

Reconstituting Manhood: Examining Post-Conflict Remasculinisation and its Effects on Women and Women's Rights in Afghanistan

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Masculinity has always occupied a central position in Afghan culture and identity. Historically it has expressed itself through the designation of female behaviour as standards by which to judge male honour and social status. Under the Taliban, women were perceived as inferior and their status as rights-bearers was continuously challenged. The rights of women are further imperilled by the crisis in male masculinity that has resulted from the protracted episodes of male-targeted violence. At present, with the Taliban ousted and Afghanistan undergoing a period of reconstruction, it is important to consider how Afghan men will attempt to reassert their masculinity after a long period of extreme violence and oppression, and how such practices may impinge on the human rights of women within Afghanistan. This paper argues that because traditional means by which masculinity is asserted in most societies have been rendered virtually devastated or severely restricted by the long episodes of conflict, men will attempt to reclaim their masculinity through the use of violence. Using traditional theories of masculinity, the article argues that remasculinisation in Afghanistan will occur through the use of violence, particularly in the private sphere, where women will often become the most accessible targets.

Introduction

Reconstruction in Afghanistan is progressing gradually amidst continued threats of insurgency and acts of violence. Along with this slow period of economic and social reform, Afghans are also left with the task of reaffirming or reconstituting their national identity, an undertaking that has progressed in a piecemeal fashion throughout Afghan history. In the past, tribal affinities and inter-ethnic conflicts have often threatened Afghanistan, virtually obliterating any possibility of forging a cohesive national identity. Despite a historical tendency to shy away from the idea of a unified Afghan national identity there is much evidence to support the idea that there is a sense of belonging and of being distinctly *Afghan* among the majority of people in this country. Hence, as Nancy Dupree argues, feelings of national solidarity and identity do, in fact, exist in Afghanistan (Dupree, 2002: 978). Dupree suggests that this sense of identity

focuses on the idea of a unique Afghan culture. As such, in a bid to bridge the chasm between the various tribes and religious factions it can be maintained that future heads of State in Afghanistan may attempt to reinstitute highly patriarchal family practices emphasising the more salient aspects of Afghan culture (Moghadam, 2005: 66).¹ In the past, such practices have left women extremely vulnerable as such constructions of masculinity and femininity tend to normalise or naturalise violence against women (Moghadam, 2005:63).

Although Afghanistan has historically gone through periods where the preservation of women's rights were seen as important objectives of the State, and respect and reverence of women were historically considered an important aspect of Afghan culture, it can certainly be argued that the political circumstances of the last two decades have redefined Afghan masculinity as one that inherently involves female-targeted violence. The hypermasculinity of the Taliban regime (hypermasculine because their concept of masculinity required the complete removal of women from the public sphere, as well as severely restricted women's rights in the private sphere) has reformulated the question of what it means to be a man in Afghanistan. In essence, for at least the last two decades 'being a man' in the Afghan context has almost always involved the threat and use of violence, where women have been most often the primary targets.

Masculinity has occupied an important position within Afghan identity even prior to the emergence of the Taliban, often in the form of male honour, social status and male authoritativeness. These symbols of masculinity bridge the gulf between various tribal and ethnic affinities, and present views and ideas very common among Afghan men. Historically, this attraction for maintaining masculinity through a patriarchal society, where women are considered subordinate to men, has led to the disintegration of many governments that desired to give women's rights the place and respect that it deserves and has received internationally (Moghadam, 2002: 22).

Some have suggested that perhaps the most prominent cultural trait that unites all Afghans is belief in the concept of honour as central to Afghani life and society (Dupree, 2002: 978); and women are very much bound up in the concept of honour in this society. In Afghanistan, women are frequently considered the "standards by which morality is judged, and they carry the responsibility of passing on the values of the society to younger generations" (Dupree, 2002: 978). Hence, Afghans see limitations on the practices of women as a necessary evil meant to safeguard social status and honour. By extension, one can also make the argument that male masculinity is reinforced by this added power of men in Afghan society to restrict or limit the actions of women based on what men consider appropriate and honourable behaviour. Dishonourable female behaviour can be seen as symbolic of a male's (be it her husband, father, brother) inability to exercise adequate authority and power. A society that measures the social and moral worth of men by the behaviour of the women in their lives undoubtedly illustrates the central position that

¹ This method of fostering national support was utilised by Saddam Hussein in Iraq during his reign.

conceptions of masculinity occupy within this society.

Although more international media coverage and zeal has been devoted to the plight of Afghan women during the rule of the Taliban, it is important to note that Afghan men were also frequently made targets of Taliban-initiated violence. In a culture where men are constructed as being vital to the public sphere, and the capacity to govern is considered a measure of manhood, the extreme experiences of violence coupled with the near inability of the majority of Afghan men to be involved in the political process, has resulted in eroding feelings of masculinity among Afghan men. As a result, as this paper argues, since Afghan society has traditionally been very patriarchal, the cultivation of national identity during this process of transition to democracy will largely depend on how Afghan men will reclaim their masculinity during this period of relative independence. This presents a further challenge to the rights of women in Afghanistan. I argue that because traditional means by which masculinity is asserted are virtually absent or severely restricted within Afghanistan, men will reassert their masculinity through the only means they have observed to be effective in at least the last two decades – violence. This, I argue, at least in the private sphere, will most often take the form of violence directed against women.

