

The Afghan Women's Writing Project: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Poetry and
Narrative as Conflict Resolution Tools

by

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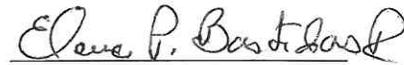
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Farah Naghib, who entered the banquet hall of eternity on October 16, 2017 at 9:32 am. She was a champion of women's rights and advocated for my education her entire life. My mother had a passion for Middle Eastern women being one herself. May all women's voices be honored and heard.

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Much gratitude to my mother and father, Farah and Mahmoud Naghib, for their courage and fortitude in sustaining a difficult life of displacement and enduring the hardships of restarting their lives in a foreign country so that my brother and I could live in freedom. I would not have written this dissertation without their constant support and encouragement. Further thanks is extended to my dissertation chair, Dr. Robin Cooper, for not giving up on me when I wanted to give up on myself, and for pushing me forward on this dissertation while grieving my mother's death. Thank you.

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Abstract

The Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP) emerged in 2009 as a platform through which Afghan women could express their lived experiences and perspectives on a range of culturally relevant issues while retaining their anonymity. The purpose of this research was to understand poetry as a conflict resolution tool that Afghan women are using to be active participants in the social, political and cultural dialogue that is determining their rights. This research focused on three questions: 1) How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan? 2) How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives? 3) How might poetry and narrative be used to manage the conflict that Afghan women are facing? This research presents a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of one hundred published poems from the AWWP poetry database. Data analysis included open coding, thematic analysis, and the use of van Dijk's six-step CDA model to evaluate the semantic macrostructures, local meanings, linguistic markers, global and local discourse forms, linguistic realizations, analysis of context, and the researcher's own interpretive analysis. The findings identify and explain the major themes derived from the study as well as describe how Afghan women feel about womanhood and conflict. The major themes included: child brides/forced marriage, hijab/burqa/niqab, women's resistance, parents as protectors and/or perpetrators, the power of writing and stress as a result of conflict. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of implications for sustainable norm change using poetry, directions for future research, and recommendations for policy and programming.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is freedom of speech into action! We can speak out about our way of life, our desires and the things we regret or like in our culture, without fear of getting in trouble. It gives people the real picture of what it takes to be an Afghan. B. Fatimah. A., AWWP, 2016

Description of Research Problem

How can the problems of Afghan women be described? Fawzia Afzal Khan, professor of English at Montclair State University, said it best: “Afghan women’s oppression becomes a part of this great game. Until we distribute power, Afghan women will always be the victims. The issues of their rights, or the lack thereof will always be used in this power game” (as cited by Foster, K., 2007). In other words, Afghan women’s oppression, a broad term to describe their struggles, can definitively be classified as being in a constant state of limbo. The lack of policy and regulation in determining as well as implementing Afghan women’s rights is largely due to the history of conflict that characterizes Afghanistan’s statehood. One aspect of Afghanistan’s volatile socio-political history is the resulting gap in establishing an explicit and comprehensible first-hand account of Afghan women’s subjection to authoritarian control in addition to distinguishing their specific needs.

Understanding how Afghan women explicate their oppression is critical to determining an informed and mutually beneficial decision on resolutions to the conflicts they encounter. In his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1968) incites the need for continual inquiry. Freire stresses, “For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry

human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (1968, p.72). By means of first-hand accounts, authentically pursuing inquiry on Afghan women’s lived experiences is acutely necessary to begin any dialogue surrounding resolutions to their oppression. Much like Freire, James Ryan, Dean of the Harvard School of Education, emphasized the need for educators and researchers to ask the question, “Wait, what?” (Ryan, 2016). Ryan cites Dean Rakesh Khurana to underscore the significance of asking clarifying questions. He says, “The Dean of Harvard College, Rakesh Khurana, recently gave a master class where he emphasized the importance of inquiry before advocacy. It is important to understand an idea, in other words, before you advocate before or against it” (as cited by Ryan, 2016). Therefore, prior to advocating for Afghan women, it is essential to gain clarity on how they define their own needs in the context of their lived experiences.

There is a definitive lack of literature and data on the lived experiences of Afghan women due to political, religious, and cultural barriers. Most women do not report conflict nor disclose lived experiences in order to not tarnish the family name (Perry, Shams, & DeLeon, 1998, p. 129). Thus, what is perceived about Afghan women is part of what critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (1971) defines as technocratic inquiry—inquiry from a third-hand perspective. Additionally, Ayotte and Husain (2005) redefine second-hand data on Afghan women as “ventriloquism” (p.116). They expound, “Especially problematic is the ventriloquism of Afghan women by discourses speaking for [both “on behalf of” and “in place of”] them” (Ayotte & Hussain, 2005, p.116). Herein rests the problem—what existing information presents about Afghan women is not first-hand or

self-professed information. Thus, the conclusions that are being drawn about Afghan women and the advocacy efforts put forth are neither accurate, nor effective.

The problem remains that Afghan women continue to live in oppression, their needs remain unidentified and thus, any self-derived resolutions to the conflicts they experience go unacknowledged. Afghanistan's unstable history substantiates these claims. Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, also known as Operation Enduring Freedom, the Taliban have returned; furthermore, it was estimated that in 2014, roughly 60,000 Talibs were operating in the country (Dawi, 2014). The Taliban symbolize one faction of the range of groups who oppress Afghan women. In 2003, a congress of Afghan female leaders established the Afghan Women's Bill of Rights and presented it in Kandahar, Afghanistan, to the country's then president, Hamid Karzai. Their goal was to have the Afghan Women's Bill of Rights integrated in Afghanistan's constitution. However, the 2004 unveiling of the constitution reduced the broad spectrum of women's rights to two sentences in Article 22, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law" (Karzai, p.9). While Article 22 may appear demonstrative of gender equality in Afghanistan, the implementation of the article is bound to a sociopolitical system that negates the linguistic parameters embedded in gender equality. For in circumstances where it must be determined if this aspect of constitutional law is violated, the courts, including the Supreme Court, are left to decide the outcome. This is problematic in that the courts retain a conservative stance founded upon a strict interpretation of Islamic religious law, Sharia law, which poses a disadvantage to women specifically on issues surrounding

morality and equality. Moreover, as of 2013, a majority of the members of Afghanistan's parliament were recognized as former mujahedeen warlords.

Identifying how Afghan women describe their womanhood, needs, and perspectives on resolutions comprised the underlying research problem upon which this study was focused. This research examined existing poetry and narrative written by Afghan women in order to apprehend their viewpoint on their conflicts and needs. Second to grasping Afghan women's point-of-view on their oppression was gaining insight on how poetry and narrative were used as a tool for advocating for gender equality in Afghanistan.

Problem Statement

To date, there has been little, if any, formal evaluation of the use of Afghan women's poetry and narratives as a tool to ascertain their lived experiences or as an instrument to engender equality for Afghan women. This research was focused on contributing to the existing research on Afghan women by examining two aspects of poetry: 1) how Afghan women use poetry and narrative to delineate their experiences and needs 2) how Afghan women use poetry and narrative as a tool for advocating for their equality. Poetry and narrative can be just as informative as interviews or questionnaires in uncovering lived experiences. Furthermore, poetry and narrative can be just as effective as mediation or facilitation, yet are less likely to be implemented, or examined by conflict resolution practitioners. In order to understand the complexities of poetry and narrative as both tools of inquiry and conflict resolution in Afghan women's lives, it was important that a critical discourse analysis (CDA) study be conducted on the poetry and narratives of the female Afghan writers who contributed to the Afghan Women's Writing Project

(AWWP). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how Afghan women in the AWWP used poetry and narrative to describe their lived experiences as well as a method for conflict resolution.

Background

The focus of this research was on the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP) and the use of poetry and narrative as a tool for inquiry and activism for gender equality in Afghanistan. The AWWP was founded in 2009 by Masha Hamilton as a direct result of hearing about the unlawful and unjust stoning of an Afghan woman, Zarmeena, who was accused of allegedly killing her husband (retrieved from www.awwproject.org). The Taliban in Kabul's Ghazi Stadium killed Zarmeena. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), an independent organization fighting for Afghan women's rights, unveiled:

When she reached the center of the field she was ordered by one of the women to sit. Behind her a young Taliban soldier, his head wrapped in the traditional turban, took aim with his Kalashnikov rifle. But suddenly Zarmeena stood up and tried to flee. A policewoman stopped her and forced her to sit, said witnesses. The Taliban soldier moved closer and shot her three times (1999, retrieved from www.rawa.org).

The injustice of Zarmeena's death and of having to leave seven children behind prompted an outcry in Afghanistan in 1999 (retrieved from www.rawa.org). From that time, Masha Hamilton would travel back and forth to Afghanistan to record women's stories and to record their lived experiences. In 2009, although the Taliban was banished, their strength was still profound in Afghanistan and women were as concerned as when

the Taliban was allegedly in full force. Hamilton spoke to women in prisons, in the streets, and to those who were employed. Hearing their stories motivated her to establish the AWWP with the following mission: “To share one’s story is a basic human right” (retrieved from www.awwproject.org). The purpose of the AWWP is to teach Afghan women to record their lived experiences through poetry and narrative, while providing them access to technology, and education. To date, there have been 190 Afghan female authors writing poetry and narrative to express their lived experiences. Not only were the poems and narratives published, but also the global community was invited to respond to the women. The AWWP invited mentors who were professors, poets, historians, and counselors to guide each woman as she developed her skills and shared her lived experiences. In the conflict resolution field, the power of storytelling and the record of the lived experience have been used to understand conflict, phenomena, and the factors that escalate and deflate global issues. Mazzocco and Green (2011) elaborate, “Narratives then, appear to be uniquely suited to changing opinions and beliefs which are held emotionally, and which may be resistant to other forms of persuasion” (p. 28). This means that when a conflict is stuck and competing positions are immovable, narratives function as a tool to keep the dialogue open. The AWWP provided an exceptional case study in narrative data.

Afghanistan has had a tumultuous socio-political and religious history. To understand the research problem outlined in this dissertation, the broader gender-based struggles Afghan women had faced were put in the context of a historical timeline. In the documentary *Afghan Women: A History of Struggle* (2007), filmmaker Kathleen Foster

denoted the difficulties Afghan women had faced through consecutive timeframes. These timeframes along with the period's corresponding Afghan rulers are outlined as follows:

- 1964-1973: Kingdom of Afghanistan, King Mohammed Zahir Shah
- 1973-1978: Republic of Afghanistan, Daoud Khan
- 1978-1989: People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin
- 1979-1989: Proxy War between the U.S. and USSR
- 1989-1992: Civil War between the Mujahidin and Afghans
- 1986: Peace Proposals, Geneva Accords, Civil War between USSR with new troops, and Afghan Mujahidin
- 1992-1996: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, President Rabanni
- 1996-2001: The Taliban (Mujahidin separatists) takes over most of Afghanistan and pushes the rest of the Mujahidin to the north of the country.
- 1996-2001: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
- 2001: Operation Enduring Freedom—fundamentalist war lords were given money by the Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban.
- 2004: Afghan Constitution established, and the only incorporation of women's rights in the document is the phrase in Article 22, "There will be equality between men and women" (Karzai, p.9).
- 2001-2007: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, President Hamid Karzai
- 2014-present: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, President Ashraf Ghani

Still a minority in gender equality, Afghan women are struggling to raise their concerns and to do so in a manner that will garner the changes that are needed. The issue of gender rights and advocacy, non-violent protest and activism to be specific, is relevant

throughout Afghanistan. Presently, Afghan women are still underrepresented in employment, rights, health, and family planning. This is not a stereotype or an exaggeration; it is a reality. This research is relevant when considering that gender inequality is a global issue. Afghanistan is a third-world country rife with conflict. The conflicts that plague Afghanistan are complex and have a direct impact on women, men, children, ideologies, religious beliefs, and practices. Thus, having examined the outlet provided by the AWWP and the poems and narratives that resulted enabled researchers to have a true sense of what it felt like to be a woman in Afghanistan. To effectively develop changes and propose advocacy, it is vital to understand how Afghan women view their own circumstances. As expressed in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) 2015 report, “UNAMA highlights that an approach centered on women’s direct experiences which amplifies women’s insights and concerns can better inform and influence policy and institutional reforms needed to improve women’s access to justice” (Kanalstein, p.1). Much like UNAMA’s experience-centered approach to advocating for Afghan women, the AWWP focuses on sharing the lived experiences of Afghan women through poetry and narratives personally written by Afghan women. The poetry and narratives that Afghan women have written through the AWWP is the first type of published record where Afghan women have the right, ability, and resources to speak about their lived experiences publicly, and safely. The content of the poems and narratives serve as an insight into Afghan women’s lives as well as perspectives. Likely, the AWWP’s method of using poetry and narrative for conveying the experiences of Afghan women demonstrates the use of both methods as tools for activism. As expressed by UNAMA (2015), Afghan women’s perspectives are invaluable when forming policies

that advocate for gender equality and the elimination of violence against Afghan women. Therefore, the poems and narratives published on the AWWP website are significant when considering that Afghan women are rarely given the opportunity to voice opinions and to do so without threat.

Finally, this research was valuable because the direct beneficiaries of the research were primarily Afghan women. Other beneficiaries included the global community, women, educational institutions, and policy makers. Poetry and narrative are often ignored or undermined when it comes to activism, policy making, and record keeping. More so, poetry and narrative are often not considered as a tool for conflict resolution. However, this research was significant because it examined how poetry and narrative were tools for activism, non-violent protest, and policy change. The global community were shareholders in the findings. When anger, frustration, division, and tension are built-up without an outlet for self-expression, the conflicts aggregate and deepen. Literature is often overlooked as a useful and effective tool for managing real-world conflict. Thus, this research was significant because it demonstrated how poetry and narrative were being currently used with Afghan women and how the program implemented by the AWWP could be duplicated for communities, academic institutions, and underrepresented populations. Consequently, this study principally focused on the following research questions:

- How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan?
- How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives?

- How might poetry and narrative be used to manage the conflict that Afghan women are facing?

Definition of Key Terms

Afghan. A person native to the country, Afghanistan.

Afghani. Afghanistan's currency, not to be confused with Afghan's—the people of Afghanistan.

Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP). A non-for profit organization whose mission statement is: "To tell one's story is a basic human right" (www.awwproject.org). The organization helps Afghan women document their lived experiences through poetry and narrative.

Ayatollah. A Shia Muslim selected by other ayatollah's to serve as an interpreter of the Islamic holy text, the Koran.

Gender apartheid. The systematic economic and/or social-sexual discrimination of a person based on their gender.

Gender-based violence. Any act that results in the physical, psychological, social, or economic harm to a woman.

Islam. "Islam" translates to "submission". Therefore, Islam is a religion whereby its followers believe in five pillars:

1. Shahadah: sincere allegiance to Muslim faith
2. Salat: proper recitation of Muslim prayers
3. Zakat: paying alms to the poor
4. Sawm: fasting during the Islamic holy month, Ramadan
5. Hajj: pilgrimage to Mecca, the Islamic holy city

Koran. The Islamic holy text.

Mujahedeen. Extremist and fundamentalist Muslims, who consider themselves as freedom fighters. They fight to implement their extremist ideology.

Muslim. Any person who ascribes to the principles of the Islamic religion.

Mullah. A Muslim who is chosen by an ayatollah with the purpose of going through the process of becoming an ayatollah.

Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women (RAWA). “RAWA is the oldest political/social organization of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women's rights in fundamentalism-blighted Afghanistan since 1977” (www.rawa.org).

Sharia Law. Islamic law as interpreted by either the lead Ayatollah of a region.

Shiite. Shiite refers to one of two sects of Islam. Shiite’s practice a moderate form of Islam.

Stoning. The act of killing a person by throwing stones at them until they die.

Sunni. Sunni refers to one of two sects of Islam. Sunni’s are orthodox in their faith.

Talib. Talib refers to “student of Islam”. Therefore, a talib is any person who goes to a madrassa to learn how to become a mullah or ayatollah.

Taliban 1. In the political sense, “Taliban” refers to a politically oriented, terrorist organization.

Taliban 2. In the traditional sense, “taliban” refers to a nomadic tribe of Central Asia. Taliban can be likened to the Native Americans of the United States of America. The Taliban have existed from the time of Genghis Khan.

Justification and Rationale

This study rested upon two arguments. To begin with, Afghan women have equal value. As such, they have the inherent right to have equal opportunity to shape the policies that determine the political and cultural landscape in which Afghanistan functions. Therefore, this study proposed an examination of Afghan women's first-hand accounts of their lived experiences as well as their needs. Prior to policy formation and implementation, Afghan women's perspectives needed to be recognized. The need for this study was justified because to date, there was a lack of data on Afghan women's first-hand accounts. This gap in data existed for reasons including culture, religion, fear, and accessibility to safe outlets for Afghan women to independently share their experiences. This research not only filled a gap, but it was also useful in shaping policies that affected Afghan women's lives. Apart from this, this study also purposed to demonstrate the efficacy of poetry as a method for data collection as well as advocacy.

The AWWP, the organization by which Afghan women are able to document their lived experiences, uses poetry and narrative as the modes of communication. Examining poetry and narrative as conflict resolution tools was pivotal to this research. First, poetry has historical roots in conflict resolution and democracy; Afghanistan is not the only country to utilize poetry as a resource. During the Civil War era, slaves used poetry in the form of lyric and sang emancipation spirituals as a method for coping, communicating with other slaves, and recording lived experiences. Some examples include the emancipation spirituals Free at Last, Go Down Moses, and Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen. In other instances, early forms of rap were used to protest civil and racial injustice. One prominent example includes Tupac Amaru Shakur (1996), who

wrote numerous poems on injustice, the black-white divide and life in abject poverty. Most notably, his poem *Liberty Needs Glasses* directly addressed structural violence and the lack of awareness in acknowledging it. In Afghanistan, much like the rest of the Middle East, poetry is revered, respected and valued. Examining and analyzing this mode of conveying conflict and lived experiences amongst Afghan women was a logical initiative because poetry and narrative were already accepted as non-threatening and respected modes of communication. Furthermore, poet laureate Robert Pinsky (2002) wrote that poetry and democracy are correlated. Pinsky explains, “But the vocalicity of poetry, involving the mind’s energy as it moves toward speech, and toward incantation, also involves the creation of something like—indeed, precisely like—a social presence” (2002, p.18). Afghan women do not have a social presence; therefore, the outlet that the AWWP provides empowers them with a platform to engage in the dialogue surrounding their circumstances and future. Thus, the poems and narratives published through the AWWP were worth researching and analyzing.

Human rights are nonexistent if women’s rights are not established and protected. The reality of the conflict is that Afghan women are overlooked, and their needs are generalized to the needs of women throughout the world. The rationale for the study upon which this dissertation was founded was significant when considering that Afghan women’s lives have equal value in relationship with any other human life in the world. The belief that all women, including Afghan women, have equal value is not evidenced in Afghanistan’s policies, nor culture. In the documentary, *Afghanistan: No Country for Women*, filmed by producer Karishma Vyas (2015), prominent parliament leader Nazir Ahmad Hanafi claims that the fourteen safehouses that provide shelter for abused Afghan

women are “...very bad. They protect people who are doing wrong things and give them immunity. They open the gates to social problems like AIDS.” As a member of Afghanistan’s parliament, Hanafi purposefully retains laws and implements policies that further violence against women. In fact, his stance is that it is unfair for a man to pay the equivalent of \$6,000 for a marriage and later be accused of abuse, put through divorce, and subject to incurring shame and further monetary damages (Hanafi, as cited by Vyas, 2015). Hanafi’s stance embodies the power and privilege entitled to an oppressor; consequentially, the conflict comes full circle. The popular argument from Islamic scholars and government leaders, such as Hanafi, is that gender oppression is not an Islamic tenet; rather, it is a cultural phenomenon. Irrespective of the different sides to this argument, one aspect remains undoubtedly valid: it is typically the oppressor, the ones shaping politics and culture, that make those claims. Consequently, proposing to research Afghan women’s lived experiences was justifiable because their lives had equal value, and their circumstances were critical.

