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# Misogyny in 'post-war' Afghanistan: the changing frames of sexual and gender-based violence

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## ABSTRACT

Although the US and NATO invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was ideologically justified under the banner of democracy and women's rights, the latter issue has been completely forgotten within the public sphere since then. As the war has officially ended in Afghanistan, new forms of misogyny and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have arisen. The 'post-war' Afghan context presents an institutional normalization of violence, favouring a culture of rape and impunity. The changing frames of violence against women are widely related to the political situation of the country: while public attention is focused on peace agreements, women's issues are relegated to banalities and depicted as 'everyday' news. Meanwhile, new frames of SGBV appear as body part mutilation within marriage, forced prostitution, and increasing domestic violence, partly due to the growing consumption of opium but also to the perpetuation of powerful warlords in state structures. This article draws on gender studies to analyse the current misogynist culture in 'post-war' Afghanistan, framing the new forms of violence induced by successive armed conflicts. It relies on interviews conducted in 2013 in Afghanistan; and on secondary sources, mostly taken from the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and Human Rights Watch reports.

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## Introduction

As we are writing these lines, various protests have been taking place in Kabul, following the brutal murder of Farkhunda, highly mediatised as a failure of the US-led coalition in Afghanistan but also, as evidence that a misogynist culture endorsed by the state institutions persists (Malikyar, 2015). It is far from being the first time that women have been politically active against the daily violence they suffer from; since the Soviet invasion of the country in the 1980s, they have struggled to end the oppression and instrumentalisation of their bodies. However, it is only with the well-known Taliban regime and the subsequent invasion of NATO that women's issues came to the centre stage of global politics (Zulfacar, 2006).

Based on an 'epistemic violence', Afghan women<sup>1</sup> have been represented in the world as 'gendered slaves in need of "saving" by the West' (Ayotte & Husain, 2005, p. 113), without taking into account their resistance and the diverse roles they can perform in a 'multi-ethnic and multi-tribal society' (Zulfacar, 2006, p. 27). The 2001 US and NATO invasion of Afghanistan was ideologically justified under the banner of democracy and women's rights; however, the latter issue has been completely ignored within the public sphere since then. Women's position in society remains marginal and peace seems to be nothing

more than a façade to their everyday experiences as they express concern over increasing levels of violence they are facing (Abirafeh, 2009).

Historically, women's issues have been at the centre stage of policies and political struggles in Afghanistan, trapped in between different conceptions of modernity, nationalism and cultural conception of their bodies (Kandiyoti, 2005). Although 'women have made advances in constitutional rights and political participation and representation' (CPHD, 2011, p. 4), Afghanistan has a Gender Inequality Index of 0.705, positioning the country as 149th out of 152 countries in 2013, indicating that disparities between women and men are still alarming, and demonstrate that gender policies derived from international aid have not been successful (Fluri, 2011b; UNPD, 2013). As the war has officially ended, new forms of misogyny and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have arisen. The 'post-war' context presents an institutional normalization of violence, favouring a culture of rape and impunity. New frames of SGBV appear as female genital cutting within marriage, self-immolation, forced prostitution, acid attacks, body part mutilations perpetrated by husbands, and increasing domestic violence partly due to the growing consumption of opium, but also to the presence of powerful warlords in government institutions.

This article analyses the current misogynist culture in 'post-war' Afghanistan, framing new forms of violence induced by successive armed conflicts. It addresses the 'continuum of violence' (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006; Ayub et al., 2009) that women are facing, demonstrating that political institutions foster a misogynist culture that varies in function of the socio-political situation of the country where sometimes, 'peaceful areas' mean higher levels of SGBV against women. It demonstrates that institutional misogyny is built upon the complex history of conflicts, wars and foreign invasions where power over women's bodies has been politically defined through the supremacy of gunmen<sup>2</sup> (HRW, 2015).

The following article is divided as such: the first part explains the methodology employed; the second part contextualizes SGBV in Afghanistan, exploring the conceptual framework of analysis and specifying the crucial historical periods that have been marked by successive conflicts. The third part engages in the understanding of the changing frames of violence, mostly against women due to the 'state-sponsored misogyny' (Fluri, 2008) built throughout uninterrupted foreign invasions and civil wars since the 1980s. We study the narratives of women that have been victims of SGBV during these periods of instability, exemplifying the political oppression that favoured rape culture. This part also addresses the complex intertwining between women's rights and the political situation, demonstrating that SGBV against women has increased in the 'post-war' setting instead of decreasing despite the massive (and weakly oriented) inversion of the international community in the reconstruction of the country. The fourth part insists on the ongoing resistance of Afghan women throughout decades of conflict by briefly reflecting on local initiatives that have been trying to overcome the misogynistic culture that persists in the country, preventing women's bodies from flourishing (Butler, 2009; Fluri, 2011a).

## Methodology

The methodology employed in this article is twofold: on the one hand, we ground the analysis on primary sources, relying on interviews conducted in 2013 in Afghanistan by Lida Ahmad<sup>3</sup>; and, on the other hand, we take on secondary sources to complete our study. As for the secondary sources, we mostly base our writing on reports taken from the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) as they are the most comprehensive in this regard. These reports are also confronted with the recent literature on SGBV in Afghanistan. Although RAWA is one among many organisations<sup>4</sup> that advocate for women's rights, our decision to make it a priority for our analysis relies on its organisational and historical background with regards to SGBV in the country, but also for its strong position against misogyny and its political reproduction in the country. In that sense, we consider RAWA reports to be insightful for the purpose of this article, based on the historical consistency in reporting SGBV and the commitment of their members to secularism and feminism.

With regards to the primary sources, the field research consisted of conducting in-depth interviews in the city of Kabul, covering the life experiences of 40 victims of SGBV<sup>5</sup>; 20 women from the civil war

period<sup>6</sup> and 20 women from the 'post-war' setting.<sup>7</sup> In June 2013, two districts of Kabul, Share-e-Kona (district one) and Afshar (district five), were selected to carry out the interviews with the 20 women and girls who were sexually assaulted during the civil war. Share-e-Kona was selected for the research because it has been harshly affected by war and Afshar was also prioritised for study given that widespread violence, including SGBV, occurred during a three-day massacre when Ittihad,<sup>8</sup> Jamiat<sup>9</sup> and Shura-e Nazar<sup>10</sup> launched military assaults in February 1993.

