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Afghanistan, Gendered Subjects, and Border Politics in Lillias Hamilton's *A Vizier's Daughter: A Tale of the Hazara War* (1900)

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<1> In 1900, Lillias Hamilton, court physician to Abdur Al Rahman Khan, Amir of Afghanistan, published *A Vizier's Daughter: A Tale of the Hazara War*, a unique novel, on a politically sensitive subject, namely, the Amir's quelling of Hazara uprisings between 1888 and 1893, with brutal consequences for Hazara women. The Hazaras are Shia Muslims, an ethnic and religious minority, officially designated by the United Nations as a people who have been historically persecuted. (1) When, in 1893, the Durand Line was established as the international border between British India and Afghanistan through negotiations between Sir Mortimer Durand and Kabul's Amir Abdur Al Rahman Khan, it generated a focus on strong, centralized nation-building within Afghanistan, with territories belonging to tribes like the Shia Hazaras forcibly brought under the sway of Kabul. British interests were well served by such developments, for in strengthening the northern border by compelling Hazara tribes in the region to submit to the authority of the nation state, Afghanistan could operate more effectively as a buffer zone between imperial Russia and British India. The outcome of such border diplomacy for Hazara women and children was catastrophic. Large numbers were taken captive, forcibly transported to Kabul, and sold into slavery.

<2> As court physician from 1894 to 1897, Hamilton witnessed the adverse impact of border negotiations and border troubles on women's lives, arising from imperial policy. She belonged to a decade when, as Holly Laird notes, "the New Imperialism was knotted in wars abroad and had ceased being a nearly universal point of pride for the British" (Laird, 2). To visit the complicated and neglected work of this extraordinary woman, is to be reminded of the task articulated by Deirdre David of examining how Victorian women write "sometimes in enthusiastic consonance with

praise of Britannic rule, sometimes in a contrapuntal voice that speaks skeptically alongside the primarily androcentric voices that articulate ideal governance of the empire” (David, 5). Hamilton’s work does not lend itself easily to preferred areas of focus for nineteenth-century scholars of women’s writing. Agendas of liberal feminism engage with woman as either self-determining subject or discursively subjugated, by addressing issues of voice, agency, sexuality, and the performance of gender in relation to cultural misogyny. What has not been fully addressed is woman in relation to systems of government, and international politics. The lacuna is understandable, given that, at a time when women did not have the vote, very few nineteenth-century women writers had access to witnessing how governments worked, or how women from marginalized groups were affected either directly or indirectly by British imperial policy, and elided from imperial and national histories.

<3>This essay introduces and examines *A Vizier’s Daughter: A Tale of the Hazara War* as a little-known work of fiction that explores the impact of imperial policies on women as minoritized subjects. First, it establishes biographical and historical contexts for Hamilton’s engagement with the question of border politics in relation to Afghan-British India relations and the Great Game, during the late nineteenth century. Next, it analyzes how Hamilton employs the figure of Gul Begum, her female protagonist, for purposes of exploring how gender politics in the region came to be imbricated with border politics as a form of necropolitics. Thereafter, it evaluates Hamilton’s strategic engagement with the concept of colonial modernity through her fictionalized construction of Mir Munshi Aala Sultan Mohammed Khan, a citizen of British India, who served as Chief Secretary at the Kabul court. Finally, it addresses the significance her work may hold for scholarship on women’s writing in relation to decolonization.

<4> *A Vizier’s Daughter: A Tale of the Hazara War* engages with a topic unusual for a Victorian woman writer, for, while the position of Muslim women fascinated many women travel writers of the age such as Sophia Lane Poole, Julia Pardoe, Annie Harvey, and Georgianna Dawson-Damer, their attentions remained largely confined to female spaces such as the zenana, the hammam, or the “hareem,” rather than “the public sphere.” (2) Hamilton, by contrast, focuses on how women’s situated identities are damaged when international diplomacy alters spatial relations. In her realistic depiction of the destructive consequences of the Great Game’s stratagems for women, Hamilton eschews the well-worn *topos* of the imperial romance, populated by female border figures such as Kipling’s Woman of Shamlegh in *Kim*. Instead, she explores gender politics in relation to the periphery as a geographical space. Namathullah Kadrie, contending that Hamilton deferred criticism of the Amir till after his death in 1901, chooses to dismiss *A Vizier’s*

Daughter as a work of fiction, “loosely-based on history” (Kadrie, 5). A literary critic might argue otherwise. Hamilton was adroit in employing fiction to censure the Amir, and, by extension, Viceroy Curzon, by representing the repercussive effects of British imperial policies that fostered ethnic nationalism in Afghanistan through the institution of the Durand Line.

<5> As a professional woman, Hamilton both occupied and understood the periphery, though defining positionality in relation to empire for a virtually unknown Victorian writer, who was mobile, single, independent, and a practicing medical doctor at the court of Kabul, is problematic, given the paucity of scholarship on her life and work. One might certainly posit that given her professional history, she was the approximate of the New Woman. Yet, paradoxically, if Hamilton’s daring professional mobility emerged at a time when the concept of the flamboyant New Woman was gaining currency through the writings of Sarah Grand, and Ouida, her unorthodox lifestyle derived from embracing obscurity, in a remote region that resisted British expansionism.

