiovenda, to cite a few, brought critical insights into perceptions and construction of gender, and how norms and models are interpreted and re-negotiated in the context of war and the reconstruction project. Overall, however, field-based research remains scarce.

Finally, academic and applied research operate largely in parallel to one another, and dialogue between the two remain limited. While applied research, largely funded by international donors, dominates the qualitative and quantitative production of knowledge on women and gender in Afghanistan, it is often constrained by the interests of donors who fund research, and insulated from debates on gender, epistemology, methodology and ethical implications of research conducted in scholarly settings. It remains exceptional for evaluations of development projects to be made public, and despite the continued focus of interventions on gender, there are no publicly available studies of the gendered outcomes and long-term impacts of development interventions targeted at women, or/ and in which gender is mainstreamed.
MOVING FORWARD: SHORTCOMINGS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER STUDIES IN AFGHANISTAN

Three key considerations emerged during the discussions held around the presentations on the first day of the symposium, and during the closed session on the second day. First, oscillations, and occasional tensions, between the perception of research in terms of “usability”, as producing an evidence-base leading to practical action and feeding into policy making on the one hand, and that of social research with no direct “applicability” other than enriching understanding of social dynamics in a specific context, on the other. Second, the need to expand and rethink methodological approaches and frameworks for analysis of gender within the Afghan context, including by raising an informed discussion on the ethical implications of social research in general, and gendered research in particular. Finally, pervasive challenges for the institutionalization of the practice of academic research within Afghanistan.

This section summarizes insights from the panel discussion and questions in relation to presentations on the first day, and discussions during the closed door session on the second day.

MOVING BEYOND POLICY RESEARCH?

One of the most prominent aspects of discussions was the confusion surrounding the perception of what the term “research” covers and implies. Significant in this regard was the concern expressed by some of the interlocutors of the closed session over the translation of findings presented on the first day into practical recommendations (i.e. increasing the presence of women in universities, or the understanding of gender within academia), and the reactions of some of the social researchers present against the equation of relevance of research with its applicability for policy and development objectives.49

The discussion held over the definition of research in term of its relevance/applicability appears to be symptomatic of the tensions surrounding what research represents in the contemporary Afghan context. First, the dominance of commissioned research intended to produce “tangible outcomes” and recommendations for policy use in the public debate - and by extension in the social imaginary and representation of social research and researchers in Afghanistan. This is particularly acute concerning gendered research given the high politicization of the terms “gender” and “women”. Gendered research is thus perceived as doubly political: because gender itself has been instrumentalized for development and policy purposes, and because research is conceived as a one of the key instruments of this politicization. Second, the pervasive divide (and lack of communication) between researchers who produce knowledge with the intention to inform policy debate and formulation, and

49 SR-2; SR-3; CS-1; M-AHL-3; M-AHL-4; M-AHL-5
researchers who consider their work as one of elucidation of social dynamics with no immediate implications for policy or development action.  

At the same time, the need to bridge the divide between policy and development circles on the one hand, and academics and social researchers on the other was raised as essential to ensure the policies affecting all segments of a population would not feed into tensions, inequalities and inequities rather than resolving them, but also to move beyond ideological and stereotypical presentations and representations of gendered bodies and norms. Presentations by Dr. Mondal and Chakraborty on the first day of the symposium opened up the discussion on the lack of understanding of social realities and use of evidence in the formulation of public policies. As a constructive element of social relationships, significant of relations of power within society, gender is a central component of this understanding.  

One other key issue underlined is the presentation, in policy and development discourse, of “the Afghan woman” as a homogenous category, and the saturation of policy and development debates by the overdetermining frameworks of violence against women and women’s political representation, overlooking social structures and institutionalized discriminatory social institutions.  

Similarly, social norms and gender arrangements are often presented as static, particularly in rural areas, eluding the social transformations the country has undergone over the past four decades of war. The understanding of how power relations are formed, produced and reproduced remains insufficient, as is the study of how gender relations and roles, and the understanding of gendered social norms vary and differ between and across social, geographical, cultural and ethnic lines, and how they have evolved overtime.  

While within academic institutions, scholars have started to address and think these evolutions and redefine frameworks of analysis of social norms and institutions as they relate to gender, these reflections have not yet permeated policy and development circles, nor policy/ applied research nexuses that gravitate around them and tend to reproduce the frameworks used by the policy makers they intend to advise. This points to the need for more scholarly social and societal research on gender in Afghanistan, but also for more permeability and dialogue between and among those who produce knowledge and those who intend to use it: academics, applied researchers, development programmers, policy makers, religious institutions, and artists, among others.
RETHINKING APPROACHES TO GENDERED RESEARCH

Building on the discussion surrounding the need to expand the areas and scope of research on gender and social norms in Afghanistan were reflections on the need to rethink the way gender was approached conceptually and analytically, and practically in terms of methodology for access to data sources.

