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THE (IN)SECURITY OF GENDER IN AFGHANISTAN'S PEACEBUILDING PROJECT

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Abstract ---
In this article I draw on a feminist approach to hybridity to explore interview data and observations from my field research in Afghanistan. I argue that there is a logic of masculinist protection influencing the affective environment of the peacebuilding project there. The combination of a perceived patriarchal context in Afghanistan and security routines protecting civilian internationals (and Afghan elites), which rely on hypermasculine signifiers, help to create and perpetuate the conditions in which the female (for both internationals and Afghans) is marked with insecurity. I point to hybridity between the foreign and female experience, as well as resistance and reflexivity within my research. Throughout I explore fragments of power hierarchies that cut through the meaning of gender, rendering the female state a disempowering one, always referenced in some uncertain, hybrid way as protected or in need of protection.
-- **Keywords**
peacebuilding, Afghanistan, hybridity, affect, masculinist protection

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I draw on field research in Afghanistan to explore the ways that Afghan and international civilians, working within a (broadly defined) peacebuilding remit, connected protection, gender and security. Liberal peacebuilding in conflict-affected states is best understood as "the simultaneous pursuit of conflict resolution, market sovereignty, and liberal democracy," and all activities undertaken by organizations and institutions that relate to these areas (Goodhand and Sedra 2013, 239). In Afghanistan, promoting women's rights was a key element of the liberal peacebuilding project post-2001 (Abirafeh 2009, 21). This took place "against a backdrop of the Afghan women's plight and the West's civilizational duty to protect them" (Welland 2015, 290). Yet equally "[t]he transformational hubris of the liberal peace doctrine disappeared on . . . the streets of Kabul as the international community retreated into their diplomatic enclaves and high-security compounds" (Goodhand and Sedra 2013, 242) so that there was a disjuncture between the desire to transform women's social status, and the need to protect peacebuilders from ongoing violence.

Afghanistan differs from other peacebuilding contexts because it still manifests aspects of an active conflict, and the security practices I discuss in this article are directly linked to a high level of threat perception (Duffield 2012, 477). This does not detract from the importance of examining these practices and protection logics, however, especially since the increased threat levels render them commonsensical and difficult to question (Enloe 2004). In addition to this, the high risk of actual violence against peacebuilding actors means that the gendered implications of protection logics are best understood in an affective mode that is not recognized in gender terms – they are often felt viscerally rather than directly acknowledged. A feminist curiosity asks whether, even in the face of justified fear and real attacks, a masculinist protection framework can bring about security in any true sense, just as it asks if militaries can bring about peace (Whitworth 2004).

I argue that the relationship between gender and security among my respondents can be explored through a feminist approach to hybridity (McLeod 2015), in which gender is affectively guided by certain masculinist logics which render it uncertain, and laden with insecurity. I pay attention in

the latter part of this article to practices linked to the protection-gender-security nexus that I encountered in Kabul that were routine, embodied and habitual, marked by hypermasculine signifiers. I suggest that these practices contributed to a sense of how gender and (in)security interacted, but in a largely affective as opposed to an overly acknowledged way. Thus, I mix deliberate testimony with routine praxis, based on an understanding that both highly cognitive (spoken answers) and less cognitive (everyday practices) processes contribute to the relationship between gender and (in)security in Afghanistan, and the affective environment that underlies it. I collapse two separate areas of meaning, psychological/perception-based and structural/physical, into the same analytical framework in order to discuss an overarching affective environment to which both are contributing factors.

I argue here that viewing how gender is thought about and is linked to (in)security in different ways by (primarily) civilian actors in a liberal peace context opens up a space to engage with how gender is impacted by peacebuilding practice. I build on insights from Laura McLeod (2015) and Laura Shepherd (2014) to outline a feminist approach to hybridity. I then discuss aspects of my interview data which can best be read as manifesting hybridity in relation to protection, gender and (in)security. Finally, I look at one aspect of the peacebuilding project in Afghanistan – the hypermasculine symbolism of routine protection – and suggest that this logic taken together with the perception of a logic of traditionalist patriarchy in an Afghan context (Burki 2011, 45–59),[1] fosters an affective environment that is reflected in my respondent's iterations of gender and (in)security, particularly linked to being female. Drawing on recent feminist work by Sarah Bulmer (2013), Cara Daggett (2015) and Katharine Millar (2015), I suggest here that gendered frameworks which are contradictory, confused, multiple and defined by splits, paradoxes and disjuncture are also indicative of relations of power and function as sites of gendered negotiation and boundary building.

