Afghan Refugee Women and Their Struggle for Survival

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INTRODUCTION

On a dusty tent-filled plain a mile and a half from the Afghan border, a group of black-clad women, their faces marked with weariness yet full of dignity, communicate through sign language their plight of having been raped and of having lost as many as ten or twelve members of their families at the hands of the Soviet occupiers of their country. One of the women, Sultana, related how she herself had escaped only by pretending she was dead in the apparent rush of the Soviet soldiers to get on to the next village.

These women poignantly conveyed to me in this scene the key role women play in this courageous struggle against the communist regime in Afghanistan now propped up physically with the presence of 120,000 Soviet troops. The women’s appearance revealed the dark reality of the refugee situation more vividly than did the scene of the better dressed crowd of men patiently seated around the grass lean-to where I conversed with the tribal leaders.

Refugee women must cope with the trauma of enforced idleness and isolation brought about by being separated from their agricultural domestic work and crowded into refugee camps or among the host population. An added burden is making do with the meager rations received from the relief organizations, which they award first to their men, followed
by their children, and only finally to themselves.

Tradition plays an important role in the Afghan refugee women's contribution to the resistance effort against the Soviet-backed Afghan regime. Women's separateness and invisibility from the public world outside the home characterize Afghan traditional society, a society engaged in a struggle against the Soviet-controlled, purportedly modernist regimes of Babrak Karmal and now Najibullah. This freedom struggle is being waged within and supported from centers just beyond the Afghan borders, with Peshawar and the NorthWest Frontier Province (NWFP) in Pakistan serving as a major center for more than three million Afghan refugees. The Afghan freedom movement is characterized by a number of different groups formed on the basis of family, tribe, or religious (Islamic) ties typical of a traditional society. The harsh conditions of refugee living and the help provided by outside or host country agencies to ameliorate these conditions with such amenities as clinics nevertheless have brought about certain social changes in the lives of the women.

Scholars of Afghan affairs have paid little attention to the role women play in the freedom struggle, despite the fact that women and children constitute three-quarters of the refugee population, and the Mujahideen (holy warrior) leaders recognize women's importance to the jihad (or holy war) with their exhortations to preserve women's honor through the continued practice of seclusion. The reinforcement of this tradition, most Westerners have failed to notice, serves to strengthen the men's will to resist. Why have women received so little attention? Is it another case of "out of sight, out of mind"? Merely because women are out of sight does not excuse scholars and others concerned about the fate of the Afghan people from facing the fact that the liberation struggle cannot be won without the support of the women. How they are supporting this struggle, "behind kala walls," must be addressed as well as how the struggle is impacting upon the women.

The functional separateness of the Afghan women's world and the way it performs for the strength of the Mujahideen or freedom fighters' struggle are two issues crucial to this study. Has this separateness assumed new meaning in the special circumstances of the refugee and resistance presence in Pakistan? Is it a condition more stringently imposed by
the men in these changed conditions? And how do the women cope with their separateness and added burden of responsibility for the survival of their family? In curious, unsuspected ways, the very separateness of women can and perhaps does meet the physical and psychological needs of the Afghan freedom movement, through the maintenance of informal networks among women, strengthened by the new access to meeting places such as clinics. Other research has found that such separateness "provides women with the opportunity to develop leadership skills and to accumulate resources for leverage and coalition building with other groups" (Staudt 1980, 58). To what extent does this hold true, if at all, for Afghan women refugees and their relationship to the freedom movement?

The basic characteristics of Afghan culture governing the women's role must be outlined first. Then a picture will be presented of the current conditions of Afghan refugee life in Pakistan, primarily in the NorthWest Frontier Province's capital of Peshawar, which I was able to visit. Finally, this study will explore the interaction of tradition and environment of refugee conditions upon the contributions of a publicly neglected majority of the Afghan refugee population, and the refugees' struggle to regain control of their homeland. Data is from a personal visit in May 1984 to Peshawar as well as the scant secondary sources on women's roles in Afghanistan.

PUSHTANA (THE HONORABLE AFGHAN WOMAN)

The code of Afghan behavior is permeated by the Pushtunwali or code of the Pushtuns, the major ethnic group in Afghanistan, comprising over 50 percent of the population, and 7 percent of the population in Pakistan. The code possesses three core elements: hospitality, refuge, and revenge. Other key values are equality, respect, pride, bravery, purdah (seclusion of women), pursuit of romantic encounters, worship of God, and devoted love for a friend. Focus here is on the traditional values more directly affecting women which they themselves manifest. Purdah is a key element in protection of the family's pride and honor (Knabe 1977). This seclusion from the world outside the family walls is customarily justified by invoking Quranic prescription and by the notion that women are basically
licentious and tempt men. Therefore, women must be protected from cuckholding their husbands or fiances. This protective role underscores a means of male control over women. (1)

