

Afghan Women's Resistance and Struggle in Afghanistan and Diasporic Communities

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End of Award Report

- **Background**

This ESRC project grew out of a field research I had previously carried out in Kabul, assessing gender issues in the process of media reconstruction in Afghanistan, February 2002. This previous field research was funded by BBC World Service Trust (WST) and Department For International Development (DFID). The task of WST was to produce a comprehensive detailed plan of action for the reconstruction of the media in Afghanistan. My role in this project was to address gender issues and media and my research in 2002 became the pilot project that informed this subsequent study.

In the 2002 pilot I used a qualitative participatory approach, principally involving six days of detailed observational study and 126 interviews: eleven individual interviews with women and eight group interviews in different institutions with 123 women and three men. The intention was not to marginalize men, but to give prominence to women's voices in identifying the needs of women and men in the process of media reconstruction in Afghanistan. This approach enabled me to identify the processes experienced by individual Afghan women, as well as women's networks and organizations, and their range of activity between 1992-1996 (the years of civil war) and during the rule of Taliban (1996-2001).

I used an approach based on the oral history method and less structured research strategies, which avoid creating a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewees. I asked questions that encouraged women to express enhance and share their experiences in order to plan their new life (Finch 1984; Oakley 1981; Thompson 1988). Throughout the interviews I kept the flow as near to an ordinary conversation as possible. I told the women about myself and the purpose of my interviews. With their permission I recorded the interviews and I took photographs of the women that I interviewed.

My aim in what became the pilot study was to identify the needs of women in the process of Afghanistan reconstruction, particularly in relation to the media. I tried to identify women's expectations and suggestions for the new media and for this

purpose; I used a mental check-list of pre-set topics that I covered in the interviews.

My conceptual analytical framework was grounded in the finding of the fieldwork. I used the term gender to mean a social process constituting relations of power and powerlessness determined by institutions such as family, religion, media, military and community leaders both at national and international levels.

My analysis of this field research (Gender and media reconstruction in Afghanistan) was published as a report by BBC WST in 2002. On the basis of my findings I also wrote an article (Women in Afghanistan, Passive Victims of the Borqa or active social Participants?) which was published by Development in Practice Journal in 2003. In 2004, this article was published as a chapter in a book published by Oxfam (see sections: Bibliography and Outputs below).

In these publications a gendered analysis of media enabled me to identify different perceived needs of both women and men in the process of reconstruction. I discussed how women and female children experience war and violent conflict differently to that of men and male children by identifying different types of violence against women in Afghanistan. My aim was to raise the awareness of policy making institutions and draw their attention to the important issue of gender analysis in decision making which could make a difference to what can be done for women and men in the process of reconstruction.

From the analysis of the interviews it was apparent that twenty-two years of war and violent conflict in Afghanistan had eroded social capital (the rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, social structures and societies institutional arrangements that enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives) (Moser and McIlwaine 2001: 178-200). I reported and highlighted the fact that women's secret organisations, under the Taliban (1996-2001), had laid the foundation for the re-building of social capital. As social actors, they had given cohesion to their community by turning their homes into an underground network of schools for girls and young women. By risking their lives, they created cohesion and solidarity in their community. I stressed that it is important to recognise that Afghan women's experiences under the Taliban were and still are the main reason they are inspired to participate in the reconstruction of their country. This is an important argument because the dominant portrayal of Afghan women in the West has been as passive victims of war, violence, and political repression, to be liberated only by Western military intervention. I argued that the media can play an important role in recognising the importance of women's issues and acknowledging women's role in the process of reconstruction

My recommendations were:

1. Afghan women should be seen as agents of change.
2. Women in Afghanistan felt the media could play an important role by advocating women's rights to choose.
3. The media in Afghanistan could play an important role in providing opportunities for women to tell and share their experiences as a healing

process. The media could play a role in breaking the taboos surrounding women's experiences.

4. Women required access to the media in order to demand the protection of law for women in the family and their rights to equality of opportunity in education and employment. 'We need radio and television programmes, dramas and articles in newspapers and magazines to discuss these issues'.
5. The media had to present the role of women leaders and the dissemination of information about role models is crucial in the process of reconstruction.

It is important to acknowledge that this field research was only a pilot study based on the words of a limited number of women in Kabul, collected over six days. I therefore recommended that further participatory research was crucial to provide evidence for an appropriate quantitative and qualitative analysis of the needs of women and men in Afghanistan in the process of reconstruction. Although participatory research has been criticised for not necessarily reaching the poorest of the poor and not necessarily redefining the hierarchical gender relations (Cooke and Kothari 2001), it has a very important role to play. In my report to the BBCWST I suggested that this approach could, to some extent give prominence to men's and women's voices in Afghanistan rather than the agendas set by the facilitators, academics and the aid workers.

In this pilot study interviews were my most important research materials and guided the design of the full ESRC research project. In each interview women insisted that, before discussing questions in relation to gender and media reconstruction, they wanted to discuss their life and work histories during the civil war and the Taliban era. Each story brought tears into their eyes, but they wanted to talk about their sad and rich experiences; they wanted their stories to be heard in Afghanistan and throughout the world. I therefore, decided to be flexible and allow the local character of the research process to determine the answers to my research questions. This was extremely fruitful as these interviews not only produced the results for the BBCWST project but inspired me and enabled me to pursue the present project (Afghan women's resistance and struggle in Afghanistan and diasporic communities).

- **Objectives**

As indicated in my original application form, the aims and objectives of the ESRC funded project were:

1. To investigate the vast diversity (class, age, ethnicity, religion) of women's experiences in the process of historical changes (in times of war and conflict, in exile and in times of peace making) and the different ways they emerge as autonomous agents and construct their identities, in culturally specific circumstances (theoretical) This objective was addressed and was met. See the following:
 - a) Result (Section below)

- b)** The attached article: Gender, Agency and Identity, the case study of Afghan women in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, 1996 – 2005. This article is in press to be published in Afshar H (ed), Islam and Female Identity, Women, Identities and Struggle, Journal of Development Studies.
- c)** The attached Chapter 1 of my forthcoming book 'Afghan women's resistance and struggles in Afghanistan and diasporic communities 1996 – 2005', monograph.
2. To generate primary data on a relatively under researched subject: – gender, agency, identity in times of war, exile and in peace making in the context of Afghanistan (new information and data sets). This objective was addressed and was met. See the following:
- a)** Method Section below
- b)** An example of my interviews which is attached.
3. To develop a comparative methodology incorporating a variety of qualitative methods (life histories, interviews, participatory research) as well as quantitative indicators to study women's diverse positions and their resistance to their hostile environment and their survival strategies (methodology). This objective was addressed and was met. See the following:
- a)** Method Section below
- b)** An example of my interviews and statistics (tables 1-6) which are attached.
4. To provide a deeper understanding of strategies adopted by Afghan women both in Afghanistan and outside of Afghanistan in combating social exclusion. The field research also assessed the gendered nature of social exclusion; and the importance of women's inclusion in the processes of reconstruction and peace making (contribution to knowledge). This objective was addressed and was met. See the following:
- a)** Result Section below
- b)** The attached article: Gender, Agency and Identity, the case study of Afghan women in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, 1996 – 2005. This article is in press to be published in Afshar H (ed), Islam and Female Identity, Women, Identities and Struggle, Journal of Development Studies.
- c)** The attached Chapter 1 of my forthcoming book 'Afghan women's resistance and struggles in Afghanistan and diasporic communities 1996 – 2005', monograph.
5. To inform and make recommendation to policy-makers (national and international bodies, NGOs and academics) (policy). This objective was addressed and was met. See sections Activities; Outputs; Impacts below.