A FEMINIST APPROACH TO HYBRIDITY

Hybridity is described by critical peacebuilding scholars in different ways, however for the purposes of this article it can be understood as the way that aspects of the "international" and

aspects of the "local" can "coalesce and conflict to different extents on different issues to produce a fusion" (MacGinty 2010, 397). It involves the merging of the "liberal international order . . . with other non-liberal indigenous institutions, norms and practices at the domestic level" (Laffey and Nadarajah 2012, 406). Central to the notion of hybridity is the idea that power is flexible and contradictory; that a paradigm of dominance can be shifted and reinterpreted, taken up in different forms and with different intentions, and still maintain the central touchstones of its hierarchies intact (Kothari 2006, 163).

McLeod (2015) provides a feminist critique of the concept of hybridity, arguing that a feminist lens elucidates "a nuanced perception of the power relations between local and international actors" (49–50) and that comparing and "contrasting the wartime experiences of local and international actors allows a sense of the organising logics that limit and make possible certain meanings of gender" (59). It is specifically feminist in exploring the "diversity of the personal," which hybridity normally neglects, and in understanding "international" actors as individuals rather than just as a collective (52). A feminist approach to hybridity understands that "[a]s war and post-war can be experienced in multifarious ways, local and international advocates bring diverse conceptualisations of that war based upon the windows of knowledge that they can access, and have accessed" (49).

McLeod suggests a focus on the emotional and the embodied levels of peacebuilding, noting that "how the body 'feels' the world impinges upon how the world is experienced and described" (53), and I build further on McLeod's insights using the notion of affect. Shepherd's (2014) feminist engagement with peacebuilding suggests "reorienting research towards the affective and relational dimensions of peace activities" (112), and I attempt to do that here. Affect understood as *prepersonal* is slightly different from particular emotions, and not individual as such, but environmental (Shouse 2005). It is the conditions in which emotions can come to be articulated fully, a sensory perception of the parameters that are set for feelings to be felt. I thus go back a step from McLeod, looking for felt experiences but also the environmental aspects that bring them into iteration. Using both interview data and observation, I perceive affect as "amorphous potential that remains outside of discourse, which is difficult to articulate but none-the-less has

effects within discourse" (Solomon 2012, 908).[2]

In the latter part of the article I "underline the not-necessarily reflexive sensory dimensions of experience by paying attention to the perceptual dimensions of our actions and the habituated and routine nature of everyday existence" (Vannini 2015, 323). This aligns with McLeod's (2015) view that "hidden or mundane practices and processes operate alongside macro-political processes" in peacebuilding (52). I illustrate how different kinds of interactions in the protection-gender-security nexus in my field research data and experience were affectively coded with deep uncertainty and imbued with power imbalances between masculinist protector and feminized protected. My central argument in this article is that a masculinist logic of protection in peacebuilder security practices helps to create an affective environment in which being female becomes always already hybrid, uncertain and affectively linked to insecurity.

Iris Marion Young (2003) develops a framework in which a masculinist protector figure shields a subservient, feminized protected from a dangerous and unknown male Other "out there" who must be securitized against. Should the protected resist, there is an understanding that they would be abandoned to an unknowable threat (14). Thus, the protected and feminized in this paradigm is always subject to the uncertainty of a disempowering safety, a protection that is also an implicit threat. I argue here that the logic of masculinist protection seen in security practices helps to foster the kind of affective environment in which notions of patriarchal protection are constantly underlying and intertwining with gender meanings. This affective environment is a hybrid between the protective logics of security practices linked to peacebuilding, and a sense of traditionalist patriarchal protection frameworks in the Afghan context. I do not mean to equate the experiences of peacebuilding actors with Afghan women who may be subjected to patriarchal control, but to point to an affective hybridity tied to certain kinds of protection logics, in which gender is bounded and delineated. Given the space restrictions of this article, I do not unpack the meaning or reality of traditionalist patriarchal protection frameworks in Afghanistan, but consider references to it in my interviews. My intention here is to investigate how affective environments might relate to gender and (in)security, and how this can be read through the lens of a feminist

approach to hybridity in which ideas around Afghan patriarchy, security routines, foreign status and female status mix together.