Women are regarded as men's property. As noted by Boesen, men exercise control over women in two crucial ways: their control of marriage and of property, as illustrated by the institution of bride-price, the Pushtun prohibition of divorce (despite the Quranic allowances, primarily to the men), and the taboo of land ownership for women (again contrary to Islamic law and the actual practice in many other Muslim countries). Women normally are viewed as subordinates dependent on their husbands, as further exemplified by women never asking the men their whereabouts or expecting marital fidelity. The women also are expected to give all the meat, choicest food, and the best clothing to their husbands, as well as their personal wealth if so demanded. (2)

Since the woman's standing is maintained primarily through bearing sons to continue the family, she of course must marry, for only through marriage can one's basic needs be legitimately fulfilled. A certain stoicism characterizes the women's expectations of marriage. The choice of husband most often is made by her family with its own concerns of lineage maintenance or gain and property. The best she can hope for is a handsome and kind cousin or close relative she has known and with whom she has grown up. The worst is an old man from another village whom she has never seen and who is unkind. In either case he is obliged to provide for her materially and, it is to be hoped, father her children who will in turn endow her with status in her new home.

If the husband treats her unbearably she does have recourse to breaking out and returning to her own family or seeking nanawaita (refuge) with another family. Such an action would bring dishonor to her husband's family as well as to her own, the very threat of which therefore serves to some extent as a brake on the husband's behavior. This weapon is not used often, however, as her natal family has given up rights to her through the customary bride-price at the time of marriage. Moreover, since she is married to one of equal standing or higher, her family would not have much leverage and would cause an undesired conflict
between the two families (Boesen 1983).

The prohibition against divorce has given the women a sense of security to be balanced against the disagreeable situation of marriage to a man who mistreats her or takes on a second wife. This bittersweet "security" perhaps has contributed to the wife's resilience and cultivation of her role as wife-mother par excellence and mistress of the kor, or house. When her daughters are very young she transmits to them these skills of preparing bread and food, washing clothes, cleaning the house, and caring for the animals and vegetable garden within the compound, or kala.

In view of her world as defined by the kala walls, the woman must learn to cope with the demands generated by the social relations among the household women: the mother, sisters, mother-in-law, and sisters-in-law. The physical closeness of the household and the culture of purdah, throwing the women together for long periods of time, has in general made for an atmosphere of peacefulness and cooperation. However, this closeness has the potential of creating tension among women, as they are all dependent on men for survival and contact with the outside world. Women must develop their own resources of strength of personality and sons' loyalty if they are to improve their situation. (3)

Another means of dealing with her rivals and erring husband is the practice of magic (djardu). A woman will place amulets with verses from the Qur'an and key names in strategic places such as her husband's tea or in places frequented by her female rival in order to cast spells to exact the desired appropriate behavior (Boesen 1983).

The goder (watering place or proverbial meeting place) is another route of escape for women, as are the romantic fantasies acted out in poetry (landays) in which the goder figures prominently. It is at the goder that women may hope to meet other women, and other men. The institution of the goder has changed its form in the refugee environment in Pakistan as medical clinics have to some degree supplanted the watering place as a meeting ground for women.

In Afghanistan, the very suspicion of a woman's search or pursuit of extramarital affairs is done at great personal risk. Traditionally, the husband or fiance is bound to kill her and her alleged lover. Yet, she may resort to such a dangerous means to escape if she sees this as her only hope.
for an improvement in her life. More likely, however, will be her acceptance of the kor (house), and purdah, relieved by periodic visits to the goder.

Should the woman engage, however, in a flirtation or affair at the symbolic goder, she can at least count on the support of her fellow female household members. Women's solidarity against the men is broken only by household lines. Conflicts between the women of the two households are dealt with only by the women, as the men are not brought into the disputes at all.

As beings set apart and excluded from the public, women are united in their hostility toward men as "bad, ugly, and cruel." The women find comfort among themselves during the gatherings over domestic chores performed together or for pure entertainment. In any case, the men have no expressed interest in women's affairs, in keeping with their assumption of superiority. On the other hand, women have no compunction about openly criticizing their husbands. Moreover, since women do not hold land in Afghanistan they are not subject to the rivalry that develops among men. Although competition exists among women over possessions, the hostility is not as severe as it is among men, perhaps because women are thrown together more often.

The women's sense of harmony and community of feeling also can be attributed to the relatively low level of their expectations, in contrast to their men's higher and often unrealistic ones of world conquest. Women have the defined boundaries of the house over which they can exercise control, but men realistically cannot hope to rule the world. Moreover, women have the luxury generally of remaining in private and being able to express themselves openly without fear of public reaction and loss of face. The women, therefore, have been much more accepting of their fate (Lindholm 1982).

