

**Ayla Black**

**Project report**

**BCM390, “Media, war and peace”**

**Autumn session, 2013**

**University of Wollongong**

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see [http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/BCM390\\_13outline.pdf](http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/BCM390_13outline.pdf)

*Ayla Black* prepared (1) an information pack in the form of leaflet and (2) a fictional dialogue on doing the project. See following pages.

- The link to this document is from [http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp\\_tops.html](http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp_tops.html).

## Do you know what it means to be a woman in

It means:

- Culturally ingrained gender inequality
- Having little to no status in the community; facing significant disadvantage
- Facing significant gender oppression and gender based violence
- Attending school for less than half the years that boys will attend
- An adult literacy rate of 26%
- Facing imprisonment and execution over minor crimes, for which men will not be punished.
- A 46% chance of giving birth before your eighteenth birthday; the highest maternal death rate in the world
- A life expectancy of only 44 years

(Emadi, 2005, p. 165; AusAID, 2013B)



Image: AusAID, 2012.

## Australia's Key Role in Educating the Women of Afghanistan

In the past three years the Australian government has invested \$380.3 million into Afghan development. A significant portion of this has been directly invested into education. Working through Care Australia, AusAID (the Australian International Aid Agency) has developed community based education for more than 8000 students, with a strong focus on education for girls, and developing the leadership potential of women and girls, including recruiting and training them as teachers (AusAID, 2011).

AusAID, in partnership with Malaysia, have educated over 1200 Afghan teacher-trainers who will now use their skills to help improve the efficacy of thousands of teachers working in schools throughout Afghanistan (2013C).

Julia Gillard, the Prime Minister of Australia, has announced a 'comprehensive long-term partnership between Australia and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan'. Stating that Australia, through continued peace building efforts, is committed to promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, as the republic continually strives to build a stable, democratic society with a lasting peace (Press Office, 2012).

If you would like to educate a girl in Afghanistan, for one year, for just \$69, please visit:  
[www.care.org.au/donate](http://www.care.org.au/donate)

For further information, please visit:  
[www.ausaid.gov.au](http://www.ausaid.gov.au)

Compiled by Ayla Black as a member of BCM390-2013, at the University of Wollongong.

Cover Image: Ibrahimi, 2013.

Australian Aid  
in Afghanistan

# Afghan Women

## Victims of War and Peace

## Education Holds Key to Empowerment



***For every little girl in Afghanistan,  
going to school takes much more  
than just pencils and books—it  
takes extreme bravery.***



## Life in Afghanistan for women

Gender inequality and oppression are an entrenched part of Afghan culture. Traditionally patriarchal, the country's civil laws coexist alongside strict Islamic law (SVAW, 2013). For generations, Afghan women have faced significant gender oppression, both socially and politically—with tradition believing that 'girls belong at home' (UNICEF, 2013). Their oppression was at its worst during the height of the Taliban rule. During this time, Afghan women were forbidden from working, attending school, visiting public hospitals, as well as confined to their homes unless accompanied by a male relative and wearing, the head-to-toe covering, burqa. Women were stripped of their rights and forbidden from being seen or heard.

### Afghan Women Today

Following the fall of the Taliban, in 2001, Afghan women have struggled to regain a place in society. There are now 2.4 million girls enrolled in Afghan schools, compare to just 5000 in 2001. Women's education is considered one of the rare Afghan success stories of the past decade (Care Australia, 2011). While women and girls are now theoretically free to attend school, they still face incredible opposition from many avenues, including: vicious militant attacks, lack of adequate



Image: Pearlman, 2012.

facilities and teachers, and parental reluctance over safety fears and traditional beliefs (UNICEF, 2013). There are fears that recent gains made in women's education may be lost following the security transition in 2014, when foreign security and peacebuilding forces officially depart from Afghanistan.

### Why is women's education vital for the future of Afghanistan?

Evidence has shown that when women are given the chance to receive an education the benefits are far reaching. Educated women are less likely to die in childbirth, are more likely to have healthier babies, be able to better provide for their families, and send their own children to school (Care Australia, 2011).