Much research has focused on exploring transitional justice from feminist perspectives; and many studies have concluded that theories and processes of transitional justice fail to address or take into account the role and experiences of women (Bell & O'Rourke, 2007: 23). However, there has been little research done on the remasculinisation of men post conflict. Examining the move away from emasculation to remasculinisation – from the point where conflict is contained, to the point where a nation begins the transition to democracy and the rule of law – can be particularly helpful in adding to the literature already available on the dilemmas facing women during the transitional process. The methods by which men may attempt to reclaim their masculinity after a conflict may result in dire consequences for the continued respect for and protection of women's rights within that particular community.

The situation in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime presents a rare glimpse into the many different dilemmas men can face during conflict and how that translates into ideas of *manhood* once that conflict subsides. Given the social and political circumstances that prevail in Afghanistan, Afghan communities are missing the traditional institutions - such as education or employment - by which masculinity is asserted in other societies. Accordingly, in the face of this absence, I argue that Afghani men will reclaim their masculinity through the use of violence.² This violence will manifest itself in two

² Violence has been described as a normalized means by which to solve conflict in most societies (Kaufmann, 1987: 5-9). Indeed, researchers have also maintained that, in particular, men in most societies have been taught to use violence as a method of conflict resolution in situations where they feel powerless or vulnerable. This is one of the reasons why men are, more often than not, the primary participants in violence in the home, schoolyard and streets. Essentially, violence is very much a part of constructions of masculinity (Kaufmann, 1997: 30-37). However, men in Afghanistan will be more likely to resort to violent means of renegotiating their masculinity because it is the only method of successfully attaining power that Afghan society has bore witness to for at least two decades. Furthermore, female-targeted violence is also more immanent in Afghanistan because of the highly patriarchal structure of the society. The inherent need to resort to violence to reassert masculinity by men's feelings of powerlessness, the fact that violence has been seen as the only means of successfully asserting authority and power for the last twenty years,

possible forms, which I refer to as *public* and *private*, or political and domestic.

The first part of this paper discusses some of the most prominent theories of masculinisation, outlining the common or traditional methods by which masculinity is often asserted in most societies. This section also illustrates why I believe that Afghans may have an attraction to violence as a method by which to assert masculinity. Secondly, this analysis demonstrates how masculinisation utilising traditional methods – employment, educative institutions and familial relationships - are either impractical or impossible for Afghan men given the political and social realities present within the state. I argue that violence may be a more probable method of remasculinisation, namely that a strong case for it exists based on Afghan history and the sex/gender system adopted by Afghani society. Lastly, this examination attempts to highlight some of the key challenges that this example of post-conflict remasculinisation may pose for Afghan women and women's rights in Afghanistan.

Theories of Masculinisation

The concept of traditional masculinity has been developed by several sociological and psychological theories. One theory attempts to differentiate between male and female using the "sex/gender system", which can be described as configurations of social relations centred on reproduction and gender division. These configurations, although present in all societies, may vary according to the society's demographics and history (Carrigan et. al, 2002: 111). Two particular aspects of this system that have received considerable attention have been - the division of labour and the structure of power or sexual politics. Lying at the crux of both these frameworks is the subordination of women. Thus, it has often been suggested that the most central feature of masculinity in general is that it empowers men through the subordination of women (Carrigan et. al., 2002: 111). Many authors suggest that research on this subject should not focus on masculinity, in the singular, but rather – *masculinities* (Carrigan et. al., 2002: 112), all hierarchically subordinate to the overarching "hegemonic masculinity" (representing the culturally idealised form of masculinity), which has the ability to enforce a particular definition on all other kinds of masculinity (Carrigan et. al., 2002: 112). Hence, masculinities exist in hierarchical relationships, with the hegemonic masculinity being the most admired and dominant of them all. For most societies this would include an image of masculinity as aggressive, authoritative, courageous and heterosexual. The differential masculinities are considered both psychological, meaning that it affects the types of people men are and become, as well as institutional, achieved through collective practice (Carrigan et. al., 2002: 112).³ This and because Afghanistan represents a highly patriarchal society where women are constantly seen as subordinate to men, male-instituted violence is more likely than not to be the most prominent manner in which masculinity is reasserted after the fall of the Taliban and Afghanistan's transition to democracy.

³ The authors give the example of the British Printing workers as a group that institutionalized masculinity through collective practices. The authors maintain that the compositor's work remains hypermasculine due to practices of

suggests that although there is no one model of masculinity that every man within a society adopts, the hegemonic masculinity model has the tendency to override and impose certain restrictions on all other forms of masculinity that may appear in a particular society. In the Afghan context, this theory supports the idea of agency – in that Afghan men are able to develop and define masculinity for themselves, however there continues to exist an overarching idea of *manhood* that imposes on other masculinities ideas which may subordinate women and support violence. Social definitions of masculinity are, thus, extensions of ideas embedded both within the dynamics of institutions, such as the state, corporations, unions and families, as well as an extension of ideas espoused by individuals. It would be reasonable to assume that if one particular masculinity model, say one that holds violence as central to conceptions of manhood, is institutionalised through decades of practice within any given society, it would eventually become normalised, and would therefore become part of that society's hegemonic masculinity model.