LOCALIZING AND REDEFINING GENDER IN AFGHANISTAN

Moving beyond homogenous categorizations and overdetermination of gender as a category of analysis, as above, implies disentangling the different elements that interplay in the formulation, production and negotiation of gender roles: socio-economic background, geographic location, religious observance, ethnicity, and experiences of individuals, and how the understanding and meaning of notions and concepts evolve between and within different categories in relations to definitions of masculinity and feminity. The localization of the understanding of gender within Afghanistan implies the deconstruction and redefinition of concepts, notions and terms it remains often juxtaposed to: “tradition”, “culture”, “modernity”, “and Islam”, “nation”, “honor”, “identity”. This requires additional research into the meanings and understandings associated with each of these terms, their evolutions across different discourses, dominant and marginalized, in Afghan society, how they are reinvented through every day practice, and are evolving as a result of social and political changes.56

In this respect, one of the challenges outlined was the general lack of social and societal studies beyond urban areas (or beyond Kabul), and within different segments of the society.57 The seminal studies initiated by Tapper, Grima and Boesen on Pashtun communities in the 1970s and 1980s were not followed and complemented since. Other segments of Afghan society further remain largely under-researched – including rural communities, ethnic minorities, the displaced and migrants, among others.58 Among areas that remained under-researched mentioned during the discussions were the articulation between Islam, the variety of religious interpretations and practices within Afghanistan, religious discourses and how they permeate consciousness and representations of gender; the analysis of gender arrangements in relation to political and social economy at the household and community levels, and the evolution of gendered representations, norms and practice as a result of conflict and displacement.59 This is by no means an exhaustive list, but is indicative of the importance of furthering dialogue between researchers and expanding the scope and areas of gendered research and research on gender in Afghanistan.

56 SR-1; SR-3; SR-4; SR-5; SR-6; SR-7; M-AHL1; M-AHL-5.
57 SR-1; SR-3; SR-4; SR-6; M-AHL1; M-AHL-2; M-AHL3; M-AHL4; M-AHL-5
58 Monsutti and Chiovenda’s studies of masculinity in Hazara communities of the Central Highlands, and among Pashtun communities in Jalalabad constitute exceptions in this respect. (see previous section)
59 SR-1; SR-3; SR-6; SR-7; SR-8; M-AHL-1; M-AHL-2, M-AHL3; M-AHL4; M-AHL-5
DECOMPARTMENTALIZING RESEARCH ON GENDER

In order to broaden the scope of the understanding of gender within the Afghan context, the importance of decompartmentalizing gendered studies on Afghanistan was underlined. Beyond national borders, through comparative studies, the inclusion of a regional perspective in analysis, and increased dialogue and exchange with researchers and research institutions working in different contexts.\(^{60}\) Between and across disciplines, through multidisciplinary approaches and the sharing of knowledge between researchers looking at gender from different disciplinary standpoints, and interdisciplinary approaches, with, for instance, the inclusion of a historical perspective in social research on gender in Afghanistan in the 20\(^{th}\) century and beyond, critical approaches to the understanding and construction of concepts and analytical framework beyond a single discipline, and the inclusion of new lenses to analyze representations and production of gender, such as through literature and art production.\(^{61}\) Through transdisciplinary perspectives, strengthening dialogue between scholars from various disciplines within academia, and engaging with practitioners outside of the academy, including, for instance religious institutions and scholars on gender from the perspective of Islam.\(^{62}\)

ETHICAL CHALLENGES

While there is general agreement on the lack of social studies grounded in qualitative research and long-term fieldwork in Afghanistan, there is also a clear agreement that research in a conflict environment like Afghanistan bears ethical implications for the researcher and his/ her interlocutors. This holds true beyond gendered research. As observed by one of the participants in the discussions, research requires a set-up, ensuring the physical and psychological security and well-being of the researcher and his/ her interlocutors – a set-up which is often not available due to generalized violence, the distortion of social networks of trust, and the association of social research with the reconstruction project and the occupation of Afghanistan in the minds of many.\(^{63}\) Going beyond the risks, perceived or real, that may be associated with the interaction between the researcher (an outsider) and his/her interlocutors requires engaging open conversations on what is perceived as threatening or dangerous by both, and, for the researcher, to make informed and conscious decisions about what to research and how.\(^{64}\)

