

## Conclusions

### *Protection at a Price?*

On a beautiful Friday in April 2015, I was sitting in my garden in Kabul, relaxing and chatting with a friend. I cannot remember how it came up, but somehow the conversation turned to the murder of a woman named Farkhunda a month earlier. “You can see how it happened,” my male Afghan friend said. “There is this anger, a feeling that many women are being provocative on purpose. First, it was that girl who went around not far from here without pants and scarf. And then the other one who was protesting—the one who had that metal dress showing off her body. And finally Farkhunda—that was reaction to all of it. Some people think certain women are just going too far.” I remember feeling both perplexed and upset with my friend’s argument. “But these were three completely different things,” I protested. “It’s unfair to put them together like that. That girl who went around with bare legs—the one who was filmed and put on the internet—clearly she was in distress; she did not do it to protest. Maybe she had run away from some situation at her house—what do we know? It wasn’t the same as the girl who was protesting sexual harassment with that metal thing.” This woman, a performance artist named Kubra Khademi had dressed up in self-designed body armor emphasizing her breasts and bottom, and braved a short walk through Kot-e Sangi, a busy suburb not far from Kabul University. She had been mobbed by male pedestrians and had gone into hiding after pictures and videos of her performance act had circulated in social media. “And Farkhunda,” I continued. “That was something different again. She . . . well, doesn’t it scare you, people being killed on the streets of Kabul just because someone shouts that they are infidels? It could happen to one of us, too.” I wasn’t very articulate that day, but I was trying to appeal to my friend’s deep antipathy to religious fanaticism, trying to somehow induce him to

show more solidarity, to see Farkhunda's murder as a danger to us all, not as some understandable or at least explainable reaction to women "going too far."

But, of course, there were stark gendered dimensions to what had happened to Farkhunda. To the mob that had killed her at Kabul's Shah-e Do Shamshira shrine, she represented everything that had to be opposed—a woman trespassing in public space, questioning male authority on religious issues, who then quickly turned into an infidel, burning the Quran, probably on the instruction of the Americans. I had been in Norway at the time of the murder, and I found myself on national television struggling to explain how it was possible that a woman could be lynched in the center of Kabul in front of a large group of people, with nobody—not even the police observing the crowd—intervening to stop it. I felt that the interviewer wanted me to paint a picture in which Afghan society was hopelessly primitive, captive to misogyny and backwardness beyond redemption—to confirm that Western efforts to modernize it and to save its women had been misguided from the start. In the few seconds available to me, it was difficult to communicate that while the radicalized politics of the last decades had made the murder possible, it was far from an ordinary occurrence somehow in line with traditional Afghan culture. To most Kabulis, the public murder of a woman by strangers was abhorrent and shocking.

What happened afterward was also remarkable, again suggesting that many Afghans had found the killing abhorrent. At Farkhunda's burial, a small group of women carried her coffin. It was a highly symbolic act in Afghanistan, where, as a rule, this is a task performed by men. At the time of her funeral, so soon after her death, it was still not clear exactly what had taken place at the shrine. The prevailing story was still that Farkhunda had burnt the Quran. Thus, the women who carried her coffin did so with considerable bravery, given the fact that they could easily fall prey to the same hateful and dangerous rhetoric and be painted as the accomplices of an infidel. By and large, they were not part of the more established women's rights networks that have featured prominently in this book—the groups that were running shelters, advocating for the EVAW law, and taking part in the many policy and advocacy events in Kabul. The women in those groups typically had a background in NGO work in Peshawar (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 2006) or had held government positions during the communist era. Instead, the women who carried Farkhunda's coffin and took part in her burial were mostly of a younger generation, with various professional backgrounds and were not engaged in full-time women's rights work. They were also more radical. Many were self-declared feminists and appeared less intimidated by the prospect of being labeled by the mujahedin or the religious establishment. However, a few days later, thousands gathered for the largest demonstration seen in Kabul since the 1980s. At that point, it had been clearly established that Farkhunda had not burnt the Quran. She was, in fact, a deeply religious woman who had challenged the shrine

keepers for what she considered an un-Islamic practice—profiting from selling *tawiz*—amulets containing pieces of holy scripture.

