Genre & Histoire

Genre & Histoire

25 | Printemps 2020
Histoire des femmes et du genre dans les sociétés musulmanes : Renouveaux historiographiques

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OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/genrehistoire/5017
ISSN: 2102-5886

Publisher
Association Mnémosyne

Electronic reference
Marya Hannun, « From Kabul to Cairo and Back Again: The Afghan Women's Movement and Early 20th Century Transregional Transformations », *Genre & Histoire* [Online], 25 | Printemps 2020, Online since 01 March 2020, connection on 25 November 2020. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/genrehistoire/5017

From Kabul to Cairo and Back Again: The Afghan Women's Movement and Early 20th Century Transregional Transformations

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Marya Hannun

1 In the early summer of 1928, a young Egyptian journalist, Hanifa Khouri, set off from Beirut in the company of her brother. She had been in Lebanon as the official delegate from Egypt to a conference held by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).[1] The two traveled through Port Said to Aden. From the bustling port city in Yemen they then set sail to Karachi, in the north of British India. There, they presented their passports at the Afghan consulate and received visas to the country. They took a train to Peshawar, and when the rail line ended at the border, they went by car through Jalalabad, arriving finally in Kabul. In Khouri's eyes, the capital appeared to be "a verdant oasis surrounded by barren mountains that acted as an impenetrable wall protecting it from invaders. Its highest peaks were covered in snow".[2]

2 Khouri was traveling to Afghanistan at the invitation of the newly independent nation's queen, Soraya Tarzi (1899-1968), whom she had met in Cairo one year before. She later wrote about her travels to the Islamic kingdom for the Egyptian cultural magazine *al-Laṭā'if al-Muṣawwara*.[3] Khouri particularly extolled the vibrant women's awakening (*nahḍa*), she had witnessed taking place under the reign of the queen and her husband, the reformist monarch Aman Allah Khan (r.1919-1929). Not only had their rule seen the first modern school for girls open in the country, *Maktab-i Mastūrāt* (1921) but also the first women's newspaper, *Irshād al-niswān* (1921), and hospital (1924). Aman Allah had further instituted a series of legal reforms targeting women and the family, altering the personal status laws governing polygamy, dowry, and marriage age. It was an

unprecedented moment of blossoming in women's rights, but even before Khouri's article had gone to press it was ending. Uprisings against Aman Allah's reforms beginning in late 1928 led to the monarch's eventual overthrow and the royal couple's exile from the country in 1929.

3 Given the fleeting nature of these reforms, they are often treated as ephemeral, instituted one year and gone the next, their most significant impact being the regressive response in the realm towards policies regarding women during the subsequent monarchs' reigns.[4]

4 In this essay, I attempt to challenge this traditional interpretation by locating women and their voices in this period, and by suggesting that the reforms had a far longer *durée* impact and significance, one that can only be seen through a novel analysis of the sources. I am doing this by examining the writings of the early modernist reformer Mahmud Tarzi in 1911, the interventions of a selection of women intellectuals in Afghan newspapers in the early 1920s, alongside their memoirs, and the proceedings of the 1932 Eastern Women's Congress in Tehran.

5 I apply what feminist geographer Cynthia Enloe calls a "feminist curiosity" to these sources. Methodologically, this means bringing women and their lives to the forefront, no matter how seemingly insignificant or sparse they may be. In Enloe's own words, "a feminist curiosity finds all women worth thinking about, paying close attention to, because in this way we will be able to throw into sharp relief the blatant and subtle political workings of both femininity and masculinity".[5] In what follows, I explore the question of women's emancipation by beginning to place women, their actions, and their words at the center of the modernist discourses in Afghanistan, from 1911 until the mid-1930s. Attending to the subtleties of how women were discussed, how gender was wielded by those in power, and how women themselves responded to the changes being implemented from on high gives us a clearer picture of the ways in which reforms in Afghanistan interacted with broader regional trends. It also illustrates the role elite women played in the new spaces created by this transregional dialogue.

6 Applying a feminist curiosity further challenges the neat temporal bounds of monarchial reigns that is so often used to periodize Afghan history. My chronology is framed around the two women whose experiences open this essay: the Afghan Queen Soraya Tarzi and the Egyptian women's rights activist Hanifa Khouri. Queen Soraya was the daughter of the reformer Mahmud Tarzi, who began articulating his vision for progress before World War I. Tarzi, along with the female members of his family, particularly Soraya, would go on to have a tremendous influence in the Aman Allah period (r. 1919-1929).

7 Hanifa Khouri visited Afghanistan in 1928, towards the end of Aman Allah's reign. She would later play a significant role in the interwar, anti-Colonial transregional women's network that included Afghan women and reached its zenith in the Eastern Women's Congress of 1932.

8 In her study of the 1932 Eastern Women's Congress, which followed on the heels of the All-Asian Women's Congress in 1931, Charlotte Weber suggests "these conferences constituted a momentary intervention in both the nationalist and international feminist discourses regarding Eastern women that often positioned them as powerless to reform themselves".[6] Building on her work, I argue this was more than a "momentary intervention." Rather, exploring the case of Afghanistan in a

transregional context illustrates that the dialogue about and between women of the "East" had earlier roots as well as a complex afterlife.

9 As attested to by this journal's special issue, significant work is being done to move beyond national frameworks in evaluating women's activism in the Middle East, from North Africa to Iran and Turkey. However, attention needs also be paid to the ways in which this early period of "women's awakening" moved across regions of what today we term the "Global South," particularly the geographical span Shahab Ahmed (speaking of an earlier age in Islamic thought) elegantly termed Balkans-to-Bengal.[7] Situating modernist reforms within this broader transregional context challenges accounts that isolate Afghanistan or view women's participation in the country simply as a one-off failure. It demonstrates how mobility—not new to the Global South but taking on new forms in the early 20th Century—was critical to women's movements across regions.

Locating Women in the History of Afghanistan

10 In "Updating the Gendered Empire: Where Are the Women in Occupied Afghanistan and Iraq?" Cynthia Enloe argues that the practice of silencing women in the narratives surrounding the US invasion of Afghanistan contributes to its popular image as a violent, masculine place, justifying, in turn, violent, military intervention.[8] Applying "a feminist curiosity" to this space reveals not only how gender was wielded by those in power but also how a range of women understood and experienced the occupation.[9] In her approach, Enloe consciously draws on a robust body of feminist historiography on the Middle East and South Asia, by scholars who posed a critical question to the sources: where are the women? And they found them in the domestic sphere, kitchens, brothels, but also in the nascent women's movements that got their beginnings in classrooms, charitable organizations, and the reformist press.[10] Through the body of work built around locating women and gender in imperial structures of power and emerging states, feminist historians challenged not only masculinist readings of history but also the very definition of what it means to be political.

11 Yet, despite tremendous advances in the literature on women's political engagement in the age of empire, the bulk of scholarly focus, particularly among historians, remains centered on Egypt,[11] and, to a lesser extent, Turkey[12] and Iran.[13] Regional peripheries such as Greater Syria, Iraq, and the Maghreb garnered less attention until recently.[14] Ironically, when it comes to Afghanistan's own past, despite the fact that Afghan women have become the often faceless face of postcolonial critiques such as Enloe's, the question of where the women were in this earlier period of nation building remains virtually unasked.