<6> As a forbidding landlocked country, with mountainous terrain and warring tribes, Afghanistan, “the graveyard of empires,” witnessed innumerable invasions by aspiring imperialists from Central Asia, who failed to establish permanent rule. It emerged as a modern state in the eighteenth century, under the Durrani dynasty, but thereafter disintegrated into smaller, independent kingdoms. Reunited by Dost Mohammed Khan, with British support, it again lapsed into succession wars following his death, in 1863. With the end of the Second Afghan War, in 1880, it became a British Protectorate State under Abdur Rahman Khan, formerly a fierce enemy of the British, who returned from exile in Tashkent. His negotiations with the British included importing British munitions of war, establishing the Durand Line, and receiving a subsidy of Rupees 1,850,000. His control of Afghanistan rested on military despotism, surveillance, and the subjugation and displacement of ethnic groups for purposes of national security, with his conquest of Shia Hazarajat, and conversion of Kafiristan to Nuristan contributing considerably to his reputation as the “Iron Amir.” Such ruthlessness served British interests in the Great Game, earning him the Honorary Grand Commander of the Most Exalted Star of India in 1885, and the Honorary Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath in 1893! Hamilton was therefore extraordinarily courageous in addressing the deleterious effects of such imperial policies on women. Her novel anticipates contemporary scholarly debates on decolonization as succinctly summarized by Jansen and Osterhammel. (3) As they note, scholarship today interrogates the assumption that nationalism is the binary opposite of imperialism, and its inevitable successor. Amazingly, Hamilton, back in 1900, represented how these two systems

coexisted in a symbiotic relationship, and how internal conflicts between ethnic or religious groups could complicate the binary between colonizer and colonized. In addition, her novel confirms contemporary findings that violence frequently informs nationalist movements, while the regulation of citizenship by the new nation state is conjointly influenced by patriarchy and the class affiliations of those who shape emerging constitutions. Consequently, gender-specific impairments to mobility frequently arise out of new political geographies, with women's rights of citizenship jeopardized when external borders and internal provinces are redefined.

<7> Borders were a crucial factor in Hamilton's professional life. Born in 1858 in New South Wales, Australia, she moved with her family to England in 1860, and visited Europe after attending Cheltenham's Ladies College. Mobility marked her professional training. She qualified first as a nurse at the Liverpool Workhouse Infirmary, then earned medical diplomas from the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, and finally obtained her degree as Doctor of Medicine from the University of Bruxelles. The opportunity to work abroad, extended to her by Dr. Charles Henry Joubert of the Indian Medical Service, enabled her survival in the medical profession. Christopher Timmis, in his assessment of Hamilton in the *Journal of Medical Biography*, discusses discrimination women doctors faced in securing employment in Britain, and observes that Hamilton, on her return from abroad, could only obtain the position of Principal at an agricultural college for women! (4) By contrast, as Éadaoin Agnew notes, for British women, "India and the empire more generally, was a space where they could evade the constraints of Victorian domesticity" (Agnew, 11). In India, Hamilton practiced as a qualified doctor, establishing a private clinic first, before her appointment as head of the Lady Dufferin Zenana (Women's) Hospital in Kolkata (Calcutta), but following a bout of ill-health, she accepted an offer of employment from the Amir and moved to Kabul, where she lived from 1894 to 1897.

<8> Her initial employment was in the quaintly styled role of "lady specimen" for the women of the Amir's household, but Hamilton was later elevated to the rank of court physician. The reasons for her promotion remain uncertain. Kadrie claims that the appointment followed her successful treatment of the Amir, who pleaded with her for medical attention during an illness. Hamilton's Obituary in the *British Medical Journal* in 1925, identifies the patient as the Amir's favorite wife. Regardless of which version is correct, the outcome was the same: she was officially deemed the Amir's "daughter," and thereby gained opportunities through her new position in court to witness Afghanistan's violent and unstable political culture, even

as her work with vaccination to eradicate smallpox, and her proficiency with Farsi, brought her into contact with the Afghan people.

<9> Hamilton left Afghanistan in 1897. Kadrie avers that she fled the country due to political intrigue, and her friendship and support for the Chief Secretary, who also escaped to British India, and figures as a character in her novel, suggest this as a possibility.⁽⁵⁾ The *British Medical Journal's* Obituary offers a more tactful explanation without contradicting Kadrie's account: "Her life there must have been one of inconceivable difficulty, constantly fighting against superstitions, ignorance, and the jealousies of an Eastern court...Failing health obliged her to relinquish her appointment in 1898, when she returned to England" (*BMJ*, 141). In her life story, Hamilton engages with what reads like the *topos* of a colonial adventure novel, a phenomenon that LeeAnne Richardson addressed. Undoubtedly, her position as an employee of a ruler whom the British simultaneously negotiated with and mistrusted, was a delicate and difficult one, shared by many British citizens who served in the Amir's court. These included John Alfred Gray, his physician from 1889 to 1893, Frank A. Martin, his engineer-in-chief from 1895 to 1901, and Kate Daly, who served as the Amir's nurse from 1895 to 1901.⁽⁶⁾ As the Amir's employee, she was under contractual obligation to abstain from dealings with the foreign press, for Abdur-al Rahman was notoriously averse to scrutiny from the West.⁽⁷⁾ When Hamilton, in a published letter, defended the Amir's annexation of Kafiristan by invoking the sanctity of the Durand Line, she failed to win his appreciation, while the journalist, Mary Billington, on an assignment to report on women's rights in South Asia for the *Daily Graphic*, had her application for entry into Afghanistan refused. Little wonder, therefore, that in her Introduction, Hamilton cryptically privileged fiction over nonfiction, for purposes of seriously addressing Afghanistan and the region:

To explain everything would be to tell too much, to get down to the dregs and stir up a sediment that is perhaps better left to settle. To half explain would lead to misconstruction...An autobiography of my sojourn in the capital of Afghanistan would therefore necessarily entail many explanations that for very obvious reasons it is better not to enter into. They are best forgotten.

To get over this difficulty I have written *AVizier's Daughter*, every character in which is drawn from a model, and should, therefore, as far as it goes, give an accurate description of one phase, at any rate, of Afghan life. (3)

It is problematic to assess if Hamilton's tact affirms or contradicts Jutseva's observation that many fin-de siècle women were often "deeply invested in the

maintenance of the British empire” (Jutesva, 5). Her disavowal of seeking to “stir up” sediment seems like a maneuver that alerts the reader to suppressed narratives.

<10>Trauma narratives gesture towards “best forgotten” women’s histories, and *A Vizier’s Daughter* narrates a young Hazara woman’s encounters with patriarchal authority’s varying faces as she moves across boundaries, from the Hazara hills, to Kabul, to an attempted crossing of the Durand Line into British India, where she meets with an untimely death. As a woman who crossed borders, politically, and culturally, Hamilton as novelist could demonstrate what official reports could not capture, namely, how survival for women was contingent upon personal adjustment to shifting spaces that were subject to varied and changing structures of state power shaped by patriarchal culture. Hamilton offers an alternative narrative on state formation in response to imperialism. In exploring emerging nationalism as a militarized, misogynistic phenomenon, Hamilton offers us a complex view of the processes of internal colonization pursued by an emerging nation state reacting to the threat of a foreign presence on its borders, and the specific complications this held for women from ethnic minorities as displaced subjects. Hazara women, in Hamilton’s novel, must negotiate with contending claims of multiple colonizers, who define and determine the spaces they inhabit.

<11>Spatial discourse on the British empire that employs the binaries of metropole and colony, or margins and center, may not adequately serve the task of analyzing the colonial state’s engagement with vexatious borders, as it sought to pursue agendas of British expansionism, and the containment of native rulers on the subcontinent. Scholarship on the Sepoy Uprising of 1857 has paid attention to borders that were re-drawn through the annexation of Indian princely states or rendered fluid under the deliberately imprecise doctrine of paramountcy, enabling indirect British rule over vassal native states. Less examined are the effects of international borders imposed by the British empire. The Durand Line with Afghanistan, and the McMahon Line with Tibet, were two major instances where the British sought to manage indeterminate territory to secure British political hegemony in the region. The binary of center versus periphery is particularly “scandalized” by international borders (to use a Derridean term), for, if a weakening of the center’s power and authority is often viewed as proportionate to distance from the center, national borders disprove this assumption. The center reasserts itself at borders, where its powers are often most strongly enforced.

<12>The story of Hazara women is part of the larger historical narrative on the emergence of Afghan identity through borders. By defining boundaries, the nation state may bring within its scope groups such as tribals, who are subjugated as much

through nationalist and colonial discourses as by military and structural violence that criminalize their independence. History demonstrates how the reduction of groups considered as “nations” to the lowly status of “tribes,” a term that has never been adequately defined, has often been part of a trajectory that culminated in genocide, when such peoples proved resistant to “evolving” into members of a modern polity that defined itself as the nation state. Regions occupied by such groups, once regarded as an ecological niche to which they “naturally” belonged, devolve into provinces and administrative units, by which the indigenous inhabitants are dispossessed of ownership rights. Borders can thereby be used to posit a near homogeneity in populations, and to censure the assertion of ethnic or religious difference as anti-national. Hamilton addressed the fate of such groups in the Hazara, at a time when their culture, history, and social formations were not seriously considered.

<13>At every stage in the story of Hamilton’s female Hazara protagonist, Gul Begum, her relations with patriarchy intertwine with her relations with the state as an entity conceptualized by borders. Afghanistan, with its fiercely patriarchal culture emerges as the exception to what McIntock, Loomba, and Sen among others have described as the imperial tendency to “feminize” Asian and African lands and peoples. (8) When the novel commences, Gul Begum has scornfully dismissed the crone figure of Old Miriam, the fortune teller, whose predictions yoke the fate of Hazara girls to the character of their destined husbands. Her soothsaying is, ironically, both a superstitious practice and an educational exercise for young women who must come to terms with patriarchy. Gul’s resistance meets with a curse that foregrounds spatial relations: “You will have dust to lick and tears to dry. Your day will soon be over, and you will come to envy old Miriam, who wanders free among the Hazara hills” (9). It is significant that for the elderly woman, freedom is invoked through a landscape that affirms the absence of borders. Miriam’s age exempts her from becoming the victim of a carceral state that consigns young Hazara women to confinement and bondage under its warlords, clerics, courtiers, or civil servants.