• **Methods**

The analysis of what women did in times of war and violent conflicts, in exile and in the period of reconstruction requires a qualitative participatory methodology. At the heart of this approach is to learn from, and to validate the knowledge and intelligence of, ordinary people. Despite many criticisms of participatory research, this approach can be empowering as it can create a link between local communities and policy makers (Chambers 1994; Cook and Kothari 2001; Law et al 2003; Moser and McIlwaine 1999 and 2000).

The collection of the evidence of the conflicts and struggles faced by my interviewees also required an approach based on oral history discourse and methodology. In oral history methodology the researcher takes an active role by drawing sources from people's knowledge and experience. This method allows interpersonal interaction and communication skills and an understanding of social inequalities in relation to gender, class and ethnicity (Bornet 1992; Finnegan 1992; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Thompson 1988; Poya 1999:18-19 and 21).

Interview methods, language and translation/transcription

This research project was conducted through the use of in-depth and extensive interviews in Afghanistan and in diasporic communities (Iran, Pakistan, UK and USA). The interview method used was that of a focused interview schedule with both a topic list and the inclusion of some structured questions designed to capture demographic and activity information for the purposes of comparative analysis. The aim was to produce qualitative data that could be understood in the context of the social characteristics and life history of the different participants in the study which was designed to include a range of diverse groups (in relation to religiosity, ethnicity, age, marital status, fertility rate, class, citizenship status, employment status, political, social and cultural activities) (See attached table six). For many individual respondents I was able to construct life histories.

The structure of the interview schedule (topics and structured questions allowed the use of different methods of interviewing. The interviews were designed to incorporate semi-structured qualitative data collection with participatory and qualitative research, based on the following tools:

1. Long detailed interviews: These were one to one interview of approximately 1-2 hours with key informants including NGO workers, journalists, women activists and two women cabinet ministers in Afghanistan.
2. Short detailed interviews: These interviews followed the same format as the above long detailed interview, but some were less than 20 minutes and others around 30-45 minutes. In these interviews respondents either had less to talk or their interviews were constrained. (See the Constraints and Limitations section below).
3. Long informal group interviews: This tool allowed a flexible and useful alternative where a formal interview with individuals was not possible. These group interviews usually included around 5-8 respondents and lasted for 1-4 hours, and were undertaken with a family group, or groups of women activists, teachers and students and with women and men in refugee camps.

4. Short informal group interviews: This type interview followed the same format as the long informal group interviews, but some were less than 20 minutes and others around 30-45 minutes, due to constraints of the respondents. (See examples of interview texts and table six).

The process of focus groups yielded thematic and qualitative information as well as phenomenological insight, whilst individual interviews yielded life-histories and individual processes.

As a speaker of Farsi as a first language, I was able to conduct many interviews directly. Farsi, which is spoken in Iran, resembles Dari which is spoken by the majority in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the interviews took place in Dari/Farsi languages. In Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, a number of respondents were Pashto speakers. In these cases, my interpreters translated from Pashto to Dari/Farsi. In the UK and the USA, the interviews with the older generation took place in Dari/Farsi and with the younger generations in English, as was preferred by my young interviewees. It was possible, therefore, to conduct the interviews in a conversational manner, as the interviews that I undertook directly in Dari/Farsi provided an understanding of the important concepts and words used by the majority of my respondents, and this guided the interviews in which I had to use a translator from Pashto to Dari/Farsi. It also gave my interviewees confidence in my understanding of their story and their perspective on that story.

The use of different languages in the original interviews has one consequence for publications. In Iran, most Afghans, especially the younger generation speak Farsi with different Iranian accents, depending on where they live in Iran and they spell their names according to Iranian Farsi spelling. In Pakistan, UK and USA they speak Dari with different accents, depending on where they come from originally in Afghanistan and they use the Pashto and Dari spellings of their names. In my publications I use the spellings of names and terminologies according to the usage of my particular respondents.

Most interviews were recorded. In some cases the interviewees asked me not to record the interview, and in other cases they asked me to turn off the tape recorder in the middle of the interview. In these cases I asked them to permit me to take notes. Follow up interviews were also conducted with a number of key informants. The interviews were translated and transcribed into English in Iran, by two professional translators. I asked my translators and transcribers to translate and transcribe every word as it was said and I double checked the transcripts against the tapes.

The sample and access to respondents

I conducted interviews in the following countries during the following periods:

September – October 2004 in Iran and Pakistan;

April - May 2005 in Iran and Afghanistan;

December 2004 in the USA and

February 2005, in the UK.¹

As reported above the sample was not drawn as a representative sample but as a theoretic sample designed to include a range of Afghan women in relation to their degree of religiosity, ethnicity, age, marital status, fertility rate, class, citizenship status, employment status, political, social and cultural activities and their poverty/wealth. This theoretic sample was informed by the previous pilot study that had been undertaken in Kabul in 2002. It was designed to include a range of Afghan women living in urban area, rural areas, refugee camps, and in the West. Because of this range of respondents it was necessary to gain access to respondents through a wide variety of NGOs.

In Iran: in Tehran (the capital city), Shahre Ray, Varamin and Kan (cities near Tehran), Zabol and Zahedan (in the provinces of Sistan and Baluchestan in south east Iran, near south west of Afghanistan) and Mashhad (in Khorasan province, in north east Iran, near north west of Afghanistan) access was gained through Iranian women's NGOs (NGO Training Centre, Hami NGO and Rushdieh Cultural, Research and Educational Institute), UNICEF and UNHCR. These agencies helped me to interview Afghan women (and a few men) activists, teachers, students and female headed households.

In, Zabol and Zahedan, I interviewed Afghan women and men in Niatak refugee camp in the border area of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the help of Hami NGO, UNICEF and Kanoneh Parvaresh Fekri Kodakan va Nojavanan (The Centre For Intellectual Development of Children and Youth) a part of Ministry of Education,

In Pakistan, in Karachi (an economically significant city where a sizable Afghan community have settled and Peshawar (north west of Pakistan, near south east of Afghanistan) I gained access through the BBC World Service, UNHCR, Afghan Women Network (AWN), Afghan Women Council (AWC), Sherkat Gah, Revolutionary Afghan Women Association (RAWA) and Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA). These agencies helped me gain access to Afghan women (and a few men) who were teachers, journalists, students, NGO workers and women in Afghan settlement areas (Jhangabad; Camp Jadid and Al-Asif Square in Karachi) and refugee camps (Kacha Garaie and Haji Camp).

In Afghanistan, in Kabul (the capital city), Jalalabad (Pashtun area) and Mazar-e Sharif (Tajik and Uzbek area) I gained access with the help of HAWCA and

¹ My original plan had been to conduct interviews in Iran and Afghanistan in September – October 2004, but my contacts in Afghanistan suggested postponing my travel to Afghanistan to April – May 2005 for security reason. This did not have an impact on the completion of the research project, or on my research design. With the agreement of ESRC I changed the timetable. I visited Pakistan in September 2004 and Afghanistan in April – May 2005.

interviewed women and a few men activists, teachers, students, journalists, NGOs and UN workers.

In the UK, Dr. Martin Lau of the School of Oriental and African Studies introduced me to the British Council who helped me to meet a group of Afghan women and through snowballing through this and other networks I was able to interview Afghan women in London and Oxford.

In the USA, Professor Nayereh Toohidi at the Women's Studies Department of California State University introduced me to the Afghan Women's Association of Southern California and interview Afghan women in Los Angeles.