Another 20 women were interviewed as SGBV victims during the 'post-war' period as they were surviving in safe houses<sup>11</sup> in Kabul run by Women for Women and Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA). The women interviewed are not only from Kabul, but rather most of them arrived to the safe houses from other provinces: they are victims of different forms of SGBV and found refuge in the safe houses. The age of the women interviewed ranges between 13 and 45 years old and most of them presently have very low levels of literacy and only four of them have accessed higher education. The recollection of information was not recorded because of the enormous sensitivity of the issues discussed in the interviews: notes on paper were preferred. All the interviews were designed in Persian. In this article, we analyse some of these life stories (and related field notes) to assert our argument on the consolidation of misogyny through war and its further institutionalization.

## Misogyny and SGBV in Afghanistan: an overview

### *Historical context*

Conflict and unrest erupted in Afghanistan when 'The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan' (PDPA<sup>12</sup>), with the support of Soviet Union, led a bloody coup in April 1978 (Dupree, 1980; Runion, 2007). The conflict further escalated in December 1979 when Soviet Union troops invaded Afghanistan and were confronted by resistance groups highly supported by the US. Although some sources confirm that the US has been financing Afghan Islamic Parties<sup>13</sup> since the 1950s with arms and logistical support<sup>14</sup> (Jones, 2013), it became systematic during the 1980s.

In April 1992 the Islamic parties called the *Mujahideen* took over power in Kabul after the Soviet-backed regime collapsed and war spread throughout the country, as the *Mujahideen* were unable to establish a stable government in Afghanistan. The Taliban<sup>15</sup> emerged from Kandahar in 1994 and by September 1996, they seized Kabul as *Mujahideen* leaders escaped mostly to the North of the country.

The US and other Western countries officially preferred to be silent about the Taliban regime; however the US administration, because of its political and economic interests, secretly tried to negotiate with the Taliban (Rashid, 2000). Eventually, the 9/11 attacks officially gave the US and its allies an 'opportunity' to attack Afghanistan; within a month, the US and the UK had dissolved the Taliban regime.

Soon after the Taliban collapsed, the US-led coalition tried to establish a new government in Afghanistan based on their alliance with the *Mujahideen*. Thus, *Mujahideen* leaders had a major role in the Bonn Conference of December 2001, where the transitional government was formed. At that point, the US installed the warlords in power, pretending to achieve democracy. The crimes, atrocities and particularly VAW that these groups committed during the civil war were simply ignored by NATO's occupation forces. The *Mujahideen* received key positions in government, dominating the majority of seats in Parliament. These circumstances provided a golden opportunity for Afghan warlords to establish impunity for one another. Consequently, justice died for the Afghan people.

### *SGBV, war and misogyny*

In the fieldwork conducted in 2013, we found that SGBV in Afghanistan is currently interpreted in two ways: 'legitimate' and 'non-legitimate'. 'Legitimate' types of sexual violence are those forms that are legitimized within tradition and religion in the context of marriage. Such instances include forced marriage, child marriage, *baad*,<sup>16</sup> *baedal*<sup>17</sup> and rape within marriage. Although these acts are barred according to Afghan civic law, they are broadly legitimised within Afghan traditions. 'Non-legitimate'

forms of sexual violence are objugated by traditional culture, customs and religion, and include rape, gang rape and forced prostitution. These types are generally not accepted within Afghan customs but occur frequently during war and in fact, are still occurring (Ahmad, 2013).

Sexual violence during conflicts is the result of a patriarchal ideology portraying women as men's honour where men must protect women: 'Women are presented as female embodiments of their communities, and their honour is diminished by sexual violence and tied to that of their community' (Gerecke, 2010, p. 147). Afghanistan is composed of many different ethnic groups, each of which has their own culture. Abirafeh insists on the centrality of ethnicity in Afghan identity: 'Contrary to common understandings of patriarchy in Muslim contexts, patriarchy in Afghanistan is more tribal than Islamic' (2009, p. 24). Similarly to other patriarchal societies, gender order is shaped by socio-cultural factors largely based on women's role as keepers of family honour. By sexually assaulting a female member of the community, the whole community feels humiliated. Thus, femininity is the representation of men's honour, making women more vulnerable in wartime. As Odoemene argues, '[...] "femininity" is traditionally associated with protection, peacefulness, and life-giving, while "masculinity" is associated with protecting, warring, and killing. Such associations render women and girls particularly vulnerable to rape as a weapon of warfare' (2011, p. 229).

As argued by Suk and Skjelsbæk, it has finally been recognized that SGBV has been used as a weapon of war and that it is both an effect and cause of misogyny (2010, pp. 1, 2). In that sense, we claim that successive armed conflicts have exacerbated SGBV against women and have crystallized institutional forms of misogyny. We understand misogyny as not only a hate and aversion of women, but also as a complex ideological and political system that contributes to unbalancing power relations and at times generates high levels of violence in almost all cultures (Bosh & Ferrer Pérez, 2000; Cazés & Huerta Rojas, 2005). Misogyny is sustained on the perceived natural 'inferiority' of women and is related to the continuum of violence in different social structures that has impacts on gender interrelations; and in these structures, hierarchical power is reflected, generally with preference to men and discrimination towards women (Bosh & Ferrer, 2003). Consequently, with weakness of law, wartime, and warlords' domination of politics, the misogyny idea becomes stronger, putting Afghan women at high risk.

## Changing frames of violence

As the Taliban have represented institutional VAW in collective imaginary and in the rhetoric that legitimized the invasion of Afghanistan on the basis of 'perceived misogyny within Islam' (Ayub et al., 2009, p. 12), important matters have been left aside. The erroneous focus on Islam and Afghan culture as homogeneous categories and fundamentally violent traits has hampered the important political problems that foster SGBV in the country. A recent report of HRW underlines this as problematic:

In the years since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the failure of the Afghan government and its foreign allies to adequately establish the rule of law within institutions such as the courts, army, and police has undermined all gains. Corruption is rampant in virtually all Afghan institutions; [...] The ongoing insurgency led by the Taliban has generated considerable insecurity [...] All these factors, coupled with the entrenchment of existing power structures, have contributed to impunity for those with guns and power. (2015, p. 11)

The occupation of the country by foreigners and the 'failure of the aid apparatus' (Abirafeh, 2009, p. 145) to consolidate political institutions based on the rule of law have presented intrinsic difficulties in the post-war setting. Afghanistan is facing serious problems with regards to democracy, gender inter-relations and healing processes not without also recognizing the resilient power shown by organized civil society<sup>18</sup> (Malikyar, 2015).