Gendered studies bear their own specific issues because of the heavy symbolic weight associated with gendered behaviors, representations and norms, and their strong interplay with broader relations of power between individuals, within and between institutions and communities. The degree of access to household members is often conditioned by the sex of the researcher, female researchers usually having better access to women and children,
sometimes also men, but is also a function of representations associated with the researcher (because of his/her social background, nationality, origin, ethnicity, etc), and norms, attitudes and behaviors displayed by both the researcher and his/her interlocutors. The perceived or effective insecurities, and sometimes dangers associated with the mobilization of certain concepts and terms when discussing gender, or of interactions between different gendered behaviors performed by the researcher and his/her interlocutors thus need to be discussed and addressed as part of research protocols.65

**INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC (GENDER) STUDIES IN AFGHANISTAN**

There is a “gender controversy” in this country. A misunderstanding of women’s rights, with imported policies from Western society. Afghanistan is invested in war and the most important thing for us is survival. We need opportunities to address these issues that are not there. [...] We do not have gender expertise in this country.66

A fundamental challenge of research in Afghanistan is the relative absence of critical thinking in humanities studies in an academic context. One observation from the symposium, and the preparation that led to it, was the difficulty in finding academic studies carried out by Afghan researchers within Afghan academic institutions. 67 With the exception of one speaker currently working in an Afghan institution and who presented her work in Dari (though she had herself had carried out her doctoral research outside of Afghanistan, in Iran), speakers at the symposium were all affiliated with foreign, Western academic institutions, and did not publish in Afghan national languages.

A number of issues hampering the development of research within Afghan academic institutions, and in particular research on gender, were outlined by participants. First, the lack of structures for transmission of knowledge on epistemology and methodology in social sciences and humanities. Universities are also under-resourced, both in terms of availability of qualified teachers in social sciences and in terms of financial resources to provide the necessary set up for specialized courses and access to documentation and literature, let alone funding for doctoral research. Second, the relative insulation in which universities and institutions of higher studies operate. There is little or no communication between academic and research institutions within Afghanistan, let alone with institutions in the region and beyond. Studies carried out on Afghanistan in the framework of foreign academic institutions are rarely translated in local languages and published in Afghanistan, de facto limiting their access for Afghan students and academics. The language barrier also limits access to studies carried out in other contexts.68

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65 SR-1; SR-3; SR-6; SR-8
66 M-AHL-5
67 M-AUAF-1
68 M-AHL-1; M-AHL-2; M-AHL-3; M-AHL-4; M-AHL-5; SR-4; SR-5; SR-6; SR-7; SR-8
Finally, there is a lack of recognition of gender as a “serious” subject of academic study, because the term itself is not fully understood, routinely under-valued and sometimes considered with suspicion.\textsuperscript{69} The increasing presence of women in universities and institutions of higher learning, while noted as a positive development, has also generated tensions, insecurities and debate, affecting how the notion of gender is perceived and raising discussions on how it should be addressed and discussed within academic settings. The rise of discussions surrounding the benefits of sexual segregation of students at the university level, for instance, appears symptomatic of these insecurities.\textsuperscript{70}

Courses on gender do exist nominally in some universities, but these are often proposed due to external pressure by international donors, lack the full support of university management and faculty, and are often limited to an introduction to women's rights rather than a full introduction to gender concepts. More generally, there is a lack of expertise on gender within academic settings in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{71}

That said, discussions with and among university chancellors during the symposium show there is interest in expanding reflections on the inclusion of a gender component as part of academic teaching first, and more widely discuss gender in an academic setting. One of the university chancellors present during the closed session explained the skepticism surrounding the notion of gender could be skirted by including gender analysis as part of other curricula, giving the example of a “Peace Studies” course that had been delivered at his university with donor support and which introduced a gendered perspective in conflict analysis. In the current institutional and social context, the set-up of study programs dedicated to gender studies is therefore a long shot.\textsuperscript{72} Treating gender separately as part of academic teaching may also increase their vulnerability to political changes. In this respect, participants from TISS gave the example of institutional backlashes against gender studies programs in India, raising the debate on the benefits of the development of gender studies as a separate program of studies within academic institutions, against that of its mainstreaming throughout programs from other disciplines. Infusing knowledge on gender across different disciplines, however, requires sustained efforts and resources for building the capacity and expertise of professors. This further needs to be complemented by capacity exchange and building in humanities and social sciences, qualitative and quantitative research, research tools, methodology, and ethics.

