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Sexual Misconduct and International Aid Workers: An Afghanistan Case Study

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SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND INTERNATIONAL AID WORKERS: AN AFGHANISTAN CASE STUDY[1]

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Abstract: This paper seeks to add to existing study of gender and conflict by examining the complexities of interactions between international workers and local populations in spaces mired in war or post-war conflicts. Feminist scholarship on gender, war, and political violence/security provides the theoretical and empirically informed framework for this examination. I argue that in order to discuss Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), it is necessary to first consider context with respect to location, gender, belief, and praxis. "Universal" conceptions of sexual conduct, misconduct, and SEA may be in opposition to acceptable practices within a particular site and situation. This includes addressing temporally specific conditions and the lack of legal parameters or enforcement during times of heightened conflict. Thus, both local populations' and international workers' obedience to international or national/local laws remains flexible rather than fixed. Consequently, civilian populations reside in a state of vulnerability to various forms of misconduct and abuse, including SEA. This study suggests additional research on the tensions and divisions between supposed universal rights and the beliefs or practices positioned in contrast to these standards.

Introduction

Several scholars have analyzed the discursive framing of gender-based rights at international scale (Chinkin, 2003; Hampton, 2004; Neuwirth, 2002; Sheppard, 2008) and the lived experiences of gender-based violence and other human rights violations (Enloe 2000; Giles & Hyndman, 2004; Hawthorne & Winter, 2001; Jacobs, Jacobson, Marchbank, 2000; Rile, Mohanty, Pratt 2008; Truong, Wieringa, Chhachi, 2006). In order to add to these important studies on gender and conflict, this paper focuses on gender-based violence and sexual conduct, misconduct, harassment, and abuse in Afghanistan. This paper emphasizes the interactions between international workers (military, aid/development, non-government, logistics, security, and

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government) and local Afghans. This examination is based on both secondary[3] and primary-source data.

Feminist scholarship on gender, war, and political violence/security provides the theoretical and empirically informed framework for this examination. I argue that in order to discuss Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), it is necessary to also consider context with respect to location, gender, belief, and praxis. "Universal" conceptions of sexual conduct, misconduct, and SEA may be in opposition to acceptable practices within a particular site and situation. Conflict zones (such as Afghanistan) attract an influx of international workers from a number of organizations such as; state controlled military, private military or security companies, government and non-government aid or development agencies, and contractors, and logistics corporations.

In the midst of political violence, the laws of the host country generally exist in a state of emergency or exception as several hallmarks of war and its aftermath include continued conflict, a rise in criminality, and the inability of the existing government or outside forces to effectively maintain or enforce the rule of law. Thus, both local populations' and international workers' obedience to international or national/local laws remain flexible rather than fixed. Consequently, civilian populations reside in a state of vulnerability to various forms of misconduct and abuse.

Sexual conduct remains a complex and difficult area for evaluation and analysis. Acts that constitute sexual misconduct in one context may be identified as acceptable or understandable forms of sexual conduct based on a different set of values or perspectives. Correspondingly, we must also consider and question whose definition of sexual misconduct or abuse is constituted or considered valid in a particular site and situation. Within spaces of weak governance, in the cases of "failed states," or sites of conflict, these definitions are further complicated by gender politics and political constructions of scale.

Examples of gender politics that intersect with a political construction of scale include the use of "universal" or international definitions of SEA to identify local forms of conduct as SEA or human rights abuses. For instance, in particular sites and situations, child marriage may occur based on a number of war-induced factors including poverty, fear of conflict, lack of security, or economic desperation. Conversely, this "practice" may be correspondingly interpreted as cultural or traditional, rather than placed within the temporal context of contemporary conflict. If a family arranges the marriage of their child in order ensure or increase the physical, economic, or food security of the family and child, does this also constitute an act of abuse? In consideration of an alternate scenario—if an international-aid worker engages in a consensual sexual relationship with a local employee, is this an act of misconduct by nature of the unbalanced power relationship (employer/employee)?

