

**Between “Small Arms Fire” and Support:
How Rural Afghan Women Simultaneously Resist and Reproduce
Patriarchal Power Structures in the Hirat and Balkh Provinces of
Afghanistan During Winter and Spring 2019.**



Sarah Edgcumbe

3315924

Utrecht University

1st August 2019

**A Thesis submitted to
The Board of Examiners
In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Conflict
Studies and Human Rights.**

Dr Mario Fumerton

1st August 2019

Research project and thesis writing (30 ECT)

27,546 words

Photograph on cover page: burqas hanging outside a literacy class

Image is author's own

Map of Afghanistan



Image credit: The University of Texas at Austin

<https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/afghanistan.html>

Map of Districts Within Hirat Province

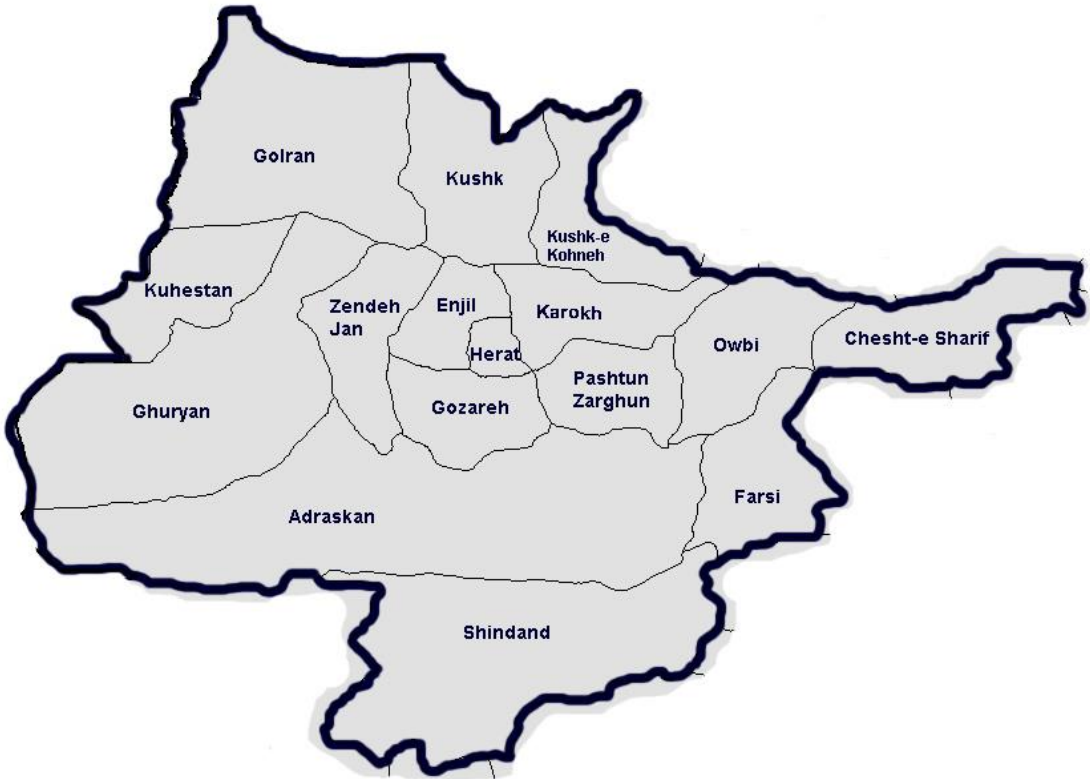


Image Credit: Naval Postgraduate School

<https://my.nps.edu/web/ccs/herat>

Map of Districts Within Balkh Province



Image credit: Naval Postgraduate School

<https://my.nps.edu/web/ccs/balkh>

Abstract

This thesis will examine how rural Afghan women employ practices of everyday resistance as a means of challenging extremely patriarchal power structures and male domination in Afghanistan, whilst simultaneously supporting and reproducing patriarchal societal structures and values through quiet encroachment of public spaces and the labour market as well as conscious adherence to certain patriarchal norms.

Through qualitative research methods consisting of eleven focus groups with 130 rural women from two provinces in Afghanistan, this research employs a structurationist approach in order to fully account for the interaction and interrelationship between dominant, male-privileging structures of power and rural women's agency; the latter often being unrecognized as such. Significantly, these women, through the intentions behind their practices of everyday resistance and encroachment upon public spaces demonstrate that they do not wish to eradicate patriarchy, but rather to transform it into a more benign structure of power which conforms to the women's interpretation of Islam, and which accommodates them as individuals with agency and ability, enabling them to take advantage of independent mobility, provide for their families, and send their children (sons *and* daughters) to school.

Ultimately, this thesis will argue that what rural women aspire to is not a form of empowerment which is characterized by individual autonomy and political rights, but rather a form of empowerment which is informed by their experience of extreme poverty and the value they place in Islam and family. Thus, these women deliberately engage in everyday resistance to extreme manifestations of patriarchy, but simultaneously consciously adhere to, and subtly advocate for, more benevolent patriarchal social norms.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the rural women who welcomed me into their lives and participated in this research so honestly and openly. Your resilience is both humbling and inspiring and I hope the bonds of sisterhood, so strong amongst you, remain so always. Every single day you are working against all odds to improve the future for your children and I sincerely hope that better days for you all are just around the corner. Nobody deserves better days more.

To Zohal and Malalai, you ladies are amazing! Thank you for translating, humouring me, and never ceasing to make me laugh. Slowly suffocating on thick black smoke in our guest house in Herat, as the walls crumbled around us, is perhaps one of my favourite memories from my time in Afghanistan because we laughed so hard. I wish you both the best of luck in your future endeavours.

To Mum and Dad for supporting (or tolerating) my continued studies and frequent stints in countries that you'd prefer I didn't visit - thank you and I'm sorry!

To John Teem, for suffering almost daily excited or frustrated updates from Afghanistan without complaint; more so for sacrificing so much of your very rare, and much needed time off from teaching in order to diligently provide me with feedback – I owe you. Thank you.

And finally, thank you to Dr Mario Fumerton for supporting me in this research-based adventure, holding me to a high standard whilst letting me be myself, providing me with guidance and sharing my enthusiasm. Your support has been greatly appreciated.

Contents

Introduction	11
Empirical Context	11
Academic Context	13
Chapter Overview	15
Chapter One: Methodology	18
1.1 Theory and Concepts	18
1.2 The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACCAAR)	19
1.3 Research Question	20
1.4 Research Sub-questions	20
1.5 Research Strategy	21
1.6 Research Sample	22
1.7 Research Method	23
1.8 Feasibility, Challenges and Ethical Considerations	24
Chapter Two: Literature Review	27
2.1 Afghan Women: Patriarchy, Imperialism and Conflict	27
2.2 Everyday Resistance: Weapons of the Weak	30
2.3 The Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary	34
2.4 Hegemony	35
2.5 Conclusion	36
Chapter Three: Visions of Empowerment	38
3.1 The Co-option of Empowerment	38
3.2 “Proud to be Muslim Women”: Factors Influencing Rural Women’s Definition of Empowerment	38
3.3 Rural Women’s Definition of Empowerment	41
3.4 Political Empowerment	44
3.5 Conclusion	46

Chapter Four: Small Arms Fire in the Private Sphere	47
4.1 Everyday Resistance within the Home: False Deference and Calculated Compliance	47
4.2 Everyday Resistance in Women-only Spaces: Hidden Transcripts	50
4.3 Parameters of Resistance	52
4.4 Extreme Patriarchal and Masculine Hegemonies	54
4.5 Conclusion	55
Chapter Five: The Quiet Encroachment of Public Space and Reproduction of the Ordinary	56
5.1 The “Non-movement” of Rural Women	56
5.2 Reproduction of the Ordinary	58
5.3 The Unintended Consequences of Quiet Encroachment	59
5.4 Conclusion	61
Conclusion	62
Research Findings	62
Further Research Recommendations	64
Bibliography	65

“Only God helps us and supports us.” – Rural Afghan IDP woman, Herat district.

Introduction

This thesis will examine the perceptions, objectives and behaviours of rural Afghan women as they seek to define their rights and construct what they interpret to be version of empowerment which is congruent with Islam. The ultimate objective of these women is to obtain access to public spaces and the labour market, consequentially accessing the resources, space and mobility necessary in order to generate an income and provide for their families. Though their primary objective is not to completely transform patriarchal power structures, they do employ practices of everyday resistance as a means of challenging extremely patriarchal expressions of behaviour, particularly when such behaviour contradicts their understanding of Islam or prevents women from enjoying their rights as outlined within the Quran. The resulting behavioural dynamic practiced by the rural women who participated in this research is a complex web of interacting and sometimes contradictory beliefs, values, religious and social obligations which is expressed as everyday resistance to extreme patriarchy, but which simultaneously supports, perpetuates and reproduces patriarchal societal structures and values through quiet encroachment of public spaces and the labour market. It is worth noting that this encroachment is driven by necessity rather than a desire to demonstrate female ability contrary to the dictates of extreme patriarchy.

The objective of this research is to fully explore the ways in which rural Afghan women simultaneously resist and reproduce patriarchy, both consciously and subconsciously. Central to this exploration of methods through which rural women resist and reproduce patriarchy will be the development of a more nuanced and authentic understanding of rural Afghan women's conceptualization of women's rights as they are interlinked with a culturally and religiously compatible construction of empowerment. The resistance behaviours employed by rural women will be examined and analysed alongside the intentions behind these behaviours in order to develop a comprehensive picture of what rural women themselves wish to see for their future: their construction of empowerment and desired shift in social norms, along with the factors which inform these constructions.

It is important to note from the outset that this research took place in only two provinces (two districts in each province), with a small amount of supplementary research being conducted in Kabul. This small but academically significant research sample is notable due to the diversity of culture, social norms, social practices and variations of conservative interpretations of Islam that exists across Afghanistan. This research does not claim to be representative of all rural Afghan women, but rather of the rural women from two districts in Balkh province and two districts from Hirat province who participated in this research. Afghanistan was chosen as the venue for this research due to the extreme nature of patriarchal power that currently prevails there in terms of social norms, gender roles and community-level governance.

Empirical Context

The American invasion of Afghanistan took place in 2001, and the resulting conflict has continued ever since, further compounding the problems currently faced by rural Afghan women. Since 2001 violence in the country has continued unabated, with 2018 being the deadliest year for Afghan civilians since records began in 2009.¹ The Taliban, who until 2001

¹ (July 15th 2018), 'Highest Recorded Civilian Deaths in 2018', *UN Mission in Afghanistan*.
<https://unama.unmissions.org/highest-recorded-civilian-deaths-conflict-mid-year-point-latest-unama-update>

had ruled Afghanistan for five years, neglected social services² and imposed a radically misogynistic interpretation of Islamic law, which saw women and girls prevented from receiving an education, sufficient healthcare, gain employment, or leaving the house without a *mahram* – a male relative and guardian. Women were required to wear the *burqa* in public and their human rights were almost completely eliminated as they were largely banished to the realm of their family home. As people around the world viewed footage of women clad in blue *burqas* being shot or stoned in public for “moral” offences, there was an accompanying deep sense of shock and outrage. Indeed, high profile American women such as Laura Bush played upon this public feeling by advocating for and justifying the war in Afghanistan as a means through which to achieve the “liberation of Afghan women.”³ This is a quintessential demonstration of the pervasive deployment of women’s perceived victimhood to justify military interventions; a political action which privileges the voices of external actors and male elite over the perspectives of local women in Muslim countries.⁴

The elite and/or male domination of the lives of rural Afghan women continues today, largely through policies and development strategies which have often been imposed upon rural communities without any pre-consultation with those rural women they claim to be striving to assist and protect. This has often resulted in the failure of these policies and strategies to create change on the ground in rural communities. In many areas of Afghanistan poverty levels remain extremely high, physical violence against women is widespread, and harmful cultural practices towards women persevere, combining to make the country the world’s second most dangerous for women.⁵ Traditionally in Afghanistan, the honour of entire families rests upon the shoulders of the women, and repercussions for perceived transgressions can be fatal: despite the introduction of the 2009 ‘Elimination of Violence Against Women Law’, domestic violence and murder of women is largely ignored by the Afghan justice system.⁶ Approximately 2,400 Afghan women attempt suicide every year – often seeking an escape from forced marriage, abuse and extreme poverty.⁷

The barriers rural Afghan women currently face in fulfilling their potential are multifaceted. Decades of conflict have torn the country and the economy apart, fracturing social cohesion and increasing the vulnerability of women. It is estimated that seventy per cent of Afghans require psychological support⁸ as a result of ongoing conflict and extreme poverty, and many women in rural areas are still prevented from accessing education or other public services. Women are primary carers for entire families and throughout this research they demonstrated that they were keenly aware of the problems facing their families and communities, yet they had not been consulted by government authorities or researchers, or otherwise provided with the opportunity to voice their concerns or suggestions. Desired solutions may prove to be unpalatable for the Americans and coalition forces as illustrated by the fact that some

² Zachary Laub, (July 4th 2014), ‘The Taliban in Afghanistan’, *Council on Foreign Relations*.
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>

³ Abu-Lughod L, (2002), ‘Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and it’s Others’, *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3), p784.

⁴ Bond K.D et al, (March 4th 2019), ‘The West Needs to Take the Politics of ISIS Women Seriously’, *Foreign Policy* online.

⁵ (2018), ‘The World’s Most Dangerous Countries for Women’, *Thomson Reuters Foundation*.
<http://poll2018.trust.org/>

⁶ Barr H, (May 30th 2018), ‘Afghan Government Ignoring Violence Against Women’, *Human Rights Watch: Dispatches* online.

⁷ Sana Safi, (July 1st 2018), Why Female Suicide in Afghanistan is so Prevalent, *BBC News* online.

⁸ Glinski S, (July 2nd 2019), Hidden Suffering: Afghanistan’s Widespread Mental Health Crisis, *The National* online. https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/hidden-suffering-afghanistan-s-widespread-mental-health-crisis-1.881672?fbclid=IwAR14K4cQDa9XJ5Geu0WKE-BT01D6khHzQNnR8BWvL0aGMysW8f_gR7DkCoc

participants in this research support the Taliban,⁹ but it is for rural women to shape their own future rather than the role of external forces.

Academic Context

The extremely unbalanced male-centric power dynamics, deep-rooted physical insecurity and dire socio-economic circumstances which shape the lives of most rural Afghan women necessitate an analytical framework that recognises the hidden as poignant, and which accounts for exploitative structural factors in analysing behaviours. James Scott's theory of everyday resistance is the most resonant framework with which to approach this research into rural Afghan women's resistance practices due to the fact that it recognizes that poverty often equates invisibility¹⁰ and that everyday forms of resistance 'reflect the conditions and restraints in which they are generated.'¹¹ With regard to the Afghan context, it is salient that Scott argues the intentions behind the actions should be used to define which actions constitute resistance rather than simply analysing the consequences of those actions. Given the prevalence of domestic violence throughout Afghanistan and the extremely conservative nature of rural Afghan society, it is no surprise that Afghan women do not engage in visible forms of collective action or contentious politics, even in relatively liberal cities such as Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul. However, this lack of visible resistance doesn't necessarily represent women's acquiescence or active support for the extremely patriarchal dominant power structure, nor the multitude of ways in which it is manifested in private and public life. Rather, given the extreme danger inherent in exposing the family honour to public critique by engaging in visible public protest, or overtly confronting dominant males within the home, Afghan women, through necessity for survival, engage in far more subtle means of expressing their discontent: they practice behaviour intended to subvert and transform the prevailing power structure. In short, they are forced to engage in everyday resistance rather than more overt expressions of discontent.

Throughout his academic career, Scott has given much consideration to the power interplay that exists between the dominant and the subordinate, the public transcript of how the two groups interact in front of an audience compared with manifestations of resistance expressed by the subordinate group when the dominant, or oppressive group is not present. Drawing upon his observations regarding the meaning subordinate groups invest within these discreet behavioural practices, Scott defines everyday resistance as 'the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander...and so forth...They require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent an individual form of self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms.'¹² Importantly in the case of Afghan women, Scott later built upon this initial understanding of everyday resistance by developing his concept of 'hidden transcripts'; a 'risk-averse use of language by the powerless',¹³ most notably taking the form of gossip, song, grumbling, storytelling and what many Afghan

⁹ During a focus group held in Injil district on the 26th February 2019, a participant explained "some of us think the Taliban are better than the government, some of us think the government is better than the Taliban" before going on to explain that their overriding priority is peace and fulfilment of basic needs for their families.

¹⁰ Scott J, (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p12 – 13.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p242.

¹² *Ibid*, p29.

¹³ Scott J, (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, p30.

women refer to as “backbiting” – saying negative things about the dominant power, or those which this dominant power structure privileges over them. Scott points to how these hidden forms of resistance are a survival mechanism, arguing that the greater ‘the disparity in power [and]...the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask’¹⁴ behind which the subordinate’s true consciousness and intentions lie.

Throughout the course of this research it became apparent that instead of overtly resisting the patriarchy itself, rural Afghan women consciously resist abusive family members, male-imposed restrictions on their mobility and male-imposed curtailment of their ability to be self-sufficient. Through acts of everyday resistance in the private sphere, rural women subtly delegitimize the abusive tools that the men around them utilize to reinforce extreme patriarchy, but they do not necessarily view patriarchal power structures as a problem, provided that women are treated fairly and protected by those structures.

Rural Afghan women desire above all else to be economically self-sufficient, so through acts of everyday resistance they act against those dominant males within their homes who forbid them from leaving the house and confine them to domestic chores. In the instance that the dominant males are persuaded to permit the women to leave their homes in order to work or attend some form of education or training (usually these men are persuaded by community leaders or other family members who are also high in the familial hierarchy), rural women access employment or education in a quiet and non-confrontational manner. For them, the battle has been won; they have no desire to resist or challenge the patriarchal system that makes it necessary for them to obtain a man’s permission to leave the home and move around independently in the first place. This complication, whereby resistance motivates behaviour within the home but does not underpin women’s shift into the public and economic realm, is critical in terms of selection of analytical framework.

Integral to Scott’s theory of everyday resistance is the notion that resistance behaviours should be judged by their intentions rather than their consequences. This is what makes the everyday resistance framework so valuable to academic fields such as peasant, subaltern, resistance, feminist and minority studies; actions that seem too small to be considered significant by other resistance-based theories, such as contentious politics, are recognised as salient by the everyday resistance framework. However, if the intention behind an action is not driven by a desire to resist, that action cannot be described as everyday resistance, no matter the depth of structural change that results. For this reason, whilst Scott’s theory of everyday resistance will be utilized for analysing women’s resistance practices, it will be employed in conjunction with Asef Bayat’s theory of quiet encroachment, depending upon the site of resistance and the intentions behind the actions of these rural women.

Rural Afghan women demonstrably left their resistance-based motivations at the door once they had secured male permission to leave the home and seek access to income generating activities through accessing public spaces. Once given permission to leave the home, the women who participated in this research were primarily motivated by economic necessity, as they participated in vocational-based training in order to learn a skill that would enable them to alleviate some of the effects of extreme poverty experienced by their families. Bayat’s theory of quiet encroachment is underpinned by his concept of “non-movements” in which ‘the collective actions of non-collective actors tend to be action-oriented, rather than ideologically driven; they are overwhelmingly quiet, rather than audible, since the claims are largely made individually rather than by united groups.’¹⁵ This research will demonstrate how

¹⁴ Ibid, p3.

¹⁵ Bayat A, (2013), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed), p20.

rural women engage in everyday resistance within the home, within their families and within women-only private spaces, but once permission has been granted by the dominant male of the household for them to leave the home in order to work or attend educational facilities, the women cease resisting and start to individually and independently utilize public spaces such as village streets, shops, bazaars, and small-holdings in order to generate an income in a non-ideological, non-confrontational manner. When these individual women start to multiply within a community, a quiet encroachment of public spaces and the economic realm takes place, but it is driven by necessity rather than ideology. The significance of necessity within Bayat's theory is key to understanding rural women's behaviour as they encroach upon public spaces driven by the desire to access public spaces and social roles that were previously prohibited for them without expressing the desire to resist patriarchal norms.

