CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Conflict or the propensity for conflict is inherently embedded within the human condition. As M. Afzalur Rahim states in his book, conflict is a natural occurrence once "two or more social entities, such as individuals, groups, organizations or nations, come in contact with one another when pursuing their objectives".[1] Johan Galtung, a principal founder of peace and conflict studies, in his book 'Peace by Peaceful Means', simply yet effectively explains that conflict arises as "something is standing in the way of something else" – whether it would be between two actors pursuing the same scarce goal or within oneself when seeking two incompatible goals.[2] The presence of said conflict thus results in civilisation's pursuit of peace. In the context of international relations, the study of peace itself is regarded as 'Peace Studies' and it analyses why conflicts occur and attempts to solve them. According to the discipline, there are three strategies that can be adopted to remedy conflicts once the root of the issue is pinpointed: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. This research will utilise one of these three terms – peacebuilding.

Johan Galtung asserts that peacebuilding seeks to unearth the contradiction that lies at the root of the conflict. In terms of actors involved, peacebuilding makes

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[1] M. Afzalur Rahim, *Managing Conflict in Organizations* (Routledge, 2023).

[2] Johan V. Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, p.70 (London: Sage, 1996).

use of Track II actors, further adding governmental actors (Track I) and grassroot, indigenous NGOs (Track III).[3]

It is known within Peace Studies that the role of women in transitional processes is vital for creating sustainable and durable peace. As a group that is usually most severely impacted during times of war and conflict, women carry the insights to ensure that the peace achieved is inclusive, i.e., by speaking up for excluded groups. Women are the most suffering victims in armed conflicts – yet their cries have often been the most unheard of. A plethora of reports, articles, journals, and books have illustrated all the ways in which women become weapons of war, specifically how they become subjected to sexual violence along with physical and verbal abuse as an actual tactic by perpetrators in order to assert control.[4] Therefore, as the group most affected, they possess the motivation to address the root causes of conflict. Studies have shown that when women partake in peace processes, they tend to focus more on reconciliation, education, transitional justice, and economic development which makes for the kind of sustainable peace mentioned above.[5] In regards to this, the International Peace Institute (IPI) measured that peace agreements are 20 percent more likely to last at least two years, and 35 percent more

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[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Khanyi Mlaba, "How Do Women and Girls Experience the Worst of War?," Global Citizen, March 23, 2022, https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/women-and-girls-impacts-war-conflict/.

[5] Emma Fearon, "Shifting the Power: The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping," Human Rights Pulse, March 31, 2021, https://www.humanrightspulse.com/master-contentblog/shifting-the-power-the-role-of-women-in-conflict-resolution-and-peacekeeping#:~:text=Studies%20show%20that%20women%20who,address%20underlying%20causes%20of%20conflict.

likely to last 15 years when women are present as negotiators, mediators or signatories, based on a sample of 182 peace agreements signed between the years of 1989 and 2011.[6]

Afghanistan perhaps remains one of the most concerning regions for the global community in terms of its treatment of women due to the decades-long political, economic, and social instability heeded by several parties, including the terrorist group Taliban. This instability can be traced back all the way back to the Saur Revolution of 1978 which resulted in the overthrowing of the Republic of Afghanistan and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in its place. As a result, although the newly formed government could secure Kabul, the remaining territories became a lawless land by which militant groups and warlords emerged, one of them being the Taliban. In an attempt to combat these domestic opposition groups, the Soviet-backed government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan inquired Soviet help which then prompted the Afghan War that lasted from 1978–1992. Due to the weakening internal conditions of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the Soviets had to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in 1989 – this left a vacuum of power in the country.[7]

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[6] Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz, "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes," *International Peace Institute*, accessed August 3, 2023, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking-rev.pdf.

[7] "A Historical Timeline of Afghanistan," PBS, May 4, 2011, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-jan-june11-timeline-afghanistan.

Rising from the rubbles of Soviet absence in Afghanistan was the Taliban, who succeeded in conquering Kabul by 1996.[8] The Taliban derived their name from the Arabic word *tālib* meaning student, a nod to the fact that the group began sprouting up in religious seminaries from the beginning of 1990s. Under Taliban's rule the poor treatment of women and girls was infamous, which they based on Islamic teachings that external sources often cite as being 'misinterpreted' or even 'misguided'. As soon as the Taliban gained control of the majority of Afghanistan, the group imposed severe restrictions on their ability to attend schools, to work and restricted their movement in general.[9]

Women were also denied the most basic of needs such as health and medical care. Consequently, at that time, Afghanistan had one of the world's highest maternal deaths during childbirth alongside infant and child mortality rates.[10] In urban areas, the Taliban enforced a strict dress code of a long and thick burqa to be used without any exception for girls as young as eight or nine years old. Furthermore, makeup, nail polish, white socks, and shoes that made noise were prohibited from being worn as they deemed that women should walk silently. Women were only permitted to leave the house only when accompanied by male relatives or face dire

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[8] The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Report on the Taliban's War Against Women ," US Department of State, November 17, 2001, https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/6185.htm.