Despite the potency of hegemonic masculinity models it has been suggested that these frameworks are actually quite fluid and often open for reconstruction. Features that may make up a society's model of hegemonic masculinity at one point may not do so at some other point in time. In order to illustrate this shift in hegemonic masculinity, one can examine the frequent expression of masculinity through warfare. Many feminist theorists suggest that war is often described as being inherently masculine, in that men are most often the dominant actors, and that warfare is seen as a practice that protects where men protect the *motherland* – creating a bifurcation between masculine and feminine - from intrusion (Charlesworth and Chinkin, 2000: 128-130). The fact that some societies develop different methods of warfare, for example 'war proper' as opposed to 'terrorism', may be indicative of the fact that each holds a different model of masculinity. In the society that engages in 'terrorism' as a method of warfare, masculinity involves an individual's willingness to annihilate oneself in the process. However, many states have shown a propensity for different methods of warfare throughout time, which indicates that conceptions of manhood and masculinity are fluid and can change. Hence, although violence may be very much part of a masculinity model at present, it is possible to restructure such models so that violence is eventually not seen as masculinising.

Although masculinity models are open to reconstruction and depend on the social and political particularities of a any given society (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 85), sociologists have established a set of contexts within which most men develop their masculinity irrespective of their differing cultures or ethnicities. Traditional methods of asserting masculinity are said to occur within the sphere of work/employment, education, and familial relationships⁴ (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 19-39, 42-55,

driving women out of the trade, marginalizing related labour and processes in which they continued to work, and by maintaining a strong masculine "culture" within the workplace.

⁴ Although it can certainly be argued that the role of these institutions in asserting and constructing masculinity are culturally specific, apart from perhaps education, employment and familial relationships are most certainly spheres where the role of men and women are quite observable as being different and distinct regardless of what culture one belongs to. Women have traditionally been seen as primary caregivers based on their capacity to bear children and

62-79). It is believed that self-identity, and by extension masculinity, is only open to reconstruction when it seems to be in crisis and the previously believed stability of the framework is replaced by doubt or uncertainty (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003: 14). Examination of Afghanistan's social and political conditions clearly demonstrates that these traditional institutions by which masculinity is asserted are either not present or are severely restricted. Experiences of decades of extreme violence, and civil and political unrest - where death has become very unpredictable and state-instituted violence seems arbitrary – has led to a situation where masculinity is continuously being challenged and oppressed.

Violence has become a common attribute of Afghan political culture. Afghanistan emerged as a nation in the late eighteenth century, ruled by a succession of monarchs, though their power was constantly undermined by civil wars and foreign invasions. The state's current borders were defined through a game of rivalry between Russia and Britain, resulting in much of Afghan foreign policy being influenced by powers outside the State. From 1973 to the present time, the Afghan people have lived through continuous civil wars, their rulers continuously being overthrown by a coup or executed by fundamentalists ('Afghanistan and the United Nations,' 2008).⁵ The perpetual violence has had devastating effects on the people of Afghanistan. Almost a million Afghans have perished as a result of the continuous conflict (Grenfell, 2004: 506). Over three million Afghans have been displaced, many fleeing to Pakistan and Iran for refuge after the turmoil in the eighties and nineties (Grenfell, 2004: 506). With the Taliban regime in power, human security was further limited as Afghans were forced to adhere to strict *Shari'a* law erected by the fundamentalist regime, resulting in severe forms of punishment which often involved stoning men and women to death for adultery, and cutting off their hands for thievery (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan, 2008). Exercising power and authority within the political sphere, an area where men have traditionally been seen as dominant, has become synonymous with the practice of violence. Measures of masculinity have become linked with practices of brutality and aggression.

In comparison to reports about violence against women, the oppression of men in Taliban-led Afghanistan has attracted less media attention. While the Taliban were in power, Afghan men very rarely epitomized the commonly accepted images associated with masculinity – men as courageous, strong, daring and rational (Kaufmann, 1987: 3).⁶ Threats of death became prevalent under Taliban rule as men

their 'maternal' instincts, while men's productivity tends to be restricted to wage-earning employment. Men's role as 'heads of household' is augmented by their dominance as wage-earners or 'breadwinners' in most societies. It is undeniable that men generally, in most patriarchal societies, have "traditionally escaped domestic labour, an on average [...] have higher wages, better jobs..." (Kaufmann, 1987: 8-9). Educative institutions have also been included in my analysis because it is a significant means by which gender roles are cemented in any society, hence it can be considered an important institution in the overall construction of gender and 'making of masculinity' (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003: 63-80).

⁵ Also, when the Taliban came into power, they executed both the Communist leader, Dr. Najibullah, as well as all his brothers.