For a lot of women in Afghanistan, war is not really over but rather its face has changed; experiencing backlashes in women's rights as a vacuum is created by the de-structuration of militarized masculinities. This has resulted in the conversion of violence during armed conflict into violence in the private sphere, constructing new and more complex forms, including domestic and opium-related violence. Most of the forms of violence we address in this section relate to the evolution of the political situation as direct consequences of years of war, understanding the impact of 'dislocations' between femininities

and masculinities that have led to 'normative and moral crisis' due to radical social and political transformations (Kandiyoti, 2005).

Women's bodies continue to be the 'prime sites of contestation' (Fluri, 2011b, p. 524) for international and national political gains; always prone to 'threats and attacks by conservative forces and insurgents' (HRW, 2015, p. 10). Exploring the political power of gunmen and the militarization of society is therefore crucial. The unaddressed structural factors lead us to examine the changing frames of violence from the invasion by the Soviet Union until the current period, known as 'post-war'. We first explore the construction of a rape culture through the political circumstances of war with an emphasis on the lived experiences of women. Secondly, we look at the current political situation that contributes to the perpetuation of state-sponsored misogyny and increasing diversification of the forms of violence.

### *The consolidation of misogyny through war*

Misogyny in Afghanistan does not only depend on patriarchal customs or traditional conducts. These are elements of the answer as institutional violence also has its roots in the pre-existing patriarchal culture that, prior to wars, were favouring male domination over the political sphere. The social impact of war and occupation exacerbated these cultural constructions of 'classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) and, we argue that the successive wars since the Soviet Union invasion have had a huge impact on the configuration of masculinities and femininities and provoked a fertile ground for the instrumentalisation of women's bodies in the aftermath.

There are also explicit concomitants of the corporeal body in relation to politics. The corporeal body is a site upon which politics can act. Politics can make one's corporeal body more secure or less secure; the corporeal body is what situates subjects in relation to power and to others and what enables the formation of the subject. One's corporeal body is precisely what makes one vulnerable to violence, power and subjugation (McCardell, 2001). As the feminine body is directly related to the symbolic and real reproduction of the nation, the control over the body and the morality attached to it reveal its necessity in war and 'post-war' settings (Banner, 2009; Fluri, 2012). In Afghanistan, this meant a direct association of women's bodies to the honour of the land and family; their bodies support the historical burden of perpetuating traditions and culture. This conception has favoured high risks of sexual violence both in war and 'post-war', instrumentalising it as a weapon of war (Ahmad, 2013).

During the Soviet occupation, Afghan women suffered from different aspects; they were imprisoned, forced to immigrate, they lost their children, family members and their homes. Although systematic SGBV did not occur on a large scale, '[t]here is evidence of rape, brutal killings, and torturers of women' (Rubin, 1985, p. 6) in the prisons of Afghanistan by the Soviet-backed regime. Violence increased dramatically during the factional war amongst Islamic parties to take over the capital in 1992. In the first year of Mujahideen rule (1992–1993), 30,000 civilians were killed and, during the whole civil war between the different factions, some estimates that 80,000 civilians lost their lives. Equally, 100,000 people were wounded, while 500,000 fled the city while 70% of Kabul was destroyed, and many women and girls were kidnapped, raped or forced into marriage (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007, p. 202). Afghan women became the direct target of violence and atrocities inflicted by rival political groups. The rape of women was adopted as part of the rival groups' terror campaigns.

Most testimonies and reports agree on the increasing VAW during the civil war and the institutional inaction of the US and international community on the matter. The *Mujahideen* era was the beginning of state repression against women; Rabbani, the president, 'suspended the Constitution and issued religious decrees that prevent women from holding government jobs or jobs in broadcasting, and required them to wear a veil' (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 768). Most of these powerful *Mujahideen* are now in political positions, maintaining the gender order of the Taliban based on misogyny (Gannon, 2005). Women are categorized as 'second human' in the political structure of Afghanistan, while men have been 'treated as lords', which relates misogyny to a preference accorded to men in the public sphere (Shayegan, 2014). The civil war situation has exacerbated the already existing binary gender system



and related roles and practices (Fluri, 2012), representing an extremely difficult period for women in Afghanistan due to the lawless state and widespread levels of violence:

Masood had been part of the Mujahideen, that in 1992 was engaged in the massive plunder, rape and bombing of Kabul. Stories of rape, men rushing into homes and kidnapping girls, removal of women's breasts and tearing open wombs of pregnant women were quite common. (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006, p. 14)

Ahmad Shah Masood was a commander of Jamit-i-Islami and the founder of Shour-i-Nazar; from 1996 to 2001, he led the Northern Alliance and war against the Taliban. He was murdered two days before September 11 by Arab terrorists who met him as journalists. Nowadays Masood is labelled as a 'hero of Afghanistan' and some of his commanders and gunman are in power. It appears to be a recurring problem for women to face the impunity of their rapist during the civil war, which has had consequences not only on their lives, but also on the nation's stagnation with women's issues and progression of female representatives in courts and political institutions. During an interview with 'SJ' and her mother, from Sher-e-Kona, they explained how 'SJ' considers that her rape 'distorted her life':

[...]The militants took SJ to their military sites. During the interview I [Lida] asked SJ what happened to her at the military sites, she did not reply and stared at the floor. Her mother replied: 'something happened with her that distorted her life forever and she did not get married'<sup>19</sup>. SJ silently cried and did not say anything more [...].<sup>20</sup>

In relation to 'SJ's' interview, marriage is an important institution in Afghanistan and is highly political. During the civil war like today, forced marriages have been used to secure alliances, and when a political marriage is refused, the consequences fall upon women. This is the testimony of 'HM',<sup>21</sup> as her father refused to marry her to a 58-year-old commandant when she was only 17:

The next night the commander and his two guards came to HM's house and by force took her to get married with him. She was with him for around 20–25 days, until he died in battle. HM wanted to go back to her home, however the gunmen of Zaman did not allowed her to. She talked about sexual harassment by other militants after the death of Zaman.