At the international scale, based on the United Nations (UN) identification of child marriage and its code of conduct for international workers (United Nations Secretariat, 2003; UNICEF, 2005) each of the above scenarios would befit an example of abuse. These scenarios, when examined more closely, present additional social, political, economic, and gendered factors to consider. For example, does the gender of the child in the first scenario or that of the aid worker in the second make a difference in how these cases are perceived or their ability to influence international or national/local policy or law? These scenarios may also involve a political construction of scale. For example, international definitions of individual rights are often invoked for political purposes in order to discredit or identify the acts of individuals or communities as human rights abuses, rather than acts of desperation or survival.

In order to frame this examination within the larger study of gender and conflict, I begin with a review of the relevant literature

on gender, conflict, and security. This review is followed by a brief overview of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which supports the protection of women and girls from SEA during conflict. This is followed by an overview of gender relations in Afghanistan and the implementation of UNSCR 1325. From these perspectives and approaches I discuss the differences between military uses and conceptions of gender roles and relations in Afghanistan in comparison with nonmilitary approaches such as aid/development.

Gender, Conflict, Security

Men's and women's experiences of violence during political conflicts both shape and are shaped by existing gender roles, norms, and relations and further intersected by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and location/dislocation (Jacobson, 1999; Giles & Hyndman, 2004). Due to a variety of factors associated with gender difference and political conflict, Hans (2004) suggests multi-dimensional approaches to research on gender and dislocation owing to war in order to thoroughly examine the complications of shifting gender identities during and in flight from political conflict.

Essentialist definitions and gendered binaries during conflict are reinforced and in some cases altered and destabilized for the purpose of various political actors (Goldstein, 1995). For example, the expectation of women's femininity may be narrowly defined during wartime in order to incite men to "protect" women as a metaphor for or representation of the homeland. Gender balances associated with the inclusion of women in male-dominated professions associated with political conflicts and war economies require an analysis of masculinity as it is constructed and enacted within war zones by the local/host country and different military factions.

Combat masculinity often expects men to reassert their maleness by protecting the "homeland", nation, or ideological position (Moser & Clark, 2001; Tickner, 2002). These gendered divisions within conflicts that are essentialist, and heterosexists position heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality, which further solidifies the boundaries of behavior associated with men in combat, which seek men (and sometimes women) to become protectors of the nation (Mayer, 2000). Dominant heterosexuality and hyper-masculinity are significant features of wartime, which require docile (noncombatant) manifestations of femininity as complementary forms of difference (Radcliffe, 1996; Oliver, 2007). Wartime masculinity may require a civilian "object"—most often positioned as "women and children," thus providing a continual "victim" as an effective counter to the assumed power attributed to combat masculinity and the "right" to kill for the sake of the state/nation.

Enloe (1993, 2000) argues that women's roles in combat have done little to legitimize the position of women within political hierarchies. However, as illustrated in several cases in Afghanistan, female international military commanders, due to their rank and relative autonomy on an isolated base, have found opportunities to implement gender-based security reforms without the explicit support of their conservative or male- dominated "superiors" (i.e. headquarters). Carpenter (2006) also disrupts gendered binary assumptions about the male body in conflict by disaggregating the experiences of male noncombatants (civilians) in order to illustrate that men may also experience corporeal abuses including SEA. Carpenter (2006) argues for deconstructing the ways in which sexual violence against women acts as political conduits for emasculation. Additionally, the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, and Abu Ghraib prisons sexualized and racialized male prisoners by situating homosexuality and femininity as methods of corporeal abuse to the male body (Nausir, 2008; Razack, 2008; Paur, 2004). Gendered and sexual violence during war, as argued by Butler (2004), deliberately disrupts

existing gendered frameworks that violently reinforce the borders of a binary gender system.

It is also important to note the cooptation of women's lack of security and rights caused by political unrest, extremism, and religious fundamentalism for alternative political goals. For example, the U.S. under the Bush administration made use of gender-based violence to "demonize the 'Islamic other' and justify more militarization of society" (Bunch, 2004, p. 80). Similarly, popular western feminist rejections of Islam as misogynistic supported U.S. aggressive foreign policy agendas, which rhetorically implemented the "saving women" trope to legitimize racist stereotypes of Islam (Bahramitash, 2008; Sutton & Novkov, 2008). Subsequently, the use of the "terrorist" label was invoked by governments throughout the globe to forgo human rights in the name of providing for public or national security (Bunch, 2004; Young, 2003).