In rural Afghanistan poverty levels are extremely high, thus the income a woman generates may be the only regular income her household receives. These women are therefore not consciously acting through a desire to demonstrate that women can do what men can do, but rather a desire to feed their families, send their children to school and afford medication when needed. This absence of conscious resistance reflects Bayat's description of the quiet encroachment of non-movements as 'a politics of practice' rather than a 'politics of protest', and notably in choosing this path, women engage with and reinforce patriarchy to the extent that once they have been granted permission to leave the home, they cease to further consciously challenge patriarchal family and community norms, instead contributing to a system that seeks to govern them in a patriarchal manner both financially and socially. As they encroach upon public spaces as well as the labour market, these women may seem to be protesting through their very presence in the public realm, as the mere presence of their bodies in the streets acts as the catalyst for a gradual cultural shift towards less conservative forms of patriarchal social norms, but crucially for Scott's theory of everyday resistance, they are not. Importantly, the women in this research continue to believe that males should retain ultimate authority over communities, without recognising this as inherently problematic for women.

Chapter Overview

Chapter one: Following this chapter overview, the methodology undertaken throughout this research will be presented in conjunction with details on the research sample, challenges encountered and potential bias on the part of the researcher and research method. The methodology also includes the research sub-questions formulated in order to deconstruct the primary research question into components which served to enable more specific and comprehensive data generation.

Chapter two: This chapter will comprise a review of relevant literature pertaining to the current situation of women in Afghanistan along with identification of factors contributing to their oppression in order to provide context against which to view the academic literature.

James Scott's theory of everyday resistance will be examined in terms of its fundamental approaches to resistance and power as a means of illustrating the resonance of this analytical framework for the socio-political situation of rural Afghan women. Scott's theory of everyday resistance will then be placed within a broader academic debate concerning the saliency of the actions it applies to, as well as criticisms that the theory adopts an essentialist approach towards peasantry.

Critiques of Scott's theory which posit it as essentialist and restrictive in terms of intentional consequence will lead into Asef Bayat's theory of the quiet encroachment of "non-movements", which will be analysed in comparison to both the everyday resistance framework and the rural Afghan context in order to distinguish between the two theories and clarify when they are best applied in their mutually exclusive spheres.

Both Scott and Bayat's analytical frameworks will be positioned within, and interrogated by, post-colonial feminist writings on Muslim women and Muslim women's resistance by Lila Abu-Lughod, Saba Mahmood and Anila Daulatzai as they point to the necessity of shedding the western-imperialist gaze and being open to the values and experiences of Muslim women as they articulate them themselves.

Chapter three: This chapter will explore rural Afghan women's construction of empowerment. This is the foundation upon which the remaining data rests, as without an understanding of the factors that contribute to women's constructions of empowerment, it is difficult to ascertain resistance motivations and targets as well as everyday behaviours and practices.

The stated priorities of rural women will demonstrate that though IDP and non-IDP women have very different contemporary experiences and priorities, overall they share the same conception of empowerment as it is influenced heavily by both their religious piety and poverty. The importance of Islam for these rural women informs every aspect of their lives, which will be illustrated in chapters four and five. Moreover, as they strive to find income generating opportunities in order to lift their families out of extreme poverty, the women's behaviour results in the unintentional consequences of transforming social norms, as will be discussed in chapter five.

Chapter four: Chapter four will present data corresponding to forms of everyday resistance women deploy against immediate manifestations of male power sanctioned by extreme patriarchy in the private sphere; why they choose these methods of resistance; what exactly they are resisting; and how Islam provides the prism through which they view morality, relationships and gender roles within their private and public lives.

Parameters of resistance will also be identified as a means of better understanding both the institutions of repression and the intentions behind the acts of resistance, with a duality being presented to exemplify how the structural and the personal interact to form parameters of resistance through an omnipresent threat of violent retribution for dissent, combined with a conscious effort to conform to the behavioural standards these women set for themselves in accordance with their patriarchal interpretation of Islam. Women simultaneously resist what they perceive to be un-Islamic behaviour sanctioned by extreme patriarchy, whilst making a conscious decision to conform to patriarchal religious and social standards. Despite this conscious effort to adhere to certain patriarchal standards while resisting others, data will be presented that shows how in engaging in hidden transcripts the women are consciously resisting individual males within their families, but also unconsciously resisting societal and patriarchal norms which dictate that what happens in the home should stay in the home.

Chapter five: This chapter will relocate the site of rural women's agency from the private sphere to the public sphere and examine how this change in arena represents a corresponding shift in intention for rural women. In analysing rural women's non-movement for increasing acceptance of their access to public space as a means through which to generate an income, this chapter will investigate data that suggests that once having gained permission to utilize the public arena, they view their battle as won, and will switch to supporting and reproducing patriarchal structures of community governance provided they are benign. Though the

women do not intend their encroachment upon public space to be an act of resistance, it nevertheless is resulting in structural change as social norms are shifting and communities are becoming more accommodating towards women, driven initially by poverty maybe, but then becoming more overtly supportive.

This chapter points to how everyday resistance and the quiet encroachment of non-movements are behaviours guided by different intentions than analytic frameworks competing to provide the most feasible explanation of a singular behaviour.

Conclusion: The final chapter of this dissertation will be the conclusion. This will include a summary of the research findings pertaining to the contradiction focused upon throughout this research: how rural women simultaneously resist and reproduce patriarchal norms. The final section of the conclusion will point to areas of recommended further research and lessons we can learn from rural Afghan women moving forward in the peacebuilding and development process.

Chapter One: Methodology

1.1 Theory and Concepts

This research primarily relies upon Scott's theory of "everyday resistance" and Asef Bayat's theory of the "quiet encroachment of non-movements" with post-colonial feminist scholarly writing being used to supplement, support and interrogate these theories.

Though neither Scott nor Bayat focus exclusively on gender, their theoretical frameworks are extremely adaptable and easily applied to societal and domestic power dynamics characterized (as they are in Afghanistan) as being extremely patriarchal. By way of demonstrating this adaptability, Scott stresses that whilst his theory of everyday resistance cannot be applied uniformly to all scenarios of power distribution, there are certain structures of domination to which everyday resistance theory can always be applied successfully. 'These forms of domination are institutionalised...they embody formal assumptions about superiority and inferiority often in elaborate ideological form, and a fair degree of ritual "etiquette" regulates public conduct within them. In principle at least, status in these systems of domination is ascribed by birth, mobility is virtually nil, and subordinate groups are granted few, if any political or civil rights... Thus these forms of domination are infused by an element of personal terror that may take the form of arbitrary beatings, sexual violations and other insults and humiliations.'¹⁶ This description of domination perfectly illustrates the prevailing means of control that men routinely exercise over women in Afghanistan. This resonance of everyday resistance with patriarchal forms of domination perhaps explains why so many feminist academics have employed Scott's theories in their research.¹⁷

One of the defining features of both Scott and Bayat's theories is the recognition that through focusing on seemingly insignificant and non-confrontational acts, we can recognise what is so often overlooked in academic writing associated with the fields of politics, conflict and resistance studies. This bias is also evident in analyses of the resistance practices of Muslim women, which often goes unrecognised within Western academia. Bayat provides an example of the inherently Western tendency to overlook subtle resistance by describing how in the early 2000s Iranian academics uncritically employing social movement theory (a theory originating from and developed in in the U.S) failed to recognise Iranian women's activism because it did not conform to the acknowledged conceptualization of activism as visible and collective, as it has traditionally been characterized in Western scholarship.¹⁸ This bias within academia is the reason that the feminist literature informing this research is from the post-colonial school of feminism; as this lens permits recognition of the agency of rural Afghan women and the multiple forms of repression they face. More importantly, it

¹⁶ Scott J, (1990), p21.

¹⁷ See for example: Rahman Z, (2017), 'Online Feminist Resistance in Pakistan', *International Journal on Human Rights*, 14 (26), pp151-159; Lopez O, (2013), 'Women Teachers of Post-revolutionary Mexico: Feminization and Everyday Resistance', *Paedagogica Historica*, 49 (1), pp56-69; El-Haddad L, (2014), 'After the Smoke Clears: Gaza's Everyday Resistance', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 44 (1), pp120-125; Slymovic S, (2014), 'Algerian Women's Buqalah Poetry: Oral Literature, Cultural Politics and Anti-colonial Resistance', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, (45), pp145 – 168; Abdmolaei S, (2014), '(Re)Fashioning Resistance: Women, Dress and Sexuality in Iran', *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 9 (2), pp38-55; Wells J, (2003), 'The Sabotage of Patriarchy in Colonial Rhodesia: Rural African Women's Living Legacy to their Daughters', *Feminist Review*, 75, pp101 – 117; Kassem F, (2011), *Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gendered Memory*, Zed Books; Richter-Devroe S, (2018), *Women's Political Activism in Palestine: Peacebuilding, Resistance and Survival*, University of Illinois Press.

¹⁸ Bayat A, (2013), p5.

acknowledges their conformity to Islam, conformity to certain patriarchal norms and preference for piety over personal freedoms as a demonstration of agency and conscious choice, rather than a manifestation of false consciousness.

In examining the interrelationship between the dominant power structure in rural Afghanistan, the constraints it places on women, women's modes of resistance to these constraints, but also their conscious acceptance of elements of this power structure, this research will adopt an ontologically relational-interactionist approach. Epistemologically speaking, this research will be influenced by the structurationist work of Anthony Giddens through a constructivist framework. Structuration theory centres around what Giddens calls the "duality of structure" – 'viewing structure and action as mutually interwoven in social interactions without giving priority to...[either] in an asymmetric manner.'¹⁹ Giddens' epistemological framework is particularly adept at combining theoretical studies with empirical studies, which is particularly relevant for the field of gender; as Heike Kahlert points out that studies performed by scholars of women's or gender studies are often exclusively action-based or structural, and thus 'not able to analyse the simultaneity of stability and change in social practices...they investigate only "subjective" aspects or "objective" conditions.'²⁰ The constant and simultaneous challenging of, conforming to, and compromising with extreme patriarchal power performed by rural Afghan women demands a structurationist approach in order to examine the interrelated and fluid nature of power structure and agency.

1.2 The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)

DACAAR played a crucial role throughout the process of conducting this research in facilitating access to rural women who would otherwise have been inaccessible. During the late winter and early spring of 2019, Afghanistan was extremely unstable; multiple conflicts raged throughout the country between the Taliban, Afghan state forces and other armed opposition groups (AOGs) such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. Foreigners were high profile targets for fatal attack by AOGs and kidnap by both AOGs and career criminals. Compounding these general security issues was the focus of this research on rural women, with rural communities being far less predictable and easy for state forces to secure than urban areas. In addition, accessing rural Afghan women as a lone researcher would have been impossible within the timeframe permitted. The majority of rural women lead extremely localised lives and do not venture past the immediate perimeters of their villages, or peri-urban settlements, in the case of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Many women from the most conservative areas rarely leave home, and certainly never without a *mahram*. To enter villages as an unknown foreigner and ask women personal questions would have been unthinkable in terms of their safety as well as my own, and it is probable that they would not have trusted me enough to want to engage with me.

For the above reasons, the only method through which to access rural Afghan women and simultaneously ensure their safety as well as mine as far as possible, was through embedding within a well-established organization with a culturally-sensitive approach to operations, so as not to increase the chances of becoming a target for violent extremism. I therefore worked with DACAAR from the 1st February through to the 29th April 2019 as a women's empowerment consultant based in their head office in Kabul. Employing this embedded

¹⁹ Kahlert H, (2012), The Simultaneity of Stability and Change in Gender Relations – Contributions from Giddens' Structuration Theory, *Studia Humanistyczne*, 11(2), p60.

²⁰ Ibid, p57-58.

approach to researching rural women permitted me to take advantage of DACAAR's security apparatus, but also their contacts and vast wealth of local knowledge regarding geographical, socio-political and economic contexts across the country.

It should be noted that the term "empowerment" was very much part of DACAAR's overarching discourse for its women's programmes, with the beneficiaries and their communities all having been exposed to this terminology. However, "empowerment" much like "patriarchy" is an ambiguous term, subject to differing interpretations and implementations. It is unclear exactly to what extent DACAAR influences the construction of empowerment as articulated by rural women and understood by the wider community, but it is important to acknowledge that a degree of influence certainly exists.

DACAAR's policy is to establish women's empowerment programmes only in communities which invite them to do so. In order to lay the foundations for programme establishment, a social organizer will generally visit the community and converse with the elders, then the broader group of men in the community; they will discuss women's rights whilst positing those rights within Islam in order to reinforce their legitimacy. A negotiation then takes place between the community and DACAAR's social organizer whereby a shared understanding of acceptable "empowerment" objectives and methods is agreed upon. If this negotiation is successful, DACAAR will be invited to establish a women's empowerment programme, which will enable the most vulnerable women from the community to come together and work as a group on economic empowerment initiatives. Some communities will allow group-based women's empowerment programmes, while others will allow them provided they can be implemented on an individual basis, meaning beneficiaries do not have to leave their homes, whereas other communities simply refuse to permit the establishment of women's empowerment programmes at all. Thus, though DACAAR's strategy and objectives undoubtedly influence rural women's construction of empowerment, the community also influences and negotiates its meaning.

1.3 Research Question

How are Rural Afghan Women Simultaneously Challenging and Reproducing Male Domination Through Practices of "Everyday Resistance" that Interact with Ingrained Patriarchal Habits and Discourses in Hirat and Balkh Provinces During Winter and Spring 2019?

1.4 Research Sub-questions

In order to unpack the research question into the most instructive components for data collection, the following sub questions were formulated:

- 1. How do rural Afghan women understand and define the concept of empowerment, and is this something they are consciously striving to achieve?*
- 2. What institutions of repression, patriarchal norms, discourses and other constraints must rural Afghan women negotiate when practicing everyday resistance?*
- 3. What "ordinary weapons", such as gossip, "backbiting", jokes, grumbling, and false deference, are practiced by rural Afghan women, and how do these practices differ according to the site of agency or resistance?*

4. *Is there evidence of existing patriarchal production and reinforcement of male-privileging information and religious interpretation working to influence and shape desirable thought and behavior patterns underlying social norms and laws, which are in turn working to limit the consciousness of rural Afghan women? Do those rural women who recognize the existence of such hegemonies resist them in any way?*

1.5 Research Strategy

This research will examine the interrelationship between dominant patriarchal power structures along with the conditions and constraints they place on the Afghan women who seek to challenge them, but who also maintain and reproduce these patriarchal structures through their ingrained behaviours and expressions of agency. This relationship between power and subject, rather than being static, is fluid and dynamic, being continually pushed, transformed, remoulded and reinforced by both sides.

The structurationist epistemological stance of Giddens permits approaching this research through the dual lenses of structure and agency as intimately interrelated and thus of equal importance in the dynamic relationship between patriarchy, resistance, conformity and reproduction. Giddens's epistemological approach and its move away from a purely structural or agency-based approach also permits a departure from the traditional andro-centric nature of resistance studies. Robin Thomas and Annette Davies (2005) explain that in moving away from strictly Marxist theories of resistance, we create room for 'a more adequate theorizing of the self, to appreciate the complexities and nuances of resistance at the level of the individual, and different motivations of individuals to resist'.²¹ In researching modes of resistance deployed by rural Afghan women to extreme patriarchy in its many manifestations, this flexibility of recognition and theorizing is essential.

The strategy employed throughout this research was that of qualitative data generation through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The problematic security situation in Afghanistan meant that I was only able to visit rural women (both IDPs and non-IDPs) in Injil and Herat districts in Hirat province, and Mazar-i-Sharif and Balkh districts in Balkh province. Between these four districts, a total of eleven focus groups were conducted with one hundred and thirty rural women. Due to the then-insecure nature of the peri-urban and rural areas in Afghanistan, I was unable to spend more than a few hours in each DACAAR women-only space; therefore, focus groups were the only method of inter-personal data generation I was able to employ with rural women. Despite being limited to focus-groups as opposed to the ideal research scenario of having the opportunity to supplement focus groups with semi-structured interviews, during these focus groups women nevertheless provided a wealth and depth of knowledge that surprised me, as did their openness in talking about very private matters.

In conjunction with the focus groups discussed above, I also held a focus group with fourteen of DACAAR's female employees who work as field staff within WE programmes all over Afghanistan. This focus group was conducted in Kabul and followed the same standardised question format as those focus groups conducted with the rural women in Balkh and Hirat

²¹(2005), What Have the Feminists Done for Us? Feminist Theory and Organizational Resistance, *Organization*, 12 (5), p712.

provinces. Through this focus group, I was able to gather data which confirmed what rural women had described: a bleak picture of the dire socio-economic conditions of rural Afghan families and the combined negative effects of extreme patriarchal power structures and conflict for rural women.

Finally, two in-depth interviews were held with female Afghan members of DACAARs staff in Kabul. One interview was with the senior WE officer who has a degree in agriculture, and who has worked at DACAAR within the WE team for three years. This interview was used to gain a broad understanding of the situation of Afghan women, both rural and urban. The second interview was with a female Afghan communications assistant with a degree in journalism. This interview was used to develop an understanding of whether or not there is male domination of the media, to determine how females contribute to national and regional narratives, and to gain a broad picture of Afghan women in terms of gender norms.

1.6 Research Sample

The sampling method consisted of stratified sampling of each group of DACAAR's beneficiaries I accessed in terms of age, ethnicity, and living situation (widowed, married, unmarried and female-headed households). Focus group participants ranged in age from eighteen to sixty years old. This was essential to ensure that any significant generational differences in perspective and life experiences could be detected and analysed. DACAAR's women's empowerment programmes select both displaced and non-displaced women according to the communities they are working in, and so I ensured as equal a distribution of these two groups as possible in the overall sample in order to avoid bias in the data generated.

In terms of ethnicity, I could not ensure a sample that proportionally represented the demographics of Afghanistan as a whole due to the fact that I was only able to access four districts because of security concerns. However, the research sample, though majority Pashtun, included a significant number of Tajiks and Uzbeks. Hazaras were not present in the sample group as they do not comprise more than a small minority of DACAAR beneficiaries. This is probably due to the fact that the Central Highlands (the area of Afghanistan historically inhabited by Hazara) were relatively safe during the research period (and had been for several years), so displacement was not occurring to the same extent as in other provinces. Despite this relative degree of safety, I was unable to visit the Central Highlands as DACAAR has no contacts there, so I was unable to obtain security clearance. The extent to which rural Hazara women conform to the data generated through this research would benefit from future investigation given the tapestry of currently fragmented ethnic groups, sub-groups and cultures that comprise Afghanistan. However, the Asia Foundation's 2018 survey of the Afghan people found that Hazara people do consistently have more relaxed perspectives on women and women's rights than Uzbeks, Tajiks and Pashtuns.²²

A potential research bias resulted from the snowballing method of sourcing participants who are all DACAAR beneficiaries, despite subsequent stratification. The women are all beneficiaries of DACAAR's WE programmes and thus could construct empowerment in accordance with the contents and objectives of DACAAR's programming. This risk is minimized by DACAAR's participatory, community-led approach, which means that project

²² The Asia Foundation, (2018), A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2018, pp165 – 200.

objectives and methods of implementation are subject to negotiation with the community in which the programmes are established, but the risk of DACAAR influence is present nonetheless.

1.7 Research Method

Step 1: The preliminary stage of this research involved gathering empirical data on the current situation of women in Afghanistan (gender disaggregated or otherwise) within the public and domestic spheres. This initial phase of desk-based research also included exploration of academic literature on Scott's theory of everyday resistance, Bayat's theory of the quiet encroachment of "non-movements" and related analytic concepts, such as hegemony. Post-colonial feminist literature was then analysed in order to supplement and further interrogate these theories and concepts as they apply to rural Afghan women.

Step 2: This stage of the research took place within DACAAR's head office in Kabul and involved taking every opportunity to gain a deeper, more nuanced, contextual understanding of the situation of rural Afghan women. Through two semi-structured interviews and hundreds of informal conversations, DACAAR's staff assisted me in gaining insight into factors which interact in order to produce community expectations of women which differ between provinces (and even districts), but which are all governed to varying degrees by extremely patriarchal power structures which are reinforced and legitimized through a masculine hegemony.