Afghan women’s rights cannot be overlooked. They must be defined, understood, and laws henceforth developed and implemented. There must be trust in the first-hand accounts of women who explicate their lived experiences, needs, and perspectives on how to develop a country where they are equally included. There are global women’s rights, and then there are country-specific women’s rights. The advancement of women in the Middle East as well as Central Asia, Afghanistan included, is particularly important to the advancement of women’s rights because the advancement of women directly influences the advancement of a community. Nicholas Kristof (2009), author of *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, claims that

gendercide has been occurring and that more women have died as a result of oppression in the last five decades than in the sum total of deaths in all the genocides in history. Therefore, it was worthy to research and analyze the lived experiences of Afghan women—one group that made-up the part of the oppression women face globally. On the whole, the United Nations has established Afghanistan as the worst place in the world to be a woman. Any research and resulting knowledge that can support the living conditions of Afghan women was justification for pursuing a research study on Afghan women.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how Afghan women describe their lived experiences, and how they used poetry and narrative as conflict resolution tools.

Overview of Methodology

This study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze one-hundred poems and narratives written and published by Afghan women through the Afghan Women’s Writing Project (AWWP). Critical discourse analysis is a research method that frames language and power through the same lens (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 3). Furthermore, CDA views the interpretation and analysis of language as a relevant mediator between “ideology, power, hierarchy and gender, and state sociological variables” (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p.3). This means that CDA methodology is designed to examine the role of language within contexts such as society, religion, culture, and politics. The goal of this research study is to understand how Afghan women describe their lived experiences through poetry and narrative Therefore, a CDA methodological approach was the most suitable methodology for a research study examining the

relationships among language and ideology, religion, culture, and politics. This study underwent a ten-step CDA.

The data, the poems and narratives published on the AWWP website, are public and distinctively designed for global response. This means that the poems and narratives are already written down by Afghan women, and published for public consumption on the website, www.awwp.org. Given that there are 1,570 poems and collected narratives, the poems and narratives were selected randomly. The context of these poems are exclusive to Afghanistan, and Afghan women's individual and shared lived experiences. Each woman's name, region (if provided), publication date, and historical and cultural context was recorded. Next, the data was prepared for coding and analysis. Since the poems and narratives were already digitized, they were organized by adding numbers per each line of the poem, header, and paragraphs. Open coding, thematic analysis and Teun Van Dijk's 6-step Critical Discourse Analysis were used in the data analysis. four additional methods of analysis were used: textual structure, discursive statements, cultural references, and linguistic and rhetorical patterns. Finally, the findings included quotes from the raw pieces of data that served as evidence to connect text to the conclusions being drawn from the text.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

Several theories were used to support the impetus for researching the significance of Afghan women's poetry and narrative as forms of nonviolent discourse and advocacy. These theories include Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralist theory of mythology, constructivist theory, Noam Chomsky's linguistic theory and theory of transformative generative grammar, feminist theory and

critical feminism. Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics places emphasis on the universality of language as well as the role of the individual in producing language and reality. Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralist theory of mythology aims to increase understanding by obtaining the most foundational unit of language. The premise of constructivism is that the empowerment of the individual depends on the cooperation of the collective. Within the constructivist framework, individuals can employ language, symbols, and society to advance individual and collective knowledge. Therefore, it is valid to examine and analyze Afghan women's poetry and narratives if theory supports the perspective that individuals are empowered when using language, symbols and society to propel the collective's knowledge. In this case, Afghan women are using language and symbolism to not only empower themselves, but also to advocate for gender equality in Afghanistan.

Goals of the study

The goals of this study were three-fold. Primarily, the goal of this study was to contribute to the literature about Afghan women and gender-based violence in Afghanistan from Afghan women's perspectives. What made this study unique was the nature of the first-person narrative that framed the data. It is rare to have first-person accounts of Afghan women's lived experiences; thus, this research contributed to the preexisting literature by filling a gap. The subsequent goal of this study was to accurately convey how Afghan women described womanhood and the conflict they experience in Afghanistan. Due to cultural and religious constraints, accessing Afghan women's direct perspectives on womanhood and what the equality they hope to attain is rare. The data provided by the AWWP is a rich resource in Afghan women's poetry and narrative

regarding womanhood, gender equality and conflict. This goal was significant because decisions are being made on behalf of Afghan women according to what the global community assumes Afghan women want. The third and final goal of this research was to demonstrate the effectiveness of poetry and narrative as conflict resolution tools.

Researcher context

I am a second-generation Iranian-American woman. Further, my parents converted from Islam to Christianity and raised my brother and I with Christian values. I identify as a non-denominational Christian. Having been raised in the United States and with a Persian-American upbringing, I have a deeper insight on gender rules, Islamic customs, and Middle Eastern culture. I grew up with an oral history of the Middle East, both from family and family friends alike. These oral histories come from Middle Eastern tribe elders, refugees, and immigrants—all survivors of hardline, religious regimes. Other stories are more personal, like that of several of my aunts who were married before they were even ten-years old, simply because they were beautiful, a burden and a commodity. My identity has only made me increasingly passionate about researching gender in the Middle East and bringing awareness. Awareness creates options, and an acknowledgement that another path exists. It is the first step on the long path to resolution. Although I have a Middle Eastern background and a different faith, my approach to this research was academic and professional.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for three reasons. First, this study filled a gap in the literature and research involving Afghan women. Research guides action, and there is a need for more information on Afghan women's lived experiences. Centering this research

study upon Afghan women contributes to the current research base, and provides a different type of analysis regarding Afghan women's lived experiences. Second, this study is significant because it examined not only Afghan women's lived experiences, but also the mode in which they communicate those experiences—poetry and narrative. This study examined the role in which Afghan women use poetry and narrative as conflict resolution tools. Thus, this study provided insight on a model that could be potentially replicated and used in other high conflict, and culturally sensitive situations. Finally, this study highlighted a population of women who are routinely denied the privilege of having a public, and non-threatening platform for sharing their lived experiences as well as for advocating for themselves.

Summary of chapter 1 and Preview of Remaining Chapters

Chapter One of this study provides an introduction and background to the study. Afghan women have been historically, and structurally eliminated from discourse that supports their progressive stance in society. This is visible from a historical timeline of events; Afghanistan's history demonstrates a fractured and topsy-turvy road to stability.

Chapter Two provides an extended background to the conflicts surrounding Afghan women as well as the role poetry has historically and presently played in Afghanistan's culture. The issue is deconstructed into subcategories that include moral crimes, religion, violence against women, the Taliban, language and theories. Theoretical considerations discussed are constructivism, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, feminist theory and critical feminism.

Chapter 3 details Critical Discourse Analysis, the methodology selected for this research. This chapter also discusses the process for data collection and data analysis.

One hundred poems were selected from the AWWP website, and underwent through three measures of analysis. The first was open coding. The second analysis was through nVivo. The third was interpretation.

Chapter 4 explains the results of the study. Major themes are outlined, explained, and substantiated with direct quotes from the randomly selected poems and narratives. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of my interpretation of the results, limitations, and recommended directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Background

Afghanistan has been a country in continuous conflict. Politics, economics, and religion are significant contributors to the conflicts in the region. Overshadowed by these issues, Afghan women's basic human rights have long been determined and regulated by governments and organizations that speak on the behalf of Afghan women without empowering them to authenticate and voice their needs in addition to asserting themselves. Hardline factions of Islam as well as old-world and traditional customs retain Afghan women as a minority and serve as barriers to gender equality in the region. Photojournalist Zohreh Soleimani's (2014) award-winning documentary, *To Kill a Sparrow: Afghan Women Jailed for Love*, illustrates how Afghan law and traditions continue to dictate women's lives. Soleimani argues that Afghan women's rights remain in jeopardy even though the Taliban are no longer a public governing authority. In her documentary, Soleimani asserts:

After the fall of the Taliban, at the time everyone was hopeful that life would improve for women here. But ten years later, very little has changed. In fact, many fear that women's rights are in danger of disappearing in Afghanistan (2014).

While Soleimani centers her documentary on the theme of being jailed for loving a person outside of family's selection and focuses on one primary example, a young woman named Soheila, she highlights the fact that as of 2014, "There are some 600 women in prisons across Afghanistan, locked up for so called moral crimes". Rena Silverman (2015), author of the article *Mother And Child Behind Bars: The Women Of*

Afghanistan's Prisons, reiterates Soleimani's research by citing current fact-finding by Human Rights Watch, a non-profit and non-government organization that publishes reports on human rights conditions around the world. Silverman (2015) reports, "According to Human Rights Watch, there has been an increase of such incarcerations: 'The number of women and girls imprisoned for 'moral crimes' in Afghanistan has increased by 50 percent in the period from October 2011 to May 2013' (para.5). The violation of Afghan women's rights is a conflict that is continuing to hinder women in the region. Traditional and religious values hold a large stake in the conflict and influence the perception and definition of moral crimes.

Moral Crimes

In Afghanistan, moral crimes can include running away from home, talking to men outside of the family, questioning authority, and loving a man outside of a family's choice for marriage. The fact that Afghan women are being suppressed for thinking and speaking for themselves is an important point to examine because it demonstrates that Afghan women continue to endure a violation of basic human rights and more so, are deprived of the freedom to publicly share their lived experiences without being penalized. The governments and organizations that speak on the behalf of Afghan women do so by declaring that they are acting in the best interests of Afghan women. However, this is conflicting because the act of speaking for a disparate group of women without seeking their original testimony is a violation of basic human rights, regardless of the intentions of governments and organizations. The death of 27-year old Afghan, Farkhunda Malikzada, and the handling of her death serve as a current example highlighting the lack of voice amongst Afghan women.

On March 19, 2015, Farkhunda Malikzada was murdered in Kabul, Afghanistan. Farkhunda was falsely accused of burning a copy of the Qur'an, which ultimately led to her being beaten by a mob, pushed off a roof, run over by a car, burned, and dumped in the Kabul River. Her body is buried near the Kabul River, and a green flag marks her grave. The atrocity that was inflicted upon Farkhunda, her family, and the people of Afghanistan was recorded and now circulates the Internet. Still frames show the young woman standing with a bloodied face and disheveled hair, her arms outstretched and pleading for help. Rasmussen reports, "Her last hours were captured on mobile phone cameras by witnesses and those in the mob that attacked her. The videos of the assault circulated widely on social media" (2015, para. 12). At the heart of the issue and unrecorded is Farkhunda's original and unfiltered account of the exchange between herself and a mullah, which is what sparked the public mobbing that resulted in her death.

Many Afghan women like Farkhunda do not have an unbiased and safe platform for sharing their opinions, needs, and experiences. Farkhunda shared her side of an altercation; clearly, she did speak for herself and was publicly killed as a result. According to court records, forty-nine men were involved in the attack and death of Farkhunda; sparking aggravated public protests, the court hearing was a closed event and lasted two days. At the May 6, 2015 court hearing, Judge Safiullah Mojadedi, "...handed down sentences for 30 people. In addition to the four death sentences, he sentenced eight defendants to 16 years in prison and acquitted 18. Charges included assault, murder and encouraging violence" (Rasmussen, para.3). Contradictory to Afghanistan's longstanding reputation with issuing the death penalty, on July 2, 2015, appeals court judge, Abdul Nasir Murid overturned the four death sentences with three of the men receiving twenty-

year prison sentences and the fourth remaining man, a 16-year prison sentence (Siddique, para. 3). The brevity of the trial and types of sentencing signify the lack of importance dedicated towards women's rights. Wazhma Frogh, director of the Institute for Women's Peace and Security, argues that Afghanistan's judicial system continues to endorse a lenient stance on violence towards women. Frogh elaborates, "This has added to my frustration; we know women's access to justice is limited and it could have been a big public lesson" (Moylan, 2015, para.16). Violence against Afghan women is not isolated to an era under Taliban rule; it is a frequent occurrence. Even more pressing, Afghan women do not have a judicial, cultural, or religious forum for voicing their needs, grievances, and perspectives without fear of penalty. The question still remains--what does security mean for Afghan women? Societal structure is another dimension to this conflict.

Religion

As seen in the recent case of Farkhunda Malikzada, distinguishing between accepted cultural beliefs regarding human rights versus standard, globally accepted human rights is another aspect of the gender equality conflict in Afghanistan. Basic human rights in Afghanistan are most often seen through religious, ethnic, tribal, and regional beliefs—the majority of which generally limit women's rights. In their 2014 *Annual Report*, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported that throughout the training programs on human rights and Islam, "...it was concluded in all workshops that human rights have its roots in the religious teachings and there is no contradiction between the two" (p.21). Therefore, in efforts to train Afghan society on human rights, participants did not distinguish human rights values apart from

religious values. This poses a conflict because while there is a correlation between human rights and religious teachings, to hold fast the belief that the two entities are interchangeable limits the consequences for violations of human rights solely within the parameters of religious teachings. In the context of Afghan women's rights, religious law as recognized in Islam, is accountable to Allah and the ruling ayatollah of the region. Although culturally relevant, depending on religion to enforce human rights for all individuals does not take into account participant subjectivity, variations of belief, and the possible exclusion of non-religious human rights values. This frame of thought is substantiated by an example from film producer Alka Sadat's (2013) documentary, *Half Life Value*, which documents human rights conditions of Afghan women through the lens of Afghanistan's sole female prosecutor, Maria Bashir. In one filmed case in Sadat's (2013) documentary, Bashir is recorded questioning an Afghan husband before a judge. The husband was being tried for physically beating his pregnant wife in addition to having his son from another wife whip this particular wife with a willow stick. Bashir defends:

Do not lie, you disgraceful lowlife. If you were a Muslim, you would not have beaten a pregnant woman. We have a letter from the doctor, pictures, and the victim present as evidence! (as cited by Sadat, 2013).

This example demonstrates that while a religion, such as Islam in this case, has high value in a society's culture, it can be interpreted and practiced in a variety of ways which makes it imperative to distinguish human rights values as global values that can be upheld by any judiciary, irrespective of the judiciary's declared faith. In his article for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Hamid Khan (2012), author of *Clarifying the*

Role of Islamic Law in Afghanistan's Justice System, upholds this point by explaining, “Even among Afghanistan’s religious scholars, however, it is unclear where the fault lines between culture, customary law and religious law lie” (para. 6). This happenstance is significant when considering that decisions about women’s lives are carried out under frameworks that even cultural and religious scholars have difficulty understanding. Cultural practices of using jirgas, an appointed group of village men that make decisions, and other religious councils emphasize the heart of the issue. There are many constructs and systems for determining Afghan women’s rights, none of which include the opinions and perspectives of Afghan women themselves.

Like most religions, Islam’s central text, the Qur’an, is the foundational source of both knowledge and practice for Muslims. However, as evidenced in the examples above, implementing religious law for human rights and conducts for living can be conflicting. For this reason, jirgas, are used to determine the outcome of a conflicting situation. Khan (2012) elaborates on the structural problems Afghanistan has in separating religious law from constitutional law. Additionally, Khan (2012) emphasizes that Afghan women and other minorities suffer the most under the current system. Further, Khan (2012) explains that even religious scholars in Afghanistan have difficulty in identifying where constitutional law begins and religious law ends. He illustrates:

And while one system precedes another by centuries, Islamic law has long been seen as a transcendent source of legal authority in Afghanistan, a position carved out in the Constitution, which states that ‘no law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan (Khan, para.5).

Therefore, while there remains a constitution in Afghanistan, it is framed by religion and this is problematic because when it comes to implementing and enforcing human rights values, the law becomes entirely subjective. Implementing, enforcing, and regulating gender equality and human rights in Afghanistan would be more successful if there were in fact a distinct clarification between constitutional law and religious law; and hopefully, a distinction that would be both mutually respectful of traditional values and constitutional outlines for gender equality.

Violence Against Women

Marriage and the guidelines for getting married in Afghanistan are prime examples of how constitutional laws are inconsequential. Soleimani (2014) explains, “In 2009, President Karzai passed a law criminalizing 23 acts of abuse towards women, including forced marriage. This is rarely enforced. When a practice is repeated over and over [forced marriage], that practice becomes accepted culture”. This demonstrates that often, Afghan women do not have a voice in determining with whom they will spend the remainder of their lives. If an Afghan woman goes against her family’s marriage partner selection, she is considered a criminal. Although the law that President Karzai signed, known as the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law, was a monumental achievement for gender equality in Afghanistan, it was not ratified by a majority of members in parliament. Consequently, without parliamentary support, there was a significant increase in crimes against Afghan women. Al Jazeera America author Marisa Taylor (2013), author of the article *Afghan Law Barring Violence Against Women Stalls*, *UN Says*, reports that according to the United Nations (UN), “...650 incidents of violence against women and girls were reported to authorities across 18 different Afghan

provinces between October 2012 and September 2013, representing a 28 percent increase from the previous year” (para. 2). Furthermore, Taylor highlights the fact that these statistics do not include the 1,019 other incidents against Afghan women reported by the Afghan Department of Women’s Affairs during the same time frame (2013, para. 5). Although EVAW was decreed in 2009, the violence against Afghan women continues. Soheila, the main subject in Soleimani’s (2014) documentary, is an example of not having a passed law enforced. Soheila was dedicated in marriage to an older man when she was five. Later, when the marriage became actualized, Soheila expressed her refusal, was overruled by her father, and later ran away with a man that she loved. The consequence for not only expressing her desires, but also later acting on them, was imprisonment. Soheila disclosed:

I never intended to run away, but that’s what I did. Three years later, my father found me and put me in Badam Bagh prison. It also became clear that he was not able to think outside of his traditions (as cited by Soleimani, 2014).

Soheila’s brother provides another example of strength of tradition in decision-making in Afghanistan. When questioned by Suleiman (2014), Soheila’s brother forthrightly proclaims that if his own daughter were to do what Soheila did, “...I’ll kill her. We are not afraid. We are not afraid of dying, of beating, of killing. For us, it’s like killing a sparrow. It’s nothing”. Herein lies the duality of gender equality conflicts in Afghanistan. Afghan women sustain verbal and physical consequences for both speaking about their needs and desires as well as for acting on them. Thus, the overlap between religion and governance is problematic when considering that human lives, including Afghan women’s lives, have value.

Having a Voice

Muting Afghan women's ability to share and sift through their lived experiences without the filters of religion, culture, and male dominance is not only an aggravated conflict, but also a direct thwart to psychologist Abraham Maslow's (1954) exposition of a hierarchy of human needs. Therefore, having first-hand accounts of Afghan women's lived experiences, including their perspectives on their needs as well as their thoughts on how to implement and enforce their needs, is an invaluable tool in mitigating the conflicts that curtail their freedom. As declared in the mission statement of the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP), an American non-profit organization dedicated to helping Afghan women write their experiences through poetry and narrative, "To tell one's story is a human right" (2008). In his seminal text, *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow (1954) explicates five human needs for overall well-being. From top to bottom, these needs include: self-actualization, esteem, love and belongingness, safety, and physiology (Maslow, pp.35-46). The ability to share one's lived experiences arguably contributes to each of the components constituting Maslow's hierarchy of needs and in particular, self-actualization.

The concept of sharing lived experiences is evidenced in organizations such as the AWWP as well as Humans of New York (HONY) and My Post Secret. HONY is a social media blog inspired by a photographer, Brandon (2010), who captures both photographs and stories of individuals in New York, and most recently Iran and Pakistan. Likely, My Post Secret is a social media blog created by Frank Warren (2006) that provides a safe forum for individuals to anonymously mail their secrets for publication online. Even further, Gabriela Maj, author of *Almond Garden*, a book illustrating Afghan women's

stories of imprisonment for moral crimes, shares that while all the women had preferences for how they were photographed, they unanimously wanted their stories shared. Maj supports, “Some only wanted to share their story, did not want to be photographed at all, and some wanted to share their story and wanted to be photographed but with their face covered to retain anonymity” (as cited by Silverman, 2015, para. 6). The point remains; the ability to take ownership of one’s life experiences through storytelling empowers individuals in the course of their journey towards self-actualization. Irrespective of the outcome of the narrative, the act of storytelling is empowering in and of itself. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs remain largely unfulfilled in Afghan women’s lives due to lengthy political and religious conflicts. The reign and ousting of the Taliban, a fundamentalist Islamic terrorist organization founded in the fall of 1994, in Afghanistan embodies one of the factors that influenced the current state of Afghan women’s rights.

The Taliban

The Taliban was removed from Afghanistan with the assistance of a United States-led invasion. While Afghanistan was under Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001, Afghan women’s rights were violated. The Taliban enforced a strict form of Sharia Islamic law, which led to exceedingly reduced basic human rights for men, women and children. Zachary Laub (2014), author for the Council on Foreign Relations, elaborates:

The regime neglected social services and other basic state functions even as its Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice enforced prohibitions on behavior the Taliban deemed un-Islamic, requiring women to

wear the head-to-toe burqa, or chadri; banning music and television; and jailing men whose beards it deemed too short (para.4).