⁶ Although it may be argued that gender and masculinity are socially constructed conceptions, and therefore culturally specific, some theorists have discussed the possibility that conceptions of gender can be reduced to anthropology and

were often arrested arbitrarily, humiliated through public flogging and brutality, and sometimes executed for the most minute of infractions (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Gadoury, 2001: 391-415). At times, it seemed that being a man in Afghanistan seemed to offer little more security than being a woman. Furthermore, if execution by the Taliban was not an imminent threat, death or disfigurement by landmines certainly was. Afghanistan has the largest concentration of landmines worldwide (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2008), with over 700 square kilometres of still-contaminated land (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002). The spontaneity, randomness and complete unpredictability of death instilled a sense of perpetual fear and terror in Afghan males. The arbitrariness of death also threatened the role of men as protectors of their families, particularly protectors of the women in their lives. Women that challenged the idealised model of femininity, as virtually invisible and intellectually and politically subservient, were made targets of cruel practices of brutality that often resulted in death. Defending social status and male honour was no longer considered a right of male relatives, but appropriated by the Taliban in their bid to create the ideal Islamic state. Essentially, for at least the last ten years, “being a man” in Afghanistan meant that you had to seize and maintain power by resorting to violence and subordinating women.

As Afghanistan now makes the transition to democracy, Afghan men have been able to exercise a greater capacity for participation in the political sphere, an area that is generally considered to be masculine. Clausewitz presented a particularly interesting conception of masculinity in *On War*, claiming that de-masculinisation post-conflict occurs mostly as a result of humiliation and loss of male honour, both of which must be avenged and redeemed through acts of war (Dudink et. al, 2004: 4). Later sociological theorists, on the other hand, claim that masculinity may be asserted nonviolently outside the context of war, essentially through familial relationships, education and employment (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 85). However, I argue that since traditional institutions of family, education and employment do not exist, or exist in a limited capacity, current social circumstances in Afghanistan do not allow men to reclaim their masculinity without resorting to excessive violence. Accordingly, Afghan men must seek out other methods by which to remasculinise. Judging from their political history, these methods will likely involve some form of violence, be it public as in the context of war or other forms of conflict, or in the private sphere where women often become targets.

Absence of or Restrictions on Traditional Methods of Asserting Masculinity

In Afghan society, it is generally agreed that men are meant to be the primary wage earners, while

male physiology. Goldberg asserts that an inherent disposition towards hierarchy compels men to engage in those behaviours that will guarantee their domination in male-female relationships (Goldberg, 1975: 70). As such, if there is such a conception of “universal female subordination” (Lee and Daly, 1987: 30) then the construction of masculinity is quite similar in most societies.

women are considered the primary caregivers and homemakers (Shalinsky, 1986: 324). Of course the confinement of women to the private sphere was further compounded by the numerous restrictions placed by the Taliban on the ability of Afghan women to be productive outside the home. Regardless, given the current political and social realities in Afghanistan, observance of these traditional gender roles has become extremely problematic. Formal regulated employment outside the home is scarce, and although zero percent of Afghan women stated employment as their top human rights concern, work most certainly was a concern for at least 14% of Afghan men (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2002). Despite these statistics, women's organisations that have moved into the state have been industriously providing women with increased opportunities to participate in the work force, but have done very little by way of providing the same opportunities for men. This has resulted in a great deal of resentment among Afghan men (Abirafeh, 2007: 8-9). Masculinity is most definitely threatened under these conditions as traditional gender roles become reversed and men are considered less important contributors to the economic successes of the family. One particularly interesting illustration of how men are attempting to challenge this threat to their masculinity is by their efforts to preserve their sense of pride by refusing food assistance despite having concerns about family income (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2002). With the added assistance of women's aid organisations that have moved into the country, women are more readily becoming the 'head of households' as they acquire the position of primary breadwinners. International initiatives make it harder for men to assert a role they have historically become accustomed to, in part because women are given special attention and treatment. As employment is scarce, and men more frequently find themselves in the role of homemaker, rather than primary breadwinner, masculinity becomes threatened by women who are now appropriating traditionally male roles. Hence, employment in Afghanistan seems to be a site where men are further emasculated, rather than a site where masculinity can be championed.

Another means by which masculinisation traditionally occurs is through educational practices. Schools provide perhaps the most significant environment within which gender roles are established; "schooling processes form gendered identities, marking out 'correct' or 'appropriate' styles of being." (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 63). Although the Taliban had very little interest in educating the people of Afghanistan, in a recent study 12% of Afghans consider education the top priority for human rights initiatives within the country (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2002). When not ranked in terms of importance, respondents chose education as a human rights concern more frequently than any other concern, at 24% of the time (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2002). Although the right to education has vastly improved in comparison to when the Taliban was in power, many Afghan children cannot access basic education. Almost all children residing in rural areas have no access to schools (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Access to education in urban areas has also been tenuous. In the years after the fall of the Taliban

regime, terrorism was very much a cause for concern in Afghanistan. Since oppositional groups often made teachers and students targets of violence, almost 100,000 students that were previously attending school in 2005 remained home in 2006 (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Teachers and students endured at least 200 attacks perpetrated by warlords and insurgent groups in the country between 2005 and 2006, and at least seventeen teachers and educational officials were assassinated during the same time frame (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Direct attacks on schools destroyed infrastructure and forced these schools to shut down. Increased shutdowns resulted in a 'ripple effect', causing other schools in the vicinity to do the same out of fear that they may become the next targets (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Although women were barred from education by the Taliban and only men were considered rational and capable enough to be worthy of educating, the virtual absence of schools during this time effectively guaranteed that men were unable to live up to these characterisations of masculinity.