The male Pushtun "must present to the world the image of the hawk, the bird of prey. What he must conceal is the dove, the sensitive victim" (Lindhom 1982, 189). The values of equality and pride develop survival traits of struggle, cruelty, and at times betrayal. Pride and the hostility toward the opposite sex to compel the Pushtun to conform to the outward norms all the time, and any deviation from the social norms is ridiculed by peers. Therefore, custom can lead men to act against their inner feelings—as, for
example, a family will keep their daughters from attending school for "fear of what the neighbors would think."

Whereas the Afghan men's world may be conflict-ridden in the quest for individual independence and honor, the Afghan women's world is characteristically more cooperative, born out of the recognition of their isolated common status as bearers of the family's honor, food, and children. How have these worlds changed in the context of the flight from a foreign force bent on changing the basic cultural values of the Afghan to an environment undergoing its own processes of change, though within the familiar cultural framework of Islam? How different are the women's lives in the refugee conditions in Pakistan? How are these differences affecting their traditional role as silent but essential preservers of Afghan men's and family's honor, and indeed the honor of the Afghan people? An examination of the refugee conditions in Pakistan in the area of greatest concentration, the NorthWest Frontier Province, is the focus of this study. I will not deal with the internal refugees, or with the refugees in Iran.

NANAWATIA IN PAKISTAN

In April 1978 the "Red" Prince turned President, Muhammad Daoud, was overthrown by his erstwhile, now impatient, supporters, the communists comprising two factions: the Parchamis and the Khalqis. The successor regime was led by Nur Muhammad Taraki, a Khalqi, and his colleagues, Hafizullah Amin, a fellow Khalqi, and Babrak Karmal, a Parchami.

The Taraki regime soon embarked on a program to modernize the country rapidly, first by putting through a land reform law, as David Edwards indicates in Chapter I, and then by limiting the bride-price practices and raising the minimum marriage age. Both of these so-called reforms struck at the heart of the key traditional patron-client relationships in the rural areas. The Taraki regime also thought, erroneously, that it could win support from the "oppressed" tenants by abolishing rural indebtedness to the rich landowners. Taraki, despite his nomadic origins, failed to understand rural Afghan society and its bonds of mutual dependence and resistance to outside intervention (Bradsher 1985).
The bride-price limitation and the minimum marriage age laws as well as the promotion of girls' education, whether or not genuinely intended to promote the status of women, were resisted equally by most Afghans. Rural economic relations were based to some degree on bride-price payments, and furthermore these payments were regarded as women's social security. Whether the Khalqis were genuinely interested in what they considered to be reform or whether their purpose was to break up rural power relationships can be subject to debate, but these self-appointed reformers in retrospect clearly needed to understand the reason these seemingly archaic customs existed and the full range of social purposes they served. It was serious enough that the new Marxist regime failed to recognize the vital social function performed by the much maligned concept of bride-price. Worse yet, this regime and the subsequent Marxist regimes of Hafizullah Amin, Babrak Karmal and presumably Najibullah have coopted the women's liberation issue.

Despite the strong and often blunt resistance to these new laws by rich and poor alike, these laws were forcibly implemented. The regime's determination to move ahead with its reforms contributed to the birth of the Afghan resistance movement, the activation of the traditional principle of refuge or nanawatia in neighboring and culturally affiliated lands, and the re-emphasis of purdah in exile.

Most members of the small, urban, non-Marxist elite who might have supported genuine social reform have fled to distant countries. The vacuum has been filled by the predominantly rural and traditionally oriented mullahs who have reinvoked their customs in a show of resistance solidarity. By the end of 1978, the first year of the communist regime, 25,000 had fled across the border to Pakistan. In 1984, the year I visited the NWFP, the Afghan refugee population numbered worldwide about five million, with more than three million registered in Pakistan, mostly in the NorthWest Frontier Province (Bradsher 1985).(4)

The growth of the refugee population is, of course, a product of the Afghan communist regime's difficulty in gaining popular acceptance and of conflicts within the leadership which contributed to the rise in brutality by the regime and the increased and direct Soviet involvement in
the communist rule of Afghanistan. This Soviet rule culminated in the December 27, 1979 armed invasion of the country in an attempt to save "face" and their investment pursuant to the Brezhnev Doctrine.

After Hafizullah maneuvered himself into, and forced Taraki out of, power in the first year of communist domination, he proved to be even more brutal in the exercise of this power. His ruthless response to the growing opposition to communist rule in the rural areas served only to harden the Afghan resistance and to embarrass the Soviet sponsors. This resort to armed intervention in December, 1979 and the forcible replacement of Amin with the Soviet-preferred Babrak Karmal were seen as more accommodating to both themselves and the Afghan people. The resistance to communist rule now turned to resistance to the Soviet armed presence in Afghanistan and has continued unabated, with far-reaching consequences for Afghan women.