Although some of the perpetrators of the murder were quickly arrested, the legal case was complicated and remains inconclusive as I write this. It is not my intention to probe into the details of the case here. Rather, I bring it up as an illustration of two things. First, the murder of Farkhunda showed with terrifying clarity how potent the mix of gendered and religious denunciation could be. To her raging attackers, Farkhunda embodied all that was subversive, dangerous, and insulting in the post-2001 order—a woman asserting herself in public, attacking religion, instigated by foreigners. As my friend had detected, they felt justified in reining in a woman who had gone too far. Their reaction was given divine sanction by the now-routine framing of women who stepped out of line as religious detractors. But second, the aftermath of the killing hinted at something that has been largely absent in the processes covered in this book: a broad, popular mobilization confronting its adversaries head on. There had been small street demonstrations in Kabul on a few occasions, but nothing remotely close to the scale of what happened on March 24, 2015, when thousands of people marched to protest the killing of Farkhunda. It was as if the demonstrators' realization that their worst fears had become true prompted a determination to take a more direct and open stand against conservative forces. The large demonstration and—before that—the women carrying Farkhunda's coffin at her burial, represented a stark contrast to the more discreet, cautious, and often donor-dependent approaches featuring centrally in the processes discussed in this book.

My purpose in this book has been to explore the effects, limits, and politics of the focus on gender violence in post-2001 Afghanistan. My starting point was the fact that attempts to define and regulate acts of gender violence offer a window into shifting relations of gender, power, and governance. I set out to explore concrete processes and strategies through which definitions of gender violence have been articulated and renegotiated, and sovereign domains and jurisdictions claimed, affirmed, or disputed. The trajectory of the EVAW law has been central to my investigations. Derived in parts from the global VAW discourse, it defined violence against women in terms of violations of their bodily integrity (e.g., rape, forced marriage, and beating) as well as their civil rights (e.g., deprivation of inheritance and denial of access to education, work, and health care). As the EVAW law was reviewed in Parliament, there was a clear tendency toward reinstating some of the authority of fathers and husbands over their daughters and wives. For instance, fathers were exempted for punishment in cases of forced marriage, since it was argued that they were better placed to determine what was in their underage daughter's interest. But there were also attempts to ensure women their part of the deal; for instance, the nonpayment of wives' maintenance was inserted as a form of violence against women. Had the process in Parliament been completed and the

EVAW law ratified there, it is conceivable that the law would have defined gender violence in ways that partly constituted women as independent legal persons whose bodily integrity and sexual autonomy was inviolable and partly as gendered beings who, by virtue of being women, could call upon certain male obligations, such as maintenance. The latter would have amounted to a public regulation of patriarchy, curbing male and family excesses and guaranteeing women their part of the Afghan “patriarchal bargain” (Kandiyoti 1988). Instead, the law was kept as a decree and in the form that it was enacted as such. In other words, the compromises that a broader national settlement would have entailed were avoided through the ability to mobilize executive power, partly by international pressure.

Having explored battles unfolding on Afghanistan’s legal terrain, I turned to two key parts of the institutional infrastructure that had been erected through similar dynamics as the EVAW law: the specialized prosecution units for crimes of violence against women and the women’s shelters. The prosecution units were established through donor funds and initiatives. It was hoped that these units would provide a space where acts of gender violence could be pursued in insulation from the challenges affecting the overall justice system—a kind of ring-fenced site of intervention where reform could be fast-tracked. However, my analysis of the specialized unit in Kabul showed the limits of the kind of top-down change that the coalition behind the EVAW law was trying to bring about. As long as broader relations reinforcing women’s dependence within the family remained intact, the unit was poised to do little more than to serve as a recourse for marital difficulties, as opposed to an institution enforcing the law. Yet even if this was not the kind of purpose the backers of the unit had envisaged, it still provided many women with a curtailed kind of empowerment. The shelters, on the other hand, were able to function as autonomous spaces, out of reach of the restraining power of conservative national actors. This enabled them to avoid the kind of concessions that a stronger national anchoring would have entailed, such as a more rigid screening of residents based on chastity. At the same time, the shelters were dependent on foreign funding and entangled in geopolitical tropes about saving Afghan women. In turn, their residents became reliant on the shelters for their survival, as they often had few prospects of being reintegrated back into broader society.