\textbf{RECOMMENDATIONS}

Recommendations below derive from the comments and suggestions made by participants during the two days of the symposium. While the intention of this report is to focus on

\textsuperscript{69} M-AHL-1; M-AHL-2; M-AHL-5  
\textsuperscript{70} M-AHL-4  
\textsuperscript{71} M-AHL-1; M-AHL-2; M-AHL-3; M-AHL-4; M-AHL-5  
\textsuperscript{72} M-AHL-1; M-AHL-2; M-AHL-3; M-AHL-4; M-AHL-5
gender studies, it appeared difficult to dissociate challenges faced in gendered research and research carried out with a clear focus on gender from the broader issues faced by social research in the context of Afghanistan, and by institutions of higher studies and academia within Afghanistan. Some of the key elements that emerged in the discussions for strengthening Afghan-owned gendered studies are summarized below:

- Support and strengthen regional dialogue and exchange between academic institutions and research centers in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, through joint conferences and symposiums, joint research projects, student exchanges, fellowship and residence programs. Engage critical discussions on how gender is addressed through research in different contexts in South and Central Asia, and how different institutions incorporate gender in their curricula. Within Afghanistan, strengthen communication and collaboration between universities, private institutions of higher learning, and applied research organizations to further the development of a research community within Afghanistan.

- Conduct a thorough assessment of how gender studies are perceived within institutions of higher learning in Afghanistan, the extent to which and how gendered approaches to academic disciplines are addressed in teaching methods, the needs and challenges faced in strengthening a common understanding of what gender means and entails.

- Engage discussions within public and private institutions of higher learning in Afghanistan on how, in the light of existing resources, critical thinking on humanities, social sciences and ethical research can be further supported. Specifically, rethink if and how gender studies can be incorporated or mainstreamed within different curricula and what needs are to support this incorporation.

- Support the development of research programs within Afghan institutions, adopting a holistic approach to build and exchange capacity on research methods, analysis and academic writing, including sensitization and dialogue about contextual challenges in conducting research in an ethical manner in Afghanistan. Consider developing partnerships between international and national universities and institutions of higher learning, and research organizations.

- Support the production of knowledge in national languages, and the translation of studies produced in other languages. Strengthen sharing of information in national languages through the availability of data bases of data and studies in open access.

- Support discussions on gender bringing together academic institutions, research organizations and centers, policy practitioners, development practitioners, religious institutions, artists, etc. to instigate debate and discussion on the multiple perspectives on gender and its production/reproduction within Afghanistan, and
move beyond the use of “gender” as a political instrument for policy and development intervention towards an understanding of the multiple forms of gender arrangements and relations in Afghanistan.

- Beyond the Afghan context, researchers working in Afghanistan and the region need to continue to engage and debate, across disciplines, about theoretical approaches and concepts for understanding gender representations, production, reproduction and evolutions in the context of Afghanistan, and regionally.
### Appendix 1: Symposium Agenda

**September 24, 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>Welcome and Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>Recitation of the Holy Qur'an</td>
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<td>09:05</td>
<td>National Anthem</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:10</td>
<td>Opening Remarks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• American University of Afghanistan- AUAF President</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The Women’s Center, AUAF – Executive Director</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Keynote Speaker - Ambassador Nurjehan Mawania</td>
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<td>09:40</td>
<td>Introductory Address—Dr. Nandita Mondal (Center for Labour Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences) - Concepts of Gender and Development</td>
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<td>10:00</td>
<td>Tea Break</td>
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<td>10:15</td>
<td>Panel 1 – Contextualizing Gender: Representations and Discourses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ananya Chakraborty (School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences) – Gender and Human Development. Discussant: Shahrazad Akbar, Senior Advisor to the President.</td>
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<td>• Dr. Sarvarasa Rafizada, Rana University, “A Study of Women’s Problems in Fictional Literature of Afghanistan; Based on Critical Discourse Analysis”. (Presentation and discussion in Dari). Discussant: Emran Rateeb, Gawharshad Institute of Higher Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
13:00 Round Table Discussion

- What concepts and approaches from studies in other contexts can be useful for the study of gender in Afghanistan?
- Should practitioners be included in determining areas of academic research and how?
- How have discourses on gender in Afghanistan evolved since 2001 and what are the implications?

13:30 Break

13:45 Panel 2 - Rethinking Gender in Afghanistan: Societal Perspectives and Gendered Identities

- Lucile Martin, Ghent University - "Return Migration, Cultural Transfers and (Re) Definition of Identities in Afghanistan”.
- Dr. Weeda Mehran, Georgia State University - “Jihadi feminism? Female Taliban, Al Qaeda and Daesh”.
- Dr. Sonia Ahsan, Columbia University – “Pedagogies of Womanhood in Afghanistan”.