12 In 1999 Ellen Fliesch mann quoted Berenice Carroll, writing twenty years before, to say historians of the Middle East "are, at the most basic level, still working at just 'construct[ing] women as historical subjects".[15] Lamentably, two decades later, historians wishing to study women in Afghanistan can say the same. Forty years of foreign intervention and conflict have made accessing sources difficult for long periods of time. On the ground, conditions in Kabul have deterred researchers from visiting National Archives, and provincial records, such as court documents, where they have survived, are even harder to access.[16] Staggering population displacement has made family repositories and oral histories elusive, though by no means inaccessible, to

historians. Even in available archives, which are growing increasingly accessible due to digitization projects like the Afghan Digital Library (ADL),[17] locating women's voices in this early period can be like finding a needle in a haystack.

13 However, the difficulty of locating women's voices in archives does not fully explain the lack of critical attention to women in the historiography of Afghanistan. Though their words are scarce, the sources contain ample evidence of women speaking and even more evidence of how they were being spoken of. I would argue part of the explanation for this oversight can be traced to Afghanistan's tendency to fall through the cracks of the imagined distinctions in areas studies between the regions of the Middle East, South, and Central Asia.[18] As James Caron has noted, the intellectual isolation of Afghanistan studies has rendered it largely exempt from the shift to history from below and the related exposition of feminist and critical theory that characterized the genealogies of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies.[19] So vastly interwoven into the histories of both "regions", the geo-strategic interests at the roots of areas studies have worked to isolate Afghanistan from either. Barring a few notable exceptions[20] and bearing haunting echoes of contemporary media discourse, when Afghan women are mentioned in the historiography of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is either as the objects of attempted Islamic reform or as the reason for tribal backlash against these reforms, as is the case with the Aman Allah reforms at the heart of this essay. Such simplistic narratives, as Caron notes, feed into a larger trend in the historiography of Afghanistan to paint Islam as insurgent, violent, and divorced from the everyday realities of life.[21] As much as the rhetoric about "saving" Afghan (and more broadly Muslim) women today, they paint a picture of a conflict-prone society where women are reduced to a monolithic, voiceless category— a battleground upon which violent men wield Islam in opposition to one another and to a fragile state. As Lila Abu Lughod has shown, these representations undergird political projects of neocolonial domination.[22]

14 Then as with now, Afghan women in this period were not a monolithic entity. Elite women of Kabul in the early 20th Century—themselves a diverse and international group made up of Pashtun, Tajik, Circassian, Arab, Turkish, and Indian women— by no means represented the totality of Afghan women. If anything, they were exceptional. However, attention to their narratives and the narratives surrounding them allows us to evaluate Afghanistan's reforms in this period in light of broader changes sweeping the Middle East and South Asia.

Connecting Afghan Women to Regional Discourses of Reform

Mahmud Tarzi and the Afghan "Woman Question" (1911–1919)

15 As with its regional siblings, the early decades of the 20th century saw new ideas emerge in Afghanistan about the place of women in society and its advancement. However, it is important to note that while the term "awakening" (*nahḍa* in Arabic, *nahża* in Farsi) was used by reformers across the region, women were by no means dormant in the preceding era. While this is mostly clearly traceable for elite women, who are simply more present in the written sources from the time, a survey of Fayż Muḥammad Kātib's seminal contemporary history-cum-court chronicle presents

accounts of a variety of different classes of Afghan women in the 19th Century appealing to official channels for state intervention in local matters.[23] Royal women wielded direct political influence in the court and from within their positions in the harem.[24] They also achieved prominence as literary figures. One of the first published lithographs in Afghanistan was the diwan of 'Āyishah Durrānī (d. 1853), a poet and member of the royal family, in the year 1881.[25]

16 Yet, as elsewhere, a shift did occur in the early 20th century in Afghanistan. The first thematic stage of women's movements identified by Flieschmann is a new consciousness about women and their role in social life permeating intellectual circles across the Middle East and South Asia, as reformers discussed the importance of women to society and progress.[26] Like other states across these regions, in Afghanistan, it is a male intellectual who is credited in traditional historical accounts with first articulating this consciousness: writer and statesman, Mahmud Tarzi (1865-1933).[27]

17 It is important to note that the notion of male intellectuals pioneering feminist movements has been problematized by both indigenous feminists and, later, feminist postcolonial scholars across the Middle Eastern context. For example, Leila Ahmed argues Qasim Amin, though historically deemed among the first Arab feminists, was reproducing a colonial discourse that was neither centering women as agents nor particularly emancipatory.[28] In her analysis of contemporaneous Egypt, Margot Badran discusses the differences between the feminism of women and men, observing that they tended to operate from different vantage points.[29] Whereas the more visible male reformers, like Qasim Amin, often came by their stances via contact with European society and advanced an intellectual position that located society's backwardness in the treatment of women, Muslim women tended to be more critical of the ways in which Islam had been misunderstood and misappropriated indigenously to deprive women of rights.[30] This framework is helpful in analyzing Mahmud Tarzi's own contribution to the "woman question" in Afghanistan.

18 Heralded as a nationalist figure, Tarzi's biography embodies the supra-national, trans-regional circulation of intellectuals and ideas in the period, beyond the Middle East and spanning South Asia. Tarzi was born in Ghazni, Afghanistan, to a prominent Pashtun family. His father was exiled during the reign of Abd al-Rahman Khan (1880-1901) as part of a larger purging of intellectuals and those who had fallen out of favor with the throne. His family first went to Karachi in British India's Sindh region, before moving to the Ottoman Empire, where he spent twenty formative years between Damascus and Istanbul. Able to read Pashto, Farsi, Turkish, French, Arabic and Urdu, Tarzi was exposed to a range of ideas. He even claimed to have studied under the anti-colonial reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani for seven months in Istanbul. Though there is no evidence other than Tarzi's own word for this encounter and some reasons to doubt it took place,[31] simply by claiming to have met the itinerant pan-Islamic writer who famously moved between such far flung locales as Hyderbad, Cairo, and Istanbul, Tarzi was consciously situating himself in the genealogy of Islamic reform and activism that connected the Ottoman and Indian worlds.

19 In Damascus, the young Tarzi met and married Asma Rasmiya. Rasmiya was born in Damascus in 1877 to a Circassian mother and Salih Muhammad Effendi— a notable member of the Damascene Ulama. Like many Syrian women of her generation and her class background, she was literate, educated in Arabic, and would later learn Farsi as well.[32] When Habib Allah Khan ascended the Afghan throne in 1901, Tarzi was invited

back to Afghanistan, where he founded the reformist newspaper, *Sirāj al-Akhbār,* "The Torch of the News" in 1911.