I started this research by posing the question of whether gender violence was becoming a governance or state matter in Afghanistan. Taking my cue from the literature on expanding state regulation over family and kinship, I wondered what such a shift would mean for gender relations and state power—a shift in which the state assumed a larger responsibility for intervening in acts of gender violence. However, as became evident fairly quickly, I could also have asked if gender violence in Afghanistan was becoming a *global* governance issue. The book has drawn upon insights of the literature on global governmentality and transnational gender activism to demonstrate how this has indeed been the case. The promotion and

implementation of the EVAW law, the specialized prosecution units, and the institution of shelters came about through transnationally constituted assemblages and only to some extent were routed through the Afghan state. These efforts were certainly not driven by the centralizing impulses of an Afghan ruler seeking to expand the power of government by drawing women into the circle of government justice, wresting away the autonomy of their male relatives. In fact, President Karzai's strategy on violence against women was much more opportunistic and appeared primarily informed by his efforts to create and maintain personal alliances. As one activist suggested to me, unlike King Amanullah or the PDPA, "Karzai is not personally committed to women's rights, but he is committed to the international funding that comes with it."<sup>1</sup> Neither were there any signs that the Afghan president attempted to use government courts to achieve tighter state regulation of family and kinship in order to centralize power. As the Sarepul case shows, the government's response to issues such as rape was reactive and entangled in patrimonial politics. Whether by effect or intent, the EVAW law, the shelters, and, to some extent, the special prosecution units instead constructed a globalized zone of protection for Afghan women, dependent on external funds and political pressure.

My argument that the specific shape that formal sanctions of gender relations takes is not preordained by religion, culture, or other fixed societal attributes, but contingent on situated politics, resonates with academic literature on gender in the Middle East and beyond. Research on women and legal protection in the Middle East has documented the importance of the state's local power bases (Kandiyoti 1991; Molyneux 1995; Joseph 2000; Charrad 2001) for how women's rights are enshrined and enforced in government frameworks. This book has added another dimension to this literature by underlining the importance of zooming out beyond national borders when mapping the political constituencies shaping government policies. By pointing to the many and sometimes contradictory ways in which international pressure and funding shaped interventions into gender violence in Afghanistan, I have highlighted how transnational coalitions and political agendas can be as important for outcomes as national constituencies. An important part of this historicized perspective has been to unsettle the national state as the ultimate, self-contained unit of reference and guarantor of claims. As Kim-Puri notes, the theorization of the state in line with recent insights understanding it as a contingent set of institutions and relations (as opposed to a monolithic structure) has largely been absent in feminist sociology (Kim-Puri 2005: 144). Moreover, transnational feminist studies, while attending to the asymmetries and inequalities produced by the flows of global capital and geopolitics, have not explored in detail how the state has been reconfigured as a consequence of such flows.

The book has set up an analytical frame that sees state institutions as immersed in and partly expressive of transnational processes. It has done this by drawing upon the work of Sassen and others, demonstrating how the very notion of the

Afghan state, as a nationally contained, unitary, sovereign body makes little sense in the context of interventions into gender violence in Afghanistan. I have shown, for instance, how in the case of the EAW law and in the push to end impunity for gender violence, certain state capabilities were reoriented toward more global projects (Sassen 2008). National institutions—courts, prosecutors, and the legislative bodies—became part of a globalized sovereign regime, in which Afghan women’s security was made a global concern and ultimately guaranteed by external funds and pressure. In other words, the Afghan state was denationalized, in the sense of being reassembled as a vehicle for the operation of global sovereign claims.

However, if there was a global EAW law assemblage working through national institutions, it should also be said that this assemblage was in no sense a totalizing, unidirectional force. National institutions did not simply seamlessly facilitate a global order. Rather, global templates intersected with local dynamics in ways that produced outcomes distinct to Afghanistan. The processes traced in chapter 2 show that rather than being two contradictory forces, personalized politics and external reform attempts often reinforced each other in particular ways. Executive power was strengthened as Western diplomats, looking for swift results, preferred to deal with the cabinet and the president rather than the unwieldy and capricious Parliament. But this strategy also enabled President Karzai to strengthen his personal power base through the granting of favors in an exchange of offerings and loyalty. He gifted the EAW law to two of his constituencies—women activists and Western supporters. At the same time, he also bestowed on other of his constituencies a gift that, in some ways, cancelled out the EAW law—the Shia law. Similarly, the emphasis placed on output and fundraising by the “NGO-ization” of women’s activism also fed into personalized and patron-client politics, reflecting the link between development brokerage and patron-client systems pointed out by Olivier de Sardan (2005: 174). Overall, the force of the EAW law assemblage was paradoxically both enabled and constrained by its dependence on the diplomatic and financial leverage of NATO countries. The short plenary debate about the law in Parliament in May 2013 served to underline the partial nature of its reach and its ambiguous status. And by 2015, it seemed possible that the entire law, so central to both local and donor-driven gender activism for almost a decade, could be turned into a historical footnote by the creation of comprehensive new penal code.