<14> However, as the vizier’s daughter, Gul’s enlarged spatial perspective in relation to the politics of gender emerges from conversations with her father, and extends beyond the hills, to Kabul, and British India. Nationalism emanating from Kabul is experienced as a violent form of patriarchy, embodied in the “Iron Ameer, whose word was law, who swept whole villages, whole tribes off the face of the earth” (12). By contrast, circulating oral narratives on British India feature a golden-haired woman presiding over sporting contests, to whom British masculinity pays obeisance, receiving trophies and laurels from her hand. The feminization of British

power intrigues the Hazara heroine, given the implication that in the colonial state across the border, a Governor's, or Commandant's wife, endowed with cultural and moral authority, may exercise a moderating influence on toxic masculinity. While such public roles for British women might appear sharply at variance with lifestyles of seclusion associated with Kabul's harems, both are products of "strange stories" (13), for the Hazara are equally alienated from Afghan and British conceptions of female space. Activity is equally forbidden to the occupants of the carceral spaces of the harem and the enshrined spaces of the sports pavilion. In both spaces, women are relegated to spectatorship, whereas Hazara women's participation in subsistence economies as tenders of livestock and producers of domestic goods, permits for a mobility that enables them to roam "free over hills and dales" (13).

<15> Fate, for Gul, is therefore determined by the state's constraining powers over her mobility, through border discipline. Gul Begum and her father, the Vizier, engage in an exchange of views that foreground the problematic nature of borders which render them subject to the authority of the "Iron Ameer." Hamilton's narrative strategy of introducing the Amir as focalized through the gaze of the Hazaras, astutely ensures that a representation of the controversial Afghan ruler does not transpire through the authoritative voice of an omniscient narrator that, if conflated with her authorial voice, could prove embarrassing for Viceroy Curzon, and for British-Afghan relations. Instead, the Vizier and his daughter demonstrate how borders engender differing perspectives regarding relations with the state and its sovereign. For the Vizier, imposed borders are synonymous with taxation demands from Kabul, which he views as emasculating, for the Amir "would fain be the only man in all the land, and commands all the other men be women" (16). Significantly, the Vizier does not contest woman's inferior status, objecting only to his own diminished powers as a male, whereas his daughter finds some cause to commend "the iron hand" which brought "peace and safety to thousands of honest tradesmen and herdsmen" by sweeping "robbers" like the rival Shinwari tribe off "the face of the earth" (16). Furthermore, while the Vizier is tolerant of abduction in internecine warfare, for Gul, a strong center that weakens tribal patriarchy, potentially offers a greater measure of protection for tribal women. However, complications ensue when such developments come to be viewed within the broader context of imperialism. For the Vizier predicts that the "Iron Ameer" will not parley with the Hazara. Citing the transactional dynamic between nationalism and imperialism, the Vizier notes that the Amir has gained support from the British: "The Afghans have allied themselves with the Kafirs, the white governors of Hindustan; these Kafirs have given them weapons, given them canon, given them money. One third of our nation will be bought over, one third killed, and the remainder will be fugitives or slaves"

(18). As Mary Procida has observed, “the contest for imperial power played out at different levels of society and among diverse groups of actors” (Procida, 8).

<16>The Amir, for his part, forcefully deploys nationalist rhetoric in his demand for a strong center: “The Hazaras... were aliens, planted in Gaur, part of the territory proper of Afghanistan,... they have lived and multiplied in the land of the Afghans, without even owning allegiance to the prince whose territory they occupied... for the future there was to be but one ruling sovereign in the country of Afghanistan, one capital and seat of government, one military center, and in consequence, of course, one royal treasury” (18). Such logic alludes to re-drawn borders; hence, it is no accident that the Vizier’s mother-in-law, witnessing to atrocities committed on Hazara who resisted unification, specifies her village’s location as “close to the borders of the Ameer’s country” (40). Her narrative details burned homes, wolfhounds dismembering Hazara children, and the terrorizing pronouncements of Afghan commander, Ferad Shah, who declares: “We’ll roast these swine alive... We’ll teach them how to treat us, these low Shias” (43).