These countries were chosen for the study because in the period under study Iran and Pakistan received 6-7 million Afghan refugees (UNHCR 2005, and attached statistics). The majority in Iran is Shi'a and Hazara and the majority in Pakistan is Sunni and Pashtun. However, there are a minority of Pashtun in Iran and a minority of Hazara in Pakistan as well as Tajik, Uzbek and Baluch in both countries. In both Iran and Pakistan it was possible to interview within refugee camps and these interviews were important sources of information on what women and children, in particular, consider being the benefits and drawbacks of life in the refugee camps. It is possible to compare the experience of refugees in camps and living elsewhere in these two countries.

The USA received 9,000 and the UK received 24,000 Afghans (UNHCR 2005) (see statistics attached), the majority of which are middle class and diverse in terms of religiosity and ethnicity. The individuals and groups selected for the study in these countries demonstrate a diversity of religiosity, ethnicity and class positions. They also represent two generations of Afghan women (see statistics attached).

The participants in the study were selected by the individuals and institutions that helped me, mainly UN organisations and Women's NGOs (both local and international).

Constraints and Limitations

The constraints to the research processes were both practical and due to sensitivity of the subject. Within the confines of this study, it was not possible to draw a scientific random sample of all groups of Afghan women and men interviewed for this project. This research took the approach of drawing a theoretically informed sample that encompassed a range of experiences among Afghan women and men. However, as part of the study, it was important to collect statistical data to place the social position of interviewees in context, without claiming that this data is statistically representative of a larger population (Laws et al 2003). As discussed above, interview transcripts provide my research data, and this data was collected using a participatory approach and oral history discourse and methodology. This may be open to criticism that the study is too subjectivist, is open to bias and does not permit the generalization that is necessary for policy formation (Jayaratne 1983: 156-7; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991). However, what this method captures is the perspectives of the

respondents and the facts as they perceive them and through those perspectives provide insights into selecting the appropriate analytical strategy. Moreover, the transcripts of all interviews will be available through the ESRC archive and any subsequent researcher in this field can interrogate these transcripts for themselves and create new insights; the validity of the evidence or aspects of it can be checked with the documentary evidence (Bornet 1992).

By comparing the results of in-depth interviews across diverse communities, I was able to identify themes which can be generalised and are important for policy formation (Holstein and Gubrium 2003). Equally, these qualitative interviews, with a relatively small sample of women, have been important for the development of theoretical insights and, of as much importance, this form of analysis allows an analysis of women as fully historical persons who struggle to improve their status. This approach and methodology is, therefore, both scientifically valid and in the interests of the women who participated; it creates precise notions, theories and processes whose results will return to women and to society (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991: 90; Jayaratne 1983; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991:93; and Poya 1999: 18-19 and 21). By collecting comparative demographic and social information during the interviews I have also accumulated some quantitative data that informs an understanding of: comparisons of refugee populations in Iran, Pakistan, UK and USA; ethnic distributions, religions and languages in Afghanistan; Human Development Indicators in Afghanistan. I also produced statistics from my interviews to demonstrate the diversity of my respondents (See tables 1-4).

As an active participant I was listening to my interviewees while also attending to my own response and trying to learn more from each woman and man. Each life history taught me a new dimension of women's life, and using oral history methodology, I was able to scrutinise the meaning of different issues which emerged from each interview, understanding and comparing the experiences of each woman with another who was socially differentiated. Throughout the field research my observation of the circumstances of women in each country, and their situation in relation to reconstruction, confirmed the validity of the interview data about women's unrecorded demands.

Other constraints were embedded in the situation. First, my more educated interviewees were more confident and engaged with the interview; the poorer and less educated interviewees were less engaged. In some interviews, I felt that particular women were telling me what I wanted to hear. In this situation I tried to cross examine my respondents by asking them alternative questions in order to arrive at a more objective analysis.

Second, in some cases it was practical that the interviews took place as group interviews. In refugee camps, the leading members of the community and male members of the family did not allow me to interview individual women, and also a family group interview in this situation took place in the presence of the male kin. In most cases, after a few minutes, I requested the men to step aside in order to

discuss 'women's issues'. In all cases, they agreed and once the women were a little more comfortable, they began to talk about openly.

Third, in other cases, women did not want to talk at first and kept saying that 'everything is fine'. However, because they were willing participants in the interview, it was possible to gradually build trust and create a spirit of openness at which point they began to discuss the reality of their life. I insisted that they talk to me about the level of employment, poverty, access to housing, education and employment they had. In some cases, the organiser of the meeting intervened and assured them that they could trust me and talk openly to me (see examples of my interviews).

Fourth, I faced in some interviews the universal difficulties of conducting interviews with women and men in difficult circumstances. For example, in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where poverty was more acute especially in refugee camps in Pakistan, answers to questions were not always coherent. Sometimes the responses sounded rambling, fragmented, diverting from the research questions. However, as a Dari-Farsi speaker it was possible for me to listen carefully and pick up on one particular issue and to re-build the interview around this topic.

Despite these limitations and constraints the research method allowed consistency and comparability across diverse groups and communities. Moreover, rigorous, systematic and uniform analysis was possible creating testable hypotheses, as well as generating aggregate statistics. It is my hope that this field data will aid a feminist consciousness of the issues facing this population, in exchange for the knowledge that I was able to gain from the women I interviewed, who helped me to produce this research. It is also my hope that research of this kind will aid processes of change in social and gender relations in these societies, and change assumptions women's passivity and how women's role in such societies can be enhanced. It is a further hope that this research can be used to inform policy proposals, to improve women's lives and eventually lead to the promotion of women's status.

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to draw out differences in the experience of different groups in Afghanistan and in exile. Recognising the diversity of experiences, the following research questions (see questions in attached examples of interviews) enabled me to focus on:

Women's survival strategies;

Women's resistance to their hostile environment and the building of social capital,

Women's acquisition of knowledge and power;

Women's willingness to participate in the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan;

Understanding the obstacles and challenges that women are facing under the occupation.

Ethical Issues

I followed the British Sociological Associations code of conduct (2004) for undertaking this research. I also followed the Economic Social Research Council's ethical guidelines (2004). Information gathered in the course of the project was treated with confidentiality and due regard for interviewees concerns. For this reason, the data is anonymised through effective editing of interview transcriptions, involving the use of pseudonyms and in some parts the removal of the text. The names of all interviewees were removed from the interview tapes and were changed in the text. In articles and the book I have used the name of some of my interviewees who agreed that I quote them directly in their personal or institutional capacity although the field research includes some undocumented interviews and encompassed what could be seen as sensitive issues.

Ethical considerations included informing the participants in detail about the reasons, purpose and use of the research. I clearly explained to them that the research will be used for reports, articles and a book. Also I explained that the data will be archived for the use of other researchers. They were also advised that complete confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained and that they would not be personally identified within the research, reports, articles and the book, unless they agreed. Names and photos were not taken where they did not want to be named or photographed. All my interviewees gave verbal consent.

• Results

The research results, based on testimonies and life histories and in-depth interviews in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, UK and USA, will contribute to the understanding of the importance of gendered power relations in times of war and violent conflicts, in exile and in the processes of peace-making and during post-war reconstruction. This contextually specific analysis has and will suggest new areas for theoretical debate and policy-oriented research which will continue to be prominent on global agendas. The project will, therefore, be widely disseminated to researchers, policy-makers and aid agencies. The aim is to develop a better understanding of Afghan women's resistance to war and violent conflicts; their engagement with multiple worlds as refugees or living in exile; their struggle for survival and/or their acquisition of new knowledge and power; the importance of their participation in the process of Afghanistan's reconstruction and transition from war to peace.

