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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Exposing Masculine-Imperial
Peace from an Anti-Imperialist, Muslim-Feminist Perspective”

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This paper insists that we locate current discussions about gender in post-conflict settings from within the ever-expanding reach of *masculine-imperialist* peacebuilding, whereby the existing multifarious international aid-governance structure is steered exclusively by a highly militarized, Western politico-ideological agenda. Post-conflict settings are characterized by *outsiders* (mainly men) having greater levels of decision-making authority in “*Other*” territories, the permanence of incongruous civil-military partnerships, mismatched and competing foreign agendas and the continuation of tenuous, ineffective and failed policies and outcomes. This paper presents an anti-colonial critique of the normative peacebuilding agenda, which largely displaces all forms of (local/national) alternative approaches to recovery in the aftermath of war. Drawing from my work as a consultant and researcher in post-conflict Afghanistan, I will argue that existing aid interventions in post-conflict contexts can not and should not simply integrate culture/religion to further legitimize existing strategies, but rather, be principally inclusive and integrative of religious/spiritual worldviews to help reframe both the approach and design of peacebuilding initiatives as an anti-colonial political project. This paper further argues that although acknowledging culture and religion will facilitate greater ownership of the peace process, it is important to equally highlight how religion is used as a weapon to justify the documented *backlash* experienced by women in post-war context, particularly to re-assert traditional gender roles and gender relations, and to police public space.