Contemporary and continued conflicts in spaces such as Afghanistan illustrate the increased blurring of expected divisions between civilians and combatants (Bunch, 2004). The public battlefield is no longer easily distinguishable from the private home-front (Hyndman & Alwis, 2004). Gendered abuses and sexual exploitation are also perpetrated on civilian populations and displaced individuals and groups in spaces of expected assistance by aid workers and peacekeepers (Aoi, Coning, & Thakur, 2007; Mackin, 2004; Vandenberg, 2005). The United Nations' edited volume *Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations* (Aoi, et al. 2007) outlines several examples of abuse and exploitation suffered by vulnerable and displaced populations in flight from armed conflict. Kent's (2007) chapter examines SEA by aid workers and peacekeepers. Kent (2007) clearly identifies SEA as "expected and predictable" while simultaneously identifying these acts as "unintended" (pp.44-66). I argue that SEA by international workers in conflict zones should also be identified as intentional (despite the lack of *intentionality* of

host/sponsoring organizations). Spaces of political conflict that are rife with international aid workers should not assume worker benevolence and altruism, as these spaces include several (if not many) workers that opportunistically exploit or engage in acts of oppression including SEA. Just as local forms of SEA emerge or increase during times of political conflict, the influx of international workers also increases various forms of SEA. It is essential that we explicitly recognize the power differential that is structurally, geographically, and temporally situated between international workers and local populations.

International workers exercise power (over) vulnerable populations by virtue of their ability to control the distribution and allocation of necessary resources (e.g. food, water, shelter) for human survival. It is at the very site of this interaction where instances of abuse occur; for example, international workers exchanging food for sexual services from girls and young women (Kent, 2007; Mackin, 2004; Vandenberg, 2005). International workers also enjoy more control over their international mobility due to their ability to easily excise themselves from the site of conflict, in stark contrast to the fixed encampment of refugees and internally displaced persons (also see Hyndman, 2000). The disparate positions of power and mobility between international aid workers and local populations illustrate a clear and consistent framework for expected, predictable, and *intentional* exploitation and abuse.

It is both practically and theoretically incongruous to assume that "real, predictable and expected" SEA perpetrated by international aid workers are not also in fact intentional simply by virtue of the macro-scale mandates and "expectations" of their host/sponsor organizations (such as the UN). Additional examples of this include the "expected" increase in sex work and the trafficking of women and children upon arrival of peacekeepers and aid workers in the aftermath of (or during) political conflicts (Kent, 2007). The geopolitical, spatial, and scalar[4] disconnections between international discourse on human rights and the "protection of

civilians" during armed conflict further underscore the need for multi-scalar, varied, and multi-dimensional understandings of SEA during conflict both among warring factions and the organizations that characterize peace (also see Hans, 2004). Prior to discussing the implementation of UNSCR 1325, I outline some of the complexities involved in Afghan gender relations.

Gender Relations in Afghanistan

"There is no such thing as Afghan Women." An Afghan man stated this phrase during a discussion of gender roles and relations in Afghanistan. I include this statement because it helps to situate the significant diversity rather than singularity of women (and men) in Afghanistan. I use the term "Afghan Women" to refer to the female population generally with the understanding that this cannot nor should be used to identify or define a singular category of analysis.

Afghan women's placement, position, and status at the household and community scale vary considerably by ethnic group, location, religious belief, socioeconomic status, education level, and also vary household to household when the former list of social indices are similar (Edwards, 2002; Kakar, 2002; Smith 2009). Women's status also varies across the life cycle; for example, older women who have built up social and kinship networks over time, gain more authority and influence than they had as younger women (Kakar, 2002; Kandiyoti, 1988). Generally, a woman's position within her family is coveted by her family *namus* (honor/face), which functions predominantly through her duties as wife/mother (Tapper, 1991; Kakar, 2002; Kandiyoti; 2007; Smith; 2009). The specific expectations of women and men in the maintenance of *namus* are also significantly variable. The household provides a space of physical and economic security for and control over women (Barakat & Wardell, 2002), and it may also be the place where some women experience verbal or physical violence.