After a crisis, schools are most often the very first community organisations to start functioning; with women teachers playing a critical role in the education process. It is argued that women as teachers hold the potential to 'act as agents of change for a gender-just peace' (Kirk, 2004, p. 51).



Image: Boone, 2011.

“ Research shows that when you help one woman out of poverty she will bring four others with her ”

Women experiencing personal and professional development through their roles can be further empowered to support societal change and reconstruction of their communities built on principals of a gender-just peace (Kirk, 2004, p. 52-54). Increased self-confidence at work, often follows women into their community lives (AusAID, 2013C).

Educating women is vital for enabling them to realise their full potential. Women in Afghanistan have the power to markedly change societal attitudes, and contribute to peacebuilding efforts seeking to attain a lasting gender-just peace. They play a key role in maintaining peace after foreign forces depart from Afghanistan. It is important that all efforts be continually made to ensure education is not denied, and is equally accessible, to the women of Afghanistan.



Image: Afghanistan NOW, 2011.

**Dialogue between a child and their father about the project the child is working on.**

Child: Hey, Dad, can I ask you something?

Father: Sure, fire-away.

Child: What do you think about the Australian government's current involvement with Afghanistan?

Father: (Ponders question) Hmm... I don't think it's really necessary. Why do we need to have any involvement? Isn't this America's war? It seems to me like a bit more attention needs to be paid to our own country.

Child: Ok. What do you actually know about the Australian government's current involvement with Afghanistan?

Father: (Somewhat awkwardly) Well, truthfully... I don't really know a lot.

Child: Where did your thoughts in response to my previous question stem from, if you don't feel you're up-to-date with the current situation?

Father: I guess it's just comes from the news, or what I've read in the paper. You hear people chatting about things at work, and you throw your opinion out there when you join in.

Child: So your opinion is generated from media information and popular opinion?

Father: Well, yeah, I guess so. (Seems flustered, mildly aggressive) Why? Is there something wrong with that?

Child: Calm down, I'm not attacking you. I'm just interested in your opinion on, and thoughts regarding, the topic. It's because I'm working on developing a project aimed at debunking common myths surrounding, and educating the general public about, the Australian government's current aid involvement, as a part of peacebuilding efforts, with

Afghanistan. And you're a perfect representation of a member of the target audience. Your input will be incredibly useful to me for ensuring I develop the project to enable maximum efficacy.

Father: Oh ok. What's the project?

Child: I'm developing an information pack, specifically in the form of a brochure, which breaks down and effectively conveys the information I wish to disseminate. My brochure will focus specifically on the Australian Government's aid contribution to Afghanistan that has the aim of empowering women and girls to bring about a lasting peace, through education.

Father: That sounds really interesting. How much aid funding does Australia contribute to Afghanistan?

Child: Well, in the last three years Australia has invested \$380.3 million into Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>. Their achievements are wide ranging and include providing better access to basic healthcare, improving maternal health, clearing the remnants of war—such as landmines—and promoting education opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Father: I didn't realise we were so invested in Afghanistan.

Child: We are. Afghanistan is a struggling country. Their development issues are immense, and it remains one of the worst places in the world to be born.<sup>3</sup>

Father: So, we're trying to help them?

---

<sup>1</sup> AusAID 2013, *Afghanistan: Overview*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/home.aspx>>.

<sup>2</sup> AusAID 2013, *Afghanistan: Overview*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/home.aspx>>.

<sup>3</sup> AusAID 2013, *Afghanistan: Why we give aid to Afghanistan*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/why-aid.aspx>>.

Child: Yes. We are working to enable fair and equal opportunity for all persons to basic human rights such as shelter, security, sustenance, healthcare and education. As well as bring about a lasting peace in the country. We are providing continual support to the Afghan republic as they strive to 'build a stable, democratic society based on the rule of law, where human rights, including the equality of all men and women, are guaranteed under the Afghan Constitution'.<sup>4</sup> These are just some of Australia's many peacebuilding initiatives within Afghanistan.