Though the Taliban have been removed in sense, they still have a strong influence over Afghan culture and decision-making processes. Although they are not formally housed in Afghanistan, it is widely believed that they are thriving in neighboring Pakistan. The fact that the Taliban still has sway over the parameters of day-to-day living in Afghanistan does not promote the universal advancement of gender equality for Afghan women. Laub demonstrates the Taliban's stronghold in Afghanistan by explaining that, "More than a decade since its fall from power, the Taliban enjoys continued, if declining, support" (para. 9.). In combination with deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs, the Taliban's governance, even at a distance, promotes public resistance to public institutions. As evidenced through political history, this happenstance is not likely to be mitigated overnight because it stems from deeper, multifaceted conflicts. However, one of the resulting conflicts, gender inequality amongst Afghan women, can be mitigated. A significant gap in progressing gender equality for Afghan women is the lack of research that examines the circumstances, needs, and experiences of these women. There are numerous books in the genre of photojournalism as well as documentaries that depict selected stories from Afghan women. Yet, there lacks analysis on Afghan women's firsthand, written testimony. The AWWP provides a safe forum for Afghan women to publish their testimonies through poetry and narrative. This information is rich in content, but remains analytically unexamined. Therefore, this research will contribute to the literature surrounding Afghan women as well as the methods used to alleviate gender conflict in the region.

Language

Arabs have a maxim, “Poetry is the record of the Arabs”. This maxim clearly indicates that poetry and narrative are highly valued in Middle Eastern culture. Currently, popular Middle Eastern television shows include *Millionaire Poet* and *Poet of the People* (Creswell & Haykel, 2015, p.4). Much like American reality shows are focused on musical skills or business acumen, Middle Eastern reality shows are focused on poetry. This is one indicator of poetry’s relevance in modern Middle Eastern culture. Another indicator of poetry’s relevance in the Middle East is war poetry. Currently, the Taliban, Al-Qaida, and the Islamic State terrorist groups have published poetry that spreads their ideology. These examples are important because they point to the need for examining the intersection of culture and language when seeking understanding and change in the Middle East. Creswell and Haykel (2015) argue:

Analysts have generally ignored these texts, as if poetry were a colorful but ultimately distracting by-product of jihad. But this is a mistake. It is impossible to understand jihadism—its objectives, its appeal for new recruits, and its durability—without examining its culture (p. 3).

Therefore, if poetry is the language of the Middle East, and is used by philosophers and terrorists alike, it might be worth analyzing as a method for conflict resolution for Afghan women. The same tool that can be used for terrorist recruitment and the spreading of dogmatic ideology can be used for peace and non-violent advocacy. Although poetry has a current, and modern place in Middle Eastern culture, it also has a historic place, unique role in Afghan culture.

Afghanistan, as part of Arab tradition, boasts a long heritage in the literary arts. The emphasis placed on poetry and narrative is evidenced in Afghan's culture, religion, politics, and community development. Afghan society is built around the literary arts, and metaphor is the reigning language. The reverences Afghans have for poetry is seen in memorials, statutes, and landmark tributes to poets. Historically, Afghan philosophers, politicians, warriors and religious scholars were also poets. For instance, Ahmad Shah Baba, considered to be the father of Afghanistan, was a poet. Further, Khoshal Khan Khatak was both a warrior famous for his oppositional lead against the Mughal Empire, and a poet. Both of these men were critical to the development of Afghanistan, and the fact that they were poets made them trustworthy. Wali Shaaker (2009), author of *Understanding Afghan Culture: Occasional Paper Series #4*, elaborates, "Being a poet confirmed their intellectual legitimacy, which in turn reinforced their authority as capable leaders." (p. 6). Shaaker argues that understanding the role that poetry has in Afghan culture is important to understanding Afghan mentality. This understanding would then prove to be useful in political discourse with Afghanistan. He writes, "In short, as an effective channel of communication, poetry can help us strengthen our relationship and achieve success with our Afghan partners" (Shaaker, 2009, p.6). Therefore, if Afghan poetry is communication tool worthy of analysis by the United States Navy, it might equally prove itself as a useful conflict resolution method that is also in need of careful analysis.

With limited outlets for voicing their lived experiences, the female poets of the AWWP are writing poems that express their thoughts and ideas. These poems are significant because they utilize a form of expression that is valued in Afghan culture, and

as such, might be an acceptable method for Afghan women to advocate for gender equality. In his book, *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan*, Hafizullah Emadi (2002) explains that women have traditionally expressed frustration and anger regarding their circumstances through literary expression; however, they have only ever done so in the company of fellow women. Emadi elaborates:

Women have also expressed their feelings of defiance in local folk songs, songs that reveal their romantic and sensual fantasies, as well as their frustration and anger at their lowly position in society. Such songs could be viewed as a challenge to the social system (2002, p.54).

The issue at hand is not that women are not expressing themselves, nor voicing their concerns; the issue remains one of audience. If the audience remains segregated, then there is a slim chance for change. A direct consequence of vocalizing their concerns openly, Afghan women put themselves at risk. Transparency is relevant when considering that the poems of the participating women in the AWWP are published on the organization's website, all with respect to protecting the poets' anonymity. The participants have the unique opportunity to have their feelings and points-of-view not only exposed to the global forum, but also responded to. This format is a stark contrast to the confined expressions of Afghan women who confide in each other behind closed doors. This transparent format allows for research, analysis, and change. Veronica Doubleday (2011), author of *Gendered voices and Creative Expression in the Singing of Chaharbeiti Poetry in Afghanistan*, notes the significance of having access to the poetic expressions of Afghan women, especially since most happen in private and small-group settings. Doubleday explains, "Male scholars have been unable to enter female

performance spaces, so, apart from Lorrain Sakata's 1983 monograph (reprinted Sakata 2002), relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to female *chaharbeiti* performance" (2011, p.4). The *chaharbeiti* performances that Doubleday is referring to are quatrains, four-lined poems, which are most likened to folk blues. These quatrains generally cover themes of love, loss, and betrayal. Thus, this is another example of not having access to Afghan women's lives. Therefore, the poems Afghan women write as part of the AWWP are critical to understanding how Afghan women view womanhood, and how poetry is used as a conflict resolution tool with regard to Afghan women's rights.

Theories

Language is a part of the diversity that contributes to conflict. In the linguistics field, research is focused on the specific attributes of language that accomplish a task. Rarely is the task coupled with a conflict and the linguistic properties that enable that conflict to run its course identified. Weeks (1992) explains that, "Diversity is such an integral part of conflict that more needs to be said about its positive value" (1992, p.34). Therefore, language can be examined in positive and negative values. When considering the mutability of language, and the transformation of a people's narrative, as applied to gender-based conflict, it is not commonly understood in positive values. Throughout the course of reviewing literature, most texts described solely the negative values of language, and with respect to gender-based conflict, most of the literature involved past events. These past events became repetitive and seemingly, the pattern became stagnant. This point is supported by Week's admonition, "This negative use of the past is, in effect, a self-deprecating and self-disempowering pattern. It implies that people are incapable of

growing and improving” (1992, p. 162). In review, this notion reinforced the demand for directing the course of this research to find how language can be isolated in gender-based conflict amongst Afghan women, and transformed from negative values to positive ones. Weeks’ excerpts on the positivity of diversity in contributing to and resolving conflict are significant when evaluating the narratives of Afghan women.

With respect to the positive and negative attributes of language, language then can be considered a critical force in the resolution of extreme conflicts such as gender-based conflict in Afghanistan. According to Dr. Kenneth Cloke (2008), author of *Conflict Resolution: Mediating Evil, War, Injustice, and Terrorism*, it is not enough to simply categorize language into positive and negative properties. Cloke claims that this classification does not justify the use of language to drive political evil. However, Cloke (2008) does claim that this it is the repetitive abuse of the language on the collective that drives conflict, in fact, he calls it the asphyxiation of language (p.158). He states, “...asphyxiation occurs in the rhetoric of ordinary conflict as a result of distortions produced by adversarial assumptions in speaking and listening, and by the strangled expressions of intense emotions...” (p. 186). This means that language is indeed broken down into assumptions, identity, perceptions, and attitudes. Further, these variables can be distorted repeatedly in communicative agency, which leads to Jürgen Habermas’ theories of communicative action.

Habermas’ unwavering belief that the core of social conflict is the communicative action that bridges the structural confines with conflict is what sets him apart from other theorists who reference the structuralization of society as the core of all social conflict. Habermas’ theories surround two terms which he originated: communicative action and

lifeworld. By lifeworld, Habermas meant the correlation between language and community. To be clear, Habermas believed that "...the more rational the lifeworld becomes, the more likely it is that interaction will be controlled by irrationally motivated mutual understanding. Such understanding or a rational method for reaching consensus is based ultimately on the authority of the better argument" (Ritzer & Goodman, 1997, p. 350). Habermas' theories of communicative action, rationality, and lifeworld are critical to researching gender-based conflict in Afghan society. It is significant to identify gender-based conflict as part of a language family that uses its language to rationally meet the demands of community needs. However, with the application of Habermas' theory, identifying linguistic properties in gender-based conflict may only prove to better the argument within a community that shares one language. These are critical points to evaluate when analyzing the poetry and narratives of the women in the Afghan Women's Writing Project.

In addition to theories of diversity and language, Pruitt and Kim's (2004) perspectives on the psychological changes of hostile attitudes contribute to the broader discourse surrounding the linguistic properties of gender-based conflict. Pruitt and Kim (2004) sustain an interesting correlation between the definitions of attitudes and perceptions as well as Weeks' definition of diversity. The authors also break down language into positive and negative values. Pruitt and Kim (2004) state, "An attitude is a positive or negative feeling toward or evaluation of some person or object. A perception is a belief about, or way of viewing, some person or object. Hostile attitudes and perceptions make it easier to blame the other for a party's unpleasant experiences" (p.106). By removing the word hostile from attitude, and examining gender-based

conflict as an attitude put in linguistic form, the language of this conflict can be broken down into rotational perspectives of identity, meaning making, and perceptions. With regards to gender-based conflict in Afghanistan, the political and societal infrastructure demonstrate a lack of desire to expand or establish perspectives on mutually-derived interests. The Afghan mindset, as well as perception, is founded on a limited worldview because of politics, education, and cultural frameworks. Therefore, identity and perception are strongly linked together and possibly, interchangeable terms. The terms identity and perception can be linguistically defined as functional verbs rather than nouns because reformations, or changes, occur as processes rather than fixed points. From this, it can be concluded that language, identity, perception, and attitudes are changeable and have positive as well as negative properties. Therefore, the mutability of those language families can transform gender-based conflict.

Constructivist theory supports the notion that identity is created and as such, easy to manipulate. Ho-Won Jeong (2000), author of *Peace and Conflict Studies: An Introduction*, explains, “Identity emerges from a dialect between similarity and difference in group interaction” (p.172). By dialect, Jeong, like Habermas, means the interplay between language and community. Their definitions support my breakdown of language, identity, attitude and perceptions. Further, it helps validate the claims that the use of dialectic can be reversed as much as it is manipulated. Jeong (2000) also states, “Motivational forces behind the mobilization of ethnic groups can be explained by instrumentalism. Identity can be used ‘instrumentally’ to promote individual or collective interests” (p.172). Jeong’s perspective on language supports the notion that gender-based conflict is part of a language family rooted in identity and used to promote underlying

collective demands. Role theory also supports the idea that language and identity are intertwined and open for manipulation. Cheldelin, Druckman, and Fast (2008), write, “In international relations, structural theories claim that state identities and their actions to be congruent with the roles attributed to them by other states” (p. 136). Again, the constructivist theory supports the presupposition that gender-based conflict is rooted in a linguistic identity that has been manipulated.

Famed linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1916) theory of structural linguistics supports claim that language is innate and precedes humanity. Ferdinand de Saussure argued that language is not private, and universal. His primary interest was in the structure of language, and not the use of it. De Saussure believed that every word was a linguistic sign and that the meaning of each linguistic sign was considered signified. For instance, in de Saussure’s famous example, if the letters p-e-a-r are put together, the image of a fruit comes to mind as opposed to any other word. De Saussure’s point was that meaning is only derived from a words difference from any other word. In another notable example, de Saussure persuades that language can be interchangeable in relation to other signs and other units of communication. For instance, the term maid can be exchanged for an unmarried woman or a house cleaner. Likely, a quarter can be exchanged for items because of its monetary value. The significance behind de Saussure’s theory of language is that since meaning is not a private experience, gender equality is universal. The words gender equality are not exclusive to every woman in the world except for Afghan women. No, the universality of language means that term gender equality has meaning for all women including Afghan women. Moreover, in de Saussure’s theory of structural linguistics, the individual is more a product of the system

than a producer. As applied to gender-based conflict in Afghanistan, the language, religion and culture engendering Afghan women is aggressive, archaic and constricting. Thus, Afghan women appear to be a byproduct of those three tenets rather than initiators. Finally, de Saussure's structural linguistics indicates that reality is produced by language. In relation to this dissertation, the poems and narratives written by Afghan women is a testament to their will to change reality by their language. Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralist theory of mythology is another linguistics theory that supports this dissertation.

Claude Levi-Strauss (1963) argued that just as there is not one authentic version of a myth, language is simply the manifestations of all derivatives of a myth. Levi-Strauss believed that the goal of all language was to find the fundamental units of meaning. His intent was to find the relationship between subjects and their function. The significance of Levi-Strauss' structuralist theory of mythology is that humans think in binary oppositions. For instance, for every thesis there is an antithesis. As applied to this dissertation, the Afghan Constitution has one line indicating that women have rights. However, the lack of explanation of or support for those rights has largely left the interpretation of that line to culture, men, and religion. Another binary opposition that can be applied to this dissertation is freedom and constriction. For example, Afghan women can walk unaccompanied by men, but they must be covered with either hijabs, niqabs, or burqas. In yet another application, expression and censorship are binary oppositions that Afghan women endure. Afghan women can only openly speak about their struggles with each other, and not among men. The intent of Levi-Strauss' structuralist theory of mythology is to identify meaning in its most foundational sense in order to expand

understanding. Thus, there is significant worth in conducting a CDA of Afghan women's poems and narratives to pinpoint underlying conflicts and extract meaning.

Noam Chomsky, largely considered the father of modern linguistics, claimed that language was not a result of communication between individuals, but rather the very mode of thought itself. Chomsky also proposed that language acquisition is an innate quality in human beings. Therefore, if language a universal thought process irrespective of sociocultural differences, then not much would get lost in translation from Dari to English with respect to the poems and narratives from the Afghan Women's Writing Project. Moreover, Chomsky argued that language is a learned behavior. With application to this dissertation, several questions come to mind: Do Afghan women know the language of gender equality? Do Afghan men recognize that gender equality has a discourse—a narrative? Is the language of gender equality something that needs to be taught? Finally, Chomsky's theory of transformational generative grammar focuses on the surface and deep structures of language in order to extract meaning. Components such as sentence structure, syntax, word order, utterances, tone and fluency are analyzed. This analysis support the methodology for this dissertation—Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is also known as linguistic analysis and analyzes linguistic structures to identify meaning. This is useful for this dissertation because the intent is to understand how Afghan women describe the conflict they are enduring, how they describe womanhood, and how language is used as a conflict resolution tool within the AWWP.

Maslow's hierarchy of basic human needs is another framework that can be used for understanding the gender-based conflict that the women in the Afghan Women's Writing Project discuss. In his book, *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow (1954),

explained that there are five basic human needs that must be satisfied in order for individuals and groups to thrive. These five basic human needs have been expanded to eight basic human needs. They include: 1) biological and physiological needs 2) safety needs 3) love and belonging needs 4) esteem needs 5) cognitive needs 6) aesthetic needs 7) self-actualization needs 8) transcendence needs. At its most fundamental level, human beings have needs that must be met in order to thrive. These needs originate from the individual level and eventually culminate to the community and organizational level. Communities and organizations are extensions of individuals and the conflicts individuals carry are not confined to their interpersonal lives; they get carried into every aspect of human life. Much like this bottom up exemplification of needs from the individual to the community and nation, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is also organized from the lower-level needs to the higher-level needs. In order for an individual to reach the higher-level needs, their lower-level needs must be met. In the case of the women in Afghanistan, many of Maslow's hierarchy of needs are at a significant low. In the broader scope of national gender equality as demonstrated in cases such as Farkhunda Malikzada, all of the above listed needs are in a deficit.

To begin with lower, level needs, love and belongingness as well as safety and security needs are two needs-based categories that have taken a toll on Afghan women's basic human rights, which is a dynamic specific to Afghan women. During the height of the Taliban's domination in Afghanistan, women were subject to rules that confined their basic human rights. For instance, one of the Taliban rules indicated, "Women should not step outside their residences. If they do, they should not wear fashionable clothes and cosmetics. They should not attract unnecessary attention to themselves. If women go

outside with fashionable, ornamental, tight, and charming clothes, they should never expect to go to heaven” (Logan, 2002, p.4). In a culture where religion and views of afterlife are significant, the threat of not going to heaven based on the basic human right of choosing one’s attire would shake any person’s feelings of safety and belonging. In another instance, one Taliban rule threatened the husbands of women who wash their clothes along the side of a stream. The rule states, “No washing clothes along the streams in the city. Young ladies who violate this rule should be picked up in a respectful Islamic manner and taken to their houses. Their husbands are to be severely punished” (Logan, 2002, p.5). The threat and consequence in this rule is significant because it demonstrates the ability to use fear and harm as tools for depriving Afghan women basic human rights. Afghan women deserve the right to feel safe in their communities and that they belong. Although the Taliban was ousted in 2001, the residue of the Taliban’s rules is still embedded in Afghan culture and dictate Afghan women’s behaviors. These rules have affected the ability for Afghan society, both men and women, to grow and heal from gender-based conflict instilled by the Taliban. Maslow labels the highest-ordered need as self-actualization, which is the ability to “develop as a person in order to reach individual potential” (Cherry, 2015, para.4). If the premise of the conflict resolution field is that the nature of conflicts can improve and that individuals and groups can change as stakeholders in conflicts, then it is relevant to examine conflicts at the individual level of need. By way of being part of a global community where every citizen has value, countries like Afghanistan are inherently responsible in the fulfillment of basic human needs and the resolution of circumstances that frustrate those needs.

As stated before, at its core, gender-based violence in Afghanistan is a multifaceted conflict; however, under the current governmental regime in Afghanistan, these gender-based conflicts also include political conflict. Politically, the level of conflict occurs top-down as well as bottom-up. Afghan women are still more likely to continue suffering from gender-based inequality and conflict because in addition to being culturally limited in sharing their circumstances with judiciary leaders, the political system in Afghanistan remains gender biased. Thus, the need for safety and security is frustrated. The gender-based conflicts throughout Afghanistan go largely unreported, thus authorities are mostly unaware of the issues at hand. The brutal death of Farkhunda Malikzada is a prime example of how the legal and political system in Afghanistan deals with gender-based conflicts. Malikzada was violently mobbed, trampled, and burned to death. Shortly after her death, authorities directed Malikzada's family to tell family, friends and neighbors that their daughter had a mental illness. Because her family refused to lie about their daughter's character, they had to flee to Dushanbe, Tajikistan for their safety. In an interview with the RFE/RL Tajik Service, Hajera Bibi explains how the same judiciary and political system that should have protected her daughter and brought her justice, is the same system that has eliminated the death sentences and lessened the prison sentences of the perpetrators. Hajera Bibi elaborates, "Many Afghan women frequently face cruelty, including domestic violence, but the perpetrators usually go unpunished" (2015). The fact that the Afghan Appeals Court has overturned death sentences and lessened prison sentences for Farkhunda Malikzada's perpetrators demonstrates that gender-based conflict in Afghanistan continues and Afghan women's safety and security remains at risk. If Farkhunda Malikzada had the support of local

authorities at the time of her attack, the police would have demonstrated the value of the legal and political involvement in securing women's basic human rights. In this case, the needs of safety and security in addition to belongingness were violated by Farkhunda Malikzada's community. While reported cases are rare, the case of a 19-year old Afghan girl, Rukshana, serves as another example of the deficient role the legal and political system play in establishing and nurturing Afghan women's rights.