A strong patriarchal structure remains in Afghanistan, although women's lack of rights or experiences of abuse cannot be reduced to culture, patriarchy, religion, or tradition. As Kandiyoti (2007) argues, when we focus on Afghan women's lack of rights in Afghanistan as a form of cultural and institutionalized patriarchy[5] we ignore the entrenched and caustic effects of insecurity and poverty. It is also important to note that women in urban spaces with more socioeconomic status and education experience life much differently than their rural counterparts. Also the efforts of many Afghan women's organization are constrained by funding limitations and the dictates of donors, which in many instances creates additional barriers to the development of a women's movement in Afghanistan (Abirafeh, 2009; Azarbaijani-Moghadam, 2006; USAID and Counterpoint International Report, 2007)

Despite the diversity of Afghan women's experiences and status, there remains a general respect for the boundary between home-domestic spaces and public space. In many cases where the sexual-security of the female body is maintained through her virtue (virginity before marriage and monogamy within marriage), this virtue remains a central component of both female and family honor. Therefore, a breach of a woman's corporeality reverberates as a breach of family honor and the structural "protections" by men over women to secure this honor. Afghan civilian men are largely powerless to retaliate against international forces that rupture the boundary of women's corporeal privacy and family honor, which in some cases has a causal effect of increasing domestic violence against women.

Conversely, Taliban and other local forces due to their embedded understanding and knowledge of gender-based practices are in some cases able to more easily articulate their political ideology and attempts at social transformation than their international counterparts (also see Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2008). Thus, international military attempts to gain support from local

populations have also begun to address some of these concerns. In what follows I examine the UN's international mandate on the protection of civilians during armed conflict, its implementation in Afghanistan, and other measures to gain the support of local civilian populations.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

International mandates[6] on gender and violence are highlighted in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR, 1325), which attends to the treatment of civilians during conflict—and women and girls specifically by identifying the need for specific protections. UNSCR 1325 states "All parties to armed conflict [are called upon] to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse" (UNSC 2000: Article 10). Sheppard's (2008) comprehensive analysis of UNSCR 1325 questions the ability of this resolution to actually deliver the "radical reforms" it "purports to seek" (7). She further identifies the discursive and macro-scale assumptions and generalizations that fix women as victims and objects of "gender violence". She argues that these assumptions serve to reproduce binary conceptualizations of gender and violence that are both theoretically and practically dangerous. In response to Sheppard's analysis and concerns, I address some of the "practical" dangers and gendered assumptions associated with the implementation of UNSCR 1325 by critical analyzing the Swedish Defense Research Agency's 2009 report on its implementation in Afghanistan.

Operational Effectiveness of UN Resolution 1325

In the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan (October 7, 2001) and subsequent Bonn Agreements, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was developed as part of the United States' "Coalition of the Willing". ISAF is mandated to maintain a safe and secure environment for the full engagement of

the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) and to assist the Afghan government in its exercise of sovereignty (Olsson & Tejpar, 2008). The *Operational Effectiveness and UN Resolution 1325—Practices and Lessons from Afghanistan*[7] report provides a summary of the comprehensive qualitative research study of five Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) located in different provinces throughout Afghanistan. The PRT system integrates civilian-military personnel to provide security and assist with reconstruction projects. This also illustrates the growing fusion between military with civilian aid/development operations (see Goodhand, 2006).

Other strategies by ISAF include the use of female soldiers for specific gender-based operations such as the newly formed Female Engagement Teams (FETs). FETs encompass a small part of the larger Counter Insurgency (COIN) strategy, developed by the United States military for operations in Afghanistan. FETs are employed to access domestic spaces for forced searches and seizures. FETs are expected to avoid the loss of honor/*naumus* to Afghan families, which would occur when a male solider violates the private space of the home through forced entry. The Human Terrain System (HTS) is another aspect of the COIN strategy, which employs anthropological methods to gain information about the "enemy" in an effort to avoid civilian causalities and "win over" the local population. HTS remains controversial and the American Anthropological Association released a statement in 2007 expressing its distinct disapproval of this project[8]. These strategies are also employed inconsistently an include skepticism and debate among academics and military personnel (see American Anthropological Association, 2009; Cannable, 2009, US Army, 2009).