For details of research findings see the following:

- a)** sections below: Activities, Outputs and Impacts
- b)** The attached article: Gender, Agency and Identity, the case study of Afghan women in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, 1996 – 2005. This article is in press to be published in Afshar H (ed), Islam and Female Identity, Women, Identities and Struggle, Journal of Development Studies.

c) The attached chapter one of my forthcoming book 'Afghan women's resistance and struggles in Afghanistan and diasporic communities 1996 – 2005', monograph.

- **Activities**

February 2006: Participated in and contributed to the discussion on 'Canadian Afghanistan And Foreign Policy Roundtable' with Peter Mackay, Canada's Foreign Minister, Canadian embassy London.

September 2005: Development Studies Association Annual Conference, Open University. Presented a paper on Afghan women's experiences in diasporic communities.

May 2005: Development Studies Association Women and Development Study Group, York University. Presented a paper on Gender, Agency and Identity, the case study of Afghan women in USA and UK.

September 2004: Participated in and contributed to the discussion on 'Afghan's refugees in Iran' at UNHCR in Tehran, Iran with High Commissioner at the time Ruud Lubbers

May 2004: Afghan women refugees in Iran and Pakistan, Refugee Council, London. Presented a paper on Afghan women refugees.

May 2004: Development Studies Association Women and Development Study Group, York University. Presented a paper on Gender, Agency and Identity, the case study of Afghan women, in Iran and Pakistan.

- **Outputs**

A list of publications divided into the following sections:

(a) Forthcoming Book

2007 Afghan women's resistance and struggles in Afghanistan and diasporic communities 1996 – 2005 (monograph).

(b) Forthcoming article

2006 'Gender, Agency and Identity, the case study of Afghan women in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, 1992 – 2005' in Afshar H (ed), Islam and Female Identity, Women, Identities and Struggle, Journal of Development Studies.

(c) Articles in Journals

2003 Women in Afghanistan, Passive Victims of the Borqqa or active social Participants? Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives, Development In Practice, Volume 13, Numbers 2 & 3, Oxfam, Oxford, pp 266-277. **This article was republished as a chapter in the book Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives, A Development in Practice Reader, Oxfam GB, pp 172-187.**

2002 Gender and Media Reconstruction in Afghanistan, Afghan Media Reconstruction In Focus, An Activity Report, BBC World Service Trust, London, pp 59-71.

(d) Articles in Encyclopedia

2004, Civil Society in Afghanistan, in Suad Joseph et al (eds) Family, Law and Politics, Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. 2, Brill Publishers, Netherlands, pp 40-41

Forthcoming articles in Encyclopedia

2006 'Women, Gender and Migration: Labour and Remittances in Afghanistan' in Suad Joseph et al (eds) Family, Law and Politics, Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. 2, Brill Publishers, Netherlands

2006 'Women, Gender and Labour Profiles in Afghanistan' in Suad Joseph et al (eds) Family, Law and Politics, Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. 2, Brill Publishers, Netherlands

2006 'Women, Gender and Paid Domestic Labour in Afghanistan' in Suad Joseph et al (eds) Family, Law and Politics, Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. 2, Brill Publishers, Netherlands

• **Impacts**

The following UN organisations and NGOs have shown interest to receive the report and the result of the research:

In Iran:

Iranian women's NGOs (NGO Training Centre).
Hami NGO
Rushdieh Cultural, Research and Educational Institute)

UNICEF

UNHCR

Kanoneh Parvaresh Fekri Kodakan va Nojavanan (The Centre For Intellectual Development of Children and Youth).

In Pakistan:

UNHCR

Afghan Women Network (AWN)
Afghan Women Council (AWC)
Shirkat Gah, Women Resource Centre
Revolutionary Afghan Women Association (RAWA)
Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA).

In Afghanistan:

Ministry of Women's Affairs

Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled
Asia NGO
HAWCA.

In UK:

British Council
Refugee Council
Women Living Under the Muslim Law

In USA:

Women's Studies Department of California State University
Afghan Women's Association of Southern California and interview Afghan women in Los Angeles.

Future Research Priorities

The impact of Afghan refugees on Iranian society

Afghan Women's Resistance and Struggle in Afghanistan and Diasporic Communities

ESRC Reference No: RES-000-22-0762

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Chapter one of the forthcoming book titled:

Afghan Women's Resistance and Struggles in Afghanistan and Diasporic Communities: 1996 - 2005

I. Introduction, Methodology, Conceptual framework

In this book, following the footsteps of Afghan women, I will take you on a journey to: Afghanistan under the Taliban (1996-2001); Iran, Pakistan, UK and the USA, the diasporic communities where Afghan women and men are concentrated; and back to Afghanistan after the fall of Taliban and the US-led invasion (2001 – 2005). Based on testimonies and life histories and in-depth interviews my aim is to contribute to the understanding of the processes by which many Afghan women, as diverse groups, exercised autonomy and agency in these three historical periods. I will demonstrate how they reformulated their identity, a multiple identity which is made up of their past history and present circumstances and tried to rebuild life and renegotiate gender roles according to their own culture.

One critical theme runs through the chapters: the issue of gender, agency and identity, and the extent to which men and women, through their positioning in violence, diaspora and under invading forces are also social actors.

Under the Taliban, they lived under the most extreme forms of coercion and fear. In diasporic communities and under the US led invasion of their country they lived and still live under high levels of uncertainties. Nevertheless, in all these cases, they have invented different ways of coping with life, with creativity and resourcefulness.

As the Other, in diaspora, they do not find stability in one country. They face racism, prejudice and many social, economic and cultural constraints. They exist in the peripheries, they travel across the borders (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, UK and USA) geographically and culturally to construct their unique identity, which is complex and dynamic. They move beyond the many opposing identities and cultures (Muslim, Western, Tradition, Modern, Shi'a, Sunni, Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik, Uzbek.... Iranian, Afghan, Pakistani, American, British) and different

languages (Dari, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, English). In this process many women find a meeting point of these different cultures, languages and identities which enable them to negotiate ideologies concerning patriarchy, imperialism, Islam, tradition and modernity in order to try to be in control of their destiny.

Despite the horrors of war, violent conflicts and life in exile many Afghan women have emerged empowered. In Afghanistan and in diasporic communities in a world of stereotypes and misconceptions they have reacted to different structures of power (male, ethnic, religion, age, class and international power relations). Through their struggles at different levels, these women have tried to change the patriarchal gender relations, recognising only men as breadwinners, heads of household and decision makers. They have formed new and diverse conceptions concerning their identity and agency. Back in Afghanistan, many believe that in their own way, and according to their own culture, they can change their communities to accept the participation of women in the economy and the society and find legitimate roles for women in the process of reconstruction. But they are faced with many obstacles and challenges.

In section two of this introductory chapter, I will discuss the methods that were used in this study, the constraints and limitations of the research methodology and my personal experience. In section three I will discuss the conceptual framework which shapes the arguments of this book. In section four, I will outline the organization of the book and a summary of the arguments of different chapters.

Speaking Farsi, which is spoken in Iran and resembles Dari spoken by the majority of Afghans was an advantage and allowed me to interview Afghan women and men and present the reality of Afghan women's life which is different from the perception of Afghan women as passive victims of male and religious domination awaiting to be liberated by Western values - an image which is too often portrayed in the West.

As the writer of this book I come from different identities and positions: an Iranian woman, university teacher, living in London, secular but deeply engaged with Iranian / Islamic culture. For twenty five years, I have been involved with the women's movement in Iran and since 2001 with the Anti War movement in Britain. Therefore my identities, background, values and experiences have obviously shaped the way I understand and represent the experiences of Afghan women.