Mark Duffield (2010; 2012), Severrine Autesserre (2014), Oliver Richmond (2009), Roger MacGinty (2012) and Jennifer Fluri (2009; 2011) (among others) have critiqued the approach to security and other practices found among internationals and (less often) national elites in post-conflict or development contexts, and these authors each to some extent collapse physical or structural manifestations of peacebuilding praxis with psychological or attitudinal aspects. In particular, Duffield (2012) coins the concept of "bunkerization" to refer to both a physical and a psychological distancing mechanism. Thus, linking these two elements in this article is not a novel approach, however where it departs from previous work is in suggesting that these two elements work together to generate an affective atmosphere in which gender becomes a hybrid entity, impacted by a masculinist logic of protection. This article makes an original contribution to the field of feminist peacebuilding by providing an empirically guided analysis of how affect can be related to gender and (in)security in Afghanistan.

METHODOLOGY

During a four-week visit to Afghanistan in 2014 I conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews (mainly in Kabul) and one focus group, speaking with thirty people in total (formally). Interview participants were gathered through snowballing (where one respondent would put me in touch with others), and in addition to these I had multiple informal conversations that focused on my research topics, mainly with international civil society personnel, but also with Afghans whom I had a chance to speak with day-to-day. Of my interview respondents, eleven were internationals (non-Afghan) and the rest were Afghans, though all but the focus group were linked to the international peacebuilding project through their work, role or funding. Only two were military personnel, and the rest were civilian with one respondent bridging the divide as a civilian liaison to the military. My methodology was in line with an ethnographic approach and I kept detailed

notes, including generating a self-ethnography of my emotional trajectory and various perceptions and experiences (Vannini 2015).[3]

I worked voluntarily for an Afghan NGO (co-authoring two policy papers), which helped me establish contacts. My observations of civilian peacebuilding personnel can be understood as participatory observation, since the vast majority of my work-related and social interactions were with NGO or UN staff who saw me as someone occupying a similar role to their own. My interview guide focused on issues of protection, gender-based projects and personal experiences, and the impact of peacebuilding on gender equality. I improvized to modify the direction of the conversation depending on how the interview was developing. I interviewed people mainly in their place of work, or in restaurants frequented by internationals; occasionally I travelled to their homes. I lived with my NGO contact in a house in a residential district, set back from the road, surrounded by razor wire but without the customary *chowkidar* (doorman/guard), and reached my interview locations either by being allowed the use of organization cars, using public taxis or on foot.

The category of civilian peacebuilder that I refer to in this article covers those persons in Afghanistan who are mainly expatriate but can be Afghan, are civilian in relational terms (non-military) and are conducting work linked to internationally funded peacebuilding (Billaud 2012; Duffield 2012; Autesserre 2014). However, in line with a feminist approach to exploring (post-) war contexts that acknowledges complexity and slippage, I "comprehend actors working in post-conflict contexts as subjects constituted by a multiplicity of positions whose articulation is always precarious and temporary" (McLeod 2015, 54).

This article analyzes original interview data from six respondents: an Italian man (Carlo), and five women – an American (Lisa), an Australian (Kate), a Pole (Sally) and two Afghans (Tela and Asal),[4] chosen for the relevance of their comments and experiences to the idea of a feminist approach to hybridity in peacebuilding. It also draws on analysis of observations and fieldnotes, including reference to a (UN) respondent who did not wish to be recorded. All but one of the six respondents – the exception being Carlo, a defence attaché to an embassy – were civilian staff

engaged in work related to civilian peacebuilding. I include Carlo because of his references to female internationals, and his perception of the patriarchal structure of Afghan society. Since this article is concerned with that which is affective, and not necessarily fully acknowledged, it follows a methodological strategy in which there is to some extent a "need to accept that research can be insightful and valid even if it engages unobservable phenomena, and even if the results of such inquiries can neither be measured nor validated empirically," and takes this need as an analytical starting point from which to generate analysis that is speculative and partial, but reflective of patterns and perceptions of meaning in important ways (Bleiker and Hutchison 2008, 115).

GENDERED (IN)SECURITY

Gender and Protection in an Afghan Peacebuilding Context

In these sections I trace in my interview data a formal logic of masculinist protection and a corresponding linking of the feminine to an uncertain and hard-to-articulate sense of insecurity. Arguably, "[p]lacing people at the centre of an exploration of peace politics prompts the question . . . of what work gender was (and is) doing in these sites, given that all social practices operate in and through logics of gender" (Shepherd 2014, 103). Throughout, it becomes clear that "the gendered body in need of securing is female" (McLeod 2015, 59). Yet it also surfaces that international actors are implicated in the creation of the need to secure, both in terms of the need to secure the foreign female self, and Afghan women (Fluri 2009; 2011).