20 The paper is an important source for tracing the public discourse on women and modernity in Afghanistan. Not only does it provide a thorough overview of the output of the most influential Afghan reformer and statesman of the time, but, read carefully and in context, it provides a glimpse of the ways in which elite women were engaged in this project. It was printed in an accessible, vernacularized Farsi. It had a circulation of sixteen hundred copies and claimed to have one hundred female subscribers in the capital alone. Subscription was also mandatory for some thirteen hundred bureaucrats. [33] Based on the postmarks of letters to the editor and from where some of its articles appeared in reprint, it was read across Asia from Turkey, the Caucasus, Turkestan, Japan, and even as far as Australia. While it is difficult to speak to the life of such sources— who actually engaged them and how they were taken up — its intended audience is telling: it was performing to a new official class as well as to a broader, predominantly Muslim, global public.

21 Tarzi used the paper to articulate a new vision for the Afghan nation in which women were central, drawing on his experiences abroad and his knowledge of regional languages to do so. He penned articles on the importance of women's education and their role in child-rearing, adopting and defining for his readers a particular terminology of *tarbīya* and *ta'līm* that was a strong feature of the Arab press of the period and used to link women's progress with that of the nation.[34] In this newspaper, Tarzi also translated a biographical dictionary of famous women from across space and time, including not only European royalty, but women related to the companions of the Prophet, Herati poets, and Indian princesses.[35] Like those biographical dictionaries of women that populated the Egyptian press,[36] Tarzi's had the explicit goal of providing a model for the women of the nation of both leadership and piety. It is no coincidence that this parallel exists. In a response to a letter in 1913 from a mufti, Muḥammad Rafīq, sharply questioning Tarzi's focus on women rather than men or machines which, in his opinion, were more linked to progress, Tarzi responded:

> "There is no newspaper or magazine these days that does not mention something about the activities of women. Apart from European papers, Turkish, Arabic and Indian journals have coverage on debates over women's rights."[37]

22 It is clear Tarzi was reading journals around the Middle East and South Asia and taking note. His response also betrays a sense of anxiety about Afghanistan's ability to keep up, not just with Europe— a common refrain for male intellectuals justifying reform in this period — but with an entire Ottoman-Arab-Indian milieu. This moment just before and during World War I was one during which pro-Ottoman sentiment permeated the entire sub-continent as the Ottoman Empire sided against the Allies and pan-Islamic anti-colonial movements in India coalesced around the caliphate.[38] The Pan-Islamic press provided a vehicle for the circulation of these political sentiments. For Tarzi, women provided a critical component in connecting Afghanistan's progress to that of its Muslim neighbors.

23 Ottoman women themselves were held up as a source for emulation. In an article criticizing the Afghan ulama for rejecting the developments of modernity and for being stuck in the past due to their ignorance, particularly concerning women, Tarzi cited the Turkish literary figure, Halide Edib, when she delivered a speech to women at an assembly in Istanbul in 1913. He claimed that she "provides a model for our male

preachers and shows them the progress of Muslim women in other countries".[39] He also translated from Turkish into Farsi the text of her speech, in which she discussed the importance of women to the nuclear family, and the necessity of her education for the health of the nation.

24 This first taste of an Afghan women's awakening in any comparable form to those occurring across the Middle East and South Asia coalesced around the work of Mahmud Tarzi. Like male reformers in Egypt and elsewhere, Tarzi cited women as a primary target for reforming society's backwardness and righting the ignorance that held the nation back. He too was looking west to make his case, but unlike his Arab peers, rather than to Europe, he drew largely on discourses as well as examples from women in the Ottoman realm.

25 In a further comparison to the broader region, here too, we find a male reformer being credited with planting the seeds of a women's awakening, or, in the Afghan case, transplanting the seeds from an Ottoman context. However, as post-colonial feminist scholars of the Middle East have warned, speaking about the role of 'men' when discussing social changes for women obscures not only the role of women in enacting these reforms but also the important role played by elite and reformist families in their entirety..[40] The women related to Tarzi played a prominent part in the processes his work set in motion. Mahmud Tarzi's eldest daughter, Khayria, married one of the King Habib Allah Khan's (r. 1901-1919) sons, Inayatullah (1888-1946). Meanwhile Tarzi's daughter Soraya married another son, Aman Allah (1892-1960). Aman Allah would succeed Habib Allah in 1919, and during his reign, many of Tarzi's ideas would be implemented at the behest of the state. In this period, women surrounding him, most notably Soraya, would play a prominent role in articulating a vision for Afghan women's liberation that reverberated beyond the state.

Where were the women in the Aman Allah era Reforms?

26 Aman Allah Khan came into power in 1919, shortly after the end of World War I. At the conclusion of the brief Third Anglo-Afghan War, fought the same year, he won Afghanistan's complete independence from the British. Before this victory, the country's foreign policy had been controlled by the British Raj in exchange for colonial subsidies. Upon independence, Aman Allah embarked on an ambitious legislative overhaul with the goal of modernizing and nationalizing the state. Along with advisors from Afghanistan, he employed Indian and Turkish scholars to enact a series of Islamic legal decrees (*niẓāmnāmah*) which would form the basis of the country's first official constitution in 1923.[41] As Faiz Ahmed notes, this can be considered "one of the twentieth century's first projects of Islamic state making".[42] It is also among the first examples in the region of emerging states co-opting the discourses and practices of women's awakening in order to assert their modernist credentials,[43] preceding both Ataturk's social and legal reforms for women in the new Turkish Republic as well as those of Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran.

27 Aman Allah's state-building project, unlike Ataturk's, was not secular, even in name, but explicitly rooted in Islamic precepts. Key to enacting this vision of a modern, Islamic, nation was a series of top -down legal decrees impacting women that, while grounded in the Hanafi tradition and Islamic law, did present a radical break from the past in Afghanistan.

28 Aman Allah abolished marriage before the age of 13, regulated the *mahr* (or dowry), required marriages to be registered in courts, and severely restricted polygamy by necessitating court permission under strict rules of treatment.[44] It is clear from their content that these reforms were an attempt by the state to assert itself in the domain of the family. From Aman Allah's remarks at a Loya Jirga in 1924 in defense of these reforms after they elicited backlash, nothing less than the unity of the nation was at stake in laws regulating marriage. He cited the betrothal of minors — particularly young women to potentially multiple suitors — as among the "leading causes of discord and disunity in Afghanistan."[45] Aman Allah explained to the gathering of men his great responsibility to his female subjects, even over that to his male subjects, because they did not have a political voice.[46] The state via Aman Allah was thus cast in the paternalistic role of protector, ensuring rights for women that they would otherwise be denied by society.

29 These reforms allowed the monarch to assert his modernizing credentials in keeping up with the changes sweeping the region. In defense of educating women, for example, Aman Allah pointed, not to Europe, but to the existence of multiple girls' schools in the rest of the Muslim world, citing the examples of India, Egypt, Greater Syria, Iraq, and Turkey.[47] Much like Mahmud Tarzi then, Aman Allah enacted reforms for women in emulation of a broader Ottoman-Indian milieu. Also like Tarzi, he articulated this vision in terms of correcting society's backwardness, once again echoing Badran's observation of the first wave of Egyptian male reformers for whom gender served as a tool to be wielded in the name of progress.