Nor was the EAW law assemblage the only transnationally constituted sovereign claim in the field of gender violence. There was a significant difference between the more technocratic and international coalition that formed around the EAW law and the more directly geopolitical agendas of NATO military victory being mobilized around the shelters. If, as Lisa Hajjar and others argue, struggles over women’s rights are also struggles over authority, and if increased regulation of gender violence is also about expanding power, this book underlines the need to be open-minded about exactly what forms of authority and power are being

expanded. We cannot meaningfully limit ourselves to predetermined templates (such as the state or global governance). Instead, we must map and dissect the actual constellations (or assemblages) that define and adjudicate gender violence in practice. The overall picture that emerges from subjecting the landscape of gender and violence in post-2001 Afghanistan to such a survey is one of fragmentation and partial-ness. And this is to say nothing of the shrinking control exercised over territory within Afghanistan's borders by either government officials or the international military—even within the contracting space that they operated in, there was no singular policy, institution, or sovereign power. The political and legal orders enforcing claims and counterclaims, the moral universes that gender relations were inserted into, and the bureaucratic machineries through which problems were delineated and remedied were multiple and evolving, appearing in historically specific configurations. Afghanistan in the first two decades of the new millennium revealed a thin but not inconsequential constellation of women's activists and progressive justice officials and diplomats, boosted by international funding and alliances. Sometimes entangled in orientalist tropes of saving Afghan women, its reach was compromised by its top-down mode of operation, but also by the dynamics of patronage politics and the war that was engulfing most of the country. The warring parties also launched their own attempts at rule through justice—the Taliban insurgents with their ostensibly pure sharia and (as I have discussed elsewhere in more detail) the foreign military with their experiments in tribal and traditional governance (Wimpelmann 2013). I problematized the notions of total, determinate logics further by showing how discourses of honor can function as a vocabulary of demands and assertions in struggles over access to state power. The cases discussed in chapter 5 and 6 demonstrated that gender ideologies where women were subsumed under family sovereignty operated across the social field and were not in any sense reducible to non-state, “tribal” structures or worlds.

From the perspective of feminist politics, the fragmentation characterizing the field of gender violence appeared both as an opportunity and a problem. It enabled forms of intervention that were somewhat autonomous from the conservative gender ideologies espoused by important power holders. But at the same time, these interventions were dependent on problematic, sometimes overtly imperial alliances. Moreover, in practice, they were constantly compromised by legal and social practices that castigated female autonomy, sexual and otherwise. The individual cases analyzed in part 3 of the book illustrated that what was often at stake in the contestations regarding the definitions of, interventions into, and protective measures against violence against women was the degree to which kin—in particular, male relatives and husbands—could claim legitimate interest in and authority over female sexuality. Runaway girls, safe houses for women, and government-mandated punishments for forced marriage or honor killings all potentially challenged or renegotiated notions and assertions that subordinated women to their

families. Yet the totality of legal practices and the social relations underpinning them mostly went in the other direction. As chapter 4 showed, the legal apparatus operated with an extremely broad definition of female moral transgression. Not only was *zina*—sexual intercourse outside of or prior to marriage—a criminal act, but also, women’s very presence outside of government or family surveillance was made into an offense, suggesting that what was at stake was the prospect of female autonomy per se. Similarly, the problematization of women’s existence outside of the family unit had ramifications for the degree to which justice institutions were able (or inclined) to punish gender violence. Because women’s prospects for survival outside of family settings were so limited, both justice officials and women themselves often preferred reconciliation with their abusers or their families rather than criminal sanctions. To some, this was an unproblematic and culturally appropriate solution—MOWA, for instance, in its 2014 report on the implementation of the EAW law, had stated, “Mediation . . . has emerged as the most preferred and commonly used method of resolution of cases of violence against women because it respects the sanctity of ‘family’ as a unit and is in consonance with cultural traditions” (MOWA 2014: 12).

However, this conservative and ahistorical statement was, in fact, a symptom that the post-2001 focus on gender violence had left much of the structural relations that underpinned women’s vulnerability to family violence unquestioned and intact. Kapur, analyzing the Indian women’s movement, suggests that there is an inherent tension between attempts to delineate an indigenous, “culturally appropriate” feminism and pursuing equality between the sexes. She is worth quoting at some length.