When speaking about the interactions between protection and gender in an Afghan peacebuilding context, my respondents' opinions, experiences and perceptions were marked by hybridity, victories and setbacks, change understood as positive and negative, power and agency playing out in unusual ways. Protection held complex connotations linked to the (in)security of women. For example, Kate pointed out that dominant narratives that coded women as inherently insecure victims with the intention of protecting them were unhelpful:

> [Y]ou find people mobilizing the discourses of women as passive victims of war
>
> and conflict, of women as naturally peaceful. And even though people want to

mobilize that discourse to assist women in participating in peace, I think it

actually recreates the stereotype about women which I don't think is particularly

useful.[5]

Sally provided an interesting example of this kind of mobilization: she discussed with great

optimism a project that blended innovative crowd-mapping technologies and the reporting of

gender-based violence, illustrating a problematic engagement between liberal peace processes

and gender-based insecurities:

[T]he aim of this project was to enhance the use of innovative tools in reporting

about violations of women's rights . . . in the form of a map. . . . You can basically

record it by type of the case: rape, kidnapping, stuff like that. Everything what

you need, and then you can have access to this data in the visual way, so you can

use it for better mediation, or approaching donors, or media [sic].

Here, a globally available data-visualisation tool, the Ushahidi platform, is used to reinscribe

localized gender insecurities onto a technologically advanced, easily measurable and easily

categorized template. This is done so that information can be ordered in the format best suited to

donor and media requirements. Yet it can be read as a means of technocratic governance

(MacGinty 2012) in which a liberal order subsumes individual abuses within an overarching

perspective on gender insecurity that is simplistically sorted, and subject to gendered and

racialized logics of identity and expected behaviors: violent/victim-based or protector/protected

(Grove 2015). This well-intentioned project was ostensibly designed to try to protect women from

insecurity and violence. However, its manifestation echoes Kate's frustration with dominant

narratives about women and her understanding of the ubiquitous stereotyping of Afghan women

as victims in order to offer them protection (and the Othering of Afghan men as perpetrators),

which undermined their relationship to action and agency, constituting a different kind of

insecurity. Kate summed this up by saying, ". . . that idea of the victim Afghan woman – that

actually persists even now, so yeah I don't know how much it has changed."

Tela discussed the negative implications of certain kinds of masculinist protection in Afghan society very directly based on her perception and experience:

> That protection is really a sort of indicator of the patriarchy that is going on in this society, and we girls, women, daughters, wives, we are considered as the savior of family's name . . . a woman if she works, if she studies, something wrong happens to her or she for example makes a mistake then it is all, like – the family loses honor, and the family's man is mandated to actually do something to protect that honor. So that's why when they say that we are protecting our girls, we're protecting our honor. And that protection is actually encircling her, so that she is not able to move anywhere, she's not able to speak out. . . . And that's what they think protection is all about in this society, because it's really – I think it's caging rather than protection – so that she is caged, she is shamed, she is not able to make a decision, whoever she wants to marry she has no right to even say. It is us the family who will decide whom she will marry, what she will do, where she will live. So this whole notion of protection is actually caging her, chaining her, because there is this understanding if a woman is free she will be immoral.

A logic of masculinist protection threads through Tela's account, one that leads to a construction of men as protectors and women as "protected" to the detriment of their freedom and security. The way that Tela speaks about "this society" transcends the particulars of individual actions and relationship dynamics. She is speaking in concrete terms but also making reference to a broader sense of a patriarchal climate, an affective climate sedimented over time, in which protection logics prescribe and delineate possibilities, choices and meanings.

Carlo echoes this as well, speaking about his perception of how protection operates in an Afghan context:

> I don't think they can go back to Taliban period, never, but there is still a very traditional way of thinking about women. Women are the object of the honor of these men but they are not, yeah it is an abstract way of thinking about honor. So if you look at a woman – if another man look at your woman – it is not an

honorable thing, if mmm, the woman not behave according to the strict traditions

– Islamic law – it is not good [sic]. But it is really more abstract than that, they do

it because they're used to doing it.