Father: And you're just focusing on one of these: educating women?

Child: Yes, as peacebuilding efforts within Afghanistan are so broad I have decided to narrow my research to focus upon the Australian Government's efforts to promote and enable the education of women within Afghanistan, why this is important, and to disseminate this information to the general public.

Father: Ok. What exactly is peacebuilding?

Child: Well, the process of peacebuilding is complex, to say the least. The term first arose in the 1970s, through the work of Johan Galtung who called for the creation of peacebuilding structures to promote sustainable peace by supporting indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution.<sup>5</sup> Peacebuilding became a familiar concept within the United Nations (UN) following a 1992 report by former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, *Agenda for Peace*; the report defined peace as actions taken to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid relapse into conflict.<sup>6</sup>

Father: Hang on! Let me just process this. So in the case of Afghanistan, the efforts following the war, in the form of foreign intervention, to develop a sustainable structure within the country that could bring about and maintain a lasting peace, are all peace building efforts?

---

<sup>4</sup> Press Office 2012, *Comprehensive long-term Partnership between Australia and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Prime Minister of Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, < <http://www.pm.gov.au/press-office/comprehensive-long-term-partnership-between-australia-and-islamic-republic-afghanistan>>.

<sup>5</sup> Peacebuilding Support Office 2013, *Peacebuilding and the United Nations*, United Nations, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pbun.shtml>>.

<sup>6</sup> Darweish, M and Rank, C 2012, 'Introduction', in M Darweish and C Rank (eds.), *Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*, Pluto Press, London, p. 2.

Child: Exactly.

Father: We are taking their society, fractured and split-apart by violent conflict, and re-fashioning the pieces into a peace-shaped product.

Child: That's a very eloquent way to put it.

Father: Alright, I don't know anything about women's education in Afghanistan. I know that women in that part of the world face oppression though.

Child: That's true. Gender inequality and oppression are seriously ingrained in Afghan culture. Afghanistan is a traditionally patriarchal country, which is reflected in the cultures and customs of Afghan society. The country's civil-law coexists alongside strict Islamic law.<sup>7</sup> For generations, Afghan women have experienced varying degrees of gender oppression, both socially and politically.<sup>8</sup> This oppression was at its worst during the height of the Taliban rule. When the Taliban seized control of Kabul in September 1996, Afghan women and girls were stripped of their rights and forbidden from being seen or heard. They were confined to their homes unless wearing a burqa and accompanied by a male relative. They were even barred from visiting the hospital; female doctors were banned from working, and male doctors were forbidden from treating women.<sup>9</sup> And that's just the tip of the iceberg. It sounds completely ludicrous, but that was the reality of life for women in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

Father: Yeah, I've always found it hard to get my head around that. So the Taliban represent the peak of oppression, but Afghan women still face oppression outside of Taliban rule, just not as extreme?

Child: Precisely. Like I mentioned earlier, it is a deeply entrenched part of their culture. But it is something that measures are now being taken to combat,

---

<sup>7</sup> Stop Violence Against Women 2013, *Violence Against Women in Afghanistan*, The Advocates for Human Rights, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.stopvaw.org/afghanistan>>.

<sup>8</sup> Emadi, H 2005, *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p. 165.

<sup>9</sup> Hanford, C 2012, *Women's Lives under the Taliban*, National Organisation for Women, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.now.org/issues/global/afghanwomen1.html>>.



including efforts by numerous non-government organisations (NGO) and governmental bodies to affect lasting change in Afghanistan.

Father: Ok, so tell me more about the importance of educating women.