15:30 Round Table Discussion:

- How can we rethink the relation between gendered identities, feminism, tradition and Islam in Afghanistan?
- What are current gaps in gender studies in Afghanistan and what perspectives can be further addressed through research?
- What are avenues for renewing approaches to gender studies in Afghanistan?

16:00 Concluding Remarks

- Khudadad Bisharat, Executive Manager of Academic Symposium, from AUAF

September 25, 2018
### Round Table: Gender in Academia in Afghanistan. Moving beyond the Limits.

**Closed discussion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>Welcoming and Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:10</td>
<td>Overview of Discussions from Day 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:30</td>
<td>Discussion on key observations from Day 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td> Key insights</td>
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<td></td>
<td> Challenges</td>
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<td>10:15</td>
<td>Tea Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Moving beyond the gaps</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td> What areas in gender studies are under-researched and require more focus?</td>
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<td></td>
<td> What concepts and lessons learned from other contexts could be useful in the Afghan context?</td>
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<td> Should linkages be made between academic and applied research? How?</td>
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<td></td>
<td> What are ethical challenges and implications of research on gender?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Strengthening Gender Studies in Afghanistan</td>
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<td></td>
<td> What are key institutional challenges, and possibilities, to further development of gender studies in Afghanistan?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td> What opportunities can be used to strengthen dialogue between researchers in Afghanistan and abroad?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Abstracts

Concepts of Gender Issues

Dr. Nandita Mondal, Center for Labour Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai – “Concepts for Gender and Development Studies”

Abstract

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

The concept of gender needs to be understood clearly as a cross-cutting socio-cultural variable. It is an overarching variable in the sense that gender can also be applied to all other cross-cutting variables such as race, class, age, ethnic group, etc. Gender systems are established in different socio-cultural contexts which determine what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman/man and girl/boy in these specific contexts. As gender roles are learned through socialization processes; they are not fixed but are changeable. Gender systems are institutionalized through education systems, political and economic systems, legislation, media, religion and culture and traditions. In utilizing a gender approach, the focus is not on individual women and men but on the system which determines gender roles/responsibilities, autonomy and restrictions, access to and control over resources, and decision-making potentials.

Biographical Sketch – Dr. Nandita Mondal

Dr. Nandita Mondal is a trained social worker (Master in Social work) from Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. She initiated her career in North Eastern States of India to facilitate women entrepreneurship and agricultural cooperatives. Then she spent ten years of her career in furthest corner of Western, Central and Northern part of India as the team member of ‘Operation Flood’ Programme. She was engaged to train the women cooperative management committee members at village level, District level Men and Women Board of Directors and State level Federation Board of Directors to foster the cooperative business enterprises and facilitated women's participation in Cooperative movement across India. She was in-charge of Maharahstra and Goa States for implementing Women's Leadership Development Programme during Operation Flood III phase. She was part of Ford Foundation research study on women's empowerment and Dairying in India and assisted a senior FAO
Advisor for four years as Officer on Special duty at New Delhi. Later, she was a lecturer at Department of Social Work, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai being instrumental in establishing the Masters Course in Social Work in the said University.

She had done her Ph.D. on Women's' Labour and Empowerment: A study on Fisherwomen in Mumbai from University of Mumbai in 2014. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor, Centre for Labour Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Her research interest include Women's work and dignity, women and cooperative governance, Cooperative Movement in India, Corporate social responsibility, corporate citizenship and Sustainability.

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**Gender and Human Development South Asia in the Era of Sustainable Development Goals: Progress and Challenges**

Ms. Ananya Chakraborty, Doctoral Scholar, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
Co-authored with Dr. Dr. Sandhya S. Iyer

**Abstract**

This paper presents the nature and level of human development progress of women in South Asia. The multidimensional measures like the Gender Development Index (GDI), Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), and Gender Inequality Index (GII), presented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), despite refinements over the years continues to capture only a small gamut of the wider range of gender-based outcomes leaving aside critical gaps in conceptualizing, understanding, and measuring gender and development. This paper argues that women's marginalization is a process that occurs through several critical gaps in the formation of basic capabilities across men and women in the society. Using data of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the South Asian Countries, this paper provides a comparative analysis of differences in human development outcomes in the region not only due to differences in capabilities but also due to differences in endowments and entitlements. Poorly designed policies on issues such as property-rights, migration rights, and capabilities have not only socio-culturally marginalized women but also inhibits them from accessing a range of other entitlements and opportunities. The intersectional analysis of women's human development outcomes in South Asia is driven both by gender relations and social dimensions where the continuation of dependence on older forms of reasoning for the implementation of public policies have led to the widening of gender inequities. Thus, effective implementation of SDGs is extremely crucial to ensure that South Asian countries take a right step towards ensuring gender inclusive development.
Biographical Sketch - Ananya Chakraborty