The way that Carlo presents the logic of masculinist protection here, as abstract and habitual, can be read as an affective force, one in which women are automatically in need of protection by a masculine entity. At another point in the interview, Carlo discussed what he understood to be the vulnerability of foreign women in Afghanistan, linking this to his own capacity as a man to protect women he accompanied in public, allowing them more [but still limited] freedom of mobility:

I have a lot of friends in the international community, and of course girls here,

women here, are much more restricted; I can go out in the street and I can do

things that they couldn't think to do. They go sometimes around with me, but

there is still a restriction.

While these gendered contexts and restrictions in the experience of Afghan and international women cannot be equated, taken together they point to an almost precognitive disposition (in that it is not understood as being gendered in any deep sense, just simply natural) in Carlo and more generally to regard international women as in need of masculinist protection, and to perceive a somewhat similar (though not the same) logic operating habitually in the Afghan context. Equally, in the project Sally discussed and the frustration with dominant discourses articulated by Kate, fragments of power hierarchies cut through the meaning of gender, rendering the female state a disempowering one, always referencing it in some uncertain, hybrid way as protected or in need of protection. Discourses and understandings in which women are automatically assigned victim status (and men assumed violent, etc.) are not uncommon in many contexts and institutional frameworks (McLeod 2015). However, in Afghanistan these were arguably shaped by a very specific affective environment – hybridized and bounded by masculinist protection of different kinds.

Protecting the Self

In this section I put into practice McLeod's (2015) argument that a feminist approach to hybridity must "pay deeper attention to the diverse ways in which the personal is political for *both* international and local actors" in a peacebuilding context (52). When my female respondents spoke about their own gendered selfhood, they often demonstrated a hybrid understanding and set of experiences, particularly in relation to self-protection and (in)security. For example, international female respondents would suggest that they had more opportunities, mobility, freedom and authority than Afghan women, and yet in their interviews, and in my unstructured conversations with them and others outside the interview context, would also highlight restriction, harassment or self-enforced security measures based on gender. Lisa in particular highlighted the connection between her gender and her sense of personal insecurity, illustrating a high level of self-policing and limitation of her own behaviors as a self-protection mechanism:

> I have definitely noticed my complete sense of helplessness in every situation, it's not that I can't have an independent life, I could choose to walk to the store if I wanted to but I choose not to because I know that I'm going to be probably harassed, I know that I'm going to be uncomfortable, I know that I'm going to be making sure my coat is pulled around me, making sure my scarf is covering.

> Or going to the field, if [male Afghan colleague] hadn't been with us in the field I would have been much less comfortable, just because you have no agency or personal freedom as a woman to just go do the things that you would normally do. . . . [I]t is so frustrating, because there are so many things that I just literally cannot do for myself because I'm a woman. Like taking out the trash, I one hundred percent rely on a man to take out the trash for me and that is so stressful because I can't just walk three blocks down the street with my bag of garbage and throw it away. . . . I'm not willing to expose myself to that kind of pressure on top of what I already have in my life here. But then there is the additional pressure that that causes of having no independent control over my life.

Lisa and Kate were conscious of their hybrid bodies, which were marked as both female and foreign, both vulnerable and powerful. In their awareness there is resistance, reflexivity and

confusion. Kate exemplified this hybrid gendered state, discussing how she was sometimes mistaken for an Afghan woman (thus read as vulnerable, possible to harass):

Sometimes people think I'm Afghan, when I'm dressed in a particular way, especially when I'm not wearing my glasses, umm, and I get harassed at check-points a lot and as soon as they discover that I'm a foreigner, that's, that's fine.

She struggled to give voice to this sense of hybridity; what it meant to occupy a female body and a foreign one, referencing the "third sex," a paradigm of both/neither female and/or male (Knafo 2001) to illustrate her sense of uncertain liminality:

[P]eople talk a lot about foreign women being like the third sex. I don't really like the analogy but there is certainly things that you can do, that Afghan women can't do. . . . So sure there – as a woman working here – there's a lot of possibilities in terms of accessing people that Afghan women don't have the same access, but there are other difficult things as well; there are difficult things about, you know when you're moving around you get a lot of attention. And again, I don't know how much of that is because you're foreign or because you're a woman.

Lisa similarly suggested that "foreign women are not viewed the same as Afghan women, especially – it's complicated – people have certain expectations of Afghan women, and as a foreigner you're expected to fit with those expectations, yet you're sort of exempt from them in a way as well." She also struggled to fully articulate the pressing sense of hybridity she experienced in relation to her gender: "My perception of what it means to be a woman, I don't necessarily act that out in Afghanistan; it's a compromise between what I perceive as my gender and what I know is perceived of me because I'm a woman."