Feminist theory can also be used to analyze the gender-based conflict in Afghanistan. Feminist theory in interpersonal conflict and international relations was developed in the early 1980s, and since then has become a widely used theory for evaluating issues such as security, gender, and global politics. While many different premises constitute feminist theory, feminist post-structuralism and critical feminism are most suitable for analyzing gender-based conflict in Afghanistan. Applying feminist theory begins primarily at the individual level before it is addressed at the community and global levels. Much like the bottom-up approach in linking basic human needs from an interpersonal level to a society or political level, feminist theory as applied to gender-based conflict in Afghanistan should be evaluated first at the individual level, and then at the societal and political level.

From a feminist post-structuralism perspective, definitions and viewpoints of gender and reality are developed through language. The premise is that, at large, language has been codified by men. Therefore, the lens through which gender is discussed and understood is from a masculine perspective. Characteristics attributed to individuals are then inherently classified as either masculine or feminine. Dunne, Kurki, and Smith (2013) explain that these contrasting linguistic constructions are damaging to women's

rights and, even further, concepts of security and gender. They elaborate, “Dichotomous constructions such as these denote inferiority and even danger with respect to those on the outside—they are also gendered and have implications” (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, 2013, p.211). This perspective is significant in evaluating gender-based conflict in Afghanistan when considering that the politicians, religious leaders, and governing authorities are all men. In the list of Taliban rules, several words stood out: burqa, ban, must not, sexual gratification, appear, and be seen (retrieved from www.rawa.org). As supported by post-structuralist feminism, these words were codified by men and retain masculine tones. These words were all spoken by men in reference to restrictions on women. This verbiage implies that Afghan women do not have equal standing when it comes to worth, value, legal support, and basic human rights. These words and restrictions were used during Taliban’s reign in order subdue and control Afghan women. Thus, at the interpersonal, political, and societal level, women are being devalued. This outcome presents a dual measure of abuse—the first being relational and the second being structural. Regardless of the form of abuse, this point poses a conflict when the conflict resolution field upholds standards of equality for all humans, regardless of gender.

Validating the premises of post-structuralist feminism is the fact that Afghan women linguistically codified the institutions that were designed to protect Afghan women. For example, Afghan women’s rights activists along with specific global interest groups and lawyers formed the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law in 2009. Further, the same groups that are motivating the Afghan parliament to ratify EVAW mainly consist of women and women’s interest groups. However, the Afghan

parliament is comprised of men. These examples support the post-structuralist feminist stance—language codifies gender in masculine and feminine categories. This stance remains problematic when human rights span across genders. Thus, any resolution, or lack thereof, to the policies required to protect and promote Afghan women are going to continue to be implemented or upheld by men. Shepherd (2013) argues that “the language of the resolution not only reflects reality, but is constitutive of it” (as cited by Dunne, Kirk, & Smith, p. 211). Therefore, the variables that contribute to violence against Afghan women and its resolution are only as productive as the forces that created them.

Critical feminism is another perspective in feminist theory that can be used to analyze the plight of Afghan women. From this perspective, gender is not just a variable; it is an idea that can be changed through language, material conditions, and institutions (Dunne, Kirk, & Smith, 2013, p. 209). The groups that exclude women in Afghanistan need to be restructured. In redefining or restructuring exclusionary forces such as language, material conditions, and institutions, new perspectives for creating an inclusive and non-violent society for Afghan women can be used. At the political level, the Afghan parliament can adopt as well as implement consistent policies for eliminating violence against Afghan women. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) argued that an earlier study conducted by UNAMA demonstrates that simply enacting EVAW as law does not guarantee that the law will be implemented, regulated, and updated. UNAMA (2011) elaborates, “...the report’s use represents a very small percentage of how the Government addresses cases of violence against women. UNAMA/OHCHR found there is a long way to go to fully protect women from violence through the EVAW law” (p.1). This revelation is important because it signifies the

critical feminist perspective—political institutions can change social norms regarding issues with gender. Language, material conditions and political institutions are not independent variables; they are part of an interconnected network.

Limitations

The literature and media surrounding Afghan women has its limitations. Primarily, the majority of the literature is concentrated on the oppression of Afghan women. Furthermore, the media also details only the plight of Afghan women. Both of these resources provide rich history and context for understanding the existing state of womanhood in Afghanistan. While this information is useful, it does not demonstrate the conflict as constantly manifesting towards resolution; rather, it demonstrates a conflict that is progressing through a downward spiral. These viewpoints are insufficient because they depict only half the story. Afghan women have a voice, even if it is unheard, subdued, and disvalued. Afghan women are in resistance to their oppression although the documentation is largely lacking. Examining Afghan women's resistance to oppression is critical to understanding and empowering Afghan women as well as changing the cultural, religious, and political systems that engender their oppression. Therefore, there was a gap in the existing literature. This research was focused on contributing to the literature by examining and analyzing Afghan women's resistance through the poems and narratives published on the AWWP website.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Explanation

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), also known as Linguistic Analysis, is a methodological research approach that examines language to identify and understand the power struggles among a variety of socially occurring relationships. The emphasis on criticizing social relations, examining social justice and the role language plays in promoting or resolving conflict is one of CDA's main tenets. Longtime CDA researcher Michael Billig explains (2003) that, "The first and most important factor is that critical approaches claim to be critical of the present social order. Van Dijk (1993) writes that the targets of Critical Discourse Analysis are power elites that sustain social inequality and injustice" (p.39). A CDA methodological approach to research views language as the central mode of contact with conflict. For instance, social inequality and injustice can be fueled by politics, culture, economy, and religion; however, a CDA researcher would claim that each of those factors are conveyed through the language. Therefore, examining language is key to understanding social inequality and injustice. While there are many different methodological approaches that could be used within this research, CDA was the most suitable for examining the poems and narratives written by Afghan women for the Afghan Women's Writing project. The purpose of this research was to first understand how Afghan women view gender-based conflict in Afghanistan, and second, to analyze how poetry and narrative were used as conflict resolution tools. Since language retains a significant part of writing poetry and narrative, CDA served the needs of the research.

Within the spectrum of qualitative methodological approaches to research, CDA remains the most suitable to this specific research. To begin with, case study would only have examined one particular case within the gender-based conflict in Afghanistan. Case study would have been ideal if I purposed to research the death and aftermath of Farkhunda Malikzada, for example, who was brutally killed for questioning the mullah about the Koran. With consideration to ethnography, field observations of a city in Afghanistan would not only have been detrimental to the city, but also ineffective for the purposes of this research. Afghanistan is still flanked with incidents of terrorist activity, and is currently ranked the worst country in the world to be a woman. It would have been neither safe nor ethical for me to have made field observations as a researcher since my presence as a foreigner and researcher could have put Afghan lives at risk. A CDA methodological approach with the data published by the Afghan Women's Writing Project would have been more constructive and ethical than an ethnographic methodological approach. Moreover, while a phenomenological approach would have been beneficial in that one of its goals is to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences, it did not examine the functions of written and oral communication as social practices that filter lived experiences. Finally, the intent of this research was not to develop theory as it would have with grounded theory. As mentioned above, the intent of this research was to first understand how women view gender-based conflict in Afghanistan, and second, to analyze how poetry and narrative were used as conflict resolution tools. Therefore, CDA remained the optimal methodology for this research because CDA specifically examines the role language carries in various conflicts and

contexts. The intent of CDA and the purpose of this research were the most compatible amongst the differing qualitative methodologies.

Data Collection

While CDA was the best methodological approach for researching the Afghan Women's Writing Project, it provided a variety of ways to both collect and analyze data. The philosophy within the CDA field is that there is not one right or wrong method for collecting and analyzing data because much like selecting an appropriate methodological approach for a particular research design, the method selected would need to reflect the purpose of the research. Since the purpose of this research was twofold, it was logical that the approach to data collection and analysis would be unique to this research. In reference to CDA, the data collection can occur in different phases to meet the needs of the research goals. The data collection process for this research was already published, and as such not requiring field research, surveys, interviews, or questionnaires.

Because this research was on the Afghan Women's Writing Project website, www.awwproject.org, the data was readily provided. When Afghan women agree to participate in the Afghan Women's Writing Project, they agree to the terms and conditions of the organization. Their agreement includes consent to publishing their lived experiences on the organization's website; therefore, each poem and/or narrative published on the website is made available for global consumption and response. Furthermore, the Afghan Women's Writing Project has published a book of the poems and narratives of Afghan women who participated with the organization. The book, *The Sky is a Nest of Swallows*, can be purchased on www.amazon.com --a website used for buying and selling goods, including book. Therefore, the data for this research was not

only readily available, but also easily accessible. Benefits to this approach included respect for ethics in retrieving data from Afghan women, safety for both the researcher and participants, and cost effectiveness. Overall, the entire purpose of this research was to utilize the data provided on the AWWP website. Due to the design of the AWWP, it just so happened that all the Afghan women's poems were on the AWWP website.

Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis

This research was framed by gender-based violence that has been occurring in Afghanistan for decades. Within the context of the disparities Afghan women face in society, government, and culture, there remains the opportunity to use the unfiltered perspectives of Afghan women to challenge the current socio-political constructs that govern Afghan life. Afghan women continue dying as a result of not only hardline socio-political and ideological ideals, but also in correlation with ancient cultural values. The context of this research was established upon the injustices suffered by Afghan women that span through six decades of historical, political, cultural and religious conflict. The interest of this research was to further the path of balance, security and justice for Afghan women solely within the terms of their self-defined interests and needs.

The data for this research was strictly focused on the published poems of Afghan women participating with the Afghan Women's Writing Project. Therefore, the participants were the Afghan women who had agreed to participate with the AWWP. There was no need to recruit subjects within the scope of this research because the subjects were already identified, recruited and vetted by the AWWP. For the purposes of this research, a combined one-hundred poems and narratives were the baseline sample. Purposive and quota sampling were used because initial factors were needed for

establishing which poem, or narrative, fit the needs of the research. In purposive and quota sampling, the required number of data depended on the availability of the data as well as the scope of the research. There were 1, 574 poems and narratives on the AWWP website; thus, it is sufficient to say that should the initial sampling of poems had not yielded the needed data, there would have been enough poems remaining from which to select.

To begin with, all of the poems and narratives from the AWWP were printed and numbered. Of the 1,574 poems and narratives, 100 were selected using a list of 1,000 random numbers generated on Microsoft Word. The poems and narratives were selected randomly and in conjunction with purposive research sampling. Purposive research sampling is designed to select data based on an established research question. This study had two research questions: 1) How do Afghan women use poetry and narrative to delineate their experiences and needs? 2) How do Afghan women use poetry and narrative as a tool for advocating for their equality? Therefore, poems were selected based on their relevance to the research questions. If an examination of the title and poem/narrative contents yielded a thematic response saturation point, that particular poem qualified as part of the data set. Likely, in quota sampling, specific criteria were used to identify and select appropriate data. For the purposes of this research, the inclusion criteria that was considered part of the data set were: girl, woman, Farkhunda, marriage, hope, sadness, fear, and burka. This was not an exhaustive list of the descriptors used as the list of descriptors increased as poem and narrative titles and contents were read. As poems and narratives were read, and the women referenced terms

that justified the research questions that framed this study, the list of criteria for the data was refined.

The data analysis is contained in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which was used to manage and track the data. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to manage and track the data. There were two sheets—each containing fifty of the combined poems and narratives. Whether it was a poem or narrative, each piece of data was analyzed uniformly. The header row identified the poem or narrative title, author and year, codes, memos, and the three research questions. The second and final header for each poem or narrative consisted of van Dijk's six-step CDA. Therefore, the dual analysis for this research can be seen for each poem or narrative in the same panel. Screenshots of the data are below to provide a visual of the data analysis.

The data analysis for this research consisted of three-steps. First, open coding was used to identify meaningful concepts. Meaningful words and texts that spoke to this research study's questions were labeled. Second, thematic analysis was used to further identify meaningful words, texts, and theme that satisfy the research objectives. Finally, Teun van Dijk's six-step Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to evaluate the semantic macrostructures, local meanings, linguistic markers, global and local discourse forms, linguistic realizations, analysis of context, and the researcher's own interpretive analysis. Using van Dijk's six-step CDA honored the voice of the participants as it further reduced researcher's bias. Commonalities between open-coding and van Dijk's CDA codes were identified. After the initial coding processes, the subsequent step was coding and memoing the poems line-by-line to identify what the data said. Finally, an interpretation of what the data meant was provided.

As mentioned above, van Dijk's six-step CDA was used in conjunction with thematic analysis. The six steps involve analyzing semantic macrostructures, local meanings, linguistic markers, global and local discourse forms, linguistic realizations, analysis of context, and the researcher's own interpretive analysis. By semantic macrostructure, van Dijk was alluding to the overarching theme of the discourse. Local meanings involved identifying and analyzing implicit or indirect phrases, implications, vagueness, polarizations, and allusions. For example, nearly all of the selected poems and narratives had polarizations because the Afghan women would balance out confessions of atrocities with niceties about Afghan culture. This is important to take note of because it indicates important values in Afghan culture and how conflict resolution practitioners can both identify conflict and help mitigate it. Next, linguistic markers such as personification, symbolism, simile, praeteritio, consonance, disclaimer, assonance, meiosis, metaphor, and conduplicatio were analyzed. For example, many of the Afghan women used a bird in a cage as a metaphor for gender inequality. These are essentially what comprise literary markers, otherwise known as literary devices. They are tools for analyzing and evaluating language and meaning. Then, global and local discourse forms were evaluated. Global and local discourse forms entail language structures that are inherent to the population in Afghanistan, and those that are prevalent worldwide. For example, poetry was consistently listed as a local discourse form because Dari is a language that utilizes metaphor and Afghan culture prizes poetry as the marker of an educated individual. Following this, van Dijk's CDA requires an examination of linguistic realizations that include hyperboles and litotes. This was not prevalent in the data set. Next, an analysis of the context of the poem or narrative was conducted. The

poems and narratives had dates and often, editor's notes. The authors had biographies that gave more insight into both the author and the context of the poem or narrative. This step of van Dijk's analysis was important because it pulled together the aforementioned analyses in perspective. For example, if without knowing that a poem or narrative had been written ten years prior, it would have given a different understanding of the author, the conflict and current Afghan culture. Finally, after all six-steps of van Dijk's CDA were completed, the researcher's own interpretive analysis was provided.

Timeline

The timeline for this research was one year. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) process was quick considering that the data for this research was already published and vetted through the AWWP. Each Afghan woman who published on the AWWP website consented to the use of their poetry on the public domain.

In conclusion, CDA was the best research method for this study because the focus of this study was to understand how Afghan women used poetry to frame their lived experiences, specify their perspectives on Afghan womanhood, and resolve or mitigate conflict. This study analysed one hundred poems and narratives from the AWWP website. The results are presented in Chapter 4.

CMA van Dijk's 6-step analysis		
1. Analysis of semantic macrostructures (topics): The title pretty much discloses the topic: Afghan Traditions. Essentially, jirgas and warjirs are two subcategories of overall Afghan traditions.		
2. Analysis of local meanings: (implicit or indirect, implications, vagueness, polarizations, allusions, etc.) Saffron makes polarizations: good customs versus bad customs; ethical standards versus rule of law; powerless and powerful.		
(p.2). 3. However, it was not all positive because we were confined within our traditions and culture without new concepts coming into the country, Afghanistan was behind in development and scientific progress' (p.2). Rhetorical figures: irony and oxymoron. RONY: 'Afghans are also tremendously go		
Turks and weapons from Russia' (p.1). 'find it ironic that Saffron would use Hitler's comments about Afghans as a compliment to the good fighting qualities of the Afghan people. Hitler sought world domination and nearly accomplished his intent for genocide without any repercussions. It's ironic because th		
4. Analysis of global and local discourse forms/topics: N/A		
5. Analysis of specific linguistic realizations (hyperboles & litotes): N/A		
6. Analysis of content: Saffron wrote this excerpt in 2011, which was the year that President Obama implemented the US troops rollout from Afghanistan. In the context of the year this was written, her perspectives on justice receiving funding and disavowals of countries who leave Afghans as easy prey		
Researcher's interpretive analysis: At first glance, it appears that Saffron is retaining objectivity in narrative, but at closer examination, we see disparities in her claims.		

Figure 2. Screenshot of Analysis 2

Poem 2	Codes	Memos	Research Question 1: How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan?	Research Question 2: How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives?	Research Question 3: How might poet to manage the conflict that Afghan women experience in their everyday lives as uncomfortable and painful. It also seems she explains it as isolating.
All Souls by Farahaz, (2013)	new/different country Ongoing conflict	Farahaz uses interesting wording in her third stanza, "dark foreign sky choking people". Considering that in stanza 4 there is a radio announcement mentioning another explosion in Kabul, which some would consider to be dark, foreign and choking.	No mention in this narrative.	Farahaz describes the gender conflict Afghan women experience in their everyday lives as uncomfortable and painful. It also seems she explains it as isolating.	Research Question 3: How might poet to manage the conflict that Afghan women experience in their everyday lives as uncomfortable and painful. It also seems she explains it as isolating.
	sharable pain staring is discomfort	With or without, it draws negative attention. Interesting wording in the final stanza, "An old lady, white hair, white dress, white fur hat...". This is entirely contrast with Farahaz's hijab.			
COA van Dijk's 6-step analysis					
1. Analysis of semantic macrostructures (topics): Perceptions of being an Afghan foreigner in another country					
2. Analysis of local meanings (implicit or indirect, implications, vagueness, polarizations, allusions, etc.) Farahaz alludes to the fact that it's not just one ethnic group that carries stigma—all do. "Outside the cafe window fall heavy drops of rain to hide a thousand mysteries, a thousand sorrowful stories." <i>country doesn't make her the only one with stigma. I also think she's being vague when she writes, "Pushing against its weight, they hold up umbrellas and legs. Are their souls unhappy?" Farahaz once against alludes to the point that others might be unhappy too—not just Afghans.</i>					
3. Analysis of subtle formal structures (linguistic markers): 1) Personification: "Outside, thunder and black clouds, in a dark foreign sky, choking people, pressing down on them" (stanza 3). This is personification because the sky cannot physically choke people or press down on them. Farahaz is giving human					
4. Analysis of global and local discourse forms/formats: Poetry is a global discourse form, AND a local discourse form in Afghanistan. As referenced in my literature review, poetry is revered in Afghanistan. Locally, behind closed doors, specific types of poetry are shared by women. So, this private discourses their ear to the door too.					
5. Analysis of specific linguistic realizations (hyperbolic & litotes): N/A					
6. Analysis of context: Farahaz was studying abroad in 2013. I don't know exactly where, BUT I understand that she was a foreigner and felt out of place to an extent.					
*Researcher's interpretive analysis: Farahaz uses poetry to express the pain she experienced as a foreigner studying abroad as well as how she felt hearing about the explosions occurring in Afghanistan over the radio. The fact that Farahaz uses allusion and personification to express herself is indicative a shame/honor system. To be direct would have been shameful, and Farahaz honors herself, her circumstances and others by sharing her lived experience in a poem.					

