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## Education of Hazara Girls in a Diaspora: education as empowerment and an agent of change

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**ABSTRACT** Afghanistan is a country which has experienced years of conflict and war. This unrest has forced large numbers of Afghans into diasporas, Hazaras comprising one of these groups. Hazaras have mainly fled from rural Hazarajat to more urban areas in Pakistan. Marginalization of Hazaras in general and girls in particular, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, restricts their ability to, for example, access education and challenge traditional gender roles. However, in the authors' view, the change of locality is but one factor that has altered what kind of marginalization they experience, changing, among other things, the sentiments toward girls' education, as well as their access to schools. In analysing interviews conducted with Hazara parents, teachers and female students in Pakistan, the authors argue that this situation in a diaspora has made girls' education more accessible, and can be seen as an agent of change for both individuals and the Hazaras as a group.

### Introduction

Afghanistan is a country which has experienced years of conflict and war. This unrest has forced large numbers of Afghans into diasporas, the Hazaras being one of these groups. Hazaras have mainly fled from rural Hazarajat to more urban areas in Pakistan. The concept of marginalization is commonly used in connection with the Hazaras in general and with girls in particular, both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. It may be argued that the marginalization restricts their possibilities of empowerment since this limits their access to, for example, education. Marginalization has been defined by UNESCO as a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities (UNESCO, 2010, p. 135). Furthermore, UNESCO (2009, p. 3) maintains that 'household poverty is one of the strongest and most persistent factors contributing to educational marginalization', in addition to group-based identities such as ethnicity and language, which again constitute significant features preventing the international goal of Education for All. However, we claim that although Hazaras experience marginalization in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the nature of the marginalization differs in the two localities. The focus in this article is on the changes of the sentiments toward girls' education, as well as on their access to schools. In analysing interviews conducted with Hazara parents, teachers and female students in Pakistan, we would argue that the situation in the diaspora has made girls' education more accessible, and can be seen as an agent of change for both the individual and the Hazaras as a group, moving them from 'extreme education poverty' to an improved situation (UNESCO, 2009, p. 2).

### **Hazaras – a backdrop**

There is a scarcity of research and academic work pertaining to the Hazaras. In one of the few available works, Poladi (1989) addresses the Hazaras in terms of the people, the land, culture and religion, the effects of different Afghan rulers and wars on the Hazara population, their political and social organisation and their economy. Additionally, Mousavi (1998) has explored the lives of the Hazaras from historical, cultural, economic and political perspectives. Literature concerned with Hazaras localizes them in several places in Afghanistan and Pakistan: in the previous North West Frontier Province of the former British colony of India (the province has recently changed its name to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa); in the north-east of Pakistan on the border of China; in Quetta, the capital of the Pakistani province of Baluchistan; in Iran; and, finally, the majority live in Hazarajat in Afghanistan (North-Western Frontier Province, 1914; Qasi, 1977; Harpviken, 1996; Mousavi, 1998; Monsutti, 2005; Farr, 2007). The Hazaras constitute the third-largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, although the actual number is contested (CIA Factbook, 2009; Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 2009).

Quite commonly Hazaras are presented as Shi'ite Muslims, but there are also differences in their Shi'ite affiliation in addition to some few being Sunni Muslims (Harpviken, 1996). However, given that most inhabitants of Afghanistan are Sunni Muslims, the religious affiliation is a factor in marginalizing them in the larger Afghan society (Monsutti, 2005). Their physical features are usually claimed to differ from the rest of the Afghan population since they have Mongoloid features - narrow eyes, flat noses and broad cheekbones (Thesiger, 1955). The description of Hazaras as one ethnic group signals a set of objective traits that people in this group have in common (e.g. origin, language, territory) in addition to cultural features that signal the boundary in terms of other groups and their willingness to be treated, or their acceptance at being treated, as part of a group (Barth, 1981, 1994). However, being a Hazara may mean different things to different people, depending on context, and Monsutti (2005) argues that the shared identity among the Hazaras rests not on their Mongol ancestry, but rather on their experience of marginalization. The fact that the latter is a focal point in this article makes it worthwhile to spend some moments on the actual marginalization they experience.

