The next speaker is Deepa Kumar who is a professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies and she will be talking about the power of images of women in revolution I should also take offense there. Because after all non-violent resistance was a strategy developed by Mahatma Gandhi and being that I am from India. I'll go ahead and take offence as well. So all right my title changed just a little bit. It's now called Reimagining Muslim women revolution and social media. And I want you to before I show you the slides from various revolutions and the rule that women have played in it I want you to sort of think about the dominant image. This may not be the dominant image that you have but think of the dominant image that we have of Arab and Muslim women in this culture. I think when you think about it for a second the image that comes to mind is that of an oppressed victim a person who is submissive repressed oppressed and subservient in general. And all of these qualities I think are captured quite well in the image of a veiled woman. And so where do we look at this image. It exemplifies all of our stereotypes of what an Arab woman or what a Muslim woman is. And that's enough in terms of understanding who she is. Watch what motivates her and so forth. And suddenly we've seen these images you know in all of the places where ideas can be found. Certainly Hollywood if you go all the way back to the 1920s you have films like The sheik with Rudolph Valentino and so forth with these images of Arab women. Of course the flip side of the docile out of a woman is the hyper sexualized woman right. The woman in a harem was always sexually available and promiscuous and so on and so forth to move forward. We have the images from Iran for instance from the film Not Without My Daughter where you know I go back and talk much more to this question if you've seen that film how many of you've seen that film. With Sally Fields OK just two people just very quickly let me say then that what that film is about is of course glorifying the agency of American women and denying that agency to Iranian
women who are seen of course in completely submissive and docile ways. And the most recent example that I can think of is father of the bride part two where you have an Arab couple that wants to buy the house of the protagonist. There's one scene where essentially the woman is trying to make some suggestions about renovating the kitchen and he just shut her up and she just sits quietly in the corner. And of course she's wearing Western garb and all the rest of it. And so that image no matter what a woman is wearing that image for the most part is dominant. Now what I want to do it really is try to move away from this image and show other ways of thinking and reimagining Muslim women. And I have to say the supply. You know I've given these sorts of talks before but it's become really easy to do so now in the context after the Tunisian revolution after the movement in Iran after Egypt and so on and so forth of course my personal belief is they did this so that I could be a better lecturer but just a little bit of history on the political uses of Muslim women as victims. You may already know this but I think it's worth going over. Is that the ways in which this docile image of Muslim women as victims gets used politically is in relation to mobilizing public opinion around questions of war. The most recent example of this of course is rescuing Afghan women from the Taliban. I'll just read one or two quick quotes from here. This was Laura Bush who was on the front lines of making this argument and she says fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture. It is the acceptance of our common humanity a commitment shared by people of goodwill on every continent. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women. And I won't go through all of them I'll just skip to the bottom to Cherie Blair where she says nothing more symbolizes the oppression of women than the burqa which is a very visible sign of the role of women in Afghanistan. And of course there were other reasons given for why the US intervened in Afghanistan. But this became one of the key sort of tropes used to mobilise public opinion. Now of course it is true that Afghan women did suffer under the Taliban. They were forced to be fully veiled. They couldn't go out without a male escort. They were stoned to death for adultery and so on and so forth. But what's missing from this account is that even though all of this was known back from the early 90s on it didn't really
stop the United States from having dealings with the Taliban. Right. So the Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid has an excellent book on the interests of the United States say it's hard and continues to have in Caspian Sea oil and particularly the oil company Unocal wanting to build pipelines across Afghanistan Pakistan and so on into the Arabian into the sea into the to have access to it and so forth. But of course you know let me not use. Ahmed Rashid let me instead use a source from a from a congressional representative. And this is Dana Rohrabacher who is a California Republican from California. He's a congressman and this is what he had to say back in the 1990s quote I am making the claim that there is and has been a covert policy by this administration that is the Clinton administration to support the Taliban's movements Taliban movements control of Afghanistan. This amoral or immoral policy is based on the assumption that the Taliban could bring stability to Afghanistan and and permit the building of oil pipelines from Central Asia through Afghanistan to Pakistan. I believe the administration has maintained this covert goal and kept the Congress in the dark about its policy of supporting the Taliban the most anti-Western anti female anti human rights regime in the world. It doesn't take a genius to understand that this policy would outrage the American people especially American women. And so the question then is why was this used. And of course the story of rescuing innocent people somewhere else has been a very long