[Feminism in India] has been charged with being a product of “decadent Western capitalism” . . . based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World. Therefore, feminists have adamantly denied allegations of being Western and have sought to establish a distinctively Indian feminism, based on the notion of an authentic Indian woman, one who is routinely a victim of oppression and violence. Any discussion of female choice, especially in sexual matters, has been muted. Sexual pleasure per se has been regarded by many within the women’s movement as a foreign contaminant and something that distinguishes Indian women and culture from the “West.” Thus the women’s movement in India has remained simultaneously tied to a revolutionary and a nonrevolutionary sensibility. It continues to invest in an essentialist and conservative notion of Indian culture and womanhood while pursuing the revolutionary enterprise of achieving equality between men and women. This tension continues to inform feminists’ engagements with the law, which have focused on securing formal equal rights with men without disrupting the dominant cultural, familial and sexual norms that define Indian womanhood. (Kapur 2012: 336)

While Kapur is far from the first scholar to point to the complicated relationship between postcolonial feminism and nationalism (Chatterjee 1993; Yuval

Davis 1997; Parker et al. 1992), she goes on to argue that the focus on the “authentic women” has enabled an alliance between third-world feminism and a certain strand of Western feminism. For this alliance, a joint focus on violence against women has been a natural common ground. This focus disrupts neither gender nor global hierarchies, instead it reinforces at all levels the notion of the women of the Global South affected by gender violence as a “victim-subject” in need of protectionist intervention. In post-2001 Afghanistan, the dynamics underpinning this protectionist logic were unusually pronounced. There was constant slippage between women’s general ability to live, move, and support themselves outside of family settings and their morality and chastity. In turn, women’s chastity—or mere non-deference—was routinely translated into questions of religious adherence, intertwined with notions of national resistance to Western impositions. Thus, all kinds of female defiance—escaping the family home, living in a shelter, setting up an independent household, attempting to marry a man of one’s choice, arguing for women’s civil rights, questioning male religious authority—could be constructed as defiance against Islam. This would cause a woman to enter a perilous terrain where charges of ultimate betrayal—being a nonbeliever—could be easily invoked.

Of course, religion, as elsewhere, did not appear in a “pure” form, and so there were competing ways of envisioning women’s positions, interwoven with ideologies of conservative nationalism (in the articulation of the jihadis) or modernist enlightenment (in the articulation of Afghan feminists and liberal religious scholars). However, as witnessed, for instance, in the parliamentary debate over the EAW law, the jihadi version tended to prevail. This was based on a number of contingent factors, among which were the former mujahedin’s powers of intimidation, their ability to mobilize around the need for national and religious assertion in the midst of a political order underwritten by Western infidels, and their appeal to patriarchal sentiments. The broader backdrop was a constant tension between three key aspects of the post-2001 order: foreign military operations, the rehabilitation of the mujahedin, and external attempts to promote Afghan women’s rights. In a setting where many power holders evidently owed much of their current positions to Western funds and armed support, taking a conservative position on women’s rights became a valuable way of demonstrating one’s nationalist and Islamic credentials.

In this landscape, there were few attempts to directly confront the gender ideologies that placed an absolute premium on female propriety. Discussions about forced marriage or the shelters emphasized women’s right to choose their own husbands and to be free of family violence, but they did not attempt to dethrone the imperative of female chastity. Thus, the validity of a distinguishing line between “good” and “bad” women, between those deserving protection and those beyond the pale of respectability, was not fundamentally disrupted. Instead, the line was merely pushed back and forth. Perhaps, for Afghan women, who only a decade

earlier had been banned from the public domain altogether, and for whom public presence was still extremely tenuous, this was far too risky a topic. Most already felt the need to carefully maintain a virtuous public persona. To enter into a debate that would put them in solidarity with non-chaste women would almost certainly taint them as “bad women” or outcasts. Neither did international actors challenge the distinction *per se*. Although U.N. staff and others were supportive of the efforts to distinguish *zina* from running away and from rape, they did not challenge the criminalization of *zina*, which could have been framed as interfering in religious issues. All things considered, the interest, whether genuine or strategic, that many Western governments held in promoting women’s rights in Afghanistan constantly clashed with other objectives, such as stability and force protection and a general wish not to add to a local image of occupiers unduly interfering in religious and social life. Moreover, the dominant aid modality in Afghanistan—project delivery through private contractors and NGOs—tended to favor measurable outputs and individual achievements over broader and more political mobilization.