II. Research Methodology

The analysis of what women did in times of war and violent conflicts, in exile and in the period of reconstruction requires a qualitative participatory research. At the heart of this approach is to learn from and to validate the knowledge and intelligence of ordinary people. Despite many criticisms of Participatory Research, this approach can be empowering as it can make a link between local communities and policy makers (Chambers 1994; Cook and Kothari 2001; Law et al 2003; Moser and McIlwaine 1999 and 2000).

The analysis of the conflicts and struggles which my interviewees faced also need an approach based on the oral history discourse and methodology. In oral history methodology, the researcher takes an active role by drawing sources from people's knowledge and experience. It allows interpersonal interaction and communication skills, which allow an understanding of social inequalities in relation to gender, class and ethnicity (Bornet 1992; Finnegan 1992; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Thompson 1988; Poya 1999:18-19 and 21).

Therefore, this research is comprised of in-depth and extensive interviews in Afghanistan and in diasporic communities (Iran, Pakistan, UK and USA). These semi-structured interviews with individual and groups of women in different countries represent a sample of diverse groups (religiosity, ethnicity, age, marital status, fertility rate, class, citizenship status, employment status, political, social and cultural activities). This enabled me to construct life histories. In appendix, I will discuss research questions, interview tools and ethical issues.

Constraints and Limitations

The constraints to the research processes were both practical and due to sensitivity of the subject. Within the confine of this study, it was not possible to draw a scientific random sample of all groups of Afghan women and men interviewed for this project. This research took the approach of drawing a theoretically informed sample that encompassed a range of experiences among Afghan women and men. However, as part of the study, it was important to collect statistical data to place the social position of interviewees in context, without claiming that this data is statistically representative of a larger population (Laws et al 2003). As discussed above, interview transcripts provide my research data, and this data was collected using a participatory approach and oral history discourse and methodology. This may be open to criticism that the study is too subjectivist, is open to bias and does not permit the generalization that is necessary for policy formation (Jayaratne 1983: 156-7; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991). However, what this method captures is the perspectives of the respondents and the facts as they perceive them and through those perspectives provide insights into selecting the appropriate analytical strategy.

Moreover, the validity of the evidence or aspects of it can be checked with the documentary evidence (Bornet 1992). By comparing the results of in-depth interviews across diverse communities, I was able to identify themes which can be generalised and are important for policy formation (Holstein and Gubrium 2003). Equally, these qualitative interviews, with a relatively small sample of women, have been important for the development of theoretical insights and, of as much important, this form of analysis allows an analysis of women as fully historical persons who struggle to improve their status. This approach and methodology is, therefore, both scientifically valid and in the interests of the women who participated; it creates precise notions, theories and processes whose results will return to women and to society (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991: 90; Jayaratne 1983; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991:93; and Poya 1999: 18-19 and 21). By collecting comparative demographic and social information during the

interviews I have also accumulated some quantitative data that informs an understanding of: comparisons of refugee populations in Iran, Pakistan, UK and USA; ethnic distributions, religions and languages in Afghanistan; Human Development Indicators in Afghanistan. I also produced statistics from my interviews to demonstrate the diversity of my respondents (see the Appendix).

A personal experience

In February 2002, I entered Kabul with my British passport with a group of BBC World Service Trust journalists and aid workers. This was to carry out a field research on the role of women in the reconstruction of media in Afghanistan (Rostami-Povey 2003). In this period, just after the fall of Taliban, Afghan state institutions were not formed yet. The institution of passport control was in the process of being established. The male passport control officer welcomed me in Dari language: 'khosh amadi Elaheh Jan' (welcome dear Elaheh). I felt that the reason I was welcomed was not determined by my British passport, but by my Persian name and my Farsi language shared with Afghans.

In April 2005, I entered Kabul from Iran with my Iranian passport. The flight was from Mashhad in Iran to Kabul. The passengers were all Afghan refugees who were returning to Afghanistan from Iran. As we entered the passport control area, the female officer at Kabul airport shouted at us 'get in line, don't think that you have come from Iran and can do anything you like'. I felt that the anti Iranian sentiment was in contrast to my experience in 2002 and was the result of policies advocated by the US-led invading forces. Curiously, I felt solidarity with the Afghan refugees who were leaving Iran and returning back to Afghanistan, but felt rejected at the moment of their arrival.

My experience when I was leaving Kabul in May 2005 was also interesting. I was going back to Tehran with my Iranian passport, I was carrying my interview tapes in my hand luggage. I was searched and questioned by the female officers at the Kabul airport who wanted to know about the interview tapes. I explained to them that the interview tapes were the result of my field research in Afghanistan on women's issues. They said that they will not allow me to take the interview tapes without the permission of the Ministry of Information and they attempted to confiscate them. At this stage I showed them my British passport and an official letter from my British university (School of Oriental and African Studies). These two documents suddenly changed the atmosphere and they said 'Ostad befarmeed (please professor you can go). In this case the commonality of language did not play a positive role and my Iranian passport would have cost me the loss of my interview tapes. But my British passport saved my interview tapes. My transnational position (being able to lead a political, economic and social dual life) and having two passports and two citizenship rights were advantageous. As will be discussed in the next section and in chapters two and three, this experience brought home to me the diversity of living in exile (nomadic existence) ranging from having two passports to not having any passport – to be or not to be transnational.

III. Conceptual framework

The existing publications on women in Afghanistan are valuable sources of inspiration (Brodsky 2003; Collett 1996; Dupree 1984; Kandiyoti 2005; Mehta 2003; Mertus 2000; Moghadam 2002; 1994a; 1994b; Rashid 2002; Shah 2000; Shakib 2002; Tapper 1984; Wallace 1993; Wolfe 1992).

However, they do not address the following important theoretical issues:

1. The multiple oppressions with which Afghan women have been historically engaged by virtue of their different positions in sexist, racist and imperialist conflicts.
2. The interaction of different institutions (family; religion; state; international community and the invading forces) with the processes of socio-economic and socio-political changes which have impacted on women's participation.
3. The vast diversity of women's experiences in the processes of historical changes (in times of war and conflict, in exile and under US-led invasion) and the different ways they have emerged as autonomous agents and have constructed their identities, in culturally specific circumstances.

The issue of gender, identity and agency has been addressed in different contexts (Bujis 1993; Ellis 2000; Giles et al 1996; Indra 2003; Kofman et al 2000; Lenz et al 2000; Long 1992; Morokvasic-Muller et al 2000; Moser and Clark 2001; Orlando 1999; Stewart and Strathern 2000).

This book, based on empirical research and grounded in the historical and political specificities of Afghanistan will contribute to the existing debates. My aim is to illustrate how a focus on gender, agency and identity may modify our perspectives and our understanding of Afghanistan and of feminist praxis within it.

In the following pages of this section I will discuss the complex ways the discourses of gender, agency and identity intersect with other discourses of class, ethnicity, religion and age.

Gender

An important part of this study is about how gender matters in the context of Afghan women. My field research shows that the conventional gender divisions, as they have been understood in the West, fail to explain the fluidities of Afghan women's identities. Through an analysis of Afghan women's agency and identity and a critical evaluation of the concept of gender, this paper offers a different view of gender. I suggest a greater fluidity in defining women and men so that they are not labelled merely by faith or gender.

Throughout this book I will discuss gender in the context of social relations, Islamic religion, culture, domination, subordination and masculinity.

