

©2014

Isra Ali

All Rights Reserved

HAVE FREEDOM, WILL TRAVEL: GENDERED DISCOURSES IN THE WAR ON
TERROR

By

ISRA ALI

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School – New Brunswick
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Communication, Information and Library Studies

Written under the direction of

Deepa Kumar

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

JANUARY 2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Have Freedom, Will Travel: Gendered Discourses in the War on Terror

By ISRA ALI

Dissertation Director:
Deepa Kumar

This project examines how women traveling from North America and Western Europe to Afghanistan in the era of the War on Terror go about making media about Afghan women, and considers the experience of contemporary travelers alongside those of European women who traveled to the Muslim world in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. This work expands on and revises existing cultural studies scholarship on the representation of brown bodies in a post 9/11 world, using an anti-colonial lens to examine the work of journalists, independent documentary filmmakers, and activists. It pays particular attention to the varied ways in which the concept of feminism is deployed to advocate for or against ongoing military occupation of Afghanistan. This project asks: what is the relationship between feminism, Afghan women, and the War on Terror? It examines articles, broadcasts, images, films and websites, produced about Afghan women alongside interviews, memoirs, and other materials these traveling women make about their own experiences of being “liberated” women working within the danger of the war zone and the “traditional” culture of Afghanistan. It examines intersections of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and class with gender through an analysis of the term traveling women use to describe their experience of being foreign and female in Afghanistan – the ‘third sex.’ This work traces how the ‘third sex’ come to be in

Afghanistan after 911, and how they access Afghan women. This makes visible the networks of media, military, and non-governmental agencies they rely on there and how these relationships shape news output in the war zone. I then parse out the conflicting perspectives of liberal feminists and radical feminists as they emerge online in the discourse on militarism and Afghan women's liberation, making visible the relationships amongst Afghan and non-Afghan feminist organizations and media outlets. The conflicts that emerge amongst liberal and radical feminists are indicative of the challenges that arise when feminists attempt to articulate cross-cultural, global, concepts of gender equality and liberation. These challenges are compounded by the context of the War on Terror, and the use of humanitarian logics to rationalize military endeavors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance, dedication, and encouragement of Dr. Deepa Kumar. I would also like to thank Dr. Ethel Brooks for her valuable contributions to this project. Their mentorship and support has contributed immeasurably to my development as a scholar, and to the character and scope of this work. Thank you also to Dr. Jack Bratich and Dr. Regina Marchi for the time and energy they have given to the project as evidenced in their thorough readings and insightful comments. I would also like to acknowledge the Department of Journalism and Media Studies and the School of Communication and Information, as well as the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, and the Center for Race and Ethnicity, for all of their support throughout my time at Rutgers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vii
I. INTRODUCTION: Gendered Discourses in the War on Terror Women Reporting on Afghanistan Visibility and Credibility Traveling Women, Gendering Orientalism and the ‘Third Sex’	1
II. CHAPTER 1: Print Journalism and the ‘Third Sex’: Women Traveling to Afghanistan to Report on Afghan Women for The New York Times and Time Magazine 2001-2005 Editors and Letters to the Editor The Reporting Translating Journalism to Expertise	19
III. CHAPTER 2: Making the images of Afghan women: Television Correspondents and Freelance Photojournalists in Afghanistan The Story of Bibi Aisha Producing Images of Subordination and Suffering from the Perspective of the Third Sex Mobility on the Ground, and the Infrastructure of the War on Terror Heroism, Humanism and Television Correspondents	67
IV. CHAPTER 3: Documentary Film and the ‘Third Sex’ Feminism, documentary, and visibility Coming to Afghanistan Networks The Third Sex, Afghan Women, the Logic of Humanitarian Warfare	125
V. CHAPTER 4: Online Interactions and Feminist Discourse in the War on Terror The War on Terror, and Online Exchange Personal Narratives The Exchange	171
VI. CONCLUSION	225
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	236

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	News Coverage Before and After 911.....	41

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations	Page
1. Dr. Marzia Mohammadi by Kate Brooks.....	89
2. Stillborn birth, Badakshan Provincial Hospital by Paula Bronstein.....	95
3. Live birth at Badakshan Provincial Hospital by Lynsey Addario..	96
4. The Candidate by Stephanie St. Clair.....	97
5. Victim and Police Officer by Veronique de Viguerie.....	98
6. Burqa Clad Women by Stephanie Sinclair.....	100
7. Feminist in Chief, Cover of Ms. Magazine January 2009.....	187

I. INTRODUCTION: Gendered Discourses in the War on Terror

The goal of this project is to develop a clearer understanding of how the concepts of feminism, gender equality, and liberation, have been rather seamlessly co-opted into the rationale for war and ongoing occupation in Afghanistan in the public discourse. In order to better understand this phenomenon, I look at the work of a select group of women who travel to Afghanistan from North America to Western Europe to write about, make images of, and film documentaries about Afghan women. I examine how these women come to produce this work on Afghanistan in this moment in history, and how the dissemination through different media platforms and venues (print, photography, television, film and digital media) impacts how it travels and circulates through the discourse on War on Terror militarism from 2001 on. The work of these women tells us a great deal about the roles women play in the maintenance and proliferation of the War on Terror over the course of a decade through their participation in the production of knowledge about gender, sexuality, and Afghan culture. A close analysis of the media produced by these women also reveals the relationships between the production of knowledge about Afghan women in news media, and the discourse produced by feminists that advocates for or against militarism in Afghanistan. The latter part of this work examines how liberal and anti-war feminists use digital media to engage one another in a public debate on troop surges, troop withdrawals and the end of the war in Afghanistan after the election of Barack Obama in 2008. This debate makes visible the interrelated nature of reporting on Afghan women and advocating for Afghan women, and the impact of the state's implementation of Orientalist logics to make the case for war on both of these actions.

In the realm of public discourse, the relationship between terrorism, the War on Terror, and gender equality in Afghanistan was established quickly, in the short period between the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 and the declaration of war (dubbed Operation Enduring Freedom) in Afghanistan on October 7th 2001. It is during this period that spokespersons for the United States government explicitly make the case that war in Afghanistan will democratize Afghanistan and liberate Afghan women. In the first chapter, I look at the editorials and letters to the editor authored by women that appear in internationally circulating and venerated mainstream news media outlets (The New York Times and Time Magazine) during this period. These editorials establish the explicit ways in which the administration of George W. Bush sets about overtly framing the War in Afghanistan as a mission in service of democracy and human rights, through the argument that this war will engender equal rights for Afghan women. This section shows how the administration frames this as a particularly gendered issue by deploying female statesmen to talk about Afghan women and their oppression by the governing party of Afghanistan, the Taliban.

This blatant propagandizing by the state was met with a number of critiques from scholars of empire, Orientalism, and Islamophobia, who saw in this narrative a contemporary re-configuration of long-standing Orientalist notions about gender and sexuality in Muslim societies¹. In the realm of mainstream public discourse however, the

¹ At the outset of the War on Terror this critique is seen in Lila Abu-Lughod's 2002 article "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" Charles Hirschkind & Saba Mahmood's 2002 piece "Feminism, the Taliban and Politics of Counter-Insurgency" in *Anthropological Quarterly*. This critique has been reiterated more recently in Kristan Hunt and Kim Rygiel's volume (En) Gendering the War on Terror, Deepa Kumar's Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire (2012) and Saadia Toor's piece, "Imperialist

state's articulation of a narrative in which large-scale warfare could re-set history in Afghanistan and usher it into the modern age, was met with significant agreement amongst liberals and conservatives who were otherwise staunchly divided on domestic issues. Women's rights in Afghanistan became a common good cause that divided political factions could unite over in a particularly vulnerable moment for the nation.

Part of the liberal faction who extended support for this rationale were select feminist organizations who, despite their entrenched and vocal opposition to President George W. Bush's administration on domestic issues such as reproductive rights, saw this as an opportune moment to extend assistance to women suffering under the combination of oppression and poverty. Though these organizations do not represent the totality of feminist thinking about this issue in the United States or globally², this particular brand of liberal or progressive feminism has come to be seen in the mainstream public discourse as a representation of the feminist perspective on militarism and the liberation of Afghan women. The apparent reconciliation of feminist principles with support of a global military power invading and occupying a small nation caught up in a cycle of war and poverty, suggests there is something at work in the discourse itself that allows for this take place. In this project I think about how the mechanisms of the War on Terror, its policies, the appetite it creates for information about the enemy, and the infrastructure it establishes on the ground in Afghanistan, create the conditions in which information about Afghan women and feminist discourse on Afghan women are produced. Those

Feminism Redux" (2012), and a full-length book by Lila Abu-Lughod on this topic was published in 2013.

² In her piece on "'Embedded feminism' and the War on Terror," Krista Hunt details an exchange amongst liberal and antiwar feminist activists that emerged publicly in 2002. The fourth chapter looks at this episode and a subsequent moment in 2009 in which the same feminists engage one another again.

mechanisms create conditions in which the state of Afghan is “out there,” belonging to the global, and is never thought about in relationship to the local/domestic. This is the only way in which liberal feminist organizations that have such a contentious relationship with the Bush administration in the arena of domestic issues could see the same administration as a champion for women’s rights in Afghanistan. Antiwar feminists, however, do not draw such distinctions, and they view the actions of the Bush administration in Afghanistan as imperialism, the global expression of a neo-liberal political and economic value system that has negatively impacted women at almost every turn within the United States, particularly working class women.

Women Reporting on Afghanistan

This division between the domestic and global is exemplified by the reporting done by women traveling to Afghanistan from North America and Western Europe. Apart from the work that they produce about Afghan women, I examine various forms of media they produce about their experience of being a woman in Afghanistan. Throughout Chapters 1, 2, and 3, we see how the stories of women who travel to Afghanistan in this period are in as much demand from media distribution channels as the work they produce on Afghan women. So much so, that there are many moments in which the women who are reporting become part of the story – their narration, their observations, their presence in the frame is the other against which the experiences and words of Afghan women are viewed and measured by audiences ‘back home.’ This is because the notion of a woman traveling in the war zone, in a nation that is considered to be amongst the worst places to be a woman, is titillating to North American and Western European audiences. Unlike the

oppressed Afghan woman who is seen as a static object in the landscape, the journalist or filmmaker is seen as the courageous and daring adventurer who actively traverses this terrain. Her presence there is represented as an encounter in which East meets West, where the liberated Western woman enters a traditional society and challenges the very foundations of their social configurations through her presence there.

Embedded in the stories these women tell about Afghan women, and the stories they tell about their own experiences in the war zone, are indicators of how they go about getting to Afghanistan, and how they navigate the terrain of the war zone in order to access Afghan women. Individually, they each have a story about negotiating the treacherous entrance into Afghanistan and trying to get about safely on the ground. When these stories are viewed together, it becomes apparent that women traveling to and in Afghanistan are reliant upon their relationships with media organizations, military installations, state entities (both Afghan and U.S.), and with Non Government Organizations and women's/feminist organizations working on the ground there. Their relationships military, state, and NGOs, is evidence of the role of various networked institutions in mediating the access female journalists get to different parts of the Afghanistan, and to different Afghan women. Their relationships with them help determine whose stories they retrieve.

Their relationships with these entities can also shape how they see the Afghan women they come into contact with, and this also frames the stories they tell. In Chapter 2, I show how freelance photojournalists visit the same sites repeatedly, and create images of women that echo each other. These are not a homogeneous set of representations of Afghan women's victimhood. Rather, there is a significant

representation of Afghan women taking active, political stances in these images. What is evident is that Afghan women's experiences are dichotomized for North American and Western European audiences, as either subordinate to the existing order of the Taliban (and oppressed and victimized as a result) or as subversive and in resistance to the Taliban. What these images omit is a depiction of Afghan women's relationship to the occupation. This omission allows these women to be represented as displaying agency and resistance in a way that does not challenge the state's narrative, but can actually act in support of it. The story of the victimization of a young Afghan woman named Bibi Aisha functions this way. Aisha is photographed by a number of photographers examined here, and her story is reported on for multiple television news channels.

Almost a decade into the war, her story provides fodder for the ongoing argument that the Taliban pose an active threat to Afghan women and the U.S. military has an obligation to remain there in order to provide security. Aisha's interactions with the journalists are facilitated by a women's aid organization in Afghanistan who are very much in favor of ongoing occupation. Their rescue of Aisha also reveals the relationships of women's aid organizations with U.S. military units who are engaged in nation building in Afghanistan. The reliance of women making media in Afghanistan on NGO's, military, guides and translators to maneuver on the ground creates a significant investment in the infrastructure of the occupation itself, as it is that infrastructure that aids their work there. Drawing out the relationships they develop with these organizations and individuals are an important component in determining how it is that feminism travels in the discourse of the War on Terror providing support for, and in some cases challenging, U.S. militarism in Afghanistan.

Visibility and Credibility

As a consequence of their participation in the production of this media, these women gain professional credibility and reputation, and become known as experts on Afghanistan, Afghan culture, and the war efforts there. Back home, this translates to numerous opportunities to interject into the public discourse on issues of security and foreign policy. Of course the opportunities each woman is offered, and the media venues each woman has access to, varies depending on their existing affiliations with media, activist, and business organizations. It also hinges largely on the stance they take on the war. Their work as journalists in the region allows these women to speak from the perspective of someone who has seen the devastation firsthand, and who has had direct contact with Afghan women and observed the experience of Afghan women. Often, these women do not report on Afghanistan once, but continuously, developing long term relationships there and spending significant time in country, all of which gives them a position of authority from which to speak to North American and Western European audiences about Afghanistan.

A New York Times or Time Magazine reporter who remains in Afghanistan or returns there repeatedly for several years may find that it not only leads to advancement within the organization, but also to opportunities to produce fictional and non-fictional content about Afghanistan in the realm of popular culture and commentary, and in some cases into the realm of scholarship. The journalism produced about Afghanistan during this period is the basis for the proliferation of a body of knowledge about the nation, its people, and culture in the era of the War on Terror. This body of knowledge determines what histories of conflict are pertinent to the situation now. This body of knowledge

helps to determine ‘who’ Afghan people are, what they want, and how they want to go about getting it. The demand for knowledge about Afghan people is a productive moment for women to participate in this production of knowledge. The trend in public discourse on war and foreign policy is to avoid gender altogether, as Joan Wallach Scott notes, historically sex and gender are relegated to the institution of the family, while war is thought to belong “exclusively in the domain of ‘high politics.’” (Scott, 1988). Sex, gender, and “women” as a category, are not thought to matter in international relations generally. Those who do matter are: “states, state leaders, militaries, international organizations, global capitalists and, in this particular case, transnational terrorist organizations... Women, when and if they appear, are typically represented as being acted upon rather than as actors themselves.” (Hunt & Rygiel, 2006). If it were not for the particular focus on Afghan women (and Muslim women more generally) by the state in its War on Terror discourse, there would be less opportunities for women to participate in this discourse.

Traveling Women, Gendering Orientalism, and the ‘Third Sex’

The ‘third sex’ is a term these women often use to describe their experiences traveling in Afghanistan. Upon their return, they are continually asked, how was it to be a woman traveling in Afghanistan? Their response is often that they are not ‘just’ women while on the ground in Afghanistan, and they deploy the term the ‘third sex’ to denote the process by which gender as a category is destabilized while they are there. The ‘third sex’ describes the position a woman traveling from North America or Western Europe to Afghanistan finds herself in when gender intersects with race, ethnicity, citizenship,

culture, socioeconomic privilege, and institutional affiliation, and the war zone itself shapes their interactions with Afghans and others there. The term third sex, or third gender, is a concept that emerges most often in the realm of queer theory and discussions of sexuality, and/or to discuss individuals who disrupt the gender binary by existing in a biological intermediacy between discrete categories of male and female. This is a different context, one in which the women who travel to Afghanistan are clearly identified as women, and are assumed to be (by those they interact with) heterosexual; their experience of intermediacy is a byproduct of the destabilization of gender that occurs as a result of being women who are also white and foreign in a nation that has its own rigid codes around gender, visibility, sociability and mobility and that is also in the midst of being invaded by a foreign entity. That many of these women are traveling from the nations who are participating in the military invasion and occupation of Afghanistan provides another dimension to the experience of the 'third sex.' Though their presence and movements there are facilitated by the warfare, they are not agents of war they are observers. As such, they can be of the enemy and also not of the enemy.

The position of the 'third sex' is almost uniformly characterized by these women as a positive; it refers to the exemption they have from restrictions on Afghan women's mobility and visibility in public spaces, and the capital that accrues to them because as women they are that much more likely to gain access to Afghan women in gender segregated spaces than their male colleagues. On the ground, military factions on all sides can be potential allies or enemies; military agencies can facilitate their movements or inhibit them. These women should not expect to have access to powerbrokers, soldiers, and the general infrastructure of the occupation and Afghan and U.S. state agencies and

state agents. Yet, they do. This is because they are foreign women, and because they are citizens of the United States or a Western European state, who are in some way working with the credentials of a media organization. Their citizenship, and their affiliations with media organizations, as well as their access to NGOs and/or military units, facilitate their existence outside of the restrictions placed on Afghan women. The ‘third sex,’ is the measure against which the experience of Afghan women is perceived by audiences of this media.

The women who are traveling to Afghanistan from North America and Western Europe to engage in knowledge production about ‘the Muslim world’ are not a historical anomaly. Nor is the experience they have as the ‘third sex.’ Reina Lewis, Nancy Micklewright, and Barbara Hodgson³ all write about European women who traveled to Muslim nations in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Artists, writers, and companions to their fathers or husbands, these women found they could occupy another position in their travels to Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, and Palestine during the period of the decline of the Ottoman Empire through the rise of imperialism in the 19th century. During this period, travel to these places was for these women as much about their own position in European society as it was about travel to these regions. In contrast to the rigid gender codes they experienced in their own societies, in these places “they reaped the benefits of being treated almost as men-especially regarding freedom of movement and respect for their opinions – while still being accorded the protectiveness customarily due to them as women.” (Hodgson, 2005). Like their contemporaries, the women who traveled to Muslim nations during this period also describe their position as a kind of ‘third sex.’