Step 3: This stage involved qualitative research with rural women from four districts across two provinces. Upon arriving at each DACAAR project, my female colleagues and I selected a stratified sample of the beneficiaries that included a mix of age, ethnicity and living situation (in terms of married, single, widow female headed household). Roughly half of the focus groups consisted of IDP women, while half were non-IDPs. Once the women had been made aware of who I was, the objective of this research had been explained, and ethical considerations had been addressed; their verbally informed consent was obtained, and we proceeded with the focus groups. In order to secure the women's trust and ensure their safety, I did not record any names, or even the names of the village or peri-urban area in which the focus group took place. Instead, the district was the only identifying factor recorded.

During these focus groups I asked a standardised set of questions, but supplemented this standardized format with ad hoc questions and prompts which sought to encourage elaboration of answers in order to strengthen and better develop the data generated. Focus group questions explored: what life is like for rural Afghan women; how they define "empowerment"; whether they resist extreme forms of patriarchy within the home and how; whether they resist extreme forms of patriarchy in the community and how; any peacebuilding behaviours the women consciously or subconsciously engage in; and how they formulate what is acceptable in terms of power structures and resistance. I endeavoured to transcribe interviews as soon as possible after they were conducted, in order to record environmental and social features that contributed to the focus group experience.

For the duration of my time in Afghanistan I kept a field diary in which I recorded natural data such as observations and relevant snippets of informal conversations with staff. This field diary provided me with a concrete reminder of events, conversations and cultural

nuances, a context against which to compare transcripts from focus groups and interviews after I had left Afghanistan, enabling me to write this dissertation as authentically as possible.

Step 5

After leaving Afghanistan I was able to embark upon data analysis. This analysis was conducted by coding the transcripts according to key concepts within questions and corresponding key phrases within the responses of the women. These codes were then entered into a spreadsheet accordingly, which enabled me to identify patterns within the data. This deconstruction of focus group discussions also enabled the triangulation of data by comparing focus groups against each other (in order to identify any anomalies), comparing focus group responses with interview responses from DACAAR colleagues and also comparing focus group and interview responses to my earlier, desk-based research. This analysis process culminated in the selection of key elements of data and allowed for the identification of patterns which were then committed to this dissertation.

1.8 Feasibility, Challenges and Ethical Considerations

The foremost limiting factor for this research was the extremely volatile security situation in Afghanistan. This eliminated my freedom of movement, resulting in significantly restricted access to rural women outside of the pool of DACAAR's women's empowerment programme beneficiaries. However, with the exception of Hazara women, DACAAR's women's empowerment programmes are demographically inclusive, community-based initiatives; therefore I was able to access a reasonably representative cross-section of rural women.

Due to language barriers and cultural norms, female interpreters were integral to this research process. My interpreters were two female members of DACAAR staff who live and work in Kabul. One was fluent in Dari, Pashto and English, the other fluent in Dari and English. DACAAR staff have a good relationship with beneficiaries of their projects, but in order to reduce research bias as far as possible, and as a measure of protection for the participants, the members of field staff who the beneficiaries have interaction with through implementation of the programmes were asked not to enter the room while the focus groups were taking place. This procedure was implemented in order for the participants to feel more comfortable speaking freely in the knowledge that statements made would not affect their status as a DACAAR beneficiary, nor their safety within the community. Translators were briefed on how the focus groups would be conducted, the necessity of direct translation and impartiality. Verbal informed consent was always sought prior to the focus groups, as was permission to use my recording device.

The focus groups conducted throughout this research represented an extremely unbalanced power dynamic between myself as the researcher and the rural Afghan women as participants which requires acknowledgment. Realistically there was no way to circumnavigate or reduce this imbalance. As a British white woman, my life experience is intimately interrelated with a history of imperialism, exploitation, military aggression and relative privilege. My British passport also privileges me by ensuring that I can exit conflict zones and dangerous situations whenever I choose and return to the UK. These experiences are not shared by rural Afghan women, who have endured intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination on a daily basis as a result of gender, class, displacement, social circumstances and sometimes religious and ethnic group. Further, as the person posing the questions, I cemented my position of

authority, albeit as sympathetically and sensitively as possible. I was only able to employ of few measures in an attempt to address this power imbalance: I made it clear before each focus group began that all questions were voluntary and that if participants didn't want to answer any questions we would simply move on without applying any pressure. The second thing I did was to ensure that at the end of each focus group I allowed time to invite questions from participants which I answered honestly.

During the initial stages of this research, I was aware there was a chance that the women would not want to speak to me. I am extremely grateful that they did, and in fact they opened up about their personal lives far more than I expected. Despite the unexpected openness on the part of the participants, some of the initial questions I had planned to ask had to be revised for three different reasons.

At the outset, it became apparent very quickly that some questions were too abstract for the participants, who had received no formal education and were illiterate. Initially I planned to ask questions about women's perceptions of, and resistance to, both armed conflict on the national scale and more domestic manifestations of extreme patriarchy. However, the participants did not understand the dynamics of the ongoing conflict at a national level, nor the role of the government (in terms of conflict or governance). This lack of political awareness seemed to stem from two factors. First: rural women's lives are consumed by poverty, thus their immediate concerns are survival-based and their days are filled with caring for children and other family members. Coinciding with this complete absorption in day-to-day survival are clearly defined gender roles in rural Afghanistan, which stipulate that it is only men who listen to the news on the radio and talk about politics; women are discouraged from engaging in such activities. For their part, the women often informed me that they weren't remotely interested in politics, stating that they just want peace. My questions therefore had to be simplified enormously. I stopped asking about the conflict on a national scale and asked questions about inter-family and inter-community conflict instead. The women were able to comprehend these questions and answer in depth, because the contents of the questions were intimately related to their lived experiences.

The second alteration I had to make to my focus group questions was to change the word "resistance". Most of the participants didn't perceive resistance as an individual endeavour, conceiving of it only as visible collective action. They were also suspicious of the word "resistance" in the context of resistance to patriarchy, viewing it as possibly denoting behaviour which is incompatible with Islam. However, after discussing the word that they would use to describe how they react to power and behaviours they don't like, we came up with "challenging." I therefore changed the format of the question and swapped "resistance" for "challenge", in terms of challenging their husband, or challenging social norms. After this, participants understood the question, recognised it as something they do, and provided a lot of examples of ways in which they employ such behaviour. There is therefore a disjuncture between the wording used in focus group questions, ie "challenging" and the wording of this dissertation, ie "resisting". I have chosen to continue to use "resistance" throughout this dissertation in order to maintain linguistic cohesion with the chosen analytical frameworks.

Finally, I had planned to ask questions pertaining to hegemony, particularly looking to the media for examples. However, all of the participants were illiterate, and none listened to the radio; listening to the news on the radio was viewed as the domain of men, meaning they were unaware that some radio programmes discuss social issues, or other topics that would be of interest to women. Lack of time was also cited as a prohibitive factor which prevents them

from listening to the radio. None of the participants owned a TV or had access to internet on their phones, thus eliminating their access to social media. As a result, I examined this key component of my research through engagement with my colleagues in Kabul rather than focus group participants.

In conclusion, a note on reflexivity. Though I made a concerted effort to approach this research objectively and continually hold myself to account in terms of preconceived notions, and imposition of my own belief structure, there is no escaping the fact that my perception of the world and social phenomena within it has been shaped by my life experience as a British white woman from an individualistic capitalist society, in contrast to the very religious and community-oriented society that characterizes rural Afghanistan. In order to minimize the inevitable reflexivity that arises from the dichotomy of these world views as much as possible, I recorded my own thoughts and reactions to events within my field diary as a tool by which to keep track of and confront any creeping subjectivity and incursion of research bias.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to discuss Afghan women and their engagement in everyday resistance, this literature review will first visit empirical sources which examine and discuss how women interact with patriarchal power structures, as well as qualitative and quantitative empirical research on the current situation of Afghan women. A short book by Elaheh Rostami-Povey (2007),²³ a lecturer in development studies at SOAS University, will underpin the empirical component of this literature review as this book provides a comprehensive understanding of Afghan women as they view themselves. Their self-identity is defined as integral components of organic Islamic communities, which evolve, devolve, fragment, fracture or support according to pressure exacted upon them by external bodies of power. Empirical sources will be juxtaposed within the post-colonial feminist field of research in order to shed light upon the multiple forms of structural violence that shape the lives of rural Afghan women. Furthermore, this literature review will explore how post-colonial feminist scholarship also simultaneously identifies and amplifies agency as something that rural Muslim women exercise on a daily basis in contrast to the orthodox “Western” perspective of these women as simply silent victims of conservative Muslim men.

Once the relevant empirical sources have been discussed, academic sources on everyday resistance and the quiet encroachment of “non-movements” will be analysed. James Scott’s (1985 and 1990) work²⁴ will first be used to introduce the fundamental principles of the theory of everyday resistance and how it is characterized in terms of applicable scenarios of power distribution, resistance behaviour and constraints. Following this, Matthew Gutmann’s (1993)²⁵ and Asef Bayat’s (2013)²⁶ critique of the theory will be summarized and located within an academic debate between these scholars and Scott. This overview of existing academic debate will then lead from Scott’s theory of everyday resistance to Bayat’s theory of the “quiet encroachment of non-movements”, a development in the field of subaltern studies which recognises and responds to the actions of individuals who act out of necessity rather than conscious resistance, but who nevertheless transform the prevailing system of power dynamics and social norms through their behaviour. Academic literature produced by post-colonial feminist scholars will be used in order to provide nuance and gendered analysis.

Finally, in an attempt to discern exactly why so many rural Afghan men and women adhere to the prevailing social norms, perpetuating and reinforcing extreme patriarchal power structures in the process, the theory of hegemony as formulated by Antonio Gramsci will be analysed in conjunction with feminist adaptations of his work.

2.1 Afghan Women: Patriarchy, Imperialism and Conflict.

‘We hate them when in the name of women’s rights and human rights they come and intrude on our privacy. They keep saying women should work. They don’t understand that women are not happy that they provide work for women and not for men. It does not work like this in our

²³ Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion, Zed Books.

²⁴ (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press and (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Yale University Press.

²⁵ *Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance and Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance: Rejoinder*, *Latin American Perspectives*, 20(2), p74 – 92 and p95 – 96 respectively.

²⁶ *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed), Stanford University Press.

*culture. We want to work side by side with our men. We cannot ignore our men. Men also need education and employment.*²⁷

The above statement by an Afghan woman cited by Rostami-Povey succinctly illustrates the subtleties and nuances this research will navigate in examining modes of everyday resistance deployed by Afghan women. Rostami-Povey comprehensively examines gendered power relations in Afghanistan, and the effects upon them of Taliban rule as well as prolonged conflict and occupation. She notes that whilst the Taliban ruled, women had many male allies, and were surprisingly able to turn gendered power dynamics on their head in some instances. Through presenting scenarios such as women employing unrelated men to act as *mahrums* during Taliban rule, she provides real-life examples which challenge the good woman / predatory man binary so often propagated by Western media when discussing Afghanistan, all the while demonstrating that gender norms and the social rules that enforce them are not rigidly conformed to by everybody.

The central theme throughout Rostami-Povey's book is that Afghan women have a long history of resistance. In addition to her documentation of the pervasiveness of extreme patriarchy and successive occupations (first the Russians then the Americans and coalition forces), she details how Afghan women have also resisted gender identities imposed upon them by both the Taliban and the American occupiers, refusing to conform to either. She states that 'women's life histories are diverse but all have the common ground of a struggle against the gender prejudices ranged at them, from Islamic tradition to Orientalist representations.'²⁸ While Rostami-Povey does not actually define the actions of Afghan women as everyday forms of resistance, when read in conjunction with James Scott's work, definitive similarities can be drawn. An example of how Rostami-Povey and Scott complement each other is in Scott's identification of solidarity as integral to successful peasant resistance. Rostami-Povey chronicles how under the Taliban, women's networks crossed ethnic and class divides in order to prevent destitute women from starving to death due to having no male relatives and being unable to work themselves.

Afghan women in Rostami-Povey's book articulate their understanding of women's rights as community orientated and focused on the socioeconomic wellbeing of their families. This contradicts the individualistic civil and political rights which are so favoured by western actors from developed economies, and for whom economic rights are taken for granted. Furthermore, the more external actors impose their own conceptualization of women's rights on rural Afghan society, the tighter rural Afghan's hold on to their cultural and religious traditions. It is in this context that women are able to utilize Islam in their struggle against patriarchy. By locating their rights within Islam, they are able to present them as non-debatable religious duties and garner support from Afghan men. This approach conflicts with the dominant western narrative of Islam as impinging upon women's rights rather than providing for them.

Rostami-Povey points to the resulting tension inherent between Afghan women's vision of gender equality and imperialist formulations of such. She states 'as the women in this book constantly reiterated, the domination and oppression they face is as much imperial as patriarchal. In their view, socio-economic development and engaging all ethnic groups and religions, is the only way to achieve peace, security and development whilst presenting a catalyst for change in gender relations. However, instead of development, peace and security,

²⁷ Nuria, Mazar-e-Sharif cited in Rostami-Povey, (2007), p40.

²⁸ (2007), p3.

the invaders use the concept of women's rights, human rights, democracy and humanitarian intervention to advocate imperial domination.'²⁹

Anila Daulatzai,³⁰ Saba Mahmood,³¹ Lila Abu-Lughod³² and Christine Jacobsen³³ all agree that there is a fundamental problem characterized by cultural imperialism in the way in which feminist scholars often approach Muslim women as research subjects, thus creating an adversarial relationship between feminism and Islam. Mahmood argues that feminist scholarship often only recognises resistance and agency when they conform to 'norms of secular-liberal feminism and the liberatory telos', and in which 'the conceptualization of agency [is restricted] to acts that further the moral autonomy of the individual in the face of power.'³⁴ She continues on to explain that the prevailing model of agency 'that seeks to locate the political and moral autonomy of the subject in the face of power...sharply limits our ability to understand and interrogate the lives of women whose sense of self, aspirations and projects have been shaped by non-liberal traditions.'³⁵ An integral feature of the cultural imperialism imposed upon Afghanistan is the failure of western feminism to adequately grasp religious piety in its complexity, given the fact that western feminism is informed by the principles of autonomy and freedom.³⁶ The repercussions of this failure to comprehend the complex nature of piety and agency in Afghanistan continues to hinder successful development and peacebuilding as international actors seek to transform Afghan society and shape it in the mirror image of the west, an imposition which is experienced as an additional form of violence by rural Afghan women, who are often deeply religious and find the prospect of having their ability to visually signal their piety (for example through wearing the burqa) forcibly eroded to be traumatic.

It is for rural Afghan women to decide upon what change they would like to see affected in their communities, and how they wish to see this change introduced. It is certain that the imposition of values they do not recognise by external actors is not the method of change that rural Afghan women wish to experience, but that is not to say that they are completely content with their current socio-economic status or acquiescent to every aspect of the prevailing gendered power-dynamic which is often manipulated by men to legitimize control and violence against women: a practice that is inherently contradictory to the teachings of Islam as understood by rural women. A quantitative 2016 study conducted by Nina Burridge et al³⁷ presents some informative data on aspects of rural women's lives that they may well wish to change in some way. Most importantly, it distinguishes between different regions and notes that women's literacy levels are estimated to be three times lower in rural areas.³⁸ In such areas only 5.8% of females have reached secondary education or higher, whilst female

²⁹ Ibid, p133.

³⁰ (2008), The Discursive Occupation of Afghanistan, *Gender and Diversity in the Middle East and North Africa*, 35 (3), pp419-435.

³¹ (2006), Feminist Theory, Agency and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt, *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion: Temenos*, 42 (1), p31-71.

³² (2002), Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others, *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3), pp783-790.

³³ (2011), Troublesome Threesome: Feminist Anthropology and Muslim Women's Piety, *Feminist Review*, pp65-82.

³⁴ (2006), p31.

³⁵ Ibid, p33.

³⁶ Jacobsen C, (2011), p70.

³⁷ Burridge N, Payne A M, & Rahmani N, (2016), 'Education is as Important for Me as Water for Sustaining Life': Perspectives on the Higher Education of Women in Afghanistan, *Gender and Education*, 28 (1), pp128-147.

³⁸ (2016), p129.

participation in the labour market is 15.7% compared to 80.3% for men.³⁹ Given the number of widows and female-headed households in Afghanistan, particularly among IDP populations, the latter statistic is particularly alarming in terms of repercussions for the survival of widowed rural women and their families.

Aside from being greatly disadvantaged in terms of employment and education, a 2013 report⁴⁰ produced by UN Women in Afghanistan points to a gendered perception of safety as a result of Taliban violence against, and oppression of, women. The report details how throughout the war against the Soviets, women were routinely abducted and forced into marriage or into providing sexual or domestic services.⁴¹ In a country where family honour rests upon the women, such abductions had a catastrophic effect not only on the women, but also entire families and communities, resulting in a fracturing effect upon society which eroded the family and community-support mechanisms many Afghans made use of in the past. As the report explains, ‘women have male relatives killed in the conflict...this increases their vulnerability to conflict-related violence.’⁴² This is corroborated by the women in Rostami-Povey’s book who recognise that the trauma induced in the past is still very present today, but with additional, more recent traumas exacerbating the negative effects. It should be noted, however, that though the UN report provides a background to the current situation of women and seeks to provide an explanation for prevailing social norms today, it neglects to place the Taliban within a broader context of interrelated oppressions faced by women such as poverty, occupation and imperialism.

2.2 Everyday Resistance: Weapons of the Weak

An important qualifier with which to prelude Scott’s theory of everyday resistance is to point out the fact that Scott’s work is focused on peasant resistance to dominant economic classes rather than gender-related forms of oppression. However, the theory can easily be transferred to women’s resistance, or in fact any form of resistance characterized by an extremely asymmetrical power dynamic expressed through an intimidatory or violent personal manifestation of power by the dominant in contrast to limited resources, or recourse to justice on the part of the subordinate group. All of the aforementioned characteristics of the prevailing power dynamic are experienced by rural Afghan women on a daily basis, demonstrating resonance with everyday resistance and cementing it as a suitable framework through which to approach this research.

Scott defines everyday resistance as ‘weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so forth...They require little coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority...or elite norms.’⁴³ Whilst these examples are taken from peasants resisting the economically dominant, it takes little imagination to see how Afghan women could engage in everyday resistance to extremely patriarchal power structures and behaviour through acts available to them such as; wearing nail polish or make up, reading or gaining an education informally,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ UN Women, (2013), “‘Like a Bird with Broken Wings’”; Afghan Women Oral History 1978 – 2008.’ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/12/report-on-afghan-women-experiences-with-violence>

⁴¹ (2013), p34.

⁴² Ibid, p49.

⁴³ Ibid, p29.

performing domestic tasks half-heartedly, or perhaps spitting in a meal, failing to instil proper deference to the patriarchy in their children, etc. Scott notes that gossip, stories, jokes and other oral transcripts can also be a subtle yet pervasive form of resistance – a behaviour he calls “small arms fire”⁴⁴, and this is something that is undoubtedly employed by all rural Afghan women; complaining about husbands, ridiculing men in positions of authority, cracking derogatory jokes about men in visible positions of power etc. A further aspect of Scott’s work which resonates with the situation of Afghan women is the role of shame in regulating social behaviour.⁴⁵ As women carry the burden of family honour, they can be manipulated by their families accordingly, and this threat of shame will act to restrict the space and type of resistance available to them.

Scott argues that parameters of resistance are set by institutions of repression, thus peasant resistance is non-hierarchical, flexible and persistent⁴⁶, characterized by low-grade but continuous struggle. The same defining features of resistance and corresponding parameters of resistance exist in rural Afghanistan, with institutions of repression being located within the family and community, and therefore posing an omnipresent and immediate threat to rural women if their resistance practices are detected. Scott explains that a resistant group can often be misinterpreted as compliant, for that is what they need the dominant institutions to think: the more powerful the oppressor, the more hidden the majority of the transcript of resistance.⁴⁷ If this is the case for Afghan women, it would directly challenge the popular western trope of Afghan women as passive victims, whilst explaining this outside misperception.