Figure 3. Screenshot of Analysis 3

Poem 4	Codes	Memos	Research Question 1: How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan?	Research Question 2: How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives?	Research Question 3: How might poet to manage the conflict that Afghan women experience?	
Disabled and Working in Afghanistan, by Seeta, (2009)	<p>supportive parents</p> <p>persistence</p> <p>career woman</p> <p>provider</p> <p>independence</p> <p>entrepreneurship</p> <p>water responsibility</p> <p>traditionalist</p> <p>society/system/culture</p> <p>optimism for the future</p>	In this narrative, Seeta recounts the story of Rahima who shows another aspect of womanhood in Afghanistan. Despite a disability, Rahima is strong, persistent and becomes a career woman who supports herself and her family. It shows resistance and persistence as well as a desire to contribute to her family. She wants to be independent and to have a voice in the decisions of the country (water responsibility).	In this narrative, womanhood is described as strong, persistent, and capable even when traditionalist views attempt to be a roadblock.	In this narrative, womanhood is described as strong, persistent, and capable even when traditionalist views attempt to be a roadblock.	Seeta describes the conflict as an ongoing one and one that is stuck in traditionalist views. Lack of education is also described as part of the conflict, both in part of the women and society. Finally, the conflict is described in the sense of lack of agency in the desired changes.	Research Question 3: How might poet to manage the conflict that Afghan women experience? Interestingly, Seeta writes about Rahima's ability to vote. "I am able to vote because I was not 18 years and could not vote election because it is my job." The conflict is described in the sense of lack of agency in the desired changes. Seeta speaks up with determination and resilience. The narrative gives women an opportunity
<p>Chk van Dijk's 6-step analysis</p> <p>1. Analysis of semantic macrostructures (topics): Disability and employment in Afghanistan</p> <p>2. Analysis of local meanings (implicit or indirect, implications, vagueness, polarizations, allusions, etc.) Seeta isn't implicit, indirect or vague. Neither does she use vagueness or polarizations. Seeta uses allusion in two places, but is otherwise direct. 1) "Because of her disability, it took her 30 minutes to In Afghanistan is possibly not the only experience with disability in the country. 2) "participated in the election because this is my job." Rahima, the disabled girl, is quoted in this sentence. This allusion is that she knows it is her duty to vote-- to have a voice.</p> <p>3. Analysis of subtle formal structures (linguistic markers): 1) Affirmation 1. "Disability is NOT an obstacle in my life. I will fulfill all of my wishes despite my disability," says Rahima, 22, a tailor in Faisal Province. " 2. "I can support my family and I can take care of my own needs. I am happy to have this skill Maibai. " At first, we did not take her to the doctor because of lack of information. I just took my daughter to some local women who claimed they knew how to fix some health problems. But every day it became worse. " 2. "Rahima attended school until eighth grade and is able to write and read, but her father's ear to the door too.</p> <p>4. Analysis of global and local discourse forms/formats: Poetry is a global discourse form, AND a local discourse form in Afghanistan. As referenced in my literature review, poetry is revered in Afghanistan. Locally, behind closed doors, specific types of poetry are shared by women. So, this private discourse form is shared by women.</p> <p>5. Analysis of specific linguistic realizations (hyperbolic & litotes): N/A</p> <p>6. Analysis of context: Disability AND womanhood are both the context in this narrative. Disability is a narrative that isn't addressed much in the Middle East. Afghanistan is still progressing in creating an environment that is culturally and socially inclusive of individuals with disabilities. Also, it's not just the counts.</p> <p>Researcher's interpretive analysis: Seeta speaks on behalf of Rahima, the girl with the disability. The tone of this poem as the linguistic markers used demonstrate the sense of ownership that Afghan women take in handling their struggles. This narrative was used as a measure of support for Rahima, and</p>						

Figure 4. Screenshot of Analysis 4

Narrative 5	Codes	Themes	Research Question 1: How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan?	Research Question 2: How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives?	Research Question 3: How might poet to manage the conflict that Afghan we
<p>2014</p> <p>What Happened to Equality?, by Nasima</p>	<p>closed minded</p> <p>rights are not inherent</p> <p>gender equality</p> <p>active citizenship</p> <p>ignorance</p> <p>education</p> <p>women as property</p> <p>women's rights</p> <p>enslaving equality</p> <p>traditionalist</p> <p>society/system failure</p> <p>closed mindedness</p> <p>women's resilience</p> <p>conflict ownership</p>	<p>Nasima also references that the downfall of human rights in Afghanistan was a closed-minded, traditionalist attitude. She blames the country itself, not foreign invaders, for the lack of progression in gender equality. Like Seeta, she expresses optimism for the future, and hopes to see gender equality.</p>	<p>Nasima describes womanhood in Afghanistan as outdated and closed to progress.</p>	<p>Nasima is very clear in describing the conflict as a lack of education and a closed-minded, culturally traditionalist society that does not see the importance of education or women being involved in political issues. Nasima also describes womanhood in terms of rights that can be "killed" rather than rights that are inherent, but not respected.</p>	<p>Nasima uses this narrative to envision future where Afghan women attain gr Afghan men. She uses the freedom to AWW narrative method to create the in. Creativity and imagination are tool manage the conflict internally and not</p>
	<p>optimism for the future</p> <p>tyrants, Jihadists, Taliban, so-called opportunists, warlords</p> <p>questioning injustice</p> <p>women's resilience</p> <p>slaughtering women</p> <p>women as slaves/property</p>	<p>"We have oppressed ourselves." "women will do things like exercise outdoors like men run businesses, and become president. They will be seen equally as humans, not separately as men or women. This is my dream of equality"</p>			

Figure 5. Screenshot of Analysis 5

Claire van Olf's 6-step analysis		
1. Analysis of semantic macrostructures (topics; equality)		
2. Analysis of local meanings (implicit or indirect, implications, vagueness, polarizations, allusions, etc.; Nasima doesn't use implicit, indirect, polarizing or vague language; Nasima is direct and has one section of implication: "The boy will come when instead of forcing women Afghan people will build their homes, not separately as men or women. This is my dream of equality." The implication of this quote is that according to Nasima, Afghan women are rising. They are fighting. They are pushing for their equal place in society. They won't be taking a back seat.		
3. Analysis of subtle formal structures (linguistic markers); 1. Onymization: "later, opportunist tyrants did not recognize the benefits of forcing women advance themselves, so they liked women's rights..."; 2. Metaphor: "...Afghan people will build houses of women, like queens"; 3. Affirmation: "My good look		
4. Analysis of global and local discourse forms/formats; Poetry is a global discourse form, AND a local discourse form in Afghanistan. As referenced in my literature review, poetry is revered in Afghanistan, locally behind closed doors, specific types of poetry are shared by women. So, this private discou		
5. Analysis of specific linguistic realizations (hyperboles & inoves); N/A		
6. Analysis of context; This narrative was written in 2014 after the American troops were pulled out of Afghanistan. Ideally, there would have been progress with the supposed establishment of ERAW, but according to Nasima, gender inequality is still prevalent. The context of this narrative is on the cur		
"researcher's interpretive analysis": there's a strong sense of ownership in Nasima's writing. She doesn't offer any disclaimers, but addresses the situation Afghan women are facing head on. She places ownership of the conflict within the country itself. She does offer one disclaimer about how society in writing and her perspectives. If she had used other linguistic markers, it wouldn't have filtered her message.		

Figure 6. Screenshot of Analysis 6

Narrative 6	Codes	Memos	Research Question 1: How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan?	Research Question 2: How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives?	Research Question 3: How might we to manage the conflict that Afghan women experience?
The Incorrect Tradition, Seeta (2011)	education ignorance	Seeta expresses education in two ways: a woman's desire and something based out of tradition instead of something that is a tool used by families to suppress Seeta also adds insight into the marriage proposal process. She explains that much attention is put on the girl, but never on the man. Thus, the man could be a psychopath but no one would bother to investigate.	Seeta describes the state of womanhood in Afghanistan as vulnerable and unstable. She writes about a girl named Farda who was forced into marriage at 15 years of age, and ended up being abused. She describes womanhood as grown into.	Seeta describes the conflict as the result of archaic and binding traditions that are rooted in familial ignorance that is passed down through the generations.	Research Question 3: How might we to manage the conflict that Afghan women experience? Seeta writes about conflict resolution in this narrative. She recounts how Farda's mother wasn't helped, she is community rallied around her and the governor issued a warrant to arrest Farda disclosed where Farda was being held experience. Seeta does something about resolution that women derived for their experience. Seeta does something about resolution that women derived for their experience.
	women as sacrifice ignorance hurts women child bride stopped education ignorant families	Seeta writes about a repeated theme: forced marriage, child brides, and interrupted education. The repetition is on sustained abuse, lack of agency and the inability to assert rights. Seeta asserts this conflict to ignorance and archaic and binding traditions.			
	ignorant men seeking understanding to be understood hidden pain shame				

Figure 7. Screenshot of Analysis 7

Omar al-Jishi's story analysis	
1. Analysis of semantic macrostructures (topics): Early marriage; forced marriage; child/old marriage	
2. Analysis of lexical meanings (morphs): indirect, implications, vagueness, generalizations, adjectives, etc.; Implication: if young traditions were banned or not practiced, the conflict of early/forced marriage would not happen, Al-Jishi: There's a lack of education or awareness in the marriage community; social	
3. Analysis of subtle formal structures (linguistic markers): 1) Precedent: assuming that one will not discuss a particular topic, in the process of which the topic is brought up. "These problems hit women in many parts of country, but I want to write about a single young Saudi Province who was suffering." 5) 4) Thesis: "He was surprised he didn't know about women and the" (para. 4). "Sustaining" because of this incorrect tradition, "from what I've read doesn't have" (para. 5).	
4. Analysis of global and local discourse forms/formats: Poetic is a global discourse form, AND a local discourse form in Afghanistan. As referenced in my literature review, poetry is revered in Afghanistan (locally, behind closed doors, specific types of poetry are shared by women. So, this private discourse is their ear to the world too.	
5. Analysis of specific linguistic relations (properties & themes): N/A	
6. Analysis of content: The content of this narrative is on a forced marriage and the governance to families. This was written in 2011, a time where one would imagine that the right to marry a person of their own choosing would be a practice in Afghanistan. Also, the fact that Saad makes an interesting point	
Researcher's interpretive analysis: While the use of linguistic markers in this poem is relevant, I personally want to focus on something that caught my attention: the subject of women to support their women. I thought that was the most significant point of this narrative. The women related amongst her	

Figure 8. Screenshot of Analysis 8

Chapter 4: Results

Process

There were three questions that were the focus of this dissertation: 1) How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan? 2) How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives? 3) How might poetry and narrative be used to manage the conflict that Afghan women are facing? The data for answering these questions was based on the poems and narratives published on the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP) website, www.awwp.org. The poems were randomly selected using a table of one-thousand random numbers generated on a Microsoft Office Word document. These randomly selected poems and narratives became the restricted data set that were analyzed in response to the aforementioned research questions.

The poems and narratives on the AWWP website are located under the section called "Our Writers". Each Afghan poet's name is hyperlinked to her respective poems and narratives. Each woman's hyperlink was accessed and all of her poems and/or narratives were downloaded and numbered. This culminated in an accurate data set that was alphabetized and numbered. The total number of combined poems and narratives was 1,574. The random selection process was simple. Starting with the first column and number on the table of random numbers, the poems and narratives were selected. If the poem and/or narrative fit the criteria for the restricted data set, then it was kept and renumbered in the order in which it was flagged. If the poem and/or narrative did not fit the criteria for the restricted data set, it was passed over and the next poem and/or narrative was selected according to the following number on the table of random

numbers. The criteria for retaining a poem and/or narrative as part of the restricted data set included key words or phrases found in the title and/or body of the text. Once it appeared that the data set had reached saturation point, as in the selected research had sufficiently provided enough information to satisfy the research questions, the data was analyzed.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically Theo Van Dijk's 6-step CDA, was used to analyze the poems and narratives that were selected. Van Dijk's 6-step CDA analysis involves the following measures: 1) Analysis of semantic macrostructures: topics 2) Analysis of local meanings: implicit or indirect meanings, implications, vagueness, polarizations, allusions, etc. 3) Analysis of subtle formal structures: here most of the linguistic markers are analysed 4) Analysis of global and local discourse forms/formats 5) Analysis of specific linguistic realizations: hyperboles and litotes 6) Analysis of context. Finally, the analysis concluded with the researcher's interpretive analysis. To ensure organization, clarity and a thorough analysis, an excel spreadsheet was created. The excel spreadsheet was organized by two sheets each totaling fifty narratives and poems. In entirety, the restricted data set that resulted from the random sampling was one-hundred combined poems and narratives. There were five columns: 1) the narrative or poem title 2) codes 3) memos 4) research question one 5) research question two 6) research question three. The first analysis comprised of coding, memoing, and responding to the research questions for each narrative and/or poem in the restricted data set. The second data analysis involved Van Dijk's 6-step CDA. Underneath the first data analysis for each poem or narrative, a section for Van Dijk's 6-step CDA was included

underneath. The data collection and analysis process concluded with Van Dijk's 6-step CDA.

Findings

The dual CDA analysis of the restricted data set revealed both major and minor themes. The major themes included: child brides/forced marriage, hijab/burqa/niqab, women's resistance, parents as protectors and/or perpetrators, the power of writing and stress as a result of conflict. Minor themes included: rape, low literacy rates, building a safe society, hope, voter anxiety and ignorance. Only the major themes were identified and formed as a result of recognizing their repetition in both analyses of the restricted data set. As a theme was continuously repeated throughout all one-hundred poems and narratives, it became classified as a major theme. Each theme was substantiated by various lines and stanzas from each poem and/or narrative. The evidences are explained in subsequent paragraphs.

Child Brides

Perhaps the most overarching theme of this entire CDA research on the AWWP poems and narratives was that of child brides. Many of the Afghan women writers voiced their thoughts on child brides and Anonymous, author of *God! If You Were an Afghan Woman*, expressed her agony in her husband's plan to have her 13-year old daughter sold into marriage. Anonymous (2013) wrote,

“My husband is under the tree daydreaming of the money he will make selling my little 13-year old Marwa, Mariam for more, because she can knit carpets” (lines 27-29).

Anonymous repeated the themes of women as property--specifically as property that could be sold, regardless of age. Abuse was framed as women who were married off as child brides, or who were only valued for skills that were good for marriage. Because of the circumstance of child brides, Anonymous doubted in God; also, she doubted and accused God for allowing abuse and pain. There seemed to be this logical argument with God. Anonymous questioned: if God created women and men, how could He create women for the purpose of pain and abuse? Seeta (2011), author of the narrative *The Incorrect Tradition*, is another author that wrote about child brides. She elaborated,

“Most of them think about marrying their children to someone wealthy, instead of someone healthy. Some families don’t even try to understand the man who wants to marry their daughter” (2013, para. 1).

Seeta’s perspective was insightful because she addressed the philosophy of tradition that supported an egregious act—selling girls as child brides. Seeta described the state of womanhood in Afghanistan as vulnerable, and unstable. She wrote about a girl named Farida who was forced into marriage at 15-years of age, and ended up being abused. Seeta wrote about a repeated theme: forced marriage and child brides. The repetition was on sustained abuse, a lack of agency and the inability to assert rights. Seeta asserted this conflict to ignorance and archaic and binding traditions. She described womanhood as something based out of tradition instead of something that is grown into. The tradition of child brides lead to the theme of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is addressed in subsequent paragraphs.

Another interesting aspect of the child bride theme was the logic behind carrying on the tradition of child brides in Afghanistan. N. (2013), author of *Early Marriage:*

Selling the Daughters, described the conflict of early marriage as Afghan society having wrong beliefs about religion, a lack of law enforcement, and that girls did not know about their rights. She attributed the conflict to wrong thinking and faulty ideology. For instance, she wrote that families misunderstand education for girls by thinking that an educated girl is a cheap girl. N. substantiated,

“These families also misunderstand education for girls. They think if a girl leaves the house, she will learn too much about life and be considered a ‘cheap’ woman” (p.1).

Thus, the very issue that Afghan women fight for, gender-equal education, was what society was against. She also said the conflict of child brides was wildness, madness, and a lack of humanity. N. brought the theme of child brides to life by writing her narrative. From the perspective that individuals in conflict, the oppressed, should have a say in how things get resolved, these poems and narratives were invaluable. Clearly, N. was writing things that she did not have the freedom to freely voice. These poems and narratives were platforms, mediums, in which women, the oppressed, were able to give unique insight into the shape of the conflict and how it could best be transformed to fit their needs. An additional aspect to the theme of child marriage that the data analysis revealed was child marriage as a traditional and cultural cycle of abuse.

Leeda, author of the narrative, *A Poppy Addict's Story*, used the story of a child bride, Sagar, to illustrate the immediacy of the conflict of child marriage as well as the need for families to intervene on their daughters' behalfs prior to a marriage agreement. Leeda explained that Sagar was married off to her mother's cousin when she was 14-years of age. No one was aware that Sagar's betrothed was also an opium addict. Prior to

falling into addiction herself, Sagar turned to her family for support. She would beg to return to her parents, but she was turned away with silence. Leeda explained the refusal to take Sagar back as a cultural norm. She wrote,

“Afghan men believe that women who get divorced are bad. It is considered a sin and her family told her she should stay with her husband” (2011, p.2).

This was one of the main arguments for claiming that child marriage is an aggravated factor in cyclical abuse against women. Sagar then fell into opium addiction even though she had children early on in her marriage. The end result was that her parents realized that they should have never married her off so young, and that they should have taken her back into their family when it was the right time to rescue her. The act of marrying of girls before their education is complete, against their will, or without investigating the man whom they are marrying their daughters off too was what Leeda was labeling as a cyclical act of abuse. Leeda quoted Sagar,

“I was beautiful, smart, but child marriage brought me to this point. I could have studied and had a good life, but I am addicted now and everyone laughs at me” (2011, p.2).

Being a child bride entirely changed the course of Sagar’s life. Leeda’s narrative was significant because it not only voiced a concern that she has, but also gave agency and an outlet for Sagar. Two Afghan women’s voices were being honored and validated in this narrative. In what otherwise seemed to be a dangerous and unresponsive climate for Afghan women to seek help, having the opportunity to share this aspect of lived experience in Afghanistan demonstrated how Afghan women utilized writing to manage the gender-based conflict in the country.

Another author who wrote about child marriage as cyclical abuse in Afghanistan was Masooma (2012), author of *Baghlani Bread Girls*. Masooma's main premise was that children were continually robbed of their childhood, readied for child marriage, and then unattended to as they grew up. As with the other authors, Masooma focused on a repeated theme within the tradition of child brides. She believed in letting children be children instead of child brides. Masooma's example was the Baghlani bread girls who were taught how to make a special and loved bread as early as 8-years old in order to be desirable for marriage. However, many of these girls got burned and killed by the tandoori ovens. Masooma elaborated,

“...so they can show their craft to a future husband. Most Baghlani girls learn how to bake between ages of eight and thirteen, and everyday we hear stories about girls who are burned and die while baking bread” (2012, p.1).

Trade skills were not for developmental or personal growth; rather, they were for promoting desirability for marriage. By supporting her argument with the example of the Baghlani bread girls, Masooma gave voice and agency to young girls who socially, developmentally and emotionally may not have otherwise been able to speak up for themselves. Masooma used narrative as a tool to identify the conflict and made a claim against it. Thus, the narrative was used as a conflict-resolution tool among Afghan women because it gave them a safe and anonymous outlet for voicing conflict without jeopardizing their safety or violating socio-cultural cues. More often than not, the Afghan women writing in argument against the practice of child brides in Afghanistan were teenagers or young women themselves. Thus, having the platform of an anonymous, safe and authentic venue to share lived experiences and perspectives on gender equality in

Afghanistan was critical considering that a lot of the Afghan women writers were young. Arifa, a sixteen year old, was a prime example of being both young and a voice standing against child marriage.

Arifa authored the narrative, *“I Don’t want to Be Young and Married to that Old Man”* (2015). Just as with Masooma, Arifa used her platform to speak up for a 13-year old girl named Nasima who was given in marriage to settle a debt. Arifa (2015) wrote,

“The man already had five wives. He had already married Nasima's sister and he had beat her brutally and she died. The man apparently said the girl had misplaced 2000 Afghani. She said none of her other relatives said anything” (p.2).

This was significant considering that this did not occur five or ten years ago—this occurred in 2015. It was remarkably fresh and begged the inevitable questions: Why were girls still be used to pay off debts? Why were girls and women viewed as property to be swapped and exchanged? Arifa herself was very young and was using her opportunity to write with the AWWP to speak up for someone else. This was a recurring happenstance in many of the poems. Another significant aspect to consider within this theme was the continuous silence that Afghan women and girls were met with when seeking help. Arifa likened this to being attacked without having a weapon to defend oneself. She elaborated,

“It is as if women are surrounded by wolves at the top of the mountain without a weapon. The only escape is to throw themselves from the mountain and die” (2015, p.2).

Arifa explained that this problem was the result of old traditions and beliefs that classified women as property. At the end of her narrative, Arifa wrote about how she wished she could convey a portion of what Afghan women went through in her writing.

She explains that she wished she could write in detail about what the women went through. She continued to say that she hoped that her narrative was “not just a chapter in a story”, but a stimulant for an entire change of circumstances. Like the other Afghan women referenced in this section, Arifa demonstrated the effectiveness of safely writing lived experiences in identifying conflict and possible solutions particularly for regions that were high conflict zones like Afghanistan.

