REVIEW OF CRIME, PEACE AND SOCIETY
ISSN (O): 3079-6105, ISSN (P): 3079-6091
Vol. 3, No. 7, 2026, 341-352

Writing Across Borders: Gender, Place and Literary Expression in Contemporary Pashto Literature

Muhammad Ali Dinakhel*[1]

Abstract

The Pak–Afghan border, commonly associated with the Durand Line, has shaped Pashtun identity, mobility, cultural belonging, and literary expression. Although Pashto is spoken on both sides of the border, its speakers inhabit different political, educational, and institutional environments. This article examines how contemporary Pashto poetry represents the relationship between borders, gender, place, and identity by bringing together two bodies of literary material. Drawing on comparative literary analysis and thematic analysis, the article investigates border consciousness, transborder solidarity, homeland, displacement, gendered restrictions, cultural memory, and resistance. The analysis demonstrates that male poets in the border-focused corpus frequently articulate collective Pashtun unity and challenge political separation, whereas the selected women poets expand the meaning of borders through representations of gendered mobility, social exclusion, war, emotional experience, and individual agency. These distinctions are tendencies within the selected corpus, in which all male poets belong to Pakistan while among the four female poets two belong to Pakistan and two belong to Afghanistan, rather than universal differences between male and female writers. The article argues that contemporary Pashto poetry provides a literary space in which territorial boundaries and social divisions are simultaneously contested, reproduced, and reimagined.

Article History
Received 02 September 2026
Accepted 24 September 2026
Published 29 September 2026
Corresponding Author*
OPEN ACCESS

Keywords
Pashto poetry, Pak–Afghan border, Durand Line, gender, place, Pashtun identity, female poetry, comparative literature

Introduction

Literature provides a means of examining how communities understand their histories, negotiate identities, and respond to political and social transformations. In Pashto literature, the relationship between language, territory, and identity is particularly significant because Pashto-speaking communities are distributed across Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their shared linguistic and cultural traditions coexist with separate political institutions, national histories, and language policies. The international boundary between the two countries therefore constitutes not merely a geographical division but also a subject of literary reflection. The Pak–Afghan border, commonly referred to in political and historical discussions as the Durand Line, has attracted sustained attention from Pashto poets and writers. Dinakhel (2023) demonstrate that the border is represented in Pashto poetry as an obstacle to ethnic solidarity and movement, while also affecting language planning, dialect classification, and the development of a unified literary standard. This study identifies poetic expressions that

[1] Post-Doctoral Researcher, Inalco, Paris, France. aliasc@uop.edu.pk

imagine Peshawar and Kabul as culturally connected places despite their location in separate states. However, the literary significance of borders extends beyond territorial separation. Borders can also be understood as social and cultural structures that regulate movement, determine access to public space, and shape the expression of identity. Gender is central to this broader understanding. The experiences of women who negotiate restrictions on education, mobility, love, and literary expression reveal forms of division that cannot be explained through territorial geography alone. Dinakhel and Farid's (2023) comparative study of Pashtun female millennials in Afghanistan and Pakistan identifies recurring themes of gender inequality, homeland, migration, war, peace, social restrictions, and Pashtun unity. The four poets examined in that study—Shafiqa Khpalwak and Mujda Baran from Afghanistan, and Sawera Khan Nangyalai and Asma Ikhlas from Pakistan—articulate different relationships between individual experience and collective identity.

Bringing these two bodies of poetry together makes it possible to investigate how political and social boundaries intersect. The first corpus foregrounds the territorial division of Pashtun communities, primarily through poetry by male writers from the Pakistani side. The second foregrounds women's experiences of social regulation, conflict, belonging, and self-expression across the two countries. These corpora are not identical in their scope or composition; their juxtaposition nevertheless provides a productive comparative perspective. The central argument of this article is that contemporary Pashto poetry constructs multiple, overlapping meanings of borders. For male poets represented in the border-focused corpus, the border frequently signifies territorial division and the interruption of collective Pashtun solidarity. For the women poets, borders also emerge through gendered restrictions, displacement, unequal access to public life, and the struggle to articulate individual experience. Together, these poetic voices demonstrate that literary expression can challenge geographical and social divisions while revealing differences within the broader Pashtun cultural world.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis, thematic analysis, and comparative literary interpretation. Its primary material consists samples of contemporary poetry from Pakistana nd Afghanistan and samples of male and female poets from both countries. These poetry samples can be categorised into two groups; the first category is the corpus of male poets from pakistan mainly describing the border in their poetry and the second corpus is samples of the poetry of female poets from Pakistan and Afghanistan. The first corpus consists of poems and folk verses describing the border. The poets selected for this study include Akmal Lewanay, Sarwar Khattak, and Mumtaz Awrakzai, Rahmat Shah saiel and some others. The border-focused poems discussed here are predominantly by male poets from the Pakistani side. The second corpus comprises selected poetry from four published collections by contemporary women poets: Shafiqa Khpalwak and Mujda Baran from Afghanistan, and Sawera Khan Nangyalai and Asma Ikhlas from Pakistan. This article examined their poems for recurring themes relevant to gender, identity, place, conflict, and social change. The poems were selected for their relevance to five overlapping analytical categories: (1) territorial borders and collective identity; (2) place, homeland, and belonging; (3) gendered restrictions and agency; (4) war, displacement, and social insecurity; and (5) literary expression as a form of resistance. The analysis compares recurring motifs and differences in perspective rather than attempting a quantitative comparison of male and female poetry.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Comparative literature across national boundaries