Scott’s emphasis on the symbolism inherent within the discreet resistance behaviours of the subordinate group compliments post-colonial feminist scholarship; indeed, when Scott’s framework is viewed through a gendered lens, the two schools of thought synthesise considerably. Scott heavily criticizes those who insist on only recognizing visible, organized acts of resistance as such, arguing that it is the intention behind the acts that should be judged as revolutionary or resistant, rather than the consequences of the actions.⁴⁸ Supporting Scott’s argument against the privileging of visible, political action, Daulatzai presents a feminist justification for recognising the invisible and discreet. She states that ‘the mapping of a feminist political consciousness over the everyday concerns of [rural women] sets up a dichotomy between the oppressed, voiceless women on one side, and the heroic autonomous figure on the other...the exclusive celebration of only certain forms of resistance ultimately discounts the everyday struggles of Afghan women in general, and represents a misreading of the complex forms of agency they enact.’⁴⁹ Recognition of rural Afghan women’s agency therefore requires a framework such as everyday resistance, which recognises the subtle as significant and which coexists so comfortably with post-colonial feminism.

Everyday resistance, according to Scott, is effective and unbeatable in many respects, as over time it can result in structural change whilst keeping participants safe due to the fact that they remain hidden. As evidence of this, he points to the everyday resistance of slaves and explains that small acts of resistance ‘[m]ultiplied many thousand-fold...may in the end make an utter mockery of the policies thought up by...superiors...’⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Ibid, p22 – 23, 282.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p17 -18.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p298-299.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p286-287.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p290-292.

⁴⁹ (2008), p431.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p36-37.

Scott's theory of everyday resistance is not without critique, though the criticisms presented by Matthew Gutmann (1993)⁵¹ serve to further establish the theory of everyday resistance as the most compatible for this research. Gutmann's principle arguments are that everyday resistance theory ignores overt forms of resistance and that it does not result in structural change as Scott suggests.⁵² In response Scott argues that Gutmann has missed the point, and that understanding everyday resistance is imperative because it exists with or without rebellions, but rebellions cannot be understood without understanding everyday resistance.⁵³ Thus it would seem that the validity of everyday resistance as a theory rests upon whether the intentions or the consequences are being judged, as well as on what scale the consequences must qualify as sufficient structural change. Existing empirical evidence along with the data generated through this research suggests that rural Afghan women do not necessarily wish for structural change, but for the ability to formulate their rights in accordance with Islam and patriarchal cultural values. It would therefore seem that everyday resistance is the theory that best resonates with their goals and circumstances.

A further criticism offered by Gutmann is that Scott's theory is decontextualised and that it essentializes peasantry. On this latter point, Asef Bayat agrees, denouncing those academics who view the politics of the poor 'in binary terms of a revolutionary / passive dichotomy' which 'overlook the dynamics of the poor's everyday life.'⁵⁴ Scott however counters the charge that everyday resistance theory is decontextualized by acknowledging that his theory will only be applicable to specific forms of institutionalized domination and power dynamics. These dynamics are informed by 'formal assumptions about superiority and inferiority...Status in these systems of domination is ascribed by birth, mobility is virtually nil, and subordinates are granted few, if any political or civil rights...These forms of domination are infused by an element of personal terror that may take the form of arbitrary beatings, sexual violations and other insults and humiliations.'⁵⁵ Scott's strategy therefore has been to formulate a theory of resistance that applies to these specific power dynamics rather than the global peasantry as a homogenous group. Importantly, the gendered power dynamics which govern rural Afghan communities conform to the framework and characteristics of power identified by Scott as applicable to everyday resistance.

By way of extending Scott's theory and applying a gendered lens, Palestinian scholar Eileen Kuttab (2010)⁵⁶ combines the class resistance of Scott's theory with resistance to occupation and imperialism, and the struggle against patriarchy which Palestinian women are also embarking upon through their nation-building struggle. Echoing Rostami-Povey's discussion of how men and women were often allies under the Taliban, Kuttab also identifies the role of both genders in challenging the patriarchy and occupation, pointing to the development of mixed-sex Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in Palestine to do just this. In line with Scott's theory that forms of resistance reflect the conditions and constraints under which they

⁵¹ Gutmann M, (1993), *Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance and Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance: Rejoinder*, *Latin American Perspectives*, 20(2), p74 – 92 and p95 – 96 respectively.

⁵² (1993), p74 – 77.

⁵³ Scott J, (1993), *Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance: Reply*, *Latin American Perspectives*, 20(2), p93-94.

⁵⁴ (2013), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, p37.

⁵⁵ Scott J, (1990), p21.

⁵⁶ Empowerment as Resistance: Conceptualising Palestinian Women's Empowerment, *Development*, 53 (2), pp247-253.

are generated, the ethos behind these CBOS is that ‘if you give people physical space or place to gather, they will begin to exchange ideas and plan activities that meet their needs.’⁵⁷

Kuttab’s writing provides a theoretical and empirical bridge between Rostami-Povey’s and Scott’s writings in recognizing the need ‘to tie empowerment to everyday resistance to the colonial occupation’ whilst simultaneously ‘address[ing] patriarchy and class exploitation as an integral part of the struggle.’⁵⁸ She emphasises that women’s resistance in Palestine is a grassroots, community-orientated form of resistance to multiple, interwoven forms of oppression, and so resulting change will be gradual, but widespread, effective and sustainable. The gradual nature of Kuttab’s envisioned revolution would result in it not being recognized as such by Gutmann, unless the resistance were to comprise and maintain actions that were visible and confrontational, which in most cases of women’s resistance in Palestine and Afghanistan they are not. As Scott makes clear, the intentions should be the deciding factor on what constitutes resistance, rather than the consequences. Lack of open rebellion does not indicate that change is not happening, or cannot happen as a result of discreet intentional behaviour, particularly when employed en masse.

The defining feature of women’s resistance as grassroots and covert, particularly in highly patriarchal societies lends itself to an application of everyday resistance theory, and as such many feminist studies of women’s resistance to patriarchy and imperialism have been conducted. In Palestine, women engage in multi-faceted acts of resistance, primarily to the Israeli occupation, but in doing so they also carve a political and social space for themselves from which to fight for women’s rights as part of the Palestinian nationalist state-building project.⁵⁹ Similarly, feminist scholars have utilized the everyday resistance framework in studying how Algerian women employed poetry as a form of ‘cultural protest and resistance to language policies under French colonialism’;⁶⁰ how Iranian women ‘refashion their...public bodies in new styles...to not only resist dress codes, but to...challenge the regime’s patriarchal discourses regarding women’;⁶¹ and how rural women in colonial Rhodesia undermined patriarchal customs they perceived as oppressive through the way they raised their children.⁶² Through these studies and more like them, a geographical mosaic is developed which contains examples of everyday resistance being employed by women in communities all over the world.

⁵⁷ (2010), p251.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p252-253.

⁵⁹ Kuttab E, (2010), Empowerment as Resistance: Conceptualising Palestinian Women’s Empowerment, *Development*, 53 (2), pp247-253; El-Haddad L, (2014), After the Smoke Clears: Gaza’s Everyday Resistance, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 44 (1), pp120-125; Richter-Devroe S, (2018), Women’s Political Activism in Palestine: Peacebuilding, Resistance and Survival; Johnson P & Kuttab E, Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada, *Feminist Review, The Realm of the Possible: Middle Eastern Women in Political and Social Spaces*, 69, (2001),p397 – 415.

⁶⁰ Slyomovics S, (2014), Algerian Women’s Buqalah Poetry: Oral Literature, Cultural Politics and Anti-colonial Resistance, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 45, p145.

⁶¹ Abdmolaei S, (2014), (Re)Fashioning Resistance: Women, Dress and Sexuality within Iran, *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 9 (2), p38.

⁶² Wells J, (2003), The Sabotage of Patriarchy in Colonial Rhodesia: Rural African Women’s Living Legacy to their Daughters, *Feminist Review*, 75, pp101-117.

2.3 The Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary

Asef Bayat, in his 2013 book 'Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East' addresses the conundrum posed by the everyday resistance framework: if consciousness is the decisive factor as to whether an act constitutes resistance or revolution regardless of the consequences, what then should we call actions driven by necessity rather than conscious resistance which nevertheless result in favourable structural change of some kind? In answering this complication, Bayat develops the concept of "quiet encroachment": 'the silent, protracted, but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied, powerful or the public, in order to survive or improve their lives.' He continues on to explain that 'while quiet encroachment cannot be considered a "social movement" as such, it is also distinct from survival strategies or "everyday resistance".'⁶³

In recognition of the fact that quiet encroachment does not represent the deliberate actions of a social movement, Bayat coined the term "non-movement" to describe a scenario whereby 'the collective actions of non-collective actors tend to be action-orientated rather than ideologically driven; they are overwhelmingly quiet, rather than audible, since the claims are made largely individually rather than by united groups.' Furthermore, in non-movements, 'actors directly practice what they claim, despite government sanctions. Thus theirs is not a politics of protest, but of practice.'⁶⁴ These non-movements are distinct from performative everyday life because the actions carried out by individuals engaging in such non-movements are contentious; 'they subvert governing norms and laws and infringe on power, property and public.'⁶⁵

In justifying his hypothesis and theory of non-movements, despite recognising Scott's significant contribution to the study of micro-politics, Bayat ultimately agrees with Gutmann that the everyday resistance framework is essentialist. However, Bayat's primary critique of everyday resistance is that it fails to explain the dichotomy between intended and unintended actions and results. He also argues that though everyday resistance theory rests upon the Foucaultian premise that power is everywhere, and wherever there is power, there will necessarily be resistance: a notion that has advanced subaltern studies considerably; Foucault fails to fully account for state power in all its enormity. Thus, the concept of quiet encroachment is very similar to everyday resistance in that the non-confrontational individual actions of a non-collective group are integral to the theory, but the two theories depart from each other significantly when actors are put under pressure. Whereas everyday resistance remains discreet through necessity, with increased threat to the actor resulting in more deeply hidden, or invisible transcripts of resistance, non-movements differ from this pattern significantly. Bayat explains that in the case of non-movements, if there is sufficient threat to actors or their gains, a social movement may be formed and collective action pursued, particularly if actors have the political resources and opportunity to mobilize collectively. According to Bayat's theory, when such collective action emerges, the target will usually be the state rather than individuals, in contrast to everyday resistance.

The most common objectives of non-movements according to Bayat are the redistribution of social goods, public space, opportunities and other life chances.⁶⁶ They therefore represent 'changes which the actors consider significant in themselves without intending necessarily to undermine political authority. Yet these simple and everyday practices are bound to shift into

⁶³ P46.

⁶⁴ (2013), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed), p20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p49.

the realm of politics'⁶⁷ due to the sheer number of individuals engaging in them. Public space, the labour market and land for housing is quietly encroached upon, but in such a way as to shift the prevailing power dynamic just enough to accommodate the changes that have been made, making them durable for the long-term.

Due to Bayat's work predominantly focusing on the urban poor, he identifies those most likely to embark upon a path of quiet encroachment as 'floating social clusters' such as IDPs, 'refugees, migrants, the unemployed, squatters, street vendors and other marginalized groups'⁶⁸ who do not have access to a social safety net. In the case of rural Afghanistan, women are often so marginalised that in many villages their access to public space is minimal, if not non-existent, which has a concurrently detrimental effect on their ability to generate an income, gain an education, socialise with other women, or exercise any kind of autonomy. We must bear this in mind in turning to the work of Richard Ballard, who describes the politics of non-movements in such a way as to demonstrate their resonance with rural Afghan women perfectly: 'people trespass onto spaces on which they are not 'allowed'...and in doing so, appropriate the very soil [of those spaces].' They challenge established assumptions and as a result of these reconfigured power relations, 'individuals can "step out" of the futures expected for them',⁶⁹ as mundane practices carried out by the many consequentially shift social norms. This claiming of public space, and subsequent legitimization of women as public actors is something that will be explored further in chapter three.

2.4 Hegemony

A final consideration to be given attention during this literature review is the explanation behind so many rural Afghan men and women adhering to social norms which are manifestations of extremely patriarchal power structures. It is not clear whether the majority of rural communities simply adhere to such social norms in order to avoid confrontation with community and religious authorities, to preserve their family honour through the policing of women's bodies and behaviour – itself an extremely patriarchal exercise, or simply because they have no frame of reference against which to compare and thus agitate for change. Moreover, the extent to which social norms are not simply adhered to, but actively supported and reproduced by rural men and rural women is unknown, though it would certainly be a worthy subject of future research.

Scott's theory of everyday resistance incorporates an element of Marxist theory by featuring and building upon Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony⁷⁰ as an explanation for peasant compliance with the dominant power and correlating lack of ability to recognise exploitation and structural violence. Gramsci himself developed the concept of hegemony as a means of explaining "consent" by the masses to be governed by the state, though it can easily be applied to societies governed by extremely patriarchal structures of power and consent to be governed by such on behalf of the public. According to Gramsci, certain social institutions such as schools, religious establishments, and the media 'function to manufacture and

⁶⁷ Bayat A, (1997), Un-civil Society: The Politics of the 'Informal People', *Third World Quarterly*, 18 (1), p58.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p58.

⁶⁹ (2015), Geographies of Development III: Militancy, Insurgency, Encroachment and Development by the Poor, *Progress in Human Geography*, 39 (2), p219-220.

⁷⁰ Gramsci A, (1971), Selections from the Prison Notebooks, reproduced by ElecBook: The Electronic Book Company, London, (1999).

maintain the consent of non-dominant groups' to be governed.⁷¹ By extension, he identifies 'social hegemony' as the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed upon social life by the dominant fundamental group.⁷² Thus Gramsci explains how ubiquitous social institutions work to distract the masses from the structural violence imposed upon them, whilst simultaneously manufacturing the consent of those same masses to be governed by the dominant entity which is imposing the structural violence in the first place. Uthara Soman applies a gendered lens to Gramsci's theory of the production of hegemony and identifies how 'patriarchal norms are maintained through a variety of means' which include familial and educational upbringing, social environment, lack of facilities (childcare, contraception training), discriminatory practices, laws, policies and the use of force.⁷³ It is clear that sites for manufacturing patriarchal norms identified by Soman are very similar to Gramsci's sites for the manufacture of consent, but Soman takes a further step and ventures down a more gendered analysis of these sites. As such, she identifies community and public spaces as sites of social control exercised through intimidation and violence against women along with simultaneous expression of social hierarchies which disadvantage women. Soman's analysis is particularly pertinent to the context of rural Afghanistan.

Fatma Kassem (2011) looks beyond the process of manufactured consent and focuses on the negative implications of masculine hegemonies, describing how they 'efface women as a category of analysis from the areas of public memory, transforming them into dispossessed and non-historical beings.' This masculine hegemony results in an intersection of discrimination due to class and gender, which works to further reinforce and legitimize the oppression of women and the silencing of their narratives and aspirations, particularly those aspirations which are perceived as a threat to absolute patriarchal power. This intersectional element of hegemony and patriarchal power could feasibly be employed as a socio-political commentary of Afghanistan.

According to Gramsci, when the masses are unable to recognise their exploitation or the structural violence they are subjected to, they are suffering from "false consciousness". This notion of conscious awareness of the oppressor, versus false consciousness often proves to be problematic in feminist writing, with false consciousness commonly conferred upon conservative Muslim women by western feminist scholars who fail to recognise the agency of Muslim women who choose to engage in practices of piety⁷⁴, or who deploy alternative methods of resistance to those practiced in western societies as part of a political struggle. Thus, the literature review has travelled full circle and returned to the suitability of the analytical frameworks provided by Scott and Bayat for this research due to their focus on the otherwise invisible behaviours exercised by subalterns.

2.5 Conclusion

Rostami-Povey, in her analysis of Afghan women's perceptions of imperialism, patriarchal social norms, Islam and the struggles of daily life in Afghanistan, draws attention to the

⁷¹ Atack I, (2006), Nonviolent Political Action and the Limits of Consent, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 111, p93.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ (2009), p253-244.

⁷⁴ Mahmood S, (2005), *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton University Press.

extent to which ‘material conditions have important social and political consequences on their lives.’⁷⁵ She also points out that after the American invasion, ‘[w]omen’s rights issues were formulated by the predominantly male Afghan elite and were generally based on western models of women’s rights which were culturally insensitive and unpopular with the majority of Afghan women.’⁷⁶ These political elites (now both male and female) have ignored rural communities by ostracizing them from development and peacebuilding processes, further marginalizing rural women in the process. It is this neglect of rural collective values, and the struggles and agency of rural women within the constraints of these values that has influenced this research and determined the theories of everyday resistance and quiet encroachment as the most academically suitable. These theories are sensitive to the invisible actions of the marginalised, recognising agency and continually evolving power dynamics in communities where political elites commonly see only illiterate peasants.

The post-colonial feminist literature reviewed highlights the problematic nature of the majority of feminist writing in its approach to Muslim women, illustrating that caution must be taken during the process of this research in terms of making a conscious effort not to impose externally formulated meaning upon the actions and perspectives of rural Afghan women. Instead a sensitive approach must be employed which provides rural women space and time to formulate and articulate their own concepts and convey their own meanings and experiences pertaining to empowerment and extremely patriarchal power structures in Afghanistan.

⁷⁵ (2007), p8.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p12.

Chapter Three: Visions of Empowerment

This chapter will examine the influences, experiences, tensions and contradictions which shape rural women's construction of their desired vision of empowerment. As discussed in the introduction, one of the justifications widely espoused by U.S political actors and influential western women for the invasion of Afghanistan was the desire to liberate and empower Afghan women. However, rural Afghan women have rarely, if ever, been consulted in any meaningful way as to what they perceive empowerment to represent. This chapter will shed light on rural women's narratives in such a way as to enable their definitions of empowerment to be examined against their socio-economic status and related life experiences, religious piety, perceptions of patriarchy, societal norms and the effects of the prevailing political atmosphere. Understanding these values and perceptions is critical when moving forward to examine rural women's resistance practices and reproduction of patriarchy as discussed further in chapters four and five.

3.1 The Co-option of Empowerment

The term "women's empowerment" is inherently political and fraught with subjectivities. Eileen Kuttab⁷⁷ argues that development institutions such as the World Bank, UN organizations and the donor community have reproduced the concept of empowerment within a neoliberal paradigm, 'hijacking its original emancipatory meaning and intent' and instead mainstreaming the concept 'along with their own financial philosophy and conditions.'⁷⁸ She argues that today "emancipation" is often 'narrowly interpreted as participation in decision-making, increased access to productive resources and expanded choices of individual women.' The consequence of this narrow construction of the concept she concludes, is 'the neglect of the transformative and radical understandings of the term... [and related focus on the] individual instead of collective empowerment.'⁷⁹ Kuttab thus highlights the point that there is no single definition of empowerment, but the individualistic concept of empowerment advocated by the West is less radical and capable of genuine societal change. It should come as no surprise that rural Afghan women's vision of empowerment reflects their daily struggles and values; it omits fundamental elements of the western vision of empowerment whilst emphasizing the necessity of women's solidarity and incorporating deference to patriarchal structures of religious authority.

3.2 "Proud to be Muslim Women": Factors Influencing Rural Women's Definition of Empowerment

Rural Afghan women do not have a uniform system of values or homogenous life experiences, but they do share a common understanding of what empowerment represents. In exploring what factors contribute to rural women's construction of their desired vision of empowerment, it became apparent during focus groups that whilst IDP and non-IDP women share many experiences (for example; domestic violence, extremely patriarchal dynamics of control and oppression, extreme poverty, patriarchal interpretations of Islam and desire to behave as "good Muslim women"), they also live entirely different experiences which are

⁷⁷ (2010), Empowerment as Resistance: Conceptualizing Palestinian Women's Empowerment, *Development*, 53 (2), pp247 – 253.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p247.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p247.

most clearly reflected through their priorities. These mutual and distinguishable life experiences and priorities will be analysed as a means to fully understand the definitions of empowerment provided by focus group participants, which are very much economically-driven and diligently framed within their interpretation of Islam.