Additional academic research on COIN, HTS, and FETs is necessary in order to fully examine the use, effectiveness, and implications of these strategies. Based on preliminary research of COIN, HTS, and FETs, these programs all identify the need to

acknowledge and, to a certain degree, respect local gender relations as part of military strategy. Conversely, there remains little understanding of the complexities of Afghan gender roles and relations, especially the variations across the country and the fluidity of culture and praxis.

As discussed in the ISAF implementation of UNHCR 1325 report, female international personnel may traverse the threshold between public and private domestic spaces in Afghanistan without threat to women's virtue or male/family honor, because they are not perceived as a sexual threat to women or a physical threat to men within the household. These home-based encounters provided international women with some measure of improved understanding of Afghan gender relations[9]. Female soldiers were also actively involved (to varying degrees of success) with convincing male soldiers that gender awareness and "women's issues" were important to enhance the mission's effectiveness. Gender balances with the internal operations of the PRT / ISAF operations and local gender awareness were therefore identified as a means to an end for improving mission effectiveness.

The report recommends the need for a "gender specialist/advisor" on each base without including any specific definitions of the skills necessary to understand local gender relations or implement gender- awareness programs. Similarly, the identification of all-male situations as "gender-neutral" and the assumptions that "women's issues" were not related to security because local women are not involved in armed resistance further underscore the binary assumptions and narrow categorizations associated when gender is used as a narrow or singular category of analysis (also see Mohanty's critique 2004). As discussed by Abirafeh (2009), aid/development workers and projects in Afghanistan also conflate gender with women as part of the gender politics of assistance after the U.S.-led invasion (October 7, 2001).

The most promising aspects of gender-based implementations to improve women's place and status within PRTs were limited to physical structures. For example, building separate male/female housing, addressing the need for co-ed bathroom facilities on bases, and the use of female international guards on roof tops because of their visual access to the interior courtyards of Afghan homes (unroofed interior courtyards are common to most Afghan homes, and are important places for women to engage in domestic labor such as clothes washing and cooking). The visual intrusion of male eyes into domestic spaces would restrict women from moving within the interior of their own homes, as it would be perceived among Afghan households as violation of the private corporeality of women's bodies.

It is also imperative to address the actual and perceived experiences (or expectations) of sexual conduct, violence or abuse. Due to the diversity of Afghan women's experiences, a woman's presence or absence in public space is mitigated by a number of social, political, spatial, and economic factors. In addition to the gender-based "fixes" to civilian-military operations, it is important to also examine sexual conduct, misconduct, exploitation, and abuse within the international aid/development sectors (both within and outside the PRT model).

This analysis is based on field observations, surveys, and interviews with international workers[10] in Kabul, Afghanistan (summer 2006, winter 2007, and summer 2008). As part of this study, participants identified their recreational activities and interactions within the international (expatriate) community as well as with Afghans, which included acquaintances, friendships, and intimate partnerships. I examine these relationships in order to discuss the complexities of association and intimacy in conflict/post-conflict sites and the ways in which gender and its intersections with other social and political hierarchies complicate a clear understanding or labeling of SEA.

Sexual Conduct and Misconduct

Intimate and sexual relationships between international females and Afghan males were identified as possible by all respondents and more common than similar relationships between international men and Afghan women. International men have relatively little access to Afghan women outside of professional encounters[11]. The seclusion of Afghan women or their limited access to international spaces was often identified as an example of Afghan women's lack of autonomy and empowerment, while it also served as a method of protection from SEA from international aid/development personnel and employees of aid/development organizations, contractors, logistics, private-military, or private-security corporations.

It is important to note that forced house searches attributed to NATO, ISAF, or U.S. military forces may provide access to homes harboring potential insurgents, while this does not lead to an effective form of assistance or liberation for Afghan women generally. Conversely, accessing the home within acceptable parameters (i.e. by invitation) remains unavailable to many aid/development workers, who are barred from entering Afghan homes due to security concerns and restrictions of their respective organizations.

International women workers who engaged in sexual or intimate partnership with Afghan men identified these as consensual. However, extra-marital sex (despite being consensual) fits within the parameters of sexual misconduct in Afghan society. Consensual sex between international workers and local recipients of aid, assistance or employment also fits within the UN's definition of SEA (UN, 2003) due to the unbalanced employer/employee power relationship. Conversely, do the genders of the individuals alter certain assumptions about power relations? International female workers' mobility and

socioeconomic opportunities are generally much greater than their Afghan male-intimate partners'.