Although the ousting of the Taliban has resulted in over 5.8 million children being able to attend school (Straziuso, 2008), the fact that education was historically developed as a domain to be accessed only by men, and the fact that the majority of the students now attending schools are women, continues to pose problems for education-related masculinisation in Afghanistan. Traditionally, Afghan culture has depicted men as more rational than women, and therefore more competent in matters of knowledge and learning. Allowing women access to education challenges this presumption and causes further crises in masculinity in a society that generally believes women to be irrational and feeble-minded. Balancing the functions and responsibilities of women with that of men may be perceived as assaulting the sensibilities of a society that has historically been extremely patriarchal. Additionally, because schools are virtually inaccessible to the majority of Afghan men living in rural areas, there exists little by way of establishments that institutionalise traditional gender roles. Perhaps for some rights activists this may be considered a positive consequence of being unable to access educational institutions, particularly for a society that should aim to prevent any cementing of societal norms which may put women in an inferior position. Nonetheless, the inability of males to assert their masculinity through school-instituted gender norms may mean that more aggressive methods of masculinisation may be pursued. As such, not having access to schools may, particularly in societies that have shown a propensity for resorting to violence, prove to be more detrimental to the rights of women.

The traditional family in most Western societies used to consist of a male breadwinner, whose principal task was to work outside the home and earn enough to support his family, and a female homemaker, whose primary task was to manage the home and look after the children. However, late modernity has brought with it many challenges to the traditional family unit. In particular, the distinctions between male and female roles are less pronounced. Women are increasingly entering the workforce, while males are more often assuming the roles traditionally assigned to women. The ability of women to juggle both sets of roles, those of the private realm (the home) and those of the public realm (work), has

led to a disintegration of standard gender roles. The responsibility of the man as breadwinner and father has been shattered by the ability of women to manage both roles, that of caretaker, as well as that of wage earner – which begs the question “do we need fathers at all?” (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 43). The imposition of such standards on societies that have historically adopted a framework centred on the idea of men and women having very distinct and different functions in society may be considered a threat to that society’s model of masculinity.

The family unit is extremely important in Afghan culture. Afghans do not consider human rights as individual entitlements; rather, they understand such rights from a family or community perspective (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2002: 23). Although the family is considered an integral component of Afghan identity, emerging issues have destabilised familial relationships, and have thus been perceived as a threat to male masculinity. The traditional view of the family, an institution within which men assert their masculinity through non-violent means – such as disciplinarian, protector, and primary wage earner – has become endangered by both the constant and arbitrary demonstrations of political violence, as well as the influx of various rights organisations.

Working in the public sphere allowed men to develop a “patriarchal, authoritarian masculinity within the home” (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 43). However, with the inability of Afghan men to acquire employment, the prerequisites for developing this level of masculinity can no longer be acquired. Men’s participation in the family unit, as well as their image as the powerful ‘father’ and ‘husband’, is further threatened by a reconstitution of gender roles, where women are viewed as new ‘heads of household’ by virtue of their earning potential. This new image of the ‘father’ as “pitiable, marginal” (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 45) and inferior to the mother serves to further emasculate Afghan men and delegitimises their authority within the family unit.

Along with this inability to develop authoritarian masculinities in the home, remasculinisation in the Afghan context becomes further impeded by the extreme violence prevalent in the country, which renders the family unit vulnerable and susceptible to destruction. Traditional images of the ‘father’ envision him as ‘protector’ of the family. However, the inability of Afghan men to curb the excessive political violence ever-present in Afghan society most definitely compromises his function as ‘defender and protector’ of the family.

Moreover, the human rights organisations and activists flooding the country are appropriating the role of fathers as primary teachers of morality. Media and activists are continually imposing upon the population new ideological models which emphasise equalising the rights of women and which are often perceived as reflecting Western rhetoric and foreign values. Disciplining of women and children, traditionally a matter left in the hands of the male head-of-household, is being severely restricted by the myriad human rights organisations moving into the country. This is, of course, not to say that the respect for women and the rule of law is inappropriate or wrong, but that such impositions result in crises in self-

identity among the men and women that comprise a patriarchal society, where men and women are ordered hierarchically. By assuming responsibilities that were traditionally fulfilled by the father figure, these organisations are threatening the traditional family unit in Afghan society.