'Public' rapes also alter family order as the reputation of the family is directly related to the sexual purity of the women. This is partly why, coupled with the near absence of psychological help, a lot of women try to commit suicide. It was the case, during the civil war with Karima<sup>22</sup> and her sister-in-law<sup>23</sup>:

Karima [...] was raped during the civil war while she was four months pregnant with her first child. It was the beginning of winter 1993 [...] Junbish militants raped her and her sister-in-law while they ran from their house because of war. Karima and her sister-in-law were traumatised; her sister-in-law had serious psychological trauma and 7 years after, she attempted suicide. Now Karima has three children and she also has many health problems. She said: 'Even though my husband and his family are very nice with me, they try to help me forget the accident; however it is very difficult for me to get over it. I also want to commit suicide, but when I think about it, I remember my children. [...]':

The Taliban era has been largely discussed as a model of state-sponsored misogyny, which currently still has consequences on women's daily lives. At first, the Taliban politically used the widespread violence and rape atrocities perpetrated by the *Mujahideen* to consolidate their power among the Afghan people; it helped them to win 'hearts and minds'. However, their views changed as they gained power and reinforced their political control; in the 'name of honor and for the preservation of patriarchal institutions, control over every aspect of women's lives and bodies are deemed essential' (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006, p. 7).

Most of the women changed their life style with the arrival to power of the Taliban to reduce the threat and violence against them (HRW, 2001). The Taliban era represented a 'major break' with other forms of social control, rooted in traditional and moderate Islam (Kandiyoti, 2005). The institutional misogyny of the Taliban was creating a 'fear culture' where educated women, urban and rural women or ethnic minorities were the targets; no one was spared by the 'Religious Police', a euphemism to express the control over women and men's bodies. The following is a testimony of a 20-year-old Hazara woman, Layla Shah, who remembers her experience in Mazari-Sharif; where ethnicity also becomes politics:

Two Taliban did bad things to her. Now she has a bad name. She came to tell me herself. She was twenty-years-old. She is still there. She has a bad name and no one will marry her. She told me that they came to search the house and she was alone. That was the first time when the Taliban took over Mazar. They did not tell her anything. They just raped her. She said she screamed but they did not say anything. (HRW, 2001, p. 20)

Apart from hate and war crimes, the 'Religious Police' beat women in public and controlled their bodily appearance as well as their right to enter public life. This quote from Shokeria Ahmed exemplifies the social control of the body that perpetuated the 'shame culture', enlarging the gap between femininities and masculinities, represented as hegemonic:

[...] I went to get some material for tailoring. [...] I had to put up my chadari to compare the color because the shop was dark. The Taliban came and they beat both the shopkeeper and me. They beat us with a wire, made from rubber with a wooden handle and the rubber attached to the end of it. They said to me, 'stupid, cover your face.' No one helped because no one can. (HRW, 2001, p. 13)

War has served the different factions of the *Mujahideen* and the Taliban to consolidate their power through time and now, they openly monopolise every political sphere. As argued by Kandiyoti, the 'legacy of fearfulness and insecurity of this period should not be underestimated' (2005, p. 10). The fundamentalists are still refusing access to school for women and girls as they continue to terrorize the population in various regions of Afghanistan, establishing their own system of laws. As reported by HRW, in 2008, 'Taliban members threw acid in the faces of a group of five girls on their way to a school in Kandahar, leaving two girls badly disfigure' (HRW, 2010, p. 31).

War has unquestionably marked Afghan landscapes, people and beliefs. This legacy has been harsh on women's lives, contributing to a normalization of misogynist practices in every sphere of society. As Kandiyoti remarks, the political economy of war transformed

Afghanistan from a predominantly rural country that provided hard-earned but relatively self-sufficient livelihoods to its population into a fragmented society where a sizeable and growing proportion of the economy is illicit and depends on criminalized networks of trade in drugs, in commodities such as timber and emeralds, smuggling of goods and human trafficking. (2005, p. 12)

Afghan wars have linked women's bodies to the politics of fundamentalism, targeting women and girls and implementing laws and regulations through which they have been able to control them. Before 1992, Afghan women living in cities were free to dress how they wished and to appear in public. However, successive wars have transformed Afghan reality, as SGBV does not necessarily end or decrease with the official cessation of armed conflicts. As Ward and Marsh argue, SGBV is 'exacerbated by reconstruction programs that fail to specifically target their needs, or to address long-standing patriarchal traditions that discriminate against women' (2006, p. 9). The reality of 'post-war' Afghanistan is very complex: VAW is still pervasive and increasingly dehumanizing (Abirafteh, 2009) as it is supported by institutional misogyny and widespread privileges accorded to men in the political sphere that hinder political and social development of women.

### *Institutional misogyny: global and local politics*

The situation in Afghanistan is rather volatile since the beginning of the NATO occupation; it appears that VAW has increased on a large scale with foreign presence and recent peace talks. In the 'post-war' context, SGBV has shifted from war crimes to open domestic and institutional VAW, favouring a culture of rape and impunity. The changing frames of violence are widely related to the political situation of the country: while public attention is focused on political agreements, women's issues are relegated to banalities and presented as 'everyday' news. Most of the fundamentalists that perpetrated massive sexual violence attacks during the civil war are now enjoying positions of power with Western support. Equally, foreign occupation has contributed to the militarization of society which in turn, has changed relations to sexuality and increased SGBV. Therefore, the violated body in Afghanistan is directly related to the globalized world and local political spheres (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006).

### *Global politics: the impact of the NATO intervention on women*

As the US-led invasion was legitimised on orientalist visions of Afghan women, the focus was put on the 'de-veiling' of women and 'going back to school' rhetoric, with the impact of 'liberation' strongly debatable (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). Fourteen years later, none of the objectives have been achieved as security remains fragile and the central government is still vacillating. The Afghan government has



received millions of dollars to empower women and reduce SGBV, and a Ministry of Women's Affairs was even created. Still, a recent study estimated that nine out of ten Afghan women face physical, sexual or psychological violence (AJ, 2015). Recently, VAW has undergone changes as the occupation of Afghanistan permitted a fertile ground for the consumption of opium and inevitably provoked a radical change of militarized masculinities in search of other sources of power that are generally found with women's bodies. Nowadays, the domestic scenario does not represent a secure place for women anymore as war politicized and militarized also the private sphere (Fluri, 2011a). The insecurities and misogynist practices that were built during the Taliban era have not disappeared. On the contrary, the injection of dollars to reconstruct the society, without a serious compromise with the denaturalization of corporeal and psychological violence, has rather fomented new forms of insecurities for Afghan women, signifying other forms of sexual violence.