International women also experience a significantly higher level of power and influence among international workers in contrast to Afghan male workers in international offices. Conversely, international women have little to no control or influence over Afghan males' status and position within Afghan families and communities. Afghan men experience a greater degree of mobility within local communities in Afghanistan, in contrast to international females' limited local and augmented global mobility.

Additionally, the international women (within this study) discussed sexism, sexual harassment, and in some cases sexual violence from *international male colleagues* more often than from *Afghan-male colleagues*. Structurally, international women do not threaten the honor or sanctity of male bodies in the same way international men pose a threat to the bodies, virtue, and honor of Afghan women (and by extension their families). However, Afghan men engaging in sexual relations with international women do risk the disapproval and reprimand from their families and may increase their chances of contracting and spreading sexually transmitted diseases to other women including spouse(s).

Female international workers who develop intimate partnerships with Afghan men do not view these relationships as exploitive or as a form of exchange for resources; rather they largely identified them as an emotional connection or to alleviate loneliness. This examination leads to additional questions for consideration. In some cases these relationships led to marriage or long-term partnerships, which may include polygamy[12]. Does marriage offer legitimacy to these relationships, and if so, does this legitimacy suggest a lack of exploitation by either or both parties? Should there be specific parameters for these encounters that are fraught with competing definitions of exploitation and power imbalances when one considers gender, economics, mobility, context, and

location? In consideration of these questions and to illustrate additional complications of gender and sexual encounters, the following section examines gender relations and other forms of SEA in this conflict zone.

Gender, Sex Work, and SEA in Conflict Zones

The geographic and ideological separation of Afghan women from international men occurs largely through the structures of Afghan society. The lack of intimate relationships or SEA against Afghan women by international men is further supported by international gender politics surrounding the rescue and protection of Afghan women (Fluri, 2008; 2010). Therefore, intimate relationships between international men and Afghan women are rare (and largely invisible), and international men who seek sex through monetary exchange patronize international sex-worker brothels operating as Chinese Restaurants.

Men who seek to participate in these forms of sexual-monetary exchange are from various aspects of the international worker community such as: aid/development, logistics, contractors, and private military/security companies. Sex work is illegal in Afghanistan and some efforts have been made to close down these establishments, while rampant corruption and the excising of bribes ensure their continuation (Constable, 2006; Lyn & Burch 2008; Womensphere, 2009). Chinese sex workers cater primarily to international men (and wealthy Afghan men) and enter the country on short-term visas or are trafficked illegally.

Additionally, there is a growing auxiliary war economy in Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul, which caters to the comfort "needs" and desires of "first world" international workers made possible by their inflated salaries and disposable incomes. Chinese sex workers are one aspect of the service-based economy that has flourished in Kabul to meet the consumptive desire of international workers (Fluri, 2009). Real and rumored information about

Chinese sex workers, extra-marital and multiple-sex partnerships among international workers, and the proliferation of pornography in local shops and internet cafes encompass contextually specific definitions of sexual conduct/misconduct, and subsequently reverberates into more stringent controls over Afghan female mobility and interaction with international workers.

In some cases, various forms of illicit sexual activity (consensual, coerced, and for economic exchange) are also mislabeled as exemplifiers of democracy. For example, identifying extra-marital and other forms of sexual conduct as the result of "democratic freedoms" helps to discredit democracy as a viable political system in Afghanistan. Similarly, acts of conservative views on women's roles in society or the use of domestic violence as a form of social discipline by certain Afghan men becomes a political tool for the "saving women" trope. Controls over the female body remain the focal point for both Afghan patriarchy and international "savior" respectively. For example, the sexual behaviors of international women are invoked to discredit democracy, and the treatment of women under Afghan patriarchal structures, are cited to illustrate the continued "need" for international intervention (military, political, socioeconomic). This subsequently acts as an effective method for discrediting certain geopolitical frameworks (i.e. western democracy, political Islam, or customary law). In all cases women's bodies act as a geographic terrain for situating discourses of abuse or protection to subsequently influence political will or policy initiatives.