With the Soviet invasion and the paradoxical Soviet-demanded release of thousands of prisoners held by the now deposed Amin regime, the refugee population in Pakistan had increased to 300,000. Each month 25,000 had been leaving their homes in Afghanistan to seek refuge, primarily in Pakistan (U.S. Committee on Refugees 1983).(5)

Most of the refugees belong to the Pushtun tribes who comprise the majority in Afghanistan and a considerable minority in Pakistan.(6) Other groups represented in the refugee population are the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkomans, Badakshansis, Hazaras, and Nuristanis. Regionally, the refugees have come for the most part from the central and western sections of Afghanistan. Eighty percent of the refugees have flocked to the NWFP (International Labour Office 1983).

Debate exists over the exact number of refugees in Pakistan as some contend the numbers are underestimated, though others contend the reverse (U.S. Committee on Refugees 1983). Certainly some refugees are living with their kin who have resided on the Pakistan border for some years—testimony to the political rather than physical or natural border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This border, the Durand Line established in 1893, ignored the dominant presence of the ethnic group, the Pushtuns, who comprise 51 percent of the Afghan population and who considered the border area their home long before the Great
Powers sought spheres of influence and favorable boundary definition in the late nineteenth century (L. Dupree 1980a). Since then Pakistani-Afghan relations have been marked periodically by disputes over the "Pushtunistan" issue. In the recent attempts by the Karmal and Najibullah regimes to secure popular Afghan support, the issue may well be used again to divide the Pushtuns and reduce their involvement in the resistance.

The great majority of the refugees are women, children, and elderly males who cannot participate in guerrilla operations inside Afghanistan. A third of the refugees are women and 48 percent are children. Almost three-quarters of the refugee households are headed by women (Overseas Education Fund 1984). The average number of persons per family as registered with the authorities is seven (York 1980). In terms of occupation and geography, the majority of the refugee population has come from the agricultural areas and are primarily agriculturalists (U.S. Committee on Refugees 1983).

The Pakistan government has assumed responsibility by providing the Afghans a refuge for humanitarian and political reasons. Understandably, they wish to control the migrant situation in view of the common ethnic population shared by both Pakistan and Afghanistan—the Pushtuns, the influx strains they are bringing on the local society and resources; and the security considerations vis-a-vis the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

The Pakistan Government has increasingly had to appeal to the international organizations that have responded chiefly through the medium of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As aid from abroad has increased, the Pakistani government has reduced its own contributions of monthly stipends to refugees. Presently the Pakistani government provides a cash supplement of 50 rupees (PRs. 14.05 = $1.00, 1984 average) per refugee per month to a limit of 500 rupees per family, and it transports food and supplies from Karachi to the hinterland. To reduce the pressure on the local Pakistani population, the government has stipulated that the refugees must remain in the refugee villages to qualify for monthly stipends (Azhar 1984). The particular effect of these refugee policies on women's development merits further study.

The refugees are housed in approximately 330 villages,
of them in the NWFP. While each is designed to
house 5,000, several villages comprise as many as 12,000. In
Peshawar, the village populations average around 14,000.
Gees in that province have concentrated in the districts
of Chishin, Chazai, and Quetta and in the NWFP in Peshawar,
North Waziristan, Quetta, Mardan, Bannu, North Waziristan, and
Kotabod (International Labour Office 1983).
The middle class urban Afghans about which Grant Farr
writes elsewhere in this volume are not to be found in the
provinces. Rather, members of those classes who came as
gees live among Pakistanis, usually in Peshawar or
Kotabod, if they have not moved on to Europe, the United
States, or elsewhere.

Settlements are basically of two kinds: the refugee tent
ges (RTVs) and the older, more stable structures of mud
brick. The second type is more likely to indicate the
military culture of the refugees and their earlier arrival in
Peshawar, while the tent villages represent the nomadic
way of life of some of the refugees with poorer economic
resources. The mud-brick housing units are characterized by the
single-walled family compounds which provide the security
shelter for the families, particularly for their women whom
are determined to protect from the outside world. Two
three rooms usually surround the open-walled space,
depending on the size of the family and their economic
resources (International Labour Office 1983). One room
customarily is used for receiving guests and for family living
activities; it is customarily furnished and decorated with the
family's handiwork of embroidered hangings and coverings.
The open space or courtyard is used for vegetable garden-
planting, the livestock the family managed to bring with
them from Afghanistan, water and fuel storage, or a well.

WAWATIA LIFE FOR WOMEN

Within these walls, once the families have been able to
structure their lives, the women lead their lives, performing the
domestic tasks of baking bread, cleaning, tending the
livestock, and, when conditions permit, practicing their skills
and crafts.