Comparative literature provides a framework for examining literary works that share a language but emerge from different political, historical, and cultural environments. As discussed by Dinakhel and Farid (2023), Pashto literature in Afghanistan and Pakistan can be compared through its shared linguistic heritage as well as its differences in social conditions, political experience, literary practice, and cultural expression. Susan Bassnett (1993) emphasises the importance of comparative inquiry beyond the confines of a single national literature. Applied to Pashto, this approach makes it possible to investigate how a shared literary language accommodates different regional experiences without assuming that literary identity is uniform across national boundaries.

Border studies and place

A border is both a territorial demarcation and a structure that influences how people imagine community and belonging. In the poetry considered here, the Durand Line becomes a symbol of separation, while places such as Peshawar, Kabul, Chitral, Malakand, and Laghman acquire meanings that extend beyond their geographical locations. Place is not simply a setting in which poetic experience unfolds. It can become a repository of memory, an object of attachment, a site of conflict, or a symbol of collective identity. The contrast between political boundaries and imagined cultural unity is therefore central to interpreting the border-focused poetry.

Gender and literary agency

Gender provides a complementary analytical perspective. Dinakhel and Farid (2023) show that the four women poets address restrictions on female expression, educational opportunities, love, social mobility, and participation in public life. Their poetry also explores homeland, conflict, migration, and peace. These themes demonstrate that a border may be experienced through social expectations as well as through territorial arrangements. A woman's inability to pursue education or express her feelings publicly constitutes a form of social limitation, even when it does not involve crossing a national frontier. Poetry becomes a means of making these less visible boundaries perceptible.

The Territorial Border and the Imagination of Pashtun Unity

The border as a barrier to collective identity

The border-focused poetry frequently represents territorial separation as incompatible with the historical and cultural relationships connecting Pashtun communities. In this poetry, the border is not simply a political fact; it is a line that interrupts an imagined community. Akmal Lewanay expresses the difficulties of collective advancement and the need for unity:

څوک که په دي خپله خاوره خپله وداني غواړي
نۀ کيږي ويريا دا به عظيمه قرباني غواړي
دا خلق بي پټه دي څو کسه پخواني غواړي
يو شئ رونو يو شئ ختمول دا ځان ځاني غواړي

Translation: Whoever seeks prosperity and development on this land must recognise that it demands great sacrifice. The present generation lacks the dignity and qualities associated with

earlier generations. O brothers, unite; the divisions and dissensions among us must end (Lewanay, 2004, p. 41).

The poem connects collective advancement with solidarity. Although the cited passage is not exclusively about the Durand Line, its emphasis on unity provides a thematic foundation for understanding the border as one among several obstacles to collective development. Sarwar Khattak makes the geographical breadth of Pashtun identity more explicit:

د ایشیا زړۀ کښې د چترال نه تر بوالنه پورې
د وروروڼۍ دعوې کونکي پښتانۀ پراته دي
هیڅ یو طاقت نور دغه قام دباواوڵے نۀ شي
دغه عظیمه وروروڼي څوک وړانوڵے نه شي

Translation: In the heart of Asia, from Chitral to Bolan, Pashtuns who believe in brotherhood are spread across the land. No power should be able to suppress this nation, and no one should be able to destroy this great brotherhood (Khattak, 2004, p. 131).