Child: Well, Care Australia—an NGO who works closely with AusAID (Australia's international aid agency) in Afghanistan, who have a focus on empowering women and closing the gender gap—state that 'When you help one woman out poverty, she will bring four others with her.'<sup>10</sup> Research shows that educated women are: less likely to die in childbirth, more likely to have healthy babies, more likely to send their children to school, and be better able to protect their families.<sup>11</sup> Advocates declare that educating women and girls provides the single highest return on investment in the developing world.<sup>12</sup>

Father: That's unbelievable. They don't talk about that on the news.

Child: No, they don't. There is currently a trend of generating fear of the 'other' in Australian media. Fuelled by politicians and the media, it constantly suggests that an interest or investment in foreign culture and persons is wrong or detrimental to Australian prosperity. The 'other', often given the form of the war-mongering Arab, the veiled woman or the Islamic fundamentalist, is an unwelcome invader—or so popular media representation would have us believe.<sup>13</sup> That's why I am interested in putting together this information pack for the general public; to debunk these common misconceptions. And although peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan are so broad, I can at least inform readers about one area of interest.

Father: So the Australian government, as well as many other Government and Non-Government Organisations are working to build lasting peace within Afghanistan—as we can all see it is a troubled nation—to better

---

<sup>10</sup> Care Australia 2013, *Women's Empowerment*, Care Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.care.org.au/womens-empowerment>>.

<sup>11</sup> Care Australia 2011, *Afghanistan: Educated Girls are the future*, Care Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://blog.care.org.au/2011/05/27/educated-girls-are-the-future-of-afghanistan/>>.

<sup>12</sup> Care Australia 2013, *Women's Empowerment*, Care Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.care.org.au/womens-empowerment>>.

<sup>13</sup> Kabir, N 2007, 'Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 313-314.



the lives and conditions of Afghan people and promote a secure and democratic future for them, especially women. Am I on track?

Child: You're right on track! I've given you a bit of a run-down on several matters relating to Afghanistan and somewhat contextualised it all, but since my information pack is focusing solely on the task of educating Afghan women as a peacebuilding effort, and the benefits of this, how about I complete my brochure and then pass it on to you to read. After you view it we can discuss what you thought of it, and how you felt the information was presented to you.

Father: That sounds like a great idea. You've really got me thinking about this now. It's not something that has ever come to my attention before.

Child: Try and view the brochure as you would have before this conversation, so we can better evaluate its efficacy. Your thoughts have been really useful, I will consider them as I finalise the information pack and I'll get it to you for your critique as soon as it is finished. Thank you for your help!

Father: That's ok, like I said, I'm really thinking about this now. I feel like I've been somewhat misinformed, or under-informed.

## **TWO DAYS LATER**

Father: I've finished viewing your brochure, would you like to discuss my thoughts on it now?

Child: Yes, please. What did you think?

Father: I thought it was very informative and well-constructed. The front cover caught my attention with the grabbing visual. My first thoughts were that it's unusual to be presented with an image of a woman revealing her face from behind a burqa. Typical media representations of burqa clad women are usually employed to demonstrate oppression and/or suffering. It is nice to see that behind the burqa is not the *hideous face of oppression*, but a radiant, smiling youth—a person like any other. The

title is effective as it gives the reader just enough information to know what the brochure is about and to get them thinking. But it is the short paragraph at the bottom of the page that draws the reader in—each reader will be captivated at that point and have to read on. You have very effectively used the space of the front cover, as this is the most important page. It is what determines whether the reader will open the brochure or not.

Child: You have interpreted my intentions exactly. I hope they are this clear to each reader. The image of the woman on the front is particularly important, I believe. It is essential that the reader not enter the brochure with any preconceptions. Hopefully the image of a smiling, happy, burqa-clad woman will invite them to rethink any assumptions about Afghan women.

Father: I found the layout and presentation of information very inviting as well. Upon opening, the list about what it means to be a woman in Afghanistan further roused my interest and drew me to read on. This is good because it provides enough of a teaser before the brochure heads into the information-heavy section; the teaser ensures the reader is interested enough to stay on and read the entire brochure.

Child: That's great. I thought the list format would be an effective way to quickly deliver some interesting facts to further draw the reader in.