trope in mobilizing public opinion in favor of war. You know you can go all the way back to the 18 98 Spanish American War and all the rest of it. And a study that I did with my colleague Carol to Bill what we found is that in the two years before 9/11 there were about a dozen newspaper stories and all of the major newspapers having to do with the plight of women in Afghanistan after 9/11. There are several hundred. Right. And then when you look at the broadcast media and the same pass time period we saw about 30 something stories in the broadcast media after 9/11. There are over 600 news media reports. And so the question that we have to ask is when someone's victimhood becomes so prominent that primary define as of news like Laura Bush like Colin Powell and so on and talking about it what is going on. What larger agenda is being mobilized. And of course absent from all of this is the following that since the 1950s girls in Kabul and other cities attended
schools that Afghanistan's constitution written in 64 ensured basic rights for women that women made up 40 percent of Afghanistan's doctors 70 percent of its teachers and so on and so forth. And that in fact the decline of women's rights begins with the support that the US gives to the holy warriors or the mujahideen back in the 1980s and the proxy war with the Soviet Union who when they come to power start to attack women's rights. Right. One of the key allies that the US has in the region is a man by the name of Goldwyn within Hekmatyar who comes to the attention of the CIA because he goes around throwing acid on the faces of women who are not covered and these are the people to whom billions of taxpayer dollars were were funneled. Now one of the most outspoken critics really of this entire argument is a woman by the name of Malalai Joya. She served as a member of parliament in Afghanistan. She is currently on tour actually in the United States right now. And this is her book and she's written very beautifully about what has happened to Afghan women since the 2001 intervention. She she backs up her claims with of course the work of various human rights organizations. And I had the pleasure actually of interviewing her about what happened to Afghan women after 2001. And here's what she said she said First let me say that after September 11th the US government through us from the frying pan into the fire over the last eight years the US under the banner of women's rights and human rights has occupied my country and millions of men and women have suffered from injustice insecurity corruption joblessness poverty et cetera. I just skip on and I'll say this time wearing suits and ties they have again come to power with the help of the US. This is the warlords that came to power in the period before the Taliban took power. And that's why is today's situation for women as worse especially in many of the provinces. It is true that in some big cities like Kabul my city was Mazar e Sharif or Herat. You will see that some women have been able to get jobs and an education. But in most provinces women do not even have basic human rights. The situation is like how a friend of mine who used to work as the Afghan correspondent for The Wall Street Journal and who I've heard speak about this as well was telling me recently about an incident where this young woman who had been raped by actually one of the warlords in the Northern Alliance was trying
to seek justice in a court. And you know as horrible as the Taliban were at least women could expect some degree of justice went to them around these sorts of issues. But now it is these same people who are doing the harassing of women and the raping and so on who are the judges. And so she has been completely denied justice. And so symbolically what she did is she set herself on fire and killed herself as a way to show the complete lack of justice for women in that country. Now I bring this up really to show that women's liberation can never be achieved as a imperial project instituted from above and from elsewhere. But of course these ideas are not new. They have existed for a long time. So for instance the British used a similar justification when they invaded and occupied Egypt in 1882 and Lord Cromer who oversaw the occupation viewed Islam and Egyptian society as follows. He says quote Islam is a social system has been a complete failure. The degradation of women in the east is a canker that begins its destructive work early in childhood and is eaten into the whole system of Islam. And of course you know Lord Cromer says that he's going to be the champion of Egyptian women's rights and so forth. But of course if you dig into who Lord Cromer actually is you will find that he is a founding member and president of the Men's League to end suffrage in Britain. So there you have it. On the one hand he is obviously not a believer in women's rights back home in Britain. He was very much in favor of preventing women from gaining the right to vote. But of course as an as a justification for colonialism this becomes very convenient in terms of marshalling domestic opinion. All right. Now I want to move on then to this dominant image which has occupied the political sphere which has occupied the cultural sphere and so on to the role. Most recently of women in various revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East. And I want to argue that really these images have played a very useful role in not only spreading information to the West about the revolutions but also the role of women in these revolutions. Suddenly people who are progressives who are liberals who are on the left who are tapped into Facebook and Twitter and so on have seen these sorts of images and in many ways changed their old understandings of the role of women in Arab and Muslim societies. And I just want to say that this is important because in the last 10 years I've been giving lectures on the question