Coverings: Hijab, Niqab, and Burqa

Preliminary thematic data analysis revealed a second dominant theme: coverings. These coverings ranged from the hijab, niqab and burqa. The hijab was considered the lesser of the coverings because it was simply a shawl or scarf that covered the hair entirely. The niqab was the next level of covering. With the niqab, the covering was extended over the entire body, but the eyes and lips were made visible. The fabric had cutouts where the eyes would be and retained a covering over the nose. Finally, the burqa had the maximum level covering. It covered the entire body like a tent, and it had a mesh, almost lattice-like covering over the eyes. This theme was not only prominent consistently throughout the restricted data set, but also extended to perspectives on the significance of what women wore in Afghanistan.

What a woman wears in Afghanistan will always draw attention. The Afghan women writers in the restricted data set talked about the double-edged sword of covering or not covering. As Farahnaz (2013), author of “*All Souls*” put it, with or without the hijab, she drew negative attention both in her native Afghanistan and abroad. She wrote about her stay in a foreign European country where she was studying, and how all eyes were drawn to her and her hijab at a café where she was sitting. The radio in the café

announced another bombing in Afghanistan, and she felt all eyes turn to her. Farahnaz reacted to a white woman who approached her kindly and gave her a hug. The first thing Farahnaz saw was “An old lady, white hair, white dress, white fur hat...” (2013, p.2). This point was interesting because just as she was judged by her appearance, Farahnaz assessed the elderly woman by her appearance which entirely contrasted with Farahnaz's hijab. What this encounter did for Farahnaz was humanize her—a repeated solution that many of the Afghan women wrote about.

Nilofar (2014), author of the poem “*Freedom*”, wrote about humanizing Afghan women and how one way of approaching that resolution was to give them the freedom to choose how they dressed without repercussion. Nilofar described womanhood in several ways. In terms of attire, she expressed womanhood as if it were a prison. She referred to the porous frame on the front face of the burqa as [barred windows]. She also expressed womanhood as helplessness, hopelessness, shame, and gender discrimination. Nilfar (2014) illustrated,

“I'm tired of looking backwards through barred windows and shame” (lines 6-7).

Nilofar’s poem and act of writing brought this conflict to light. When Nilofar wrote about fear, isolation, and lack of freedom, she was writing about conflicts that were too dangerous for her to exercise any form of independent resolve. While poetry and narrative were not direct and blunt forms of conflict resolution, as in they would not immediately bring wars, rape, or the ideology of the Taliban to an end, they did give women a form of nonviolent, safe, and protected agency to share their pain. In essence, it took Afghan women from hiding pain to verbalizing pain. Because Nilofar's entire poem

was based on conduplicatio (repetition) and metaphor, the literary elements were critical to the meaning in her poem.

Poetry was a global discourse form, and a local discourse form in Afghanistan. As referenced in my literature review, poetry was revered in Afghanistan. Locally, behind closed doors, specific types of poetry were shared by women. So, this private discourse form had now taken a global form while still retaining the anonymity of Afghan women, just as if behind closed doors. It was like the women were still getting the privacy of being behind closed doors, but the rest of the world could put their ear to the door too. The fact that clothing was mentioned consistently throughout the data analysis brought forth the consideration that clothing could be used as a measure of conflict resolution. Pari, another Afghan woman writer elaborated on the freedom that writing had given her beyond her burqa.

Pari (2015), author of “*Do Not End This Poem*”, described womanhood in Afghanistan as hidden and painful. She explained the conflict was the burqa, not being humanized or recognized and abused from men. Pari wrote about deep pain. She recalled a painful moment,

“My hair hidden in the burqa, my black long dusty dress. ‘Hide somewhere,’ he said. ‘We have male guests.’ (stanza 4).

It was clear that her pain was being hidden both behind a burqa and dually, away from society. Most importantly, she wrote about how writing had given her a voice beyond the burqa and black long dress. Writing helped her speak out. Pari illustrated,

“Burning my burqa, seeking light out of darkness, my pen suggests, do not end the poem. Words remain speechless” (stanza 5).

Clearly, writing was a tool that the women were using to open the discourse surrounding gender-based violence in Afghanistan, and to keep the dialogue going. As with Pari, writing helped with self-confidence, self-expression, and unloading untold stories and experiences.

The context of the poem was the effect the power of writing had on Pari and her circumstance as a woman. It appeared that she endured significant pain and was told to hide whenever men come. She described their beards as evil, so it made me wonder what was the source behind calling the male visitors evil. Was she abused? She also alluded to carrying many heavy stories and that the burden was too much. The poem was written in 2015, which showed that the gender discrimination issue was not just one from the past, one that was still current in Afghanistan. We also saw that in the context of her poem, that writing helped liberate and free her. Thus, that lent credibility to the power of writing as a conflict resolution tool.

Poetry and narrative might have been the best forum for women and men to discuss the issues surrounding Afghan women without the conflict escalating to violence. Arifa H. (2015) did write about being able to debate the issue of what a woman wore. Arifa H. authored the narrative "*Walking Woman*". She wrote about an Afghan woman whose picture was posted on social media—she was walking the streets of Afghanistan showing her legs, hair and face. This occurrence caused a ruckus in Afghanistan and people were debating the issue of what a woman can and cannot wear. Arifa H. (2015) explained that the two sides of the issue were between the secular and the conservative people. Those who were secular said that "a woman should be able to decide for herself what to wear" (2015, p.1). On the other hand, those who were conservative claimed that

“...Muslim women should not walk in public like that” (2015, p.1). Arifa H. followed up these perspectives with her own and posited,

“I believe it should be up to each woman to choose whether she wants to wear the head covering or not” (2015, p.2).

She also claimed that,

“The burqa and the niqab are too much—no one wears the burqa in the district where I live. It’s enough to wear a scarf and regular dress” (2015, p.2).

Overall, Arifa H. seemed to want to have an amenable conversation about this particular issue. While her stance was that women should decide for themselves, she did leave room for discussion. Once again, Arifa H. demonstrated that writing provided a neutral platform for Afghan women to express their lived experiences, perspectives on gender-based violence, and possible resolutions.

The context of this narrative was essentially about what right an Afghan woman had over her own body in terms of clothing. This narrative was written in 2015 and was indicative of a social climate that was ready for change. Arifa H. did not use any linguistic markers, but she did exercise tone and unity throughout her entire narrative. She did not lose sight of her message. Her message was this: with respect to culture and religion, each woman had the right to choose what she wore within reason. While Arifa H. established a narrative of freedom and democracy in what a woman wore, she also exhibited conservative undertones when she said that it was part of Islamic religious ideology to be covered; however, the extent to which was entirely up to the woman. She also expressed something that was an undercurrent throughout all the narratives--the fuel of public opinion. If I were to pinpoint a significant contributor to the escalation or

resolution of conflict in Afghanistan, it would be culture and the public. The greatest takeaway from Arifa H.'s narrative was that progress in Afghanistan was slow because once someone broke some barriers to create space and openness for change, the culture of the people was to gossip, and throw opinion down that person's way. To change the ideology, one needed to address culture. To do this, the dialogue needed to remain open.

Shogofa (2009), author of *“Kill Silence”*, wrote about the need for an Afghan society that was open to dialogue about every issue that involves Afghan women in society. Shogofa described the conflict as the maltreatment of women at home and in society; essentially, her driving point was gender discrimination. Shogofa recalled that she and her sister were repeatedly told what good girls behaved like. She wrote,

“Good girls are silent, cast their eyes down, and wear veils” (2009, p.1).

Shogofa explained this repeated message to girls in Afghanistan built a culture of silence and by being covered, Afghan women were further silenced and hidden. Shogofa was writing about a lack of agency, and what having one might look like. This was useful in managing the conflict.

Overall, Shogofa was not vague. Neither did she use language that was allusive or indirect. However, there were some polarizations and implications. Primarily, Shogofa used polarization when she talked about the love and attention she got when she was a child versus the instruction and limitation she was taught as a young woman. As a child she was lavished with love and attention because she was seen as “cute”. However, she remembered the contrast when she and her sister started growing up into young adults. They were told that “good” girls were silent, wore veils and held their head and eyes down. Shogofa was writing about a lack of agency, and that having one started with

having an upbringing that supported Afghan girls to have a voice and an identity. This information was useful in managing gender-based violence in Afghanistan.

Shogofa's narrative, "*Kill Silence*", was written in 2009, which showed a span of time that women had been feeling oppressed in Afghanistan. The more recent poems and narratives showed currency and relevance, but the older ones did just the same. In fact, the older poems and narratives demonstrated a history in the conflict that gave a foundation to the conflict as it is now. The context of the poem was about how girls were raised in Afghanistan as well as the expectations of women in the country. Shogofa explained that as she was growing up, the teaching was that good girls were quiet, seen and not heard, cast their eyes down, and held their heads down. She also talked about how debilitating that was for her until she sought help in breaking the cycle. I did not think the linguistic markers had any bearing on the meaning of the narrative. There were very few. However, the greatest takeaway from this narrative was the phrase, "*Kill Silence*" because it was essentially what the narratives and poems had done for the Afghan women participating in the AWWP. The poems and narratives opened the dialogue for Afghan women and provided them access to the social communities in a global manner. They were killing silence by writing their lived experiences.

Mahnaz was another AWWP writer who shared her lived experience with the burqa. She authored (2010), "*Blue Like the Sky, Beautiful Like the Ocean*", which recounted her distressing yet triumphant experience with the burqa. Mahnaz's brother was religious and tried to convince her and her sister to wear the burqa. He would drill this request to the extent that Mahnaz's mother was nearly convinced for her daughters to wear it just to appease their brother. His rationale was that the burqa would solidify his

family's reputation as a good family; it was about family honor. However, Mahnaz's father stood up to his son one day and silenced him by saying that his daughters' welfare had nothing to do with the burqa. Their father, as per tradition, had the final word and stood against the burqa. Mahnaz elaborated,

“I knew if I agreed to wear the burqa once, then I would be condemned to wearing it always. I knew it would become like an inauspicious owl over my head that would never leave” (2010, p.1).

Mahnaz described the conflict as the external pressure to wear the burqa, not being heard, and male dominance. Mahnaz made the argument that the burqa was not for protecting women, but for enticing men. She argues,

“Burqa is not for protecting women but to make wild men interested in them, arouse their appetites for women, and of course, break weak women that are afraid to talk with men and defend themselves” (2010, p.1).

Therefore, Mahnaz clever argument made a valid point: the very institution, the burqa, that was used to protect women was what debilitated them.

Mahnaz elaborated on the times she refused to wear the burqa,

“I couldn't accept the choice of staying at home or wearing the burqa. It seemed no one could hear me. I was disappointed and near to breaking but still fighting. I was tired; my throat tightened and I couldn't control myself” (2010, p.2).

While the central issue in this theme was the extent to which Afghan women covered themselves, an underlying conflict was not being heard or continually being met with silence. At the end of the narrative, Mahnaz posited the need for Afghan women to stay strong and resist:

“By refusing to wear the burqa, I began to realize a most important lesson. We were the ones who empowered ourselves. If we consider ourselves weak, others will consider us weaker” (2010, p.2).

The narrative was used as an outlet. If the issues that Afghan women were facing were not exposed, or given an outlet, Afghan women would suffer more. In this particular narrative, we saw resolutions that could be actively institutionalized to manage the conflict.

Another aspect of the burqa conflict was the inevitable question, “Who decides?”. Asma M. (2013), author of poem “*Burqa*”, described the burqa conflict as the difference between what Islam said about women's rights, and what culture said; ignorant people; and the lack of freedom and agency. With respect to the burqa, Asma M. explained the state of womanhood as imprisonment, suffocation, and vulnerability. Asma M. claimed that the burqa was not a legitimate part of Islamic teachings. In fact, she explained that Islam taught modesty with no mention of the burqa. As with the other Afghan women cited in this theme, Asma M. made one thing very clear: there was no win-win outcome with the burqa in Afghanistan. She stated,

“If I say I don’t want to wear burqa, They’ll burn me or kill me like the other women. These ignorant people say that we are Muslim, but if you are Muslim you should know burqa is not in Islam” (2013, lines 6-12).

Where there were no rights or platforms for women to speak up, the poetry and narrative had been used as tools for “being freed from the cage” (Asma M., 2013, line 13). Poetry and narrative gave Afghan women wings.

When writing about the burqa, Afghan referred to themselves as being in a cage. They felt as if they were a bird clipped of its wings and kept in a cage without any opportunity to roam about. In this respect, Arifa (2011), author of the poem “*The Blue Cage*”, described the state of womanhood as imprisonment and suffocation. According to Arifa, the main conflict was the burqa and war. She questioned having an identity under the burqa, and cared about being seen, known, and having her beauty recognized. Arifa agonized,

“Who am I, woman under the burqa? My beauty is covered. I can’t see the beautiful world. It covers my identity and kills my personality. Who am I under the blue burqa?” (2011, lines 3-6).

Under a burqa, Arifa felt like she could not even identify who she was let alone expect others to understand and know her. At the present moment, there was much discussion on Arab women covering and whether it was ethical, desired, or enforced. Nations were choosing whether to accept women who cover into their employment. Other women were donning coverings to stand in solidarity with those Arab women who did cover. As a result of this research analysis, it was clear that Afghan women in Afghanistan mostly saw the burqa as a violation of their basic equal rights as humans. Arifa closed the poem by speaking about the empowerment she got through writing. Arifa wrote,

“I want to fly from this blue cage. I want to feel love and peace. I want to take a pen and write dreams of freedom on the world walls” (2011, lines 7-9).

Poetry and narrative liberated Afghan women and gave them agency both safely and anonymously. As with Arifa, more often than not, writing was the only outlet that Afghan women had.

As with most arguments, there existed a counterargument. The argument that the majority of the Afghan women writers in the restricted data set wrote about was the conflict of Afghan women having to cover. Pakiza (2016), author of the narrative *“Putting on the Hijab”*, provided a counterargument to the majority opinion that the Afghan women writers held. Pakiza’s stance was that the conflict is flipped! Pakiza defined the covering conflict as a lack of acceptance for hijab, even to the point of retaining a mocking attitude. Moreover, Pakiza did not complain about the state of Afghan womanhood in her narrative. However, Pakiza made several claims. First, she argued that a woman was condemned regardless if she did or did not wear the hijab. Her stance was that there would always be some family members or individuals in society who disapproved of what a woman decided to do with what she wore. Pakiza’s counterargument was that more Afghan’s judge a woman for actually donning the hijab than not wearing it. She wrote,

“It wasn't easy to don the hijab. I was embarrassed, criticized, harassed, and even ignored by family, friends, and colleagues, and the community, both male and female, not only personally but professionally” (p.1).

Pakiza also remembered someone mocking her by telling her she looked like a woman who cleaned for a living simply because she wore the hijab. Nevertheless, she made a case for why Afghan women should be wearing the hijab. Pakiza explained that wearing the hijab was a part of being a Muslim woman and that it demonstrated self-respect and embodied protection. She illustrated,

“In fact today, wearing the hijab has begun to make me feel more protected in a society that is not secure for either males or females” (2016, p.1).

Two perspectives could be gathered from her statement: 1) Afghanistan was still an unstable and unsafe safe for both genders 2) wearing or not wearing the hijab was no longer a choice of demonstrating religious beliefs—it was necessary for safety.

Pakiza’s counterargument to banishing or eliminating the requirement for Afghan women to wear coverings was inspired by her marriage to her husband. In her narrative, Pakiza wrote how it was her husband who showed her the great benefits of wearing the hijab, but ultimately left the choice to wear it in her hands. Pakiza called wearing the hijab a personal choice, but she gave her husband the credit for convincing her to wear it. It was ironic because Pakiza wrote about having the freedom to choose, but then disclosed how her husband led her to it. All in all, Pakiza was the only Afghan woman in the restricted data set who wrote in support of wearing the hijab. All the other Afghan women writers wrote that wearing either the hijab, niqab, or burqa were similar to being restricted in a cage.

Roya (2010), author of the poem “*The Cemetery of My Identity*”, described the conflict as having to wear the burqa, not having a voice and jobless men. She described the state of womanhood in Afghanistan as imprisonment. Roya wrote,

“Where is the sky? The world is not so big for me. There is no world. I live in the prison under my burqa, no permission to breathe the air. I am a woman here, here, here” (2010, stanzas 1-2).

She wrote from the perspective of being a caged bird, particularly when she questioned where the sky was. Clearly, Roya likened the burqa to being a cage, a prison. She blamed men for inventing the burqa. Although she did not say it directly, by claiming that men

invented the burqa, she was stating that it was not God's decision for women to wear the burqa. Roya elaborated,

“Men are jobless with nothing good to do, they discovered burqa for me” (2010, stanza 3).

Nevertheless, Roya showed a preference for the hijab and made a reference to Islam by claiming that she wore the hijab when she prayed, not the burqa. As with the title of this poem, Roya agonized that the burqa was the cemetery of her identity and served as a grave. The poem served as an outlet for Roya. With the poem, she was uncaged and could be seen. The AWWP poetry and narrative initiative had given Afghan women the freedom to share their lived experiences and a sense of agency. In a critical and high conflict zone country, the poems and narratives that the Afghan women have written have been the safest measure of ascertaining what life might be like for them. Knowing what it might be like to be an Afghan woman is important if any efforts for conflict resolution are to be ethical and accurate.

N. (2013), author of the narrative *“What it Means to be a Muslim Woman”*, described the state of womanhood in Afghanistan as fragile and lacking voice. She saw conflict as Afghan women being seen as lesser than and surviving in a country with post-Taliban era ideology. N. wrote about what it meant to be a Muslim woman, specifically positing two key points. She declared,

“Being a Muslim woman doesn't mean to hide myself under a black tent, and walk after my husband outside home because he is ashamed to walk with me in public” (2013, p.1).

N. used her narrative to assert herself. Without this narrative, she would not have been able to openly and safely share her transparent thoughts on what it meant to be a Muslim woman. This was significant considering that many decisions were being made on the behalf of Afghan women, from politics to family planning, and Afghan women were not being included in the dialogue. The poems and narratives on the AWWP demonstrate that Afghan women are critical to the dialogue and it is the international community that needs to engage with them.

Women’s Resistance: Education, Take Your Rights, Civic Duty, Persistence

Women’s resistance was another dominant theme that surfaced as a result of the data analysis. Across all one-hundred poems, Afghan women spoke of resisting a gender inequality, violence, and the lack of access to education. The majority of Afghan women in the restricted data set referenced two key phrases: take your rights and “I am a woman”. Likely, the majority of the Afghan women in the restricted data set demonstrated forms of resistance by writing about civic duty, being united with other women, persevering, being brave, getting educated, building business, speaking up, refusing to marry or to cover, and to protest peacefully. These Afghan women writers expressed their need to rise up and not wait for anyone to give them their rights. When they wrote about “take your rights”, they explained that they had been sitting like ducks in stormy waters for decades waiting for culture, religion, and politics to establish and implement the obvious call for gender equality. Now, the majority of the Afghan women writers in the restricted data set declared they would no longer sit and be vulnerable. They asserted themselves by saying they would resist even in the smallest of ways. Whether it was a known phrase among Afghan women or an outcome of the AWWP, the

phrase “I am a woman” was repeated consistently across all the poems. This phrase was used in resistance to a male-dominated society. The mere utterance of the phrase put the idea into reality. By inserting “I am a woman” into the dialogue, it reminded the global community and the Afghan community that Afghanistan was a country for both men and women.

Anonymous (2013), author of “*God! If you Were an Afghan Woman*”, demonstrated resistance in the second to last stanza of her poem by questioning God and refusing to pray to Him until justice was served. She wrote,

“Who can hear me but you?” (stanza 11).

This demonstrated a desire to be heard. She also sought justice by saying,

“God! I swear Until you stop this injustice against women I won't hold my hands to pray again” (stanza 11).

This statement showed the desire for justice, social accountability, and help in the face of oppression. Therefore, poetry and narrative could be used to resist, voice pain and seek help. In a narrative, Seeta (2009), author of “*Disabled and Working in Afghanistan*”, wrote about a woman named Rahima who persevered and resisted. In this narrative, Seeta recounted the story of Rahima who showed another aspect of womanhood in Afghanistan. Despite a disability, Rahima was strong, persistent and became a career woman who supported herself and her family. It showed resistance and persistence as well as a desire to contribute to her family. She wanted to be independent and to have a voice in the decisions of the country (voter responsibility). In this narrative, womanhood was described as strong, persistent, and capable even when traditionalist views attempted

to be a roadblock. Interestingly, Seeta wrote about Rahima who shared the significance of her ability to vote,

“I am able to vote because in the last election I was not 18 years and I could not vote. I participated in the election because it is my job” (2009, p.2).