The physical appearance of the Hazaras is one factor contributing to singling them out in wider society. Moreover, their religious status has added to the escalation of conflict, both at a local and at a national level (Anderson & Dupree, 1990). Confiscation of land is reported to have taken place (Amnesty International, 1999). Their ethnic belonging has prevented access to education. This marginalization has led to several Hazaras changing their names to Tajik ones in order to improve their possibilities of access to education (Farr, 2007). Many Hazaras have also lost relatives, land and livestock, experienced war and famine, and migrated to Pakistan, Iran and other parts of Afghanistan (Monsutti, 2005; Farr, 2007). However, it is worth noting that the migratory flow or spatial mobility of the Hazaras can be seen as an existential principle which has taken place for centuries, not necessarily as a traumatic experience per se (Monsutti, 2005). Nevertheless, the marginalization in Afghanistan and the immigrant status in neighboring countries have led to a situation where the Hazaras tend to live on the margins of the dominant society, be it in Afghanistan or in Pakistan. Then again, it is important to note that several waves of Hazara immigration to Quetta in Pakistan, the locality of this research, have taken place. Many of the migrants have achieved a legal status as Pakistani citizens. This provides access to the formal systems of, for example, education, health, and politics. All the same, the Hazara ethnic belonging is in and of itself marginalizing. Ethnic belonging seems to constitute an important part of people's identity in this area, illustrated through the fact of the town of Quetta itself being mainly divided into suburbs according to ethnicity. Strengthening of one particular group, through education and empowerment, may modify the existing power relationships in Quetta.

It is common among many of the Afghan groups to seek shelter among their kin in Pakistan (Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont, 1988). One of the most common destinations for Afghan migrants has been the city of Quetta. Hazaras in the Quetta diaspora have taken cover under the patronage of local Hazara leaders. Here the Hazaras have gradually come to form the third-largest community of Hazaras outside Afghanistan (Mousavi, 1998). Hazaras in Quetta are mainly self-settled. Their self-settled status has, in the long term, become a problem for the Hazara immigrants. Until recently, presence in a refugee camp was required to receive any support from

the government of Pakistan. Those living outside the camps stay in the country illegally. Currently, all refugee camps for Afghans are closed and no refugees are allowed in. However, the group among whom this study is conducted are perceived to have integrated into the local Hazara population already settled in the area. They are among the large number of immigrants who have fled from the situation in Afghanistan in recent years, but their self-settled status and illegal presence in Pakistan contribute to us identifying them as immigrants, rather than as refugees, in this article. Mainly they live with their relatives, but even if they do not have relatives in Quetta, they are content to live in the area of their *Qaum* (a commonly used term meaning 'my kin' or 'my people'), although this implies living on the margins of society. It is also interesting to note that many Afghan immigrants in Pakistan consider themselves as exiles (Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont, 1987, 1988). But regardless of how the Afghans describe themselves, their situation in a diaspora is likely to affect their identity. One feature is how the population was dependent on agriculture while living in Afghanistan, while now, in Pakistan, the Afghan immigrants have no access to land. Another feature is the alteration of skills needed when moving from a mainly rural area to an urban setting (Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont, 1988). Although Centlivre & Centlivres-Demont (1988) mainly study Pashtun refugees, their arguments on how the identity of Afghans exiled in Pakistan mirrors the crisis in Afghanistan, its complexity and its disrupted society may also be applicable to the Hazara refugees in Quetta. Acknowledging differences in meaning between 'exile' and 'diaspora', we have chosen to use the latter concept since it embraces a wider variety of migrational motives.

### **About This Study**

The empirical material presented in this article is part of a study focusing on education of young female Hazara immigrants in Quetta, with the following research questions: (1) What are the general attitudes of Hazaras towards young females' education? (2) Which factors influence the ability of young female Hazaras to access basic education? (Changezi, 2009). Specific interview questions have focused on a variety of topics, such as the background of the children (both in and out of school) and the parents, teachers and politicians; and culture, tradition, and future aspirations, to mention a few. The center of attention has been the Hazaras who have migrated from Afghanistan in the last ten to fifteen years, and hence live illegally in the town. The informants have therefore been able to provide their understanding of the situation both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Including previous studies on the Hazaras, we have then been able to take a comparative perspective on access to education for girls in Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively, and on how the spatial mobility has influenced and somewhat changed the genderized identities of both girls and the Hazaras as a group.