30 However, applying a feminist curiosity prompts us to look beyond how women were being spoken of and locate the women themselves. Elite women in Kabul during the interwar years were instrumental in enacting many of the features that characterize the early stages of women's awakenings elsewhere in the region. Aman Allah's sister, Princess Kobra, established the *Anjumān-i-ḥimāyat-i-niswān* (the society for the protection of women) in 1928. Women of the royal family also opened the first hospital for women (1924), as well as textile workshops explicitly for the purpose of employing women.[48] This parallels what feminist historians of other parts of the region have noted with regards to elite women. As Meriwether and Tucker observed in the contemporaneous Middle Eastern context, "[a]ccess to power for women was not only dependent on class position and the ability to mobilize resources but also on the structure of the state and the distribution of state power."[49] The state's discursive and legal agenda opened up new spaces for women to act.

31 It was in the realm of education where elite women proved the most active. In 1921, the first school for girls, *Maktab-i Mastūrāt,* in Kabul opened under the patronage of the queen and the directorship of her mother, Asma Rasmiya. *Maktab-i Mastūrāt* was attended by girls between the ages of six and ten who were recruited from daughters of the royal family as well as from a small but growing class of bureaucrats.[50] Upon its opening, the Queen issued a proclamation detailing why education for women was so important, in which she quoted the Prophet by saying "to gain knowledge is the religious duty of all Muslim men and women." She further stated, in a position many find controversial even today, that the Shari'a permits women to be judges, *qazis*.[51] Unlike the rhetoric of her husband, the King, and her father, Mahmud Tarzi, she appealed exclusively to the sources of Islam and argued misinterpretation of these sources in order to state her case for women's education.

32 As occurred elsewhere in the region, education for girls in the fields of language, Islamic Studies, and mathematics represented a new avenue of professionalization for elite women since it was largely women who engaged in the processes of teaching and running schools. Afghanistan provides a particularly unique case in who these women educators were. They not only hailed from France and Germany but also, and more predominantly, from Muslim neighbors like Turkey and India. These were women who had received formal education elsewhere across the Middle East and South Asia but found themselves in Kabul, having accompanied husbands to the capital for diplomatic or industrial purposes in the service of the newly independent state.[52] The school benefited from their mobility. Furthering the spirit of transregional mobility, in 1928, a group of school girls was appointed to be sent, not to Paris, but to Turkey to continue their education abroad.

33 Elite women were also actively involved in the press during this period. Asma Rasmiya edited the first women's newspaper, *Irshād al-niswān,* which began publication in 1921 and ran through 1925. Though I have only been able to track down a few pages, in addition topraising the importance of Aman Allah's legal reforms, this paper contained articles reflecting themes that were prominent across the region, on household management and child-rearing.[53] In the official newspaper, *Amān-i Afghān,* Queen Soraya penned articles on the importance of female education outside of the home for the development of the people of the East.[54] Her voice also circulated beyond Afghanistan through the press. For example, she is recorded in *Ḥabl al-Matin,* a newspaper from Calcutta, discussing the widely contested issue of veiling. Employing a Salafi modernist message that once again looked to Islam's past, she argued that if it was truly un-Islamic not to wear the veil, the Qur'an would detail the consequences for it. As far as I have found, she is the first person in Afghanistan to make such an argument. This article was reprinted in the Afghan paper *Amān-i Afghān*.[55] In this way, Soraya's ideas circulated back and forth across borders, forging a regional dialogue.

34 Not only their words, but women themselves moved between these various sites of reform, connecting with each other and becoming exposed to the changes taking place for women elsewhere. In late 1927 and 1928, Queen Soraya accompanied Aman Allah Khan on a world tour that took them first to India, then Egypt, followed by a number of European capitals, and finally to Turkey, and Iran. While scholarly fascination with this tour has tended to focus on how the image of the Queen in European dress was fawned over in the British, French, and Italian press and denigrated back home,[56] her image and words on female education and dress were also taken up more substantively in the local press of the Muslim countries she visited. For example, a 1928 issue of the Indian paper *Pratap,* published in Lahore, reproduced an interview Soraya held with the Indian press during her travels in which she argued Islam was the only religion that granted women true equality to men. Looking to the *salaf*, or companions of the Prophet, Soraya pointed to the women who accompanied these men into battle in the first years of Islam, as well as the work women like the Prophet's wives engaged in, which she likened to the work being done by European women in that present age.[57] Again, we find her employing a Salafi modernist message to make her case about gender parity within Islam.

35 It was during these travels that Soraya met Hanifa Khouri and invited the young Egyptian woman to Afghanistan. As was mentioned at the start of the article, in the summer of 1928, Khouri visited Afghanistan, traveling from Beirut, where she had been

attending a meeting of the Young Women's Christian Association. She traveled through Yemen, Karachi, and finally Peshawar before entering Afghanistan. In the travelogue Khouri penned for *al-Laṭā'if al-Muṣawwarah,* an Egyptian cultural weekly magazine, she informs an Arabic reading public about what she had seen in the foreign capital. In its tone, Khouri's article distinguishes itself from the handful of accounts published in the European press by visitors to Kabul and the royal court in this period, which tended to be full of breathless astonishment that people in the East were wearing European dress and granting women a prominent public place in society.[58]

36 Khouri describes what she saw in terms of the familiar and even familial. In Kabul, at court, she writes that she was treated as a member of the family. She dined with the Queen and her family, including Mahmud Tarzi, who was serving as foreign minister at the time. She pauses to make a point of the generosity and hospitality of the Queen and her family, saying the "Eastern monarchs" distinguished themselves among monarchs with these attributes. It is hard not to read in this emphasis some celebration of a particular set of values held up by people of the "East", and these themes would become touchstones in Khouri's later work in the 1930s.

37 Khouri gave a speech at the schools she visited that was translated into Farsi for the students by the minister of education. She praised the role of education in achieving progress (*tarqīya*), employing an Arabic word that was used in Farsi and Turkish, and — less commonly — in the Arabic press of the time to describe the goal of activism and reform. In similarly familiar terms, she went on to discuss the education system that recalled the changes happening in her own society. Looking around, she observed what was obvious to her to be a *nahḍa* happening in the realm of education:[59]

> "It pleased me what I saw in the schools for girls in terms of activity, initiative, and rivaling men in the domain of education. The *madrassa* of *Mastūrāt* is under the care of her majesty, Soraya, who has expended a great deal of energy intellectually and materially. Her mother is the director of affairs at the school and the pioneer in establishing it. It opened with eight girls. The Afghan people were indignant at this project. Now the number of female students has exceeded one thousand. The women's awakening (*"al-nahḍa al-nisawiyya")* in Afghanistan is rapidly advancing on the road to progress and the credit for that goes to Soraya because she has done a lot to instill the *nahḍa* spirit and principles amongst the women of Afghanistan. I want to draw the readers' attention to the democracy ("*dīmuqrāṭīyya*") of the queen because the daughters of the king, and his siblings, and the siblings of the queen, all study together in the *madrassa*, and they are dressed in the simplest national clothing with the other female students of the nation, and it is all free."

