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# Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security



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# Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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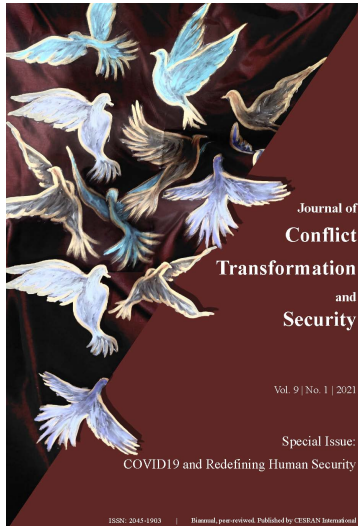
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\* The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.

## INDEXING & ABSTRACTING



- EconLit
- Genamics JournalSeek
- Index Copernicus
- Index Islamicus
- Peace Palace Library

The Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security (JCTS) provides a platform to analyse conflict transformation and security as processes for managing change in non-violent ways to produce equitable outcomes for all parties that are sustainable. A wide range of human security concerns can be tackled by both hard and soft measures, therefore the Journal's scope not only covers such security sector reform issues as restructuring security apparatus, reintegration of ex-combatants, clearance of explosive remnants of war and cross-border management, but also the protection of human rights, justice, rule of law and governance. JCTS explores the view that by addressing conflict transformation and security holistically it is possible to achieve a high level of stability and human security, requiring interventions at both policy and practitioner level. These would include conflict management, negotiated peace agreements, peacekeeping, physical reconstruction, economic recovery, psycho-social support, rebuilding of primary services such as education and health, and enabling social cohesion. Other macro-level governance issues from constitution writing to state accountability and human resource management also need to be considered as part of this process of change.

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International Think-tank [www.cesran.org](http://www.cesran.org)

Consultancy

Research Institute

CESRAN International is headquartered in the UK

CESRAN International is a member of the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI)

**CESRAN International** is a think-tank specialising on international relations in general, and global peace, conflict and development related issues and challenges.

The main business objective/function is that we provide expertise at an international level to a wide range of policy making actors such as national governments and international organisations. CESRAN with its provisions of academic and semi-academic publications, journals and a fully-functioning website has already become a focal point of expertise on strategic research and analysis with regards to global security and peace. The Centre is particularly unique in being able to bring together wide variety of expertise from different countries and academic disciplines.

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## Art as Hope, Art as Refuge, Art to Give Voice: Suffering and Hopes of Women in Afghanistan

Tamana Barakzai

The series of paintings presented here are my expressions of what it means to be a woman in Afghanistan, what it means to be forgotten, oppressed and voiceless. What it means to struggle and hope in the absence of a better future.

I found refuge in art when my family and I became refugees and lived in Iran for eleven long years in exile and my brother and I were not allowed to go to school. I started painting to escape the boredom and because the colours and images gave me hope. I painted when I should have been at school and studying, painting became my sanctuary and outlet. What was my life in Iran is now the life of all Afghan girls under the new Taliban government: not being allowed to go to school, not being allowed to learn, not being allowed to express themselves.

Art continued to give me hope after my family returned to Afghanistan when the first Taliban regime fell. At the time, my father was very happy to finally be free from displacement and homelessness. He promised that when we returned to Afghanistan, I would be allowed to study art, and become a professional artist. When we returned home Kabul was in bad shape, we had no electricity, so many houses were still destroyed, many women still wore the *burqa* – and it was difficult to walk. But we were happy; we were home at last. I could finally was able to go to school. I made up for 12 years of education. I worked hard and graduated after five years. My parents were not rich, my mother was a teacher, my father worked for the government, but they put all their money into food and education.

Those years when I was home in Afghanistan were both the best and the worst of my life. As the security situation deteriorated, we never knew if we would return home alive. So we said goodbye to our families every day as if it might be our last. I experienced war, poverty, violence, insecurity and illiteracy. Still, we had hope and we believed that **one day** the darkness would end and a better future would come. But it did not, the situation changed and the return of the Taliban to power took us back to square one. This is the fourth time that I have had to rebuild my life from scratch.

The more I learned, and the more difficult life became, I realised that women are the worst affected by all this. My mother is a good example. She lost her father, mother, four brothers and a sister during the civil war; she spent her entire youth in displacement (Pakistan and Iran) and poverty, and then worked as a teacher to give her children a better life. She always hoped that one day she would be able to retire and spend the rest of her life in peace. But she had to flee again, and now she worries every day about her son, my brother, who is left in Afghanistan. So her soul cannot be at peace. Life is still a struggle.