<17>The process of internal colonization, as articulated by men like Ferad Shah may therefore be defined as a form of necropolitics, a concept first advanced by Achilla Mbembe. Mbembe observes that the state’s “sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rule in the colonies...Colonial warfare is not subject to legal and institutional rules. It is not a legally codified activity” (Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, 25). Ferad Shah may therefore exercise his right to untrammelled violence, by claiming human booty in the form of Gul Begum, for if borders are the means whereby identities are articulated, Gul Begum may be subsumed into, and rendered coterminous with land remapped as Afghan territory. The capture and enslavement of Hazara women and children that follow the subjugation of Hazaras as aliens with no territorial rights, are part of the trajectory of necropolitics, when, as Mbembe notes, borders determine distinctions between “ ‘pure’ citizenship (that of the native born) versus borrowed citizenship (one that, less secure from the start, is now not safe from forfeiture)” (Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 3). Women’s bodies, in the context of necropolitics must function to establish borders that articulate either separation or unification, whether enforced, or negotiated. From the wars of attrition that involve the abduction of women members of hostile tribal groups, to the Vizier’s naive fantasy of offering Gul in marriage to the Amir’s son as a diplomatic union that would elevate her to the status of Hazara queen, to Ferad Shah’s demand for her as an assertion of necro-citizenship that signifies the absorption of Hazaras into the Afghan state, women are used to determine and maintain borders.

<18>To thwart the nation state's efforts at transgressing borders through the appropriation of women, Gul is "named" to Mohammed Jan, a herder formerly rejected as an unworthy match, but now approached for providing legal immunity to the young Hazara woman against the marauding demands of internal colonization from agents of the nation state, like Ferad Shah. His domicile is the first of a series of carceral spaces under a male protector that the Hazara heroine encounters. In the home of Mohammed Jan, she undergoes a steady deterioration of status, as the Hazara rebellion led by her father suffers increasing losses. Upon her refusal to accept the role of either wife or servant, she is starved, and bound hand and foot, as a disciplinary measure that demonstrates the status of a woman under a man's protection as equivalent to that of a prisoner. Her rolling down the stairs, and out of the house while bound with rope is the first of many strenuous acts of resistance against boundaries and borders. As the narrative progresses, iterations of border tropes such as doorways, thresholds, gateways, and courtyard walls, punctuate the trajectory of her struggles for mobility.

<19> Following her return to her father's home, she, like many Hazara women and children, is taken prisoner by Afghan soldiers and subjected to the long march to Kabul where they are sold as slaves. Gul Begum must now negotiate with a misogynistic nation state. She is delivered first to Ferad Shah's home, overflowing with women captives. Ferad Shah, lustful and sadistic towards women, is the face of nationalism in its crudest form. The silent woman captive grinding grain that she encounters, whose tongue has been cut out, embodies, literally and emblematically, the general condition of her sex under the new order. The home, with its walled courtyards and gardens, is another carceral space, and its guarded gateways confine Gul within new boundaries, with domestic territory operating as the mirror image of national territory. As captive, Gul manages to cross this second border through guile, by eliciting her mistress's aid, for the young Hazara is feared as a potential rival. Paradoxically, she proceeds to evade further domestic captivity by seeking sanctuary in prison, where she renders herself unappealing to prospective employers from Afghan households by deliberately maintaining an unkempt appearance.

<20>However, her third state of domestic captivity commences on being chosen to serve the wife of the Amir's Chief Secretary, a householder whose power stems, not from tribal patriarchy, or military muscle, but from authority as a civil servant of the state. The interface between patriarchy and state power, however, manifests in two contending figures who represent opposing political philosophies of the nation state. The Mir, a religious cleric, exemplifies the values and interests of pre-modern theocracy, while diametrically opposed to him, is the Chief Secretary, a civil servant who, for an imperial readership, would epitomize Macaulayan ideals, as an

ambassador for colonial modernity. Colonial modernity, as an ideology, views the modern state, and all other modern developments, as derived through contact with Western colonial powers. It finds its ironic advocate in the dark-complexioned Chief Secretary, who is a Muslim of Hindu ancestry, and hails from British India. The Indian master, monogamous, conversant in English, and dedicated to social reform, becomes the visible face of British imperialism for Gul and the Afghan state. Hamilton therefore strategically elides British presence from her representations of Afghan life, choosing to render Afghanistan as wholly without European contact, when in fact there was a constant presence of Europeans like herself at the Amir's court. Instead, imperial paternalism is presented as an ideology embraced by the colonized subject, with the Chief Secretary as earnest Victorian, committed to constitutional reform, improved health, and modern education for Afghans. The Mir, by contrast, is a septuagenarian widower, belonging to that category of godmen who wield extra-constitutional political power, rising to prominence when the state is in turmoil by offering prophetic counsel to its beleaguered officials. Gul scorns the Mir's proposal of "honorable" monogamy, issued after the Chief Secretary refuses to dispose of her as chattel in a transactional exchange between two men.

<21> Thereafter, the Chief Secretary's home transforms into a site of negotiation for Gul. Gul's gradual integration into the household as preferred handmaid suggests that borders may also intimate possibilities for the reconstruction of identity. Enamored by colonial modernity, her perspective undergoes a shift, so that labor is now rendered in a spirit of willing servitude rather than forcibly extracted from an enslaved subject:

"She was no longer a Hazara in thought or hope or aspiration ... Her spirit, her pride, were still unbroken, but the old dreams had vanished. She filled her thoughts and time with active work.