³ As well as Mari Yoshihara who writes about white women’s contributions to Orientalist knowledge production about Asia. (2003)

Moreover, like their contemporaries, travel to the Orient (as it was known at that time) was seen as a mode of adventuring that took one out of the stilted life of European society. Hodgson reports that the women who traveled there came from varied class positions, from the aristocracy downward, though they would have had to have had some form of means to travel there. The women who travel there today are all college educated professionals working in media organizations, some of whom run their own independent media companies. They also often need some support and resources from external funding sources, but they do have the means to travel to Afghanistan. Unlike the women who traveled there in previous centuries, these women are not necessarily looking to escape rigid gender codes in their own societies. Their presence in Afghanistan is a demonstration of how women in North America and Western Europe have moved beyond such a time, and that they are now liberated agents, free to roam the world. In their capacity as reporters in Afghanistan, they are now also the authors of the knowledge that is produced about Afghan women, and the impact of warfare on them.

Reina Lewis finds an analysis of traveling women to be particularly important for thinking about the process of gendering Orientalism. In his seminal study, Edward Said identifies a routine of historical knowledge production about the East in the West, one that produced the image of an image of 'the Orient' that "are never simple reflections of a true and anterior reality, but composite images which came to define the nature of the Orient and the Oriental as irredeemably different and always inferior to the West." (Lewis, 1996). The power of Orientalist knowledge production to sustain itself and to endure is due to the way that:

Orientalism as a body of knowledge about the East produced by and for the West came to bypass Oriental sources altogether in a self-referential process of

legitimation that endlessly asserted the power of the West to know, speak for and regulate the Orient better than the Orient itself. (Lewis, 1996)

In the era of the War on Terror, we can see how Orientalist knowledge production functions as an ancestor to the current drive to gather information and knowledge about Afghanistan. In the era of the War on Terror, however, there are two important distinctions. The first is that the conventional imperialist framework is somewhat shifted in this context. The War in Afghanistan is framed as a humanitarian endeavor, not an imperialist one. The imperial nature of this military action is almost entirely obscured in this framework. The second is related to the first, in that in a humanitarian framework Afghans are necessary partners in the production of knowledge about Afghan women's oppression. Their endorsement is certainly necessary when it comes to articulating a position for or against military invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

However, these women are still reporting within the framework of the War on Terror, and they must be aware that this positions them in ways that are not entirely neutral. Moreover, they come from a context in which the framework of the War on Terror provides them. Of their historical counterparts Lewis writes:

As agents socialized in an age of everyday imperialism it would have been impossible for the subjects of this study to be unaware of, or uninfluenced by, imperial discourse –even if they couched their relationship to it as oppositional. That some of the key writers of the twentieth-century feminist literary canon...couched their demands for female emancipation precisely through the Orientalizing of a structural other requires even more our willingness to include the conditions and discourse of imperial difference in our analysis of the work. Attention to the role of what Spivak calls the 'other woman' ('not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?') will open up the imperial dimensions of women's texts and allow us to locate them historically. Without this we will never be able to understand, or challenge, the structural role of racism in the history and praxis of feminism. (Lewis, 1996)

The women whose work is analyzed here also come from an everyday environment in which certain imperial and Orientalist logics persist and frame the ways in which Muslim women from any nation are viewed and understood. Their reporting from the position of the third sex requires that attention be paid to ways in which that position becomes a reference for and expression of emancipation. Their presence in Afghanistan suggests they are emancipated to the point that they have overcome the binary of gender categories. What does this suggest for the ways in which their coverage will depict Afghan women?

In this context, it becomes important to understand how the increase in women's participation in knowledge production about Afghanistan and Muslim societies for North American and Western European audiences is directly related to the declaration of the War on Terror, and the demand that created for information about Afghanistan. Framing that demand is the state's deployment of a rescue narrative about Afghan women that reinvigorates Orientalist logics that are already familiar in the public discourse. Stories about the oppression of Afghan women appear commonsensical and match existing vague cultural knowledge we already have about 'the Muslim world.'

Female reporters are aware of how gender impacts their experiences, and are eager to articulate the benefits. Journalists Christina Lamb writes, "I knew only too well the advantage of being a female journalist in Afghanistan; we enjoy access to the half of the population that our male colleagues never meet" (Lamb, 2004).⁴ And, this is not only the case in Afghanistan, but in the 'Muslim world' as a whole: Lindsey Hilsum, the UK's Channel 4 International Editor states,

⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/article492493.ece>.

Twenty years ago, when I applied for a job as a correspondent in Cairo, I was asked if I would find the job more difficult because of my gender. On the contrary, I said, it's much harder for men. In the Middle East, more traditional women will not talk to a male stranger, so male reporters often cannot get the views of women. Female reporters have no such problems. I was frequently invited into the women's section of people's homes in Iraq, while my male colleagues had to wait outside. In Afghanistan last year, my all-female team – including a female camera operator, which is still quite unusual – got access to a project training young women as teachers that no man would have been allowed to film (Hilsum, 2011).⁵

Amy Waldman articulates a similar sentiment in her December 2001 reflection on reporting in Afghanistan. Women with exposed faces may be clowns to Afghan men, but as a reporter she acknowledges that she is affected differently by the rigid patriarchal social customs than Afghan women. She may be a woman in Afghanistan, but her presence is treated as a temporary incursion, outside of the jurisdiction of Afghan society. Waldman notes that upon entering Afghanistan she was one of the only women publicly visible:

Still, I never felt I counted for less as a reporter here, perhaps because Afghan men, like Afghan society, can contain seemingly irreconcilable contradictions. They can trade in sleazy pictures of Indian actresses even as they insist that their women be covered from head to toe. The same men who did not want their wives working never treated me with anything less than respect. (Waldman, 2001.)

This sentiment is echoed by another reporter, Kim Barker, who covered Afghanistan and Pakistan as the South Asia Bureau chief for the Chicago Tribune from 2004 until 2009.

Officials were often happy to meet with us because they wanted to show us hospitality or because they were curious,” she tells an interviewer, describing the position female Western correspondents occupied in Afghanistan as a third sex – “Not the same as local women, not the same as foreign men. (Washington Post Q&A, March 22nd 2011).

⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/lindsey-hilsum-equality-on-the-frontline-is-the-only-way-2219307.html>

Barker and reporters like her are compelled to create a separate gender category that encompasses the liminal experience of being a white journalist in Afghanistan. These women operate at the boundaries of gender categories in Afghanistan, claiming mobility and the right to be in the public sphere the way men do, and yet, are female bodies who may access private spaces, but who may also have some increased vulnerability in the war zone. However, the self-reflexivity exhibited by these women and their interviewers about the role of gender, there is little to no discussion of race. Though there is significant discussion of the potential for the invasion of Afghanistan to benefit women, there is no discussion of the fact that if not for that invasion these women would have significantly more difficulty entering Afghanistan and achieving the mobility they enjoy when accompanied by foreign troops, or state agencies or non-profit aid agencies.

Describing her experience as an embedded female journalist in rural Afghanistan, Claire Truscott writes that there aren't many women to be seen in there, not in public in the villages, nor on the Golestan military base where she is living in 2009. Still, she finds that being a female Western reporter gives her leeway to be playful with some of the Afghan men she encounters,

As I interviewed officers from the Afghan National Police they asked me through the military interpreter: "Where is your husband?" Lying, I replied: "At home cooking my dinner." They laughed -- rather than disapproving of me, a woman outside of the home and working among men, they are rather incredulous and fascinated. They have never seen anything like me before.⁶

Because she is white, and because she travels with NATO military personnel, Truscott is able to engage in a playful interrogation about her ability to be present in Afghanistan. She can be playful about her choice to leave home, and because she is seen not only as

⁶ Retrieved from <http://blogs.afp.com/?post/2009/09/29/On-being-a-woman-reporter-in-rural-Afghanistan>

white, but as a foreigner, she faces much less hostility than. When Truscott, and Waldman and Barker, make the assertion that their gendered status in Afghanistan is ultimately a source of privilege, they do so without acknowledging how much that would shift if they were not recognized as white, and American, or European or Western. It is those elisions in particular that create opportunities to produce a dissonant discourse that can at once endorse an occupation that brings violence to the streets Afghan women live in, and simultaneously seeks to valorize their accomplishments. One that implicitly endorses the invasion of Afghanistan by championing the moments of progress it has incurred. Even Truscott's assertion that these men have never seen anything like her before suggests that through a foreign invasion Afghan men in remote locations like Golestan may be exposed to women like her, at that perhaps that experience could shift their perspectives on what women are capable of. Truscott is referring to her liberated female body when she notes that she is a new encounter for these men, and she is certainly invoking Westernized notions of modernity by positioning herself in those terms in relation to Afghan men, but there is no real contention with the role of race. Her account also obscures the role that class plays in her presence in Afghanistan. Her professional credentials as a journalist and affiliations with media organizations and the resources available to her as a citizen all create a complex configuration of global class encounters. In this sense, there is another dimension of what Truscott and her cohorts produce about Afghanistan that ought to be closely examined, and that is the role that what they produce will play in legitimizing policies that will force Afghanistan further into poverty by continuing cycles of warfare, and/or result in the extraction of valuable resources by foreign entities for profit.

The obfuscation of the racial and class interplay at work in these encounters between white female reporters, Afghan men, and the military translator whose presence is only briefly mentioned, also allows these Truscott to circumvent a discussion of colonial and imperial histories of Western involvement in Afghanistan. These histories are particularly significant in the reporting on Afghan women because they illustrate how Afghan women have come to occupy such a low social status. Without that historical contextualization, it makes sense to locate the oppression of Afghan women solely in terms of the current attitudes of Afghan society, and in turn that the fascination of media coverage lies with the interaction in the present moment between a white female reporter and the men they must work with and around in order to get the story.

It is remarkable that when examining the discourse produced by North American and Western European women in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries traveling through Muslim countries, there are significant similarities. Like these journalists, many of the women of earlier periods were there authoring work on Muslim society, like the harem painter Henriette Brown, or Jane Dieulafoy who photographed and wrote about the trips she took to Persia with her husband and Amelia Edwards who wrote about traveling up the Nile, in the late 19th century. (Hodgson, 2005 & Lewis, 1996) Though they were not employed by news organizations per se, like their contemporary counterparts they were engaging audiences back home for the purpose of educating them about the “Muslim world.”

The work of these women may also be characterized as the work of the ‘third sex,’ and their accounts reflect similar characteristics of the reporting today. Like Barker, Waldman and Hilsum, Englishwoman Sophia Poole noted the respect she was given by

Turkish and Egyptian dignitaries made her feel like a superior rather than an equal.

Describing these encounters Hodgson writes:

Western women were like nothing Eastern men had ever seen before. Although undeniably females in the physical sense, just by traveling they were judged to be outlandishly independent. By riding fearlessly, they were esteemed for their masculine accomplishments. And, their clothing, a hodgepodge of feminine and masculine articles, tossed them into the category of some mystifying sex, neither man nor woman. (2005)

Like their contemporaries, these women are thought to be the first of their kind seen by Muslim men. This assertion is used in both contexts to place Afghanistan in a state of pre-modern impeccability, in which the values and progressive terminology of Western civilization have never been articulated until now. The women who travel from North America and Western Europe to the “Muslim world” come to represent the actual embodiment of those values; gender equality and respect for women as authors of history. The newness of their presence may well be enough to shock Afghanistan into modernity. And yet, these assertions live alongside the continual reference to Afghan women’s ongoing struggle for and determination to achieve equal rights. Like some of their colonial counterparts who are invested in portrayals of women that fit within the imperialist framework (Lewis, 1996; Lewis & Micklewright, 2006; Mills, 1991), the reporters based in North America and Western Europe are eager to portray Afghan women as actualized and in conscious rebellion against the imposed restrictions and abuses of the Taliban.

II. CHAPTER 1: Print Journalism and the ‘Third Sex’: Women Traveling to Afghanistan to Report on Afghan Women for The New York Times and Time Magazine 2001-2005

President George W. Bush declared the United States’ War on Terror in a speech to congress on September 20th, 2001, nine days after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. As discussed in the introduction, the rhetoric and logics of the War on Terror had an immediate impact on the journalism being done by mainstream media about the attacks, and provided the framework through which these organizations would report on the political and economic histories that led up to the attacks. One of the primary frameworks for thinking about the attacks was the notion that these events were the consequence of an irrational and visceral hatred of American values by Islamic fundamentalists, including gender equality. Subsequent links between Al-Qaeda (the perpetrators of the attacks) and the Taliban (the ruling government of Afghanistan) were forged quickly. By October 7th, 2001, the United States had declared war on Afghanistan. The linkage of events in the news coverage turned the attention of news organizations towards Afghanistan, and in doing so created a demand for personnel who would travel to the nation and report from the ground. The next chapter will in part examine the work of television correspondents and photojournalists, but in this chapter we begin with an analysis of two U.S. based print (and now digital) media organizations that are distributed globally, Time Magazine and The New York Times.

These two organizations, one a news magazine and the other a newspaper, maintain archives of their reporting on Afghanistan online, and it is in these archives that we can chart the turn towards Afghanistan in the post 9/11 news coverage, and the simultaneous increase in the coverage on Afghan women. Within the context of that

moment, I would like to consider two simultaneous and emerging phenomena and their relationship to one another: the utilization of the Afghan woman as a marker against which to measure the narrative of the progress or regression of Afghan society, and the upsurge in women reporting from Afghanistan and the war zone. The relationship between the two is rooted in the narrative that positions Afghan women as beneficiaries of U.S. and allied militarism, rather than as its victims. It is in this narrative that we also see how liberal feminist viewpoints come to provide support for military action. The increase in demand for content about Afghan women not only resulted in an increase of women being sent into the war zone to report, it also created space in the editorial pages for a particular feminist perspective to make the case for militarism as means of liberation. Both the editorial pages of the *The New York Times* and *Time Magazine* in the early stages of the War on Terror reflect this trend. It is in these editorial pages that we see the rationale for war-as-a-humanitarian-act emerge and it is often articulated by voices that identify as feminist. In the Letters to the Editor published in these periodicals responding to these editorials, there is a small window into the reactions amongst some readers, and in their responses we get some immediate feedback on how effective these efforts are at linking the use of military action for the liberation of women in other places to broader, long-term feminist goals of reaching poverty stricken populations of women in remote regions.

In this discourse, the war is framed as an opening that feminists must take advantage of in order to disburse the resources they have access to, as women in the first world. In this framework, the imperialist action of military invasion and occupation is transfigured into a class-conscious effort directed towards equality, precisely because the

act of military occupation results in an actual seizing of the nation and its borders and establishes occupying forces as gatekeepers. As long as the United States government considers the project of aiding Afghan women to beneficial to the project of occupation and nation building, why not take advantage and use this moment to access the most vulnerable populations of women and deliver them some form of relief? This is a particularly effective rationale when war appears to be an inevitability, as was the assumption after the 9/11 attacks, and in turn helps to create a public mindset that makes war inevitable.

It is important to consider this framing, and the explicit ways in which “feminism” as a concept is co-opted into the discourse on the War on Terror and its military policies, before we engage with the actual journalism produced by women reporting for The New York Times and Time Magazine. This is because the role feminism plays in the discourse justifying military action in Afghanistan is also related to the ways in which female journalists who are at the very least cast as adventurers in the war zone, and at most as pioneers. Whether they are characterized as adventurer or pioneer, their presence in the war zone is viewed as evidence of the liberation of North American women generally, and confirmation of their authority to speak as a liberated subject to. Women have only more recently become visible in the realm of war zone journalism, and the women who make a name for themselves while reporting in Afghanistan during this period are still regarded as a generation coming up in the wake of the vanguard in that particular field whose experiences are still relatively uncommon. As such, their experiences in the war zone are already somewhat in demand, but the added titillation afforded to their stories that results from their ability to access Afghan women

and can voice the experience of being a woman in Afghanistan in a vernacular that is familiar and from a perspective that is familiar results in a whole auxiliary form of knowledge production about the act of doing journalism in Afghanistan. This includes the interviews with other news organizations, talking head commentary, blogs, memoirs, novels, scholarship, and other materials, whose subject is the experience of the journalists themselves.

Their stories are also in demand because these women embody a particular liberal feminist narrative of progress in which the first and second wave of feminism in the United States fundamentally changed U.S. society. This narrative supports widely circulating notions about women in the U.S., and how they have achieved a level or threshold of liberation and a state of near-equality. Whatever minor discrepancies that stubbornly persist are framed as social issues that will most likely resolve themselves over time, when a younger more progressive generation comes to power. It is from this point of almost-equality that women in the United States, and in Western Europe, draw their authority to speak about the oppression of women in the Third World. This progressive narrative, however, is only properly applicable to a certain population of middle to upper-middle class and elite women in the United States. This state of near equivalence in the realm of gender is not necessarily true for working class women, and working class women of color in particular remain at the bottom of the income strata. The increased presence of women in the traditionally male dominated field of war zone journalism fits well into that narrative, and they are seen as exemplars of this state of almost equality. The women who travel to these war zones are predominantly middle class, white, young women who are largely educated at elite institutions. Now as they

travel to Afghanistan to report from the war zone, they function as exemplars of this type of feminist progress. Their willingness to put themselves in a dangerous position, so far from home, is interpreted as a type of bravery that mirrors the reverence of military bravado in public discourse. Women, whether as journalists or military personnel, who are willing to go into the war zone voluntarily accrue credibility as exceptional individuals. The ability of women to now be able to occupy these exceptional roles is considered a marker of feminist progress, particularly in mainstream liberal discourse.