It is important to recognize that gender is a process embedded in all social relations and institutions. It is a relationship, which is constituted through people's lived experience within continually redefined and contested social activities and

institutions. It is necessary to recognise the interconnectedness of gender, culture, religion, class, and ethnicity (Harzig 2003: 50). In the context of Afghanistan the issue of gender and ethnicity is particularly problematic. Simonsen (2004: 708-711) argues that different factors such as language, religion, descent, tribe, region, sub-groups within the ethnic groups, rural, urban, education, profession and *qawm* (solidarity group) can be used to define ethnic groups. Equally important Afghanistan's rich history of inter-ethnic relations demonstrates the coexistence, harmony, tolerance and pride in diversity (Monsutti 2005: 77-82). Ethnic conflicts have been the result of ethnicised politics manipulated by political leaders and foreign invaders. As will be demonstrated in this book, most Afghans that I interviewed referred to marriages across ethnic boundaries as evidence of harmony in inter-ethnic relations.

Contrary to popular views in the West, some Afghan men oppose traditional ideologies of male superiority and dominance. Therefore, I contest the common assumption that Afghan men are embedded in patriarchal ideologies to a much greater extent than supposedly liberated and enlightened Western men. I will also explore the challenges to masculine identity experienced by selected individual Afghan men and the varied ways by which they try to reconstruct their identity under the harsh realities of their life under the Taliban, in diaspora and under US-led invasion.

Gender relations are historically specific. They are determined by social, economic, class, political, legal as well as cultural and religious factors (Buijs 1993: 55). In Afghanistan, like all Muslim majority societies, the interaction of Islamic culture and religion with secularism, nationalism, ethnicity and other important historical, social and economic mechanisms structure the lives of women and men. Too often Islamic culture and religion is considered to be the primary agent determining the identities of women in Muslim majority societies and is used to justify war, occupation and invasion.

I do not deny that patriarchal attitudes and structures remain extremely strong in Afghanistan. But by discussing Afghan women's resistance and struggles against different structures of power (male, ethnic, religion, age, regional and international) my aim is to reject essentialisms about women in Afghanistan (and indeed other Muslim majority societies).

I have tried to track the functioning of gender in Afghan's everyday activities, as well as the essence of institutions and laws. The gender perspective in this study focuses on how to change patriarchal gender relations, because the Afghan women that I interviewed were not interested in different forms of male domination, but how to change them.

Agency

By telling Afghan women's stories, I intend to explain how engendered agency is relevant to the argument of this paper. These stories explain how some Afghan women, by moving into the space of agency (arising as intelligent being); deconstruct the world which has created for them by Taliban, in diaspora and

imperialist invaders. Their numbers may be few, but their voice is the voice of many others, as they have challenged the male conception of the world by voicing their own identity.

As is argued by Orlando (1999:139) when women are able to pull themselves from the depths of seclusion and oppression they are able to enter a free space of agency. Stewart and A Strathern (2000: 61 and 122) also discuss agency as the ability to explicitly or implicitly, exercise personal autonomy and agency with creativity and resourcefulness and how individuals and groups in diverse ways shape their own lives, histories, and identifies. Long (1992: 5 and 23) argues that the notion of agency attributes to the individual's ability to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion, uncertainty and other constraints. Moser and Clark (2001:13-30), argue that multiple realities play an important role in the construction of identifies, therefore, we cannot assume that a universal interpretation of agency across cultures can exist (Momsen and Kinnaird 1993; Parpart and Marchand 1995: 3). These arguments are also relevant to discuss the specificity of Afghan women's agency in the context of capability, empowerment, social capital and women and men as social actors.

In chapter two I will discuss Afghan women's struggle against the Taliban as well as a minority of pro Taliban women who exercised agency to protect and assert their own ideology, but in support of violence. Sarkar and Butalia (1995: 147) and Butalia (2001:109) in the context of mobilization of right wing Hindu women in India, raise an important issue of whether women's agency is always positive or whether we should only speak about the positive cases of women's agency. In my view we should speak of both, as it is a global issue. For me there is an analogy not only between the mobilization of right wing Hindu women in India and pro Taliban women, but also between these movements and the mobilization of Western women across class and ethnicity into right-wing politics who participate in war and violent conflict ranging from the role played by Condoleezza Rice and other neo-conservative women in Bush's administration to female soldiers participating in killing and abusing people in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

Identity

I will discuss Afghan women's gender identity according to their diverse positions (ethnicity, religion, class, age) and how they try to reconstruct their identity by bridging between their life under the Taliban, their nomadic existence in diaspora and under invading forces. My aim is to recontextualise the role of Afghan women in a space of agency, by discussing their identities in the context of nomadism, marginality, knowledge, empowerment and culture - culture as a sight of contestation and struggle (Stewart and Strathern 2000: 174). It is also important to recognise that historical and cultural experiences are not unitary, monolithic or autonomous. On the contrary, they are hybrid and have important social and political consequences (Said 1993:15).

The post-modern concept of nomadism (Brah 1996; Braidotti 1994; Hall 1987; Lutz 2002:66-69; Orlando 1999:58-59) is useful to understand how Afghan

women move between different worlds, languages and jobs without being bound to a fixed location; how their multiple positions and identities are formed, and how nomadism links different spheres of being.

This is particularly important in the case of refugees and exiles. As Said (1996: 61) argued, 'Exile means that you are always going to be marginal, but that you will also embark on nomadic roads that will lead to more knowledge and empowerment'. This notion of identity has had a great impact on my analysis of Afghan women in diasporic communities. They used the concept of *khane be dosh*, (our homes on our shoulders) or *sargardan* (wanderer) to explain their feelings of nomadism. In her book, Shahbibi Shah an Afghan woman writer and poet, she writes 'I just feel without ground, if only I knew where I belong?' (2000: 19).

Orlando also discusses how the diaspora merge their heritage and identity with that of exile culture, while embarking on new roads that will lead them to empowerment: 'they are neither inside nor outside of the collectivity'... 'they transcend beyond the many opposing paradigms of culture, identity, striving to enter into a new phase of identity... a meeting point of different cultures and identities' (1999: 59;110).

However, as is argued by Phoenix (1998: 67) the diaspora may exist in the margins, in one way or another, according to the complexity of their social positions, but they are not equally marginalized. Afshar (1989:211-223) also argues that racism, class and regional location are all important factors that determine minority status. These analyses are particularly important to discuss the diversity of Afghan nomadic existence in Iran, Pakistan, UK and USA.

A number of authors have discussed the relationship between agency and identity. Long argues that identity (knowledge) and agency (capability) are differently constituted. This, in turn, affects how actors attempt to cope with situations they face (1992:25-27).

Orlando (1999:5 and 59) also argues that when we promote women's voices politically, socially, and culturally, we develop platforms of change. As will be discussed in this book, the Afghan woman is able to represent many other voices who have never been heard and together they are able to fight against oppressive authorities.

IV. The Organisation of the book

Chapter Two will discuss Afghan women under the Taliban:

Throughout the rule of Taliban, many women in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan risked their lives by turning their homes into underground organisations for girls, boys and women. As social actors, they created cohesion and solidarity in their community. These networks and forms of solidarity became mechanisms for women's empowerment. In this chapter, I will discuss how their activities and their secret organizations laid the foundation for the building of social capital, which is crucial for the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan.

The aim of this chapter is to achieve a better understanding of how the war economy and violent conflict during the Taliban era affect women and men differently. My concern is with the way women's secret organisations as a resistance movement to Taliban's regime enabled women to prove their strength by pulling themselves from the depths of seclusion and oppression in order to reach a free space of agency. Furthermore many Afghan men refused to participate in raping, killing and violating women and stood by their women and supported women and their secret organisations. An earlier version of this chapter has been published before (Rostami Povey 2003 and 2004). The updated version for this book includes new materials based on field work in Afghanistan in 2005.

