Academic Symposium:
Gender, Beyond the Limits

September 24-25, 2018
AUAF, Kabul
About the Women Center

The Women Center (TWC) is a Center of Excellence based at the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF). TWC was established in 2013. Throughout its existence TWC has remained committed to create a national hub for the development of women’s capacity in Afghanistan.

The Center’s vision is a peaceful, stable, democratic, prosperous and pluralistic Afghanistan, where women exercise their capabilities equally as men.

The Center’s mission is

Creating an enabling environment to boost the women’s meaningful and active role in development of Afghanistan

- Through Education, creating the necessary capacity for the professional and personal growth of women to perform confidently in public and private sectors;
- Through Research, developing the knowledge basis to support evidence-based decision making on development of policies and programs empowering women;

Through collaboration, building women’s collective agency to inform actions for development of women in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres.

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Lucile Martin
Consultant & PhD Candidate at Ghent University, Belgium
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I. Background

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 prerequisites 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

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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.

This symposium, the first of its kind in Afghanistan, is an attempt to widen the debate on knowledge on gender in the country. To this end, the symposium brings together professionals from academia, applied researchers, public policy experts, and civil society actors to assess the status of academic research on gender in Afghanistan to date, and explore new avenues for gender studies in Afghanistan.

II. Intended outcome

The symposium seeks to create a platform for researchers, prospective scholars and practitioners to exchange ideas and perspectives that contribute to academic discourse on gender in Afghanistan. The desired outcome is to open up a space for dialogue and collaboration that will support further development of gender studies in Afghanistan.

III. Proceedings

The symposium will proceed in two phases:

On the first day, researchers will be invited to present their papers for a maximum of 20 minutes, addressing societal, political and/or cultural aspects of gender in Afghanistan. Presentations, grouped under two thematic areas, will serve as the basis for discussions on how to further academic knowledge and understanding of gender in Afghanistan, and within Afghan academic institutions.

A session on “Contextualizing Gender: Representations and Discourses” invites 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. Comparative approaches or research on other contexts will also be included to initiate a discussion on commonalities and differences between the way gender is or could be addressed in Afghanistan. The second session on “Rethinking Gender in Afghanistan: Societal Perspectives and Gendered Identities” will include presentation 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.
On the second day of the symposium, a panel of scholars and practitioners will be convened 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.

IV. Agenda

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<th>September 24, 2018</th>
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<tr>
<td>08:30 Welcome and Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:00 Recitation of the Holy Qur’an</td>
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<td>09:05 National Anthem</td>
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<td>09:10 Opening Remarks</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ The Women’s Center, AUAF – Executive Director</td>
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<td>▪ , American University of Afghanistan, President</td>
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<td>▪ Minister of Higher Education</td>
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<td>09:40 Introductory Address – Dr. Nandita Mondal (Center for Labour Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concepts of Gender and Development</td>
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<td>10:00 Tea Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15 Panel 1 – Contextualizing Gender: Representations and Discourses</td>
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<td>▪ Ananya Chakraborty (School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences) – Gender and Human Development.</td>
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<tr>
<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)</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Seyedeh Paniz Musawi Natanzi, SOAS, and University of London – “The ‘war mode of production’: visual art producing spaces and the making of the eternal ‘Afghan/i’ art producer between Kabul and Tehran”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 Lunch</td>
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<td>13:00 Round Table Discussion</td>
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- 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?

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<tr>
<th>13:30</th>
<th>Break</th>
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<tr>
<td>13:45</td>
<td><strong>Panel 2 - Rethinking Gender in Afghanistan: Societal Perspectives and Gendered Identities</strong></td>
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<td>Lucile Martin, Ghent University - &quot;Return Migration, Cultural Transfers and (Re) Definition of Identities in Afghanistan&quot;.</td>
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<td>Dr. Weeda Mehran, Georgia State University - “Jihadi feminism? Female Taliban, Al Qaeda and Daesh”.</td>
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<td>Dr. Sonia Ahsan, Columbia University – “Pedagogies of Womanhood in Afghanistan”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:30</td>
<td><strong>Round Table Discussion:</strong></td>
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<td>How can we rethink the relation between gendered identities, feminism, tradition and Islam in Afghanistan?</td>
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<td>What are current gaps in gender studies in Afghanistan and what perspectives can be further addressed through research?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What are avenues for renewing approaches to gender studies in Afghanistan?</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td><strong>Concluding Remarks</strong></td>
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**September 25, 2018**

**Round Table: Gender in Academia in Afghanistan. Moving beyond the Limits.**

*Closed discussion*
V. Abstracts

A. 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.

B. 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.

C. “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.

D. 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 jihadist 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.

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

Sarvarasa Rafizada, Rana University, Kabul

Abstract by Sarvasa Rafizada
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.

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G. 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
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.