She was a slave only in name. The service she rendered was the service of the free, willing, bountiful, at times even joyous." (172)

The process of negotiating identity intensifies following the death of the Chief Secretary's wife in childbirth. As a chaste wife-surrogate, Gul's attentions now range from the private to the public sphere, supplying the master with food and prayer mats, engaging in border transactions at the threshold with the door-keeper over the reliability of the water-bearer, and displaying civic consciousness, when the stench of dead frogs in household canals that have run dry create a public sanitation problem.

<22>As the scope of her world widens, so do her capabilities for socio-economic analysis. She contemplates the way borders redefine social and economic spaces, when noting the shoddy work of Hazara laborers, who shovel snow off the flat-roofed houses of Kabul. She concludes that in a pre-capitalist economy, the minimal labor of Hazara menfolk sufficed for providing the meagre necessities of life through subsistence farming. By contrast, alienation is the result of wage labor in a capitalist economy. If Gul's position as domestic servant is now that of a classic subaltern, her enhanced capacity for reflection spurs the growth of political consciousness. The news that Jan Mohammed, the herder, having treacherously made peace with the Kabul regime, now lives like a member of the Afghan elite, with Hazara slaves, and seeks her return as a wife, elicits a sharp reaction: "A Hazara, with Hazara slaves! What I said the other day then proves to be perfectly true. It is very easy for a traitor to prosper." (172) Jan Mohammed, colluding with the nation state's agenda for internal colonization, has metamorphosed into the Hazara equivalent of Ferad Shah, exercising a similar claim of ownership over Gul's person, and propounding the rhetoric of necropolitics as he threatens reprisals against Gul and the Chief Secretary, whose colonial modernity by this time has proved inimical to an authoritarian Afghan state. For, the Chief Secretary has violated border legalities by permitting the fugitive Vizier to visit Gul and enjoy sanctuary under his roof.

<23>However, if the domestic sphere may afford protection to the fugitive Vizier who transgresses borders, such spatial relations fail to operate in a similar way for women. Gul, within the private sphere of the home, remains vulnerable at the hands of other women, who exercise powers on behalf of patriarchy, as they seek to discipline and punish what they deem to be *hubris* in a young Hazara woman getting above her station. The reappearance of Old Miriam, who taunts Gul over her "fall," incites the other women servants to physically assault the girl, enraged by her pride. In this act of violence, an ironic collusion across lines of religion, ethnicity, and gender transpires, as Shia and Sunni, Hazara and Afghan, patriarchy and its female surrogates unite to punish transgressive femininity. Violence, both physical and psychic, against Gul, mark her as an outsider, who, as a displaced person and stateless citizen, must look beyond the Afghan state to its border with British India for survival.

<24> If historical evidence has demonstrated that the recurring solution for displaced minor girls in times of civil war is acquiescing to the will of a male protector, then Gul has repeatedly resisted this option with Jan Mohammed, Ferad Shah, and the Mir. However, Gul's relations with the Chief Secretary are of an altogether different character.⁽⁹⁾ Devoted and efficient service inspire passion in the slave, and unconscious attachment in the master, manifesting forth in a desire to afford each

other mutual protection. Such affinity does not simply originate in sexual attraction or feudal loyalty between overlord and bondswoman. Their ties are forged out of a mutual recognition that they are both border peoples, whose situated identities are precariously dependent upon the state's perceptions of their loyalties. The Hazara slave, intuitive of court enemies, feels compelled to protect the Chief Secretary, who turns fugitive after he is framed on a charge of spying for the British, through stolen documents. If the Hazara heroine is seized of a need to protect the master from spies and enemies like the Mir, and the hakim, the master recognizes the vulnerability of the Hazara heroine given the claims of Mohammed Jan. In a series of mutually supportive efforts against an antagonistic Afghan state, master and slave must address how border crossings and border erasures are constantly in play, so that insider or outsider status for both, remain always unpredictable.

<25> In a collaborative venture, they plan for flight across the Durand Line, with Gul disguised as a man. For Gul, the decision to cross the Durand line is a critical moment of recognition of herself as sexed subaltern, for in choosing to do so disguised as a male, she finally acknowledges that border crossing is contingent on the politics of gender. As men, Mohammed Jan, or her father, may successfully cross borders, but women remain subject to disciplinary action from family, community, and state, if they aspire to mobility. Gul's quest for agency through cross-dressing, as she attempts one final crossing over the Durand Line, with her master, comes to naught, as she is assassinated by Mohammed Jan at the border. The Chief Secretary rides down alone to British India. By the end of the novel, the Durand Line becomes the apotheosis of the modern border, which, in the words of Mbembe, testifies to a new order of "unequal redistribution of capacities for mobility" so that "the only chance of survival, for many, is to move and to keep on moving" (Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 3). Gul cannot effectively escape confinement as a woman who is a victim of border politics, ironically, enforced by both the Hazara, and the Afghan state, so that her efforts at reconstituting subjectivity based upon a new-found faith in colonial modernity are doomed.