Despite concerns with family, education and employment, a relative majority (40%) of Afghans considered peace and security the top human rights concern (Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2002: 23). Even if one was to argue that the traditional means of asserting one's masculinity were very much available in Afghanistan, the instability caused by the lack of peace and security, and the constant fear of death would most certainly undercut the existence of these institutions. The threat and use of violence, whether by occupying forces, militants or insurgents, has become an every day occurrence for Afghans. Judith Butler suggests that societies that are exposed to long periods of violence, coupled with the periods of mourning that frequently go along with it, often find a "basis for community in these conditions" as a result of our sheer level of human vulnerability to such circumstances (Butler, 2004: 19). Perhaps violence has become an important facet of Afghan political life, and thus, by extension, Afghan masculinity. This possibility may be further reinforced by the reality that other traditional methods of asserting masculinity are either absent or restricted in the Afghan context. Although it is generally accepted that remasculinisation through traditional methods such as education or employment is not benign – in that it often results in pushing women out of the workforce, marginalising them in education and asserting control over the female body – it is possible that reasserting masculinity through these means may not result in the excessive physical violence which may possibly ensue if these methods remain unavailable.

Asserting Masculinity through Violence & its Effects on Women's Rights

I argue that as a consequence of employment, familial relationships and education being severely restricted or virtually unavailable to Afghan men, and because power and authority have traditionally been exercised through the use of violence, men in Afghanistan will resort to violence in order to assert their masculinity. As a result of Afghanistan's violent history, and because Afghan society accepts a hegemonic model of masculinity that affirms the dominance of men by subordinating women, masculine violence will express itself in two key ways; through the perpetration of violence on the bodies of Afghan women in the private sphere, and through the use of violence as a political tool in the public sphere. Since the self-identity of men has become fractured within the home, and because the majority of men (particularly those residing in rural areas) are in effect prohibited from participating in political life, the private sphere can definitely be considered the most important arena within which this crisis in identity and attempts at remasculinisation will be reconciled. As human rights groups filter into Afghanistan, and women's rights are more readily defended in the public sphere, the home is the only domain in which men can, and will,

institute traditional Afghan models of hegemonic masculinity, one in which women are often considered subordinate, and where female behaviour relates directly to social status and male honour.

Tocquevillian philosophy has posited that there is a correlation between honour and violence, claiming that a propensity for violence increases with the need to defend one's honour, and is usually fuelled by feelings of insecurity (Tocqueville, 1863: 281). He found that when honour was "at the zenith of its power, its rules are at their strangest, apparently the further they are from common sense, the better they are obeyed." (Dearinger, 2004: 26). Based on the Tocquevillian model, male honour can be resuscitated through the use of violence. Such violence, at least within the private sphere, will most probably be directed at the target that is believed to have caused the greatest breakdown of paternalistic honour within the family unit: the woman. Punishment and brutalisation of women that contravene gender norms, can serve the purpose of reaffirming male honour and reasserting one's masculinity within the family unit through the subordination and inferiorisation of the female – a practice that most Afghan men have grown accustomed to because it is deeply embedded in their patriarchal culture.

In her article on Afghan cultural heritage and national identity, Dupree argues that Afghan identity has historically been and continues to be centred on the notion of protecting the homeland against foreign occupation and threats (Dupree, 2002: 978). Additionally, Dupree also mentions how the emergence of fanaticism and the creation of an atmosphere of intolerance and oppression have caused the deepest resentment among Afghans. It is commonly believed that the imposition of radical views of Islamic morality on the Afghan people was a practice that the Taliban achieved with help from forces outside the country itself (Dupree, 2002: 980). The practices of the Taliban further cement the deep resentment that Afghans have towards foreign forces attempting to control the political life within their country. Considering that much of Afghanistan's history has converged around the need to prevent foreign invasion, and taking into account that protecting the homeland has become an important facet of national identity which bridges the ethnic and tribal divides within the country, participation in political life will become extremely important as Afghanistan moves towards greater democracy. As a result, it is reasonable to expect that Afghan men will utilise the political sphere, an area that has too often been the cause of their distress and oppression, as a means by which to assert greater power and authority. Among much of the elite, active participation and authority in the public sphere define the essence of manhood in Afghan culture.

History provides many examples by which masculinity has been articulated through the state (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 53). Articulation of masculinity through the state generally involves practices that are linked to national identity, cultural belonging and citizenship. Contemporary media images have developed modern expressions of masculinity through status apparatuses taking the form of "fundamentalisms, ethno-nationalisms and ethnic cleansing." (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 53). Liberal conceptions of the state designate it as "an impartial adjudicator between competing interests, for example, between men and women, and hence as a legitimate source of power and means of violence."

(Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 53). However, it is important to note that throughout much of Afghanistan's violent history, the majority of the conflict that has plagued the country has been the result of extremist rejection of the legitimacy of a bona fide state apparatus (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan, 2000).⁷ Much of the historical violence in Afghanistan has been the product of fundamentalist groups refusing to comply with the authority of the state. It would seem imprudent to believe that this may no longer be a real and probable possibility in post-conflict Afghanistan.