The US-led intervention has also been associated with a 'growing resurgence of political conflict and increasing militarisation of aid/development' (Fluri, 2011a, p. 284). That is the case with the opium trade, which is on the rise in Afghanistan and seems to have strong impact on Afghan lives and bodies. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: 'Opium cultivation and production in Afghanistan reached record levels this year, with the former increasing seven per cent to 224,000 hectares in 2014, and production levels potentially climbing as much as 17 per cent[...]' (UN, 2014). The 'sociological effects of a war generation of uprooted male youths seeking employment and status as fighters or in the opium economy are poorly understood' (Kandiyoti, 2005, p. 12). The impact on women is more apparent, although highly undocumented. It was the case of Setara reported this year by RAWA: her husband, a drug addict, was asking her to supply the money to sustain his daily addiction. Confronted to the obvious difficulty to find the money, Setara could not meet her husband needs and he attacked her with a rock and further cut her nose and lips. Because of state misogyny and legal obstacles for women to file charges, she faced a lot of problems in demanding a divorce; even with the strong disfiguration she suffered (RAWA, 2015). The international influence on the war economy has had consequences on domestic violence too: drug addiction has increased with insecurity and unemployment as well as the impossibility of men to 'fulfil' their traditional gender roles, as testifies Mariyam:

This is how our lives have become, in this time of *peace*' [emphasis hers], she said. Her husband was unemployed. He tried to find work as a day laborer but was not able to bring home a steady income. 'He is angry,' Mariyam explained, 'and so he has turned on me, and turned to drugs. What can I do but tolerate this? I am a woman, after all' (Abirafeh, 2009, p. 41)

The core problem of global politics on the Afghan question is related to the support given to former *Mujahideen* to occupy positions in the government. As the US did with Karzai, the current government of Ghani is supported by the international community while it is well-known that close members of his cabinet are warlords and associated with paramilitary factions.<sup>24</sup> Despite these facts, in the London Conference in 2010, it was stipulated that Afghanistan should engage in reintegration and reconciliation, but without a clear disarming and demobilization process that would at least diminish the power of gunmen. It means that 'lower-level fighters' would be encouraged to stop fighting and reintegrate society while justice and accountability would be sacrificed for 'peace' as reconciliation implies 'negotiations with insurgent commanders' (HRW, 2010, p. 5).

In the 'interplay of local and international masculinities', Afghan women's bodies are sacrificed to ensure political alliances and guarantee power to those with guns (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006, pp. 6 and 14). On the international level, it safeguarded the national interest of the hegemonic and imperialist power, '[n]o matter that the Northern Alliance, which replaced the Taliban, has an equally brutal history' (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 773) and that the conception of peace would be dilated to ensure global capital.

### *Local politics: gunmen, political power and impunity*

The 'post-war' setting implies some clarifications: it appears that, ultimately, an increased number of violent acts perpetrated against women have been committed in 'secured' and 'peaceful' areas as, for example, Kandahar, while on the contrary, conflict zones present lower levels of SGBV. The problem detected in 'peaceful and secured' areas is related to the normalization of SGBV, leading to a misogynist

culture within the state institutions as former militants and commanders now occupy important positions of authority, further increasing social and political discrimination against women and legitimizing impunity.

Most of the warlords that have committed SGBV are currently in power. With the money and guns they have acquired during wars, they consolidated their power: 'they have arisen as powerful commanders and figures in their respective regions' (Ahmad, 2013, p. 120). The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission report of 2013 affirms that 91% of sexual assaults and honour killings that took place between 2011 and 2013 were perpetrated by gunmen or people connected to gunmen (AIHRC, 2013). The political culture has not been able to tackle the power structure based on war which has favoured a culture of impunity for those who possess arms (HRW, 2015).

This was the case of Sara, a resident of Ruyi Du Ab village in Samangan, a province in the North of Afghanistan, reported by HRW. In 2005, she was raped by three gunmen and the rape was ordered by a powerful local figure, a commander known as Karim. Some reports say that she was raped in revenge of the sexual violence committed against a relative of Karim by Sara's son Islamuddin; other reports highlight that the rape was perpetrated because Islamuddin would not join Karim's parliamentary election campaign in 2005. In any of the two cases, Sara was at the heart of political struggles, her body considered as a territory of combat and revenge.

State-sponsored misogyny is also sustained through the local police. They maintain their power and war masculinities through the state sphere, as is the case with Lal Bibi, an 18-year-old girl: she was gang-raped by gunmen members of the American-trained local police in her village in the province of Kunduz. It seems that the gunmen raped her because her cousin Mohammed Issa was accused of hiding his relationship with a relative of the commander Nezaami, known as the leader of the local police. She reported that Issa managed to escape while she was raped and further, the members of her family tried to kill her as she was 'dishonouring' them. She however refused this fate and sought justice, a rare possibility for women in Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup>

This normalization of misogyny within state institutions is also clearly observed through large-scale impunity that has gone unchanged since the fall of the Taliban: no one believes women unless men testify for their case. This was the case of Khatera, who has been continuously raped by her father of whom she became pregnant. Although she informed her relatives, nobody would listen to her plea, so she could barely have access to justice, which most of the time still gives no credential to women's testimonies (Adeel, 2015b). Frequently, the rapists are not judged because of the support they receive by local commanders, police officers or directly from members of Parliament, as was the case of a 21-year-old girl who was gang-raped in Bamyan province. One of her rapists was released from jail because of his political connections (Joyenda, 2015).

On top of that, the Afghan Civil Code (1977) and Afghan Penal Code (1976) present some confusion regarding women's issues, demonstrating evident difficulty to protect Afghan women from SGBV (Ahmad, 2013, p. 121). In the Afghan Penal Code (GRA, 1976), there is confusion between *zina* and rape: Art. 426 defines *zina*<sup>26</sup> as sexual intercourse between a man and woman who are not married. In turn, Art. 429 assumes that rape occurs when violence takes place within sexual intercourse. This confusing definition of rape causes numerous dilemmas; it is not difficult for a rapist to claim that 'intercourse was done voluntarily and not through violence, thereby marking the woman as a "sinner" instead of a victim requiring protection' (Ahmad, 2014, p. 21). Equally, in order to prove the rape act, four male Muslims must be present in court, which is basically impossible. Laws, instead of defending the victims, most of the time are working as structural VAW. Additionally, traditional laws are sometimes prioritised over constitutional rights which further expose women to revictimisation throughout the different moral and legal systems. According to HRW (2012), around 400 women rape victims are surviving in Kabul jails, accused of *zina*:

[...] police often treat a report of rape as an admission of *zina*, arresting the victim along with the perpetrator. Many police officers, prosecutors, and judges accept a mere counter-allegation of consensual sex to trump a complaint of rape and transform it into a complaint of *zina*, instead of treating consent as a defense that can be pleaded by a person accused of rape during a criminal investigation or trial (2012, p. 37).