The movement from Chitral to Bolan creates an expansive geographical image of community. Brotherhood is presented as a relationship that exceeds local and administrative divisions. The poem's collective vocabulary turns geography into an argument about cultural continuity. The poem nevertheless expresses an aspiration rather than proof of political or cultural uniformity. Pashtun communities across Afghanistan and Pakistan differ in dialect, historical experience, and political affiliation. The significance of these verses lies in the poetic construction of solidarity, not in the elimination of those differences.

Peshawar and Kabul as connected places

The following couplet (Dinakhel, 2023) offers one of the most concise expressions of transborder belonging:

پېښور او کابل دواړه دوه یاران دي
لکه دوه سترګې په یو مخ د جانان دي

Translation:Peshawar and Kabul are two friends, like two eyes on the face of one beloved

The metaphor of two eyes belonging to one face transforms two cities into complementary parts of a single whole. Rather than describing Peshawar and Kabul as competing national spaces, the couplet imagines them through intimacy and mutual dependence. The beloved's face provides an image of unity that does not require the two eyes to become identical. This image is particularly significant for a comparative study of literature across borders. It suggests that cultural belonging can be imagined through relationships that political geography does not fully contain (Dinakhel, 2023a). A second couplet makes a related claim through the Khyber Pass:

د خیبر دره خو الر د تلو راتلو ده
په کابل او په سرحد کښې افغان یو دے

Translation: The Khyber Pass is a route for going and coming; the Pashtuns of Kabul and the Frontier are one (Dinakhel, 2023b).

The Khyber Pass is represented as a passage rather than an absolute barrier. Movement and connection become more important than territorial separation. The verse also invokes a shared identity extending between Kabul and the region historically referred to as the Frontier. Such poetic formulations demonstrate how geographical features acquire symbolic significance. A pass that can be understood as a strategic frontier is reimagined as a corridor of human contact.

Rejection of the border as a line of identity

Mumtaz Awrakzai expresses a particularly direct rejection of the Durand Line:

زه د لاسونو او تندي کربنې هم نه منمه
ته په ما کربنه د ډیورنډ مني مازغه دي نشته

Translation

I do not even accept the lines on palms and foreheads; you accept the Durand Line drawn across me, showing a lack of reason (Awrakzai)

The verse uses bodily lines as a metaphorical comparison for political demarcation. By placing the Durand Line alongside lines on the body, the poet questions the legitimacy of treating a territorial boundary as a definitive marker of identity. The poem's confrontational tone transforms the border into a personal and collective grievance. The body becomes a symbolic territory upon which political power inscribes separation. This language illustrates the emotional force that borders can acquire in literary imagination. The verse also reveals the political orientation of this particular poetic voice.

Place, Homeland, and Cultural Belonging in Women's Poetry

The four women poets introduce different relationships between place and identity. Their poetry does not always address the Durand Line directly. Instead, it frequently presents place through homeland, community, memory, displacement, and the desire for a more secure life.

Homeland as responsibility and aspiration

Mujda Baran connects attachment to homeland with collective responsibility:

ځوانانو پاڅېږئ وطن اباد کړئ کار پکار دے
هسې وزګار مه ګرځئ دلته څه روزګار پکار دے
زمونږ وطن دے د پردو په لاس کښې
تنکي ګلونه د ازغو په لاس کښې

Translation: Young people, rise and rebuild your homeland; work is needed. Do not remain idle, for meaningful activity and employment are necessary. Our homeland is in the hands of others, and its tender flowers are in the hands of thorns. (Baran, 2020, pp. 60, 87)

The imagery of flowers and thorns expresses the vulnerability of homeland. Flowers signify beauty, potential, and life, while thorns suggest hardship and the destructive forces that threaten them. The call to young people connects emotional attachment to place with a demand for action. The poem is also important for understanding female literary agency. Baran speaks about the reconstruction of homeland in a voice that addresses young people collectively. Her

poetic identity is therefore not confined to private or domestic concerns; it participates in a broader conversation about social responsibility and political conditions.

Place as a site of insecurity

Baran's poetry also reveals that belonging to a place does not necessarily mean feeling secure within it:

له دي کلي کډه وړمه چرته لرې
دلته ژوند لاږ دشوار دے محترمو

Translation: I am leaving this village and moving somewhere far away; life here has become very difficult (Baran, 2020, p. 19)

The village, conventionally associated with familiarity and community, becomes a place from which the poetic speaker must depart. Migration emerges as a response to conditions that make everyday life difficult (Dinakhel, 2023c). Read alongside the male poets' desire to overcome territorial separation, this verse introduces a different dimension of mobility. For the border-focused male poets, movement frequently signifies connection between communities. For Baran, movement is an act of departure from an insecure local environment. The contrast illustrates that mobility has multiple meanings. It may represent freedom, cultural connection, displacement, or the loss of a familiar home. These meanings cannot be reduced to a single narrative of border crossing.