of Islamophobia and I am struck by how people on the left people who consider themselves liberals for instance still hold on to very sort of Orientalist and negative images of Arab women and of Muslim women and I do want to acknowledge that these images have been important in destabilising the dominant image. So here I'll just quickly go through some of these images here we have a woman in a full burqa. But nevertheless part of the protest here you see women taking part and being beaten equal opportunity repression by the state. And here's another one a woman being beaten by the police. You see the woman in the green jacket throwing a stone just like here. Her male counterparts on the frontlines of the protests. And I like this image because right in the middle. Can you see the woman with a pink hijab. Right. And there she is sort of standing up and standing out and pushing back and front lines not hiding behind not being docile but in the front lines of this protest some more of these images. I find this very interesting and contradictory on the one hand this is an extremely brave thing to do for a young girl to come out and then to mount a tank in this fashion. But at the same time she's dressed in traditional feminine colors. Right. And so I thought this is a there's a lot to be said about each of these images but I'm not going to go into them just a few more images from some of the other countries in which there have been protests. Saudi Arabia's Day of Rage unfortunately did not have the same kind of numbers because it was successfully repressed. But in one of the border towns the people who did show up were these women. And then of course Tunisia both men and women have played an important part in the uprising and in the overthrowing of the bell Ali regime. Now this this is not only impacted people who are liberals and people who are part of the left in the United States. It's also had an impact on the mainstream media in the United States. And so I want to give an example here of a recent story in TIME magazine this is from last week and it says Silent No More. The women of the Arab revolution. So in other words what we're seeing is sort of a shaking up even in the mainstream media of the dominant image of docile Muslim women. I'll just quickly read the first paragraph. The uprising sweeping the Arab world have toppled not only dictatorships. Gone too are the old stereotypes of Arab women as passive voiceless victims so there is a self-consciousness here that we the
mainstream media have perpetuated the stereotype and we recognize it and we're going to retract it. Over the past few months the world has seen them marching in Tunisia shouting slogans in Bahrain and Yemen braving tear gas in Egypt and blogging and strategizing in cyberspace and the article goes on. Suddenly this is a step forward that are also very clear limits to what the mainstream media has done and has been doing and that is that you look at the very title of Silent No More and what that implies is that somehow women have been silent all the way up until 2011 and suddenly they have found their agency whereas anyone who has any sense of the history of Arab feminism understands that women in Egypt and in various countries around the Middle East and North Africa have been active in fighting not just for their rights as women but for their rights as citizens for their rights as workers and so on and so forth. But I think it's really independent media in the United States or what we might call alternative media that have done a really good job of showcasing the voices of women activists. I want to thank for Cree for showing us Mama fuses YouTube video. She talked about it in relation to the Egyptian revolution. She did that video it went viral and then the day before the January 25th demonstration she did another video and I won't show you the whole thing. I'll just give you a brief intro. I want to turn to a video recording that was posted to Facebook three weeks ago. That was January 18th and then went viral across Egypt. It's reported by it's recorded by a young Egyptian named Asma Mahfouz. In the video the veil. Twenty six year old activists appeal to her fellow citizens to join her in protest at Tahrir Square on January 25th to demand their rights. I spent a few hours as one of the founders of the April 6 Youth Movement. The group's been credited with playing a leading role in organizing the January 25th protests. This is Asma for Egyptians have set themselves on fire to protest humiliation and hunger and poverty and degradation. Okay I won't show you more than that because I've got the five minute marker. Suffice it to say that the independent media like Democracy Now have done a very good job of showcasing the role of women. But unfortunately if you turn to the mainstream media in relation to what part social media has played for instance in the Egyptian revolution the story that you find is rather. Well I'll show you the story and then we'll comment
on it. This is Wall Street Journal. And as you can see from the title Egypt's revolution by social media not by the men and women who took part in it but largely by the social media I won't read it in the interests of time. Instead I'm going to show you a clip from CBS that captures this the peaceful Egyptian revolution. Let me just preface it by saying this you did not find very much discussion of Asmaa Mahfouz in the mainstream media. Instead if you google Egyptian revolution and social media the face that you will see is off this Google executive a man by the name of Wael Ghonim. And it's not to say that Ghonim didn't play a part he did. But Ghonim is more appropriate in certain ways in that this story the way you find a tool in CBS and Wall Street Journal and so on and so forth has a very sort of pro-Western pro mode modernization kind of tilt where technology is seen as liberating people and men like Wael Ghonim then come to personify this narrative. Right. So let me just show this to you. If I can. Lucian had a distinct goal but no clear leader yet from the. Gotta love technology yet from the masses a handful emerged including what you got in his tweets offered both a narrative and a nudge to protesters. He's been sort of tweeting every day. Almost almost every hour. And he's developed quite a mass of followers. He's become a