Foreign occupation continues to pose real threats for collective masculinisation by means of political participation and involvement in the public sphere. Attempts by foreign occupiers to control fanaticism in Afghanistan have resulted in Afghan men being further emasculated and depicted as unable to exercise control over their state and people. Through the processes of Othering (Said, 1978)⁸ used by the West, Afghanistan's population is erroneously depicted as uncivilised and incapable of managing and governing themselves (Stabile, 2005: 766). Human agency continues to be restricted, and the inability of the population to structure and produce their own state institutions without interference from foreign forces further erodes their conceptions of masculinity. Therefore, for the elites that do, in fact, have access to the public sphere, their ability to exercise power and authority, and thereby assert their masculinity, is severely restricted by foreign pressure and occupation.

The West, however, continues to feel that their intrusion in Afghanistan is only aimed at assisting the country's transition to democracy. There is a common conviction among most Western aid organisations and States that are participating in 'keeping peace in Afghanistan' that truly altruistic objectives lie at the heart of their actions. In their minds, foreign occupation is necessary in order to develop sustainable economic and social infrastructures within the transitioning country. There exists a deep-rooted Western belief that "keeping people busy with economic activities [will] divert their violent capabilities" (Cramer and Goodhand, 2003: 133). As Cramer and Goodhand (2003) note, this is also a common rhetoric that pervades post-conflict reconstruction, whereby theorists claim that economic development will play a significant role in consolidating peace. Economics in post-conflict Afghanistan proves to be problematic in relation to this belief.

Two decades of violence have left Afghanistan on the brink of economic failure – "State institutions were [left] dysfunctional, and the society and economy fragmented" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002: 21). A large part of Afghanistan's economy depends on the cultivation of opium. Although President Karzai has issued an official ban on the production of opium, the provinces that produce 93% of the total poppy production in the country disregard the ban (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,

⁷ When the Taliban took control in Afghanistan they executed the former Communist Leader, Dr. Najibullah along with his four brothers. Any opposition to the rule of Taliban faced swift execution, often exercised in public spaces for all to bear witness.

⁸ *Orientalism*, Said's influential piece about how the West attempts to control the East by attributing to them characteristics that are often inferiorising, describes in depth the practice of Othering as a means by which to render the East more comprehensible and manageable.

2002: 6). Economic restructuring and development in Afghanistan is severely hindered by the fact that much of the poppy production is handled and managed by regional warlords, who use violence and fear to erect order and control the population (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002: 12).⁹ Such instances seem to suggest that violence is still a very prominent aspect of how power is exercised within Afghan society. Furthermore, the fact that non-state sanctioned violence, initiated by warlords, is seen as largely successful, in that it has been successful in controlling much of the population outside the major centres, there may be increased feelings of hopelessness among the rural population, particularly men, as warlords have now replaced the Taliban in instilling constant and continual fear among Afghans. Despite the fact that the Taliban are no longer in power, the oppression of Afghan men remains, and threats to their masculinity have yet to cease. In these sorts of circumstances, masculinity cannot effectively be asserted in the public sphere, or at least not as easily as it can be in the private sphere.

Since the majority of the rural population will probably have little opportunity to participate actively in political life, as politics in Afghanistan has often been the confined to the elites living in the major centres in Afghanistan, and because political life in the rural areas is largely dominated by regional warlords, men in rural areas will most probably assert their masculinity through methods that are more readily accessible. In the face of poverty, lack of employment, deplorable living conditions, absence of educative institutions, the breakdown of the family unit, it seems probable that remasculinisation in post-conflict Afghanistan, at least among those men that have little access to political life, will mostly occur within the home. Since violence has historically been perceived as a viable means through which to exercise power and authority, I argue that attempts at remasculinisation within the private sphere will manifest itself through violence directed at the most readily available targets – women and children.

Popular resistance to endowing women with equal rights to those of men has been common throughout Afghan history. Although politicisation of women's rights was evident from the nineteenth century, when Amir Abd al-Rahman Khan ruled Afghanistan, when King Amanullah attempted to liberate women by enforcing Western norms upon Afghan society, violent opposition ensued and led to the implementation of more conservative measures (Abirafeh, 2007). History has demonstrated that episodes of violence and conflict have occurred every time a ruler or government attempts to emancipate Afghan women (Abirafeh, 2007). After more than a century of similar efforts to liberate women, and subsequent violent backlash, it is likely that contemporary efforts may produce the much the same results. Essentially, it is highly unlikely that human rights organisations can suddenly impose values of women's rights and equality upon a society that has traditionally illustrated an aversion to these sorts of ideas. This is not to insinuate that women's rights can never become appreciated or respected in Afghanistan – but that any arbitrary and sudden imposition of these values may only be seen as suspect by a society that has every

⁹ Warlords taxed opium farmers on the total amount of opium sold in return for protection in provinces controlled by these warlords.

reason to be cynical of foreign interventions and intrusions into the social and political life of their country.