[9] Shannon A. Middleton, "Women's Rights Unveiled: Taliban's Treatment of Women in Afghanistan," *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review* 11, no. 2 (2001): 421–68, https://doi.org/10.18060/17725.

[10] The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Report on the Taliban's War Against Women ," US Department of State, November 17, 2001, https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/6185.htm.

consequences. The inability to stick to the rules may result in public beatings, stoning, amputations, and even executions. As illustrated, Afghanistan under the Taliban had one of the worst human rights records in the world.[11]

The end to Taliban's exclusive rule over Afghanistan occurred in 2001 when the United States (the US) invaded Afghanistan under the guise of self-defense after the September 11 attacks of the Twin Towers. This invasion marked a second round of Afghan war between the US and the Taliban. In 2003, the US declared an end to major combat in Afghanistan; catapulted US-backed democratisation efforts in Afghanistan which birthed Afghanistan's Constitution of 2004. The constitution, among other things, promises equal rights for women, reflected in Article 22 of the constitution which states, "any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law".[12] It paved legal foundations for more policies and laws in favour of women's rights such as the Gender Quota in the House of Parliament or the introduction of the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA) in 2008. Furthermore, the constitution promotes grassroot-level efforts by and for women which contributes towards the country's peace transition processes.

These laws, regulations, policies, and efforts have yielded positive results since implementation, especially compared to when the Taliban was in control of Afghanistan. Despite these successes, there is still a lot to be scrutinised in relation

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[11] *Ibid.*

[12] "The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," Afghan Embassy, January 26, 2004, http://www.afghanembassy.com.pl/afg/images/pliki/TheConstitution.pdf.

to what critical role women play in the making and building of peace in Afghanistan since the US declared an end to major combat in 2003. Therefore, this research is interested in **"The Role of Women in Peacebuilding: The Case of Afghanistan (2004–2019)."**

1.2 Research Questions

The process of peacebuilding can be undertaken by various multi-level parties, yet studies have shown that the most sustainable of peace can only be achieved when women are present. This thesis focuses on how the gendered dimensions of conflict impact the role of women as reliable peacebuilders, highlighting the case of Afghanistan as it holds one of the worst track records for women's rights abuses at some points in time. The scope of the thesis has been limited to the timeframe of 2004–2019 as it recognises that the landmark Afghan constitution passed in 2004 was the legal framework by which the various laws, regulations, policies, and grass-roots-level efforts this thesis seeks to analyse are founded upon. Thus, I suggest the following research questions to be answered through this research:

1. How has the war in Afghanistan affected men and women differently from a gender perspective?

2. How effective have the measures implemented been to ensure that women have better access as peacebuilders in Afghanistan through the period of 2004–2019?

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the aforementioned research questions, the objective of this research is:

1. To describe how men are women are affected differently in wars from a gender perspective which shapes a women's vital role in post-conflict transition processes;

2. To find the effectiveness of the measures employed to ensure that women have better access as peacebuilders in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2019.

1.4 Research Significance

Acknowledging that the Taliban has once again regained control of Afghanistan in 2021, the research aims to shed light on how women have contributed to the peacebuilding efforts in the period of 2004 through 2019 as the group that has been most severely affected under their rule in 1996–2001. Although this has resulted in positive developments regarding women's rights in the country, a lack of analysis still exists, particularly regarding the extent how which specific laws and policies yield the aforementioned favourable results. The findings of this research are expected to raise awareness of the treatment of women in war-torn countries such as Afghanistan and further highlight the ways women play an active role in the peacebuilding processes.

1.5 Structure of Writing

This research is divided into five chapters. Introduction, the first chapter, introduces the topic as well as its urgency. It also includes the research questions, objective and significance which helps in guiding the overall research paper.

The second chapter, Theoretical Framework, consists of two parts, namely Literature and Theory and Concepts, that serves as point of departure for the subsequent chapters. The Literature Review is divided into two categories: (1) Understanding the Links Between Gender and War and (2) Women's Role in Conflict Resolution. Moreover, the second chapter also discusses one IR theory and four concepts which supplement in analysing the finding of this research, and finally answer the research questions.

The third chapter, Methodology, explains how this research is conducted by describing the research approach, research method, data collection technique, and data gathering technique.

The fourth chapter, Analysis, is composed of the most significant aspect of this thesis as it presents all the important information and data in a systematic way which aids in addressing all of the research questions comprehensively in alignment with the predetermined theory and concepts.

The last chapter, Conclusion, succinctly concludes the findings of the research while asserting the main points of the thesis. Recommendations are also included in this chapter which suggest ways as to how the research can be improved in the future.