Moreover, the notion that “women” as a category have basically achieved liberation and equality in the United States implies that feminist aims and goals can be achieved within the existing political and economic frameworks, if equality can be achieved within a Democratic and Capitalist United States of America then, the rationale emerges, importing Democracy and Capitalism to other nations will produce the same results. In that respect, strategies like forced regime change and the project of “nation-building” via military occupation come to be seen as viable means of engendering liberation for Afghan women. This perspective omits the fact that in the United States a significant contributor to the ability of women to organize effective movements at particular historical moments is due, at least in part, to the fact that though the United States has spent almost the entire period of the 20th and 21st centuries at war, the United States itself is rarely the war zone. This rationale is indicative of the ways in which the local and the global are demarcated in much of the feminist discourse that emerges in these publications, and how this impacts the formulation of transnational global feminist actions that involve women in the first world traveling to aid women in other places. This demarcation omits a critique of the actions of the United States as an imperial entity, and

purposely obscures the larger goals of the United States government in Afghanistan and surrounding areas. It also omits a historical consideration of the ways in which United States policy and conflicts between global powers have contributed to the state of constant flux and insecurity that Afghan women have existed in for the last several decades. Only through this kind of demarcation can a rationale that states U.S. military action will function as an agent of liberation for Afghan women sustain itself.

Editorials and Letters to the Editor

The women who author these editorials and letters come from a range of professional and social fields. The list includes political figures, activists, academics and women who are only identified as concerned citizens. These authors are not a homogeneous group; they have varying levels of investment in Afghan women and the oppression of Muslim women as a whole. Some women have a deep investment in asserting themselves into the discourse on Afghan women for broad practical and political reasons, and others are only interested in addressing the author of a specific article or discussing a specific piece of information. The former category is made up of women like then Senator and former First Lady Hilary Clinton. Today, as Secretary of State, Clinton is still very closely tied to U.S. policy in Afghanistan, acting as an international spokesperson for U.S. policy in Afghanistan, and articulating the U.S.'s commitment to Afghan women publicly even as they negotiate troop withdrawals.

Clinton's editorial urges readers to support Afghan women by supporting military action in Afghanistan. It is published in Time Magazine on November 24th 2001 in the same moment that First Lady Laura Bush takes over her husband's weekly radio address

on November 17th of 2001, to speak directly about the plight of Afghan women, and our responsibility to assist them.¹ Making it clear that war has been a progressive step for Afghan women, Bush tells the audience:

Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. Yet the terrorists who helped rule that country now plot and plan in many countries. And they must be stopped. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.²

These statements coordinated with the release of a State Department report condemning living conditions for women and children under the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, conjoining the discourse on Afghan women's liberation and the terrorist attacks of 911.³ Clinton's editorial, entitled "New Hope for Afghanistan's Women," uses similar language to link Afghan women's rights, the military invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and the terrorist attacks of 911. She writes:

Thanks to the courage and bravery of America's military and our allies, hope is being restored to many women and families in much of Afghanistan. As we continue the hard work of rooting out the vestiges of Taliban control and al-Qaeda terrorism, we must begin the hard work of nurturing that newfound hope and planting the seeds of a governing system that will respect human rights and allow all the people of that nation to dream of a better life for their children—girls and boys alike.⁴

The coordinated nature of these bi-partisan public statements on Afghan women speaks to the conscious ways in which Afghan women and their liberation were integrated into War on Terror discourse by the state. The rather obvious nature of the Bush administration's utilization of Afghan women in this way is even a subject of comment

¹ British Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife Cherie Blair also made a public statement about Afghan women at this time.

² Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24992>

³ Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/nov/18/news/mn-5602>

⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,185643,00.html>

by the publications they appear in. New York Times reporter Elisabeth Bumiller who reported on Afghan women prior to and following 9/11, calls the publicity effort an “unusual international offensive by the Bush administration to publicize the plight of Afghan women,” going on to note speeches by Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State General Colin Powell, as well as the wife of the British prime minister Cherie Blair in the coming weeks on this topic. Bumiller also notes “the campaign” was organized by Karen P. Hughes, a close advisor to the President, and other “high-ranking women in the Pentagon.”⁵ The focus of her article however, is that this is a female-led initiative, not that this is a coordinated and effort to shape the discourse on War in Afghanistan and minimize opposition.

At the same time that political figures are constructing the framework of how to think about Afghan women and the War on Terror, there is an immediate, simultaneous upswing in the discourse produced by women who don’t work within government and military institutions, but who are also invested in the liberation of Afghan women. In The New York Times and Time Magazine, editorials by Jessica Neuwirth, President of Equality Now, Afghan-American activist Rina Amiri, and novelist Jane Smiley were all published in late 2001 through 2002. Though Neuwirth, Amiri, and Smiley all have an existing public profile, and in this moment of the War on Terror, that public profile translates to an opportunity to write a piece in the editorial pages of The Times. The space that is made for them as the United States heads into war with Afghanistan is only available to them because they have some pre-existing professional relationship with the

⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/16/us/a-nation-challenged-shaping-opinion-first-lady-to-speak-about-afghan-women.html?ref=elisabethbumiller>

media outlet, Smiley has contributed previously to the Times on feminist issues, or because the liberation of Afghan women is considered a feminist or women's issue and these women are prominent members of nationally visible feminist organizations, or because they are Muslim/Afghan women themselves who can offer the 'native' perspective on the issue.

Some women in these positions have used the Letters to the Editor pages to insert their perspective on foreign policy in Afghanistan and on Afghan women prior to 911; just weeks prior, Smeal wrote the Times a letter urging the U.S. to show greater concern towards Afghan women and asking the United Nations to impose sanctions. Prior to 911, Smeal had to actively insert this issue into the editorial scope of The New York Times and her efforts to do so suggest a recognition on the part of feminist activists and authors that this type of visibility amongst North American and Western European audiences is valuable in the fight to establish gender equality in Afghanistan. This sense is only exacerbated after 911, particularly in response to U.S./allied policy in Afghanistan. Jacqueline Hunt London Director of Equality Now writes to warn that the Northern Alliance are not a women friendly alternative to the Taliban despite their less severe restrictions on education; Jill Sheffield of Family Care International provides follow up on a Times story on Afghan refugee women; Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies Professor Fairfield Caudle writes in to call for women's inclusion in the political restructuring of Afghanistan, (just as she writes in to support Sudan women in 2004) and Ruth Messinger, President of the American Jewish World Service, writes in to discuss the organization's contributions to Afghan women's education and health care. The contributions of these women again make clear that the authors are well aware of the

‘uses’ of Afghan women by the state, but that whether they feel the state is sincere in its commitments to Afghan women or not, this is an opportunity to have their voices heard in the broader conversation about policy directives in Afghanistan.

Feminists in Support of the Campaign

The ‘feminist’ position that emerges here reconciles the apparent contradictions of supporting the foreign policy of an administration whose domestic policies have offended feminists so deeply and mobilized them to work actively against them. Bumiller writes:

Critics lost no time in pointing out that this was the very same White House that has banned aid to international groups that even discuss abortion as a family planning option. The administration also looks the other way, they said, while women in Kuwait cannot vote and women in Saudi Arabia cannot even drive.

But on this issue, at least, the White House has silenced its critics. "I felt their positions were very strong," said Eleanor Smeal, the President of the Feminist Majority, who attended the State Department meeting. Theresa Loar, a senior adviser on international women's issues in the Clinton State Department and now president of the Vital Voices Global Partnership, agreed. "The genie is out of the bottle now," she said.⁶

It is also important to point out that the state is not the sole source of these ideas, the state has been adept at managing and exploiting existing notions about women, gender equality and violence in the Muslim world. They are capitalizing on a logic that emerged almost immediately after the 9/11 attacks, suggesting that while the state is capitalizing on existing Orientalist attitudes in the public discourse that emphasize Muslim women's oppression to the point that it is not difficult, in this post 9/11 moment, to make the case for militarism as a vehicle for liberation. In the case of the War on Terror these Orientalist narratives about gender in the Muslim world meet the rescue narrative, and is

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/19/us/white-house-letter-the-politics-of-plight-and-the-gender-gap.html?ref=women>

then integrated into the fight against terrorism itself. Afghan women are not only the victims in the rescue narrative, in this turn they also come to be seen as strategic entities in the fight against terrorism itself.

In a letter published September 27th 2001, before military action had even begun, Professor of Physiology and Psychiatry at the University of Maryland Medical School Margaret McCarthy writes:

We talk about a long and arduous war, but it is far more laborious than we realize. There is one real and effective solution: the liberation of Afghan women...As Americans, we aim to create a world in which diversity is not only tolerated but also celebrated. But we as a world are woefully short of this goal. Yet there is one major element: women. Women who have hope for the future, who feel valued as people and as human beings and who feel a sense of controlling their own destiny. These women do not send their sons to die for the sake of killing the innocent sons of others.

McCarthy not only accepts the inevitability of the war, she goes beyond this inevitability to articulate a fantasy of the potential impact these military actions could have in creating the conditions for Afghan women's liberation. There is an Orientalist imagining that Afghan women's liberation will transform the perceptions of the U.S. and its allies in the eyes of their "sons." Envisioning terrorists as the "sons" of Afghan women, particularly when none of the 911 hijackers were Afghan, is a discursive move that connotes the justification of military action in Afghanistan in response to 9/11. Her statement that women with hope and who are valued don't "send" their sons to die, is important not only because it positions Afghan women as agents in the fight against terrorism and places an undue responsibility on them to rectify the impact of global structural inequalities, but it also divests the acts of Islamic fundamentalists of their political foundation thereby obscuring the role that Western powers play in generating anti-Western sentiment. Smeal also reiterates the connection of Afghan women's liberation to

the fight against terrorism when making her public statements in support of the Bush administration's 'position' on Afghan women: "There is no way to wipe out terrorism and establish a civil society there without the inclusion of women," she writes. (Bumiller, 2001)

Novelist Jane Smiley articulates a defense of the state's uses of Afghan women in this way by chalking it up to political common sense; the Bush administration would be foolish not to move on this:

Promoting the liberation of Afghan women is a political stance without risk and without a downside. It is kind of like walking down the street and seeing a \$100 bill lying on the sidewalk. The administration has to pick it up; it would be against human nature not to. It's also the perfect cause for Laura Bush. She can ally herself with women for whom any sort of life other than imprisonment is a liberation but protect herself from feminists and Hillary types like Susan Sontag and Barbara Kingsolver, because her position doesn't require any theory or analysis that might reflect on the corporate or multinational goals of G.O.P. sponsors or the failures of American foreign policy over the years.

Smiley delineates the political positions of American women into two categories: that of Laura Bush, who would like to avoid the theoretical complexities and quandaries a political, economic, historical analysis of Afghan women's oppression makes clear, and "Hillary types," who embrace that complexity and address it in their criticism.

For Smiley, the liberation of Afghan women also invokes a nostalgic assessment of what she calls 'feminism,' which judging by the description she provides refers to her experiences with dominant second wave white U.S. feminist movements of the 1960's and 1970's:

The faces of the Afghan women remind me that we feminists aren't as naïve as we were 30 years ago. When we were sitting around in consciousness-raising groups and talking about jobs and boyfriends and sisterhood, we were new to the moral complexities and potential risks of liberating women. We didn't know that our ideas weren't universally good and that women in other parts of the world would

have different needs and use different methods to liberate themselves. The faces of the women remind me that women's liberation is a dangerous business.⁷

This statement invokes nostalgia for a “naïve” moment in feminism, which is framed around the awareness of the self, relating to one another and expressing personal experience, rather than historical and political economic critiques of structural patriarchy. When feminism was a personal rather than political movement, and factors such as racial, class and sexual difference, not to mention the context of neo-liberal globalization, were future unknowns. Smiley’s reminiscences invoke a fantasy of a white Western feminism that preceded the problematization presented by other forms of difference, like race or socioeconomic status. The life and death circumstances of Afghan women, and the complete denial of their basic human rights by the Afghan state forces greatly simplifies the feminist position – we must assist Afghan women in order to feed and house them, and protect them from violence and death – reminiscent of those early days. Though the complex conversations they invoke, when we consider the War on Terror, imperialism, occupation, race, culture and religion, also make Afghan women a reminder of the complexities that feminists now face.

Challenging the State’s Narrative

There are also select examples of feminist/non- state perspectives in the editorial pages that support the overall project of Afghan women’s liberation via military intervention, but who also want to disrupt the orientalist nature of the narrative being

⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/02/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-12-02-01-gaze-womenscrusade.html?scp=3&sq=Jane%20Smiley%20The%20Way%20We%20Live%20Now&st=cse>

presented. Rina Amiri, as well as Jessica Neuwirth and co-author Jan Goodwin (who wrote the book *Price of Honor*, on women and Islamic extremism), author editorials that attempt to complicate the issue of militarism and Afghan women's liberation shifting the starting point of the historical narrative away from the rise of the Taliban to power in the mid-1990's to a broader consideration of how the conflicts of the mid to late 20th century impacted Afghan women prior. The articulation of the history of women's rights in Afghanistan becomes important in the discourse on militarism as a means of liberation, because military intervention is presented as the extreme but necessary action to draw this pre-modern civilization into the present and, under the stewardship of the United States, to reconfigure it as a modern democratic state where women will have equal rights.

Neuwirth, Goodwin, and Amiri, use articulations of Afghanistan's history that go back further to address the oppression of Afghan women as a long-term issue, in order to broaden the discussion of feminist goals in Afghanistan to thinking beyond the moment of the Taliban's overthrow. The histories they provide describe how Afghan women were politically active in the 1960's and 70s, and emphasize being vigilant about creating policy that will in reality create the conditions in which Afghan women can be politically active again. They also disrupt the notion that Afghan women have never experienced liberation, tracing the apex of women's advancement in Afghanistan to the period prior to the Soviet invasion, and prior to the strategic utilization of this nation-state by global powers in the conflicts of the mid-to-late 20th century and into the 21st. They also broaden the historical conversation in one other significant way, they point out how Afghan women have been utilized discursively in struggles for power in Afghanistan.

In her editorial, Amiri writes: “If we cast a glance backward through the annals of Afghan history, we see that women have long been the pawns in a struggle between the elite modernists, usually defined as pro-Western, and the religious and tribal-based traditionalists.” Amiri encourages readers to avoid re-inscribing these divisions in the current War on Terror discourse:

The ideological war over modernism has focused on the emancipated Muslim woman as the symbol of Westernization and as a threat to the integrity of the authentic and Islamic way of life. In the Muslim world, versions of this story have been played out repeatedly, and differing views of women have come to signify nothing less than a battle between East and West. The Western world has contributed to this perception by centering on the place of women in its depiction of Islam as repressive and backward. To help Afghan and Muslim women create new spaces in which to negotiate their positions, we must move beyond the premise that Islam is anti-woman.⁸

This statement by Amiri, is one of the few to articulate explicitly how orientalist logics constrain the discourse on Afghan women, and her ability to do so lies in her identification as a native informant in exile. Certainly, in the War on Terror discourse around the liberation of Afghan women the only figure who can legitimately propose a construction of Islam that is not defined as essentially anti-woman, is an Afghan woman herself, though even that identification must be accentuated by existing immersion in Western democratic ideals and values. Amiri is ideally positioned to offer a critique of the Orientalist assumptions that under gird publicly circulating understandings of Islam in dominant Western discourse on the ‘war on terror,’ because she occupies the position of an ethnically Afghan woman who has been socialized and educated in the United States.

For these reasons also, Amiri is one of only a very few Afghan women who have

⁸ Amiri, R. (Nov 27th 2001). “Muslim Women as Symbols and Pawns.” Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/27/opinion/27AMIR.html?scp=2&sq=Rina%20Amiri&st=cse>

an opportunity to author an editorial for a lead publication like *The Times* in this period. But, she is not any Afghan woman; she is a member of a family exiled from Afghanistan during the Soviet era who has not been there for the twenty years prior to her visit in 2001. She is educated and affiliated with Ivy League academic institutions in the United States, and she is an expert on policy. These positionalities, coupled with her ethnic affiliation with Afghan people, make her an Afghan woman's voice that is valued in the context of mainstream Western news production. She is a woman whose perspective challenges orientalist tropes in the dominant discourse, but who does not necessarily resist the narrative that Western intervention is the best hope for the betterment of Afghan women. A 2002 editorial by Amiri for *The Times* calls for the UN to extend the presence of peacekeeping troops on the ground in Afghanistan. Without them, she argues, there is little hope for the advancement of Afghan women. Though she makes this argument at a relatively early stage in the US/NATO occupation of Afghanistan, Amiri's 'critical' narrative echoes the dominant narrative, in which the liberation and safety of Afghan women was secured to some degree by the US/NATO invasion, and that any discussion of the removal of that military presence is an argument against the liberation of Afghan women.

Anticipating, Reframing the Challenge

One reason that the logic of women's liberation in the context of War on terror militarism perpetuates and entrenches the way it does is because those who act as spokespersons to for the state's case anticipate and address these criticisms outright. Clinton's original editorial in November of 2001 for *Time Magazine* includes several

statements that are meant to preemptively address the inevitable criticism from anti war activists who worry Afghan women will not be well-served by a military invasion and who are wary of the notion that the U.S. government is deeply invested in the long-term benefits to Afghan women. She also addresses criticisms of the state's plan to "import" the liberation of women in Afghanistan and the fear that gender equality will come to be seen as an external imposition, bundled with the imperialist aims of the U.S.:

I believe such criticism fails on at least two counts. One, it does not recognize that we, as liberators, have an interest in what follows the Taliban in Afghanistan. We cannot simply drop our bombs and depart with our best wishes, lest we find ourselves returning some years down the road to root out another terrorist regime.