Pashtun unity across the border

The poetry of Sawera Khan Nangyalai and Asma Ikhlas (both from Pakistan) also addresses transborder Pashtun identity. Nangyalai calls for unity across the territorial division:

د لر بر د پښتنو ټول په اتفاق شئ
اتفاق کښې رب اچولے برکت دے

Translation: All Pashtuns of Lar and Bar should unite; God has placed blessings in unity. (Nangyalai, 2019, p. 83)

The expression *Lar aw Bar* refers in this context to Pashtuns on the Afghan and Pakistani sides of the border. The verse resembles the male poets' appeal to collective brotherhood, but its inclusion in a woman's collection complicates any assumption that transborder nationalism belongs exclusively to male literary expression. Ikhlas makes the argument explicit:

یو پښتانۀ یو څه جدا جدا قومونه نۀ یو
دلته یو والے ولې بیا د لر او بر نه راځي

Translation: We are one Pashtun people, not separate nations. Why, then, does unity not emerge among the Pashtuns of Lar and Bar? (Ikhlas, 2021, p. 98)

The rhetorical question exposes the distance between imagined cultural unity and actual political and social circumstances. The poem does not simply celebrate shared identity; it asks why that identity has not produced greater solidarity. The convergence between these women poets and the male border-focused poets is significant. Although their literary contexts and thematic emphases differ, the desire to imagine community beyond political boundaries

appears in both bodies of poetry. This convergence suggests that the border is a shared literary concern rather than a theme restricted to one gender.

Gendered Borders: Social Restrictions and Literary Agency

Territorial borders are visible on maps, but social boundaries may operate through customs, expectations, and restrictions that regulate individual lives. The poetry of the four women writers is particularly revealing in this respect.

The struggle for women's freedom

Shafiqa Khpalwak imagines a world in which girls can move freely and exercise their own will:

راته شعر وايه چې نجونې توتکی وي
وزرونه يې پرانستې وي الوځي
د جنسيت داغونه يې نۀ وي په لمنو
زړۀ يې خپل که تر اسمان که تر کاله ځي

Translation: Recite to me poetry about girls who are like birds, with their wings spread open as they fly. Let their garments bear no stain imposed by gender, and let them follow their own hearts, whether towards the sky or towards home. (Khpalwak, 2020, p. 72)

The image of flight challenges the social confinement of women. The bird's open wings suggest movement and choice, while the reference to gendered stigma exposes the social judgements that restrict female agency. The contrast between the sky and home is especially suggestive. Freedom is not necessarily defined as rejecting home or community; it is the ability to choose one's direction. The poem therefore challenges the assumption that women's belonging must depend upon restricted movement. Khpalwak's poetic voice extends the concept of borders beyond territorial demarcation. A woman may share a language and cultural heritage with others yet encounter social boundaries that prevent her from participating equally in education, public life, or literary culture.

Rebellion and self-expression

Mujda Baran makes rebellion an element of personal identity:

بغاوت مې په رګو کښې چلېده لکه د وينې
بې پرواه ومه باغي ومه سرشاره ومه زۀ

Translation:Rebellion flowed through my veins like blood; I was fearless, rebellious, and full of energy (Baran, 2020, p. 21)

The comparison between rebellion and blood presents resistance as an integral part of the poetic speaker's identity. Rather than describing rebellion as a temporary response to a particular event, the speaker makes it a defining personal quality. This voice contrasts with the collective language of brotherhood in much of the male border-focused poetry. Whereas the latter often locates resistance in a shared national or ethnic community, Baran's verse foregrounds the individual who challenges restrictive traditions. The distinction should not be exaggerated into a rigid gender binary. Collective and individual forms of resistance occur

across literary traditions. Nevertheless, these examples demonstrate how the selected women poets bring questions of personal agency into a discussion of identity and social belonging.