As a means of generating data on how women's experiences and values colour their definition of empowerment, all focus groups were asked to discuss what life is like for rural Afghan women and IDP women; specifically, what they like and dislike about their daily lives and positions within society. All of the focus groups except one were able to provide details and examples of what they did not like about being rural and IDP women in Afghanistan; however when discussing what they *did* like, the majority of the participants struggled to identify anything. Some focus groups could not formulate an answer to this question at all, whereas those groups who did provide an answer all provided variations of the same aspect of Afghan life which they value highly: Islam. As an IDP woman in Mazar-i-Sharif district stated, "our religion is very important to us. In Afghanistan we have Islam to protect us."⁸⁰ Not only did this answer provide an interesting insight into rural women's perspectives of women's rights and empowerment, but also into how they are able to recognise, despite being illiterate, that many men in Afghanistan misinterpret, or fail to honour the Quran. A different woman from the same focus group explained, "Islam supports women's empowerment so it's very important [to define empowerment in accordance with Islamic principles]. Before Islam, people believed that women had no value. When Islam came it gave rights to women and made men and women equal."⁸¹ Many women, during different focus groups, simply stated "I'm happy that I'm Muslim" or "I'm proud to be a Muslim woman", invariably followed with murmurs of consent. The solace and strength that rural women draw from their faith was best articulated by an IDP woman in Herat district who, when explaining how she felt abandoned by the government and unwelcome in the host community, lamented that "only God helps us and supports us".⁸²

Despite the unifying effect of Islam upon rural women's perspectives, IDP and non-IDP women had experienced very different struggles and thus formulated differing priorities around a shared set of values. In order to comprehensively explore these contrasting experiences, first, the narratives provided by IDP women will be presented, before comparing and contrasting those narratives with the experiences and priorities of non-IDP women.

The IDP women, having fled active conflict to areas of relative safety, no longer worry about the conflict so much as surviving the effects of it: displacement, poor physical and mental health, very few employment opportunities for the men in their families, no access to education for children, insufficient food and limited access to clean water. An IDP woman in Herat district evidences this by explaining: 'We think about the conflict in terms of it being the cause of us losing our homes and the problems we face now. We had to leave everything behind because of the conflict. Now all we can think about is finding shelter and food for our families, as well as adapting to the unfamiliar place here. Survival is very difficult for us, so we do not have time to worry about violence and the conflict. We only worry about how to deal with the effects of the conflict.'⁸³ Another IDP woman in Herat district shared a similar story; "We cannot afford to pay [the rent] so we constantly have to move between houses.

⁸⁰ Focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Focus group conducted on 26th February 2019.

⁸³ Ibid.

My husband, nephews and cousins are all jobless...we are constantly trying to survive without rent or food”.⁸⁴

All of the discussions with IDP women included a lot of conversation about the physical and mental health problems that they and their family members suffer as displacement takes its toll. Women and children suffer the most from displacement-related physical conditions⁸⁵, whilst many women also explained that they suffer from headaches and other stress-related mental conditions arising from their constant worry about the survival of their families while they have no financial income. Exacerbating these conditions is the fact that many IDPs have witnessed or experienced a great deal of conflict-related physical trauma and violence before fleeing their homes. An IDP in Herat district provided an illustration of the dire mental and physical conditions of IDPs, stating that “my son lost one leg in the conflict, so he is at home and cannot work. I also have many health problems as a result of the conflict and worrying about how to care for my son.”⁸⁶ During focus group discussions there was a real sense that the physical and mental effect of constantly struggling to survive in a harsh environment was really wearing these women down, particularly because they felt they couldn’t give their children what they feel they deserve.

Further compounding the stress of IDP women is a high degree of mistrust and open discrimination towards IDPs on the part of host communities. The host community may also be living in extreme poverty, viewing IDPs as competition for scarce resources. They may be from a different ethnic group, religious group or tribe, which often further fuels animosity and mistrust between IDPs and the host community, making IDP women feel increased levels of insecurity.

For non-IDP rural women in Balkh district, who were from farming communities and had access to small parcels of land, immediate survival concerns were of a very different nature to those of women in Injil, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif districts. Though these rural women farmers still lived in conditions of relatively extreme poverty, they were reasonably secure in their homes and were managing to generate a meagre income by working the land alongside their husbands. For these women the conflict was their most pressing concern: “The conflict and insecurity really worry us. We are especially concerned about sending our children such long distances to school because of the insecurity here. When our husbands go to work we also worry about them; that they will be robbed or attacked.”⁸⁷ The participants of this particular focus group in Balkh district had been subjected to a significant amount of violence as Taliban continually clash with Afghan state forces in and around their community, and presence of career criminals also poses a very real danger. This group unanimously agreed that “the conflict and the security situation are the biggest problem for Afghan women.” By way of demonstrating the legitimacy of this assertion, they told the harrowing story of how “a five year old girl was kidnapped on the way home from school...the kidnappers asked her parents to pay a ransom, but they had very little money and weren’t able to pay, so the kidnappers killed [her]. They also removed her internal organs. They left her body in front of

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ According to focus group participants. Men suffer the most from mental health conditions due to lack of ability to fulfil their gender role and provide for their families, resulting in their feeling emasculated. Men also suffer disproportionately from conflict-related wounds, whereas women and children develop more physical health problems as a direct result of displacement and unequal access to limited resources.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Focus group conducted on 4th April 2019.

the parent's door and ran away. The girl was from this village and attended the same school that our children attend. This is why we are so worried.”⁸⁸

Though this group identified conflict and security as the biggest problem for Afghan women, they discussed how after the trauma of losing a loved one or community member, further stress is experienced by the family due to the financial implications of losing an adult male who is often the primary breadwinner. Within this group of participants, one woman's son had been shot and killed by the Taliban. She was a widow struggling to provide for her dead son's children. Another woman had a son who had been in the Afghan police force, but the Taliban had shot him in the head. He had survived but was unable to work due to the psychological consequences of the attack. For the rural women who remained within their original communities therefore, conflict posed a double-edged sword: it robbed them of their loved ones, who were often male adults and the sole earners within the family home, consequentially plunging the grieving family into further depths of poverty.

Amongst the non-IDP women, those who were not living in active conflict zones were entirely focused on generating an income as a means through which to feed their families and send their children to school. Those living in areas terrorized by violent conflict and career criminals prioritized ending the conflict as a means of not only ensuring the physical safety of members of the community, but also as a means of increasing the ability of their men to move freely in order to generate an income. Elevating themselves out of poverty was a very close second priority behind ending the conflict, with the two being intimately connected. For rural IDP women, the conflict no longer concerned them, but their crushing daily struggle to survive was all consuming. Thus, despite the different circumstances and life experiences, lifting themselves and their families out of extreme poverty was a mutually shared priority among both IDP and non-IDP women.

3.3 Rural Women's Definition of Empowerment

During the focus groups, after discussing what rural women like and dislike about their daily lives, the participants were asked what empowerment means to them. Over time, a comprehensive formulation of their definition was presented. The most comprehensive list of considerations was provided by a focus group in Balkh district who listed the following: “Islam. [It] is very important to us – we are Muslim and we are proud to be Muslim; earning our own income is very important; being able to send our children to school is very important. We are illiterate...it is like we are blind people, so we want our children to be educated; it is very important to us to be involved in decision making within the home; being united is important – whether at household level, community level or national level, women should be united.”⁸⁹ The framework this group provided includes factors which other focus groups also identified and therefore provides a useful context against which to examine definitions of empowerment given by other focus groups.

Interestingly, the above-mentioned group in Balkh, was the only group who failed to demonstrate a desire to make any structural changes to the gendered power dynamics of their immediate or wider environment, explaining that “before we were a bit lazy because we didn't understand our capabilities...women could have been empowered before, [but] the obstacles to empowerment were ourselves.” This same group acknowledged that they were all victims of domestic violence and recognised the extreme imbalance of gendered power

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Focus group conducted on 4th April 2019.

structure which privileged men. They expressed a desire to benefit from a more “peaceful” domestic atmosphere, but they also valued being a part of what they perceived to be “a strong, united community”. The fact that the community had remained strong during times of need, despite conflict raging around them, was viewed by the women as something to be extremely proud of. This scenario played out under extremely patriarchal social control, and so the women saw no need to advocate for structural change and potentially diminish the unity of their conflict resilient community. The definition of empowerment provided by this group, though worthy of recognition and undoubtedly influenced by the violent and unpredictable security situation surrounding the women’s community, was, however, an anomaly, and was likely shaped by the fact that the women in this community were not confined to the home, as they were sometimes required to work in the field with their men. A complicating factor however is the fact that outside of working in the fields, these women were still subject to strict gender norms and limited mobility: women walking around the community alone were treated with suspicion and derision. The women in this focus group seemed to overlook this power imbalance and restriction on their autonomy, viewing it as unproblematic and perceiving it as serving the greater good of community cohesion.

The most commonly used word when participants were asked to define what empowerment looks like to them was “self-sufficiency.” For many of the women being able to financially contribute to the wellbeing of their families was the ultimate objective. They justified this in terms of being able to ease some of the effects of extreme poverty which their families were currently enduring, but also, as a means through which to gain mobility and enable them to buy things for their personal needs without having to ask for money from their husbands. Self-sufficiency therefore wasn’t framed as a purely financial exercise, but rather a vehicle through which to take care of their families whilst simultaneously eroding the most oppressive patriarchal norms that they experience on a daily basis. Significantly, the women expressed no desire to replace the men in their families as the sole breadwinner, or to completely subvert patriarchal familial norms. Rather, they pictured an ideal scenario that involved both husband and wife working. Whilst the domestic gender roles remained unchanged in this ideal, with women performing the majority of domestic labour, they were treated with dignity and respect in an environment devoid of domestic violence; males would retain ultimate but not absolute authority, as domestic decision-making practices would incorporate women.

Implicitly and consistently linked to the prioritization of “self-sufficiency” was increased mobility and opportunity to move around the community independently. The women described how even if previously granted permission to leave the home by their families, before attending DACAAR’s programme, they were often too scared, being fearful and mistrusting of the community as a result of years of being confined to the home and subjected to an extreme patriarchal narrative, which posits all men as either predators or protectors depending upon whether they are blood relatives. The women perceive this mobility as the key to achieving their vision of empowerment, as without mobility they cannot access spaces and resources required to generate an income, nor can they confront the narrative which presents *all* men outside of the home as predatory and dangerous (in areas not subjected to violent conflict or presence of violent militia groups). A non-IDP focus group participant in Mazar-i-Sharif district succinctly summarizes how empowerment is realizing “our right to free movement...[our right] to use public spaces. Before we were fearful about leaving our homes, but now we have no fear.”⁹⁰ The rural women who participated in this research often seemed to be subjected to fear as a deliberate means of social control by the men in their

⁹⁰ Focus group conducted on 3rd April 2019.

family; therefore empowerment for these women necessarily entails confronting and overcoming those fears as a means through which to diminish male power exerted over them, as well as through which to access the resources necessary for becoming self-sufficient.

A focus group of IDP women in Injil district posited self-sufficiency as the foundation of empowerment, emphasizing the necessity of women having the social opportunity to work together in solidarity. One participant in Injil stated, “empowerment means not only to stand on our own two feet, but to stand on our own two feet and take other women’s hands as well.”⁹¹ This expression of solidarity and recognition of the support that women can provide to each other was particularly prevalent amongst IDPs from more conservative districts, who until attending DACAAR programmes had not been permitted to leave the house.

Education featured in the women’s construction of empowerment, but not necessarily as a priority for themselves unless they were already attending a literacy group. One focus group in Mazar-i-Sharif district comprised women who were attending a literacy programme instead of an income generating activity. They still listed “self-sufficiency” as the most important aspect of empowerment, but they also described it as “being educated...reading and learning, so you can do things independently.”⁹² Whilst this inclusion of literacy into the definition is obviously heavily influenced by their experience as DACAAR beneficiaries, it does reflect all of the women’s desire to send their children (including daughters) to school. The non-IDP women whose children did attend school expressed frustration at being unable to help their children with their homework as a result of their illiteracy, whilst others described the frustration they experienced at not being able to read information at the doctor’s surgery or in public spaces, sometimes making them feel like they could not adequately respond to the emergency healthcare needs of their children. Thus, whilst most focus groups did not explicitly include literacy within their definition of empowerment, this does not signal a lack of desire for education and literacy for their daughters. Education for their daughters (and their sons) is high on rural women’s list of priorities, and DACAAR’s literacy beneficiaries recognised that it is also an attainable goal for adult rural women. However, most (but not all) other focus group participants did not factor literacy into their definition of what empowerment means for them as individuals, through virtue of having no access to literary classes.

The focus group discussions preceding the women being asked to define their construction of empowerment proved to be extremely instructive in understanding *why* rural women define empowerment as they do. Islam, understood as the authentic and culturally legitimate provider of women’s rights and empowerment, is applied as the lens through which possible aspects of empowerment are analysed and deemed whether to be religiously appropriate. The most encompassing definition which enveloped all expressions of empowerment provided by the various focus groups was provided by an IDP woman in Mazar-i-Sharif district who explained, “an empowered woman can read and write so can be independent; she can earn money herself, knows her rights under Islam and is a good Muslim.”⁹³ Later in the conversation, this same focus group agreed that “if the Americans try and make us do something which does not respect Islam, we will not accept it.” Interestingly, given the fixation with the burqa displayed in Western media and by Western politicians, clothing was only mentioned by one participant. None of the women identified the burqa or chador as oppressive or expressed a desire to consign these items to history, often viewing them instead as a symbol of piety. The one time the burqa was mentioned, an IDP woman in Mazar-i-

⁹¹ Focus group conducted on 25th February 2019.

⁹² Mazar-i-Sharif district, focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019.

⁹³ Focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019.

Sharif presented one of the few arguments in favour of rural women pursuing political empowerment. Again, this was justified by reference to Islam, which she argued “has given men and women equal rights, so they both need to be involved [in politics]. However, women should pay attention to and respect the wearing of hijab (in this case pointing to her burqa), even when we are empowered.”⁹⁴

The overwhelming focus of western actors on political empowerment and their continuous equating of the burqa with Taliban oppression is problematic when compared to the form of empowerment that rural women construct for themselves. Whilst there are undoubtedly rural women who would appreciate the opportunity to discard the burqa, the western gaze fails to recognize how some Afghan women view the burqa as an aid to mobility, or a symbol of piety, of which they are proud.⁹⁵ This paradox of the veil, which is experienced as restrictive by some women, but liberatory by others, is detailed by Shirin Abdmolaei in her research on Iranian women, and demonstrates that a uniform policy seeking to abolish the burqa imposed by external and / or male actors will be just as detrimental to women as policies imposed by the same actors seeking to enforce mandatory veiling.⁹⁶ In situations such as Afghanistan with widespread harmful cultural practices targeting women and pervasive domestic violence, visually demonstrating religious piety can also prove to be a useful and protective tool for women. Jacobsen, for example has detailed how young Muslim women in Oslo engaged with the Islamic tradition in order to use religious arguments against harmful gendered cultural practices and inter-generational gender issues within their communities.⁹⁷ By trying to coerce or influence women into turning their back on expressions of religious piety, or diluting the influence of Islam on their lives, it is possible that well-meaning development actors working towards “women’s empowerment” are doing more harm than good.

3.4 Political Empowerment

The rural women who participated in this research had contradictory perspectives on the desirability of political empowerment. Part of the reason behind these contradictions may well be that rural women (along with educated male and female employees of DACAAR who lived and worked in Kabul) do not recognise political activity in any arena except the national and international. In 2003, the Afghan government introduced Community Development Councils (CDCs) to rural communities in order to encourage community engagement in identifying and prioritizing needs and overseeing community issues. Fifty per cent of CDC members must be female, with eighty-five per cent of Afghan villages now having their own CDCs.⁹⁸ Overwhelmingly, participants in this research viewed the decision-making processes of CDCs as social rather than political, resulting in the same participants stating that they would like increased opportunities to participate in community-based decision making, but they do not desire political empowerment. That aside, it is also currently unclear how active female members of CDCs are permitted to be during decision making processes, with several

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Abu-Lughod L, (2002), p785-786.

⁹⁶ (2014), (Re)Fashioning Resistance: Women, Dress and Sexuality Within Iran, *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 9 (2), p42-43.

⁹⁷ (2011), Troublesome Threesome: Feminism, Anthropology and Muslim Women’s Piety, *Feminist Review*, 98, p67.

⁹⁸ World Bank (2016), Community Engagement Key to Success in Rural Development,

www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/01/12/community-engagement-key-to-success-in-rural-development

members of DACAAR staff in Kabul lamenting that in many cases the female members represent a display of tokenism rather than empowerment.⁹⁹

When discussing political empowerment during focus groups, the majority of participants stated that they are not interested in politics, they do not understand politics, and, therefore, political activity should remain the exclusive remit of men. Only three participants out of one hundred and thirty openly stated that women should engage in political decision-making alongside men, though one qualified this statement by arguing that as a woman's contribution to legal proceedings is worth half that of a man's in the Quran, this should also be the case in political decision making.¹⁰⁰ Despite definitive shunning of "political" empowerment and rural women's near-unanimous assertion that they have no interest in politics, there is a contradiction in their responses and perspectives when we broaden the concept of what constitutes the political. All participants stated that in their construction of empowerment they have greater opportunities to contribute towards decision-making within the home. Predominantly, participants wished for a fifty-fifty approach to domestic decision making alongside their men, rather than a desire to seize the monopoly of authority within the private sphere.

When discussing community-based decision-making processes however, the data generated proved to be ambiguous. Some women did not want to participate in community-based decision-making through either CDCs or any other means, content to garner more authority within the home only. Other women believed that "women's empowerment" should clearly include the opportunity and ability to participate in community-based decision-making, whilst another group felt that it wasn't worth struggling for; but if men offered them the opportunity, it would be beneficial. Due to often-conflicting statements given by participants it proved to be impossible to break down this data in terms of overall percentages. The divergence in opinion is best represented by the responses given during just one focus group, in which the following statements were made: "We...want to participate in community decision-making but it is not happening here. In this community only men can be involved in decision making, women are not given the chance to speak... we don't take this situation too seriously. If they asked us to be involved, we would be happy, but it's not a big problem for us"; "If we are given the opportunity to participate in community decision-making it will be very important for us."¹⁰¹ Aside from the apparent redundancy of international efforts to increase political participation of rural Afghan women, it seems that rural women's values and perspectives are vague where political opportunity intersects with patriarchal power in an arena the women previously historically have not had access to. Overall, the women seemed to be uncomfortable with the concept of exercising their agency through political means.

The above responses demonstrate that whereas rural women are relatively unanimous in their construction of empowerment being primarily economic, with interrelated aspects of social empowerment which are compatible with their interpretation of Islam, there is no consensus regarding political empowerment. The underlying causes of this apparent ambivalence and obvious ambiguity seemed to be a combination of a lack of education, which hampers understanding of politics, strict patriarchal gender roles which dictate that politics is

⁹⁹ Informal conversations with DACAAR staff from a variety of thematic areas indicated that the lack of acceptance of female CDC members in decision making processes, and consequential male dominance of decision-making processes is problematic and requires addressing. Various NGOs have worked on capacity-building initiatives with female CDC members as part of an orchestrated nation-wide programme managed by NGOs and overseen by the Afghan government, but gendered social norms are deeply entrenched, particularly in more traditionally conservative villages.

¹⁰⁰ Focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019.

¹⁰¹ Focus group conducted on 4th April 2019 in Balkh district.

exclusively the realm of men (and which the women, for the most part willingly or unconsciously adhere to), and finally the women's belief that political action necessitates acting at a national level, making themselves visible to men in the process, therefore tainting their family's honour and behaving in a way they perceived as incompatible with Islam.

3.5 Conclusion

In defining "empowerment", rural women, both IDPs and non-IDPs, prioritize economic empowerment due to the high unemployment rate among IDP men and the low income of non-IDP rural families. Extreme poverty was the defining feature of these women's lives, causing them a great deal of stress and mental health problems as they worried about how to feed their families, care for sick relatives, remain under a roof and send their children to school. Women view economic empowerment as a means through to which to simultaneously improve the living conditions of their family whilst reducing barriers to social empowerment, resulting in increased mobility and decision-making opportunities within the home.

The degree of poverty experienced by these women is all consuming and leaves no space or time for considering seemingly abstract concepts such as national politics. This daily struggle to survive combined with illiteracy, strict gender roles, which position politics firmly within the realm of men, and the common misperception that politics operate on a purely national level, contribute towards women's lack of understanding of, and interest in, politics. What is not clear, due to the contradicting perceptions of participants and the ambiguity of data generated, is the extent to which women genuinely are not interested in politics; the extent to which they themselves define political empowerment as un-Islamic or as contradicting important cultural and traditional values, and the extent to which women have absorbed patriarchal gender norms which act to reinforce male power, thereby unwittingly perpetuating them through their values and behaviour.