In fact, despite the increased influx of humanitarian organisations and women's rights groups that have flooded the country, respect for the rights of women is still very much absent in Afghan society. According to Amnesty International, discriminatory practices institutionalised in Afghanistan preceding and during the war have not disappeared, and in some cases have grown stronger (Amnesty International, 2005; Abirafeh, 2007: 120). It is common for Afghan women to become targets of domestic violence. Remasculinisation within the family unit expresses itself in the treatment of women as property; hence, forced and child marriages are still prevalent within Afghan society (United Nations News Centre, 2005). Male masculinity is further reinforced as a predominately male police force disregards and dismisses female complaints of domestic violence (Abirafeh, 2007: 121). It is, thus, common for Afghan women to claim that they felt more protected while the Taliban were in power (Abirafeh, 2007: 122); and as such, these patterns of violence can be seen as associated with post-conflict remasculinisation, more so than remnants of Taliban culture. Abirafeh states that these new patterns of excessive violence directed at females may be the result of years of frustration, trauma, and economic hardship that male family members were made to endure under the Taliban regime (Abirafeh, 2007: 122).

Masculinising violence can present countless problems for the protection of women in Afghanistan. First, with the absence of a state apparatus through which violence can be mitigated, non-state sanctioned violence will promote the development of male-centred transitional justice processes. Essentially, those aspects of justice that are the most important to women will be disregarded. This may include designating issues of discrimination, domination, and improvement of physical, social and legal security, as unimportant; while issues of electoral or governmental arrangements and divisions of territory are given primary importance (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007: 25). According to Bell and O'Rourke (2007: 25), allowing male biases to have increased influence at the negotiating table during transitional justice will only result in women transforming from "pawns of war" to "pawns of peace", with little change in their overall power in relation to men within the context of transitional justice processes.

In addition, deteriorating safety in the home presents impediments to Afghan women's full enjoyment of their human rights (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2004; Abirafeh, 2007: 121). Afghan men and women differently characterise violence in the private sphere. The majority of Afghan men rarely describe violence that occurs within the context of intimacy as 'violence'. Additionally, the routinisation of such violence has resulted in women thinking that domestic violence is within the boundaries of normal gender relations and thus should not be considered an abuse of women's human rights (Abirafeh, 2007: 121). Amnesty international indicates that most Afghan women consider violence to be a normal occurrence in the course of their lives (Abirafeh, 2007: 121). In order to safeguard male honour and masculinity, female violence is often denied by and within the family. The invisibility of domestic violence is further facilitated by the social stigma that is attached to its existence, which discourages women from

actively speaking out against it (Abirafeh, 2007: 121). Hence, much of the male-instigated violence against women has and will continue to take place with impunity. Furthermore, both Afghan men and women perceive this violence as being within a model of masculinity that has come to be widely accepted and normalised.

Lastly, although the presence of international organisations centred on the protection of Afghan women are integral to the safeguarding of women's rights, the fact that they seem to be more actively promoting the job security of women over men – in a society which possesses a strong patriarchal structure and hierarchically organises men above women – can be detrimental to the overall safety of Afghan women. Afghan society adopts a hegemonic masculinity model where men are principal wage earners, and the fact that employment for women is more readily secured than employment for men disrupts this delicate balance between gender roles in this society. Therefore, it is likely that the liberal model that is espoused by the West may not be the most promising to secure peace and stability in Afghanistan. Hence, human rights organisations need to rethink their mode of assistance, and need to structure their aid in a way that causes little disruption to the organisation of gender roles within the host society without compromising the human rights of Afghan women. It is possible that this may not be entirely feasible, as ensuring that women's rights gain prominence and command respect will certainly disrupt the culturally idealised conceptions of gender roles currently adopted by Afghan society. Nonetheless, aid organisations must ensure that they do not overlook the significance of the roles that men generally occupy within this traditionally patriarchal society. In order to ensure the continued security of women, attention also needs to be directed at helping men recover from the protracted conflict that has plagued the region. This may be achieved by directing resources to the development of educative and employment institutions and the transfer of power to men as 'heads of household'. Although aid organisations must persist in ensuring that women's rights continue to be respected during this transition process what must be recognised is that the renegotiation of gender roles may need to occur gradually over a period of time. It is likely that any immediate reconstitution of gender roles may further inflame the crisis in masculinity that Afghan men are already undergoing. It is very possible that these traditional institutions of asserting masculinity may not develop in a manner that is identical to the West – in that women may still be subordinate to men within familial relationships and men may still be the sole wage earners – but in a society that has always been extremely patriarchal this sort of development can be seen as somewhat expected. This is, of course, not to say that women should be eternally restricted from participating in the public sphere or from attaining a status equal to that of men. However, such developments can still be seen as somewhat beneficial as they may reduce some women's experiences of violence.

As Afghanistan attempts to resuscitate itself after nearly two decades of continuous conflict and turmoil, the absence or restricted presence of traditional institutions by which masculinity can be non-

violently asserted has resulted in masculinity being achieved through the use of violence. This violence has expressed itself within the public domain predominately by non-state actors attempting to assert power over rural populations, and has also expressed itself within the private domain, as violence against women. Although numerous studies have concluded that females are generally absent from transitional justice processes, post-conflict masculinisation provides but one forum by which scholars can more thoroughly evaluate the effects of transitional justice processes on the women residing in that particular region of the world. Within the context of Afghanistan, studies of remasculinisation can offer a new perspective on how women's rights may be hindered by the reconstruction process as men attempt to reclaim their 'manhood' after experiences of longstanding conflict.

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