Asal accepted that certain attributes of her identity and physicality could not be considered traditional Afghan, and yet in order to insure her own protection, mobility and capacity to do her work and protect others, she saw it as both necessary and desirable to accept a performative,

image-based traditionalism that she did not see as a natural part of her identity. She linked these ideas particularly to clothing, telling me:

> I've had to change from everything that I was doing, my get-up, from the way
> that I was clothing, so I wouldn't go with the clothes I have on now, with my
> jeans and pants on and all that. I mean wearing a black, long hijab didn't cost me
> anything, it didn't affect my personality or activism. . . . Rather than, you know,
> getting this very typical idea that I have to go and make them accept my very
> Western type of clothing and all that [sic].

A female Afghan UN spokesperson told me she could go without a headscarf when she was inside a UN vehicle since she was linked to the power and symbolism of international status when she travelled that way, which rendered her a kind of hybrid between Afghan and international, thus protecting her. Yet if she did the same on the street where she was clearly marked as Afghan she would face condemnation, male aggression and bodily insecurity (Author field notes 18 May 2014). Asal and this spokesperson view their taking up and/or rejection of modes of dress designated Afghan or Western by patriarchal codes as empowering in different ways, demonstrating attempted negotiation and agency within restrictive conditions (Abu-Lughod 2002).

These extracts evidence a strange mix of self-protection, pervasive psychological and physical perceptions of (in)security linked to being (and acting and dressing like) a woman, and an uncertain gendered and racialized negotiation with an affective logic of protection in which it is constantly perceived, but not always fully cognitively processed and addressed *as gendered*, that women are vulnerable without male protection or the protection of male logics and codes. This is not to suggest a lack of agency in the women I spoke with – their resistance and self-awareness is powerful in ways – but rather to suggest a process of navigation in which gender was always already a hybrid and an uncertainty. These extracts also suggest different kinds of cross-cutting complicity between the "international" and a logic of masculinist protection. While there is a constant process of flux and contradiction operating here (particularly in the relationship between

international and gender status), there is also an affective gendered order in which, once again, female equates to vulnerability faster and more "naturally" than male ever would.

Gendered Security Praxis

In addition to the mode of hybridity demonstrated in how civil society actors talked about the protection-gender-security nexus that I have discussed above, I now move to include a consideration of how less conscious, routine, unnoticed or habitual practices relating to protection and security help to create a gender-liminal space in Afghanistan, marked by hybridity. It is here that my feminist take on hybridity builds most on McLeod's by prompting questions of embodied and affective power and (in)security. It is not my intention to offer an alternative way of practicing security in dangerous settings, or to suggest that these security procedures are necessarily unjustified. However, a feminist curiosity leads me to explore how these practices are coded with gender in certain ways, and what kind of power dynamics and "embodied subjectivity" (Frerks, Ypeij, and Konig 2014, 8) this gendering might involve (Shepherd 2014). Since both male and female peacebuilders (and Afghan elites) are protected by these practices, my discussion must be understood in abstract terms, exploring how protection logics are founded on gendered ideas. It is the feminized international (and elite national) body that is secured by routine practices, rather than just women, but the validation of masculinist protection required has affective, gender-laden implications.

From what I saw and heard about in Kabul, most business and expatriate homes were guarded by private security personnel – all were men, some were Afghan, many were not. These private security personnel operate through performances of masculinity in various ways, and with varying degrees of theatricality and visibility (Higate 2012a; 2012b). In Afghanistan particularly, because of the high perceived and actual threat level, these masculine performances center on weapons, masculine physicality and a stoic, tough demeanor; often sunglasses and military-style clothing feature strongly, and the notion that these gendered indicators will be perceived as threatening and dominating by others is vital for their success (Connell 2005; Higate 2012b). Performances and props of violence have an undeniably hypermasculine dimension (Higate

2012a; 2012b), particularly when those private security actors wielding or performing them are almost exclusively male, and manifest their working identities through stereotypical tropes of masculine prowess.