It was no wonder then that Western support to Afghan women’s rights mainly took the form of narrow, targeted interventions rather than investment in more transformative change, reinforcing the overall “protect and rescue” approach that characterized efforts against gender violence in the decade and half following the 2001 invasion. The shelters were, in many ways, a prime example of this narrow approach. They were able to evade local binaries between chaste and unchaste women by partly exiting national regulatory mechanisms. But this reinforced their dependence on external backers, and shelter residents themselves were often unable to move out of the shelters, because of the strong social sanctions against women living on their own. In this sense, they were also left in a state of dependence—on the continued support of the shelters.

I would suggest that in many ways, Afghan women and feminists were facing the choice of two models of protection. Protection, as a number of feminist writers have pointed out is a hierarchical, often gendered concept, entailing a bargain of material and physical protection against loyalty, propriety, and subordination (Kandiyoti 1988; Kapur 2002; Young 2003; Miller 2004). Familial, national, and transnational bargains of protection in return for “propriety” should be placed in the same analytical frame; all entail demands for loyalty, dependence, and submission. The book has shown how protection, whether extended to Afghan women by male guardians, by government courts, or by the shelters, routinely came with demands to conform to certain normative ideals. Exactly what these ideals comprised was somewhat contentious—women could be deemed unworthy of protection (or deserving of violent punishment) for defying husbands’ authority, for unauthorized public forays, or for being in the company of unrelated men, although sexual indiscretions were a fairly agreed-upon disqualifier. In other words, and as many Afghan feminists complained, women were asked to renounce their autonomy,

sexually and otherwise, in return for protection. But there was also a price to be paid for the protection afforded by the laws and institutions that, in part, were realized through transnational actors. The price for the EVAW law was to bypass the parliamentary process and thus the opportunity for the politics of women's rights to be anchored in broader local constituencies. Instead, the law was quietly promoted through informal Kabul-based networks, reinforcing a political mode bearing more resemblance to court politics than any kind of broad-based women's movement. This made gains dependent on good relations with the presidential palace, which, in turn, differentiated between women politically affiliated with the executive and those closer to the opposition. And a tenuous local anchoring was not the only price to pay for transnationally derived protection. The NGOs running the shelters, and the transnational alliances they were part of, often mobilized orientalist tropes of saving Afghan women in a way that rendered them dependent on salvation by NATO. In this sense, renegotiating one hierarchy often meant getting entangled in another. The shelters, while out of familial and government supervision, became beholden to Western good will—and even military force.

Yet to what extent would it be realistic to expect Afghan women to negotiate a position independent from all of these sets of relations? One must be alert to the danger that the notion of “pure” or autonomous women's movements becomes an ideal that holds practical feminist gains hostage (Roy 2011). Understanding the definitions of and jurisdiction over gender violence as forged out of historicized struggles also brings into view the fact that possibilities mostly come attached with some accommodations and trade-offs. For instance, the alternative to keeping the EVAW law as a presidential decree was a modified version in Parliament—where it looked fated to become subject to problematic amendments, or where it could even have been rejected altogether. To many of the supporters of the EVAW law, the opportunity to have, for the first time in history, a law that directly addressed abuses against Afghan women was too important to let pass, even if the way it was obtained was far from perfect. Many of them saw no prospects or time to engage in broader mobilization and coalition building. Although the victory of getting the EVAW law decreed seemed to bring with it some kind of external dependence, as many Afghan feminist pointed out, the price of gaining the “protection” of one's family or husband could also be very high. And so could submitting to the demands of government and their conservative constituencies, as the attempts to establish a screening regime of the shelters testified to.

Perhaps the uncomfortable truth is that we must abandon the ideal of total autonomy; all guarantees have to be negotiated with someone. Afghanistan during the first decade and a half after the 2001 invasion is a particular stark reminder of this. Carefully laying out the nature and background of such compromises, which is what this book has attempted to do, is therefore not the same as condemning those who make them. It must also be kept in mind that the terms of these kind

of bargains are never set in stone. It is too early to say what will be the long-term legacy of the struggles over gender violence in Afghanistan during the last fifteen years. Maybe, as many women rights advocates hope, the infrastructure erected with international support will gradually consolidate and expand, slowly washing away the significance of the compromises and external dependence that brought it into being.