Consequently, the structures of local protection for and control over Afghan women help to reinforce and reaffirm international perceptions of Afghan women's localized oppression and disempowerment. The tensions between Afghan women's dependency and subordination (see Allen, 2008) within the context and structure of their families and communities remain largely unacknowledged. For example, Afghan women's dependency on men or other family members (both male and female) was

predominantly "viewed" by international workers (in this study) as subordination. The tensions between dependency and subordination are continually reworked and resisted by both Afghan and international women. Afghan women's dependency on men (and other kinship relationships both male and female) is socially reproduced through male-female interdependency ensured by gendered behavior expectations and divisions of labor.

This dependency can be (and is at times) wielded as a tool of subordination, but it is also bound within a system of social discipline, mutual needs, and respect. The opportunities and challenges faced by Afghan women and the coping mechanism and tools developed by them are bound by context, experience, and a myriad of other social, cultural, and political influences. Any projects or programs designed to help or assist Afghan women must take these complexities into consideration. Afghan women's diverse needs and concerns cannot be met when they continue to be aggregated into narrowly framed solutions by imperialist feminist and militarized discourses.

International aid/development workers who view gender relations as the sole expression of power relations (or women's disempowerment) link instances and examples of violence against women in Afghanistan to the "traditional" gender order. The lack of nuanced understanding and intrinsic value for women despite their social, education, class, ethnicity, or location further reinforces these narrow and dichotomous representations of gender in Afghanistan, which subsequently defines the "necessary" aspects of development policy and praxis (also see Abirafeh, 2009; Coleman, 2007). This serves to politically construct the scale of women's abuse locally and women's liberation internationally.

This also contracts, rather than expands, epistemological processes toward understanding social and gender hierarchies across spaces and situations where women negotiate and exercise relative power,

prestige, or status. In other situations Afghan women have organized into formal opposition and feminist groups that remain unpopular due their position as political outliers against foreign occupation *and* political Islam[13]. Social gender-identity differences also create hierarchical structures between international women from liberal-economic feminist frameworks and local Afghan women. Afghan women's multivariate experiences include additional hierarchical structures such as location, age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, education level, and kinship status. Many educated women within Kabul's urban elite who want to increase women's public, professional, and political lives also experience public and private life much differently than their rural or less-educated counterparts. Afghan women are clearly not a homogenous group (by ethnic, racial identity, socioeconomic status, or education level), and many do not view outside, foreign, or neoliberal capitalist economic frameworks as the "best" path to increased empowerment or liberation.

Summary and Conclusions

The gendered assumptions associated with implementation and analysis of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan, and the gendered hierarchies between international workers and Afghans highlight several aspects of military, aid/development, and civilian security/insecurity in this conflict zone. Unequal power relations should not be reduced to assumed gender binaries within Afghanistan (i.e. power/oppression and dependency /subordination). The tensions and interactions between these categories are important to address, and as Mahmood (2005) argues, female empowerment and agency in certain situational contexts are conditionally linked to what outside observers identify as subordination.

As identified in the cases of international women's intimate and sexual relations with Afghan men, power imbalances and conceptualization of sexual conduct, misconduct, or exploitation

must also encompass a wider understanding of the complexities associated with gender and other social and political hierarchies. At the same time it is important to note that in this context, Afghan female sexuality is much more guarded and connected to family namus (honor) than male sexuality. Therefore male sexual liaisons with international women are less likely to disrupt family structures (due to entrenched patriarchy); while they may disrupt Afghan family life and have the potential to increase the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Definitions of sexual conduct/misconduct may also be bound by context, temporally specific situations, and interpretation. Thus, SEA must be identified and addressed from multiple perspectives and address the complexities of multiple or opposing conceptualizations and context-specific experiences of sexual conduct, misconduct, exploitation, or abuse.

It is also imperative to destabilize and address the changes and often-indistinct boundaries between consensual and coerced sex for both men and women in zones of conflict and political upheaval. Gender and its intersections with other forms of social and political identity and status remain fluid and contextual rather than fixed expressions of power relations. Although gendered boundaries are often established and narrowly defined during times of political conflict— alternative gender relations also emerge during and in the aftermath of conflict.