figurehead of this revolt. I guess we can now call it a revolution. It's generally acknowledged that girl names Facebook page first sparked the protests titled We Are All Khalid Said it memorialized in Egyptian businessmen who had been beaten to death by police after threatening to expose corruption. The page called for protests on January 25th that became known as the day of wrath as thousands poured onto the streets Cunningham's arrest by Egyptian authorities January 28 and released 12 days later only added to his legend Gottlieb's mention usually his company is to Google executive Wael Ghonim created a Facebook page that was the Middle East and North Africa marketing manager at Google. So for. Google has commented only briefly we can't comment on his personal beliefs. He's on leave at the moment and we look forward to having you back at Google. It's a little bit tricky here this relationship here because again here this is an employee of Google yes but he's acting on his own time. Robert Solomon says companies in emerging markets like Egypt where governments are big customers need to be careful not to bite the hand that feeds them. Is this
connection likely a good thing or a bad thing for Google. Well on the one hand it could be a bad thing. To the extent that Cunningham's activities raise some questions or jeopardize some relationships that Google has in Egypt however it might be a good thing if people now view Google as a good place to work and a place that allows young people to have a voice a voice which ushered in a social revolution in Egypt where the most powerful weapon was social networking. SETH DOANE CBS News New York. So there you have it. It is social media and the most immediate precursor according to this report is of course what happened to another business executive and that becomes the basis and of course completely absent from all of this is decades of political frustration at the hands of a pro U.S. dictator. Absent from this is the neo liberal reforms that have created massive class polarization so that half the population of Egypt lives on less than two dollars a day. And absent from this is of course a decade of protests and organizing ever since the early 2000s where there was solidarity with the second intifada and Palestine and then in the mid 2000s when workers went on strike. And women by the way played a key role in the textile industry in Mahalla and elsewhere in leading these strikes and shaming their male co-workers to also come out onto the streets. And then the key fire movement and all the organizing work that goes on all that is completely deleted and here we have a sort of technological determinist pro-Western argument. The last video I'll show you and then I'll come to a close with this I will like the previous speakers go over by five minutes if that's okay. And this is G.G. Ibrahim. And here's what she has to say. She's also one of the organizers and I'm so as an Egyptian to comes over the next beat about the revolution that is especially evident in his name is. And you know as someone who took part in that experience before the full journey of it. I want to start by saying that I never doubted the revolution. I never I had doubts even at a time when it was so difficult to continue when I was almost dispirited. And you put yourself at risk all the time and you see nothing happening. But it was gonna be better. So this is a stepping stone in a long term strategy towards the revolution. I knew that I would experience that in my lifetime. I've seen people that mobilized have seen nothing but that was worth it. And this is part of the reason and many will be what kept me
I'd like to start by just giving you a little history or credit. Why and. This revolution came about and then I'm going to five square experience 18 days and then reflect on what's been happening since then in the transitional period. The Western media especially especially American media have focused so much on running an Internet revolution and this goes back to what I was saying. It undermines completely. And they're calling these revolution on TV yesterday that it just started on January the 25th. But the reality is this. Okay so I'll come to a close with this and sort of emphasize what G.G. is saying here which is that this overemphasis on social media really erases the historical and political context that gave rise to these uprisings. That said social media have of course been useful tools of communication useful tools of organizing and we shouldn't forget that. But it's not as if Facebook caused this. And certainly as a scholar of social movements when I talk about social movements in the past before the Internet even existed we see that pamphlets that newspapers and so on have always been central to social movements whether we're talking about the women's suffrage movement in the United States here where Lili was one of the newspapers that was used or the abolitionist movement and so on and so forth. People have always found a means of communication. Faculty talked about the role of audio cassettes in the Iranian revolution and so forth. That said there are certain distinct advantages to the Internet to social media and so forth. As Tarek mentioned earlier there is of course an immediacy the ability to get information out very quickly. There is also of course the interactivity and the fact that it's very democratic and anyone can get images up. But at the same time we need to acknowledge of course the digital divide still continues and that vast numbers of people around the globe don't even have access to electricity let alone a computer let alone the Internet. So this is a useful tool but I think we shouldn't overemphasize its role in these social movements which have causes outside of outside of the media. Thank you. Thank you. We do have Deepa Kumar's book outside the box corporate media globalization and U.P.S. strike. Nineteen Nineties which he liberates on some of the larger context that she was referring to and puts. Of course this issue of our social media companies being the hottest stock ticket currently in in some other perspective.