Chapters three and four will discuss Afghan women in diasporic communities: Iran, Pakistan, UK and USA:

Many years of wars and violent conflicts have created Afghan diaspora and refugee communities, mainly in Iran and Pakistan but also in the West and Australia. Chapter three (Afghan women in Iran and Pakistan) and chapter four (Afghan women in USA and UK) will discuss how individual Afghan women, as well as women's networks and organizations linked different spheres of life in order to reach beyond the many opposing poles of identities and notions of ethnicity; how they re-invented the institutions of social life in order to survive.

These two chapters will discuss similarities and differences between Afghan women's (and men's) experiences in diasporic communities according to their diverse positioning. For example, despite many economic and social constraints and racial exclusion, many older generations preferred exile to years of war and violent conflict in Afghanistan. Exile became an important factor to reshape their identity. However, for many younger generations, the diasporic conscience and a divided self were painful experiences. Many arrived early in infancy or were born in exile. For some, integration into the exile system is impossible. Their parents' world is different from their world. They find themselves caught in the middle of a battle of identity. Holding on to their Afghan identity and accepting their Iranian / Pakistani / British / American identity. Some times these realities are too painful. Many feel Iranian / Pakistani / British / American, but the exile societies marginalise them.

Many Afghan women, especially younger generation, try to conceptualise new ways of studying their past as well as to plan for their future. In Afghanistan they were divided according to specific forms of identities: ethnically (Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek); religiously (Sunni, Shi'a). Belonging to different classes, generations, speaking a particular language (Pashto, Dari, Uzbeki). In, exile, however, they were all identified as Afghans. They had to speak the languages of the exile (Farsi, Urdu, and English).

Afghan women's and men's experiences in diasporic communities are also different in terms of whether they are transnational or not. The literature on diaspora suggests a move away from analysing the position of individuals and

groups in diasporic communities as 'caught between two cultures' to a position of 'transnationalism'. This means people lead political, economic and social dual lives; able to move between different cultures, maintaining homes in two countries, and pursuing economic, political and cultural interests in both countries (Phizacklea 2003; Portes 1997: 812; Vertovec 1999: 447). This is a useful concept to describe a minority of Afghan women in diasporic communities in the West. However, the majority went to Iran and Pakistan. Many in Iran and Pakistan have no passports and no citizenship rights. This is in contrast with Afghans in the West who may have two passports and two citizenship rights. Therefore, in these two chapters I will discuss the diversity of nomadic existence and as is argued by Lenz et al (2003: 8) having no passport or having two, having no citizenship rights or having two are two totally different situations. Here I define citizenship as a set of practices (juridical, political, economic and cultural) or a dynamic process of inclusion and exclusion (Erel 2003: 264; Turner 1993: 2) to explain Afghan's social and economic position in diasporic communities.

In this context chapter three will discuss in detail how in Iran and Pakistan only a minority has citizenship rights. Even they are forced to live on the margins and the economic hierarchy places them at a disadvantage. They are denied the right to equal wages and are concentrated in sectors, characterized as ethnic economies (Alberts 2003; IP & Lever-Tracy 1999).

Another important argument of these two chapters is about Afghan women's commitment to change patriarchal gender relations. Based on my interviews I will argue that Afghan women in Iran and Pakistan may have relatively less access to resources including citizenship rights in comparison with Afghan women in the UK and the USA who may be transnational. However, Afghan women in Iran and Pakistan seek to break down masculine domains more effectively than Afghan women in the UK and the USA.

This is because Afghan women in the West are constantly engaged in mediating between 'Western' values and their Afghan / Muslim cultural identity.

Therefore, I will argue that free from these two constraints, it is easier for Afghan women in Pakistan and in Iran to cross the gender line within the Islamic culture than for Afghan women in the UK and the USA. In the West they are primarily engaged in compromising the line between the modern Western world and the Afghan Muslim world. Both these worlds constantly push them to negotiate between the two very different spaces.

Their struggle to negotiate a milieu where opposition may be united is easier in Iran and Pakistan than in the UK and the USA. As will be demonstrated in chapter three, these Afghan women are constantly struggling for gender equality by fighting to break free from the confining traditions, male domination, and a life of marginalization. This is especially true in Iran because of the experience of the women's movement in Iran.

In the context of their Afghan / British and Afghan / American identity, their life is confined to constantly striving to challenge the West's view of the Afghan and the

Muslims. Since 9/11 in particular, they feel rejected by the West's condemnation of Muslim culture and feel that they constantly have to defend their Afghan / Muslim culture.

Therefore, their struggle and resistance is concentrated on combating the Western stereotypical conception of the Afghans and the Muslims. As will be demonstrated in chapter four, they resist Western essentialised depictions of Afghan and the Muslim in different ways:

Some try to tear down the Western walls, in order to be accepted as an integral part of Western culture. Others build more walls as they find the rejection of living in the world of exile on the margins of established norms unbearable.

Some resort to creating a false identity and of denying their own marginality in order to adhere to accepted norms of Western culture. Others hang on to their marginality and Afghan culture which could also be a false identity.

Others try to create an Afghan/Muslim/British/American identity which represents the link between the outsider and the insider.

As will be discussed in chapter three, Afghan women in Iran and Pakistan are more able to concentrate on their resistance and struggle against the male conception of female identity. They define gender relations sometimes in the context of greater gender equality and sometimes in terms of traditional understanding of gender relations. This enables them to negotiate ideologies concerning patriarchy and Islam. They don't see wearing the traditional Pakistani dress code, and the Iranian Islamic dress code, including the head scarf as cultural constraints, oppression, patriarchy (concepts used in the West). They define their goal and social relations as an attempt to create a more progressive Afghan society where women have access to health, education and employment.

Afghan women in the UK and the USA do not see themselves as part of the Western feminist movement as they feel excluded by Western feminisms, more in the USA than the UK, who have failed to construct a more global and relative feminism that will include all women of all ethnicities, nations, religions and cultures. They feel that for many years their suffering was ignored by women in the West when their governments supported the Mujaheddin, Bin Laden and Taliban. Moreover after 9/11 some feminists, especially in the USA supported the war and cheered American and other Western women in every level of the army on their way to liberate Afghan women from their *Borqa*. Furthermore, they did not challenge the masculinist protection of Bush and Blair to justify war in Afghanistan (Stanley and Wise 2000; Young 2003).

Finally these two chapters will assess how Afghan women as diverse groups tried to make their cultures and ethnic identities in the face of fear and prejudice in exile; how they endured tough conditions to survive as refugees and as exiles, but they constantly took actions as principal actors. They worked together and developed leadership skills, and hoped to be involved in the process of reconstruction of their country.

Chapter five, will discuss the challenges facing women and men in Afghanistan in the years 2001 – 2005, under the US-led invasion:

Millions have returned to Afghanistan, however, continued lack of security, armed conflict, and harsh economic conditions forced their flight back to Iran and Pakistan. Many individuals and groups of Western educated women and men have returned to Afghanistan to help the reconstruction of their country. But, they face the rise of warlordism, opium economy, lack of meaningful reconstruction, the presence of American led invasion and a limited role played by the international community. In this context, I will discuss the role of state and the invaders as gendered institutions and as regulators of gender relations in society. I will argue that the presence of international organisations; international financial institutions, donor governments, UN agencies, international NGOs, the private sector and the military weakens the possibility of nation state building in Afghanistan.