Second, the argument that supporting the rights of women will insult the Muslim world is demeaning to women and to Muslims. Women's rights are human rights. They are not simply American, or western customs. They are universal values, which we have a responsibility to promote throughout the world, and especially in a place like Afghanistan.

Though she does not name them Clinton is addressing feminists and progressives, some of whom are in Afghanistan, who argue that insurgents invested in fighting the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan see any efforts by the United States and its allies to promote women's progress via education or healthcare as a legitimate target in that fight. This raises the likelihood that girls and women attending school or not wearing the burqa will be subject to forms of violence, particularly the farther away from Kabul they are. Ironically, both the perception of the U.S. government that women's rights are a welcome gift from the outside and the perception of Islamic fundamentalists and the Taliban that women's rights are an unwanted imposition from the outside erases histories of feminist work and activism that have been ongoing since long before the Taliban came to power.

Also on November 24th 2001, the editorial board of The Times published a piece entitled “Liberating the Women of Afghanistan.” The editorial opens with the statement that the U.S. did not enter the war with the intention to liberate Afghan women, but that the “reclaimed freedom” was a “collateral benefit” that could be taken from the invasion and occupation. The editorial is clear to state that they are skeptical of the Bush administration’s assertion that the welfare of Afghan women is a main impetus for invading Afghanistan, and that this is a war fought to give the most vulnerable populations in the world basic human rights. But, even this skeptical perspective embraces the notion that a military occupation has significantly improved the status of Afghan women. In contrast to previous editorials and letters which articulate fantasies of a liberated future for Afghan women, in which they cast off the burqa and become visible participants in political and public life, this editorial tackles another imagining of the future in which the project of Afghan women’s liberation is not as immediate and universal as other visions predict.

Perhaps the same skepticism that motivates the authors to prioritize their rejection of the state’s narrative about entering Afghanistan to liberate Afghan women bleeds into their vision of Afghan women’s future in the wake of the War on Terror. The authors envision the process of establishing gender equality in Afghanistan to be challenging and non-linear, as all movements for equal rights and social justice inevitably are, but also lay the blame for any failures that may come squarely with Afghan culture:

But Afghanistan has never been Sweden. Freedoms have been available mainly to the small urban middle class, and have been limited by traditional customs and underdevelopment intensified by war...Rural women will benefit little from the

Taliban's fall. Education and health care will not suddenly appear in the countryside because they were never present there, even before the Taliban.⁹

This is a challenge to state and feminist discourses that envision the fall of the Taliban as a quick fix. It is also an initial moment that reveals the framework of the logic that becomes common in later phases of the discourse when long-term occupation does not result in the significant improvement of women's status in Afghanistan, that rural Afghanistan is almost beyond rescue.

These statements suggest that the expectation of what can be achieved then, ought to be tempered according to this understanding. So that when the government installed by the United States and its allies fails to support women, or when the ongoing instability of the war zone continues to prevent establishing the stability and security necessary to achieve a legitimate form of progress for Afghan women, the resulting obstacles faced by Afghan women can be decontextualized and rendered ahistorical by negating the influence of the War on Terror on Afghan women's hardship in favor of a cultural explanation in which Afghans are simply 'behind' in their views and cannot be expected to 'catch up' in this short a time. This of course, disregards histories of fluctuating status for women in Afghanistan. Prior to the Soviet Occupation and the ensuing decades of civil warfare and foreign military intervention, Afghan women attended college, worked as doctors, lawyers, etc. As Carol Stabile and Deepa Kumar point out, "Even in the 1990s, large numbers of Afghan women in urban centers participated in the workforce and public life. Afghanistan's constitution, written in 1964 ensured basic rights for

⁹ New York Times Editorial Board Retrieved from 2001
<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/24/opinion/liberating-the-women-of-afghanistan.html?ref=women>

women such as universal suffrage and equal pay.”¹⁰ Moreover, it obscures a simple reality that similar conditions exist in the United States. While middle, upper middle and ruling class women living in urban and suburban areas may have relative access to resources, healthcare, and education, the rural and urban working poor in the U.S. (many of whom are women, and women of color) are also often left ‘behind’ in the mutually reliant processes of modernization and progress. Afghanistan has never been Sweden, but neither has the United States. In the articulation of this logic, the division between the local and global thinking about gender becomes apparent.

The editorials and letters by representatives of the state and women and feminists affiliated with various organizations and causes in regards to Afghan women published in the pages of Time Magazine and The New York Times in this period are not a homogeneous articulation of an uncomplicated perspective on liberation in Afghanistan. There is a range of responses, from out and out endorsement by women like Smeal to rather more ambivalent and complicating responses like Amiri’s, so as to give the impression of a robust discourse on the matter where all points of view are considered. There is still an absence, however, of the most anti-war elements in this feminist discourse. This range appears to have been anticipated by state actors who engage in a coordinated effort, not just to convince the American people of the legitimacy of the project, but also to provide the language that readers can use to refute criticisms they encounter. As Clinton’s editorial illustrates, the U.S. government is dismissive of the notion that these actions could hurt the long-term project of women’s rights in Afghanistan because pushes towards educating women and girls and providing adequate

¹⁰ (2005) “Unveiling Imperialism: Media, gender and the war on Afghanistan.” Media, Culture & Society, Vol. 27. No. 5, 765-782.

health care comes to be seen by opposition to the occupation as part and parcel of the imperialist project, and reject it as a movement that is not indigenous to Afghan culture or representative of Afghan women's desires. As Krista Hunt writes:

Within Afghanistan, those women's rights activists deemed 'too western' (in other words too intent on exercising their rights) have experienced concerted resistance to their political activities. According to Farzana Bari, 'women who are struggling for their rights in Muslim countries are labeled Western as the ultimate (Nolan, 2001)...By embedding women's rights to justify the war on terror, the Bush administration has fuelled antifeminist sentiment and made the struggle for women's rights in Afghanistan considerably more difficult. (2006)

In Clinton's words, this criticism is re-framed as an orientalist logic itself that suggests Muslim cultures are inherently resistant to women's rights, when the argument is in fact about the ways in which feminism comes to be seen as a sign of imperialist influence and a challenge to national and cultural sovereignty. Clinton's response functions as a way of preemptively representing the perspective of antiwar feminists and offering the audience language to challenge these criticisms and ways to dismiss their arguments before they have had a chance to articulate them in the public discourse themselves.

The Reporting

The immediacy with which Afghan women became a focus of news media in the days and weeks after 911 speaks to the integral role they play in the War on Terror narrative. The first mentions of the Taliban's treatment of women appear in Time almost immediately as it is perhaps the most well-known and it is just over 14 days when the first mention of securing Afghan women's liberation as a consequence of subsequent military action appears in The New York Times. Since that time, there has been an explosion of content on Afghan women. So much so, that The Times has Women in

Afghanistan as a Times Topic, under which they organize their online archives of journalism from the 19th century to the present. The archive houses 352 articles as of mid 2012. Articles from the most recent years also cover the experience of female military stationed in Afghanistan, an indication not only of how entrenched populations of US military personnel have become in Afghanistan but also of the ongoing strange turns in the discourse on Afghanistan that are a result of the War on Terror.

The table below displays figures demonstrating a spike in the number of stories in which Afghan women feature after 911. This is the latest and largest burst of coverage related a political shift in Afghanistan that relates to U.S. interests. Soviet occupation and influence made Afghanistan a point of interest in the late 1970s and 1980s; subsequently reporting ebbs as the civil war continues. After the Taliban come to power in 1996, there is another more sustained burst of interest in the declining situation of Afghan women. In this era, there is only one female reporter who consistently writes about Afghanistan, Barbara Crosette, and one or two bylines from Elaine Sciolino and Elisabeth Bumiller also appear.

The archives of Time Magazine, which include a total of 448 articles (in the domestic edition) under the search topic “Afghan women,” exhibit the same trend; the wake of the Iranian revolution and the Cold War there is a significant up tick in the coverage of Afghanistan and interest in Islam and the Muslim world. Several covers and stories appear in 1978, 79 and 80 that contextualize events in Afghanistan in terms of the broader ideological conflict of the Cold War (A May 1978 article covering the Soviet invasion bears the headline “Afghanistan: Marx and Allah”), and these stories appear in the broader context of consistent coverage on the rise of political Islam, Pakistan, Iran,

Saudia Arabia and the West Bank. In January of 1980, Afghanistan makes its first appearance on the cover. Hannah Bloch who will report on Afghanistan after 911, appears in this archive alongside the only significant piece of pre 911 reporting on Afghan women, an article by Christiane Amanpour in October of 1997 entitled, “The Tyranny of the Taliban.” Comparatively, after 911, there are now a number of women reporting on Afghan women for Time. Of these the most notable are Bloch, Hannah Beech, and Aryn Baker who has 42 bylines, and Clinton’s editorial. At The New York Times, names of women begin to appear in bylines for articles on Afghan women regularly, including Amy Waldman, Carlotta Gall, Susana Dominus, Judith Miller and Kari Haskell.

Table 1. News Coverage Before and After 911

The archive search results	Articles on “Afghan women” pre 9/11	Articles on “Afghan women” (2001-2005)	Overall coverage of “Afghanistan” post 9/11	Articles authored by women on “Afghan women” post 9/11
Time Magazine (1925 on)	138	341	1,889	142
New York Times (1987 on)	60	180	570	139

Prior to the interest generated by the War on Terror, women in Afghanistan understood the necessity of a captivating event and accompanying media coverage that would ably and vividly communicate their oppression to audiences whose awareness is critical to prioritizing global issues. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) demonstrated this when they smuggled video of the Taliban’s execution of a woman named Zarmeena in a public sports stadium. The bureaucratic

cruelty with which the Taliban execute Zarmeena provided a stark simple representation of women's oppression under the Taliban as a matter of life and death¹¹. During that period in mainstream news, Afghan women were situated discursively in the same category as any number of populations of Third World women who were suffering with starvation, poverty, repression and/or violence. That changed in September of 2001; a sudden demand for information on Afghan women surged, and coverage in major publications grew exponentially. Simultaneously, that demand for information created a demand for resources within these news organizations. Female reporters with existing knowledge of the region are especially well positioned to report continuously on Afghan women like Hannah Bloch at Time Magazine, but there are a number of female reporters taken off of a wide range of regular assignments to cover Afghanistan. Amy Waldman was a metro desk reporter covering local news for The New York Times on September 11th 2001, and six weeks later she was traveling to Russia, Iran and then Afghanistan where she reported for the next year.¹²

The reporting produced by women in The New York Times and Time Magazine in the context of the War on Terror and the discussion of Afghan women's liberation does not necessarily cover terrain that their male counterparts' do not. Most, if not all the reporting done on Afghan women deals with similar issues – particularly the removal of the burqa, women and girls' education and health care, and the role that Afghan women, and their progress or lack thereof, play in relation to US and allied policy concerns in the War on Terror. The veil is a persistent construct, and metaphor for Afghan women's

¹¹ Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/zarmeena.htm>

¹² Retrieved from <http://www.observer.com/2011/09/amy-waldmans-the-submission-not-a-911-novel/>

isolation from the public sphere. This tendency predates the coverage of 911. In *The New York Times*, it dates as far back as the 1950s, when reporters Peggy and Pierre Streit write about the advancements of women in the public sphere in Afghanistan, highlighting the ways women were claiming equal rights. The emphasis on the veil and burqa after 911 follows this established logic, which is evident in the titles of the articles alone. “Behind Closed Doors” (*Time Magazine*, Nov. 2003), “About Face” (*Time Magazine*, Dec. 2001) in reference to women “Shedding the Burqa,” “Growing up Under the Veil” (*Time Magazine*, Nov. 2001) “A Woman’s Place” (*Time Magazine*, Sept. 2005) “Allure Must be Covered, Originality Peaks Through” (*The New York Times*, Nov. 2001), “Hair as a Battlefield for the Soul” (*The New York Times* Nov. 2001), “In Heart, TV Man is King, Veil Seller is Lonely” (*The New York Times* Nov. 2001), “The Women, Veil shed, Demonstrate” (*The New York Times* Nov. 2001), “Behind the Burka Women Subtly Fought Taliban” (*The New York Times* Nov. 2001), “Lifting the Veil on Sex Slavery” (*Time Magazine* Feb. 2002), “Back to the Old Bathhouse: Free to Laugh Once Again” (*The New York Times* Dec. 2001) and “The Afghan Woman: From Burqa to Beret” (*Time Magazine* Sept. 2002). The vivid blue of the burqa that women in Afghanistan traditionally wear presents a simple and vividly effective metaphor for the Taliban’s prohibition of women from the public sphere in Afghanistan, visually and linguistically. However, embedded in these narratives about the burqa are often stories of Afghan women’s agency and strategic collaborative resistance to the edicts of the Taliban. The concern for the removal of the burqa functions alongside an acknowledgement that Afghan women have used the burqa to engage in subversive action.

Take for example a November 19th 2001 article by Waldman, “Behind the Burka: Women Subtly Fought the Taliban.” The article is one in a spate of articles written by Waldman in November and December while in Afghanistan. It is a profile of Soheila Helal, who Waldman describes as a transgressor, waging “a quiet rebellion against the Taliban.” Under the Taliban Helal ran an underground school of girls in Herat. The education Helal gave these girls extended beyond the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic, to include instructions for young women and girls to avoid detection:

So her students' lessons included what to tell any Taliban forces who stopped them -- that they were just going to visit her. The after-school activities included learning how to leave discreetly in small groups, so as not to attract attention.¹³

As a woman who at once exemplifies the degree of oppression Afghan women were living under, and simultaneously the potential for Afghans to enact change for themselves in the wake of liberation, make Helal an appealing subject. All the more so, because the narrative ends with Helal’s optimism; the school she taught at prior to the Taliban’s take over is reopening under the U.S./NATO occupation. “The good days are ahead,” a neighbor of Helal tells Waldman. This woman once worked as a doctor, and the implication is that as Helal has returned to her prior job as a teacher, and so, this woman will also soon return to practice medicine.

Women like Helal are appealing subjects for these reporters, and speak to their access to Afghan women. Amina Safi Afzali for example, who represented the Northern Alliance at the United Nations (Waldman, 2001) or Dr. Sima Samar newly appointed Minister for Women’s Affairs, interviewed by Gayle Forman in December of 2001 are

¹³ Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/19/world/a-nation-challenged-resistance-behind-the-burka-women-subtly-fought-taliban.html?pagewanted=all>

subjects of interest for these news organizations and their readers. But, the parameters of the dialogue remain somewhat closed, as is evident in Forman's questions. Though the article's primary purpose is to stress the importance of having women in power, the burqa remains central to conceptualizing that power as it will work in the world. Forman asks, Dr. Simar "So being a woman in power sends a signal: Come out and take off your burka if you want to?" and "How would you react if your daughter wanted to wear the burka?" And "Speaking of burkas, what will you wear as a deputy prime minister?"

Only weeks after the invasion, the Taliban appear to no longer have influence, supporting the Bush administration's assertions that victory in Afghanistan has been achieved. However, Waldman reports this projection of women's return to the public sphere alongside the observation that the burqa itself is not gone. She notes how women moving about in public are still wearing it, but that now many are without the male chaperones required by the Taliban. This projection is echoed in a number of other articles about Afghan women internationally as well; on November 30th, Bumiller describes "a momentous week" for a group of exiled Afghan women living in America who have been invited to the White House, and to commingle in elite political circles in Washington D.C. Marlise Simons writes about the "professional women" (some of whom live in Afghanistan, and other Afghan women who have been living abroad) who gather in Brussels "backed by American and European groups" to discuss drafting a constitution, new laws and to articulate a material role for women in these important processes. These sentiments are echoed in Jane Smiley's editorial in which she describes the beauty of seeing Afghan women's faces in the streets wake the deposition of the Taliban, and male reporters like David Rhode are also writing about "the joyful return" of

Afghan women to Kabul University's campus, and another headlined "The Women, Veils Shed, Demonstrate." By December of 2001, Melinda Henneberger is writing on the difficulty of the U.S.'s European critics to find fault with the invasion; the Taliban having been removed so efficiently, and the narrative of progress is fully underway.

There are examples of how this narrative persists, even after several years of war when it has become apparent that Afghan women's liberation will be a complex, uneven, nonlinear process. In 2005, Aryn Baker reports from Shinbul Girl's Primary School in Bamiyan for *Time*, in an article entitled "A Woman's Place: The Beginnings of a New Afghanistan." In a seventh grade classroom with students ranging from 18 to 27, a visiting election officer lectures the women about the upcoming parliamentary and provincial council vote, while students, distracted by the presence of a foreign reporter, are admonished by their teacher to pay attention as they are "the future of Afghanistan." Baker's piece is an assessment of women's progress that moves from the classroom (made possible by U.S./allied military intervention) to the new class of women overcoming entrenched social norms by running for elected office – teacher Razia Aqbalzada, doctor Marzia Mohammadi, and even women in Taliban 'heartland' Kandahar where they campaign door to door in the burqa.