<26> However, it is in the configuration of colonial modernity as epitomized by the Chief Secretary, that Hamilton's most complex responses to border politics in the context of British imperialism may be uncovered. Like Hamilton, the Chief Secretary, as a Rajput from British India, crossed and recrossed the Durand Line, as an agent of colonial modernity, imported into the Kabul court. The Chief Secretary in real life, whom Hamilton knew and befriended, was Mir Munshi Aala Sultan Mohammed Khan, born in British India, well versed in Persian (Dari) and English, and invited by the Amir to assist in state administration, and translate correspondence with the British-India Government. He worked on negotiations for

the Durand Line, concealed behind a curtain as a trusted functionary, but, unfortunately, his immense contributions to the constitution and modernization of Afghanistan were cut short after he was forced to flee Afghanistan on being branded a British spy. His wife was a relative of the Afghan royal family, who died early, but on reaching north-west British India, in what is now Pakistan, he would remarry, and gain fame as the father of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, one of the greatest Urdu poets. While Hamilton constructs him as a progressive, enlightened, and pious Muslim, who prays fervently while seeking improvements to education, health, and the rule of law for the Afghan people, his role embodies paradoxes that may amount to an implicit acknowledgement of her own awareness of the inherent contradictions of “the white man’s burden,” that entailed the dissemination of colonial modernity’s discourses and practices. For the Chief Secretary, in the novel, functions within discreetly unstated political contexts of Afghan relations with British India.

<27> First, what remains unstated in the novel is the political embarrassment of the Amir gaining his throne through British assistance.⁽¹⁰⁾ The Amir, in Hamilton’s novel, with his capricious exercise of power, may represent residual aspects of a political culture associated with a feudal state, but Hamilton’s readers would have been alive to the irony that he and his regime were the product of modern European politics. This recognition is affirmed through an observation made by the Vizier, who bitterly notes that the “kafirs” of British India have armed the Afghans against the Hazaras with Henri Martini rifles, so that imperialism and nationalism reinforce each other, to the detriment of border peoples, among whom are numbered religious minorities, tribals, and women.

<28> In addition, the narrative glancingly refers to the Chief Secretary’s ambition and opportunism, when Gul Begum muses on her mother’s lack of awareness of her master’s noble idealism.

She knows nothing of his plans for the education and general amelioration of the condition of the people—nothing of his schemes for this poor wretched country...She does not know that he never thinks of himself, is always arranging and thinking for others...that he is indeed a living saint...

Thus mused this wild mountain girl idealizing the object of her dreams...Nor could she in the least have understood the ambition, the actual craving for popularity and fame that formed so prominent a feature of the Chief Secretary’s character. (176)

Ironically, it is the slave girl, rather than her mother, who “knows nothing” of careerism. Muhammed Shafi and Noor Ul Amin, in their analysis of the historical Sultan Mohammed’s *The Constitution and Laws of Afghanistan*, confirm this terse narrative aside on his character, noting a less than rigorous accuracy in his politic attribution of constitutional reforms to the despotic Amir. Colonial modernity as a potentially corrupting ideology is made manifest in the opportunistic individualism of its civil servants.

<29> Furthermore, in capitalizing on a slave woman’s romantic devotion, the Chief Secretary’s expediency borders on sexual exploitation. Hamilton skillful use of subtext in the exchanges between the Hazara slave woman and the Chief Secretary, become the index of asymmetry in power relations between elites and subalterns. Having attained freedom by crossing the border into Hazara territory, the Chief Secretary disingenuously abrogates all ties of loyalty to the slave.

“It really does seem laughable how easily I have got rid of all my troubles... And now I come to think of it, I owe it to you, Gul Begum. You planned and arranged this scheme. I am not ungrateful; I shall remember you always. Bye-the-bye, what shall you do while I am in India?”

The girl started. “What shall I do Agha? What should I do? What I have always done. Do you no longer need me?” (214)

His laconic acknowledgement typifies a ruling class’s sense of entitlement to service from social inferiors. Hamilton acknowledges the moral deficiencies of colonial modernity as an ideology, in the indifference it breeds in urban elites towards rural subalterns such as peasants and tribals. Hence, the secretary’s insensitive response to Gul’s fear of Mohammed Jan: “Forget all about that now, child... We must both dream, but now we must dream for the future. Dreams of peace, and’ after a pause ‘of power. I feel a different man. When shall I reach India?” (213) In the Chief Secretary’s egocentric dismissal of Gul’s vulnerability, we are presented with the characteristics of a new class of native elites, for whom power is not inherited, but instead, must be wrested by the aspiring individual through talent and education. If Hamilton romanticizes the saga of the Chief Secretary’s flight to British India, it is to demonstrate the social alienation that the colonial state fosters in its functionaries. Sarfraz Khan and Noor Ul Amin provide the prosaic, historical version of the event: “Along with Imam Baksh, his guard, at night, he swiftly but secretly left for Hindustan on horse’s back [sic]. Upon arrival at Lahore, he was arrested by the British officials and put into jail” (Khan and Amin, 26).