The division of labor in the family is clearly drawn on
basis of age and sex, whereby the older women are
responsible for maintaining the stoves and cooking. Depending on the number of women in the household, the various other tasks are allocated to the daughters and daughters-in-law. Fetching water can be time-consuming. Since it involves leaving the house the older women may perform this function, provided the family (particularly the men if there are any present) feels it is in a "safe" environment (York 1980). Otherwise, little girls of five or six are delegated to go to the river or water source to wash the dishes and collect the water (Christensen 1984). The younger women will be left at home to do the handiwork as their eyesight may be better.

Purdah, the institution of female seclusion, has been reinforced in some cases and relaxed in others. Because of the crowded conditions in the tented villages and the frequent absence of the men who are seeking work or are working, fighting, or dead, the traditional notions of modesty have been mitigated somewhat as the women have to perform some of the tasks originally done by men, such as the marketing and dealing with bureaucratic institutions. Again the older women more likely assume these tasks. Differences in ethnic background, migratory practices, and occupation account for the variations in the practice of purdah. For example, some of the non-Pushtun women engage in itinerant trading of cloth and the very poor women without male support must earn their own living, primarily as tailors for other women (International Labour Office 1983).

Purdah, it should be noted, is supported not only by men for their own religiously attributed reasons of social control but also by women who view it as a convenient excuse for not performing tiresome tasks. Some women also cling to purdah as a way to preserve their privacy in a now more alien world. As Christiansen aptly notes, purdah provides the opportunity for preserving one's own identity and a certain stability in the face of external pressures (1984). Westerners who have been quick to impose their own ethnocentric perceptions should note the value of this seemingly anachronistic custom for a people under siege whose very survival is at stake.

Three basic groups of refugee women can be identified in the NWFP. One group is found in the Refugee Tent Villages (RTVs). These refugees have not obtained resources
nding a job and housing, enabling them to move ing the Pakistanis. The women and their remaining male (brothers, sons, cousins, uncles, fathers) are elled to live in these villages in order to qualify for sions awarded by the UNHCR through the Pakisti y responsible for refugee affairs.

The second group of women are those who have just ed from Afghanistan, and the bureaucratic processes for ration as refugees have not been completed. I visited a camp, established as a result of the Spring, 1984 0ffensive. Comprising 5,000 families, this tented is situated 1.5 miles from the Afghan border, 40 miles west of Peshawar in the Mohmand Agency. I met with of the women, most of whom were widows who had the greater part of their families from Soviet bombs nail.

Basic villager concerns were for survival. Between eight ten individuals occupied a tent; approximately a quarter he families at that time had no tent covering—a dis ng fact. The tent village survived on the gifts of w tribal members who had arrived earlier. A water t, but no relief agency food, arrived perhaps once a the explanation for this gap was that the paperwork orizing food allotments took up to three months to plete.(7)

In this camp it was evident that the tribal community it was very much alive and held in control by the male rs. The women were quartered in a section of the camp appropriate distance from the center with an improvised -to or mehmakhana made of saplings, which must have brought some distance to that barren, windswept plain. While the distance between the women’s quarters and the quarters established a modicum of traditional separate, the women did not shy away from gathering to relate their plight to me, a female stranger, accompanied by an han male, a member of our group. They were still lly shaken from their ordeal of having lost many mem- of their family and in some instances having been ally assaulted by their Soviet attackers.

In contrast to this group, the third group of women gees comprises those who have managed to arrive with ient financial resources or who earn enough income to in the city among the Pakistanis so that they are not
dependent on handouts from the host government.

The three groups of women refugees necessarily differ somewhat in their adjustment to and role in refugee life and in their support of the freedom fighting effort.

For the first two groups, basic issues of survival inter-mesh with support for the Mujahideen. To begin with, food and nutrition affect the long-term survival of the Afghan people. But food distribution reflects the secondary status of women and children and the role women’s honor plays: women do not go to the marketplace on their own to obtain their rations if there is a male relative in the extended family. As a result, women heading households are not as likely to receive their fair share from the men. Indeed, this is evidenced by incidence of anemia among the adult female population (Hunte 1986).

Moreover, the provided foodstuffs are often unfamiliar and there is an inadequate supply of wood for cooking (Overseas Education Fund 1984).(8) The responsibility for distributing the food is given to the representatives of the refugee villages who are often religious leaders or mullahs who in turn distribute the food to male heads of households. Quite frequently food given to the refugees is diverted to the local markets, apparently as a means for generating income to support the Mujahideen’s return to Afghanistan. The sacrificers are, of course, the women and children (Report on Refugee Aid 1981).

On the other hand, some tribal leaders may well have become sensitized to the women’s needs. At least in the camp I visited, the male tribal leaders were respectful enough of the concerns expressed about the women to verify that the women had been given the financial donations as we requested.