A year into the production of discourse about Afghan women however, the reporting exhibits some complexity in regards to women's status in Afghanistan. While their rural counterparts are deprived of educational opportunities, women in urban spaces are returning to school and work. In doing so, Waldman and authors like her, must reassess the burqa somewhat. Waldman's article notes that the use of the burqa is still prevalent, even in urban spaces, but that women are simultaneously enjoying more

freedom –reconfiguring a pre-determined timeline for most Western journalists and officials in which a collective removal of the burqa would pre-configure the attainment of women’s rights and liberties. The tone of optimism, based on these initial observations, only lasts a short while. In September of 2002, Waldman writes “The Burkas Come Off But Equality Falts at the Edge of Kabul.” This article grapples with the uneven enactment of women’s liberties in Afghanistan, reporting on the disparities of women’s experiences. For Afghan women living in rural spaces, the NATO defeat of the Taliban has not resulted in significant social change and the conventions of wearing the burqa remain firmly in place, “...in the villages, where 80 percent of the country's women are believed to live, particularly in the vast Pashtun belt south of Kabul, things are as they were. Most girls go uneducated, become child brides, produce children and hardly expect their daughters' lives to be different.” The ongoing use of the burqa and veiling is always indicative in the news coverage of other repressive conditions related to marriage, education, and health care in tribal Afghan communities.

Waldman’s articles are just a small sample of the reporting done on the burqa and the veil by female reporters in *The New York Times* and *Time*. Carlotta Gall, Alessandra Stanley, Ruth Fremson, Elaine Sciolino, Azadeh Moaveni, Hannah Beech all report on some variation of the story of women and the burqa, a narrative that is essentially a consistent gauging the progress of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the US invasion, to determine whether the promised potential of liberation can be achieved through this military intervention. To that end, there is a great emphasis on Afghan women returning to educational institutions. Images with captions reading “Photo of Farida Afzali, who is first woman to register for classes at Kabul University since the Taliban took power in

1996,” (Dec 2, 2001) and “Photo of young Afghan women gathering at gates of University of Balkh in Mazar-i-Sharif, hoping to enroll after years of Taliban rule that has barred them from school,” (Jan 5, 2002) appear in The New York Times alongside articles like “ ‘A’ is for Afghan, ‘S’ is for schoolgirl” by Kari Haskell in March of 2002 and “Shabana is Late for School” in September of 2002. In the context of the War on Terror, schools are not only spaces where Afghan women and girls receive a rudimentary education in the academic disciplines, but also sites for their transformation. They are reintroduced to the public sphere through their access to education, and in the schoolroom they are introduced to modern democratic politics and transformed into informed citizens of democracy. These articles are not only coverage of education initiatives, they are the result of an editorial imperative that is itself a byproduct of the argument that the modernization of Afghan women will result in the moderation of Afghan society, thereby reducing future terrorist threats to the United States and its allies.

Only Barbara Crosette’s article on women’s advancements in Afghanistan at this time “Afghanistan’s Women: Hope for the Future Blunted by a Hard Past” examines the current situation of Afghan women in a broader historical context that reaches even farther back than the Soviet invasion. She take us back to a moment in 1959, when then Prime Minister Mohammed Daud brought his wife and daughters into a public space uncovered at a ceremony celebrating 40 years of independence from British rule. She indicates a complex history of women’s rights and progress in Afghanistan, including the overthrow of a secularist ruler, King Amanullah, who was driven from power in part due to progressive reforms giving women more rights. Crosette cites the works of historians and scholars who have studied the evolution of gender politics in Afghanistan, including

Louis Dupree, Laili Zikria Helms, and Rina Amiri, to ground her analysis. What results is a textured examination of the reality of how women's rights has unfolded in Afghanistan over the course of the 20th century and now into the 21st, as broad ideological struggles around secularism, Marxism, Islamism and democracy continue; and how the present moment is deeply informed by these complex histories.

Reporter as Observer

What is evident in many of Waldman's articles, as with the November 24th 2001 article on the decrease of burqa sales,¹⁴ is that her position as observer is an integral component of her reporting. Waldman's observation of the lack of business at a village market where many merchants sell burqas functions in the article as evidence of disinterest in the burqa, and therefore evidence that a dramatic social shift has taken place. Waldman signals the end of a "captive market" of female consumers of the burqa, noting prices have been halved and the average sales are reduced to a quarter of what they were before the invasion. From her perspective, this spatially and temporally circumscribed ethnography is evidence that Afghan women's situation has changed because of the Taliban's exit. As an observational piece Waldman's article does not include a competing perspective, and so rather than a broader consideration of the overall impact of wartime conditions on the ability of women to move about freely in public to purchase clothing or the impact of warfare on the overall economy, the audience is left with Waldman's conclusion alone. These types of observations provide audiences with

¹⁴ 'A Nation Challenged: The Marketplace; In Herat, TV Man is King, Veil Seller is Lonely.' Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/24/world/nation-challenged-marketplace-herat-tv-man-king-veil-seller-lonely.html?n=Top%2fReference%2fTimes%20Topics%2fSubjects%2fT%2fTerrorism>

assurances that Afghan women's situations are bound for improvement with the removal of the Taliban, just as the state predicted when they first proposed military action. War then, has been beneficial to Afghan women. Stories like these are important however, because they demonstrate that there is a particular value for these publications in getting the story on Afghan women (and Afghanistan in general) via the observations of women like Waldman, and that those observations are as newsworthy as any other piece of data offered about Afghan women.

One such example is a story Waldman writes in December of 2001, "Reporters in Afghanistan: Fear, Numbness and Being a Spectacle." This piece is entirely an observational one, of a stranger's experiences in Afghanistan. Her position as a woman reflecting on Afghanistan is what makes her perspective a point of interest for The New York Times readers. In the article, Waldman writes about affection amongst Afghan men. She is struck not only by the peculiarity of men showing so much affection toward one another (... "kissing and hugging one another. They have extraordinarily strong friendships.") leading her to conclude that "women, even wives, sometimes seemed an afterthought, although I also saw marriages arranged by families, but cemented by love."¹⁵ But this article is about her experiences, and "to be a woman with face exposed was to be a circus attraction." Waldman registers her full range of reaction to the burqa, in particular ("The first burka I see each day still jars"... "I cringe when I see women having to clutch burkas is one hand to walk.") The associations she makes come from her situated historical experience as an American woman, "I was inclined by my upbringing

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/29/world/nation-challenged-diaries-reporters-afghanistan-fear-numbness-being-spectacle.html?ref=women>

to view hooded humans as something to fear, like the Ku Klux Klan. Suddenly I was in a place where a hood was a symbol not of terror but of powerlessness.”

Aryn Baker of Time Magazine has perhaps published the more about Afghanistan than any other female author examined here. Baker’s familiarity with the region, and her long-term presence there since the early 2000s, makes her a particularly authoritative voice in the discourse on Afghan women. Baker’s article on women’s political involvement in Afghanistan four years after the invasion, and the various obstacles they face, is replete with references to regional differences in the way gender equality is viewed in Afghanistan suggesting her familiarity with a number of areas in that country and not just the main city of Kabul. Baker is able to articulate the contradictions of a nation where there are women running for office, but who must campaign door to door in a burqa in more conservative regions. Baker’s assessment of the impact of the invasion is that the country is “nowhere near as violent as before,” but that the political structure is largely ineffective for people living in areas outside of Kabul controlled by armed warlords. In predicting the political trajectory of Afghan women, Baker’s perspective frames the conversation, but she is also clearly present in the story. “In a heated discussion on the subject one late summer morning in Kabul” she writes, “a former mujahid declares that neither tradition nor Islam gives women the right to lead.” Another conversant adds, “You say in American you value women very much, but if that is true, why are there so few in your senate?” These statements not only articulate the attitudes of some Afghan men to the political involvement of women, and present a challenge to Americans who claim gender equality exists in the U.S., but also refers to Baker’s own

presence in the conversation. Clearly, she is arguing the other side with these interviewees, and this is her framing of the obstacles Afghan women face.

Baker does discuss the toll of warfare on these proceedings, but talks about troop deaths and civilian deaths as a result of insurgency; female candidates who receive death threats from Islamists who may also disrupt voting and create more violence as the election approaches. This establishes the ongoing threat that requires the intervention and presence of foreign troops, rather than framing these events as a result of the invasion and the presence of foreign troops and the War on Terror. The wartime visibility of both Baker and Waldman speaks to the specific perspectives North American female reporters bring to their observations of Afghan women, and how those particularities impact their projections for women's political, economic and social liberation in Afghanistan.

Waldman's observations are couched completely in the historical and cultural symbols of the U.S. to the degree that she interprets her discomfort with the burqa in terms of her discomfort with the hoods worn by the Klu Klux Klan. Baker, as a woman well versed in the history of the region, still frames the obstacles women face in terms of insurgency rather than uninvited foreign intervention over a longer historical period, which have brought Afghan women to this place. Though both women take pains to portray images of Afghan women who are actualized and motivated towards working for gender equality, they are less equipped to conceptualize a gender equality that is specific to Afghanistan. If the burqa functions the same way as a Klan hood in the mind of the author, there is less opportunity to "see" women under the burqa as agents of change.

In an earlier article from November of 2003, Baker also publishes an observational piece on her experience as a female reporter in Afghanistan. The article is

ostensibly a review of two memoirs associated with Afghan women; Norwegian journalist Asne Sierstad's The Bookseller of Kabul, and Saira Shah's The Story-Teller's Daughter. While Shah's memoir discusses her own experience as the daughter of a famous and exiled Afghan author, Idries Shah, and her own return to Afghanistan, Sierstad's memoir is of her time living with an Afghan family in Kabul. The experiences Sierstad relates is that of an observer of Afghan experience, one who has gained access to place that is restricted from the view of her male colleagues, and even more so from North American and Western European audiences back home. The rather stereotypical and salacious account Sierstad publishes, featuring the requisite domineering brutish patriarch and abused wives and children, that book appears to bear out general perceptions of Afghan society, which Baker readily endorses as an important glimpse behind the burqa. In her introduction to this review she also discusses her own experience in Afghanistan. Arriving early, her translator takes her to a woman only wedding

About 40 women filled the tiny room, spilling over sofas and sitting in one another's laps. Space for a dance floor had been cleared between sprawling limbs, and a corpulent, velvet-bedecked woman gyrated to a popular Bollywood tune. When she tired, she was replaced by a girl whose undulating hips and gaudy makeup would not have been amiss in a strip joint. These were not the demure, burqa'd women I'd expected to meet in Afghanistan.

This depiction of the harem interior, also indicates Baker's privilege at having access to such a scene. Later, when she describes this to male journalists who had been out hunting for Osama Bin Laden with the U.S. Army they express envy that they were not able to see what she had seen, "I realized that while I could easily go out on the next Army operation, my male colleagues would probably never get a chance to discover how

Afghan women live behind closed doors.”¹⁶ In the next section I will examine the specific position female reporters occupy, and the ways in which that awareness impacts their view of Afghanistan, Afghan women, and the prospects for change.

North American and Western European Female Correspondents on the Ground: The ‘Third Sex’

There was a convergence of events that brought many of these women to Afghanistan after 911; the already increasing numbers of female journalists at news organizations,¹⁷ and the sudden overwhelming demand for news about Afghanistan, which caused news organizations to pull personnel from every area of their organization to cover the war, are two primary ones. For news organizations, there was an added benefit to deploying women to Afghanistan. Female journalists have the ability to get close to Afghan women in a number of places, and they provide coverage of the conflict from an “angle.” They cover Afghan women from the perspective of an already liberated woman forced to work in a space that is not yet liberated for women. This point of view in the reporting provides an interesting selling point in a sea of war coverage. This particular contrast is balanced on the interactions of several forces. Gender, race, citizenship, socioeconomic status, education, mobility and power are all in play here, and the women who report on Afghan women become points of reflection in this discourse for the various ways in which a full scale foreign occupation impacts a nation. Those points of reflection are articulated in terms of the specific experiences of foreign female reporters in Afghanistan, who in this analysis are all white, college educated,

¹⁶ Baker. “Behind Closed Doors” Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,538986,00.html>

¹⁷ This is, itself in part a result of the second wave feminist movement, which asserted women’s ability to work in traditionally male-dominated environments like newsrooms.

economically independent women, whose marital and reproductive decisions are generally within their purview. Through their 'lens' we come to see the nature of Afghan women's experiences, but ultimately the reporting on Afghan women is subsumed by the desire to articulate what its like to be a liberated woman in Afghanistan. Articles like Waldman's and Baker's on their experiences as reporters in Afghanistan show this to be the case. This is why a term like the 'third sex' takes on so much significance; it is a self-ascribed term, whose very articulation indicates the grappling that takes place in the production of discourse by these women about their role as observers on the ground and authors of Afghan experience for audiences back home.

The high volume of reporting by women on Afghan women is the result of the intersecting histories of women's growing participation in the public sphere in North America and Western Europe as workers in news media institutions as journalists reporting on global relations, and the circumstances of the "war on terror." The first half of that statement refers to the strides women have taken in the world of journalism, and especially in the realm of foreign correspondence and war zone reporting in the 20th and 21st centuries¹⁸. The presence of female reporters in war zones is not the anomaly it once was, though even that may be a misperception. Tad Bartimus and other female correspondents have recounted their experiences as war correspondents during the Vietnam War. The presence of female journalists in Vietnam has been largely obscured in the cultural perception of Vietnam era war correspondence¹⁹. Since then women as foreign correspondents have become much more visible. Female correspondents in the

¹⁸ Gibbons, 2002. Retrieved from <http://www.womensenews.org/story/uncovering-gender/021016/female-correspondents-changing-war-coverage>.

¹⁹ Bartimus et. al 2002

war zone such as Christiane Amanpour, who herself has reported on Afghan women for Time Magazine, have become commonplace. Women now occupy prominent positions in the news organizations examined here, and in many other large-scale news organizations operating internationally today. Aryn Baker, for example, reported on Afghan women during this period as the South Asia Bureau Chief for Time Magazine. The very presence of women in these positions suggests that gender is no longer a consideration, evidence perhaps that in these professional capacities, gender can be obfuscated in favor of a credible reputation as a journalist and through professional advancement.

However, reporting from a war zone can complicate this. As Barker notes, female reporters are subject to sexual and physical harassment when reporting in the field, a threat that can come from any number of people they come in contact with, translators, guides, and even other colleagues.²⁰ In these circumstances, the limits of the position of the ‘third sex’ are made visible. Many female reporters working domestically and abroad are subject to this kind of harassment, but are reluctant to report it for fear that they will appear less competent to the news organizations who employ them, and perhaps be restricted from taking assignments in war zones and other spaces where female populations tend to be most vulnerable. Female correspondents also articulate a desire not to be seen as “special” or different from their male colleagues, adopting a notion of gender equality that presumes women must earn their place in the world of foreign correspondents and war reporting by proving themselves to be more resilient than their male counterparts.

One “seasoned” reporter who narrowly avoids being sexually assaulted by a

²⁰ Matloff, 2007

group of assailants recalls that though she was deeply traumatized she declined to report the incident to her editor because, “I put myself out there equal to the boys. I didn’t want to be seen in any way as weaker.”²¹ She echoes the sentiment of Jenny Nordberg, who was assaulted in Pakistan covering the return of Benazir Bhutto in 2007. A Swedish correspondent, based in the US, Nordberg also refrained from reporting her assault to her editors, “It’s embarrassing, and you feel like an idiot saying anything, especially when you are reporting on much, much greater horrors,” Nordberg wrote to CPJ in February. “But it still stays with you. I did not tell the editors for fear of losing assignments. That was definitely part of it. And I just did not want them to think of me as a girl. Especially when I am trying to be equal to, and better than, the boys. I may have told a female editor though, had I had one.”²² When female reporters do decide to report the assault, they often do so with the aims of incriminating a certain faction.

In an interview with the Committee to Protect Journalists Lynsey Addario (who has a byline in the Time Magazine archive on Afghan women) described her motivation for publicly discussing the sexual and physical abuse inflicted on her by Ghaddafi forces in Libya in 2011 as a desire to utilize her experience to support Libyan women’s claims of sexual and physical assault and provide credible evidence of that violence.²³ Without these noble causes however, it is not useful for female correspondents to be open about such assaults. Their accounts are a source of shame, not just because they are the victims of an assault but also because the assault is indicative of how the reporter was unable to keep herself out of harm’s way, unlike the physical and psychological abuses their male

²¹ Matloff, 2007

²² Wolfe, 2011

²³ Retrieved from <http://cpj.org/blog/2011/04/qa-nyts-lynsey-addario-on-libya-sexual-assault.php>

counterparts experience. She will be viewed as a liability, something reporters want to avoid. Truscott describes how, “I was worried too that as a female reporter on her first embed with the military, I would be seen as too fragile to head to the front line for patrols and operations,” especially with stitches on her knee from an earlier fall, so “it has been for both professional and fitness reasons that I have been running laps around Golestan base for the past two mornings and heaving bags around as often as possible.”

Though male journalists are also vulnerable to assault, the perception that women are particularly vulnerable to assault colors the perception of news managers who determine which reporters to deploy to the war zone. Once an assault of a female reporter is made public however, she is labeled a victim and her ability to report in the field is questioned. Her assault is going to be interpreted as a consequence of her femininity and the position of the ‘third sex’ is revealed to be rather tenuous, signifying that women who are able to inhabit this position are not released from considerations of gender, but must be hyper aware of their own gender and how it may impact them in the field so as to ensure they are not judged and characterized by it.

Translating Journalism to Expertise: Expanding Discourse Authored by the ‘Third Sex’

The women who author articles and comprise the ‘third sex’ are deeply entrenched in these news media organizations as the site of their professional and public identities. Their jobs greatly impact their lives, in many cases dictating where they will live and influencing their familial configurations.²⁴ The extent of the reporting done by

²⁴ Many of the reporters profiled here are married to fellow reporters. For example Elisabeth Bumiller at the New York Times who lives in Washington D.C. and is married to former New York Times White House correspondent Stephen R. Weisman; Or,

women on the whole indicates how much more of a presence they have become in the news room, and by extension how much more they participate in creating the bodies of knowledge about the enemies of the state in the War on Terror. What becomes clear when examining the archives of these publications is that there are certain female reporters who specialize in producing reports about Afghan women. Since 1973 Barbara Crossette has worked as a foreign correspondent for The New York Times, and has reported on Pakistan since the early 80's; her earliest report on Afghan women appears in 1990. Crossette reported on the plight of Afghan women through the early nineties and into the era of Taliban rule. Her reports on Afghan women tapered off again then, until 9/11 when she returned to reporting on Afghan women. Whether these reporters have returned to reporting on Afghan women, or are long time reporters on the region and its social, cultural, political and economic lives, journalism about Afghanistan, their experience as reporters on the region is often recognized as a form of expertise in its own right. This recognition facilitates their movement into other arenas of knowledge production that includes the opportunity to comment on and articulate approaches to foreign policy in the region.