In my experience, the structures that made up homes, cafes and workplace compounds were also laden with the symbolism of masculinist militarism and aggression – razor wire, high blast-proof walls, guard buildings and watchtowers. In an affective mode, symbols of security such as the fortified aid compound are compatible with an ideology of aggression and Othering connected to a certain kind of (hyper)masculinized frontierism (Young 2003, 2), and a militarized logic that prioritizes masculine dominance in an abstract form – the values associated with notions of masculinity rather than actual men (Hutchings 2008; Hearn 2012). An embodied, spatial and commonsensical dichotomy existed in Kabul between vulnerable/feminized (devoid of the trappings of violence), and the hypermasculine means of violent action that protect against vulnerability (Young 2003; Frerks, Ypeij, and Konig 2014).

Lisa was the only one of my respondents to directly link security practices and the protective infrastructure in Afghanistan to her (in)security. Of all my respondents, Lisa was the most reflexive, and also someone who demonstrated the greatest hybridity in her responses. She was very vocal (as illustrated in the previous section) about feeling unsafe as a woman particularly, and yet equally articulated a sense that this insecurity was exacerbated by the affective environment in which she found herself, an insecurity that went beyond that generated by the Taliban:

> [T]he securitization of space matters so much, I don't know that I'm nearly as unsafe as I feel, I used to walk a lot, when I first came I walked all the time, I don't know that my decision to not walk is really based on anything rational or on the fact that nobody else that I know walks, everywhere you go there is razor wire. I really think that the psychology of conflict architecture, of having blast-walls everywhere, police checkpoints every twenty feet, guys with AK47s everywhere makes you feel deeply unsafe, if you were in a safe place why would it look like it does?

Picking up on Lisa's experience of "guys with AK47s everywhere" and unpacking it further, I suggest that the fortified aid compounds and private security personnel (as well as armored cars, the prevalence of weaponry, security checkpoints, procedures for entering buildings, safe rooms, etc.) generate an affective environment of insecurity that is also gendered. In this context, "narratives of risk and response" created by security personnel or institutions set the parameters for how a given environment can be perceived, and police the mechanisms that can be used to negotiate the everyday contexts of these environments (Higate 2012a, 14). Ideas around masculinity and masculine dominance are engaged in complex relation with this "construction and governance of insecurity and danger" (Berndtsson 2011, 1; Higate 2012a, 20), since "(male) (security) operational rationality" and physical capacity is understood to mitigate risk (Stiehm 1982; Higate 2012a, 17).

While private military contractors and personnel provide a gendered narrative and meaning that is often complex and negotiated (Higate 2012c; Eichler 2015), in an affective mode in Kabul these security personnel signalled a hypermasculine frame of reference founded on the visuality of lethal weapons, the macho demeanor of the men wielding them and the implicit understanding that "military calculation" is the "epitome of rationality" (Stiehm 1982, 375; Higate 2012a, 20). Security practices, such as living and working in guarded buildings, travelling with and hiring close protection staff, armored cars, security liaisons, etc., thus create a situation whereby safety and violence are behaviorally conflated, and the trappings and rituals of violence are an affective foundation for any understanding of gender in that environment. It is an environment that martials a precognitive sense of (almost) fear and (always) threat in gendered terms. This raises questions of the extent to which, within the peacebuilder paradigm, the "cultivation of fear and anxiety . . . was fostered as a disciplinary strategy" that in affective ways "cemented the masculinised protector role rooted in control and authority" (Higate 2012c, 14).

In an extract from my fieldnotes I illustrate a sense of oppressive gendering that I almost but not directly linked to the ubiquity of men with guns; I am aware of being female in a negative sense, but it doesn't seem like I cognitively process why that is the case:

> Again the feeling of being female was palpable. I could smell the particular kind
>
> of bread they cook here. The air was dusty and damp. The streets were quiet.
>
> There were a few men sitting around with guns. As usual it was unclear what
>
> they were guarding (Author field notes 1 May 2014).

Lisa more explicitly articulated her perception of a feedback loop between masculinized
protection, which understood women (and children) as vulnerable and men as their protectors,
and the affective impact of security measures:

> [Y]ou are coming into a society where there is already a very strong tradition of
>
> protection around women, part of that is after you have come through decades
>
> of sustained conflict and of course men and women experience that differently
>
> and especially in Afghanistan, where you have already a patriarchal society, so
>
> many children – so there is a need to protect women and children in a conflict
>
> environment. When you have this sustained, visible insecurity – in the sense of
>
> measures to try to prevent insecurity – it is a further justification to continue
>
> this need to protect who you have been protecting all along.