38 In her article, we find Khouri explicitly situating Afghanistan as part of "the women's awakening", and thus connecting the reforms in Afghanistan to a broader movement of which she was part. There are aspects of the Afghan women's education system that are also held up as an example to their sisters in the Arab world. For example, she draws on the political language of "democracy" to praise the great progress and equality of an educational institution in which royal women were in class side-by-side with others, all dressed in national dress. The theme of national dress was a leitmotif of women's movements, particularly in this period of national-identity formation. In the example she shares, Khouri shows how this national spirit in Afghanistan united women of different social backgrounds. While all of these women were in truth either from the royal family or part of a growing Kabuli bureaucratic class, Khouri's reading paints them in a more egalitarian light.

39 By the time this article had gone to press, things had already begun to change in Afghanistan. In the wake of his world tour, Aman Allah had instituted policies abolishing polygamy for government officials, and requiring that they wore European dress. Such stringent rules contributed to growing sentiment against him. While a host of interacting factors— including a heavy tax burden and waning support among prominent religious figures—led to the rebellion that overthrew him finally in 1929, as Senzil Nawid has noted in her thorough study of the period, clerical opposition was articulated largely in terms of his reforms concerned with women.[60] As a result, the subsequent period under Nader Shah saw the shuttering of the *Maktab-i Mastūrāt* and the reversal of many of Aman Allah's more radical policies, such as those circumscribing polygamy and raising the minimum marriage age.

40 This is where the story typically ends. However, even the most cursory searches for women in the aftermath of Aman Allah's reign reveal that while state policies changed, some of their effects endured. Scanning the press during the first years of Nader Shah's rule, we find that while it was not bursting with articles about the *nahża* and women's education, the themes that characterized women's movements across the region were still present. Perhaps as a result of the tenuous public role of Afghan women, discussion of women often referenced Muslim women elsewhere. For example, under a section entitled, "in the Islamic kingdoms", the government-affiliated newspaper, *Anīs,* printed a long story on the street demonstrations that had broken out on May 5, 1931 against the state's decision to hold elections when parliament was not in session.[61] The article describes Egyptian women from the Wafdist (Liberal Constitutionalist) party riding in motorcars through Cairo and confronting the police as they demanded that their male comrades boycott the vote. Women were arrested on this day, and their demands and disappointment with the regime were discussed at length in the article. In this way, Afghan audiences were exposed to a seminal event in Egyptian feminism, one that, according to Saiza Nabarawi, an Egyptian journalist and activist who participated in the demonstrations, "inaugurate[d] a glorious page in Egyptian feminism."[62]

41 Afghan papers at the time also included articles pertaining to women on the importance of *tarbiya* in childrearing, for which the mother was largely responsible, and buying locally manufactured products for use in the household.[63] These themes which were so prevalent throughout the Arab women's press, were still discussed in the Afghan press, although in more subtle ways than during Aman Allah's rule.

42 Looking beyond Afghanistan, the effects of Aman Allah's reforms reverberated across the region. The 1923 marriage code was used by the Soviets in governing marriage laws in Muslim Central Asia.[64] In Uzbekistan, Aman Allah's example, and particularly the issue of the veil, informed the battle between Muslims and the Soviet state, and the story of his rule was recast by both sides in debates over veiling.[65] Reforms in Afghanistan also influenced Reza Shah's policies in the 1930s and the caution with which the monarch advanced particularly regarding forced unveiling.[66] Even Rashid Rida, one of the most prominent Islamic modernists of the time, weighed in. Writing in the Egyptian press, he cited Afghanistan as a cautionary tale in the perils of instituting reforms too rapidly before a society is ready.[67] The same regional circulations that brought new ideas about women into Afghanistan also ensured that the example of Afghanistan's reforms would resonate beyond its border.

A Coda: The 1931 and 1932 Women's Congresses

43 Once again, applying a "feminist curiosity" to this period involves not only locating how gender continued to be wielded by those in power after the end of Aman Allah's reign, but also locating the women themselves as active subjects in the process of making history. Tracing their threads is a revealing if crude enterprise. In the next few pages, I offer only the barest of sketches to illustrate the potential of following these individual biographies wherever they may lead us. There is Hanifa Khouri whose travels began this story. In 1932 she would serve as one of the organizers of the Second Eastern Women's Congress in Tehran.[68] This meeting followed on the heels of the All Asia Women's Congress (AAWC) convened one year before in Lahore in January of 1931. [69] While not institutionally related, these two conferences were part of a larger moment in the interwar period that saw the flourishing of formal women's networks concentrated in the "East" whose purpose was to mobilize along regional lines and in the face of growing opposition to Western imperialism.[70] These conferences met with the explicit goal of forging a common identity and unity among Asian women. The AAWC of Lahore in 1931 included participation by women from Afghanistan, Burma, Ceylon, Japan and Iran, and it excluded the active participation of European women, who, in a remarkable subversion of colonial dominance, were allowed to attend but not to speak. Its goal was to encourage women in the region to come together across national borders, a goal that is clearly reflected in its call for participation, which was translated and circulated throughout the press in India, Iran, and Greater Syria. The AAWC wrote:

> "In its worship of the Family, in the hopes of the here and the hereafter that it places in the Child, in its marriage codes, in its illiteracy, in its present renaissance Asia is one... None hold this oriental culture more tenaciously, more authentically than its women. But the Chinese woman sees more of her American sister than of her Burmese neighbor, the Hindu woman knows more of her British sister than of her Arabian or Afghan relative."[71]

44 The themes that were such a part of nationalist women's movements from the Balkans to Bengal, included the importance of hygiene, education, and marriage reform, and were re-articulated there as uniting women transregionally. We also see a new focus on protecting indigenous values, for example by wearing national dress, in contrast to the emphasis on European dress among elite women in the 1920s. Following another tenuous thread, we find the Afghan delegate Mrs. Mohammad Kamaluddin. Mrs. Kamaluddin is identified as residing in the North West Frontier Provinces (NWFP) border area between what was still British India and Afghanistan. In her remarks, she extolled Afghanistan for being a country where women were protected by the Sharia laws, which mandated a minimum marriage age.[72] Referring to the deposed King Aman Allah, she praised him for opening schools and sending girls abroad to Turkey and Europe in order to study medicine, nursing, and teaching, citing his reign as an example for the other Eastern nations to learn from.[73] Following her thread leads us to Pakistan's independence movement in the subsequent decade, where she took part with the Muslim League in their anti-colonial struggle, particularly helping to organize women along the Frontier regions to take part in the freedom movement. In 1947, the year of independence, we find her in the city of Kohat near the border with Afghanistan, delivering a speech to female agitators from a loudspeaker at the Muslim League office.[74]

45 The Indian organizers of the AAWC invited the prominent Druze activist from Mount Lebanon, Nour Hamada, to preside over the conference. Though she did not attend, she was written about in the official record of proceedings for her role in advising the women practically on how to conduct the sessions and divide up leadership roles. Citing her own regional organizing by way of example, she suggested they have an official leader, but then get women from different countries to preside over the different sessions — a solution that enhanced the sense of shared ownership over this project.[75] This exchange between Hamada and the organizers of the AAWC gives us another thread to follow across regions, as Hamada presided over the General Union for Syrian Women, which was responsible for organizing the Eastern Women's Congress in Tehran in 1932, in addition to an earlier congress in Damascus in 1930.[76]

46 The 1932 conference included representatives from Iran, Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, Japan, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Hejaz and Najd. It also included a letter to be read from India.[77] In the French account of the proceedings, we pick up the thread of Hanifa Khouri. She is introduced in the proceedings as an enlightened woman who spoke of her travels throughout the East on which she intended to write a book.[78] In her remarks, Khouri spoke about the delicate balance among women in the East between progress and preservation of traditions, a common refrain among conference participants. Citing the famous leader of the Egyptian Feminist Union, Huda Shaarawi, Khouri praised the icon for refusing imitation of the past by embracing "the European customs that are appropriate for Muslim women while rejecting those that are reprehensible."[79] With her words she presents an early formulation of the powerful idea that tradition is not fixed, but fluid and negotiated.