Crossette's life and career is exemplary of how journalists often have secondary professional lives as authors of scholarly publications, teachers and advisors on foreign policy and other issues based on the expertise they cultivate during their tenure as foreign correspondents. Crossette has become an acknowledged expert on South Asia, particularly India, though she has also been the United Nations bureau chief for The New York Times and currently reports on the UN for The Nation Magazine. One article she

Hannah Bloch who lives in Hong Kong with her husband foreign correspondent Brook Larmer who also contributes articles to Time Magazine.

authored titled “Will John Bolton ruin the UN?” and published in Foreign Policy Magazine is largely credited for jumpstarting the process that would see Bolton resign from his post there. She has taught at Columbia University, Bard College and Princeton University and won a Fulbright fellowship to teach at Punjab University in India. She sits on the advisory board of New York University’s Institute for Global Studies. She is also a member of several organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Women’s Foreign Policy Group, and sits on the board of trustees at the Carnegie Council on Ethics in International Affairs.

Crossette has won numerous awards for her journalistic endeavors and published several non-fiction books. Around the time she was reporting on the deteriorating situation for Afghan women in the early to mid-nineties through the early twenty-first century she was also publishing several titles. These included So Close to Heaven: The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas (1995) and India Facing the 21st Century (1993). In 2000, Crossette wrote India: Old Civilization in a New World for the Foreign Policy Association in New York.²⁵ The recognition she receives for the work she has done on the region imbues Crossette with much credibility, but her contributions to the scholarship on India’s current place in the global political and economic order have also come under scrutiny. In January of 2010 the online news site The Huffington Post published a response to a recent article authored by Crossette for Foreign Policy Magazine by Vamsee Juluri, a professor of Media Studies at the University of San Francisco. Juluri characterizes Crossette’s descriptions of India as a “global villain/evil,” a “rogue nation” and “petulant” as Indophobic. He links Crossette’s reporting to a thread

²⁵ Retrieved from <http://members.authorsguild.net/bcrossette/>

of postcolonial/neocolonial discourse he sees as evident in The Times' overall coverage of the nation. Though her work on Afghan women has not been taken to task, as of yet, in the same way.

Crossette is one of a handful of women writing consistently on Afghan women. At The New York Times the most prominent of these are Elisabeth Bumiller, Amy Waldman, and Carlotta Gall. To a lesser degree the group includes Alessandra Stanley, Souad Mekhennet, Gayle Forman, Elaine Sciolino, Marlise Simons, Abby Ellin and Ruth Fremson. At Time Magazine there are Baker, Lisa Beyer, Johanna McGeary, Hannah Bloch and Hannah Beech. Like Crossette, many of these women have branched out into areas outside of journalism, and yet in ways very much related to their careers as journalists and the topics they cover as journalists. This is especially true of the reporters who work for The New York Times. Elisabeth Bumiller for example, has written books about the structure of family and gender roles in India as well as Japan. And, in 2007 she took a leave of absence from The Times to author a book about Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's secretary of state. Her interest in Rice was a byproduct of her function as White House correspondent for The Times during the Bush administration.

Following Crossette's example, Amy Waldman left The Times and began working for the magazine Atlantic Monthly as a foreign correspondent in the years after her reporting on Afghan women. She further cultivated her credibility and expertise as a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University from 2006-2007. Her trajectory while at The Times shows Waldman moving through the ranks from intermediate reporter in the late 1990's covering Brooklyn for the City Weekly section and moving on to the Metro Desk where she became head of the Bronx Bureau. Her

subsequent political coverage of regional gubernatorial campaigns as well as her reporting on the police shooting of African immigrant Amadou Diallo in 1999 raised her profile further. But, it was not until the attacks of September 11th, 2001 that Waldman transitioned to international reporting.²⁶ Waldman was a resource that the paper redirected to coverage of the War on Terror, giving her the opportunity to cover Russia, Iran and Afghanistan, and eventually occupy the position of South Asia co- Bureau Chief from 2002-2005. As a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute her objective was to complete:

A nonfiction work on the social and intellectual history of Muslims in modern Great Britain, starting with the migration of individuals—and of ideas, ideologies, and schools of Islam—from the Indian subcontinent and the Arab world. She will examine how the relationship between Muslims and their British rulers during the colonial era has shaped the dynamics of Islam today and how Britain has become a pivotal intellectual and ideological battleground for modern Islam.²⁷

Recently, Waldman published a fictional novel entitled The Submission, a satirical examination of the interplays of power that are made visible when a Muslim architect wins a blind competition to design the new World Trade Center, and 9/11 memorial project.

These authors also have in common college educations, most from private, prestigious colleges and universities in North America and Western Europe. Waldman graduated from Yale University in 1991 with a B.A. in English Literature, Crossette from Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania in 1963 with B.A.s in Political Science and History, and Bumiller from Northwestern University in 1977. Carlotta Gall studied at Newnham College, the women only constituent of the University of Cambridge in England and went

²⁶ Though she had previously worked as a stringer for *The New York Times* in Johannesburg, South Africa in the early 1990's.

http://tv.nytimes.com/learning/students/ask_reporters/Amy_Waldman.html

²⁷ Retrieved from http://www.radcliffe.edu/fellowships/fellows_2007awaldman.aspx

on to get her MA at the City University in London in International Relations and Journalism. Gall began her career as a journalist at The Moscow Times, and then freelanced for British publications such as The Independent and The Times, as well as US publications USA Today and Newsweek. Like Bumiller, she continues to work as a foreign correspondent for The New York Times, and like all her counterparts discussed here Gall is the author of a book on Chechnya, a part of the world she became familiar with as a reporter for The Moscow Times. Gall's investigative work into the deaths of two Afghan detainees while in US custody at Bagram air base in 2002 revealed the military's initial assertion that taxi driver Dilawar had died of natural causes. One byproduct of her reporting was the production of the 2007 documentary *Taxi to the Dark Side* that explicates the circumstances around Dilawar's death, and Gall is featured in the documentary.

Though a number of Times reporters discussed here no longer work directly for the paper, the female reporters covering Afghanistan for Time Magazine are for the most part still working as reporters there. Hannah Bloch is one reporter who has moved on to a position in the National Geographic Magazine Company. Hannah Beech, a 1994 Harold Truman scholar and graduate of Colby College, still works for the magazine. Here, however, I would like to turn my attention primarily to Baker who is credited with 40 bylines in Time Magazine's archive on the coverage of Afghanistan and women between 2001 and 2010. Like many of her counterparts at The Times, Baker holds a prominent position at the publication as the Pakistani and Afghan Bureau chief for the magazine and in that capacity has covered a number of international stories of note, including the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Baker earned a B.A. in Anthropology from Sarah

Lawrence College, with an M.A. in Journalism from the University of California, Berkeley. In 2005 she was a fellow at the International Reporting Project at The John Hopkins School of Advanced and International Studies. Prior to working for Time Magazine she worked for the Los Angeles Times and the Asia Wall Street Journal among other publications.

Recently, Baker's personal connections through her spouse have brought her reporting on Afghanistan under scrutiny from other journalists. As part of a larger investigation into the influence of the C.I.A. on the U.S. media's reporting on Afghanistan, John Gorenfeld of the New York Observer takes issue with Baker's cover story for Time Magazine published in the summer of 2010. Gorenfeld characterizes Baker's piece as reporting with the intent to forward an agenda that supports the CIA's desire to cultivate public support for the on going occupation of Afghanistan by US and allied forces. Gorenfeld's discovery of memos made public by the recent Wikileaks scandal describe the CIA's explicit mission to cultivate support for occupation amongst female audiences in North America and Western Europe, particularly Germany and France by highlighting incidences of violence against Afghan women²⁸.

The cover features the image of an Afghan woman whose face has been disfigured by an acid attack attributed to the Taliban next to the headline "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan."²⁹ From this image alone it is clear the tenor of Baker's piece supports the continued U.S. military occupation of Afghanistan, and that the foundational

²⁸ Gorenfeld, John (August 16, 2010). Time Story's Point of View' Mirrors CIA's. <http://www.observer.com/2010/time-storys-point-view-mirrors-cias-0>

²⁹ Gorenfeld claims attributions of this woman's injuries to the Taliban are actually incorrect, stating instead that her father-in-law attacked her as punishment for running away.

logic of this analysis is that the withdrawal of the U.S. would result in similar acts of violence against Afghan women who attempted to attend school or assert their rights in other ways. Gorenfeld identifies another reason why Baker might advocate for the US's ongoing intervention in Afghanistan; Baker's husband Tamim Samee

An Afghan American IT entrepreneur, is a board member of an Afghan government minister's \$100 million project advocating foreign investment in Afghanistan, and has run two companies, Digistan and Ora-Tech, that have solicited and won development contracts with the assistance of the international military, including private sector infrastructure projects favored by U.S.-backed leader Hamid Karzai.

Though Time Magazine refuted Gorenfeld's claim of conflict of interest, and defended Baker's piece they have since transferred Baker from her position as South Asia Bureau Chief and she now reports on an undisclosed country.

The purpose of presenting Baker's situation here is not to claim that it is the individual women who construct and disseminate knowledge through these news organizations simply for their own purpose, but to acknowledge how the women who most often report on Afghan women function within a network of relations that are brought to bear on their reporting, complicating the positioning of U.S. women as liberators in relation to Afghan women. These biographies suggest there are forms of currency that these women develop for themselves through their reporting on Afghan women. Gorenfeld suggests Baker could profit monetarily from her advocacy of the ongoing U.S. and international occupation and intervention, but all the examples here demonstrate other additional means of making use of their experiences as reporters.

The ability of these women to travel overseas, interact with and report on Afghan women to Western audiences attributes their perspectives a level of credibility as one

who has “been there,” seen first hand the situation on the ground and spoken to Afghan women directly. The demand in North America and Western Europe for these women to translate those experiences into modes of scholarly production such as writing and presenting work on these regions in prestigious academic forums, as well as publishing and teaching in academic institutions, not only gives these women other opportunities to participate in the discourse but also continue to place them in the position to function as knowledge producers about ‘the Muslims world.’ These experiences also raise their profiles as reporters significantly, so that they find themselves working in various forms of media production and being called upon not only as observers but also as experts to re-author over and over again those observations of Afghanistan for multiple outlets. A circumstance that mirrors those of their colonial counterparts whose books and paintings on the Orient garnered them praise and income and solidified their reputation in high society as adventurers. The contemporary journalists’ direct access to Afghan women gained throughout this period, and it creates them as intermediaries with the other women of the world “out there” as they provide other media outlets access to the perspectives of Afghan women without having to actually engage with Afghan women.

III. CHAPTER 2: Making the Images of Afghan Women: Television Correspondents and Freelance Photojournalists in Afghanistan

In this chapter, I look at the work of well-known female photojournalists and television correspondents who travel to Afghanistan to document life there in the wake of the declaration of the War on Terror. The increased demand for written reporting on Afghanistan in this moment was accompanied by an increased demand for images of Afghanistan and Afghan women, and it also resulted in an increase in the number of women working with North American and Western European based media organizations to produce still and moving images. High profile photographers Jodi Bieber, Lynsey Addario, Stephanie Sinclair, Marie Colvin, Kate Brooks, Paula Bronstein, Erin Trieb, Veronica De Viguerie, Andrea Bruce, and highly visible television personalities like Diane Sawyer and Christiane Amanpour, have all covered Afghan women since late 2001. For many of them reporting on Afghanistan is a years long endeavor that includes multiple trips to the nation. The plight of Afghan women is covered specifically as the human-interest angle of the War in Afghanistan; their progress, or the setbacks they suffer, becomes the yardstick by which the impact of foreign intervention is measured. These photographers and correspondents mark those moments of progress and setback in their images and stories.

While there, these women produce some of the most well-known and widely circulated images of Afghan women's experience in the era of the War on Terror. Those images play an integral role in maintaining the rationale that war in Afghanistan is an effective means of liberating Afghan women, and that the Taliban remain an ongoing threat which in turn justifies the violence committed by U.S. and allied troops in the

region. As happened with their print colleagues, the attacks and the declaration of War in Afghanistan created a cluster moment for photographers and TV correspondents, as happens when there is a global event in which there is bound to be a significant display of turmoil and human suffering. The coverage they produce on Afghan women is presented to audiences as spontaneous encounters with Afghan civilians they come in contact with as part of their journalistic exploration of the war zone as a visual landscape. However, when we examine the coverage produced by these women as a whole, what we see are photojournalists and television correspondents who are traveling a circuit of sorts in Afghanistan, one that has them encountering the same military and state institutions, and NGOs, as they move about. They often go to the same locations, and encounter the same individuals, a fact that becomes evident when we examine their portfolios alongside one another. Recognizing these patterns becomes an important component understanding how it is that the reporting of different women working for different organizations comes to express such a singular message, one that collapses militarism with humanitarianism. The humanitarian rationale is particularly effective at overriding the critique of imperialism, by framing the discourse on whether we should maintain a military presence or leave as a conversation about choosing the lesser of two evils. Military violence is cast as a necessary, but temporary evil, that in comparison to the ongoing brutal suffering at the hands of the Taliban, is the best option.

No story better encapsulates this than that of a young Afghan woman named Bibi Aisha. Aisha was the victim of a brutal attack in which her in-laws cut off her nose and ears after she attempted to escape an abusive marriage. Her unadorned face appeared on the cover of Time Magazine in July of 2010. Almost ten years on from the initial

invasion, her image on newsstands around the country made a resoundingly clear case for the necessity of keeping “security forces” on the ground. It is made quite explicit in the reporting on Aisha that the withdrawal of U.S. troops would be nothing short of an abandonment of women like Aisha to an uncertain and treacherous fate. For this analysis, I focus not only on the ways that Aisha is utilized by the state to function as a rhetorical symbol of the necessity of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, but also on the role of specific women’s organizations who are invested in making the case for ongoing occupation. These organizations function as a link in the chain between Aisha, a rural Afghan woman, and the journalists she comes in contact with. They play an integral role in the deployment of her story into the public discourse to advocate for ongoing occupation. These organizations argue that images of Afghan women, and their suffering, give voice to a marginalized population of women who are otherwise invisible in global mainstream news media and that the War on Terror is a moment in which feminists ought to take advantage of the public interest and demand for stories about Afghan women’s suffering. This analysis illustrates how the work of these female photojournalists and correspondents contributes to the narrative presented in the Bibi Aisha story by closely examining how the infrastructure of the War on Terror itself facilitates their mobility in Afghanistan.

Because Afghan women’s experiences are always being interpreted in terms of this measurement in the reporting, the demand for images of Afghan women is for select women, and a select category of experiences, that do not over complicate the dominant narrative about the War on Terror and its aims. They also favor an emphasis on individual Afghan women, rather than emphasizing the collective work of women. These

individuals are victims of extreme suffering or heroic figures working towards women's liberation. Though there are moments of complexity in these portrayals, Afghan women are always depicted as victims of, or in resistance to the order imposed by the Taliban. Depictions of Afghan women's relationship to the U.S./allied occupation are generally absent (though the military presence is evident in other portrayals by these journalists), as are women who are overtly critical of the occupation, creating the sense for viewers that Afghan women's oppression in Afghanistan is located solely within Afghanistan and has no broader global context. That scope is often narrowed further, to focus entirely on the Taliban as the sole source of women's oppression, even in the face of significant evidence that the current, U.S./allied approved government continues to challenge women's autonomy and codify their subjugation.

According to this logic then, a feminist ethics dictates supporting any course of action that prohibits the Taliban's return to power. This circumscribed narrative, of Afghan women as victims of the Taliban and acting in resistance to the Taliban alone, becomes very difficult to overcome in the liberal feminist discourse on militarism. This is due in part to the ways in which Orientalist logics are entrenched in this narrative. In those logics, Muslim women are either subscribing to religious beliefs and social norms in Muslim societies because they are subservient and subordinate to a repressive patriarchal order (victims) or, they are 'aware' of their oppression and display agency and autonomy by rejecting that order. As such, they come to be seen as belonging to one of two categories: they are either behaving as subordinates to the traditional, patriarchal culture of Afghan society (veiling, adhering to gender norms such as segregation), or they are subversives, acting out in ways that are recognizable to audiences in North America

and Western Europe as resistant (campaigning for political office, making public declarations against the Taliban, fighting for education).

The subordination and subversion binary portrayed in these images is always exclusively in relation to the order imposed by the Taliban and other fundamentalist components in Afghanistan. Portrayals of subversion against the order of the Taliban emphasize the visibility of women in the public sphere, engaging in activity expressly prohibited by the Taliban like participation in political life. These images do not include depictions of Afghan women as subordinating to, or subverting, the occupation of Afghanistan by foreign troops directly, leaving the relationship of these women to occupying forces largely unaddressed. The absence of explicit references to the presence of foreign troops, or depictions of Afghan women interacting with foreign troops, excludes that from the narrative of Afghan women's experience of the War on Terror. For North American and Western European audiences this leaves a narrative in the coverage that indicates the origin of the conflict is within Afghanistan and amongst Afghans themselves. In this story foreign states have been drawn into the conflict, and are peripheral to it. In contrast, there are an abundance of images depicting the consequences of women's contact with Taliban or other agents of misogynistic Afghan culture, and those images have been effectively deployed to argue for the ongoing presence of foreign troops. The overall implication is that the relationship between foreign troops and Afghan women is a positive one.