This topic required a qualitative research design which included a field study undertaken by Changezi in December 2008, with observations and interviews in addition to analysis of governmental documents and NGO and UN reports (e.g. Agar, 1996; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002; Scheyvens & Storey, 2003; Bryman, 2004). Forty-seven interviews were conducted during fieldwork: twenty with students, eight with teachers, five with parents of girls in school, five with out-of-school children, five with parents of such children, and four with politicians and educational authorities. All students were girls. Of the parents, three were fathers and seven were mothers, all of whom were related to the students in the study. In other words, the sample was a purposeful one (Bryman, 2004). Observations in the local community, private homes and schools have contributed to contextualizing and enriching the information given through the interviews (Carspecken, 1996). Changezi is fluent in Hazaragi and well acquainted with Quetta from several previous visits, both of which contributed to making access to the field and key informants undemanding. As an insider, one is likely to have the same reference points as the subjects of the study. Yet when the researcher is seen as an insider, there is both a danger that informants will provide answers they believe the researcher seeks, as well as the possibility that they may feel a lesser need to elaborate on their answers given that they feel that the perceived insider has a greater insight into the situation of the topic discussed (Narayan, 1993). The analysis of data in this mini-ethnographic study is based on the emerging patterns appearing through the information gathered and categorized accordingly (Carspecken, 1996; Boyatzis, 1998; Patton, 2002). The

inferences drawn in this study were discussed thoroughly between the two authors, hence contributing to increasing the validity of the knowledge claims presented (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2004; Kleven, 2008).

### **Education as Empowerment**

The international community has set as one of the Millennium Development Goals the need to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, in which education is to play a significant role (Goal no. 3; see UN, 2000). In the goals of Education for All (EFA) by 2015, achievement of gender parity and equality in education is seen as paramount (e.g. UNESCO, 2003/4). Hence, consensus that education is a tool for empowerment of girls and women appears to be almost universal. Distinguishing between three dimensions of empowerment, Rowlands (1995) nuances the concept as something personal, relational and collective. Personal empowerment comprises the development of a sense of individuality, personal confidence and capacity. The relational dimension relates to the ability to negotiate terms of a relationship and to influence it, whereas the collective empowerment adds the impact that group involvement may have on, for example, its surrounding community. These dimensions seem important in relation to the situation of the Hazaras, since the empowerment to be discussed in the following text encompasses empowerment at the individual level and beyond. The meaning of empowerment is also closely related to the concept of 'power' – or lack thereof. As described in the previous section, Hazaras can be characterized by disempowerment in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, although the forms of disempowerment vary. In neither location do they have significant access to political structures, formal decision-making or economic opportunities. Being aware of some few Hazaras in important formal positions in Quetta, we have to point out that these people usually arrived in Pakistan several decades ago, have Pakistani citizenship, and detach themselves from the more resent Hazara immigrants. Despite the Hazaras' common lack of access to formal structures, we employ Rowlands' description of empowerment, also including the individual's ability to maximize 'the opportunities available to them without or despite constraints of structure and State' (Rowlands, 1995, p. 102). The concept also incorporates the processes through which people become aware of their own interests and gain greater strength in influencing decision-making regarding their own lives - in other words, their ability to act and influence the surrounding world. Concurrent perspectives are present in both Rowlands (1995) and Berger & Luckmann (1991), in as much as humans are described as having the capacity to undo negative social constructions, providing themselves with the right to act and influence their environment.

Although the concept of 'empowerment' is problematized by several authors (e.g. Stromquist, 1993; Rowlands, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995; Brock-Utne, 2000), we do not engage in the problematization in this article, but rather discuss how education is differently assessed as empowerment in the distinct spatial localities of the Hazaras. In as much as education is acknowledged by the authors as an important tool in empowering the girls who are the focus of this article since it, for example, develops and expands other capabilities (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007), the significance of education varies depending on the areas the Hazaras live in. In other words, we choose to localize our discussion of empowerment through education directly in the pragmatic arguments by the Hazara immigrants in Quetta, not in the common debate in academia often based on western ideas, values and cultures. In the following discussion, 'empowerment' will be used in light of the above arguments.

In as much as education can provide an empowering situation for girls, there are certain conditions that need to be met. First of all, the availability of and access to schools seems an evident factor. Second, the matter and form of education must be considered by the stakeholders as relevant to everyday life. These are issues we intend to discuss in the following pages.