47 Charlotte Weber has noted that the transregional nature of the conference was explicitly linked to the anti-colonial solidarity forged by these women, one that drew on the power of authenticity and a notion of women not as the gatekeepers but rather as the agents of what it meant to be "authentic". While referencing Islam, the organizers were keen to highlight that this went beyond the Muslim world, encompassing Eastern (i.e. Asian) women and their unique strength in being able to unite spiritual and material progress.[80] In the course of these proceedings, Nour Hamada summed up the relationship these women saw between nations of what today we call "the Global South" and the women's movements in them, by describing women's activism from Japan to Turkey as part of a chain. Either of these two ends was the most advanced in terms of women's rights, but every part of the chain had movement that reverberated along it.[81] As we have seen, Afghan women were a crucial link in this chain.

48 Unfortunately for historians, the Afghan delegate in attendance at the Eastern Women's Congress is not listed by name, and the French translation of the proceedings contains no account of Hamada's voice, just a note that she was scheduled to speak about the "feminist movement in Afghanistan" but was not present on the first day. However, even in this smallest of sketches we have a final thread to follow. She is noted in the proceedings to be the daughter of Sher Ahmed Khan.[82] Tracing this thread, I found three daughters of Sher Ahmed Khan integrated into the elite women's education system of Kabul during and after Aman Allah Khan's reign (r. 1919-1929). The eldest, probably the one in attendance at the conference, studied at *Maktab-i Mastūrāt* before becoming a diplomat in Tehran and then returning to Kabul in the 1930s.[83] I found the names of her younger sisters scrawled on a handwritten list of women who

attended the *Maktab-i Arg*, a small school for girls that was run out of a room in the *ḥaramsarā* of Nadir Shah in the early 1930s. While unofficial, the existence of this school is another example of the ways in which women's activism lingered beyond the 1920s in Kabul. According to the women who attended, it provided a continuity after the closing of *Maktab-i Mastūrāt,* and employed teachers and former students as instructors. [84]

49 These threads all have something in common. They all represent upper-class, educated and mobile women. These women interacted, travelled, delivered speeches, and penned articles for the press. Beginning to follow and unravel these individual biographies by no means paints a complete picture, but it starts to give a clearer representation of how women took advantage of and benefited from the convergence of nationalist, regional, and trans-regional movements to express their own visions for society. These threads begin to reveal how these women continued to be active after the end of Aman Allah's reign, both at home and abroad.

Conclusions

50 The standard narrative of women's reforms in Afghanistan in the early 20th century tends to begin and end with the reign of Aman Allah Khan, whose dramatic rise and precipitous fall provide an irresistible narrative arc. However, extending the view to the period before his rule and to the spaces beyond Afghanistan's national boundaries allows us to move women from the margins of the narrative to its center, shedding light on how the women's movement during his reign was not an ephemeral flower, but a solid tree. It drew on a transregional repertoire that included liberal and modernist ideas articulated in the work of Mahmud Tarzi in dialogue with Ottoman reformers and, most importantly, upon the examples set by Ottoman women. Aman Allah Khan's female relatives, particularly Soraya, took advantage of the spaces opened up by this East to East intellectual conversation, spaces in which they were able to speak and act. During the reign of Aman Allah, Soraya articulated a feminist reformist discourse that was rooted in a re-examination of Islam and history aimed at arguing for women's equality and access to education. In this way, she tapped into a broader feminist conversation happening across the Muslim world. Although Aman Allah's overthrow in 1929 was accompanied by the closing of the school for girls and a reversal of his legal restrictions on polygamy and minimum marriage age, extending our view past his reign allows us to see the ways in which the nascent women's movement in Kabul of the 1920s reverberated beyond its place and time, not only in how it informed other states and regional actors, but also in the new forms of consciousness and opportunities for women that it generated.

51 Indeed, exercising a "feminist curiosity" towards the periodization, sources, and actors of a historical moment that is known only through male-centered lenses, reveals a number of untold stories. Among these is the story of the influence that elite women had on their male counterparts. The biographies sketched in this article demonstrate that the women of the Afghan elite participated in the modernist and reformist public debates, influencing their -more famous- male counterparts. Moreover, looking at sources from a range of languages and geographies allows scholars of women's national movements across regions to note the ways in which these intersected and informed one another in the early 20th Century. These stories and their intersections contribute

to the necessary endeavor of moving beyond orientalist paradigms according to which Muslim women need to be "saved", shifting the focus of the discussion to the underrated contribution that Muslim women made to transnational feminism.

NOTES

1. Beginning in 1894, the YWCA had established regional organizations throughout the world and in the early 20th Century had national associations in a number of countries in the Middle East, including in Egypt, Turkey, and Lebanon. For a discussion of this organization and its engagement of Muslim women see Amanda Izzo, *Liberal Christianity and Women's Activism: The YWCA of the USA and the Maryknoll Sisters*, Rutgers University Press, 2018, p. 57-64.

2. For a reprinted first person account of these travels see, Hanifa Khouri, "Sayyida ta'ūd min bilād Afghānistān (A Woman Returns from the Land of Afghanistan)," in 'Alī Maẓhar, *Afghānistān*, Cairo, Maṭba'at al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1950, p. 92-95.

3. *Al-Laṭā'if al-Muṣawwarah,* vol. 25, n°15, January 21, 1929, p. 3, 8.

4. See, for example, Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World,* Delhi, Kali for Women, 1986, p. 71-72, as far as I am aware, this is the only attempt to address the reforms in this period as part of a systematic study of women's movements across the Middle East and South Asia.

5. Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004, p. 3.

6. Charlotte Weber, "Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women's Congresses of 1930 and 1932", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 4, 1, 2008, p. 101.

7. Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 18.

8. Cynthia Enloe, "Updating the Gendered Empire: Where Are the Women in Occupied Afghanistan and Iraq?," *op. cit.*, p. 268-305.

9. *ibid*, p. 284-285.

10. *ibid*, p. 269-271. Among Enloe's references are: Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire,* New York, Routledge, 2003; Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor, and Post/colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation,* Durham, Duke University Press, 2001.

11. Among the pioneering studies see Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995; Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005.