Father: All in all, I think you have done a great job of effectively disseminating your information to the intended audience. Each reader will surely leave with some different thoughts on topic, or at least a more-informed understanding. I have. After our chat the other day, and viewing this brochure I now feel very informed. I realise I didn't really know anything about the topic before, and there is still a lot I don't know. But thanks to this I do now feel informed about women's education in Afghanistan, and I understand how important this is and why.

Child: I'm pleased that this brochure has had the power to give you that, and the power to inform about a very important topic. It is vital that we

support the process of the education of women in Afghanistan as it is crucial to developing a sustainable peace in the nation.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Care Australia 2011, *Afghanistan: Educated Girls are the future*, Care Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://blog.care.org.au/2011/05/27/educated-girls-are-the-future-of-afghanistan/>>; AusAID 2013, *Afghanistan: Why we give aid to Afghanistan*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/why-aid.aspx>>.

**Works Cited (Including Works Cited in Brochure)**

Afghanistan Now 2011, *The Afghanistan of Today: Donate*, Afghanistan Now, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://afghanistannow.wordpress.com/2011/02/>>.

AusAID 2011, *Afghanistan: Empowerment through Education*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/initiative-empowerment-education.aspx>>.

AusAID 2012, *Educating Afghanistan's Women and Girls*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://ausaid.gov.au/HotTopics/Pages/Display.aspx?QID=962>>.

AusAID 2013A, *Afghanistan: Overview*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/home.aspx>>.

AusAID 2013B, *Afghanistan: Why we give aid to Afghanistan*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/why-aid.aspx>>.

AusAID, 2013C, *Teaching the Teachers in Afghanistan*, AusAID, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/HotTopics/Pages/Display.aspx?QID=1122>>.

Boone, John 2011, *Taliban ready to lift ban on girls' schools, says minister*, The Guardian, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/13/taliban-lift-ban-girls-schools>>.

Care Australia 2011, *Afghanistan: Educated Girls are the future*, Care Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://blog.care.org.au/2011/05/27/educated-girls-are-the-future-of-afghanistan/>>.

Care Australia 2013, *Women's Empowerment*, Care Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.care.org.au/womens-empowerment>>.

Darweish, M and Rank, C 2012, 'Introduction', in M Darweish and C Rank (eds.), *Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*, Pluto Press, London, pp. 1-14.

Emadi, H 2005, *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*, Greenwood Press, Westport.



Hanford, C 2012, *Women's Lives under the Taliban*, National Organisation for Women, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.now.org/issues/global/afghanwomen1.html>>.

Hirst, C 2012, 'How has the Liberal Peace served Afghanistan?', in M Darweish and C Rank (eds.), *Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*, Pluto Press, London, pp. 15-31.

Ibrahimi, S 2013, *The Women Behind the Burqa*, Afghan Info War, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.afghaninfowar.com/the-women-behind-the-burqa/>>.

Kabir, N 2007, 'Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 313-328.

Kirk, J 2004, 'Promoting a Gender-Just Peace: The roles of Women teachers in Peacebuilding and reconstruction', *Gender and Development*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 50-59.

Peacebuilding Support Office 2013, *Peacebuilding and the United Nations*, United Nations, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pbun.shtml>>.

Pearlman, A 2012, *Afghan women largely lack healthcare, education*, Global Post, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/rights/afghanistan-women-healthcare-education>>.

Press Office 2012, *Comprehensive long-term Partnership between Australia and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Prime Minister of Australia, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/press-office/comprehensive-long-term-partnership-between-australia-and-islamic-republic-afghanistan>>.

Stop Violence Against Women 2013, *Violence Against Women in Afghanistan*, The Advocates for Human Rights, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.stopvaw.org/afghanistan>>.

UNICEF 2013, *Girls Education in Afghanistan*, UNICEF, viewed 08 June 2013, <<http://www.unicefusa.org/news/news-from-the-field/feeding-girls-hunger-to.html>>.