The right to express love and emotion

Gendered restrictions also shape the possibility of speaking openly about intimate relationships. Khpalwak questions the concealment of love:

ګاونډيه مينه ولي شرم بولي؟
ولي؟ ولي؟ يې له هر چا پټوې؟
ولي؟ ولي؟ مې وجود عيب درښکاريږي؟
ولي؟ ولي؟ زما راز ته جوړوې؟

Translation: O neighbour, why do you consider love shameful? Why do you hide it from everyone? Why does my existence appear to you as a fault? Why do you turn my love into a secret? (Khpalwak, 2020, p. 51)

The repeated questions transform an apparently private emotion into a social and cultural issue. The speaker asks why her existence and feelings must be concealed, challenging the expectations that regulate women's emotional expression. This theme is relevant to the title's emphasis on writing across borders because it reveals a boundary within society itself: the division between feelings that may be expressed publicly and those that must remain hidden. The poem also questions the cultural assumptions through which women's voices are restricted to acceptable forms of expression. The collection's title, *Gawandi* (Neighbour), further suggests that relationships with others can be understood beyond conventional romantic vocabulary. As Dinakhel and Farid (2023) note, Khpalwak seeks new themes and new ways of approaching familiar poetic subjects. Her innovation is therefore both thematic and conceptual.

War, Displacement, and the Fragility of Belonging

War provides another important connection between the two corpora. The male poets often approach territorial separation through collective identity, while the women poets more explicitly represent the suffering of ordinary people, emotional loss, displacement, and the difficulty of maintaining everyday life under conditions of violence.

The human cost of conflict

Baran personifies war as a force that destroys the foundations of individual and collective life:

جنګه ته سترې يې کنه يې سترې
رانه دې ګل واخست ريحان واخست
زما له سترګو دې رڼا يوړه
زما د غېږې دې جانان واخست
له برېتورو نه دې برېت وسول
له ږيرورو دې ايمان واخست
له خوار شپانه نۀ دې رمه واخسته
له غريبانو دې ارمان واخست

Translation

O war, are you tired, or are you not tired? You have taken my flowers and fragrance. You have taken the light from my eyes and my beloved from my embrace. You have taken away the honour of the moustached and the faith of the bearded. You have taken the flock from the poor shepherd and the hopes of the poor. (Baran, 2020, p. 90)

The repeated structure of loss makes war an active agent that takes away beauty, intimacy, moral confidence, livelihood, and hope. The poem moves from personal grief to wider social devastation. The images of the shepherd and the poor are particularly important because they connect violence with the destruction of ordinary livelihoods. War is not represented solely as a contest between political forces; it is experienced through damaged relationships, lost possessions, and diminished futures. This representation complements the border-focused poems by showing what territorial and political conflicts may mean in everyday life. The desire for unity acquires a human dimension when considered alongside the suffering produced by insecurity and displacement.

Migration and the loss of home

Baran's verse about leaving her village reveals that the relationship between place and belonging may become unstable. Migration can be a strategy for survival, but it can also involve the loss of familiar relationships and environments (Dinakhel, 2023c). The distinction between movement and displacement is crucial. The male border-focused poems often imagine the restoration of connection between places separated by a political line. The women poets' accounts of migration suggest that movement can also be compelled by insecurity and difficult living conditions. These different experiences reveal the limitations of treating all mobility as either liberation or national separation. A fuller literary analysis must consider why people move, what they leave behind, and whether they possess the freedom to return.

The interruption of celebration

Baran also questions the possibility of celebrating religious festivals amid violence:

توپک توپک ماحول او د بارودو سرو لمبو کښې
زۀ څنګه به اختر ته خوشحالي کوم ۀبلاګ

Translation: When the whole environment is filled with guns and the red flames of gunpowder, how can I celebrate Eid, my rose? (Baran, 2020, p. 18)

The juxtaposition of Eid and gunfire exposes the contradiction between the cultural promise of celebration and the reality of violence. The festival, ordinarily associated with communal joy and renewal, becomes inseparable from fear and grief. The poem demonstrates that war affects more than physical safety. It disrupts rituals, collective gatherings, and the rhythms through which communities reproduce their cultural identities. Place becomes difficult to inhabit when the activities that make it meaningful are repeatedly interrupted.