One of the recent examples of malleability of law concerning women was the Shia Personal Status Law, signed by President Karzai, although not ratified by the Parliament. This law provided Shia Muslims their own regulation on 'personal affairs,' including marriage, divorce, etc., reducing political and juridical power of women (Alvi, 2011; HRW, 2010).

Political alliances also perpetuate impunity by using 'traditional mediation' processes. Rural Afghanistan is especially marked by wide use of these mechanisms<sup>27</sup> that 'are conducted entirely by senior men' (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006, p. 5). However, with the rampant SGBV inherited from years of war, these processes have become highly problematic for women:

To be raped by your cousin's husband; be jailed for adultery as your attacker was married; to suffer the ignominy of global uproar about your jailing and assault, but be pardoned by presidential decree; and then to endure the shame and rejection from a conservative society that somehow held you to blame. The solution in this society? Marry your attacker. That's what happened to Gulnaz, who was barely 16 when she was raped. She's now carrying the third child of her attacker, Asadullah, who was convicted and jailed – though this was then reduced. (Paton Walsh, 2015)

Reports and news by RAWA, Al-Jazeera English and the Afghan News Agency have shown an increasing normalization of sexual abuse in all spheres of society. Recently, child abuse has also become a part of 'everyday' news: 'Sexual abuse and rape of children have been rampant in Afghanistan, specifically in northern parts of the country' as the same news presented the case of a seriously wounded 3-year-old child sexually abused by a 14-year-old boy (Adeel, 2015a).

Domestic violence has increased since the over-stated end of the Taliban regime: it is also related to those holding the weapons. A lot of women in safe houses mentioned that after they escaped from domestic violence, their family or in-laws sought the support of commanders with regards to their 'disrespect' of 'legitimated' forms of violence by tradition.<sup>28</sup> Domestic violence seems to be higher in considered 'peaceful areas' where laws are imposed by former commanders and where 'the pressures of the nation's double digit unemployment rate are more easily felt' (Latifi, 2013). Violence perpetrated by family members still constitutes a high risk for women: in 2011–2012, '243 cases of honour killings had been registered in human rights commission offices' (Shayegan, 2014, p. 28). The high rates of sexual violence within the household derives from the labelisation of women as socially deviant and further exposes them to social exclusion, depression, suicide or prostitution (Shayegan, 2014). Recent reports show an increasing problem related to self-immolation and suicide. Initially observed in Herat, it seems that the problem has arisen as a national one, demonstrating the link between augmentation of private violence and the reclamation of social body through self-inflicted violence (Abirafeh, 2009; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006). Domestic life is an important political structure which implies 'complicated sites and gendered spaces that in some cases compound women's experiences of violence from both within and outside the home' (Fluri, 2011a, p. 292).

The current political situation is the result of the militarization of the Afghan society which has resulted with the growing blurred lines between civilians and combatants (Fluri, 2011a, 2012). In the last section, we traced the consolidation of misogyny through war where the majority of perpetrators of SGBV were combatants; however, the current perpetrators of violence are unengaged combatants, private gunmen, powerful men, police officers, family members or other civilians. This demonstrates a normalization of violence through institutions with a direct impact on hegemonic masculinities, reinforcing patriarchy.

The insecurities lived by women and caused by the misogynist system come from three important factors that have sustained SGBV against women: 'gunmen, weak law and tradition' (Ahmad, 2013, p. 118). At the moment, politicians are only concerned by the peace talks with the Taliban, relegating any topic on women's rights to silence: the government is not interested in protecting women as a political focus, but rather in the demobilization and 'reconciliation' process with the Taliban. This whole state-sponsored misogyny and international inaction put women at risk, exposing them to the changing political situation that perpetuates SGBV. Meanwhile, Afghan women continue to engage in political efforts, even though they are denied so.

## Overcoming the misogynist culture: local initiatives

There have been remarkable initiatives accomplished by individuals and organisations in Afghanistan to fight against the misogynist culture. Before the Soviet Union invasion, there was a democratic movement in Afghanistan in which female university students broadly participated given that one of the main aims was the emancipation of women. In 1977, Meena<sup>29</sup> founded RAWA, a feminist organization determined to fight for women's rights, democracy and social justice. Meena organized peaceful demonstrations against the Soviet occupation and its puppet regime, defending the people's rights while also fighting Islamic fundamentalists. RAWA has been working incredibly hard during the civil war and Taliban era, registering documentation and information on *Mujahideen* and Taliban violence, giving their own political solutions to the war situation (Fluri, 2009, p. 261).

When the Taliban took power, all of the local and international media left Afghanistan but RAWA snapped pictures and videos when the Taliban beat women in the street and executed Zarmina<sup>30</sup> in the country's national sport stadium in Kabul. While the Taliban prohibited education for girls, RAWA along with some other organizations maintained underground schools (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006, p. 12).

Afghan women have been constantly working against the misogynistic culture of their government and the vast majority of civil society: they have been at the forefront of nonviolent and pro-democracy struggles. Despite huge challenges, a number of NGOs that have been working for women's advocacy have tried to change the misogynist culture in Afghanistan in the last fourteen years.