The Afghan women they seek out as subjects for their images are generally exemplifications of the perceived issues that plague Afghan women; images of women wearing the burqa, as well as portraits of extreme suffering become a focal point of their

coverage. These portraits embody the cultural otherness of Afghan society, and reify notions of this place as belonging to another time, far in the past. However, it is also apparent that these journalists seek out depictions of Afghan women who more closely resemble the journalists themselves in the way they push against social norms to participate in the realm of public life, as political actor, activist, and/or professional. These women not only contribute to the prevailing logic, that occupation has benefited Afghan women, they provide glimpses of Afghans that are recognizable in a positive way. In this way, images and reports of Afghan women recorded by these journalists tend to depict women as either subordinate to the social order imposed by the Taliban (and much worse off for it), or as subverting that order, by occupying roles that were prohibited to women under their rule, and unveiling for the camera.

The Story of Bibi Aisha

The July 2010 cover of Time Magazine features an image taken by photographer Jodi Bieber of a young woman, Bibi Aisha¹ who was mutilated by her in-laws in a rural area of Afghanistan. The provocative image of Aisha's exposed injuries (included in the previous chapter) provides the answer to the headline, "What Happens If We Leave Afghanistan" that accompanies the image. Hers is one of the most widely circulated. The message in the marriage of Bieber's image and the accompanying headline is supported by a barrage of coverage about Bibi Aisha, the events that precipitated her cover and her life subsequent to the intervention of entities from the West. The narrative of Bibi Aisha's abuse at the hands of her in-laws (identified by some as Taliban), and her

¹ Bibi Aisha has been referred to as Aisha Bibi and Bibi Aiesha in earlier articles, later, as simply Aisha or Ayesha.

subsequent rescue by U.S. military forces, U.S. based feminist organizations, and U.S. doctors, appears to provide an exemplary representation of the problems Afghan women face, and the liberatory impact of the presence of U.S. and allied troops. This appearance is based on the crafting of a specific narrative in which the abuses against her were perpetrated by Taliban (as if identifying the perpetrators simply as family members lessens the gravity of what has occurred) and which focuses on the moment of her rescue and not on the struggles she encounters in its wake. In actuality, Bibi Aisha's story tells us a great deal about how female journalists covering Afghan women travel the same pathways in Afghanistan, how they develop relationships with military and other organizations to 'get' this story, and how coverage of Afghan women builds on itself – if one news outlet covers Bibi Aisha, it prompts another to cover it also, and as such creates a chain of coverage that supports the argument for continued foreign intervention.

Bibi Aisha has been the subject of a great deal of coverage, and appears in reports of a number of photojournalists and television correspondents traveling from North America and Western Europe. She is also featured in Lynsey Addario's photo essay "Veiled Rebellion,"² and in photojournalist Kate Brooks' essay on Afghanistan. Bibi Aisha was photographed by all of these women while a resident at a Kabul women's shelter. Her exposure to multiple photojournalists from North America and Western Europe suggests that her meetings with them were not a matter of pure coincidence. She was 'provided', alongside other residents at the shelter as examples of Afghan women's abuse for Western news media outlets. In the logic of empowerment and visibility, this is a noble idea – to give voice to the experiences of Afghan women that may otherwise be

² Retrieved from <http://www.lynseyaddario.com/#/veiled-rebellion/VeiledRebellion005>

ignored. However, the rapacious and consistent nature of the coverage of Aisha Bibi suggests that elements of her story incline news organizations to feature her story alone, sometimes to the exclusion of other Afghan women who offer a different political perspective on liberation in Afghanistan. The sensational nature of her injuries attracts news outlets to her. The narrative of the abuses she suffered poses is as desirable, because it poses no uncomfortable challenges to the dominant narrative in which the sole source of Afghan women's oppression are Afghan men. As her profile is heightened however, the narrative comes into question, and what is revealed is the clear instrumentalization of Bibi Aisha's story, by the military unit who rescued her, the organization who sheltered her, and the journalists who covered her, in support of a narrative in which the War in Afghanistan is just, humane and necessary. Bibi Aisha's narrative also makes visible the similar routes and pathways traveled by these women as they come to Afghanistan. If they all end up at this shelter photographing Bibi Aisha at some point in their tenure in Afghanistan, it suggests a tendency to visit the same places.

Bibi Aisha is a popular subject for photojournalists and television news correspondents. It is the television news reporting that we get some information about how Aisha came to be introduced to foreign media from North America and Western Europe. It also indicates how they all these reporters came to tell an almost uniform story of a young Afghan girl married off at 12 (sometimes listed at 13) to an abusive husband who forced her to sleep with animals in a stable and who regularly beat her. She had been traded to her Talib husband and his family as payment for a blood debt. A Taliban commander, they say, ordered her assault. Her entire story, from being a young girl undervalued by her own family, to being a child bride, to her abuse and assault become

indicative of life under the Taliban, and it becomes important that her husband and the other perpetrators of the crime are Taliban. This account, however, is not undisputed. In *The Nation* on August 12th, 2010,³ reporter Ann Jones asserts that in her interviews with Aisha, the Taliban were never mentioned, only a father-in-law who attacked her with a knife and the subsequent approval of the attack by village elders. In the article, Jones explicitly addresses the ‘use’ of Bibi Aisha by “those who would convince us that the U.S. military must stay in Afghanistan,” who are “transforming a personal story, similar to those of countless women in Afghanistan today, into a portent of things to come for all women if the Taliban return to power.”⁴

Jones’ challenge to the primary narrative was met with significant ire from Esther Hyneman, Director of Women for Afghan Women, and other feminists committed to the position that retaining the presence of American/Allied troops advances women’s equality in Afghanistan. Hyneman went so far as to address Jones’s critique in a response piece for the *Huffington Post*. In an article entitled, “Staying Honest About Afghanistan” Hyneman asserts that Jones knows nothing of “Ayesha,” and it is she and the organization Women for Afghan Women who know Bibi Aisha’s story. Hyneman is open about the purpose of circulating Bibi Aisha’s story,

The world once knew about these horrors but seems to have forgotten. The point of the photograph of Ayesha, one single photograph, was to remind them, to shock them into recall, and to encourage them to consider what would revisit Afghan women and girls, 15 million of them, if the Taliban regain control of the country. Therefore, Jones is correct to say that we were trying to influence public opinion in favor of continuing the military presence in Afghanistan although we

³ Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/article/154020/afghan-women-have-already-been-abandoned>

⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/article/154020/afghan-women-have-already-been-abandoned>

take strong exception to her description of this intention as shameless and manipulative.⁵

In this statement, Hyneman makes a specific claim – that these forms of propaganda are acceptable, in service of a humane cause. According to the feminist ethics of Hyneman, and others who support militarism in the War on Terror then, activist organizations and journalists can utilize the experiences of Afghan women in service of an argument for military intervention if there is a broader “good” to be achieved. In this logic, this utilization of Afghan women’s suffering is not ‘manipulative’ or in service of the state’s imperialist aims, but is in fact a necessary deployment of media resources in service of the project of global gender equality. In her article Jones describes the two factions involved in this dispute over Bibi Aisha’s story, as the anti-war left on the one hand and feminists on the other. The delineation of the factions involved in these terms does not create a space for the anti-war or anti-imperialist feminist, and in fact suggests that no such category exists.

The desirability of Aisha as a subject of coverage in the United States is never in dispute. Her story appeals clearly to both print and television news outlets, and to both photojournalists and television news reporters. Their purpose is to tell a story about the Taliban and their brutality towards Afghan women, but also, to lend that story the quality of hope in the form of intervention by U.S. military and women’s rights organizations. In telling this story of Aisha’s assault, these television stories inadvertently elucidate the enmeshment of military, non-government and media networks on the ground in Afghanistan, whose presence facilitates coverage of the experiences of Afghan women by

⁵ Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/esther-hyneman/staying-honest-about-afgh_b_732185.html

foreign news media outlets. For example, in a report for ABC's World News with Diane Sawyer on March 11th, 2010, Sawyer describes how Aisha was assaulted ("her husband, a Taliban cut off her nose and ears while his brother held her down"). The story of her assault then leads to the story of her recovery at the Forward Operating Base Ripley⁶, an American military base that has the medical supplies to care for her when local Afghan hospitals do not.

Bibi Aisha's time at Ripley is portrayed as the divine intervention of good in a world that is otherwise very bad; her time with them heals Bibi Aisha in more than medical terms according to this coverage. In the ABC report, Sawyer narrates how Aisha crawled to her uncle's house after the attack and was denied, but eventually wound up in the care of "strangers", American military personnel, who took her in and cared for her when her own people would not. The report shows images of surgery Aisha underwent at Ripley. Her report also includes interviews from those military personnel, who call her injuries "barbaric and shocking." These individuals include the military surgeon Airforce Major Jeff Lewis from Oklahoma, and Staff Sergeant Lindsey Clarke a medic from Arkansas, who Sawyer describes as someone who became a close friend of Aisha's. These people, Sawyer says, gave her something "completely new, kindness." The report shows home video of Aisha at the base repeating short phrases in English like "what's up?" depicting the young woman at ease and happy at the military base. Atia Abawi's report for CNN entitled, "Meetings with Bibi Aisha, Then and Now" describes a touching

⁶ Established in 2004, the Forward Operating Base Ripley is located approximately 60 miles north of Kandahar, near the town of Tarin Kowt. It was home to the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, who at that time was tasked with rebuffing attempts by the Taliban to disrupt voting. It has also been a site of significant combat, with one account of a six-month period around 2008 including 150 combat missions and the deaths of 350 insurgents. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/fob_ripley.htm.

encounter in which Aisha wants to demonstrate the English she has learned while under the care of the American Provincial Reconstruction Team at Ripley. This is one of the few depictions of close contact between U.S. military personnel and an Afghan woman is detailed in this coverage, and it is entirely positive. Aligning the military presence there with saving young women who have otherwise been abandoned by their own communities constructs a narrow narrative about the interactions of Afghan women and U.S. military, which in turn makes it much simpler for audiences, including feminist ones, to make the case for ongoing military intervention.

These reports also illustrate how the military components in Afghanistan are not the only foreign organizations in the country as part of the project of rebuilding Afghanistan. Organizations like Hyneman's Women for Women and its subsidiary in Afghanistan, Women for Afghan Women, also have an institutional presence on the ground. Bibi Aisha's story indicates how these entities work alongside the military occupation, at least some of the time, as Bibi Aisha makes her way from Ripley at some point to a WAW shelter in Kabul, where she makes contact with the foreign media. In her report, Sawyer describes meeting Bibi Aisha for the first time in a shelter whose location cannot be revealed for security reasons, reinforcing the sense that Sawyer has found and entered a place that is otherwise obscured from the world's view. Sawyer references how she came to be aware of Aisha's story via the initial article published about her in American media in December of 2009; Gayle Tzemach Lemmon had written about her for *The Daily Beast*, the online extension of *Newsweek Magazine*. Sawyer's report elucidates the role that the shelter, and the organization running it, plays in facilitate journalists' access to Aisha.

An ABC report on Aisha called “Abused Women in Afghanistan Helped in Secret Shelters”⁷ quotes WAW and shelter Director Manizha Naderi in its opening sentences:

Not every Afghan is hoping the Americans soon leave their country. Some are actually dreading it. "You can't leave Afghanistan," Manizha, who helps run a shelter for battered women, recently warned "World News" anchor Diane Sawyer. Behind Manizha, women who were beaten, bruised and badly scarred shake their heads in urgent agreement.

The secret women's shelter is run by Manizha -- who, like most Afghans, goes by only one name - and by New Yorker Esther Hyneman. It is one of a string of shelters and counseling centers that opened in 2007 and have since helped about 1,500 Afghan women escape beatings and abuse that can shock even battle-hardened combat surgeons.⁸

Abawi's chronicle of her conversations with Aisha for CNN also indicate the role the shelter and its director had in facilitating contact with Aisha. Abawi first tries to contact Aisha for an interview in January of 2010, shortly after the publication of the piece in The Daily Beast. Aisha initially refused to be interviewed, “But her story was so remarkable-and so tragic- that I wasn't about to give up my efforts.” Abawi documents how several days later, WAW Director Manizha Naderi calls to let her know she can in fact interview Aisha, though Naderi cannot provide any particular reason for why Aisha has changed her mind.

Abawi's chronicle of her interviews with Aisha over the next few months is also a chronicle of Aisha's journey as she is brought to the United States for reconstructive surgeries; expensive medical services donated by the Grossman Burn Foundation, a

⁷ <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/Afghanistan/abused-women-afghanistan-helped-secret-shelters/story?id=10074409#.UOcoJYV6D0Q>

⁸ <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/Afghanistan/abused-women-afghanistan-helped-secret-shelters/story?id=10074409#.UOdImIV6D0Q>

group of plastic surgeons in Los Angeles. To this day, the front page of the website of the Foundation features a video of Diane Sawyer speaking from her anchor chair about the donated work that the Foundation has done for Aisha, who by this point has become a well-known figure. Abawi's narrative in the article has her interacting with Aisha at critical points along this journey, during which she is transformed from an anonymous young woman in Kabul, to a cause celebre. When she meets with Aisha again in August of 2010, as Aisha prepares to leave Kabul for the U.S., Abawi shows Aisha the cover of Time Magazine featuring her image. Aisha's reaction is wide-eyed, but silent. Abawi tells the audience, "According to the staff from WAW, Aisha wants to share the plight of Afghan women with the world. She doesn't want the Taliban to win again; and she wants an end to women's suffering in Afghanistan," though Aisha herself says very little and Abawi refers to her as "the shy Aisha again."⁹ It is important to note that Aisha herself does not articulate an argument against the Taliban, or her desire to act as a symbol of women's oppression

In the story of Bibi Aisha, two threads come together. On the one hand, it positions the military personnel and other foreign non-government organizations exclusively as humanitarian organizations, doing humanitarian work, without any critical consideration of their presence there. At the same time, it reifies the notion that to travel to Afghanistan as these reporters do, is to travel back in time to a place where child brides are mutilated by their husbands according to local, tribal, customs. Ending Aisha's story with a trip to the United States is important to concluding her story in a positive way for the audiences of this particular moment in the War on Terror. Aisha's journey to the U.S.

⁹ Retrieved from <http://afghanistan.blogs.cnn.com/2010/08/04/meetings-with-bibi-aisha-then-and-now/>

is framed as the ‘progressive’ moment; she is moving from the antiquated social and legal system of Afghanistan, to the arms of aid and activist organizations, to the modern medical complex of the U.S., where her mutilated face is reconstructed using prosthetics. In the arc of the narrative produced in this coverage, the process of surgical reconstruction of her facial features and the restoration of her conventional beauty stands as an indicator of that progress.

Subordination and Suffering

Images of abuse as severe as Aisha’s have high value in an Orientalist visual economy on Afghanistan. Images of such severe abuse reinforce existing narratives we have about the experiences of young women in the Global South and as such, depictions of exploitation, oppression and violence are always in demand. This demand, however, is framed in terms of a humanitarian desire to document human suffering in places that are otherwise obscured from view. In this context, the reporters who get these stories are revered as professionals with humanitarian motives who put themselves at significant risk to bring these stories back. The more obscure or shocking the image, the more valuable it is. These photojournalists then, are often balancing a sense of responsibility to document the experiences of women in far reaching places who have been marginalized in the dominant discourse and create awareness of their plight, while also serving the demand from news organizations for the most sensational content. Additionally, there is a general awareness of the ways in which those images may be used to reify perceptions of global cultures as backward, exacerbating xenophobic attitudes towards the very people they hope to help.

Freelance photojournalist Stephanie Sinclair's essay on child brides and forced marriages throughout parts of the global south, including Afghanistan, is a good example of this type of reporting. Sinclair's essay includes images from, Nepal, India, Yemen and Ethiopia, as well as Afghanistan. Though she does not focus on a particular nation, and she showcases this tradition within different faith communities, her regional focus is on poor people of the Global South. Child marriage then, in this essay, is an issue that is circumscribed as an issue amongst the world's poorest; those who lack education and resources. It is indicative of the other time and space inhabited by these peoples, separate from the time and space occupied by progressive Western societies in which these practices appear to be non-existent. As in Aisha's case, the girls Sinclair photographs are forcibly married off before the age of 18, often due to poverty, or as payment of some kind of debt, or simply because it is the custom to do so. Sinclair is often present for the marriage ceremonies, some of which take place in secret (India) and some of which are celebrated openly (Afghanistan). In these images, Sinclair gives the audience the sense that they are seeing an obscure practice of traditional societies – a sense that is enforced in an image of a sleepy five year old being carried to her wedding ceremony in the middle of the night to avoid authorities. Sinclair's essays on child brides has garnered her significant coverage and accolades; her images of child brides in Afghanistan appeared as a multi- full page spread in a July 2006 issue of The New York Times Magazine. She also won the 2007 Unicef Photo of the Year Award, for a specific image of a 50-yr old Afghan man and his 11 yr-old bride on their wedding day.