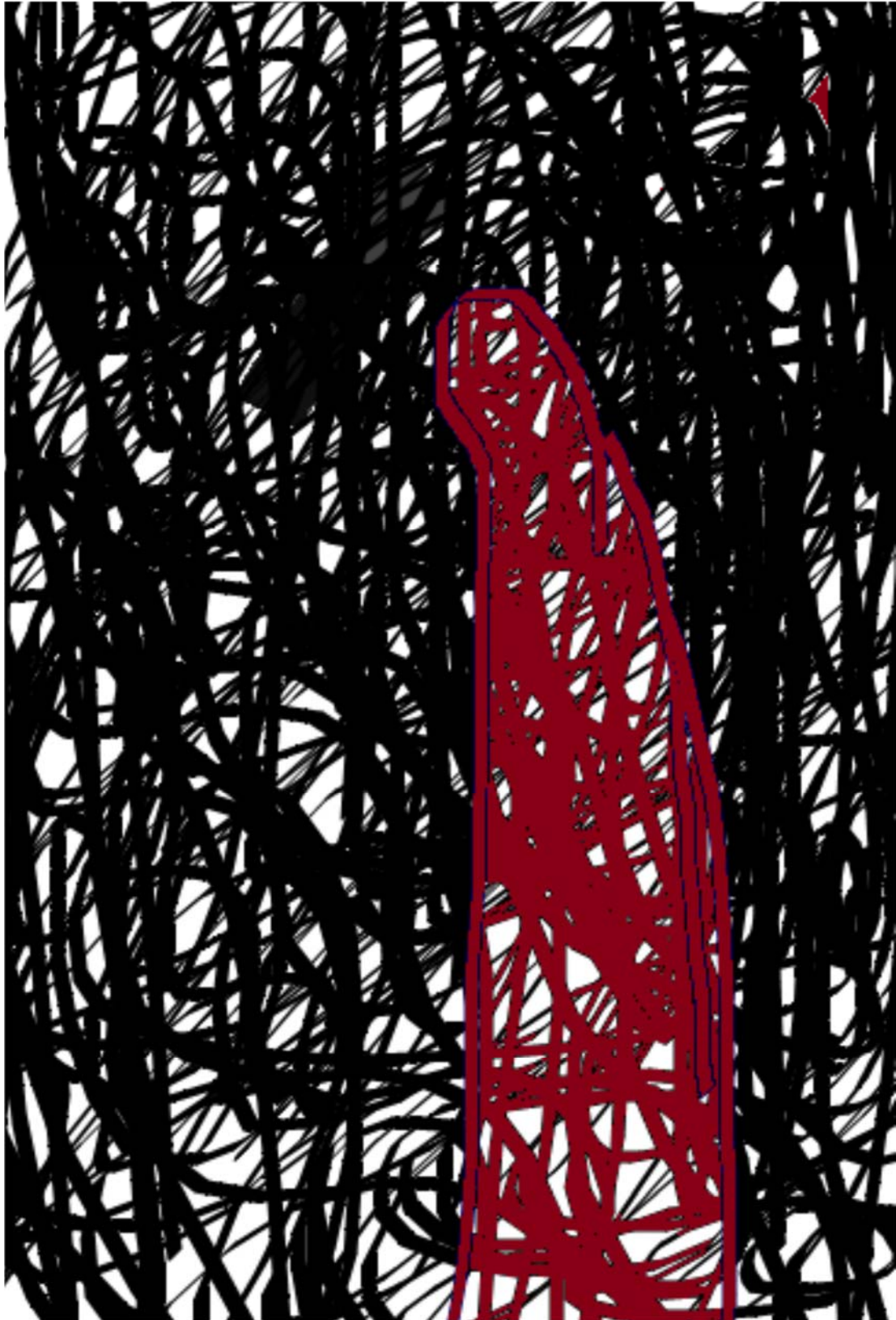
That is why I made women the subject of my paintings, to bear witness to what I see and feel in my heart: the physical and emotional experience of women in Afghanistan, who have been crying out for years, but whose voices have never been heard. But I also paint, to give hope, to break out of oppression and loneliness, and to give women a voice. This hope is also what I tried to give to my students, especially the girls, when I taught at the Institute of Fine Arts in Kabul.

In this art essays, I want to present the lives of Afghan women, both the suffering and the hopes and aspirations, one image at a time. Each picture tells a story and together they provide a glimpse at what it feels like to be a woman from Afghanistan. I wish I could show more of my art, but I had to burn it out of fear after the Taliban returned to power and I went into hiding and then fled. These paintings are all I have left, but I will paint again, because *painting is a glimmer of hope, a way to free myself from a restrictive world of suffering, and a sanctuary for my loneliness.*





**Picture 1/ Women's Alphabet:** Women are so neglected in Afghanistan that many of us feel like we have come to earth from another planet and speak a different language. No matter how much we express our wishes, needs and desires, no one listens. I express this through women in full *burqa* singing and making music. The letters of the Persian alphabet in the background are written backwards, making them illegible. This is to symbolise that women's voices are not heard.



**Picture 2/ In Complexity:** Sometimes women feel so much heartache, sadness, pain, poverty, fear, anxiety and helplessness that they wish someone would find them and break them like a glass, tearing them apart and destroying them, but for the sake of the people who depend on the women, they will be patient and endure all difficulties. This work represents the inner life of a woman who imagines herself as an audio cassette so tangled that no one can unravel it.