This is because, in the name of global governance, the economically and militaristically powerful states and governments exercise their power through these organisations. Furthermore, in the absence of Afghan entrepreneurs, the limited reconstruction, which takes place, involves foreign companies and warlords. Large and small private companies as well as Multinational Corporations are operating to exploit the resources of Afghanistan and market deregulations and are in control of internal security and reconstruction. However, a real reconstruction has not taken place. . This chapter will question the partnership between foreign and warlords' capital (Amin 2003; Callinicos 2003; Duffield 2002).

This chapter will also challenge the idea that the presence of international security forces is positive. The evidence show that they are doing very little for the majority of the people who need real help.

The efforts of the international community based on imported Western notions of market liberalisation, governance and gender mainstreaming, have failed to bring about state building, peace and security. For the majority of people in Afghanistan women's rights is not just about challenging male domination, it is also about challenging the imperialist domination, militaristically and economically, as well as culturally.

V. The Appendix

Research Questions

Research Ethic

Examples of different interviews

Statistics

VI. Conclusion and recommendation

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Afghan Women's Resistance and Struggle in Afghanistan and diasporic communities

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Table 1

Year	Iran	Pakistan	UK	USA
1980	200,000	400,000		
1990	2,940,000	3,272,000		
1994	1,623,300	1,053,000	0,000,100	0,006,200
1995	1,429,000	1,200,000	0,000,800	0,005,000
1996	1,414,000	1,200,000	0,001,300	0,003,800
1997	1,411,800	1,200,000	0,001,900	0,002,700
1998	1,400,700	1,200,000	0,003,500	0,001,900
1999	1,325,700	1,200,000	0,004,600	0,002,600
2000	1,482,000	2,000,000	0,005,700	0,004,300
2001	1,482,000	2,197,800	0,015,100	0,007,400
2002	1,104,900	1,226,600	0,020,100	0,008,900
2003	834,700	1,123,600	0,021,700	0,009,600
2004	834,699	1,123,647	0,021,718	0,009,601

Source: UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2003 and 2004

Table 2
A comparison of vital statistics 1998, 2001, 2001, 2005

Year	Life Expectancy	Literacy rate*		Under 5 mortality rate	Infant mortality rate	Percentage of population using improved drinking water			Percentage of population using adequate sanitation facilities		
		Male	Female			Rural*	Urban	Total	Rural*	Urban	Total
1990	43			260	168						
1998	43	45%	13%								
2002	45					11%	19%	13%	5%	16%	8%
2003	45	43%	14%								
2004	46			257	165						30%

Source:

World Bank Web-Site, October 2001

UNICEF the state of the world's children 2006

UNDP Global Human Development Report 2004

* According to UNDP Report 2004 urban population is 28.80% of total population

According to UNDP Report 2005, Afghanistan has the lowest adult literacy rates, at just 28.7%

Table 3

Comparison of the Human Development Indicators (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan)

Country	GDP per capita US\$	Life expectancy	Infant mortality rate	Population without sustainable improved water
Afghanistan	190	44.5	115	60
Iran	1652	70	35	8
Pakistan	408	61	83	10

Source: UNDP global Human Development Report 2004

Table 4**Major Ethnic, Religious and languages in Afghanistan***

Ethnic Groups	Language	Religion	Population	Major Locations
Pashtun	Pashto	Hanafi and Sunni	44%	East and South
Tajik	Dari, Tajiki	Hanafi; Sunni; Ismailiya; Shia	25%	Northeast
Hazara	Dari, Hazaragi	Shia; Ismailiya	10%	Center
Uzbek	Uzbek Turkic	Sunni; Hanafi	8%	North
Others**			13%	

* A small percentage of Pashtuns are Shia and a small percentage of Hazara are Sunni. War and displacement has also created a less strict division of locations.

**Qizilbash; Aimaq; Turkoman; Qirghizi; Pamiri; Nuristani and a small percentage of Hindu, Sikhs and Jews speaking different languages, belonging to different religions and live in different parts of Afghanistan.

Source: Pain A and Goodhand J (2002) Crisis and Response and Reconstruction, Working Paper 8, ILO InFocus Programme and Simonsen S (2004) Ethnicising Afghanistan? Inclusion and exclusion in post-Bonn institution building, Third World Quarterly, Vol. 25, No. 4

Table 5**Afghanistan Opium production from 1999 to 2003**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Tons of Opium	4,565	3,276	185	3,400	3,600

Source: UNDP Global Report 2004

Research Questions

The aim was to find questions to the following answers:

In Afghanistan under the Taliban:

1. Their gender, religious, ethnicity, class, marital status, number of children and their employment status
2. In what ways women and men experienced war and violent conflict differently?
3. To what extent women's secret organizations challenged exclusion and provided support for women?
4. To what extent men supported women's secret organizations?
5. How pro Taliban women reacted to anti Taliban women?
6. How do they assess the role of international community and invading forces?
7. How Afghan men conceptualise masculinity and loss of respect. How Afghan women relate to men, masculinity and gender relations

In diaspora:

1. Their gender, religious, ethnicity, class, marital status, number of children and their employment status
2. Why and when did they leave Afghanistan? Where is home for them? Where do they belong?
3. What are gender dimension of uprooting and displacement? How different cultures in exile affect their identity?
4. What kinds of political/social activities and strategies have been used in campaigning for the maintenance and extension of civil, economic and social rights in exile?
5. Can Afghanistan despite its cultural diversity remain a coherent nation?
6. How do they assess the role of international community and invading forces?
7. How Afghan men conceptualise masculinity and loss of respect. How Afghan women relate to men, masculinity and gender relations

In Afghanistan after the fall of Taliban and American led invasion of Afghanistan:

1. Their gender, religious, ethnicity, class, marital status, number of children and their employment status
2. How will women be represented in the new Afghan structure?
3. How would they respond to patriarchal gender relations?
4. In what ways can they participate in the process of reconstruction?

5. What kinds of political/ social activities and strategies have been used in campaigning for the maintenance and extension of civil, economic and social rights for women in Afghanistan in the process of reconstruction?
6. How do they assess the role of international community and invading forces?
7. How Afghan men conceptualise masculinity and loss of respect. How Afghan women relate to men, masculinity and gender relations

Actual questions used in the interviews:

In Afghanistan under the Taliban

1. Please explain your gender, religion, ethnicity, class, marital status, number of children and your employment status.
2. Explain about your experiences under the Taliban
3. Explain about men's reaction to your activities
4. Explain about pro Taliban women and their reaction to your activities

In diaspora

1. Please explain your gender, religion, ethnicity, class, marital status, number of children and your employment status.
2. When and why did you come to Iran/ Pakistan/ UK/USA?
3. What is your experience in Iran/Pakistan/UK/USA?
4. Where is home for you? Where do you belong?
5. Would you go back to Afghanistan? Why yes? Why no?
7. Are you as a woman or as a man treated differently by Iranian/ Pakistani/ British / American? If yes why? how?
8. How Iranian/ Pakistani/ British / American culture affect your identity?
9. What does it mean to be an exile?
10. Do you belong to two histories? Do you belong to two cultures? Do you feel loyal to two cultures?
11. Does belonging to both sides of the divide enable you to understand them both?
12. How do you feel about the language in exile?

In Afghanistan under the US led invasion

1. Please explain your gender, religion, ethnicity, class, marital status, number of children and your employment status.
2. Explain about your role in the process of reconstruction
3. How do men react to your involvement in the process of reconstruction?
4. What is your view about international community?
5. What is your view about the invading forces?
6. What is your view about Western culture?