As the government of Pakistan does not provide basic education for the self-settled Hazara immigrants in Quetta, they themselves are responsible for educating their children. Educational institutions for girls founded by the Hazaras themselves suggest that education is in fact deemed important. Within the context of their illegal status, the constant struggle of the Hazaras to keep their schools open bears testament to their commitment to young female education. Although school buildings are available in Quetta, the number is unevenly distributed in the city and the

classrooms tend to be overcrowded, the latter due to all students being accepted regardless of available space in school:

We take them all. And we take them in whenever they come during the semester. We see their leaving certificates, and they take a test, and then we put them in the right class for their knowledge. We never place anyone by age. Whenever they come, the school doors will be open. If they do not have their leaving certificates, we will examine them, and then we give the child admission anyway. Sometimes they do not get any leaving certificates and sometimes situations can happen along the journey to exile where the certificates go missing. We cannot turn down anyone that seeks an education. As long as the girl's parents think that it is ok that there are a small amount of boys in the classes, then we will keep enrolling boys as well. (A vice-principal)

This vice-principal runs a school with twelve classrooms and approximately 900 students. However, she displays flexibility within the educational system in this setting. Neither formal documents nor the presence of boys in an all-female school hinders the enrolment of new students. The need for education in the diaspora seems to have altered some of the cultural values previously endorsed, illustrated, for example, by the fact that it is accepted that boys attend school together with girls, at least to a certain extent.

Although the access to education in Quetta appears to be somewhat limited, we find it significant to contrast it with the situation they left, since different localities influence, for example, sentiments, culture and values – illustrated through the following examples:

Even as late as the 1950's and 1960's the Hazaras did not have access to educational institutions within most Afghan regions. Indeed, only a few primary schools existed in Hazarajat which has a population of six million. Hazaras could not register at an official school or a non-Hazara school unless they officially changed their identity to Tajiks. The Afghan Government encouraged Hazaras, sometimes by force, to change their ethnic identity. Those Hazaras who succeeded in entering a school and later attained governmental jobs changed their ethnic identity to Tajiks. Hazaras were not allowed to attend higher educational institutions, particularly military academies. (Chairman of the Hazara Democratic Party)

I really wanted to go to school in Afghanistan, but the nearest school was too far away. My father went to work really early, and came home really late every day, so he could not take me. My mother could not take me that far as she has trouble walking. (Bano [1], in last grade of secondary school)

The lack of access to educational institutions for Hazaras in Afghanistan is emphasized by the politician in Quetta (in the first quotation above), explaining the situation through the lens of their ethnic belonging. Comparing this with the interviews of the parents in this study, it is interesting to note that none of them attended schools in Afghanistan, despite the fact that six years of schooling had already become compulsory in 1931 (Harpviken, 1996), hence supporting the claim of the chairman regarding ethnicity contributing to marginalization in the Afghan society. On the other hand, as illustrated by the statement of Bano, who lives in a rural area in Afghanistan, locality is one factor explaining the scarcity of schools, not necessarily the ethnicity of the population. An additional feature of the rural life is that most Hazaras in Afghanistan are peasants, often dependent on their children's labor, which again contributes to a lower priority for education.

Migrating to an urban environment in Quetta has, however, changed access to, sentiments towards and need for education. During the interview quoted above, the Chairman confirmed the increased requests by Hazaras in general and by girls in particular for education while in Quetta. This is also supported by several parents and students, out of which the following may serve as typical examples:

I never went to school as my parents could not send me. Look at my daughter! Her eyes have opened. Both our eyes are open, but the only one of us that can truly see is her. What parents in their right mind would take away the opportunity for their child to go to school and learn to become 'seeing' people? For me it is unimaginable to find any good reason to

keep children away from school. Especially girls! What use do they do sitting at home?  
(Hakim, father)

We were blind, now our eyes have been opened ... the educated children help us see.  
(Zahra, mother)

I do not want to be at home doing nothing. I think I can do more for myself and my family by getting educated. Maybe I can get a job that pays well. If I would have been at home I would just be doing some basic chores and maybe sew on chadors [female head dress] to get some money. I would hate it if I had to go back to doing nothing. (Farida, primary school student)

We find it interesting to draw attention to the metaphor of not being blind when describing educated girls. They have both contributed to the pride of the family as well as providing support in practical tasks in everyday urban life. Additionally, several parents have pointed out that, contrary to the situation in Afghanistan, the girls now have limited ability to contribute to the household since the urban and cramped environment strictly limits the girls' mobility, especially in comparison with their rural origin. They can conduct domestic chores, but this is considered by some as 'doing nothing', or not necessarily as a noteworthy contribution to the household. Moreover, several of the interviewees expressed the necessity of being able to take care of themselves in Pakistan.