**Picture 3/ 8<sup>th</sup> of March:** Women have been neglected for decades, but International Women’s Day was celebrated every year during the Western-backed Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The president, ministers and other high-ranking officials appeared on the occasion and made empty promises to the media, but in reality nothing changed for women. Many women, probably my mother, like me, we also went to the celebrations, dressed in our most colourful clothes, wearing jewellery and make-up to appear happy. But we were not happy, inside we carried unspeakable pain because of the hypocrisy we witnessed. Our souls are dead, as represented by the skull, and the green veil with flowers is the outward appearance we keep.



**Picture 4/  
Rise:**

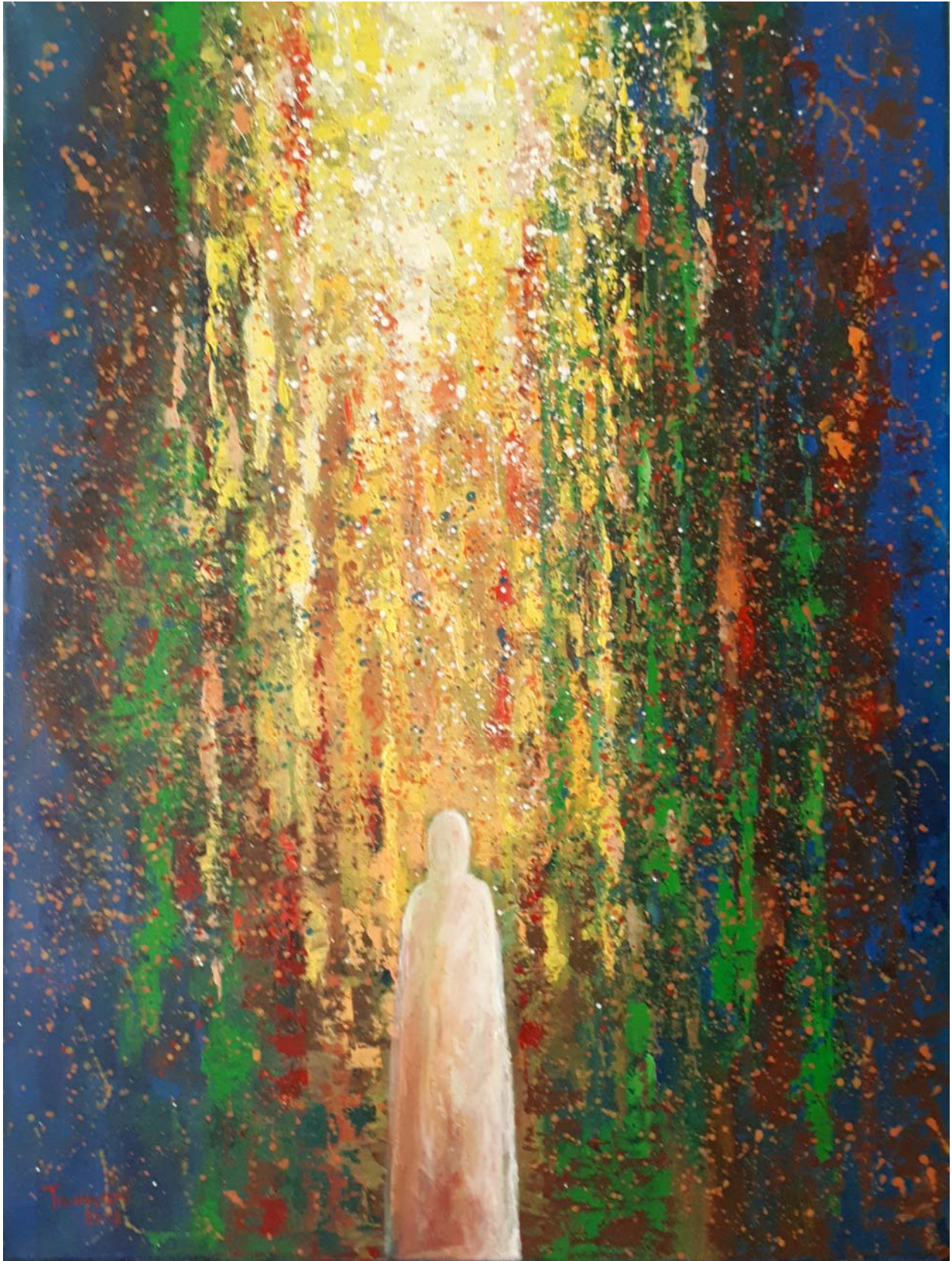
This picture is divided into three symbolic frames representing the past, the present and the future of women in Afghanistan. The past was dark, and then women moved into the light (symbolised by the sunrise) and hoped that through education would change their lives, but darkness has fallen once more with the return of the Taliban.





**Picture 5/ Search:** This painting depicts the experiences and feelings of women when they think they are lost in the desert and are reaching for the sun to warm and guide them (Hope). But in reality it is a mirage, an illusion that disappears the closer you get to it.





**Picture 6/ My dream:** A woman is the symbol of happiness and she tries to create happiness for every person in the family at every stage of life. But in spite of all these sacrifices, we (women) still feel left alone and there is no one to fulfil our hopes and wishes? So the woman in the painting imagines that she is in another world, and she imagines that her dreams of a better future are being showered on her like a colourful rain.



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