HAWCA, an organization that started working for Afghan refugees in 1999, also established safe houses for women in 2004, under the direction of Najeea Karimi and other women activists, primarily focusing on SGBV. Despite threatening and serious obstacles to their work, HAWCA is providing safe shelters, psychological treatments and literacy classes for women victims of SGBV. Women for Women, an organization founded in the USA in 2001 by a group of Afghan Women, has also established seven safe houses throughout Afghanistan. The main factor that led Manizha Naderi to the decision of establishing safe houses was institutional inaction:

young girls and women raped by commanders and paramilitaries got no assistance from the Afghan government that is very weak and unmotivated to ask for justice for these victims. Thus, it is the responsibility of civil society to defend women's rights.<sup>31</sup>

Following their path, several women's organisations have started to provide shelters for women in provinces such as Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Bamyán, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Sarpul and Jalalabad. More than ten safe houses<sup>32</sup> have been established in Kabul, but they still present numerous administrative problems and frequently serve as a long-term solution for women because there are very few options for protection as laws and policies are not adequately responding to the problematic of VAW. Despite the fact that the government closely supervises safe houses and the conservative sector of society has tried to close them down, women's rights activists strongly fight against such attempts.

Another achievement was the preparation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Woman (EVAW) by Afghan women's rights activists and approved by Karzai in July 2009. Although there are still many controversial occurrences, at least this law has provided significant clarification regarding SGBV. On June 2013, the EVAW was re-discussed in the Afghan parliament session; however, the conservative parliamentary members disagreed with some articles of this law, arguing that it was contradictory with *Sharia* law.

Besides the collective and official efforts to overcome the misogynist culture, many individuals struggled to stop violence. During the interviews in 2013, many women in Afshar pointed out that their neighbours attempted to rescue and provide safe haven for many women victims of SGBV. Activists, such as Malalai Joya, Belqis Roshan or Selay Ghafar, risked their lives to raise their voices against fundamentalists. Joya, who has been part of the Afghan Parliament, openly criticized the inefficiency of the government with regards to women's rights: 'Nowadays warlords dominate power in Afghanistan, these leaders are criminals and rapists of Afghan women; Afghanistan cannot establish a democracy and promote women's rights with a government full of these criminals.'<sup>33</sup> In 2005, she was elected to the first Parliament where her strong speeches in support of women's rights prompted other conservative

members to oust her in 2007. After that time she became a peace activist, and one of her focuses is to help Afghan women fight against SGBV (Ahmad, 2013).

Increasingly, misogynist views in and outside the government threaten women's rights demanders as well as democratic and secular groups in Afghanistan. It appears that the murderers of Farkhunda were no criminals; they were 'ordinary' Afghan men, permeated by a misogynist culture that fosters impunity as the appeal sentence of Farkhunda's murder demonstrated (BBC, 2015; Jones, 2015). However, Farkhunda's murder and the use of her story to visualize the Afghan problem have confirmed the political power of the body. Her lynching showed two important facts: on the one hand, women's rights in Afghanistan are superficial and used as propaganda, and, on the other hand, Farkhunda and Afghan women are not silent victims whereas after her murder thousands sought justice for her throughout the country. Farkhunda's body has been used by the misogynist regime as a terrain of war; activists responded from the same site of resistance that represents the body. Drawing from the bodies marked by SGBV, it is possible to revert the effects of power and reshape the social context and political institutions (Shinko, 2012), as the recent demonstrations in Kabul confirmed.

The work of activists and organizations is crucial in Afghanistan, as SGBV victims are often silenced due to shame and honour. But Afghan women have always resisted against wars and occupiers' control over their body. As RAWA firmly sustains, grassroots initiatives must be supported as they give voice to the voiceless.

## Concluding thoughts

We should summarize insisting on this ambiguous 'post-war' setting: fourteen years after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, the situation is still unstable, complex and women have been forgotten once again with increasing forms of misogyny that are structurally legitimized by tradition, laws, the international community and the current political situation.

It is not the first time in history that women's status has been linked to the political situation in Afghanistan; as Zulfacar (2006) shows, the different policies were always male-dominated decisions made in total disconnection with the reality of women. Our analysis shows that state-sponsored misogyny has tried to tackle women's agency and that global involvement in Afghanistan has further exacerbated the problem with donor agencies, where 'racism intersects with their subtle misogyny' (Saba Khattak as cited in Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006, p. 2).

The challenges ahead are multiple. One of the most important has to do with the urgent necessity to engage in disarmament and to purge the political institution from the power of the gunmen, beginning with the Parliament. As RAWA argues, no political gains and no security for women will be obtained unless fundamentalism is tackled and secular democracy is instituted. Only then, state-misogyny can start to be addressed.

The misogynist culture will not be tackled only by naming female representatives in the government; this has been going for 14 years now, without any real advancement. President Ghani promised to give a position in the Afghan Supreme Court to a woman, but the candidate Anisa Rassouli did not received sufficient votes in Parliament (Rasmussen, 2015). The reasons behind are twofold: first, because the Parliament is a misogynist institution, and second, because she could not get the support of the powerful warlords and gunmen. On the contrary, by putting warlord-backed women in the government, state-sponsored misogyny becomes tighter and more effective.

To overcome state-sponsored misogyny, it is crucial to support local initiatives and for women organisations to keep their independence and indigenous pro-activity. Apart from denouncing the foreign role in the conflict and numerous violations of women's rights, RAWA (and other important female groups) are working for the '(re)articulation of women's capacity through leadership and empowerment programmes' (Fluri, 2008, p. 50) which counter the power structures without destroying the cultural specificities that mark Afghan life.