Ananya Chakraborty is a PhD student at the School of Development Studies, TISS, and Mumbai. Her doctoral research focuses on the issue of gender, labor and migration in the South Asian context. She has presented and published her work both nationally and internationally. Her latest publication from Amsterdam University press focuses on the working conditions of Bangladeshi women in India. Previously, she has worked with renowned organizations like the Prime Minister’s Rural Development Fellowship, Landesa, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and Bankable Frontiers Associates in various research capacities. Her core areas of interest are gender, migration policy, and capabilities and human development.

“Pedagogies of Womanhood in Afghanistan”

Dr. Sonia Ahsan, Visiting Fellow, Saltzman Institute at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Abstract

This chapter argues that the literary transformations undertaken by the Afghan state in the early part of the twentieth century influenced a concomitant heterosexualization of social life whence a heteronormative Pashtun masculinity was mapped onto the social, cultural, and religious ethos of the public. This deliberate redirection of Afghan literature toward Pashto, away from Persian, coincided with the cultivation of a particular Pashtun masculinity in the public that eclipsed other historical forms of being Afghan. Pashtunwali became an influential discourse in this era that predominantly shaped the ethics surrounding gender and sexuality. The paper uses primary sources in Pashto and Persian to conclude that the modern Afghan woman produced through the literary and cultural transformations of the first part of the twentieth century was central to an Afghan modernity that relied on the centrality of Pashtun nationalist heterosexuality.

Biographical Sketch - Dr. Sonia Ahsan

Dr. Sonia Ahsan is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Saltzman Institute at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University. She obtained her PhD in Anthropology from Columbia University in May 2015. Her dissertation entitled States of Honour: Sexual Ethics and the Politics of Promiscuity, critically engages the relationship between Islam, honour, and feminism through a historical and ethnographic study of a feminist movement in Afghanistan. From 2010 to 2012 she conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Afghanistan as an anthropological scholar. Her work has been funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation, A.M. Foundation Research Fellowship, and Sheldon Scheps
Fellowship for Research, American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, and Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. She has taught courses on Islam, Violence, Gender, and Film Theory, in the Anthropology department. In addition to teaching and research, she also worked as a Franz Boas Fellow in the Anthropology department of Columbia University. She has published “When Muslims Become Feminists” in Afghanistan's Islam edited by Nile Green, and “Engendering the Taliban” in Modern Afghanistan edited by Nazif Shahrani.

Jihadi feminism? Female Taliban, Al Qaeda and Daesh

Dr. Weeda Mehran, Global Studies Institute, Georgia State University

Abstract

In its Al Naba Issue of November 2017, ISIS called upon women to fulfill their duty as Muslim women “on all fronts in supporting the mujahedeen in this battle” and pick up arms to “defend their religion by sacrificing themselves”. While much is discussed about why women join ultraconservative groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram and the Taliban and how these women are depicted by the mainstream media, there is no systematic study of how jihadi women are depicted by the jihadi groups’ media. This research addresses the question of how women are framed in jihadi rhetoric and what roles do they play within these frames. Through a comparative analysis of ISIS and Tahrik-e Taliban of Pakistan (TTP’s) magazines, this paper argues that the call for female jihadi militants is not simply a strategic move with a significant operational importance, but it also signifies a gradual evolution of a Muslim woman’s identity within jihadi framings from that of “victims”, or “mothers”, “wives” and “sisters” of jihadists to that of “mujahida” (female mujahid), “muhajira” (female traveller) and “shahida” (female martyr). The findings also indicate that this evolution has been a contentious process, as the groups appear to be in constant struggle to reconcile their strict traditional constructs of masculinity and femininity with that of a “female jihadi militant”.