In general, however, even when the food is delivered, the custom of serving the men and guests first means that women eat whatever remains. Nevertheless, availability of some food is evident, with bread being the staple. In one study it was observed that women of the household consumed about four loaves of bread in contrast to the men’s six or more. According to reports, men usually saw to it, however, that an adequate supply of the food was left for the women and girls (Christensen 1984).

Health is also a problem for the refugees. Although the women are in the habit of maintaining themselves and their
mes with particular attention to cleanliness, and continue do so even under the difficult refugee conditions, prob-
ns of adequate sanitation remain. In some cases, crowded conditions and the improvisations of the dwellings have resulted in inadequate latrine facilities. Communal latrines have been built in some camps, but the drainage could be much improved. This lack of sanitation has been cited as a major cause of gastro-intestinal diseases prevalent among refugees (N. Dupree n.d.)(9).

Although the refugees need good medical care, a shortage of medical care in the camps is caused by the reluctance of Pakistani physicians and health workers to serve under such difficult conditions, even though they are less adverse than those found among Ethiopian famine victims. The medical units in the refugee villages nevertheless are poorly equipped, and mothers seeking treatment have been turned away by the local unit with the advice that they could be treated only in the hospital in the nearest city, an unrealistic recommendation given the refugees' logistical problems and lack of money (Report on Refugee Aid 1981).

However, the provision of modern if modest health services in the camps is providing a new opportunity for the formal gathering of women, just as fetching water at the al well in the past helped serve women's social needs in their home village back in Afghanistan. In my visit with one of the few Afghan women physicians in Peshawar I was told how the clinics swell in numbers at night as women come to e for their relatives and find shelter and what might be med a "social refuge" in the process. Some women come to the clinics describing their own weakness symptoms, "weakness" or "fever." Often the physicians find no clinical basis for these symptoms, only psychological ones: the sense of frustration with their refugee status; their separation from their fields, their families, the memories of forced flight from their villages; and the loss of family members through burning and other acts of terror. A hospital operated by one of the resistance organizations has six women physicians and fourteen female nurses on the staff, two of whom are Afghan women physicians. They are faced with 350 women per day seeking medical advice, only ten of whom are admitted to the hospital as patients. One of the two Afghan women physicians, Dr. da, revealed that most of the others came for moral
support in either caring for relatives admitted to the hospital or the opportunity to share experiences and facilities with their fellow women suffering the plight of crowded conditions, uncertainty, little or no work, and lost male providers.\(^{(10)}\)

The women living among the Pakistanis rather than in the refugee camps are as isolated, in many cases, as those in the RTVs, if not more so. They must rely on their own families, what remains of them, for moral and economic support. If urban but uneducated, they do not venture out of their compounds unless they are within close walking distance of their relatives.

Both in the RTVs and outside, these women may be engaged in some kind of productive enterprise, such as embroidery or weaving. The products then are marketed by the male members of the family. On the other hand, depending on the economic-social status they have been able to acquire or retain, these women may be involved in an activity outside the home, earning the money for the family in a service occupation or working among the Afghan refugees, contributing their skills as teacher, physician, or nurse. These positions, however, have been scarce because of the ready availability and successful preempt by Pakistani personnel.

For the majority of the Afghan women in the Pakistani community, their major problems are coping with the uncertainties of their immediate surroundings: tension with their Pakistani hosts and neighbors who have discovered the advantages of manipulating for their own benefit a dependent population. Rental agreements, for example, are broken when a Pakistani landlord discovers he can get a higher rental fee by threatening or claiming he can get a higher fee from another renter. The Afghan family either must keep moving their quarters or pay even more.

How do the women maintain their spirit in the face of this unfriendly new environment where they may be deprived of the daily work to which they were accustomed in Afghanistan? The cultural sense of fatalism combined with innate resilience serve them well. Both men and women have been imbued with a basic sense of acceptance of "the will of God" and in particular the women have internalized this profoundly held belief.

While in Afghanistan, a woman was not given many life
ces other than accepting or rejecting her parents' or hers' selection of a husband for her. She was not led to expect much from life. The best she could hope was perhaps a few years of schooling, then a husband would provide for her and give her sons so she could rise status within her husband's family as soon as pos-
s after marriage.

Now she hopes that those male members who have been behind in Afghanistan have not been killed by the et-backed regime, that she can find a suitable wife for son who must carry on the family name--a goal that involve trading her daughter in marriage, and, finally, there will be a return of some semblance of security to life, both mental and economic.

The uncertainty is perhaps the most trying for the men who are now dependent on the few remaining male
bers of the family with whom they fled to Pakistan. As example, one interviewed household of eight was depend-
 a single male member for its livelihood as the women se husbands were left behind received no support from a. The rent, equivalent to $150 per month, for their ate up most of whatever income the male breadwinner fought in from his store.