What is clear however, is that the heavily individualized and political construction of empowerment which is so often imposed upon Afghan women by international actors is at best irrelevant, and at worst imperialist; as it overlooks rural women's daily struggles, needs and priorities in order to privilege a facet of empowerment which they may be largely disinterested in. Further, IDP women particularly recognised the need for women's solidarity in striving for empowerment and protecting the gains they make. Very few Western empowerment initiatives accommodate this vital facet of rural women's construction of empowerment.

Chapter Four: Small Arms Fire in the Private Sphere

This chapter will employ James Scott's theory of everyday resistance in order to examine rural women's practices of resistance within the private sphere: at home and in women-only spaces. Manifestations of extreme patriarchy which rural women dislike will first be identified, followed by the ways in which women resist these manifestations, largely through the women's own narratives. Following this examination of how women resist power dynamics and behaviours legitimized by extreme patriarchal power structures within the home, the theatre of resistance will be relocated, and women's resistance practices within women-only spaces will be examined by way of providing a broader understanding of the everyday resistance practices rural Afghan women engage in. The final section of this chapter will examine the parameters of resistance present within rural Afghanistan which serve to diminish opportunities for practices of resistance to patriarchy.

As discussed during the methodology, the focus group participants did not recognise their behaviour as resistance, due to their construction of resistance being exclusively organized and collective; the opposite of the discreet individual acts these women employ. Further, they were uncomfortable with the word "resistance", perceiving it as implying behaviour they deemed to be un-Islamic; for example by overtly challenging their husbands' authority and subverting the gender roles formulated by their perception of Islam as well as their culture and traditions. The women therefore preferred to refer to their behavioural practices as "challenging" male behaviour and power dynamics they perceived to be unfair or un-Islamic. In addressing this linguistic conundrum it should be remembered that integral to Scott's theory of everyday resistance is his assertion that other definitions of resistance depend upon 'a misleading, sterile and socially naïve insistence upon distinguishing "self-indulgent", individual acts on the one hand, from presumably "principled", selfless, collective actions, on the other, and excluding the former from the category of *real* resistance. To insist on such a distinction as a means of comparing forms of resistance and their consequences is one thing, but to use them as the basic criteria to determine what constitutes resistance is to miss the very wellsprings of peasant politics.'¹⁰² The acts of 'individual self-help' described by the participants,¹⁰³ which necessarily remain hidden from male view, definitively reflect what Scott identifies as everyday resistance. Therefore, in the interests of maintaining cohesion with the linguistics of academic concepts and scholarly work, the women's behaviour will be referred to as "resistance", though they themselves referred to it as "challenging".

4.1 Everyday Resistance within the Home: False Deference and Calculated Compliance

When discussing whether women resist things that men ask them to do, the ways in which men behave, or male power, all of the women bar one stated that they do resist such things. One young woman in Balkh district, who at the time of the focus group was unmarried, was the only participant to voice disagreement with the other women on this matter. This particular young woman argued quite forcefully that it is a woman's duty to do everything her husband or father tells her to do, and that women should dedicate their lives to keeping their husband happy. When asked by another participant why she believes this to be true, the young woman responded, "it is in the Quran. This is what is what is expected of Muslim women."¹⁰⁴ Some of her fellow focus group participants began to get visibly exasperated with

¹⁰² Scott J, (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p295.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p29.

¹⁰⁴ Focus group conducted on 4th April 2019.

her, trying to persuade her that *their* less extreme interpretation of the Quran and Islam were in fact the authentic version of the religion. This young woman was a lone voice of dissent in wholeheartedly supporting extremely patriarchal norms, but the other women's response to her was so audible because they were in a safe women-only space. They all acknowledged that they would not have discussed this matter so forcefully with their husbands or fathers, as it would have likely resulted in them being physically beaten for their insubordination, implying that their daily lives consist of practicing false deference to extremely imbalanced cultural and social norms which posit an extremely patriarchal interpretation of the Quran as authentic.

False deference appears to be a much-practiced form of everyday resistance employed by the rural women who participated in this research, utilized due to fear of extreme violence dissuading them from acting in open defiance. This fear of violence forces women to maintain a veneer of deference to their husbands and extremely patriarchal norms, despite their consciousness railing against the violent behaviour and unfair treatment regularly enacted by their husbands. When discussing the male behaviours and power structures that women resist, the majority of women identified domestic violence as something that they resist, but which simultaneously influences the behaviour they practice *whilst* resisting.

Other forms of undesirable male behaviour the women resisted included placing unfair demands upon women such as expecting delicious meals despite there being very little food, expecting women to perform household chores at the whim of the males in terms of arbitrary time frames and standards, and "un-Islamic behaviour", a term which in the context used implied sexual acts that the women did not want to participate in. Islam was the tool women used to define male behaviours which were justifiable versus those which were not: "If what [my husband] is asking me to do is in accordance with Islam, I will do it, but if it contradicts Islam, I won't do it."¹⁰⁵

Whilst discussing individual resistance practices, it was made clear that the majority of women did not overtly resist their male relatives (usually husbands), with these women stating simply "whatever he says I do." The majority of these women explained that with violence being a very possible repercussion for open dissent, "even if I don't like something, I have to do it." Two women in Mazar-i-Sharif made the following statements: "My mother is sick at home. I have only a brother. Whatever he tells me to do, I accept" and "I'm single, but whatever my father say I must obey".¹⁰⁶ An external actor observing these women behaving in such a deferential manner without seeking their narrative may mistakenly assume that these women are compliant or acquiescent to the dominant power structure of extreme patriarchy. However, this external observer would actually be viewing an expression of "calculated compliance" which masks the defiance these rural women truly feel. As Scott notes, subordinates in highly unbalanced circumstances of power will engage in 'routines of deference and compliance which, while perhaps not entirely cynical, are certainly calculating.'¹⁰⁷ The calculated nature of this behaviour is inherent within the process of judging which acts of resistance are likely to result in physical violence being administered as punishment, and acting through false deference or reluctant compliance as means of avoiding such physical harm. As an IDP woman in Herat district explained, "it is exceptional that a

¹⁰⁵ Focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Scott J, (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p278.

woman can refuse to do what a man tells her without him reacting violently. Most of the time if the woman refuses to do something, the man will hit her and make her do it by force.’¹⁰⁸

A further factor contributing to the appearance of false consciousness or acquiescence to male domination is the fact that when women are treated badly by their husbands, they often actively try to maintain a calm veneer (which can be interpreted as an act of resistance in its own right), in order to reduce conflict and violence within the home for the sake of the children. “We don’t strongly challenge our husbands in order to reduce conflict in the home. Even if our husbands have been really bad to us, we try to behave normally as if nothing has happened.”¹⁰⁹ All of the participants of this research who were mothers recognised this as a behaviour they consciously employ regularly.

It must be noted that whilst the question "who has never been beaten by their husband?" was not explicitly asked during focus groups, through the course of conversations the vast majority of participants cited fear of violence as being one of the reasons they do not venture beyond hidden forms of resistance. This fear was based upon personal experience of domestic violence, with only approximately six per cent of participants stating that their husband has never been violent. A small number of participants (approximately ten per cent) diverged from the established pattern of exclusively engaging in calculated compliance as a means of self-preservation, sometimes veering over into more overt forms of resistance. For example, an IDP woman in Mazar-i-Sharif stated “if I don’t like what my husband tells me to do, I just won’t do it. Even if he becomes violent I won’t do it.”¹¹⁰ Statements such as this were met with exclamations of shock, awe and reverence, as fellow focus group participants expressed their wonder at the bravery of these women who employed open defiance as a form of resistance, acknowledging that such behavior could potentially be fatal. However, the women who did engage in overt defiance, explained that defiance is always a last resort. The reason for this being that in openly defying their husbands, the women feel frustrated and ashamed of themselves, believing themselves to have failed to behave as they believe good Muslim wives should according to both cultural and social norms, in accordance with their own interpretation of Islam. There appears to be an inherent dissonance here between the women’s interpretation of Islam and the meanings they assign to their resistance behavior, as on the one hand they recognize that Islam protects them and provides them with rights, but on the other hand, even if they judge the actions of their husband to be un-Islamic and thus justifiably resisted, the women nevertheless feel guilty and ashamed for resisting.

Most participants described their resistance practices as behaviors that enabled them to avoid violent repercussions through their hidden nature, whilst simultaneously providing the women with an outlet for their frustration. One participant explained, “we cannot refuse him directly so we defy him indirectly”.¹¹¹ One IDP woman described how “if our husband tells us to cook something and he does it in a rude way, behind his back we will grumble to ourselves, saying things such as “he doesn’t bring me anything to cook with, so why should I cook for him?!”¹¹² The method of resistance described here involved grumbling in such a way that questioned the husband’s very masculinity, highlighting his inability to perform the expectations set by male gender norms in conjunction with the corresponding hypocrisy at expecting her to perform the gender roles stipulated for women. This expression of resistance is interesting because it uses the extremely patriarchal norms, which usually privilege men,

¹⁰⁸ Focus group conducted on 26th February 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Focus group conducted on 4th April in Balkh district.

¹¹⁰ Focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019.

¹¹¹ Focus group conducted on 26th February 2019 in Injil district.

¹¹² Ibid.

against the husband, reducing him not just to an undesirable husband and father, but also a failure as a man.

Strict gender roles and cultural norms, which are permissive of violence against women, were understandably one of the primary causes of resentment among rural women, who viewed such legitimized violence as unfair, but also as un-Islamic. Questioning the decisions or orders of husbands, fathers or brothers within the home is extremely likely to result in physical reprisal, so, as discussed above, women employed calculated compliance to protect themselves. However, whilst employing calculated compliance in the presence of their husbands, these women had also found a discreet way of utilizing the strict gender roles enforced by extreme patriarchy, which dictate that women should be solely responsible for raising children. Saba Mahmood makes an observation which is poignant here, in explaining that ‘what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency – but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of this enactment. In this sense, the capacity for agency is entailed not only in acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms.’¹¹³ The rural women who participated in this research illustrated this point by describing how, through childrearing they subvert extremely patriarchal norms which sanction violence against women by weaponizing their childrearing practices and embarking upon a transformative approach to childrearing. The women described how they consciously resist extreme patriarchy and work to improve society for future generations of women and girls, by teaching boys to be kind and respectful to girls and treat them as their equals. Thus, women were deploying their sons as agents of change for the future: “if our sons are trained to behave well with women and respect them, of course the future will be better for Afghan women.”¹¹⁴

The women who participated in this research have sought not only to influence the direct interaction between boys and girls as future men and women, but they have also sought to erase the normalization of violence against women by teaching their sons not to engage in violence at all; they forbid their sons from hitting girls, as well as from hitting their brothers, friends, or other boys within the community. This form of subversive childrearing has potential to be the catalyst for gradual, albeit effective, grassroots change in social norms among communities; as when general violence is dramatically reduced, a man hitting a woman will be amplified. In contrast, individual acts of violence against women are currently diminished by the many other acts of violence occurring on a daily basis against men, women and children. Moreover, the women also justify this resistance through childrearing in terms of ensuring that their sons grow to be good Muslims, diverging from the behavior of their husbands, fathers and brothers who the women view as exercising violence and coercion which is incompatible with their understanding of Islam.

4.2 Everyday Resistance in Women-only Spaces: Hidden Transcripts

Rural Afghan women deploy only those methods of resistance they deem to be culturally, socially and religiously appropriate. There is a notable disparity between cultural acceptance of visible, collective action between rural communities and the larger cities of Afghanistan. In March 2018, hundreds of women gathered in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital of

¹¹³ Mahmood S, (2006), *Feminist Theory, Agency and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt*, *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion: Temenos*, 42 (1), p42.

¹¹⁴ Focus group conducted on 26th February 2019 in Injil district.

Helmand province, to protest for peace alongside men.¹¹⁵ Protest tents were erected, and sit-ins were held. The following June women from Nangahar province gathered in Jalalabad, also marching through the streets to protest for peace.¹¹⁶ These examples of visible collective action deployed by women are unique in the current political context and very much frowned upon by the rural women who participated in this research. In explaining the reasons for why they themselves would not engage in such behaviour, the participants first identified male social control as the prohibitive factor: “Women are too scared to protest in the streets. They are fearful that the community and male relatives will treat them badly if they do this.” However, participants then went on to describe their own perceptions of women engaging in street protests as contrary to their culture, “it’s against our culture for women to behave this way. This is the reason our male relatives or community would be angry if we did this.”¹¹⁷ The women didn’t describe the protests as un-Islamic, but as contrary to their culture, perhaps highlighting the divide between urban and rural areas in terms of cultural acceptance of women placing themselves within the gaze of male strangers. Nevertheless, the rural women expressed no desire to be able to participate in such forms of collective action.

For rural women resisting extremely patriarchal power, the resistance practices they employ outside of the home are no less discreet than those they employ within the home, constrained as they are by similar parameters of resistance. All of the women acknowledged the self-help benefits of gathering together as a women-only group in order to share their experiences and support each other. One participant said that having access to a safe, women-only space was one of the most important things in her life, explaining “while we are here we can forget about what is happening at home.”¹¹⁸ Scott acknowledges the importance of solidarity among oppressed groups in his writing, but unlike the Malay peasants he researched who imposed sanctions on those who breach the bonds of solidarity,¹¹⁹ Afghan rural women impose no such sanctions or ostracization. Rather, because the behaviour they engage in within women-only spaces is deemed to be illicit by prevailing patriarchal and social and cultural norms, the women simply ensure that they only engage in such behaviour around women they know they can trust: “Talking and making jokes about our husbands with other women who we trust helps us support each other and cope with the situation at home. However, it can be dangerous to behave this way with women we don’t know very well or don’t trust, as if such things get back to our husbands it will make life very difficult for us.”¹²⁰

“Talking and making jokes” about husbands is the primary form of resistance practiced in women-only spaces and falls definitively within the category of everyday resistance which Scott calls ‘hidden transcripts.’ All married focus group participants acknowledged that they consciously engage in such transcripts, recognising them as a coping mechanism. Invariably, when asked for examples of such behaviour, the women relaxed and became extremely animated, even quite rowdy in two or three groups, as they laughed and joked about the derogatory things they tell each other about their husbands. Scott describes oral hidden transcripts as ‘risk-averse use of language by the powerless’,¹²¹ which includes gossip,

¹¹⁵ Dayee M I & Bezhana F, (29th March 2018), ‘Stop this War’: Afghan Women Challenge Taliban, Rally for Peace, *Radio Free Europe*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghan-women-challenge-taliban-rally-peace/29134171.html>

¹¹⁶ Shaheed A, (14th June 2018), Nangahar Women March in Support of Ceasefire, *TOLO News*, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/nangarhar-women-march-support-ceasefire>

¹¹⁷ Focus group conducted on 26th February in Injil district.

¹¹⁸ Focus group conducted in Mazar-i-Sharif district on 2nd April 2019.

¹¹⁹ Scott J, (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p261-263.

¹²⁰ Focus group conducted on 4th April 2019 in Balkh district.

¹²¹ Scott J, (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, p30.

slander, jokes, storytelling and other uses of language which are consciously utilized to resist the oppressive power and dominant individuals. Such hidden transcripts were very much present in the resistance repertoire of rural Afghan women who gave examples such as “we talk about our husbands to each other all the time...all day we backbite about our husbands. From morning to evening [when we women are together] we are backbiting about our husbands.”¹²² This particular comment was made amid much laughter and joviality. Another participant of the same focus group elaborated by explaining, “making jokes amongst ourselves, backbiting about our husbands and making each other laugh about the situation helps us to survive. It makes us feel better.” Focus group participants in Balkh district explained that “if a husband is a good man; behaves very well and is friendly and kind, his wife will say only good things about him and feels proud that she has such a good husband. If the husband is bad [the wife] will backbite and tell the other women that he is a very bad man.”¹²³ Along with examples of jokes and “backbiting”, some of the participants also hinted that they make derisory comments and jokes about their husband’s sexual performance – a taboo in conservative rural Afghanistan.

Regardless of the contents of the hidden transcripts employed by rural women, the very act of speaking about their husbands can be viewed as simultaneous self-help, resistance to individual men and an act of resistance to prevailing patriarchal social and cultural norms. As one woman explained, “whatever our men do to us, it should remain within our family. We shouldn’t speak about these things outside of our families. We are trained to be like this by our culture. We are trained to accept whatever happens to us. To make ourselves feel better we share whatever happens to us at home with other women, but only women.”¹²⁴ It is clear that in the context of rural Afghanistan, sharing experiences, performing hidden transcripts, and supporting each other in this fashion is actually a tremendous act of rebellion.

4.3 Parameters of Resistance

In examining the interrelationship between hidden transcripts and power, Scott identifies what he calls the ‘public transcript’, a concept which describes ‘the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate.’¹²⁵ He explains that ‘[b]y assessing the discrepancy *between* the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse.’¹²⁶ Rural women employ only the most discreet and invisible forms of resistance, displaying false compliance and false deference to men in public as well as in private. This demonstrates the absolute nature of male power along with the level of harm males exercising such power will inflict upon dissenting subordinates. The extreme manifestation of patriarchal power that characterizes rural Afghanistan is the foremost parameter of resistance which must be navigated by rural women as they seek to challenge threatening behaviours and unfair restrictions. Other parameters interact with it, ultimately being influenced by the patriarchal power in order to constrain the behaviour of rural women in a way which enormously privileges men.

In the case of rural Afghanistan, conflict and insecurity restrict arenas for women’s resistance by rendering certain conflict-affected public places unsafe. The male narrative, however, seizes upon this insecurity as a means through which to control women by confining them to

¹²² Focus group conducted on 26th February 2019 in Injil district.

¹²³ Focus group conducted on 4th April 2019.

¹²⁴ Focus group conducted on 26th February 2019 in Injil district.

¹²⁵ Scott J, (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, p2.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p5.

the home or their immediate neighbourhood, purportedly for their own safety. As will be pointed out in the next chapter however, whilst security issues are legitimate concerns, men often exaggerate the danger posed to women by their own communities in order to dissuade them from leaving the home, enabling men to retain absolute control over them. This dominant controlling male narrative is a manifestation of the extremely patriarchal structure of informal governance which exists throughout rural Afghan communities, which are often far removed from Kabul and the Afghan government's women's empowerment policies.

Throughout the course of the focus group discussions, it became clear that the national level Afghan government strategies and policies for empowering women were either unheard of, or considered irrelevant, and viewed as a waste of time. The women were uninterested in legislation and policy frameworks, viewing Islam as the only guidance their communities required. Islam is omnipresent in women's thought processes, consciousness and expressions of resistance. It provides the framework through which behaviours displayed by men (or patriarchal norms), are deemed to be illegitimate and thus justifiably resisted or sanctioned by Islam, and therefore to be respected. Focus group participants were clear that they will not engage in behaviour which contradicts their duties as identified through their interpretation of Islam. Islam is perceived as a much less oppressive structure of social governance than prevailing cultural norms, and therefore seen to be supportive of women's resistance, but only so long as such resistance doesn't challenge the role of the male as an authority figure. Thus, rural Afghan women support patriarchy as distinguishable from extreme patriarchy, which misinterprets Islam and imposes what the women perceive as unfair restrictions whilst sanctioning violence against them.

Children represent an additional parameter of resistance for rural women, as they often consciously strive to tolerate the bad treatment meted out to them by husbands as a strategy through which to protect their children from witnessing domestic violence and experiencing a negative atmosphere within the home. Rural women, therefore, make a conscious decision not to employ resistance practices which endanger either the physical or psychological wellbeing of their children.

Rural Afghan women are governed by an intimately personified manifestation of power. This is particularly the case within the home, where through this power, they are subordinated to immediate male family members, before being subordinated to men in their wider community. The women who participated in this research engage in everyday resistance practices which are constricted not only by the parameters of resistance manifest in their interpretation of, and respect for Islam, consideration for their children and the omnipresent threat of physical violence, but also cultural norms and social norms. These norms administer strict gender roles, impose judgements upon a woman's (and by extension her family's) honour if she breaches them, and severely restrict the arena of resistance available to women. Nevertheless, rural women's resistance practices usually target individual men (predominantly their husbands), or only the most extreme patriarchal aspects of prevailing cultural norms such as sanctioning violence against women for arbitrarily conceived transgressions and severely limiting their opportunities. The women overwhelmingly demonstrated support for a less extreme version of patriarchal authority within the home and the community, raising the question of what factors contribute towards women adhering to patriarchal social norms and gender roles, rather than shunning patriarchy completely?