Literary Expression as Resistance and Cultural Continuity

The two type of corpora also invite consideration of how poetry itself functions as a response to boundaries. For the male poets in the border-focused corpus, poetic expression frequently challenges territorial separation through metaphors of brotherhood, shared bodily identity, and movement between cities. The poems imagine a Pashtun community whose cultural

relationships extend beyond the limits of the nation-state. The four women poets broaden this function of literary expression. Their poetry contests the social restrictions that govern women's mobility, emotional expression, education, and participation in public life. Their voices demonstrate that the ability to write, publish, and circulate poetry is itself significant where female expression has historically been restricted. Dinakhel and Farid (2023) also draw attention to the role of contemporary media in the circulation of women's poetry. Social media and digital forms of presentation provide additional channels through which poems can reach audiences beyond local communities. Such circulation may create new literary relationships across geographical boundaries, although access to these channels and their effects cannot be assumed to be equal for every poet. The contrast between the two bodies of material is therefore not simply between male nationalism and female personal experience. The male poets also address collective suffering and solidarity, while the women poets write about homeland, political conditions, and transborder unity. The difference lies more in the distribution of emphasis within the selected examples than in an absolute division between male and female literary concerns. The poems also preserve Pashto as a medium for negotiating contemporary experiences. The language's shared literary heritage provides a point of connection across the border, while regional vocabulary, literary conventions, and distinct social settings contribute to the diversity of poetic expression. Dinakhel (2023b) argue that the political division of Pashto-speaking communities complicates efforts to establish a common literary dialect and unified orthography. From a literary perspective, this problem underscores the importance of treating Pashto literature as a connected but internally diverse field. Cross-border literary analysis should recognise both common cultural resources and the differences arising from regional and institutional contexts.

Discussion: Multiple Borders, Unequal Experiences

The comparison establishes three principal findings. First, the territorial border is a powerful symbol of separation in the male poetry explicitly addressing the Durand Line. Images of Peshawar and Kabul as two eyes on one face, the Khyber Pass as a route of movement, and the extension of Pashtun identity from Chitral to Bolan all challenge the idea that political geography exhausts the meaning of belonging. These poems construct an imagined cultural community across national boundaries. Second, the selected women poets reveal that borders are also produced through gendered social relations. Khpalwak's imagery of girls flying with open wings, Baran's declaration of rebellion, and Khpalwak's questions about the concealment of love all challenge restrictions that limit women's agency. In these poems, the boundary is not always a line separating countries; it may be a social expectation that determines where a woman can go, what she can say, and how she can participate in public life. Third, the two corpora converge around the themes of homeland, conflict, and collective well-being. Nangyalai and Ikhlas articulate transborder Pashtun unity, while Baran connects attachment to homeland with reconstruction and social responsibility. Their poetry demonstrates that women are not merely observers of national and territorial questions; they actively interpret and participate in them. These findings must be situated within the methodological limitations of the comparison. The male border-focused poems and the poetry of four women poets were selected for different research purposes. The former directly address the border, whereas the latter encompass a wider range of personal, cultural, and political themes. The comparison is consequently interpretive rather than statistically representative. The women poets differ in their treatment of love, rebellion, homeland, and political unity. Likewise, the male border-focused poets express particular political and cultural positions rather than a single universally shared view. Nevertheless, the comparison reveals the analytical value of approaching borders through both territorial and social perspectives. It shows how literature can simultaneously

affirm collective belonging, question political separation, expose social inequalities, and articulate alternative possibilities for living together.

Conclusion

Contemporary Pashto poetry provides a valuable perspective on the relationship between borders, gender, place, and literary expression. The poetry explicitly addressing the Pak–Afghan border frequently imagines Pashtun identity as extending beyond the territorial division between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Through images of brotherhood, connected cities, and shared cultural belonging, male poets in the selected border-focused corpus challenge the idea that political boundaries fully determine collective identity. The four contemporary women poets add further dimensions to this discussion. Their poems explore homeland, displacement, conflict, social restrictions, and women's right to express their experiences. They reveal that belonging is shaped not only by the location of a national border but also by the social conditions under which individuals inhabit their communities. The comparison demonstrates both convergence and difference. Transborder unity appears in the poetry of men and women, while the selected women's poetry gives particular attention to gendered restrictions, personal agency, and the consequences of conflict for everyday life. These tendencies should be understood within the limits of the available corpus rather than as universal distinctions between male and female writers. Poetry does not erase borders, but it provides a means of questioning their meanings and imagining relationships that exceed them. By examining territorial separation alongside gendered boundaries, this article contributes to a more inclusive understanding of contemporary Pashto literature as a space where place, identity, cultural continuity, and resistance intersect.

Acknowledgement

This article was developed as part of the ANR-PLIC Postdoctoral research project, *Pashto Literature Between Identity and Contact* (ANR-23-CE27-0006-01), hosted at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO), Paris, and the Centre de recherche sur le monde iranien (CeRMI). The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the French National Research Agency (ANR) and the academic environment provided by INALCO and CeRMI. The author also expresses sincere gratitude to Professor Matteo De Chiara for his academic guidance and continued support throughout the postdoctoral research.

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