Biographical Sketch – Dr. Weeda Mehran

Dr. Weeda Mehran is a post-doctorate fellow at Global Studies Institute, Georgia State University and a VOXPol visiting scholar at Dublin City University where she conducts research on violent extremist media strategies. Her research takes a multidisciplinary approach to studying propaganda campaign across a number of militant groups such as Taliban, Daesh, Al Qaeda, Tahrik-e Taliban of Pakistan and Lashkar-e Taiba. In 2015, she completed her PhD degree at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge. In 2007, she obtained a Master's degree in Sociology from the University of Oxford and she has an MA degree in International Conflict Analysis from Kent University. Dr Mehran has worked with a number of organizations such as Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Afghanistan Public Policy Research, Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, Afghanistan Research, Evaluation
Unit, and a number of UN organizations (e.g. UNWomen, UNDP). She has written numerous policy reports on various issues in Afghanistan.

The “war mode of production”: visual art producing spaces and the making of the eternal “Afghan/i” art producer between Kabul and Tehran

Seyedeh Paniz Musawi Natanzi, SOAS, University of London

Abstract

In this paper I problematize the war mode of visual art production and examine self-reflective masculinities in art producing spaces in West Kabul from 2014-2018. I began the research for my doctoral project in 2014 in the Centre for Gender Studies at SOAS, University of London, looking at young Kabuli women learning and practicing contemporary arts in the years after the US invasion of Afghanistan most famously at the Centre Contemporary Art Afghanistan as well as promoted by Turquoise Mountain (Firuz Kuh). However, while I accessed “the field” through the discourse on gender politics in scholarly literature as well as texts and visuals in virtual spaces, the ethnographical research conducted throughout four trips of two weeks and on-going conversations from Tehran to Kabul and later from London, proved contradictory: while women are represented on-screen and online as the driving agents of the contemporary art scene in Kabul, men are dominating the visual art producing spaces in the city as creative labourers.

To dissect the condition of visual art production and its gendered agents, I first conceptualise the war mode of cultural production. I problematize how “shifting positionalities” concerns scholarly producer of knowledge (“the researcher”) in a war zone as much as the local producers of artistic knowledges (“the interviewees”) in the process of visual and/or textual knowledge production. “Embodied experience” is not something that can be epistemologically and empirically understood in war zones in reference to social categories, but rather through living situations that trace “shifting positionalities”: individuals enter political geographies in which their bodies are read differently depending on state laws and communal social relations such as the many art producers who returned to Kabul during the Karzai era from Iran and Pakistan as well as those who were born and raised in Kabul. This means “how” art producers are subjected to sexualisation by state and non-state actors in Kabul shapes mobility and access to an income-generating vocation: a feminist geopolitical methodology allows to understand Re/Production and to explain how gender roles and relations unfold in times of advanced capitalism, militarism and state-ism in Kabul as the consistent battleground of wider imperial military projects in the “war against terror”. Subsequently, I discuss self-reflective masculinities as agents and/or allies to push for artistic space with and/or for women. While masculinities in Afghanistan have discussed men as agents of violence, in form of mujahedeen fighter, Talibs, war lords, political leaders and governmental representatives, gender political analyses about and in Afghanistan have rather emphasised gender roles than scrutinising the manifestation of these roles through
gender relations, mostly demarcated by men. Since men had more mobility than women to produce, exhibit and practice art in, e.g. cultural centres, Kabul University, self-led art studios and domestic spaces since 1978 not just “for art’s sake”, but to generate an income, they were gatekeepers for young women without artistic education with the beginning of the liberal war in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I hope to complicate approaches to gender studies about and in Afghanistan examining the potentiality of self-reflective masculinities in art producing spaces. To complicate and re-appropriate gender studies, feminism and women activism in Islamicate Asia under the condition of political violence, requires to put local epistemologies as authoritative knowledges into a critical conversation with ideas of visual art as promoted by contesting and competing political governments - state-led and state-affiliated – as well as non-state actors in Kabul. To de-colonise knowledge production in and outside of Afghanistan is a trans-continental responsibility of knowledge producers embedded in the liberal “war against terror” by paying taxes to states driving military projects in the name of “liberal peace” in the first place.

**Biographical Sketch – Seyedeh Paniz Musawi Natanzi**

Paniz Musawi Natanzi is a soon-submitting PhD candidate at the Centre for Gender Studies in SOAS, born in Tehran and raised in Lübeck (a city in northern Germany). She holds a BA in Political Science from the Free University of Berlin (2013) and an MSc in Comparative Political Thought from SOAS (2014). Paniz has published amongst others in the German daily newspaper *taz. die tageszeitung*, the French revue *l'imparfaite*, the international feminist art journal *n.paradoxa* and the online platforms Pakistan Art Now and the Centre for a Feminist Foreign Policy. She has a forthcoming book chapter, which is going to be published by Hurst & Co and Columbia University Press in summer 2017.