4.4 Extreme Patriarchal and Masculine Hegemonies

Rural women often lead very isolated lives whilst being subjected to a male narrative which acts to enforce, and justify, extreme patriarchy on a daily basis. At an individual level, this male narrative meets transgressions and dissent with violence, as it is enforced by husbands, fathers and other male relatives and community members. Media, community and national institutions act to reinforce this narrative on a wider level by consuming all public and private space, perpetuating and disseminating the extreme patriarchal narrative through religious and community leaders as well as media outlets.

There does exist some well publicised (outside of Afghanistan) television programming working to improve the situation for Afghan women, by educating boys on how they should treat girls and women¹²⁷ and educating women on their rights,¹²⁸ but this is not enough to counteract the dominant patriarchal narrative. The vast majority of rural Afghan women (ninety per cent) are illiterate,¹²⁹ but for those women (and men) who can read, print media is no less patriarchal in its agenda than state-run television and radio programming. During an interview with an Afghan female colleague and journalism graduate in Kabul, she expressed frustration at how the media is entirely dominated by the male narrative. The reason for this dominance of the male narrative, she explained, is predominantly the lack of security within the country. It is too dangerous for women to travel around Afghanistan; therefore, female media employees remain in Kabul while male journalists operate in the field. The male journalists then write the stories or present the facts as they understand them (or would like to present them) and hand this information to female employees who then either present the news or attempt to write their own story from the information they are given. Due to the highly gender segregated nature of rural Afghanistan, male reporters are unable to access women, resulting in the issues facing half the population being unreported, or presented through the ill-informed perspective of men.¹³⁰

The result of exclusively male power combined with the male narrative being the sole perspective presented in the media (even when presented by a female) is that male hegemony is absolute; there is very little room for public or journalistic dissent. It is within this context, exacerbated in rural communities by extremely conservative social norms, that rural women are identifying which aspects of their everyday situations they wish to resist, which facets of their daily lives they value, and which they feel they should tolerate for the sake of being good Muslim women. The prevailing system of extreme patriarchy could well be influencing the women's formulation of desired system of governance, gender roles and construction of empowerment, but this doesn't imply false consciousness. The rural women who participated in this research seemed to be making a conscious choice to align their values and aspirations with Islam despite the patriarchy inherent within their interpretation of it. Through Saba Mahmood's work with the Egyptian women's piety movement, she argues that the binary of resistance and subordination is restrictive, as it is 'insufficiently attentive to motivations,

¹²⁷ Associated Press in Kabul, (15th July 2017), Afghanistan's Sesame Street Brings in New Puppet to Teach Respect of Women, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/15/afghanistan-sesame-street-new-puppet-respect-women-zeerak>

¹²⁸ Kumar R, (31st October 2018), 'There is No Need for Women to Work': Afghan TV Show Takes on the Patriarchy, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/31/there-is-no-need-for-women-to-work-afghan-tv-show-takes-on-patriarchy>

¹²⁹ Frotan F, (November 20th 2016), 'Afghan Women Have Highest Illiteracy Rate in Country', *Ariana News* online.

¹³⁰ Interview conducted on 20th February 2019 in Kabul.

desires and goals that are not necessarily captured by these terms.’¹³¹ This seems the most viable approach to the resistance and agency expressed by rural Afghan women, as they consciously resist manifestations of extreme patriarchy, whilst simultaneously consciously supporting patriarchal authority and governance.

4.5 Conclusion

The overwhelming majority of rural women who participated in this research (129 out of 130) acknowledged that they employ everyday resistance practices as a means to challenge their husbands or other male relatives on a near-daily basis. There is a consciousness to these acts of resistance which define them as such, as even though the women themselves don’t recognise resistance as anything other than collective, they do recognise that they engage in these practices as a deliberate method of challenging male behaviours and manifestations of extreme patriarchal power which they dislike.

The most common resistance practices employed by rural women were false deference, calculated compliance, subversive childrearing and very deliberate performances of hidden transcripts; notably joking, backbiting and making derogatory comments about their husbands. A small number of participants also identified open defiance as present within their resistance repertoire, but these women were a tiny minority. Tellingly, a small minority of women also stated that their husbands never beat them, with those who stated that they employ defiance and those stating that they are not subjected to violence within the home often being the same individuals. However, this was not uniformly the case, with one woman stating that she employs open defiance even if her husband beats her, but only as a last resort.

To fully comprehend the significance and symbolism rural Afghan women apply to the everyday resistance practices they employ, those resistance practices should be viewed in conjunction with the parameters of resistance which exist within their communities. The primary parameters of resistance acting upon the participants in this research were violence at the hands of male relatives, desire to shield their children from violence, the women’s interpretation of Islam and extremely patriarchal social and cultural norms maintained by extremely patriarchal and masculine hegemonies.

The women make a conscious effort to recognise only that behaviour which is not sanctioned by their interpretation of Islam as unfair or illicit, and thus a justifiable target for resistance. During focus group conversations the women were all very clear on the point that Islam is one of the most important features of their lives, and that they will not contradict the teachings of the Quran. This illustrates an interesting point, as the women’s own interpretation of the Quran is patriarchal, but defined by a much more benign representation of patriarchy, demonstrating that the women aren’t resisting patriarchy as much as extreme formulations of it, especially those represented by personal acts of violence and severe restrictions on their rights.

¹³¹ (2006), *Feminist Theory, Agency and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt*, *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion: Temenos*, 42 (1), p38.

Chapter Five: The Quiet Encroachment of Public Space and Reproduction of the Ordinary.

During the course of this research it became clear that although women were consciously engaging in resistance practices within the private sphere, endowing these practices with ‘symbols, norms and ideological forms’,¹³² whilst striving to gain access to resources available in the public sphere in order to engage in income-generating activities, something different was happening. These rural women did not articulate conscious struggle against the patriarchy as motivation for economic empowerment, nor the desire to access public space, but rather were acting out of necessity due to the extreme poverty faced by their families.

This chapter seeks to delve further into the ambiguities, nuances and contradictions expressed by rural Afghan women, through their articulated desire to achieve economic empowerment in a non-confrontational manner, that is compatible with a patriarchal and Islamic system of social governance. First, the “non-movement” of rural women into the public and economic spheres will be examined against community responses to this non-movement, before the ways in which rural women reproduce patriarchal norms is analysed. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate how economic empowerment consequentially reduces social barriers to empowerment, despite the lack of conscious effort to facilitate such a change in social behaviour. This supports Bayat’s observation that there are ‘many types of individual and collective practices whose intended and unintended consequences do not correspond.’¹³³

5.1 The “Non-movement” of Rural Women

Key to the concept of non-movements is the fact that ‘they are not based in ideology, nor on organized demands, nor are they coordinated as such.’¹³⁴ Referring back to rural women’s definitions of empowerment, they were all clearly shaped by the extreme poverty dominating women’s everyday lives, and hence prioritized self-sufficiency as a means of achieving financial independence, but more importantly, as providing the opportunity to financially contribute to their family’s wellbeing. As discussed in chapters three and four, the rural women who participated in this research did not view a more benign form of patriarchy as problematic, and therefore did not express a desire to abolish patriarchy altogether.

The most dramatic theatre of resistance for these women was their own homes, due to them being the site of uninhibited domestic violence as well as the gateway between absolute male control as sanctioned by extreme patriarchy, and less restrictive gender roles as sanctioned by less severe formulations of patriarchy. It therefore became apparent throughout focus group discussions that the women viewed the hardest battle as that to persuade their husbands or other male relatives to permit them to leave the house independently in order to learn a skill (through DACAAR’s vocational training programmes) and subsequently generate an income. Once this battle was won and a certain amount of mobility was agreed upon, the women largely viewed this gender war as being over, failing to express a desire to abolish the system which rendered male consent to mobility necessary in the first place. Once granted permission to attend DACAAR’s programme, the women were singularly focused on

¹³² Scott J, (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p38.

¹³³ Bayat A, (2013), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Changed the Middle East* (2nd ed), p43.

¹³⁴ Ballard R, (2015), *Geographies of Development III: Militancy, Insurgency, Encroachment and Development by the Poor*, *Progress in Human Geography*, 39 (2), p219.

accessing income generating opportunities and did not seek to challenge the wider patriarchal structure through their encroachment upon public space, nor did they express a desire to gain access to public space without inherently relating public space to income generation. Rather, the women expressed a desire to contribute to their family financially in order to be able to buy adequate food, pay rent and thus ensure secure housing, send their children to school, afford medicine and be able to buy personal items without having to ask their husbands for money.

As has been discussed throughout this thesis, women dare not engage in visible collective action due to fear of violent repercussions. There was also no evidence of any kind of covert strategy through which to transform social norms and increase economic opportunities for women. Rather, each woman acted by herself, for herself and her family, seeking the development of a skillset which would enable her to generate a modest income with which to support her children and husband, and enabling her to send her children to school. This non-organized, collective action of individual women who independently and quietly encroach upon public space and resources purely in order to generate an income, with no intention of challenging the dominant extreme patriarchal authority, is a direct demonstration of Bayat's concept of "non-movements" as the polar opposite to organized and oppositional "social movements" which are 'concerned chiefly with politics of protest [and] contentious politics where collective actors exert pressure (by threat, disruption or causing uncertainty) on adversaries to meet their demands.'¹³⁵ Thus, whereas rural women consciously engage in resistance within their homes and other, private arenas, their encroachment upon public space and the labour market should be viewed as a non-movement due to the lack of intention to resist or confront the prevailing community-based power structure.

Though many of these rural women had been confined to the home by close male relatives for most of their lives, extreme poverty has interacted with extreme patriarchy in such a way as to present the opportunity for women, DACAAR's social organizers and sympathetic men in the community to negotiate an expansion of gender roles and increase in mobility for these women. The grinding poverty experienced by these families combined with the lack of employment opportunities for males, particularly IDPs, directly contributed to the women being given permission to leave the home and attend DACAAR's vocational training programmes.¹³⁶

Once granted permission to leave the house, the initial extent of the women's access to public space consisted of walking between home and the women's-only space in which vocational training was being held. However, as women began to hone their vocational skills, their need to access a greater area of the community and interact with unrelated men increased: they needed to learn how and where to purchase raw materials, how to market their products, network among potential buyers and sellers and advertise. These actions were all outside of the remit of women's gender roles before these women started performing them, but over time their male relatives and community members recognised the benefit to their families, whom the women financially support, and the communities which they invest in. Thus, their presence in public space gradually became legitimized; "now that we come [to this vocational

¹³⁵ Bayat A, (2013), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed), p87.

¹³⁶ Conversion of extreme patriarchal mindset to total acceptance of women's rights was demonstrably very unlikely, as in conservative rural areas of Afghanistan where DACAAR implemented literacy programmes separately to vocational training, social organizers reported that men often would not permit women to attend literacy classes unless women were provided with a financial stipend for attendance. Men were much more willing to allow women to attend vocational training programmes, immediately recognising them as beneficial for the family rather than exclusively beneficial to the women, despite the fact that women attending literacy programmes went home and taught their children what they learned.

training programme] and the community has accepted this, we are free to go anywhere. They no longer ask us where we are going or criticize us.”¹³⁷

Conversations with these rural women about how the community responded to their presence were inspiring due to the related significant, and continued, transformation in social norms. Participants explained: “We now have free movement. The community are now aware of the importance of women’s empowerment programmes, so they no longer question where we are going.”¹³⁸ “People in the community used to backbite if they saw us out walking in the community and questioned why we were out in the street. Now they recognise our right to be there.”¹³⁹ One IDP woman in Injil district identified a total shift in behaviour towards women within the community, describing how “the community has started to respect us because the community needs what we produce. The community reaches out to us now.”¹⁴⁰ This seismic shift in gender relations and gender roles succinctly demonstrates Bayat’s observation that non-movements, despite their lack of ideological motivation and organized approach, can nevertheless result in unplanned structural change.¹⁴¹ In this case, the quiet encroachment of rural women upon the public spaces within their communities has resulted in visible and experiential structural change defined by an expansion of gender roles and corresponding shift in social and cultural norms.

5.2 Reproduction of the Ordinary

As the women spoke during focus groups and articulated their motivations for being able to independently access the public arena, it became apparent that in quietly encroaching upon public space, they did not deliberately intend to challenge patriarchy, but rather they wished to secure an income for themselves that would enable them to ease some of the effects of extreme poverty for their family. The values, motivations and perceptions of rural Afghan women concerning men and patriarchy are complex, incredibly nuanced and sometimes contradictory, but they are at all times informed by the importance of Islam and consciously behaving as good Muslim women; not because they are coerced into piety by men, but because the women themselves aspire to be good Muslims, constantly holding themselves to account against their own interpretation of Islam.

It is clear that within the home and private women-only arenas, rural women consciously resist *extreme* manifestations of patriarchy; it is the threatening and violent behaviour of individual men, and the power wielded by these men to severely restrict women’s life opportunities that are being resisted rather than the patriarchal system itself. Extreme patriarchy sanctions these behaviours, but the women themselves recognise such oppression as un-Islamic, inherently in conflict with the rights provided to women within the Quran. During focus group conversations it was clear that rather than an abolition of patriarchy, the women desire a more benign patriarchal system of social governance, which would provide rights and opportunities whilst adhering to the Quran. As such, many of the women, particularly IDPs, lamented the fact that their men cannot find opportunities for employment. Even the non-IDP women farmers expressed the wish that their men could benefit from vocational skills training in order to be able to supplement the family’s meagre income. For the majority of rural women, their construction of the perfect world provides employment for

¹³⁷ Focus group conducted on 3rd April 2019 in Mazar-i-Sharif district.

¹³⁸ Focus group conducted on 4th April 2019 in Balkh district.

¹³⁹ Focus group conducted on 27th February 2019 in Herat district.

¹⁴⁰ Focus group conducted on 25th February 2019.

¹⁴¹ Bayat A, (2013), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed), p43.

both husbands and wives, enabling them to operate as partners in decision making processes within the home. In this perfect world, though the male would retain traditional patriarchal status and ultimate authority, he would wield this power benevolently.

The Afghan female journalism graduate mentioned during chapter four provided valuable insight into the perspective of Afghan women regarding patriarchy and extreme patriarchy. This young woman has had a mixed upbringing as her family originates from an extremely conservative district within Hirat province, but she was raised in Kabul and her father was extremely progressive in his perspective of gender. Therefore, she has been encouraged to gain a graduate-level university education and to seek employment, which she has secured with DACAAR. In discussing women's empowerment programmes which emulate a very western conception of empowerment such as privileging of individual civil and political rights rather than socio-economic rights and the rights of the family, this journalism graduate argues that such programmes "are causing conflict. Through their women's empowerment they are trying to raise women, but not in a good way. They do not involve men in women's empowerment, they prefer to focus on the women separately. But if you work with women and men together it will help a lot... Women could achieve greater empowerment by supporting each other [as well as] engaging with men, rather than pushing men down. This is not the way. If you worked one hundred years towards women's empowerment in the way [these organizations] are doing now, you will not succeed in empowering women. You should bring men and women together and encourage men to be a part of women's empowerment. It would give men a sense of confidence that despite women being empowered, they are still needed."¹⁴² This perspective reflects what the rural women also identified as their desired route to empowerment; working alongside men. However, whereas the journalism graduate desires a far more egalitarian society, the rural women, who live in extremely conservative areas trust men's decision making-capabilities far more than their own, believing that the Quran says that "men and women think differently"¹⁴³, and that "men can give better advice than women because they are aware of the situation"¹⁴⁴ and thus are content to live under a patriarchal structure of governance, provided that it is not extreme.

5.3 The Unintended Consequences of Quiet Encroachment.

Before examining the positive unplanned consequences of the non-movement of rural women and corresponding quiet encroachment, there is a negative consequence experienced by an unknown number of women which requires acknowledgement. For most rural women who participated in this research, generating an income did result in an increased sense of self-sufficiency; they were able to contribute to their families and simultaneously retain control of household finances themselves or in partnership with their husbands. The fact that they no longer needed to ask for money in order to buy personal items was identified as a significant improvement in their lived experience. However, some women, typically those with particularly dominating husbands, are forced to hand their income to their husbands and thereafter lose any input into how this income is spent. These women seem to be in the minority, but cases do exist. In fact, a female working in women's empowerment in Kabul stated that she also is forced to give her salary to her husband, despite him having a relatively well-paid job. Moreover, he often refuses to give her money for personal items or even

¹⁴² Interview conducted 20th February 2019 in Kabul.

¹⁴³ Focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019 in Mazar-i-Sharif district.

¹⁴⁴ Focus group conducted in Injil district on 26th February 2019.

healthcare.¹⁴⁵ This example demonstrates how actually, despite making numerous advances into education, public space and employment, under a structure of governance such as the extreme patriarchy which prevails in Afghanistan, these women remain oppressed and unintentionally financially support the extremely patriarchal power imbalance that exists within their homes and communities.

Happily, the majority of the unplanned consequences of rural women's quiet encroachment upon public space and the labour market are much more positive, such as the structural change discussed earlier in this chapter which has seen extremely patriarchal social norms diluted and transformed as they begin to accommodate women in public spaces, and in some cases actively support women's economic endeavours rather than merely tolerating them. These structural changes are enormously important, but the quiet encroachment of rural women into the public space has also had unplanned positive effects for both the rural women themselves, and their families, with economic empowerment acting as a vehicle through which barriers to social empowerment were significantly eroded (within the confines of community interpretations of Islam).

Perhaps one of the most enlightening aspects of gaining access to public space was rural women's realization that they had spent years living in fear of the community unnecessarily. "We aren't scared to leave the house now, and in this respect, we feel like men... There is no fear for me now, whereas before, even if my family gave me permission to leave the house, I was too scared."¹⁴⁶ This statement was echoed by many women and symbolizes how increased mobility has consequentially resulted in reduced fear, in turn contributing to community cohesion. This reduction in fear which is usually accompanied by increased permissiveness of husbands for greater independence of movement by their wives also benefits entire families. When asked how their presence in public spaces being accepted by the community has changed their lives, the majority of women provided the same example: being able to access medical facilities. "Before we didn't dare go to the doctor, even if we were really sick. We'd wait for our husbands to take us. Our husbands didn't want us to talk to male drivers or doctors on our own. Now if we're sick or our children are sick, we don't wait for our husbands, we just go to the doctors. Our husbands accept this."¹⁴⁷

A correlation exists between generation of income, increased presence in public space and the increased confidence displayed by these rural women as they move around the community and provide for their families. Gender roles which used to restrict every aspect of rural women's lives have shifted considerably, as have gender stereotypes. "Before we didn't have permission to do anything. Our families didn't believe in our ability to do anything. This has changed due to our income... At first when we wanted to attend this [vocational skills-training programme] our men didn't believe that we'd learn anything. Now they realize that they were wrong, and they are surprised by how much we've learned... We get more respect now. Our families want us to teach them what we've learned, including the men."¹⁴⁸ These statements illustrate how women have unintentionally transformed rural gender roles and stereotypes in their communities. Whereas women were previously confined to the home through a deliberately fear-inducing male narrative, prevented from gaining an education or employment and viewed as incapable of learning or working, now they are respected and recognised as having the ability to independently utilize public spaces, learn, make informed decisions, but also, exert authority over men through interactions which posit women as

¹⁴⁵ Interview conducted on 7th February 2019 in Kabul.

¹⁴⁶ Focus group conducted on 2nd April 2019 in Mazar-i-Sharif district.

¹⁴⁷ Focus group conducted on 3rd April 2019 in Mazar-i-Sharif district.