## Notes

1. We are conscious that Afghan women are not a homogeneous group as their experiences 'differ depending on geography, ethnicity and social class' (Ayub, Kouvo, & Sooka, 2009, p. 19). However, we refer to 'Afghan women' as the representation of female population but we want to insist on the diversity that composes this expression understanding that our analysis focuses on the institutional imposition of body control and gender divisions within the country.
2. By gunmen, we mean all the people who possess guns; they can belong to illegal or legal groups, but they use the power of the gun to assert their influence in society and in our case of study, to control women's bodies. They can be related to the Afghan National Army, Afghan police, paramilitaries, illegal groups' commanders or officers, drug lords or warlords, insurgent militant groups, etc.
3. The interviews were conducted for the obtainment of her MA degree in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies at Jaume I University, Spain.
4. It is important to point out the many debates with regards to the multiple feminisms in Afghanistan. Since our goal in this article is to show how institutionalized misogyny is affecting women's lives, we chose RAWA over other organisations because fieldwork showed the complexity of gender relations in the country: in practice, there are few women's organisations committed to the fulfilment of women's demands in the country even though their original discourses are coherent with women's rights.
5. For security reasons, almost all the names of the interviewees are abbreviated; however some of the victims use their full names as their cases have already been told to the public or media.
6. The historical period understood as 'civil war' in Afghanistan is used to describe the war between Islamic parties (Mujahideen) from 1992 to 1996.
7. The 'post-war' period in the original thesis of Ahmad was understood as the 'post-Taliban' era as it is analysed as such in most of the documents on the question. This was related to the collective imaginary of Afghan from 2002; it was thought that the conflict was over and democracy would be instituted. We understand the polemic on this regard as some authors have chosen to use the word 'aftermath' to cover the post-2001 period (Abirafeh, 2009). In this work, we understand the 'post-war' setting as the post-Taliban era, and further, the end of the occupation that has been officially announced as President Ghani was elected as the new president in 2014. We however wish to nuance this idea of a 'post-war' scenario in Afghanistan: the overall situation has not gotten better for civilians. Instead, it has gotten worse as insecurities increased, bombings never ended, groups have fragmented and the changing frames of SGBV have worsened the lives of many women.
8. Ittihad-e Islami (Islamic Association) was commanded by Abdul Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf, a fundamentalist who was supported by Saudi Arabia. He controlled the West and Northwest of Kabul during the civil war. Sayyaf has been and still is a powerful figure in Afghan politics.
9. Jamiat-e Islami-yi Afghanistan (Islamic Association of Afghanistan) was primarily composed of Tajiks. Burhanuddin Rabbani was their leader and he was also named President for 4 years during the civil war.
10. Shura-e Nazar is a faction of Jamiat party led by Ahmad Shah Massoud.
11. Safe houses in Kabul are run by local NGOs that are working on SGBV: they are safe places to accommodate women victims of SGBV. Women and girls, who have faced various types of violence including sexual violence, are housed in these locations.
12. PDPA was established in 1965 and its ideals were close to the ones of the Soviet Union. They were also maintaining constant political relations.
13. Between 1978 and 1980 with the support of the CIA and ISI seven Afghan Islamic fundamentalist parties were constituted in Pakistan mostly from the Sunni sect, including Pashtun and Tajik, while Shi'a fundamentalists were born in Iran. All planned to defeat the 'Communist enemy' (Ahmad, 2013, p. 72).
14. In early 1980 US President Jimmy Carter objected to the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, so he dedicated about \$30 million to Islamic parties (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007, p. 179). Ronald Reagan came into the White House in November 1980 and increased the aid and support to the Afghan *Mujahidee*, calling them 'Freedom Fighters' (Runion, 2007, p. 112). An estimate shows that Islamic parties got about \$40 billion in cash and weapons from the US and its allies such as Saudi Arabia in the ten-year war against the Soviet Union. The money provided by the US, Saudi Arabia and individual wealthy Arab sheikhs went towards purchasing weapons from China, Egypt, Israel, America and Britain through the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Then, ISI distributed them among the *Mujahideen*. In addition, the major European countries responded to the US's call for supporting Afghan jihad, and thousands of Arabs and non-Arab Muslim fighters answered and joined the *jihad*. The CIA and ISI trained militants; Brigadier Yousaf, the ISI general, estimated that over 80,000 militants were trained in Pakistan training camps (Wogan, 2006, pp. 61–65). This was all arranged by Saudi Arabia, a major ally of the US, wanting to temper its conservative movement that wanted more power, called Wahhabism.
15. The Taliban group was created in Pakistan by a CIA funded agreement with ISI. The Taliban had straight and tough laws and regulations for all citizens, particularly for women.
16. The *baad* tradition consist of organizing a wedding between a girl or a woman with the family of the aggressor to settle disputes or conflicts that are existing between two families or ethnic groups (WCLRF, 2008).



17. The practice of *baedal* refers to an exchange marriage. Some families marry their daughter with a man while their son gets married with the sister of that man. In this case, girls are exchanged because of their brothers and it further exposes them to potential violence; if one of the couples is not happy, it can have direct effects on the others.
18. What is understood as 'civil society' in Afghanistan emerges just after the US-led occupation. Most of the NGOs, working with human rights, women rights and justice etc., are funded by the US and other Western countries. Some of the circumstances that we mention in this article are the result of their work, which are sometimes wrongly oriented. Most of the time, these organisations are not taking a strong stand against warlords. Here we want to insist on the resilience and hard work by some organisations and individuals such as RAWA, Solidarity Party, Malalai Joya, HAWCA, etc. These small groups have a very strong commitment to fight for democracy and women's rights but unfortunately, they rarely get funding and most of the time, they fear reprisal from warlords.
19. In Afghanistan, if a girl is raped and then loses her virginity, her reputation is tainted and it is difficult for her to get married as her honour has been symbolically destroyed.
20. Interview with SJ, June 2nd, 2013.
21. Interview with HM, June 4th, 2013, a woman from Sher-e-Kona.
22. Karima was raped by Junbish militants; the founder and leader of the group is Abdul Rashed Dostum and now, he is the Vice-President of Ghani's government, reinforcing our argument that the perpetuation of SGBV is sustained through misogynist institutions.
23. Interview with Karima, June 12th, 2013.
24. His Vice-President, Rashed Dostum, leads a paramilitary group, the Junbish Islami and Sarwar Danish, second Vice-President, is an active member of the Wahdat Islamic Party. Both armed groups have been committing serious violations of human rights, especially SGBV against women.
25. Interview with Lal Bibi in Kabul, June 10th, 2013.
26. *Zina* is a criminal offence according to Afghan law, and both men and women are to be punished if they have a sexual relationship outside of marriage.
27. Local bodies are the *Jirga* and *Shura*. It is estimated that these mechanisms control 70% of the justice system (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006, p. 5).
28. It is not uncommon to observe this 'classification' over SGBV in Afghanistan: non-legitimized forms of sexual violence are understood as rape, gang-rape and forced prostitution while legitimized forms would be interpreted as forced marriage or child marriage for example.
29. Meena was a student at the University of Kabul. She is the founder of RAWA and she was assassinated in 1987 by Islamic fundamentalists in Quetta, Pakistan.
30. Zarmina is an Afghan woman who was publicly executed in 1997 in Kabul, by Taliban.
31. Interview with Manizha Naderi, Kabul, June 19th, 2013.
32. We understand 'safe houses' as safe places to accommodate women victims of SGBV. Women and girls, who have faced various types of violence including sexual violence, are housed in these locations.
33. Interview with Malalai Joya, June 19th, 2013 in Kabul.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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