The connection was that when given the opportunity to have a voice, Afghan women spoke up with determination and responsibility. Poetry and narrative gave women an opportunity to speak up.

Another aspect to the theme of women’s resistance in the data analysis was Afghan women resisting by envisioning an Afghanistan that stood by gender equality. Nasima (2014), author of “*What Happened to Equality?*”, wrote about resistance. Nasima was very clear in describing the conflict as a lack of education and a closed-minded, culturally traditionalist society that did not see the importance of education or women being involved in political issues. Nasima also described womanhood in terms of rights that could be “killed” rather than rights that were inherent, but not respected. She took the first step by recognizing how Afghan women had gotten to the place they were:

“We have oppressed ourselves” (2014, p.1).

By acknowledging this, Nasima took the first steps in resistance. Nasima then explained what Afghan women’s resistance looked like at the moment she was writing her narrative,

“Today, women and liberators are fighting and debating for women’s rights by opening the doors to schools and universities, by becoming part of the political issues and participating in elections. In every nook of our land, women have sacrificed for the sake of restoring their rights” (2014, p.1).

This admonition was significant because it demonstrated that Nasima was not alone. Afghan women throughout the country were inching their way forward to a gender equal Afghanistan. Nasima used this narrative to envision/create/imagine a future where Afghan women attained gender equality with Afghan men. She used the freedom and anonymity of the AWWP narrative method to create the world she wanted to live in. Creativity and imagination are tools that Nasima used to manage the conflict internally and nationally.

This concept of unanimity among Afghan women was another characteristic of the theme of resistance in the restricted data set. Seeta (2014), author of the narrative *“The Incorrect Tradition”*, described the state of womanhood in Afghanistan as vulnerable, and unstable. She wrote about a girl named Farida who was forced into marriage at 15-years of age, and ended up being abused. She described womanhood as something based out of tradition instead of something that was grown into. Moreover, Seeta described the conflict as the result of archaic, and binding traditions that were rooted in familial ignorance that was passed down through the generations. Most importantly, Seeta wrote about resistance and conflict resolution, or an attempt thereof, in this narrative. She recounted how Farida’s mother went to the Women's Department, the governor, and the community to request help for her daughter. Although Seeta wrote that Farida’s mother was not helped, she said that the women in the community rallied around her and protested until the governor issued a warrant to arrest Farida’s in-laws until they disclosed where Farida was being hidden. This community of women standing in resistance together for the life of a woman was powerful. Seeta recounted:

“Farida’s mother was an old woman, but with tears on her face she went to the Women’s Department, the governor, anywhere she could, to ask for help finding her daughter. No one paid attention, but the women in Farah came together and demonstrated, asking responsible organizations to help bring back Farida to her family. Their protests caused the governor to issue an order to arrest some of the members of the husband’s family. Finally they showed the place where they had Farida hidden and allowed her to call her parents” (2014, p.1).

In writing about this experience, Seeta did something using several linguistic markers: 1) Praeteritio: announcing that one will not discuss a particular topic, in the process of which the topic is brought up. The praeteritio in this narrative included the following quote:

“These problems hurt women in many parts of country, but I want to write about Farida, a girl in Farah Province who was sacrificed by her father and brothers to a marriage...” (para.2).

2) Assonance: the repetition of the last letters of words. The assonance in this narrative included the following quote:

“Most of them think about marrying their children to someone wealthy, instead of someone healthy” (para. 1).

3) Antithesis: the juxtaposition of words. Antithesis was used in this narrative in one instance:

“...incorrect tradition” (para. 5).

4) Meiosis: deliberate belittling. Meiosis was used in this narrative in the following quote:

“He was psychotic. He didn't know about women and life” (para. 4).

5) Disclaimer:

“Because of this incorrect tradition, Farida went to her husband's house” (para. 5).

While the use of linguistic markers in this poem was relevant, I personally wanted to focus on something that caught my attention: the rallying of women to support other women. I thought that was the most significant point of this narrative. The women rallied amongst each other to protest for Farida's release by the governor of Farah Province. Seeta's narrative provided a resolution that women derived for themselves and might inspire someone else to help other women in similar or difficult circumstances.

Shokria (2016), author of the poem “*I Say No to War*”, asserted her resistance in her writing. Again, the repeated phrase, “I am a girl”, took a prominent position in the poem. Shokria said,

“I am a girl with a pen in my hand. I write from my beloved country,
Afghanistan” (lines 2-3).

She followed that up by writing,

“Peace is not just a dream. I will build my country again. I am strong, and I am confident. I am a girl, and I say No to war” (lines 16-20).

So, Shokria clearly identified that writing, whether poetry or narrative, would help her rebuild her country. She said she writes from and for her country. Shokria demonstrated persistence and resistance. Writing was being used as a tool, a nonviolent tool, for conflict resolution. There was a repeated theme of wanting to serve and build Afghanistan. Where other poems convey and display hopelessness, Shokria showed hope.

It was also one of the poems that mentioned the effect of writing and literacy. It showed courage and seemed to embolden the girls.

In “*The Sun Smiles*”, written by Farida (2010), the narrative was that of community resistance against the Taliban. Farida provided a unique description of womanhood in Afghanistan: broken, stuck and yet daring. Her narrative retold a dangerous moment when she was sweeping her family’s front patio and a Talib appeared with a gun, demanding to speak with her father. Her father ended up being taken with the other men in her neighborhood. She was alone with her siblings since her mother was visiting family. Farida highlighted the women of the neighborhood who came and got her, encouraging her to get her mom to go with them and to get their men back from the Taliban. Since her mother was not there, she went in her mother's place. She described the state of womanhood here:

“We began our walk to see the Taliban. Our burkas moved with the wind and we looked like blue and white birds whose wings were broken and unable to fly.

Some of the women were wiping their eyes inside their burkas” (p.2).

Furthermore, Farida sustained,

“One of our neighbors finally dared to speak and said, ‘Please let our men go.

They are the bread bringers of our home. Our children will die of hunger” (p.2).

These were unique points of description that Farida wrote. She pointed to the strength of Afghan women; especially, strength and daringness in the face of terror. When describing the conflict, Farida identified it as imprisonment. Specifically, imprisonment in two forms: 1) physical imprisonment within a home, or a burqa 2) imprisonment within her gender. As demonstrated by Farida, poetry and narrative were used as an alternative to

the imprisonment that many women were experiencing and writing about. Moreover, within the framework of the AWWP, it would give them agency in a public platform while retaining their protection and anonymity.

Moreover, Farida did not use indirect, vague, or polarizing language. Neither did she employ allusions or implications. She was direct. Farida used the following linguistic markers in her narrative: oxymoron, simile and personification. She demonstrated oxymoron with the following quotes:

1. "What do you want, poor women" (p.2). This is an oxymoron because the women were already poor. Furthermore, they were living under a Taliban regime in which Farida already said had minimal jobs and people were afraid to go into the streets.
2. "I feel as if I have returned from a battleground. I smile and say, "It's okay" (p.2).

It is an oxymoron to feel like you just came from a battleground, but then smile to cover it up. Farida demonstrated metaphor with the following quote:

"We returned home with heavy hearts."

Heavy hearts was a metaphor for sadness. She also utilized simile and personification when she wrote the following quote:

"The rain started falling from the sky, as if the clouds were crying for us".

Simile uses 'like' or 'as' to to draw comparisons. The comparison here was that the clouds were crying (raining) for the Afghan women who had the men in their community taken away from them by the Taliban. Simultaneously, this served as personification

because clouds really cannot cry; it is a human quality. Lastly, Farida used personification in the following quote:

“I looked to the sky and saw the sun smiling at me.”

As with the previous quote, the sun cannot smile because smiling is a human quality. The significance of these linguistic markers was that they were not intentional. It was part of the natural discourse of Farida. As evidenced throughout the other examples provided in this chapter, linguistic markers were a part of Dari, the Afghan language, the Afghan discourse form.

Poetry is a global discourse form, and a local discourse form in Afghanistan. As referenced in the literature review, poetry is revered in Afghanistan. Locally, behind closed doors, specific types of poetry are shared by women. So, this private discourse form has now taken a global form while still retaining the anonymity of women--just as if behind closed doors. It is as if the women are still getting the privacy of being behind closed doors, but the rest of the world can put their ear to the door too. The context of this narrative was two stories within one. The first story was the shell: Farida was waiting on her friend and had a flashback to when her father and all the other men in her village were kidnapped. The season and setting reminded her of this moment. The second story was Farida's actual retelling of the kidnapping. The context of this poem was the flashback to the time of the Taliban regime. Based on the linguistic markers that Farida used, it was apparent that she struggled with some form of post traumatic stress disorder. The narrative itself did not have many linguistic markers; had it been a poem, there might have been more. The greatest takeaway from this narrative was the manner in which the

Afghan women of Farida's village rallied together to resist the Taliban, their circumstances and claim back their men.

In another narrative, Farahnaz (2014), author of "*The Runoff Election Can Change our Lives*" demonstrated resistance in the form of civic duty. Farahnaz did not specifically allude to the state of womanhood. Rather, her narrative was seen more in the frame of the heart of the conflict. Farahnaz sustained that voter turnout, ignorance, or results were at the crux of the lack of changes in Afghanistan. This narrative demonstrated that Afghan women had a sense of duty and citizenship toward their country. They viewed it as an act of service. Also, they showed that they were in fact knowledgeable about politics, or that they could be politically minded. Farahnaz (2014) elaborated her stance:

"Elections or more tension? This is the question worrying all Afghans as we come to another election. We've had enough tensions already in 2014. First, it was 'What will happen if the Americans leave Afghanistan? Will the world let us continue without any trouble? Will we be able to live in a peaceful environment'" (para. 1).

An overarching theme similarly intertwined with the theme of resistance was support.

Parents and Family: Protectors or Perpetrators

Throughout the data analysis, the theme of parents became significant. Consistently throughout the data, the Afghan women writers wrote about the role of the family, especially parents who were either supportive or destructive in their daughters' lives. Throughout the restricted data set, the participating Afghan women writers described times when the course of their lives had either improved or declined depending

on the support or lack thereof of their parents or family members. The typical family members identified as influential in either a positive or negative way included mothers, fathers, uncles, brothers, and in-laws. Overall, the key point from the data analysis was that if an Afghan woman had the support of one key family member, they were likely to succeed in having a safer life, access to education and/or employment, flexibility with wearing the burqa, and even delayed marriage.

Zarlasht (2009), author of the narrative *“From Idyllic Life to War”*, wrote about the conflict Afghan women faced in terms of war and the residuals of war. She pinpointed the Taliban as the source of the conflict as well as the resulting ideology and culture shift. In addition to that, Zarlasht wrote about the the economic downturn, and loss of shelter and safety for all due to the Taliban’s reign. Zarlasht wrote that during this time, the Taliban reinforced the ideology of shame for being a girl or woman. However, Zarlasht explained that the Taliban’s ideology was countered when one person in the family supported or showed support for the women in their family. The support of the family reduced the shame of being born a girl to nothing. In another instance, Nasima (2013), author of the poem, *“When the Nightingale Stopped Singing”*, wrote about the lack of support she had when her parents married her off when she was 16-years old as the second wife of a man twenty years her senior. His first wife could not have children, so she was meant to be the one who carried the children. She described her lack of support as, "I shattered like window glass, but without sound. Nobody heard my screaming in the silence" (p.2). Nasima described womanhood as something that was predetermined, and hand delivered from father, mother, and extended family down to

girls. She described the lack of support as painful, and defined womanhood as saleable property.

In the second data analysis of Nasima's poem, the discourse analysis, Nasima used three linguistic markers:

- 1) Metaphor: "I shattered like window glass, but without sound" (para. 4).
- 2) Antithesis: "Nobody heard my screaming in the silence" (para. 4).
- 3) Personification: "But there was a flame of regret in my mother's heart" (para. 9).

The context of Nasima's poem was about when she was forcefully married as the second wife to a man twenty years her senior. While there were few linguistic markers in this poem, the few that were identified were poignant. The use of metaphor, antithesis, and personification spoke to the lack of voice and agency that Nasima experienced. Her descriptions gave me a better perspective on what it must have been like to be her in that specific conflict. An addition, two quotes remained poignant:

1) "Here is what life was really like for me."

2) "I saw terrible things." These quotes from this particular poem demonstrated the intent of this research. The purpose of the research was to convey a first-hand experience of what life was and continues to be like for Afghan women. It would be quite difficult to know how to help establish appropriate resolutions without knowing what the baseline was for Afghan women. Overall, the linguistic markers did not have any significant impact on the analysis of this narrative.

Writing as Conflict Resolution Tool

The power of writing as a conflict resolution tool was another key theme in the data analysis. Many of the Afghan women participating in the AWWP wrote about the importance of writing their lived experiences and how having the opportunity was liberating and healing. In one instance, Shokria (2016), author of the poem “*I Say No to War*”, specifically wrote about being “armed with a pen” and that “writing liberates”. She said,

“I am a girl with a pen in my hand. I write from my beloved country,
Afghanistan” (lines 2-3).

She followed that up by writing,

“Peace is not just a dream. I will build my country again. I am strong, and I am confident. I am a girl, and I say No to war” (lines 16-20).

So, Shokria clearly identified that writing, whether poetry or narrative, helped her rebuild her country. She said she wrote from and for her country. Writing was used as a tool, a nonviolent tool, for conflict resolution.

In the second analysis of this poem, the critical discourse analysis, the results conveyed that Shokria did not use implicit or indirect language. Neither did she use vagueness, or allusions. If anything, Shokria used implication and polarization in her poem. Shokria used implication when she wrote,

“I am a girl with a pen in my hand, I write for my beloved country, Afghanistan”.

Her statement implied that she was literate, confident and capable of changing the discourse surrounding Afghan women and women’s rights in her country. Shokria also used polarization when she wrote,

“Despite everything that happens here--violence against women, terrorism, the Taliban killing innocent people, Peace is not just a dream.”

This quote demonstrated polarization in that on one hand, we saw an Afghanistan that had exactly what Shokria wrote about: war, violence against women, etc. On the other hand, Shokria spoke about peace. The key word in this contrast was “despite”.

Moreover, further analysis of Shokria’s poem demonstrated the use of linguistic structures such as conduplicatio and metaphor. Conduplicatio is the repetition of a word or phrase for emotional effect. Shokria used conduplicatio in nine instances in her poem:

- 1) “I am a girl”
- 2) “I am a girl with a pen in my hand”
- 3) “I am proud of my country,”
- 4) “I am proud of my country's flag of three colors--
- 5) “One day my country will be proud of me...”
- 6) “I am strong,”
- 7) “I am a girl”
- 8) “I say no to war”
- 9) “I say no to war”.

Likely, Shokria used metaphor:

“I am a girl with a pen in my hand.”

Shokria's use of conduplicatio was significant not just in this poem, but in other AWWP poems as well. The phrase, “I am a woman” or “I am a girl” came up a lot. Having read the poems as I have, and knowing what I know now, the repetition of those phrases are meaningful to the participating AWWP Afghan women writers. Repetition

was indicative of an emotional sense of agency and identity with each repetition. Lastly, Shokria's metaphor of being a girl with a pen in her hand was significant because it directly alluded to defense, literacy, and reform. The pen was a symbol for change, and being able to write one's own destiny.

Nasima (2014), author of "*A Hymn for Freedom*", also wrote about the power of writing. In her poem, Nasima expressed that writing could end violence, bring about freedom, and agency. Nasima described the conflict as women being trapped, and a country ridden with a history of violence. Poetry was used to express the desire for change and to demonstrate how writing freed Nasima. The following quotes demonstrate the depth of how Nasima felt about the power of writing:

- 1) "My speech is written by my pen on white paper"
- 2) "I will write how my heart was broken, and chained, but the locks of prison will be opened by the keys of my pen and my writing"
- 3) "The history of violence will be ended by my voice, by my writing"
- 4) "My writing makes me coincide with this one sentence: Violence stops now!"

Poetry is a global discourse form, and a local discourse form in Afghanistan. In her poem, Nasima showed that locally, behind closed doors, specific types of poetry are shared by women. So, this private discourse form had now taken a global form while still retaining the anonymity of women, just as when behind closed doors. The women still got the privacy of being behind closed doors, but the rest of the world could put their ear to the door too.

The critical discourse analysis of Nasima's poem revealed her use of local meanings and formal linguistic structures. As for local meanings within her poem, Nassima used allusion when she referenced "*Humanist Spring*" in line 1. Spring was indicative of a new chapter or a new season. Moreover, the term humanist was symbolic of equality. Put together the phrase alluded to the Arab Spring where many Arab nations revolted for rights and civil society. She further alluded to a revolt when she wrote,

"My speech is written by my pen on white paper" (lines 3-4).

Additionally, Nasima used formal linguistic markers including personification, conduplicato, and affirmation. She implemented personification when she wrote,

"Silence's heart will be broken" (line 2).

Nasima demonstrated conduplicato when she wrote,

- 1) "I am a woman" (line 9), and
- 2) "The history of violence will be ended by my voice, by my writing, by my vote" (lines 10-13).

Lastly, Nasima used affirmation when she wrote,

- 1) "...but the locks of the prison chains will be opened by the keys of my pen and my writing" (lines 7-8),
- 2) "The history of violence will be ended" (line 10), and
- 3) "My writing makes me coincide with this one sentence: 'Violence stops now'" (lines 16-17).

Nasima's use of linguistic markers in this poem contributed to the overall meaning of the poem. The fact that she used affirmation, conduplicato, and personification in this poem only made her message that much stronger. The same phrase, "I am a woman"

reappeared in this particular poem. It was indicative of conduplicatio, and that Afghan women called for recognition of their humanity. Moreover, making affirmations was one way of positioning oneself in an argument or to speak positivity into negativity. Nasima did that throughout the poem. Finally, this poem used personification to describe Nasima's feeling of being silenced and hurt.

In another instance, Pari (2015), author of *“Do not End this Poem”*, wrote about how writing helped her to have a voice and presence beyond the confines of her burqa. Throughout her poem, Pari wrote about the value of writing in helping her build her self-confidence, self-expression, and the ability to unload the weight of her life-experiences as an Afghan woman. Clearly, writing was a tool that Pari used to open the discourse surrounding gender-based violence in Afghanistan, and to keep the dialogue going. A critical discourse analysis on Pari's poem revealed the semantic macrostructure, local meanings and formal linguistic markers.

With the dense repetition of the phrase, “do not end this poem”, the power of writing was the semantic macrostructure of this poem. The local meanings used were implicit language and polarization. Pari used implicit language when she wrote,

“Hide somewhere, he said. We have male guests. I was hidden with an anonymous pen, writing bare, bare, bare laughing in the evil beards” (2015, stanza 3).

The implication here was that Pari was treated as a lesser-than person in her family. Having her hidden expressed shame and embarrassment at her being a woman. Pari demonstrated polarization when she wrote,

1) “My hair hidden in burqa, my black long dusty dress” (2015, stanza 3), and

2) “Burning my burqa, seeking the light out of darkness, words remain speechless” (2015, stanza 5).

These sentences conveyed a polarization because Pari went from abiding by the burqa to burning it, and from having been hidden to being exposed. Moreover, critical discourse analysis of her poem revealed that Pari used the linguistic markers of personification, metaphor and conduplicato. Pari (2015) implemented personification when she wrote,

- 1) “My pen kisses the white lips of the paper” (line 2)
- 2) “I see the shadow of my hair scream” (line 4)
- 3) “My pen suggests, do not end the poem” (line 20)
- 4) “Words remain speechless” (line 21).

A pen cannot kiss, paper does not have lips, hair cannot scream, and words are not speechless. The attribution of an object to a human-like quality is personification.

Additionally, Pari used metaphor when she wrote,

“I am taller than my book of poems, And heavier for burying so many stories”
(lines 5-6).

The book of poems signified strength, and her statement of being taller than a book of poems meant that she was even stronger. Lastly, Pari demonstrated conduplicato (2015) when she wrote, “Too much pain; too much pain” (lines 6-7). Pari’s use of conduplicato marked the depth of how she truly felt.