¹⁴⁸ Focus group conducted in Herat district on 27th February 2019.

teachers and men as their students. During conversations with focus group participants, they explained that they expected to teach their children and female neighbours what they learned through DACAAR's programme, but they did not expect to be asked to teach men. The women expressed an overwhelming sense of pride at having the ability to do this, a sensation which is new to many of them, and one that they hold dear, as that in turn contributes to building their confidence and self-esteem. As one woman in Mazar-i-Sharif succinctly stated, "We are *someone* now. Our families rely on us."¹⁴⁹

5.4 Conclusion

The rural women who participated in this research want to be able to generate an income and achieve self-sufficiency, but not at the expense of their male relatives. It is not the intention of rural Afghan women to render males obsolete or abolish patriarchy, but rather to financially support their families and attempt to alleviate some of the effects of extreme poverty, particularly for their children. Crucially, women don't want to replace the traditional role of the male within the home, instead they want to elevate their own position within the domestic sphere in order to become equal partners. Illustrating this is the fact that women consistently expressed the wish that their husbands could also benefit from vocational-training in order for him to be able to generate an income as well.¹⁵⁰

Through individual acts comprising a "non-movement" the women have engaged with patriarchal domination of power in what their communities deem to be a gender appropriate way; asking permission from their husbands to leave the home and attend the programme which will train them in an income generating skill. Once the husband recognises that he is also benefiting from the woman's income, he is more willing for her to continue working within an ever-increasing field of mobility. Thus, women have engaged with the norms of social control, characterized as they are by extreme patriarchy, but unintentionally transformed them in a way which empowers women, adheres to Islam, lacks confrontation and develops community support for women's access to public space and the labour market. Nevertheless, despite all their gains, the women expressed no desire to address the systemic patriarchal norms which required them to gain permission to leave the home in the first place. Nor are they willing to encroach upon the political sphere, or take up positions of ultimate authority, within either the home or community, viewing these positions as definitively the role of men.

¹⁴⁹ Focus group conducted on 3rd April 2019.

¹⁵⁰ DACAAR does provide vocational skills-training for men, but due to widespread extreme poverty, only one member of each household is helped, and if female-focused programmes exist in one community, male-focused programmes will usually be implemented in a different community.

Conclusion

The gendered context of rural Afghanistan combined with this research into women's responses to, and interactions with, extreme patriarchy, illustrate the usefulness of Giddens' structurationist theory. Whilst rural women are, at any one time, resisting, supporting, reinforcing and reproducing patriarchy in the broad sense of the term, there exists simultaneous tension, cohesion, coercion and negotiation between rural women and the extreme patriarchal manifestations of power which seek to constrain them. It would be impossible to understand rural Afghan women's values, perspectives and constructions of social phenomena if they were not examined alongside the extreme patriarchal social and cultural norms which govern them, in conjunction with their patriarchal (albeit benevolent) interpretation of Islam. The resistance practices available to rural women are restricted by extreme patriarchy and its sanctioning of severe violence against women who overtly dissent. However, the women also restrict the avenues of resistance available to them to a certain extent, by striving to adhere to their interpretation of Islam, as well as what they deem to be Islamically appropriate means of resisting. Thus, to focus exclusively on either agency or structure would obfuscate the complete picture.

Research Findings:

The data collection aspect of this research is characterized by complexities, contradictions and nuances which reinforce Saba Mahmood's assertion that "self-fulfilment" needs to be dissociated from "autonomy" in order to be properly understood. Mirroring Egyptian women who participated in the piety movement, rural Afghan women also 'acquire... a level of self-fulfilment not by referring to "autonomy discourses", but rather by "subjugating themselves" to religious practices.'¹⁵¹ Rural women do not view themselves as isolatable from their husbands and families; rather, they place great emphasis on the sanctity of the family unit due to its privileged position within Islam. For this reason, they do not wish to remove husbands from the familial domain, or resist men as a group, but rather they seek to resist the violent, unfair and perceived un-Islamic behaviours some men enact upon women, which are sanctioned by extreme patriarchy.

Islam, alongside the extreme poverty that characterizes rural women's life experiences, exerts the most influence in informing rural women's construction of empowerment as socio-economic and family orientated, rather than individualised, civil and political. Rural women's families cannot afford rent, medicines, or sufficient food, and often cannot afford to send their children to school, so the right to participate in a seemingly abstract and far removed political system is irrelevant to them. Moreover, many rural women genuinely believe that men are biologically predisposed to be better at logical thinking and decision-making than women, in turn disposing them towards supporting patriarchal structures of governance.

In contrast to "Western" notions of female-centred empowerment which work to foster female autonomy, rural Afghan women wish for economic opportunities for both themselves and their men. As such, they view self-sufficiency and education as a means of developing independence and securing greater opportunities for themselves *and* their families. The independence rural women seek is not envisioned as a means through which to entirely sever themselves from patriarchal constraint, or a tool through which to challenge men, but rather a vehicle through which to elevate their position in order to meet men as equals within the

¹⁵¹ Mahmood S, (2005), cited in Jacobsen C, (2011), Troublesome Threesome: Feminism, Anthropology and Muslim Women's Piety, *Feminist Review*, 98, p70.

domestic sphere, in turn enabling both husband and wife to operate as a cohesive partnership. The ability to participate in decision-making processes within the home is very important to rural women, but the research findings were much more ambiguous regarding participation in community-based decision-making processes or other political exercises.

The overwhelming majority of these rural women consciously employed everyday resistance practices in the private sphere, most notably; false deference, calculated compliance and subversive childrearing within the home, and hidden transcripts such as jokes, derogatory comments and backbiting in women-only spaces. Due to the omnipresent nature of the extreme patriarchal structure of power and related threat of physical violence as a form of coercion and control which permeates every aspect of rural women's lives, they necessarily engaged in hidden resistance practices in order to avoid severe violence at the hands of their husbands or other male relatives, thereby ensuring self-preservation. Again, it is important to reiterate that the women were consciously resisting individual male behaviours which were violent, oppressive, unfair or perceived as un-Islamic, rather than patriarchal authority in general. The women expressed no desire to abolish patriarchal authority provided its manifestation became more benign and aligned with their women-friendly, sympathetic interpretation of Islam.

The home represented the battleground for most women due to it being the site of sometimes extreme domestic violence, but also because the home is where the husband (or other male relative) exercises the power to permit or forbid women from leaving the house, with related consequences for mobility. Once this battle has been won, either by them or on their behalf, the women cease to resist wider patriarchal structures as they exist within the community. In seeking access to public space and the labour market, the women do not exhibit a conscious motivation to challenge patriarchal authority, but rather they act out of financial necessity; husbands are either unemployed, on a meagre income or dead, and so the women take it upon themselves to provide an income for their family, valuing the self-sufficiency and reduction of social barriers that most of them experience as a result.

Crucially, the women have gained permission from their husbands or other male relatives to utilize public space and attend DACAAR's vocational training programme, and thus have engaged with the prevailing extreme patriarchal authority on its own terms in order to secure their objective. The resulting income they generate benefits both their families and community, so this mutually beneficial arrangement works not to abolish patriarchy or replace men as sole breadwinner, but to transform social norms in such a way as to accommodate women and their newly expanded gender roles. Therefore, the non-movement of rural women as they quietly encroach upon public space can be seen to have had the unintended consequence of structural change, transforming extreme patriarchy in such a way as to render it more benign (in relative terms).

Though their quiet encroachment upon public spaces and the labour market has served to diminish the severity of extreme patriarchal social norms and community governance structures, the women continue to reinforce the patriarchy on a daily basis by deferring to male authority, particularly with regard to political issues and issues of governance. They also support the role of men as the absolute figure of authority within the home and community, but only so long as these men exercise this authority by behaving in accordance with the teachings of the Quran, treat women in a kind and respectful manner, and permit them to engage in decision-making processes within the home as equal partners. Islam is the over-riding factor in judging whether behaviour is legitimate or illegitimate, justifiable or unjustifiable, to be tolerated or resisted. The women recognise Islam as inherently patriarchal,

but they are willing to adhere to it, viewing it as a force for protection and empowerment; a defence against the existing system of extreme patriarchy.

Further Research Recommendations

This research has raised as many, if not more, questions than it has answered. Accordingly, it should be viewed as providing insight into the perspectives and practices of rural Afghan women as they respond to, and interact with, extreme patriarchy, rather than a comprehensive account. The data generated through this research is by no means exhaustive and would benefit from being used as a foundation upon which to develop and conduct future research into rural Afghan women or rural communities, the latter being fascinating, but extremely complex, socio-political entities.

Suggestions for future research include whether male family members would be so willing to relinquish absolute control over women if their communities weren't suffering from dire poverty and pervasive unemployment. This is currently unclear, but evidence from DACAAR's programming suggests that in the more conservative villages, without any financial incentive, men are far less likely to give permission for their wives to leave the home. If this evidential tidbit represents a pattern among conservative rural communities, it poses significant implications for women's empowerment and community development programming and policies.

Given the pervasive and harmful nature of domestic violence across Afghanistan, it would be interesting to explore whether the gains rural women secure through generating an income, in terms of increased respect and expansion of gender roles, correlate with a decrease in domestic violence over time. In terms of changing male perspectives and transformation of patriarchal power structures, there is a definite opportunity for a comparative study between male perspectives on the rights of women (and prevalence of domestic violence) in communities where women are mobile and able to generate an income, compared to communities where this is not the case. Such information will be informative for peacebuilding and empowerment initiatives.

Finally, a specific extension to this research that would provide much needed context and reduction of bias, would be the replication of this research with a sample of rural women who are not, and never have been beneficiaries of women-specific NGO programming. This would highlight the extent to which DACAAR's programmes have influenced these women's constructions of empowerment, subsequent practices of resistance and quiet encroachment, and perspectives on patriarchal authority and governance. This knowledge would prove to be extremely useful in understanding rural Afghan communities as well as for formulating post-conflict reconstruction policies which are relevant, culturally appropriate, and have the ability to facilitate the kind of change which is desired by rural women themselves.

Bibliography

Academic

- Abdmolaei S, (2014), (Re)Fashioning Resistance: Women, Dress and Sexuality within Iran, *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 9 (2), pp38 – 55.
- Abu-Lughod L, (2002), Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others, *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3), pp783 – 790.
- Atack I, (2006), Nonviolent Political Action and the Limits of Consent, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 111, pp87 – 107.
- Ballard R, (2015), Geographies of Development III: Militancy, Insurgency, Encroachment and Development by the Poor, *Progress in Human Geography*, 39 (2), pp214 – 224.
- Bates T R, (1975), Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (2), pp351 – 366.
- Bayat A, (1997), Un-civil Society: The Politics of the ‘Informal People’, *Third World Quarterly*, 18 (1), pp53 – 72.
- Bayat A, (2013), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed), Stanford University Press.
- Burridge N, Payne A M and Rahmani N, (2016), ‘Education is as Important for Me as Water is to Sustaining Life’: Perspectives on the Higher Education of Women in Afghanistan, *Gender and Education*, 28 (1), pp128 – 147.
- Buscher D & Makinson C, (2006), Protection of IDP Women, Children and Youth, *Forced Migration Review*, pp15 – 16.
- Daldal A, (2014), Power and Ideology in Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci: A Comparative Analysis, *Review of History and Political Science*, 2 (2), pp149 – 167.
- Daulatzai A, (2008), The Discursive Occupation of Afghanistan, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35 (3), pp419 – 435.
- El-Haddad L, (2014), After the Smoke Clears: Gaza’s Everyday Resistance, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 44 (1), pp120 – 125.
- Gramsci A, (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, reproduced by ElecBook: The Electronic Book Company, London, (1999)
- Grau B, (2016), Supporting Women’s Movements in Afghanistan: Challenges of Activism in a Fragile Context, *Gender and Development*, 24 (3), pp409 – 426.
- Gutmann M, (1993), Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance, *Latin American Perspectives*, 20 (2), pp74 – 92.

- Gutmann M, (1993), Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance: Rejoinder, *Latin American Perspectives*, 20 (2), pp95 – 96.
- Hennion C, (2014), Displacement and Violence Against Women in Afghanistan, *Forced Migration Review*, 46, p34.
- Iniguez de Heredia M, (2017), Chapter 2: Patterns and Practices of Everyday Resistance: A View from Below in *Everyday Resistance, Peacebuilding and State-making: Insights from Africa's World War*, Manchester University Press, pp50 – 74.
- Jacobsen C M, (2011), Troublesome Threesome: Feminism, Anthropology and Muslim Women's Piety, *Feminist Review*, 98, pp65 – 82.
- Kahlert H, (2012), The Simultaneity of Stability and Change in Gender Relations – Contributions from Giddens' Structuration Theory, *Studia Humanistyczne*, 11 (2), pp57 – 68.
- Kassem F, (2011), Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gendered Memory, Zed Books.
- Kohler-Riessman C, (2000), Stigma and Everyday Resistance Practices: Childless Women in South India, *Gender and Society*, 14 (1), pp111 – 135.
- Kuttab E, (2010), Empowerment as Resistance: Conceptualizing Palestinian Women's Empowerment, *Development*, 53 (2), pp247 – 253.
- Lopez O, (2013), Women Teachers of Post-revolutionary Mexico: Feminization and Everyday Resistance, *Pedagogica Historica*, 49 (1), pp56 – 69.
- Mahmood S, (2005), The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject, Princeton University Press.
- Mahmood S, (2006), Feminist Theory, Agency and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt, *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion: Temenos*, 42 (1), pp31 – 71.
- McLeod J, (2005), Feminists Re-reading Bourdieu: Old Debates and New Questions About Gender Habitus and Gender Change, *Theory and Research in Education*, 3 (1), pp11 – 30.
- Rehman Z, (2017), Online Feminist Resistance in Pakistan, *SUR: International Journal on Human Rights*, 14 (26), pp151 – 159.
- Richter-Devroe S, (2018), Women's Political Activism in Palestine: Peacebuilding, Resistance and Survival, University of Illinois Press.
- Rogers S C, (1975), Female Forms of Power and the Myth of Male Dominance: A Model of Female / Male Interaction in Peasant Society, *American Ethnologist*, 2 (4), pp727 – 756.
- Rostami-Povey E, (2007), Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion, Zed Books.
- Schwartzman L, (2003), Book Review: The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity by Allen A, (1999), Boulder: Westview Press in *Metaphilosophy*, 34 (5), pp663-680.

Scott J, (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press.

Scott J, (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Yale University Press.

Scott J, (1993), *Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance: Reply*, *Latin American Perspectives*, 20 (2), pp93 – 94.

Slyomovics S, (2014), *Algerian Women’s Buqalah Poetry: Oral Literature, Cultural Politics and Anti-colonial Resistance*, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 45, pp145 – 168.

Soman U, (2009), *Patriarchy: Theoretical Postulates and Empirical Findings*, *Sociological Bulletin (Indian Sociological Society)*, 58 (2), pp253 – 272.

Thomas R & Davies A, (2005), *What Have the Feminists Done for Us?: Feminist Theory and Organizational Resistance*, *Organization*, 12 (5), pp711 – 740.

Wells J C, (2003), *The Sabotage of Patriarchy in Colonial Rhodesia: Rural African Women’s Living Legacy to their Daughters*, *Feminist Review*, 75, pp101 – 117.

Research and Policy Reports

Belquis A & Urwin E, (March 2018), *Measuring Peace and Violent Extremism: Voice from the Afghan Village*, *United States Institute of Peace*,
[https://www.usip.org/?site_keywords=measuring peace and violent extremism: voices from the afghan village&site_type\[\]=publication](https://www.usip.org/?site_keywords=measuring+peace+and+violent+extremism:voices+from+the+afghan+village&site_type[]=publication)

The Asia Foundation (2018), *Afghanistan in 2018: A Survey of the Afghan People*,
<http://asiafoundation.org/where-we-work/afghanistan/survey/>

Thomson Reuters Foundation, (2018), *The World’s Most Dangerous Countries for Women in 2018*, poll2018.trust.org

UN Women, (December 2013), *“Like a Bird with Broken Wings”: Afghan Women Oral History 1978 – 2008*, *UN Women Afghanistan Country Office*,
<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/12/report-on-afghan-women-experiences-with-violence>

Primary Sources

Aljazeera, (30th December 2018), *Taliban Dismisses Afghanistan’s Peace Talk Offer*, *Aljazeera*,
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/taliban-dismisses-afghanistan-peace-talk-offer-181230082443475.html>

Amnesty International (25th November 2014), *Women in Afghanistan: The Back Story*, *Amnesty International Blog*,
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/womens-rights-afghanistan-history>

Associated Press in Kabul, (15th July 2017), Afghanistan's Sesame Street Brings in New Puppet to Teach Respect of Women, *The Guardian*,
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/15/afghanistan-sesame-street-new-puppet-respect-women-zeerak>

Banks G, (7th August 2017), Inside Zan TV: Afghanistan's First All-female Station, *The Guardian*,
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/aug/07/inside-zan-tv-afghanistans-first-all-female-station>

Barr H, (11th December 2013), In Afghanistan, Women Betrayed, *International New York Times*,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/11/opinion/in-afghanistan-women-betrayed.html>

Barr H, (30th May 2018), Afghan Government Ignoring Violence Against Women, *Human Rights Watch*,
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/30/afghan-government-ignoring-violence-against-women>

Bigio J & Vogelstein R, (22nd March 2018), Afghanistan – Taliban Peace Talks Must Include Women Negotiators, *Council on Foreign Relations*,
<https://www.cfr.org/blog/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks-must-include-women-negotiators>

Bond K, Cronin-Furman K, Loken M, Lake M, Parkinson S E & Zelenz A, (4th March 2019), The West Needs to Take the Politics of Women in ISIS Seriously, *Foreign Policy*,
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/04/the-west-needs-to-take-the-politics-of-women-in-isis-seriously/>

CNN, 2018 Deadliest Year for Afghan Civilians Since 2009, *CNN Video*,
<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2018/09/07/afghanistan-war-deadliest-year-for-civilians-kiley-pkg-vpx.cnn>

Dayee M I & Bezhan F, (29th March 2018), 'Stop this War': Afghan Women Challenge Taliban, Rally for Peace, *Radio Free Europe*,
<https://www.rferl.org/a/afghan-women-challenge-taliban-rally-peace/29134171.html>

Firchow P & Urwin E, (9th May 2019), What Afghan Women (and Men) Really Want, *Foreign Policy*,
<https://foreignpolicy.com/?s=what+afghan+women+and+men+really+want>

Ghani A, (27th June 2018), I Will Negotiate with the Taliban Anywhere, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/opinion/ashraf-ghani-afghanistan-president-peace-talks-taliban-.html>

Glinski S, (July 2nd 2019), Hidden Suffering: Afghanistan's Widespread Mental Health Crisis, *The National* online.
https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/hidden-suffering-afghanistan-s-widespread-mental-health-crisis-1.881672?fbclid=IwAR14K4cQDa9XJ5Geu0WKE-BTo1D6khHzQNnR8BWvL0aGMysW8f_gR7DkCOc

Haidary M S, (14th February 2018), Afghan Women Pessimistic on Peace Talks with Taliban, *Asia Foundation*,

<https://asiafoundation.org/2018/02/14/afghan-women-pessimistic-peace-talks-taliban/>

Hughes K, (3rd September 2014), ‘Talk To Me Not About Me’: Afghan Women Left Out in the Cold by NATO, *Amnesty International Blog*,

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns/talk-me-not-about-me-afghan-women-left-out-cold-nato>

Kumar R, (31st October 2018), ‘There is No Need for Women to Work’: Afghan TV Show Takes on the Patriarchy, *The Guardian*,

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/31/there-is-no-need-for-women-to-work-afghan-tv-show-takes-on-patriarchy>

Nawa F, (5th April 2019), For Afghan Refugee Women, There’s No Escape From Violence, *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/05/for-afghan-refugee-women-theres-no-escape-from-violence/>

Rumi Consultancy / World Bank, (12th January 2016), Community Engagement Key to Success in Rural Development, *World Bank*,

www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/01/12/community-engagement-key-to-success-in-rural-development

Safi S, (1st July 2018), Why Female Suicide in Afghanistan is so Prevalent, *BBC*,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44370711>

Shaheed A, (14th June 2018), Nangahar Women March in Support of Ceasefire, *TOLO News*,

<https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/nangarhar-women-march-support-ceasefire>

Sultani Haymon B, (2nd June 2018), The Taliban’s Legacy in Afghanistan has Plundered Women’s Basic Human Rights, *The Independent*,

<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/taliban-afghanistan-latest-womens-human-rights-unhcr-ashraf-ghani-kabul-asia-a8380396.html>

UNMA, (15th July 2018), Highest Recorded Civilian Deaths from Conflict at Mid-year Point, *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*,

<https://unama.unmissions.org/highest-recorded-civilian-deaths-conflict-mid-year-point-latest-unama-update>

Maps

Naval Postgraduate School: <https://my.nps.edu/web/ccs/herat> (Herat Province)

Naval Postgraduate School: <https://my.nps.edu/web/ccs/balkh> (Balkh Province)

The University of Texas at Austin: <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/afghanistan.html> (Afghanistan)