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**The Study of Women’s Problems in Fictional Literature of Afghanistan; Based on Critical Discourse Analysis**

Sarvarasa Rafizada, Rana University, Kabul

**Abstract**

This paper analyzes women’s problems as portrayed in contemporary Afghanistan fictional literature through critical discourse analysis. Case studies, selected from literature produced in the last three decades, include some of the most prominent works written about women's problems in Afghanistan Persian literature. These include two short stories and a novel written by three female writers and two short stories and a novel written by three male writers between 1980 and 2010. The purpose of this research is to study the social stand and role of women in contemporary Persian fiction in Afghanistan through discourse analysis,
allowing to specify differences in language and discourse between male and female writers. Analysis builds on Fairclough's three-dimensional stages: description, interpretation and explanation. Findings show there is a significant relationship between the formation of discourse in these works and the evolution of socio-political discourse in Afghanistan. Overall, writers try to highlight women and their problems considering the appropriate and extra textual variables characteristic of each period. They also highlight the deep gap between women's competence and their performance, always under the control of the patriarchal discourse dominant in the ideological, sociological, and cultural background, and their attempts at challenging to move towards gender equality. It seems female writers are more successful in their attempts than male writers, as they engage in deeper reflections surrounding women's identity, their rights as a citizen and a human being, and try to portray women as independent, equal, free and active.

**Biographical Sketch – Sarwa Rasa Rafizada**

Sarwa Rasa Rafizada, an assistant professor with PhD qualification in Persian/Dari Literature. She serves as full-time professor in Journalism and Mass Communication faculty, Rana University, Baraki Square, Kabul-Afghanistan. Currently, she is the head of Research Centre and as well as Research committee in Rana university. Sarwa Rasa Rafizada begun her working career in a time where barbarism and barbarians (Taliban) were fully occupied in Afghanistan, as a school teacher at Durkhanay High School in 1995, of which it clearly shows her attempt in demanding the true essence of women's rights in that of such circumstances. Since then, in 2001 to 2005, she worked as an Editor in Eqtedaar Mili newspaper (excluding of their thoughts and member of the party, she was just a newspaper editor). In 2005 she left Afghanistan for her Master Degree and joined Ferdawsi University (one of the prominent and prestigious universities of the world in Persian literature) and continued to her PhD level that finally got it in 2015. During the date, she was Senior Research Fellow in Ferdawsi Centre of Excellence, of which, she worked in Great Encyclopedia of Shahnama & Ferdawsi research project and as well as opposing, comparing and proofreading the Ancient Manuscript texts related to Afghanistan to help and solve accent problems.

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**Return Migration, Cultural Transfers and (Re) Definition of Norms in Afghanistan**

Lucile Martin, Conflict Research Group, Ghent University

**Abstract**

Afghans who migrated to Iran and Pakistan in the late 1970s to early 1990s, and returned in the first decade of the post-Taliban era came back with habits, attitudes, references, and experiences different from those traditionally prevalent in Afghanistan. On return, the confrontation of expectations with the realities of Afghan society prompts questions of identity, citizenship, and entitlement to rights. This research aims at understanding how the
effect of transfer of social and gender norms acquired by return migrants may affect in return perception of rights in relation to social institutions. It examines how the acquisition of new ideas, values, elements of lifestyle and behaviors while abroad results in the formation of new sets of normative behaviors, how these relate to perceived Afghan traditions, and how they contribute to a process of re-definition of identity. In particular, it looks into how gendered identities are negotiated in the public space, and under which conditions views on gender roles and norms acquired abroad are transferred within the communities where they return.

The paper argues that conducting a multi-level institutional analysis is essential when considering the complex issue of return migration. This includes looking into political, social, governance and family institutions that shape norms and values in the country of destination, the country of origin, the return phase of the migration process, and the way they affect social practices.

**Biographical Sketch – Lucile Martin**

Lucile Martin is PhD candidate and a member of the Conflict Research Group of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University, Belgium. Her research focuses on how cultural transfers through return migration affect perspectives on gender in society in Afghanistan. She has over 10 years of experience in applied research focusing on migration, governance, and gender. Currently, Ms. Martin is based in Kabul, Afghanistan, working with the Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO), which supports her doctoral research.
Appendix 3: List of Codes

To preserve the confidentiality of the interlocutors, codes were used to reference interventions by participants. Definitions of the elements of the coding is available below. Numbering is used to distinguish between individual participants.

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<tr>
<td>M-AHL</td>
<td>Management of Afghan Institutions of Higher Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-AUAF</td>
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<td>CS</td>
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