I read a visceral understanding in her words, a struggle to make verbal sense of what work a pre-
discursive mode of masculinized protection, which seems to self-perpetuate in commonsensical
ways, does for gender and for what it means to be female or male in Afghanistan. The fact that the
logic of masculinist protection in civilian peacebuilding practices remained just beyond and
beneath full articulation (Holland and Solomon 2014), and yet did seem to have affective
implications for how my participants thought about gender, would indicate that the affective
nature and ubiquity of this logic helps to render it commonsensical.

A feminist approach to hybridity pays attention to the way that war or postwar is experienced
differently by different actors. Thus looking at the mode of security practices in Afghanistan that
are engaged to protect peacebuilding actors (and Afghan elites), and seeing that this operates
within a gendered logic, elucidates how gender and security in Afghanistan must necessarily be
understood within a liminal space that values masculinized protection. Added to this is the push to

demonstrate improvements in women's rights since 2001, and the perception of a fundamentally patriarchal social context (Billaud 2012). While more research needs to be done on further implications of this dynamic, I suggest that the reliance of peacebuilding practices on a logic of masculine protection, and the coding of hypermasculine signifiers as harbingers of security, influence the affective environment in which gender can be understood, owned, resisted and reinterpreted. In this affective environment, the hybrid interactions between gender and security evidenced by my interview data take on a particular kind of framing. They can be seen to be bracketed by a constant flux and unease, which renders gender, particularly female gender, always already a hybrid, insecure and uncertain concept.

CONCLUSION

Private security guards and fortified aid compounds are not unique to Afghanistan. Nor, I would suggest, are the kinds of hybrid gendering processes that I discussed above, and more research should be done to explore how they might operate in different places. However, Afghanistan is a very particular example of the liberal peace paradigm in action, it has been a long process, it has shifted over time, and there was from the outset a very strong focus on gender in the form of women's rights and freedoms. Moreover, and for this reason, gender plays a large part in the narrative and practice of peacebuilding in Afghanistan, and is equally a gendering/focus on gender that is crafted onto and runs alongside deep and on-going insecurity and violence, as well as being superimposed upon a repetitive history of political battles over women's rights (Abirafeh 2009). A feminist take on hybridity focusing on the interplay between gender and security using the case of Afghanistan offers a particular and unique space to consider how gender, (in)security and the liberal peace project interact.

In this research I sought to try to perceive what gender was in Afghanistan for the people I engaged with: how did it feel, what did it mean, and did it shape, guide or cognitively prescribe? There was a specific sensory experience in my field research, one in which hybrid boundaries were constant, visceral, tangible and powerful. Part of my research design began to shift and slip toward the gravitational pull of hybrid (in)security and what that was, trying to locate gender

within this, to recognize and make sense of how gender functioned as (in)security, as and within a protection process. It felt like gender was something that my participants were constantly trying to pin down, to pull to ground and hold still, while it flickered through and around them in various guises, with different meanings and iterations provoking different levels of reflection, of fear, of (un)certainty.

I followed strands of meaning laid down like partial trails or hits of a familiar smell that sits just out of reach of remembrance. In doing this, my own instinct and intellectual leanings anchored me, and my own sense of what gender could be and do in this particular lifeworld inhabited by my participants. But my positionality as a researcher, in a liminal position myself between insider and outsider, researcher and participant observer, also disoriented me, inscribed my own sense of (gendered) uncertainty upon my research materials (Henry, Higate, and Sanghera 2009). Thus it is with an awareness of my own influence and emotional undertones that I seek in this article to unpack some of the hybrid affective interactions I encountered in relation to gender. I remain sure, experientially and through processing my research materials, that the masculinized logic of protection I perceived in different forms and at different levels of cognitive awareness, praxis or discursive iteration was always central to how gender and (in)security could be understood by my participants, and equally by myself.

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Notes

[1] I use the term perception here not to suggest this logic does not exist in reality, but because my empirical materials guide me more toward discussing perception than the direct operations of patriarchy in peoples' lives.
[2] Affect is difficult to work with methodologically, and for some scholars reading affect into discourse would be methodologically incorrect. However following Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) and Solomon (2012), I believe that it is possible to do so.
[3] I understand the definition of ethnography to be "people-focused emic research which makes use of data collection methods such as participation, observation, and interview, and which unfolds by way of thick description and interpretive contextualisation" (Vannini 2015, 318).
[4] All names have been changed for the purposes of anonymity.
[5] All of the interviews referenced here took place in 2014.

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Notes on Contributor

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