12. Leslie Peirce, *Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1994. For an overview of the historiography see Duygu Köksal, Anastasia Falierou, "Historiography of Late Ottoman Women," in Duygu Köksal, Anastasia Falierou (ed.) *A Social History of Late Ottoman Women: New Perspectives,* Boston, Brill, 2013, p. 1-30.

13. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011; and the work of Afsaneh Najmabadi, including, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005

14. For notable exceptions on Greater Syria and Iraq see, for example, Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon,* New

York: Columbia University Press, 2000; Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. For recent study on the Maghreb see, Anny Gaul, *Kitchen Affects in Modern Northern Africa* (unpublished doctoral dissertation), Georgetown University, 2019.

15. Ellen Flieschmann, "The Other 'Awakening': The Emergence of Women's Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940," in Margaret Meriwether and Judith Tucker (eds.), *Social History of Women and Gender in the Middle East,* Boulder, Westview, 1999, p. 96.

16. For example, during a recent trip to Afghanistan (August 2019), I was unable to access the archives due to administrative confusion following a deadly bombing on August 17 that targeted a wedding at the Shahr-e-Dubai hall in Kabul. It caused road closures, and impacted the centennial celebration of the 1919 independence, for which I was there. I ended up acquiring written material through informal networks, book dealers, who had access to copies of important texts as well as valuable, under-utilized Farsi-language secondary sources, including contemporary biographical dictionaries of women.

17. *Afghanistan Digital Library* [Online], accessed Feb 1, 2020, URL: http://afghanistandl.nyu.edu/afghanistan/index.html

18. See "Hannun on Ahmed, 'Afghanistan Rising: Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empire,' *H-Net* [Online], September 2018, § 1, accessed April 29, 2019, URL: https://networks.h-net.org/node/6873/reviews/2351977/hannun-ahmed-afghanistan-rising-islamic-law-and-statecraft-between.

19. James Caron, "Afghanistan Historiography and Pashtun Islam: Modernization Theory's Afterimage," *History Compass,* 5, 2, March 2007, p. 315.

20. See Nancy Dupree, "Victoriana comes to the Haremserai in Afghanistan," in Paul Bucherer-Dietschi (ed.), *Bauen und Wohnen am Hindukush,* Liestal: Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica, 1988; May Schinasi, "Femmes Afghanes: Instruction et activités publiques pendant le règne Amâniya (1919–29)," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli,* 55, 4, 1995, p. 446–62; Thomas Wide, "Astrakhan, Borqa', Chadari, Dreshi: The economy of dress in early-twentieth-century Afghanistan," in Stephanie Cronin (ed.) *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 165-203. Senzil Nawid, "The Feminine and Feminism in Tarzi's Work," *Annali Orientale*, 55, 3, 1995, p. 358-366.

21. Caron, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

22. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?,* Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 2013, p. 31.

23. For example he recounts an episode in which women speak out in a public audience with the Governor of Qandahar against a corrupt clerk who wrote to King Habib Allah Khan on their behalf. Fayż Muḥammad Kātib Hazārah, *The History of Afghanistan: Fayż Muḥammad Kātib Hazārah's Sirāj al-tawārīkh,* translated from Farsi by R.D. McChesney and Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, Leiden, Brill, 2015, Vol. 3, p. 333-4.

24. *ibid,* p. 705, 845, 951, 965 for just a few examples.

25. 'Āyishah Durrānī, *Dīwān-i Āyishah,* Kabul, Bā bayārī-i Maṭba'-i Sarkārī-i Shahr-i Kābul-i gulgul bishkuft, 1881. For a brief account of pre-19th century female Afghan poets see Wide, "Astrakhan, Borqa'," *op. cit.,* p. 169.

26. Flieschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

27. Efrati, *op. cit.,* p. 155. For an example see Senzil Nawid, who says of Tarzi, "Tarzi took the initial step to address feminist issues and challenge traditional attitudes toward women in Afghan popular culture." Nawid, "The Feminine and Feminism in Tarzi's Work," *op. cit.*, p. 358.

28. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 159.

29. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (ed.), *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing, Second Edition*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004, p. xxvii.

30. See, for example, the work of Fatima Mernissi in pioneering this critique. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Islam,* translated from French by Mary Jo Lakeland, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Perseus Books, 1991, p. 15-25.

31. See Thomas Wide's Dissertation: *The Refuge of the World: Afghanistan and the Muslim Imagination 1880-1922*, Balliol College, Oxford University, 2014, p. 80.

32. A number of these biographical details are based on a private interview shared with me by May Schinasi with one of Rasmiya's granddaughters conducted in Kabul in 1976.

33. May Schinasi, *Afghanistan at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,* Naples, Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1979, p. 68.

34. See for example, *Sirāj al-Akhbār,* 4, 21, p. 4-5. A largely complete copy of the newspaper, excepting the third year, is available in the *Afghanistan Digital Library* [Online], accessed May 1, 2019, URL: http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/rn8pk0wv.

35. This series began in *Sirāj al-Akhbār*, *op. cit.,* 1, 7, p. 8.

36. See Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied*, Berkeley, U of California Press, 2001.

37. This passage is translated by Senzil Nawid in Nawid, "The Feminine and Feminism in Tarzi's Work," *op. cit.*, p. 361. For the original see: "Wā'iẓ, Nāṣiḥ, Murshid (Preacher, Consultant, Guide)," *Sirāj al-Akhbār, op. cit.,* 2, 23, 1913, p. 13.

38. See M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics,* Leiden, Brill, 1999.

39. *Sirāj al-Akhbār, op. cit.,* 2, 23, 1913, p. 13.

40. See for example Efrati, *op. cit.,* p. 156 about Iraq, and Badran Feminists, Islam and Nation, *op. cit.,* p. 18 about Egypt.

41. Faiz Ahmed, *Afghanistan Rising : Islamic Law and Statecraft Between the Ottoman and British Empires*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 2017, p. 220

42. *ibid*, p. 28.

43. Flieschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 96. Also see Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences,* Oxford, Oneworld, 2009, p. 223.

44. *Niẓāmnāmah-i nikāḥ, 'arūsī, khatnah' sūri (A Legal Decree on Marriage, Weddings, and Circumcisions),* Kabul, Maṭba'-i Ḥurūfi Māshinkhānah, 1921. Available in the *Afghanistan Digital Library* [Online], accessed May 1, 2019, URL: http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/905qfv04.

45. Aman Allah, *Rūydād-i lūyah jirgah*, Kabul, Dār al-Salṭanah, 1924, p. 181.

46. *ibid,* p. 174.

47. *ibid,* p. 332.

48. May Schinasi, "Femmes Afghans," *op. cit.*, p. 456.

49. Meriwether and Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

50. Biographical details of the students and instructors are based on private interviews shared with me by May Schinasi, an independent scholar and archivist of Afghanistan who has written extensively on the Aman Allah period and personally contributed to the Afghan Digital Library's collection. I visited her in Nice in 2018, where she shared documents gathered in Kabul over several decades of the mid 20th century as well as oral interviews conducted with women who attended the first girls' school.

51. See "Appendix C" in Senzil Nawid, *Religious Response to Social Change in Afghanistan*, Costa Mesa, Mazda, 1999, p. 221-222.