As argued within the policy reports discussed in this article, the inclusion of women within international military and civilian personnel has been identified as a necessary component for gaining the trust and cooperation of local populations and increasing the involvement of Afghan women as part of the processes of aid/development/reconstruction. Although I agree with this assessment in principle, a critical question remains: What is the goal for international-local relations with respect to women (and men) in Afghanistan, particularly when the process of aid/development/reconstruction presupposes the implementation

and reinforcement of neoliberal economic frameworks, imperial political pursuits, and the uncertainties of military occupation? For example, forced entry to Afghan homes is considered a breach of a respected boundary. The gender of the soldiers involved in this breach, represent one, but not all, aspects of the lack of respect for this boundary. Replacing male with female soldiers may help to alleviate additional perceptions of violation; however, this gender swap does not simply fix the disruption associated with penetrating boundary between the spaces of the political-public and domestic-family-private spaces. This study also suggests the need for more feminist analysis on the political construction and use of scale that occur when local forms of gender-based abuse or violence become political discourses to support international military intervention and occupation. Similarly, "universal" or macro-scale interpretations of rights or behavior may be incompatible with local and communal belief structures. The politically weak and marginalized remain within the spaces of opposition between supposed universal rights and the beliefs or practices positioned in contrast to these standards. If Afghan women continue to be discursively situated at the center of the political and ideological battlefield between competing forms of patriarchy and misogyny, they will remain marginalized and vulnerable to oppression and abuse both locally and by way of international intervention.

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[3] (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al. 2006, 2008 Olsson and Tejpar 2009, and Independent Afghanistan Human Rights Commission reports 2008a, 2008b).

[4] The definition of scale examined in this article address the fluidity of scale in the sociospatial processes of international interventions within a conflict zone. Political conflicts can shape the ways in which geographic scales are produced and consequently the ways in which geographic scales are produced can shape political conflicts. For example, the framing of Afghan women by the former Bush administration in the U.S. both aggregated the diversity and moved the local scale of women's experiences in Afghanistan to the realm of the international. This in turn shaped the discourse and action of the U.S. led military mission and international aid/development response.

[5] For example, the decision-making and conceptualization of choice in marriage is based on a complex and multiple sets of factors and a variety of family influences from both genders. In addition to these complexities, personal family decision-making may also be mitigated by outside political and apolitical forces such as poverty, fear, insecurity, and forced mobility (Kandiyoti 2007; Smith 2009).

[6] Evans (2005) further argues for a clear understanding of globalization and its negative impact on the effectiveness of international Human Rights Law.

[7] In 2003 ISAF troops were subsumed under the direction of the U.S. led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)— ISAF is comprised of 45 countries, including 26 NATO members. At the time of this research 26 PRTs were operational in Afghanistan. Four key points are highlighted in this report: 1) Awareness of UNSCR 1325 and the different situations for men and women vary significantly; 2) There is a need for female soldiers because they have increased ability (rate of success) to reach local populations (i.e. seen as less threatening) and collect intelligence; 3) There is a need for an improved

handling of gender-based violence and 4) There is a need for more women to handle forced-based protection issues (Olsson & Tejpar, 2008).

[8] http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/Statement-on-HTS.cfm (accessed January 3, 2012).

[9] For example, female mission members "who were able to communicate with the local female[s] . . . entered their houses, were of the opinion that inside the private sphere, a lot of women were respected and cherished" (53).

[10] The international worker community in Afghanistan is comprised of individuals from over 40 countries. The majority of interviews were conducted with Americans, as they are the largest donor country in Afghanistan. All interviews were conducted in English, as that was the primary language of communication among internationals despite the diversity of worker locations and languages.

[11] There is no empirical evidence to support forced entry to homes as an effective method for accessing Afghan women who are secluded from public space.

[12] Note: In some cases an Afghan man will continue his relationship and family obligation to his Afghan wife and enter into a marriage with an international female spouse.

[13] Organizations such as the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) due to their views, which threaten the social order and their critical stance on International military and development practices continue to operate clandestinely. Women's organizations that take a radical stance on patriarchy within Afghan kinship structures (such as RAWA) are not, however, without specific forms of dependency, which are contingent upon respect and affirmation between and among men and women within the organization (Fluri, 2006).