Living in Pakistan requires new skills, as noticed during observations in the field and supported by several interviewees, as illustrated in the interviews quoted from below. Education may function as an empowering tool in this new setting. Both Hakim and Zahra use the metaphor of previously being 'blind', as if illiteracy was common in Afghanistan, but a significant hindrance in the urban life of Quetta. Through education and literacy the girls change their ways of supporting the family in everyday life, as illustrated by the following:

I had got some medicine for my husband. He was very ill. The doctor had told me how much he needed to take and how many times. I was so scared when I went to the doctor. I had never been to the doctor by myself before, and at the same time I was so worried about my husband. I forgot what the doctor told me about the medicine on my way home. Neither my husband nor I can read, but my daughter can, thank God! She is in 5th grade. If it was not for her I might have given my husband an overdose. (Hamia, mother)

My family weaves carpets for a living. One time we had been given a direction and the name of the road where we were suppose to deliver two carpets. It is not easy to find an unknown road if you cannot read a simple sign. We ended up in the wrong place, almost on the other side of the city. No one else knew the way either. Now that my oldest daughter can read we are not blind anymore. If we get instructions, she can tell us if we are on the right way.  
(Hakim, father)

The need for education is noticeably enhanced when living in this urban environment. Specifically, it requires reading and writing skills. Having access to medical facilities and treatment in the city meant that the ability to read there appeared, in fact, to be life saving, as mentioned by Hamia. In addition, written language occurs frequently in a city, from road signs to societal information. This is contrary to the rural environment where they originated. In this context, reading ability in the city becomes crucial, both for the individual and the family as a whole, making schooling important.

Presenting a theory of social construction, Berger & Luckmann (1991) suggest that from an early age we learn the values and correct behaviour of the people belonging to our culture, society and/or group through interaction with those very same people. This social stock of common knowledge is acquired through interactions in which we create aspects of our culture, objectify them, internalize them and subsequently take these cultural products for granted. Given that they emerge from human interaction, categories such as ethnicity, social class, gender and sex can all be considered to be socially constructed, value laden and given meaning. Many of these categories are transformed into systems which reproduce inequality and categories of difference. One example is the segregation of boys and girls, which is important in both the Afghan and the Pakistani society.

Despite the significance of this segregation, the situation the Hazaras find themselves in when living in this diaspora requires a change in what is regarded as acceptable interaction between the sexes (e.g. mixed classrooms). Being located in an urban setting has required a re-socialization of the population, encompassing the new needs.

Another example is related to the social organization among the Hazaras, which provides male adults with authority, placing them on top of the hierarchy. The new location requires a whole new set of competencies, giving literate children an advantage over illiterate adults, and shaking the old social structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). The girl's literacy skill empowers her as an individual, since both her capacities and her confidence may change. Although this is contrary to previous social structures, this individual empowerment is one ingredient in achieving empowerment at a collective level, since collective abilities are enhanced (Rowlands, 1995). The safeguarding of Hazaras as one ethnic group is part and parcel of the increased interest in education, in addition to how education empowers the individual and the family to cope with life in a diaspora. A further elaboration of the changes in culture will be presented in the following section.

### **Education as an Agent of Change**

Traditions and customs in Afghanistan include a segregated society, dress and religion. As Pakistan shares some of the same rather conservative culture, the Afghan culture is not in direct conflict with the Pakistani way of living. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are segregated societies where women and men, and also boys and girls after a certain age, are separated. The opportunities offered to male children differ to those of female children, and it is often the female child who is deprived of the right to education. From birth onwards girls are socialized to be segregated. However, in times of great need one cannot necessarily afford to retain all conservative traditions and norms, as illustrated earlier by boys and girls attending the same class. The following discussion includes examples of traditional beliefs and norms, and of how education plays a role in changing deeply embedded traditional practices:

I want my daughter to get married. I think she would be much happier as a married woman than an educated one. I want her to learn things that a wife does and I cannot waste her time by sending her to school. She has got more important things to learn. (Amina, mother)