At the other extreme is a group of widows separated g with their children from their male relatives and ply housed in an area near the VIP helicopter pad. The ons for the establishment of this particular camp remain ear as the Pakistani authorities claimed the widows rest this separation, but the widows rejected this claim exclaimed that the male headmen and administrators try to use and control them in this fashion. Cer-
ly, this camp's strategic placement within easy reach of pective VIP donors would suggest the male headmen and inistrators are using the women to elicit charitable nations.

Whatever the reason, this kind of situation promotes a tendency syndrome which is all the harder on the women n "temporary" assistance dries up completely (N. Dupree ).(12) The male headmen were apparently concerned the widows' condition, which did not seem to be amelio-
ed by their male relatives' household environment, would the women to pursue certain unacceptable and non-
tional occupations in order to survive.(13) With the
establishment of this camp, a kind of institutional separation was deemed to be in the widows' "best interest."
The renewed importance of *pushtunwali* and the male leaders' perceived need to enforce purdah also have adversely affected whatever progress had been made in women's and girls' education in Afghanistan. The Soviet-backed regime loudly proclaims its commitment to educational reform for women. Whether the motivations are genuine or simply the means to more effective political socialization remain unclear, but these exogenous forces (exogenous because they are both foreign and urban) are rejected out of hand by the more traditional society. School for refugee women and girls has suffered as it is seen as threatening for their essential seclusion. In 1983 the adult refugee female literacy rate reportedly stood at 1 percent and the male literacy rate at 5 percent (International Labour Office 1983). The literacy rate nationwide is usually cited at between 10 and 11 percent. Notwithstanding these constraints, literacy rates will probably climb in Afghanistan, especially in the controlled urban areas, and also in the better established refugee camps. Yet constraints do remain for many as the very idea of girls' education has been taboo among refugees in the early post-1978 revolution years.

Ironically, education may now be preferable to women's enforced idleness which so alarms some Afghan male leaders and the international agencies. Schools have been established for girls, among them 19 primary schools in the NWFP refugee tent villages.(14) These institutions have the potential for providing alternative centers for women networking.

For instance, in the Darsamand Camp in the Kohat District, a program to train midwives has been established by the International Rescue Committee. Some of the trainees were traditional midwives (*dai*) interested in learning modern methods while others were widows seeking self-support. Financial incentives of 400 Pakistani rupees per month during training and PRs 900 upon graduation encourage the women to join the program which also is geared to comprehensive maternal and child care. Despite some difficulties, the program generally has been accepted, and prenatal visits to clinics have increased, as has improved health for children under five (ARIN January 1985).
In another area, a school for girls has been established by the Union of Afghan Mujahid Doctors. Named the Shaheed Shaheed School, it serves the urban refugees but also the camps by providing bus service. The staff is reportedly energetic and the environment for women provides a healthy alternative to the crowded and often unsatisfactory camp conditions.(15)

Self-help programs are also being developed, spurred on by international agencies' investigation, to encourage women to practice and benefit more directly from their skills in handicrafts. Settings non-threatening to men are customarily the traditional home, but the clinic and the separate schools for girls could provide a healthy substitute goder, or meeting place for women.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The conditions of refugee life for Afghans have reinforced the code of pushhtonwali as applied to women. The strengths of the Afghan people--bravery, singlemindedness, pride--are being exercised in the struggle against a Soviet-backed regime. Although this regime claims to be modernist and to address itself to the liberation of women through aggressive education and social reform policies to eliminate the institution of bride-price, it is perceived by the Mujahideen to be destroying the treasured fabric of Afghan culture, of being, in a word, cultural imperialists. One suspects that the primary regime goal is to establish political, social, and economic control.

The other core element of pushtonwali, the honor of the family as maintained by the women who therefore must be protected by purdah, also has gained significance in this situation of nanawatia in Pakistan and revenge or badal against the foreign rulers in Afghanistan.

Women's seclusion, mandated by the Afghan refugee situation as they are away from the familiar and relatively freer village environment, serves the freedom fighters' need for a core of stability. The women's stoicism, resilience, acceptance of, and indeed pride in their respected role as maintainers of the home may well be crucial to the jihad if the religious leaders' claims of the need to reimpose the seclusion of women for their protection can be taken at face value.
Or is the real reason an extension of the male's need for security? In a time of enormous social and geographic dislocation the traditional Afghan male may not feel he controls much, but he may console himself with the belief that at the very least he controls his women. As noted elsewhere, the shelter of the home, protecting the preservers of the family—the women, is particularly important in a world perceived by both sexes to be dangerous. The notions of peril and refuge are generally important in Middle Eastern society. *Refuge* is sought within the *kala* walls from a dangerous and unpredictable world outside. The dangerous conditions in Afghanistan and the resulting splitting of families thus reinforces the Afghan's understanding of the world as dangerous. *Refuge* has been found in Pakistan to a certain extent but must be aided by the more conscious "protection" via seclusion, of the women.(16) But wars are by their very nature catalytic—engines of social change. Afghan women have had to take on new roles in the absence of their menfolk. They have emerged with new strength.

