Book Review

Jamal, Aamir. (2018). *The Gatekeepers: Engaging Pashtun Men for Gender Justice and Girls' Education*. Iqbal International Institute for Research and Dialogue, International Islamic University, Islamabad (236 pages) ISBN: 9697576258

Girls, representing a significant portion of Pakistan's population, encounter seemingly, insurmountable barriers to accessing formal education. To date, research on the topic from a dominant, Western perspective, usually presents the supply-side of the economic development equation by concentrating on the negative factors such as low literacy rates, weak infrastructure, poverty, low educational enrollment rates for girls and women, etc. In contrast, Aamir Jamal's: *The Gate Keepers: Engaging Pashtun Men for Gender Justice & Girls' Education*, presents a welcome departure. The book is an integrated, comprehensive approach to the topic. Jamal acknowledges the negative data but more importantly, his book discusses how to remove the barriers which prevent girls from being able to access education. Jamal explains in considerable detail, parental and community perceptions and perspectives in order to document the often-forgotten, but very important demand-side of the equation. His book demonstrates convincingly that active community engagement by the Pashtun men, the community's gatekeepers, is the key to opening the doors to the girls' access to formal education.

As an insider, Aamir Jamal grew up in the Pashtun region of Pakistan. His book draws extensively on his lived experiences and understanding of Pashtunwali culture. In his research, he identified members of the Pashtun community who have the power to understand the barriers to girls' education and if they wish to do so, can design and implement the processes to produce real change. Accordingly, the sample for the series of interviews includes religious leaders, social workers, fathers of daughters, NGO leaders, government officials, and other significant male groups of/with influence in the community. Jamal adopts a qualitative Delphi method and includes self-reflexivity in the conversations with the research participants. In his interviews, he develops the levels of trust with the male participants who frequently draw on his insider's knowledge of the culture, in their responses.

As a Muslim woman I found it noteworthy that Jamal acknowledges, early in the book, that restricting girls' access to education is not part of – and quite contrary to – the religious teachings of Islam. However, Jamal acknowledges that religious extremists use misinterpretations of Islam to accomplish and drive their motives. Throughout the book, Aamir Jamal provides insights into religious practices which hopefully, will help to combat negative biases and common misconceptions regarding Islam in, for example, the Western media. A considerable portion of the book is spent explaining the tribal code of Pashtunwali which governs the Pashtun's identities. Jamal describes Pashtunwali as “an unwritten law, a sociopolitical culture, and an ideology inherited from ancestors and carried on from generation to generation” (p. 18).

In his interviews and discussions, Jamal explores the key question with each man, “why won't he send his daughter to school?” Rather than simply identifying the men's reasons for limiting the girls' access to education, Jamal explains that there are important concerns such as

the girls' safety, traditional cultural values and rituals, as well as established notions of cultural protection.

Perhaps the part of the book which resonated with me the most, is the final chapter. Jamal speaks of his motivations and dreams when he was growing up in the Pashtun region. He explains the significant influences of his mother who was a teacher and a strong advocate for girls' education. There is much discussion regarding ways in which men committed to educating their daughters, can develop and implement the processes to guide the required changes. Jamal calls for action by inviting men to become allies for gender justice. He outlines a small NGO program for girls in Pakistan for which he is a founding member. The NGO not only supports girls' education but also offers support for orphaned children in conflict areas of Pakistan. In closing, Aamir Jamal offers an inspiring message: "cultures are not static - people do change, heal, learn, and grow. But healing can only come from within" (p. 171). This book is both moving and revealing. Readers with interests in gender justice and who wish to develop a better understanding of the key issues restricting the access to education for girls in Pakistan, will find this book very informative.

Isra Safadi

University of Calgary