The first thing I have observed is that in most families they do not give priority and respect to the girls. They say that they are just visitors, they are just like guests. One day they will leave their home, their house. The parents respect their sons because they will help them when they get work, economically the boys will work for them. The girls will just be married. (Samira, female teacher in secondary school)

When a girl reaches the age of 18 it is time to marry, if they do not marry, people say that they will not find a decent living. (Giti, female teacher in secondary school)

Marriage is an important part of the social organization of life. Traditionally, girls marry young, and are from an early age they are socialized into the 'fact' that girls are to be married, that this is one of the main goals in life. Hence, ambivalence in the attitudes towards education may occur, since the investment in a girl's education is a rather new phenomenon, in addition to having financial implications. Nevertheless, the trend emerging through this research is an increased investment in education, with marriage taking place at a later stage in the girl's life compared with previous practices. It is worth noting that several of the girls in this study clearly stated that education had to come prior to marriage as they shared the belief that 'after you marry, it is too late' to get an education (Hina, interview 2008). When marrying, a girl is usually not presented with possibilities of future education. The skills acquired prior to marriage are typically determinants of tasks and status assigned in the patrilocal environment. Although Amina believed her daughter would be 'happier as a married woman', this was contrary to the view held by most parents interviewed in this research. They did not measure a girl's happiness in terms of whether she was married or not. However, what they did 'measure' was the degree of self-esteem the girls

would receive through an education. All parents wanted their girls to be happy, something believed to be achieved through good self-esteem rather than through marriage in itself.

Yes, I think it is very important with education. It is so exciting to see that my daughter learns something new every day. The knowledge you get from being educated is important because it can be used in so many settings. I love that she seems to have gained new self-esteem. (Hakim, father)

I do not want anyone to claim that my daughter is a 'nobody'. But people might tell her that. Especially the mother-in-law can be cruel. I want her to get some self-esteem and belief in herself before she gets married. (Hamia, mother)

Why is self-esteem important? According to the interviewees, the young female Hazara immigrants are introduced to far more varied settings than they would have been in Afghanistan. Their life in this diaspora has, for example, given young girls and females other daily tasks than those they performed in Afghanistan. One mother mentions that in Afghanistan the men usually brought home the ingredients for dinner. Now, many women and girls have taken on this responsibility, as the men are often in Afghanistan busy working to make ends meet, or they may even be deceased.

The gender-appropriate behaviours, attitudes and personality traits found in female Hazaras in Quetta are rather traditional in the sense that they are similar to those of most women in Afghanistan. Traditionally, a female's role includes domestic work and chores, whilst the outside world is the domain of the men. The women are caretakers for the extended family, while the men are the breadwinners. Yet it is not always possible to maintain the traditional female roles. Some are widows as a result of conflict, and have taken on the role as the breadwinner of the family. Paid work is often considered a characteristic of the male gender role. Contrary to the gender socialization, some Hazara women have had to take on these kinds of activities as their responsibility, and hence the gender identity is slightly changed in the diasporic setting, as illustrated by the following statements:

I hope that my daughter will get a job that pays well, so that she can support me when I grow older. Even if she would not get a job I think it is wise of me to make sure that she gets educated. If I will not get the money is spent on her education back, maybe I get it back in honour, if she gets married well due to her education. Perhaps even her future family are rich, so that she can support me through them. (Hamia, mother)

It is important for her to be educated. If she can read and write she will not be dependent on her husband in important areas of life. I think that she will also be better off as a mother if she can read and write. A teacher has told us that if she is educated then our grandchildren will also do better. (Hakim, father)

[Education] is a very important thing. I want to go to school so I can learn and understand better. I do not want to be bound to somebody else's hand. I want to get a job on my own. I want to be able to understand. Being illiterate is not a good situation to be in. (Deeba, primary school student)

Interestingly, the mother above sees her daughter's education as at least increasing her 'value' for future marriage, something that may provide the mother with a more secure old age. The father, on the other hand, judged education as a means of increased independency from the girl's future husband and as improving her qualities as a mother. However, the girl, Deeba, wanted more of a complete independence. This may signal a gradual change of traditional values, beliefs and practices, both among parents and even more so for the children. The experiences of changes in the traditional gender roles undoubtedly influence the Hazara community, which again may change some sentiments towards education and the subsequent empowerment of girls.