52. *idem.*

53. May Schinasi, "Femmes Afghanes," *op. cit.*, p. 454. For more information on this rare paper see footnote 116 in Wide, "Astrakhan, Borqa'," *op. cit.*, p. 199.

54. *Amān-i Afghān*, July 25 1928, quoted in Nawid, *Religious Response, op. cit.*, p. 141-142.

55. *ibid.* See also *Amān-i Afghān*, 15 & 16, May 19 and 23, 1928.

56. For examples see, Wide, "Astrakhan, Borqa'," *op. cit.*, p. 187-188 and Ehsan-Ullah d'Afghanistan, *Le Voyage D'Amān Ullāh Roi d'Afghanistan,* Paris, Centres d'Etudes et de Recherches Documentaires sur l'Afghanistan, 2005.

57. This article, from *Partap,* Lahore, Sept. 12, 1928, was recounted by Senzil Nawid in Nawid, *Religious Response, op. cit.*, p. 228.
58. For examples see May Mott-Smith, 'Behind the Purdah in Afghanistan', *Asia*, 54, December 16 1929, p. 16; Roland Wild, 'Amanullah's Fairy-Tale City,' *Daily Mail*, September 28, 1928; "Europe and After: Life In Kabul," *The Times,* London, England, Dec 19, 1928.
59. Khouri, *op. cit.,* p. 92-95.
60. Nawid, *Religious Response, op. cit.*, p. 228.
61. *Anīs*, vol. 5, n°9, June 1931, p. 2-5. Available in the *Afghanistan Digital Library* [Online], accessed March 1, 2020, URL: http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/b2rbp022.
62. Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation, op. cit.*, p. 210-211.
63. *Anīs, op. cit.,* vol. 5, n°4, May 1931, p. 1-2. For the latter example see *Iṣlāḥ*, Kabul, vol. 2, July 1931, 89.
64. Gregory Massel, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women and the Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*, Princeton, 1972, p. 219.
65. See Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia,* Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 200-207; 293-294.
66. Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi and Afshin Matin-asgari, "Unveiling ambiguities: revisiting 1930s Iran's kashf-i hijab campaign" in *Anti-Veiling, in* Stephanie Cronin (ed.) *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 121-149.
67. See "al-Tajdīd wa al-Tajaddud wa al-Mujaddidūn," *al-Manār*, Vol. 31, n°10, July 1931, p. 770-777.
68. Henri Massé, *Le deuxième Congrès Musulman général des femmes d'orient à Téhéran (novembre-décembre 1932)*, 1933, Paris, Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
69. *Programme: First All-Asian Women's Conference Town Hall, Lahore, 19-25 January 1931*, Zurich, Switzerland. The full text is available in "Women and Social Movements International," *Alexander Street Database* [Online], accessed March 18, 2020, URL: https://search.alexanderstreet.com/preview/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C1631754./
70. Marie Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism*, London, Taurus, 2015, p. 175-6. For a discussion of this historical moment see also: Charlotte Weber, "Between Nationalism and Feminism," *op. cit.*, p. 83-106. Sumita Mukherjee, "The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation," *Women's History Review*, 26, 3, p. 363-381.
71. *AAWC Programme, op. cit.,* vii.
72. *ibid,* p. 41.
73. *ibid,* p. 85.
74. Dushka Saiyid, *Muslim Women of the British Punjab: From Seclusion to Politics*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p. 99.
75. *AAWC Programme, op. cit.,* p. 195.
76. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
77. Massé, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
78. *ibid,* p. 46.
79. Massé, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
80. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 91
81. *ibid,* p. 94.
82. Massé, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
83. See Tawab Assifi's self-published autobiography, *My Three Lives on Earth: The Life Story of an Afghan American,* in which he recounts his mother's experience in Tehran. Tawab Assifi, "My Mother," *My Three Lives on Earth: The Life Story of an Afghan American,* Authorhouse, August 14 2015. I suspect she is the daughter who participated in the conference, given her location in Iran at the time and her age compared to her younger sisters, but this is speculation.

84. These notes were given to me by May Schinasi, based in oral interviews she conducted in Kabul, but she refers to them briefly in May Schinasi, *Kabul: A History 1773-1948*, translated by Robert McChesney, Leiden, Brill, 2017, p. 178.

ABSTRACTS

When Afghan women are mentioned in the story of the country's independence, it is most often in relationship to men, as either objects of King Aman Allah Khan's Islamic reforms (r.1919-1929) or else as the locus of backlash against these reforms. This narrative reverberates to this day in discourses about "saving" Afghan women, which paints a picture of a conflict-prone society where women are reduced to a monolithic, voiceless category. Yet locating women in this historical period tells a more nuanced and far-reaching story. This article traces Afghan women and the discourses around them across archives from Egypt to India in order to demonstrate how the nascent women's movement that emerged in early twentieth-century Afghanistan was part of a broader transregional dialogue in which elite women were key actors. The "Balkans-to-Bengal complex" identified by Shahab Ahmad has galvanized scholars of the early modern Islamic world to think through new spatial frameworks, and the Ottoman-Indian nexus continues to provide a useful frame of reference for understanding women's reform between the two World Wars. I discuss methodological approaches to locating women and their voices in male-dominated archives, as well as the theoretical insights provided by this endeavor. In so doing, I challenge accounts that isolate Afghanistan and dismiss women's participation during this period as instrumental and ephemeral.

Lorsque les femmes afghanes sont mentionnées au cours de l'histoire de l'indépendance de leur pays, c'est le plus souvent à travers leur relation aux hommes, soit comme objets des réformes islamiques du roi Aman Allah Khan (1919-1929), soit comme enjeux de la réaction à ces réformes. Ce récit s'est réfléchi jusqu'à nos jours dans des discours évoquant le fait de « sauver » les femmes afghanes, discours qui peignent le tableau d'une société encline au conflit où les femmes sont réduites à une catégorie monolithique et silencieuse. Toutefois, le fait de situer les femmes dans cette période historique raconte une histoire plus nuancée et de plus grande portée. Cet article suit à la trace les femmes afghanes et les discours produits autour d'elles dans les archives depuis l'Égypte jusqu'en Inde, de manière à démontrer que le mouvement féminin embryonnaire dans l'Afghanistan du début du XX^{e} siècle faisait partie d'un dialogue transrégional plus large dans lequel des femmes de l'élite étaient des acteurs-clés. Le « complexe des Balkans au Bengale » de Shahab Ahmad, qui a incité les spécialistes du monde islamique au début de l'âge moderne à penser à travers de nouveaux cadres spatiaux, perdure dans le nœud ottoman-indien des réformes de l'entre-deux-guerres concernant les femmes. Je discuterai ici des approches méthodologiques qui permettent de situer les femmes et la voix des femmes dans des archives dominées par les hommes, de même que des aspects théoriques de cette entreprise. Ainsi, seront mises en question les analyses qui isolent l'Afghanistan et considèrent la participation des femmes durant cette période comme instrumentalisée et éphémère.

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Mots-clés: genre, femmes, réforme, Islam, entre-deux-guerres, Afghanistan
Keywords: gender, women, reform, Islam, interwar, Afghanistan

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