The adherence to purdah among the refugees varies in degree depending on their living situation. If the women find themselves in camps controlled by the fundamentalists, they are almost forced to comply with the custom, whether or not they had observed it in Afghanistan. The term "fundamentalist" is a relative one as all those involved in the resistance movement are profoundly Muslim. In contrast, educated, predominantly urban middle class Afghan women who live away from the camps may not be accustomed to stricter interpretation of purdah although they still will pursue a conservative lifestyle. Certainly, adherence to tradition is viewed by the traditionalists and religious leaders as a demonstration of their commitment to jihad.

The larger question of whether the war for the liberation of the Afghan homeland is in turn a liberating experience for women is a matter of much controversy. The women's separateness under refugee conditions, devoid of their customary work and opportunities for freer social interactions in the familiar surroundings of village life, also is testing this frequently cited strength of character. This strain is exemplified in clinics which offer possible treatment for nervous ailments, and are sources of comfort and opportunities for otherwise unavailable social communication.
This separateness is providing an opportunity for development leadership skills and to accumulate for leverage and coalition building with others as an open question at this point. Because of their and husband's organizational position with the former, educated Afghan women in the NWFP feel about exercising any overt leadership role among because of political considerations and pressures, from the conservative religious leaders gaining the movement.

In professional women who have been lucky in positions in the Mujahideen-operated institutions hospitals provide an informal leadership role of in their professional capacity, but their work load additional "natural" role of keepers of the home necessarily limit their activities among women.

On the other hand, at the widows' showcase camp of which, these women demonstrate a lively patriotism and enterprise as they seek sewing machines and looms, and consider setting up shop. They point "heads" of the families we have many responsibilities.

If return home to Afghanistan, people will discover many more adults among the women than among women.

The task will be tough; we must start preparing for the day we rebuild our country" (U.S. Com-Refugees 1984, 22).

Although the women's role in the freedom struggle inside stan has not been mentioned, it is a subject worthy but beyond the realm of possibility at the present e accounts which have filtered through from return-ahideen indicate that women have been playing a key the struggle from distributing night letters (gas) in Kabul, as objects of arrest and torture, to baking bread under siege for the Mujahideen. An Mujahida exhorted, "Though there are individuals er paid respect to the rights of women, I would just mention that women and girls today play an impor- in the independence struggle against Communism in herland" (Afghanistad Jehad March 21, 1983).

above observation certainly should apply to Afghan in refuge as they cope with uncertainty, enforced, loss of family, and new demands on their honored as upholders of the family and identity and their and resilience.
NOTES

4. See also Tavakolian (1984).
5. More recent reports put the flow rate per month at 6,000.
6. There are between eight and ten million Pashtuns in Pakistan, or ten percent of the Pakistani population.
7. See also Denker (1985), page 788.
8. See also Christensen (1984), page 60.
9. See also York (1980), page 34. Our interviews in Peshawar confirmed these findings.
10. This information comes from an interview with Syeda in Peshawar on May 17, 1984. See also Dupree (1986), "The Afghan Refugee Family Abroad: A Focus on Afghanistan."
11. The family of engineer Seyid Habib Rahman was interviewed in Peshawar on May 17, 1984.
12. See also Dupree's "The Women's Dimension Among Afghan Refugees in Pakistan."
13. Various Mujahideen were interviewed in Peshawar on May 16, 1984.
14. See Dupree's "The Woman's Dimension Among Afghan Refugees in Pakistan" and ARIN, Newsletter, No. 14 (July 1984). The latter notes that "Private, non-party, educational initiatives have become less difficult in Pakistan since mid-1983 when a new Commissioner for Afghan Refugees in the NWFP, Rustam Shah Mohmand, was appointed, an open-minded man in contrast to his fundamentalist-inclined predecessor."
15. See ARIN, Newsletter, No. 17 (March/April 1985), page 7). The school is named after a young woman student imprisoned by the Taraki regime in 1978 for distributing leaflets against the regime. She had been tortured by her captors in the effort to secure information about her colleagues. In a last ditch effort, the prison director called her into his office and did with her sexually. Unable to find her cellmates or herself with this indignity to her honor, she thereupon slit her throat with her fingernail and scra
led the word "liberty" on the wall. This account was related to me by the Mujahideen in Peshawar, May 1984.

16. Dupree (1986) used the framework from Gulick’s (1976) book to describe the scenario of peril and refuge.
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