Another interesting issue is how the Hazaras interpret Islamic values regarding education. They have taken Islam to be in favour of both male and female education, as demonstrated below:

Islam sets no limits for education. Islam has always said that we should learn from the cradle to the grave. Mohammed said that we should get educated. Women and men's rights within Islam are the same. A mother's role is very important. If a mother is illiterate, life gets tough,



but if she is educated she can teach her children, keep her house etc. (Abbas, male primary school teacher)

Islam itself means peace ... and to read. Islam is the only religion that encourages everyone, whether male or female, to get educated ... There are many misinterpretations regarding Islam. Islam says a lot of things regarding education for both genders. (Badria, female secondary school teacher)

Islam says that you should go to school. If you are educated, then you can read the Quran. (Bano, secondary school student)

Islam has always said that both men and women should be educated. (Hina, secondary school student)

When Islam is interpreted as favourable to female education it is easier for parents and heads of households to enrol their girls in school. Using Islam as one reason for girls' education is sufficient to avoid condemnatory attitudes from other Hazaras living in Quetta, who may present themselves as more morally and religiously conservative. What is more, many believe that if Islam says that educating girls is good (e.g. Bano and Hina's statements above), then it must be right. All of the Hazaras interviewed in this research expressed the view of Islam being in favour of education for all, including girls, from cradle to grave. They might be influenced by the teachers, since they tend to stress the argument of Islam being in favour of girls' education. There is no possibility of revealing the motives for using Islam in favour of girls' attendance in school. It could be used because they sincerely want to satisfy religious requirements, or it could simply be a pragmatic tool to justify changes in traditional practices.

However, through all this, a noteworthy question has emerged: Why do Hazaras organize schools in Quetta, but not in Afghanistan? Not being able to come to any conclusion on this question, informants have given an indication of several factors contributing to this situation. Several Hazara women who have lived for a number of decades in Quetta are educated. They serve as role models for new immigrants, breaking down traditional conceptions of girls' place in education. Second, the majority of the established Quetta Hazaras are favouring education and encouraging the new Hazaras to become educated. This support plays a significant role in the social structure among the Hazaras. In this situation, a supportive environment for education is established; hence, when the new immigrants attend school they are not breaking new ground. This is important, in as much as they need to integrate into the institutions of their *Qaum* in order to gain the support they need when living in a diaspora.

### **Closing Discussion**

Through the above discussion we have tried to disentangle the research focus on the education of Hazara girls in Quetta. In the course of this examination we have highlighted the remarkable situation these girls and their families find themselves in when it comes to access to education. Their original environment in Afghanistan viewed girls' education unfavourably, but their migration to the urban area of Quetta has provided them with a different setting. Contrary to what is usually the case, the diaspora has improved their educational conditions, increasingly contributing to 'Literacy for life' (UNESCO, 2006) and reduction of extreme education poverty (UNESCO, 2009). Education contributes to personal empowerment of girls through increasing their repertoire of skills necessary in, for example, calculating prices, haggling in the market, or reading signs and labels. These girls increase their competences and consequently become less dependent on their male counterparts. This results not only in personal empowerment, but also in relational empowerment due to the girls acquiring skills previously reserved for males. The newly acquired skills have most likely, for example, improved a girl's relational empowerment in enabling her to negotiate, on different terms compared with traditional situations, her relationship with her husband and in-laws in this patrilocal community (Monsutti, 2005). A collective empowerment has also taken place, given that it is now not only males who contribute to preserving and further developing the Hazara community; females can also be active participants.

Their marginalization as an ethnic group is no longer preventing the Hazara girls from attending school. This was presented as the main argument for the low school attendance while they lived in Afghanistan. Their marginalization there was experienced directly, since their physical appearance revealed their Hazara belonging, no matter whether they lived in Kabul or in Hazarajat. Additionally, indirect marginalization of this ethnic group was experienced, particularly described by those coming from Hazarajat. This is a rural area mostly inhabited by Hazaras and consequently not given development priority in infrastructure, be it in the form of roads or of schools. This kind of marginalization based on ethnicity is not described by the participants in this study as taking place in Quetta. Furthermore, fundamental values, including Islam, are no longer interpreted as a major obstacle for girls' education by the majority of Hazaras. One of the main factors preventing education, both for girls and boys, is undoubtedly the troubled financial situation. Although they are still being marginalized, but now rather as illegal immigrants, the ways in which this occurs have changed, paving the way for an alteration of the Hazaras' sentiments towards education.

### Note

[1] All personal names used in this article are pseudonyms.

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