The context of the poem showed the effect that the power of writing had on Pari and her circumstance as a woman. It appeared that she endured significant pain and was told to hide whenever men came. Pari described their beards as evil, so it brought forth the question of why male visitors were depicted as evil. Was she abused? She also

alluded to having carried many heavy stories and that the burden was too much. The poem was written in 2015, which showed that gender discrimination was not an issue solely from the past, it was still current in Afghanistan. In the context of her poem, Pari was clear: writing helped liberate and free her. Her testimony alone lent credibility to the power of writing as a conflict resolution tool. Kamila (2014), another AWWP author, also wrote about the significance of writing in her personal development in overcoming gender discrimination and violence as an Afghan woman.

In the narrative, “*An Afghan Girl Educates Herself, Parts 1 & 2*”, Kamila (2014) stressed that change could not be made by argument, but by writing and dialogue. She cited poems and books that had demonstrated the power of writing as a change agent. In one specific instance, Kamila wrote:

“I am majoring in journalism. It is much easier to influence educated people through writing than arguing or having long discussions. I have seen this when classmates react to the poem, “And You Called me Colored?” by an unknown author, or the Holocaust memoir “Night” by Elie Wiesel. I’ve seen how “The Kite Runner” by Khalid Hussaini moved the world” (p.3).

Kamila clearly underscored her belief in cultivating writing as a conflict resolution tool. Throughout her narrative, Kamila described womanhood as a category preformed and set in people's minds and a category that seemingly could not be reshaped. She also claimed that the typically accepted roles for women in Afghanistan were wife, bride, mother, cook and baby maker. Kamila’s message never changed. She consistently held writing as a tool for bringing change in Afghanistan. She wrote,

“We change the world by changing the world's citizens' ideas about each other”
(p.4).

Kamila’s narrative brought life to the AWWP’s mission as well as the intention of this research which in part was to determine the role poetry and narrative have in addressing gender-based violence in Afghan women's’ lives.

Stress as a Result of Conflict

The final major theme found in both the data analyses was stress as a result of conflict. Some of the Afghan women writers wrote specifically about trauma with regards to their circumstances. Marzia (2015), author of the narrative “*Dark Days*”, retold her trauma and consequently asserted her agency. Marzia explained that the conflict is the lack of change from the Taliban era, and that Afghans needed the international community to stay and help. Marzia did not explicitly state the state of womanhood, but alludes to a stagnancy. She wrote that women were stuck, and that there was no change. Under Taliban rule, Marzia’s mother was beaten as a punishment for leaving the house without her father. Marzia elaborated on her lingering feelings of terror and fear:

"I thought no-one could protect me from anything. I felt very empty, like a body without a soul. My heart, my stomach, and my head hurt. It took me a few ears to overcome that feeling and the nightmares. Today's situation in Afghanistan is bringing back all those terrible feelings" (p.2).

Although the Taliban were formally removed from power, they still have a lingering presence in Afghanistan. Many women like Marzia still suffer from the time the Taliban were the governing authority in Afghanistan. By having had the ability to share her story

and her trauma, Marzia was able to have her voice heard and gain agency in her own narrative.

Another participating AWWP Afghan writer who had experienced stress as a result of conflict and wrote about it is Fariba (2010), author of the narrative *“The Secret of the Hidden Library”*. Fariba (2010) described the conflict as PTSD post-Taliban, and having been confined during the Taliban era. Fariba wrote about the Taliban and what womanhood used to look like then--restrictive, and how she suffered from depression as a result. Moreover, she wrote about how books and writing helped her work through her stress and anxiety. Fariba (2010) described her experience with anxiety and her journey to self-healing:

“I remembered that my father had a diary and wrote important sayings in it. I bought a beautiful notebook and a colored pen for myself. I started writing in my diary and I still have it. By reading books and writing in my diary, I noticed that I was not sad anymore” (p.2).

As seen with Fariba (2010) poetry and narrative have helped women with anxiety to cope, and to have agency. Like Fariba, many of the participating Afghan women were abused or witnessed abuse and were afraid to go out, venture out or be their fullest potential. This platform is safe, anonymous and transparent. Poetry and narrative have connected Afghan women writers participating in the AWWP with the global forum and each other without endangering them.

Farahnaz (2011), author of the narrative *“The Panjshiry Boys”*, wrote about the state of women in Afghanistan. Farahnaz explained that there are women suffering from anxiety and afraid to leave the house. She questioned whom these women would be able

to report their issues to. Farahnaz framed the conflict as the ethnic divide and the poor infrastructure that is a result of the post-Taliban regime. She gave a glimpse into the education provisions for girls during the post-Taliban regime:

“I was sad, but never disappointed, because the girls had the opportunity to go to school, which was better than before when they weren't even allowed to walk out of their houses" (p.2).

In the western world, women's issues involve reproductive rights, fair wage, and sexual harassment among many other issues. As quoted by Farahnaz, the issues of Afghan women were far more basic in terms of being able to leave the house without a male guardian and having access to education. Farahnaz used her narrative as an outlet for sharing her lived experiences, her anxiety, and to assert herself while using the protection provided by the AWWP.

In conclusion, the premise of this study was to determine three things: 1) How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan? 2) How do Afghan women describe the conflict they experience in their everyday lives? 3) How might poetry and narrative be used to manage the conflict that Afghan women are facing? This study used thematic and Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze one-hundred combined randomly selected poems and narratives. The major themes included: child brides/forced marriage, hijab/burqa/niqab, women's resistance, parents as protectors and/or perpetrators, the power of writing and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Overall, Afghan women described the state of womanhood in Afghanistan as imprisonment, stagnancy, and being caged. In sum, Afghan women described the conflict they experience in their everyday lives as limited access to opportunities like education, lack of agency, and

gender-based inequality and violence. Moreover, as many of the participating Afghan women wrote, writing poetry and narratives has empowered them and enabled them to have a voice in an atmosphere where they largely do not. Lastly, this study demonstrated that language is a strong conflict resolution tool, especially with high-risk populations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Results Interpreted

There were three research questions that this dissertation was built upon: 1) How do Afghan women describe the state of womanhood in Afghanistan? 2) How do Afghan women describe the state of conflict they experience in their everyday lives? 3) How might poetry and narrative be used to manage the conflict that Afghan women are facing? The results of both thematic and Critical Discourse Analysis yielded six major themes: child brides/forced marriages, hijab/burqa/niqab, women's resistance, parents as protectors and/or perpetrators, the power of writing and stress as a result of conflict. The results showed that Afghan women described the state of womanhood in Afghanistan as stagnant and restricted. Broadly speaking, they described the conflict they face as repression and oppression, whether it was in the form of forced marriages, being married off as child brides, or even in dictating apparel choices and restricting access to education. Poetry and narrative were clearly used as a vehicle or a tool for Afghan women participating in the AWWP to share their lived experiences, to be heard, and to assert a sense of agency over their circumstances without repercussion and while retaining their anonymity. As a result of the findings, I do not think there is any other current forum that provides Afghan women with as safe a platform to assert themselves and share their lived experiences as the AWWP. The AWWP and the use of poetry and narrative are conflict resolution tools that enable Afghan women to use modes of communication that are not only acceptable in their society, but also revered. The limited role of Teun Van Dijk's six-step CDA in evaluating the AWWP's randomly selected poems and narratives is a unique point of interest to both interpret and discuss.

The initial goal of this research was to apply two methods of analysis, thematic and Van Dijk's six-step CDA, for each of the combined one-hundred poems and narratives randomly selected. However, after recognizing that the six-step CDA yielded stronger results for poems more than for narratives and that more analysis could be done with thematic analysis, CDA was limited to the first fifty combined poems and narratives. Poems are more likely to have the linguistic and rhetorical elements that are a tenet in Van Dijk's six-step CDA than narratives. Poems have broader flexibility in both structure and form. Narratives are bound by the standards of sentence structure and narrative formatting. While many of the narratives had instances of symbolism, imagery, simile, and personification, they were solely that--instances. Moreover, both the randomly selected poems and narratives yielded much more content for analysis with textual analysis. There were some steps of Van Dijk's six-step analysis that were much more beneficial than the two that elicited local and linguistic markers. These steps paralleled thematic analysis in that they focused on semantic macrostructures, analysis of global and local discourse formats, and analysis of structure. Overall, Van Dijk's six-step CDA analysis is an effective tool for analyzing the language embedded in texts, and if I were to use this method of analysis in the future, I would limit its use to interviews and poems.

The major themes that resulted from both analyses were simultaneously surprising and expected. Perhaps the most surprising of all the themes and the most prevalent of them all was the theme of child brides. With regards to forced marriages, I had expected results consistent with the literature review and my own knowledge of Afghanistan's culture and practices. It never had occurred to me that there was a consistently high rate of forced child marriages where children were sold into marriage as a reparation for debts

or for profit. I attribute this to the lack of opportunity that Afghan women have to both protest and publicize the conflict of forced child marriages. Of course this revelation would be a shock--what platform do Afghan women have for sharing conflicts without risking their safety, honor, and position within familial and societal structure? The only forum that Afghan women have had to publicly share their lived experiences without negative repercussions has been the AWWP.

Literature Review

There exists very little literature on how Afghan women define conflict, their circumstances, and how language is used in helping them attain gender equality. Predominantly, the literature review in Chapter 2 details Afghan women's testimonials in documentaries, interviews, and in two instances—one of them being the AWWP's literature—published books. This lack of literature on Afghan women's lives is largely due in part to the limited opportunities Afghan women have for freely sharing their lived experiences without repercussion. Moreover, Afghan women rarely have had the opportunity to transparently convey their circumstances and experiences without the lens or censorship imposed by men, politics, religion and culture. The documentaries published on Afghan women such as *To Kill a Sparrow: Afghan Women Jailed for Love* (Soleimani, 2014) and *Half Life Value* (Sadat, 2013) highlight how little has changed for Afghan women since the fall of the Taliban regime as well as the leniency the judicial system has towards Afghan men who are reported for physically abusing their wives, daughters, or sisters. This research confirmed what Soleimani (2014) and Sadat (2013) published in their documentaries. The major themes of this study's analyses included child brides, coverings, PTSD, and parents as perpetrators. The randomly selected poems

and narratives that comprised the data spoke to physical abuse and a significant lack of accountability with Afghan men. Moreover, key words in the analyses resulted in the following issues that correspond with and confirm Soleimani and Sadat's documentaries: violence, beating, Taliban, PTSD, limited opportunities, parents as perpetrators, caged, forced marriage, and no education. These codes are not exhaustive but vastly proportionate to and encompassing of many of the repeated terms found across the 100 randomly selected poems and narratives. The correlation of this study with published information in the two documentaries that voice Afghan women's lived experiences leads to a confirmation of the accuracy of the women's testimonies across the three different mediums: film, poetry and narrative.

In addition to Soleimani and Sadat's documentaries, articles such as *Mother and Child Behind Bars: The Women of Afghanistan's Prisons* (Silverman, 2015), *Annual Report*

Advancement (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2014), *Clarifying the Role of Islamic Law in Afghanistan's Justice System* (Khan, 2012), *Afghan Law Barring Violence Against Women Stalls* (Taylor, 2013), discuss the blurred lines between culture, religion, and values on gender equality in Afghanistan. The literature indicated that Afghan men often do not see a difference between culture and religion—even if the Koran indicates anything otherwise. The literature also demonstrated that much of the disparity that Afghan women experience is as a result of cultural interpretations of religion as opposed to religious values framing culture. This is mostly in part to the practice of one leader being chosen as the interpreter of the Koran, and the mere fact that Afghan culture is mostly part of an oral tradition. This study confirms the

finding in the aforementioned articles. Across the one-hundred randomly selected poems and narratives, the results of the dual analysis identified that Afghan women, for the most part, blame culture, old mindsets, ignorance, and a lack of education for how Afghan women are treated. They do not blame Islam or God. In fact, of the selected poems and narratives, the Afghan authors pointed out that the Koran specifies that women are to be treated with respect and dignity because they give birth to the world. Again, to have a strong correlation between this research and previous research done on Afghan women confirmed the results of this study. Additional articles and books on Afghan women, and the role of poetry in the culture in particular, also have significance in light of the results of this study.

Wali Shaker (2009), author of *Understanding Afghan Culture: Occasional Paper Series #4*, indicated that knowledge of poetry and the ability to utilize it in arguments is a marker of intellectual legitimacy in Afghan culture. Not only that, but Shaker also explained that the ability to use poetry in dealings, negotiations, and meetings is an expected quality in a capable leader. This study found that Afghan women who participated in the projects and who wrote about education in their poems and narratives highlighted their parents as being supportive and progressive when acknowledging that education was a benchmark for leadership and status in the community. Moreover, Hafizullah Emadi (2002) poignantly stated in his book *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan* that Afghan women have expressed their anger and frustration through literary expression, but only in the company of other women. The findings in this study confirm that this is true of traditional Afghan culture. However, the findings also contrast Emadi's statement because the data was on a digital, public and accessible to all,

platform. Therefore, the AWWP and this study are forerunners in the quest to contribute new information on Afghan women. Another point that Emadi makes is the feeling of defiance and frustration with their condition in society when singing cultural folk songs. The findings in this study reveal that Afghan women are not only expressing these feelings amongst each other, but also in the global format of the AWWP. Therefore, their frustration is not just limited to their audiences with each other which certainly corroborates their claims. The question of audience is significant because Veronica Doubleday (2011), author of *Gendered Voices and Creative Expression in the Singing of Chaharbeiti Poetry in Afghanistan*, explains that men have never been able to enter these private women's poetry forums, and thus little attention has ever been given to the voices of Afghan women as they recite the chaharbeiti's (quatrains). This findings in this study confirm that Afghan men do not attend women's gatherings because of strict cultural norms. Nearly all the poems and narratives selected as part of the data for this study retained a tone of frustration for not being heard. This finding correlates with Emadi and Doubleday's separate texts. Thus, this findings from this study not only support the minimal literature that exists on Afghan women, but also expands and contributes to it.

Contributions to the Field

This study advances knowledge within the field of conflict resolution, specifically with regards to gender-based violence and Afghanistan, because it demonstrates the practical use of language as a conflict resolution tool within a high-conflict zone. Not only was the study itself rich in content for contributing to resources within conflict resolution, but also because the study was based on the AWWP model of eliciting lived experiences from a segment of Afghan population that is living in critical condition.

Language is often overlooked in complex and escalated conflicts because these types of conflicts have multiple markers that seem to exclude language as an appropriate tool for resolution. This study illustrated the multiple ways that language can be incorporated into a long-term framework for alleviating gender-based violence by empowering victims by enabling them to globally share their lived experiences while retaining their anonymity and safety.

Limitations

The greatest limitation to this study is the nature of gender specificity within the study. The study itself was premised on researching Afghan women. On this aspect, the study accomplished its goal. However, in the course of research, many women voiced that men were victims to culture, tradition, and religion as much as women were.

Although Afghanistan is largely a male-dominated society with culture, traditions, and religion being governed and facilitated by men, the men too are subject to the limitations they impose as well. Moreover, younger generations of men or men who do not engage the same philosophies of those in power are also victim to society's restrictions. It would be valuable to have their perspective and unique recollections of their lived experiences told without fear and all while retaining their anonymity. As I read through the poems and narratives of the AWWP, it became clear that both perpetrator and victim alike are victim to the conflicts at hand. As is the case with Afghanistan, a country where free speech is prohibited, it leads me to question what the viewpoints of the men are. Even further and taking a different perspective, one where the men are not in fact victim to structural violence in Afghanistan, it would be immensely valuable to the conflict resolution field to know their viewpoints and lived experiences. Understanding the mind

of a perpetrator can provide key tools in not only resolving conflict, but also preventing it.

Translation is another limitation of this research. While the data were translated by the AWWP, the original and untranslated versions, in Dari, were not provided alongside each of the poems or narratives. While the translators are Afghan natives, the monolingual nature of the provided poems and narratives only demonstrated one aspect of my comprehension and subsequently, my analysis. Like with any language, meaning does get lost, even if it is slightly, in the translation process. Being fully literate and fluent in Farsi, a derivative of Dari, I was willing to translate the poems myself if they were in the native Dari. Because I am fluent in Farsi, I understand the depth of the language and I think having that understanding would have possibly yielded fuller results. Ethical translations show the original work, its semi-translated stage, and its final translation. Even further, would CDA have yielded more results with poems and narratives in the native Dari than they did with English? This question was one that I repeatedly asked myself throughout the study, and I consider it to be a factor worth looking into for the sake of comparison and future research. Therefore, not having the poems and narratives in bilingual form, side by side, was a limitation.

Practice-related Contributions

Much like mediation, facilitation, and negotiation are used as conflict resolution tools, the results of this study demonstrate that writing programs can be used as effectively in resolving or de-escalating a variety of conflicts. The AWWP program is the first of its kind--using a poetry and narrative-based approach to bridging the gender-equality divide in a high-conflict zone such as Afghanistan. While AWWP's model is an

effective practice-related contribution that could and should be replicated globally, the analysis for this research, Teun van Dijk's six-step Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is a practice-related contribution that can modify how practitioners of conflict resolution approach conflict. Having a linguistic perspective on conflict adds another tool to a practitioner's method for dealing with conflict. Specifically, it is a tool that should be used to establish both insights and patterns for any respective conflict. For example, van Dijk's CDA can be used to analyze how language is used during divorce proceedings, custody hearings, housing disputes, political disputes, and/or genocide, etc. This is not an exhaustive list of conflicts, but a series of examples for how CDA can be used in a practice-oriented way for ongoing research and conflict resolution. In one current practice-oriented example, van Dijk's CDA could be used to analyze the language of propaganda posters, protest rallies, and televised announcements in North Korea. This information is readily available for data collection and analysis. In another example, a comparative CDA could be done on televised and radio announcements for both the Rwandan and Armenian genocides to identify parallels in the language of genocide. Identifying patterns can preemptively signal, deflate or prevent other genocides from happening. As such, the method used in this study, van Dijk's six-step CDA, can be used as a practice-oriented model for conflict resolution as well as future research.

Future Research

Future research related to this study and the field of conflict resolution can be focused on Afghan men and language, language and gender-based violence, language and terrorism, language and forgiveness, and monothematic research within the subject and the conflict resolution field. Retrospectively, one limitation that caught my attention was

the lack of first-hand material from Afghan men. Conducting the same research but on Afghan men would be a fruitful study. Additionally, comparative studies could be done with other ethnic groups specifically on language and gender-based violence. Would a CDA study on poems and narratives on the lived experiences of women from other ethnic groups yield the same thematic results? Would rhetorical and linguistic markers be more effective for the published lived experiences of other ethnic groups than they were for those by Afghan women? Is the language and rhetorical retelling of gender-based violence universal among women or is it different based on a person's ethnic background? Furthermore, future research could be focused on language and terrorism. While the Taliban are not formally the governing authority in Afghanistan, the majority of the governing leaders are former mujahedeen leaders--the Taliban. The Taliban published a book of poems in 2012 and while many viewed it as propaganda, it actually encapsulated both the Taliban's poetic tradition as well as the severity of their ideology. Understanding the role of language in a perpetrator's logic is invaluable to the conflict resolution field. So often we are resolving the aftermath of a conflict whereas having the opportunity to prevent it would be even more effective in conflict management. Additionally, the AWWP has a newly formed section on forgiveness which if researched would dually evaluate the role of language, poetry and narrative specifically, in giving and receiving forgiveness--a valuable conflict resolution tool. Finally, a monothematic approach to researching language, gender-based violence in Afghanistan, would be a starting point for future research. Any single one of the major themes found in this study would suitable as independent research topics. The opportunities for future research in this subject and the field of conflict resolution is rich.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis research study on selected poems and narratives from the Afghan Women's Writing Project with the end goal of discovering how Afghan women define womanhood and their circumstances in addition to identifying the role of poetry and narrative as conflict resolution tools in gender-based conflict in the region. One-hundred randomly selected poems and narratives comprised the data, which were later used in a dual analysis: thematic analysis and Teun van Dijk's six-step Critical Discourse Analysis. The major themes included: child brides/forced marriage, hijab/burqa/niqab, women's resistance, parents as protectors and/or perpetrators, the power of writing and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. The analyses indicated that Afghan women largely define womanhood as a prison, and desire freedom that is supported both by their government and their culture. This study contributes to the literature on Afghan women by actually identifying how Afghan women define womanhood in addition to how they define the problems they face. This information is valuable as Afghan women progress towards gender equality in Afghanistan. The potential for future research on Afghan women is rich. This study carries a conflict resolution approach to gender-based violence in Afghanistan that can be practically utilized in aiding Afghan women.

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- Insert References here. Examples of some common types of references follow; see APA 6.22 and Chapter 7 for more details.