<30>Scholars of Afghan history agree that the Chief Secretary was suspected as a spy by both the British and the Afghans. That he was later appointed Ambassador for Afghanistan in the United Kingdom on proceeding to that country to study law, and was able to return to British India where he remarried, testifies to his adroit management of border crossings, using the good offices of Hamilton herself to transfer money out of Afghanistan, and to secure his release from jail in British India.⁽¹¹⁾ Hamilton's modifications represent colonial modernity's corrupting effects upon character, as the slave's modest expressions of devotion to follow the Chief Secretary across the border meet with evasion: "I shall miss you, Gul Begum...I am not sure that I shall be able to manage without you, but I must try. My mother would not understand your position at first, if I took you with me. If I explain everything to her, and she agrees, you could come and join me later, when I have prepared the way for you" (214). His subsequent tears for the dying Gul Begum, whom he has "learnt too late to appreciate" (217) are offset by his pragmatism, as he rides down the road to India. Such a reaction is in consonance with the historical Sultan Mohammed's rationalization of revenge killings as customary law in Afghanistan, due to the slowness of courts to deliver justice.⁽¹²⁾ The rough justice that Gul falls victim to at the border suggests that there are liminal spaces where colonial modernity and its ideologues cannot exercise authority or offer protection. If death at the border symbolically locates Gul, by virtue of her gender and ethnicity, on fault lines that deny her rights as mobile, sovereign subject, she and the Secretary must nevertheless mutually educate each other on the ironies that accrue around the concept of freedom and the significance of border-crossing:

"Agha, we are free! Do you see that rock? That is the boundary line between the Ameer's territory and ours. We are no longer in Afghanistan..."

"You forget" her companion replied "it is all Afghanistan, now – all ruled by the same king and by the same laws. All is changed since last you passed that rock. All Hazara is now Afghanistan." (211)

To this notion of freedom in relation to political geography, the slave woman offers her version of what is, in effect, the mental colonization of the civil servant: "I have often thought in Kabul, that though you called yourself free, that yours, not ours was the slavery—a far worse bondage than that of the lowliest menial in your own household. Always working, always striving, never accomplishing, never satisfying" (211). The Macaulayan civil servant, naively imagining himself as self-determining subject, fails to recognize how the individual is subsumed into the colonial state's administrative system. The feminized Hazara voice modifies any

orientalist reading of Hamilton's representations of Afghan culture as feudal, in its critique of colonial modernity.

<31> Hamilton's novel anticipates decolonization, for she is that rare instance of a Victorian woman who lived close to oppressive centers of state power and was personally acquainted with those who engaged with international diplomacy. In critiquing the political, cultural, social, and psychological effects of colonization, she also avoids the pitfalls of liberal bourgeois feminism, by engaging with the lives of women who were neither British, nor Christian, nor English-speaking. Moreover, Gul Begum, distinct from Kipling's Lippeth, or Conrad's Jewel, is not the satirical or tragic configuration of an imperial hero's romance with the East. Instead, she is a victim of the epistemic violence engendered by colonial knowledge, embodied in an emerging class of political advisors, administrators, and career diplomats, who retreat to safety, leaving behind as collateral damage dead subalterns whose insights perish with them. Hamilton's work serves as a powerful reminder that texts and authors that explore indirect interventions of Western imperial interests must be recovered and included in scholarly assessments of how women's writing addressed gender and decolonization. When assessed historically, the conditions under which women's writing transpired prove highly variable. Five hundred pounds a year and a room of one's own may have been available to a professional woman, but women attesting to the effect of imperial policies on women produced texts for international audiences under formidable political constraints. Hamilton encourages feminist scholarship to explore how obscurity and complicated positionalities for female authors determined how they could bear witness to the lives of invisible women and write prophetically of imperial legacies that have outlasted the British empire.

Notes

(1)The United Nations "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan" to the Human Rights Council, Fifty-first Session 12 September-7October 2022," addresses violations of women's rights and article 65 states: "Hazaras, who are overwhelmingly Shia, are historically one of the most severely persecuted groups in Afghanistan."(^)

(2)For example, Sophia Lane Poole's *The Englishwoman in Egypt: Letters from Cairo, Written during a Residence there in 1842,3&4* describes social encounters in the upper-class "hareem," while Julia Pardoe, Annie Harvey, and Georgianna Dawson-Damer described visits to the *hammam* .(^)

(3)See Jan C. Jansen and Jurgen Osterhammel, p.27.(^)

(4)See Christopher Timmis, “Lillias Hamilton: Personal Physician to the Amir of Afghanistan.” *Journal of Medical Biography*2021 29(4) 236-245.(^)

(5)See Kadrie, p. 5.(^)

(6)See Kadrie, pp. 1-3.(^)

(7)See Kadrie pp. 8-10 for a discussion of these events.(^)

(8)See McLintock, 117; Loomba, 151-53; Sen,39.(^)

(9)See for example, Parkinson and Hinshaw’s recent phenomenal study of the Chibok schoolgirls.(^)

(10)See L. Dupree, pp.59-60.(^)

(11)For a detailed narrative, see Khan and Amin, p.26(^)

(12)See Sultan Mohammed, *The Constitution and Laws of Afghanistan*, London: John Murray, 1900 p.142.(^)

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