Despite the accolades she has received, and the professional advancement she has experienced due to the demand for such images, Sinclair must contend with the ways

these images will be interpreted by audiences back home as ‘evidence’ of the brutality of other men. She, and her colleagues, are aware of the potential impact that their images and statements may have, and do demonstrate sensitivity to the ways in which they may contribute Orientalist perceptions of Muslim societies and their contributions to the theory of the clash of civilizations. When being interviewed about her imprisonment in Libya, and her general experience reporting in the Middle East/Muslim societies, Lynsey Addario is careful to tell her interviewer that she has always received hospitality and protection while working in these spaces,¹⁰ (though she is quick to assert this in the face of the argument that female photographers ought not to be traveling in the spaces because they are ‘more’ vulnerable than their male counterparts). In one interview, Sinclair discusses the Orientalising potential of the images she has produced of Afghanistan:

I don’t want to come across as berating a society. Every culture has pluses and minuses. But there is a serious gender disparity without a doubt and it’s something that absolutely needs to be addressed. Studies show that if you take out half a society from being able to help a country prosper, it tends to suffer, so fixing the situation for women and giving them their rights tends to help the whole community and the whole country, not just the individuals.¹¹

In Sinclair’s statement, the potential these images have for perpetuating xenophobia in these portrayals of suffering are mitigated by the larger import of making the ‘gender disparity’ visible. What Sinclair is articulating here is a feminist mission, one that is a fundamental component of her work. She, like her fellow photojournalists, is not there only to observe and record, but also to influence audiences as part of a humanitarian project. This project, the exposure of women’s suffering, is meant to contribute to the

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/lynsey-addario-its-what-i-do/>

¹¹ Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/flash_point/afghanistan/interview.html

elevation of women. Sinclair sees the elevation of women as a benefit to the whole, thereby canceling out the damage that may be done by portraying these societies exclusively in terms of women's oppression, especially when those portrayals justify military intervention. More importantly, her comments suggest the feminist mission cannot take place without the Orientalising component and, it reduces that Orientalising component to the negligible, inevitable, cost of improving women's lives in Afghanistan, and in the Global South more broadly.

This 'humanitarian' impetus directs these photographers towards particular forms of oppression and abuse creating a repetitive effect in the coverage and catering significantly to the desire for increasingly sensational content. Self-immolation by Afghan women, is a genre of image that surfaces repeatedly in the work of these photojournalists. The practice of self-immolation, or committing suicide by lighting oneself on fire, is more common amongst women in Afghanistan because kerosene and matches are materials that are readily available to them as cooking materials, especially for poor women in rural areas. The women depicted in these images attempted to commit suicide by self-immolation in order to escape physical and psychological domestic abuse at the hands of their spouses and other relatives. These images show the aftermath of these actions, as the women receive treatment in facilities whose staging and equipment suggest very little access to the resources and knowledge of modern medicine, which compounds the suffering of the women shown in the images. Everything about these circumstances, from the methods employed by these women to the medical facilities that treat them compounds the sense that Afghanistan exists in another time.

In some cases, self-immolation is the sole focus of the essay, as it is for Stephanie Sinclair who created an entire photo essay of women who self-immolated, showing particularly graphic images of a young woman screaming as her wounds are cleaned and dressed. Paula Bronstein and Veronique de Viguerie on the other hand, include one or two images of women who have self-immolated within a larger essay of pictures on ‘life’ in Afghanistan. De Viguerie’s essay “Afghanistan In’challah” includes an image of 19 yr old Gulalai, as she is held in her mother’s arms, while she recovers from her self-inflicted burns at the burn unit at Herat Regional Hospital.¹² Jodi Bieber’s portraits for Time Magazine include a woman who poured diesel over her legs and set them on fire. The title of the image is “Islam.”¹³ Like Bibi Aisha’s story, these images are representative of a specific genre of women’s suffering that is popular amongst foreign news agencies visiting nations in the Global South. Her physical injuries, and other women who have been most visibly assaulted provide the searing images that will communicate how severe the abuses are of Afghan women to audiences in other parts of the world. As such, there is a genre of these types of photographs, and they include women whose faces are burned by acid, as in the image of a woman burned with acid in 1989 who is identified by the pseudonym Ambreem, as well as victims of self-immolation. Lynsey Addario photographs these women also, for a New York Times story in November in 2010, illustrating the long-term value such stories hold for North American and Western European media outlets.

¹² Retrieved from <http://vero-de-viguerie.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/AFGHANISTAN-INCHALLAH/G0000ePj3LMOXypQ/I0000xJwmSonlJm4>

¹³ Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2007161_2170311,00.html

In a demonstration of how interchangeable these stories of Afghan women's suffering are, the original piece on Bibi Aisha which garnered her so much subsequent media attention globally by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon in 2009 is accompanied by an image of Paula Bronstein's that actually depicts a woman named Nazgul, a 35 yr old self-immolation victim.¹⁴ When Diane Sawyer reports on Bibi Aisha, the image from the article is re-shown and re-identified as Aisha. The image of the veiled and bandaged young woman stands in for Bibi Aisha in these stories, even though Aisha's injuries were cuts to her face and this woman's injuries are clearly burns on her body.

Interchangeability and repetition are evident in the stock images almost all of these photographers feature in their essays on Afghanistan; of the woman, or women, in the blue burqa. There are numerous shots of women in market places, covered, and indistinguishable from one another and fundamentally interchangeable for viewers. The very invisibility created by the burqa that is decried in public discourse, is what gives these images their power. The burqa, however, does not render suffering invisible. Paula Bronstein's essay on Afghanistan shows women begging in burqas, one image taken February 16th, 2003 is captioned, "An Afghan women covered in a wet dirty burqa sits on a wet snowy street begging for money during a snowfall."¹⁵ The other image of a woman begging in a burqa is from February of 2009. Sometimes, the emphasis of the burqa comes in portraying it in contrast to uncovered women or girls, as Paula Bronstein does in her essay. In an image from February of 2003, a young girl sits facing towards the camera, surrounded by burqa-clad women while waiting for treatment at a local clinic. The visibility of her face is emphasized by the way all the other faces in the image are

¹⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.reportagebygettyimages.com/paula-bronstein/#>

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.reportagebygettyimages.com/paula-bronstein/#>

obscured. The contrast emphasizes for the viewer how covered the other women are, and signals also the inevitability of this young girls' fate. As she ages, she will also take on the burqa and effectively disappear from view of the camera. The women in the burqa surround her, waiting passively for assistance.

Subversion

In stark contrast to portraits of acid victims like Ambreen, there are also a number of images that gesture to ways in which Afghan woman participated in public life prior to the Taliban's rule, and also of women who have since challenged the prohibition on women's participation in public life. Unlike victims of self-immolation, these women are the ones 'we' as an audience relate to, and see 'our' natural inclination to push for the improvement of women's lives. Brooks' essay features three other portraits of Afghan women who symbolize this trend. The first, is of General Khatol Muhammadazi,

A 14 yr veteran of the air force with 500 parachute jumps under her belt when the Taliban forced her to stay home with a severance pay of \$13 a month. She was the highest-ranking woman in Afghanistan's airforce, and the country's first paratrooper. After the Taliban fell, she quickly returned to work.¹⁶

Muhammadazi's role in the military (a space that has historically been restricted for women in the United States, specifically) is an important symbol of Afghan women's agency and achievement, while also continuing to be indicative of the ways in which the Taliban stifled women's agency, achievement and participation in public life. Though Brooks photographs her at home, reclining on a sofa, Muhammadazi's burqa is thrown back to reveal a military uniform and chest pinned full of medals. The next portrait is of

¹⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.katebrooks.com/#/portraits/portraits22>

human rights lawyer Shada Nasser, who has “represented a number of child brides’ divorce cases in Yemen.”¹⁷ As a professional with post secondary educational credentials, who is actively combating a cultural practice that is detrimental to women in Afghanistan, Nasser is representative of the ways in which education and women’s participation in the workplace directly improves the lives of women in the society as a whole. The third portrait is of Dr. Marzia Mohammadi from Bamiyan Province in Afghanistan, standing in what looks to be an open rural area, covered but not wearing a burqa. A young girl stands by the side of Dr. Mohammadi, who is a female candidate in the nation’s first democratic parliamentary elections.¹⁸ This woman, and political candidate, stands face exposed in an open space making numerous associations with notions of liberty and agency that are highly recognizable. The young girl next to her, suggests the influence these pioneering women will have on future generations, as moderating and modernizing elements in Afghan society.

¹⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.katebrooks.com/#/portraits/portraits39>

¹⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.katebrooks.com/#/portrait/portraits23>



Illustration 1: Dr. Marzia Mohammadi by Kate Brooks

These are a few examples of numerous images that signal the desire to “see” Afghan women engaging in political participation either as candidates, or as political actors in some capacity, in the wake of the U.S. allied invasion and occupation. Stephanie Sinclair’s series shows an Afghan man handling a large campaign poster for Safia Siddiqi, a female candidate running for office in Afghanistan’s country’s first parliamentary elections. That image was published with a New York Times Magazine article by Elizabeth Rubin published October 9th, 2005 entitled, “Women’s Work” alongside the introduction, “Now that female candidates have secured a place in the new Afghan Parliament, can they transform their country’s politics, culture – and men?”¹⁹ Sinclair’s essay also includes other images of Siddiqi, riding in a secured vehicle stumping through a loudspeaker. Sinclair also features an image of Saima Khogiani

¹⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.stephaniesinclair.com/inprint-womenswork-nytimesmag/>

campaigning from her headquarters as it has been determined that it is too dangerous for her to venture outside. Khogiani's audience in the image, are men. There are images that indirectly reference women's presence in the political scene, as in her image of a young boy aiming a toy gun at a campaign poster for Soraya Parlika, the head of the All Afghan Women's Union. In the caption, Sinclair provides an anecdote from Parlika's history as a political activist that promotes the notion of Parlika as a subversive. "...in 1979 she was burned with cigarettes, had her nose broken and was imprisoned for 18 months after organizing a women's movement opposed to President Hafizullah Amin."

The captions on these images also convey the dual effects of these images. On the one hand, these words portray a strong Afghan woman capable of fighting for her beliefs. On the other, it opens the conversation up to the existence of a political history in Afghanistan that includes the participation of women, challenging the contemporary narrative in which Afghan women had never experienced political agency prior to the U.S./allied invasion. However, the political history provided in this description is also problematic. The truncated nature of captioning, and the selection of information presented in those captions, limits the discussion of Afghanistan's historical and contemporary political scene for each image. These descriptions speak solely in terms of Afghan actors, without providing much in the way of global context for these domestic struggles. The abbreviated version of Parlika's story omits the larger historical, global, political context in which Parlika has functioned as an activist and subversive. President Amin came to power in Afghanistan in the context of power struggles within his own government and the Cold War, globally. As such, his short stint as ruler began with his assassination of his predecessor, and ended with his own assassination by the Soviet

Union, who claimed Amin was a spy for the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States. Parlika's activism then, references a longstanding political relationship between Afghanistan, the United States and other global powers and gestures to the history in which Afghanistan has previously been a focus of a global political conflict.

The omission of this broader context also has the effect of framing the political instability in Afghanistan purely in terms of the influence of Afghans, and Afghan political entities. This framing excludes the contributions United States and its allies contribute to the political instability in the region, or their role in installing a government that attempts to exclude women in the wake of their defeat of the Taliban.

Jodi Bieber's essay for Time Magazine on "Women of Afghanistan Under Taliban Threat" includes an image of Fawzia Koofi, who was then (in 2010) campaigning for another term as Speaker of Parliament. She is the first Afghan woman to hold this post, and she is described in the caption as "very outspoken on women's issues." This text also states that Koofi fears new election rules will prevent her from taking a second term, a direct result of male Afghan politicians attempting to ouster outspoken women like themselves²⁰. This image specifically is part of a longer essay of photographs that accompanies the Time Magazine cover featuring Bibi Aisha. In the accompanying article, Koofi is positioned as representing Afghan women, and their position on the peace process as the U.S. and its allies prepare to leave Afghanistan, "Afghan women are not convinced. They fear that in the quest for a quick peace, their progress may be sidelined. 'Women's rights must not be the sacrifice by which peace is achieved.'"²¹ In that

²⁰ Retrieved from

http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2007161_2170305,00.html

²¹ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2007407-2,00.html>

statement, the end of the foreign occupation, the end of the war, and the achievement of peace, are systematically positioned in opposition to the project of women's and human rights.

In 2012, Koofi has been the subject of a couple of CNN television reports, one by Ashley Fantz, and the other an interview in October of 2012 with renowned war zone journalist Christiane Amanpour. Koofi has already announced her decision to run for President of Afghanistan in 2014, this in turn has made her an attractive subject for coverage by North American news outlets. Fantz's article is headlined, "In Afghanistan, a Mother Bravely Campaigns for President." It describes Koofi's political evolution, from a young girl who pursued her education voraciously until, as a teenager, the creeping influence of Islamic Fundamentalism barred her from pursuing those dreams. The shift in the culture in Afghanistan in the late 1980s and early 1990s is described in terms of the introduction of the burqa and other aesthetic changes, "She recalls seeing glamorously dressed female news anchors taken off the air and replaced by 'dowdy women in scarves.'"²² Subsequently, the fighting and the Taliban would claim the lives of her brother and husband, who died of tuberculosis after being imprisoned by the Taliban. During this time Koofi worked for the United Nations Children's Fund, and so, did have some interaction in the public sphere as an advocate.

After the invasion of 2001, Koofi entered into politics after deciding she would "marry politics" and not another husband. Koofi articulates a stern warning of what may happen if the Taliban are allowed to participate in government, as reconciliation talks with the United States suggest this may happen. In this article, and in Amanpour's

²² Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/17/world/fawzia-koofi-afghanistan-president/index.html>

interview, the threat of assassination Koofi lives with is consistently repeated. The target on her is another aspect of her story that makes her attractive to media outlets. Malalai Joya, another woman whose outspoken political stance and career in pursuit of equal rights for women in Afghanistan, was similarly popular amongst North American and Western European media outlets when she was targeted for assassination by fundamentalists. Unlike Koofi, however, whose story fits the larger narrative of Taliban oppression and Western liberation, Joya's direct critique of the U.S./allied occupation and her insistence that the occupation has hindered Afghan women's progress has diminished her popularity for these news venues. In her interview with Amanpour, Koofi makes the case for the presence of international troops until the 2014 election, when a "political transition (can take place) before the military transition."²³ Koofi is the kind of woman whose bravery and perspective, align her and position her as a counterpart to the women who photograph and interview her. Those female reporters also travel into dangerous zones, armed with a mission to document a humanitarian crisis and raise public awareness for the plight of otherwise invisible populations in the hopes of making material changes in the lives of these women.

Subversion and Subordination, Subverting Subordination and Us vs. Them

There is a visible placement of some Afghan women as 'closer' to the women who are taking the images, women who have agency, are liberated, and in fact function outside of gender categories as a 'Third Sex.' Portraits of subversion and subordination function as a way of differentiating women's actions as with "us" or in service of "them."

²³ Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1210/26/ampr.01.html>

Women like Koofi represent the evolution of Afghan women to a state that more closely resembles the state we imagine women to be in the Global North to have already achieved. The perception of women's liberation in North America and Western Europe in particular, is represented by the presence of these women. The images they produce identify certain types of behavior as resembling their own. This is especially obvious in depictions of subversion and subordination in the same image, or in images that appear alongside one another in a single series on Afghanistan. In images of women giving birth, for example, the prostrate woman giving birth who is in the most vulnerable state, is surrounded by female doctors and nurses engaged in life saving measures as giving birth in Afghanistan is such a risk. This image, by Paula Bronstein depicts one such scenario in which a baby has been delivered still-born in the birthing room at Badakshan

Provincial Hospital, in Faizabad.²⁴



Illustration 2. Stillborn birth, Badakshan Provincial Hospital by Paula Bronstein

²⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.reportagebygettyimages.com/paula-bronstein/#>



Photograph by Lynsey Addario

A Fortunate New Mother

After traveling in remote areas where most women give birth at home, without even a midwife, I was relieved to visit the hospital in Faizabad, a provincial capital. The hospital's women doctors, nurses, and midwives work around the clock. These Afghan women, who trained both in Russia and Kabul, have the skills and equipment to deal with complications in childbirth, even though they barely have enough funds for rubber gloves and gowns. I photographed Kokogol, 25, delivering twins, with her mother by her side.

Illustration 3: Live birth at Provincial Hospital by Lynsey Addario

This image comes from the same hospital, but is taken by photographer Lynsey Addario.²⁵ These are positions women were prohibited from occupying under the Taliban, they were not even permitted to gain the medical knowledge required to do the work. In these images, we see the routine work of a new generation of female doctors and nurses, taking care of women.

Sometimes these images depict the precarious quality of women's experience in Afghanistan at this time; women are at once experiencing some measure of freedom, but

²⁵ <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/12/afghan-women/addario-photography>

they are also still functioning under the social and cultural restrictions of the Taliban era, and the additional stresses of war. These images feature depictions of women exhibiting subversion and women exhibiting subordination in the same space. Stephanie Sinclair photographs the candidate Siddiqi, laughing and smiling, her face exposed, while several women covered in burqas stand behind her unmoving, their expressions obscured.²⁶



Illustration 4: The Candidate by Stephanie St. Clair

In de Viguerie's essay, the image of self-immolation victim Gulalai being held by her despondent mother is followed by an image of Gulalai's prostrate figure on the bed, her face contorted in pain, while a female police officer who has come to take her statement stands in the foreground, facing the camera directly²⁷. Her proximity to the camera, and her upright stance in relationship to the scarred and bandaged woman laying down in the background, brings her literally 'closer' to the camera and by extension to the audience.

²⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.stephaniesinclair.com/afghanturningpoint/>

²⁷ Retrieved from <http://vero-de-viguerie.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/AFGHANISTAN-INCHALLAH/G0000ePj3LMOXypQ/I0000i4uR7dK5LDE>

Her position of authority, of police authority in particular, in a space where women's authority is continually undermined and women in prominent positions are in danger of retaliation, bring her 'closer' to the photographer who is taking her picture, and the audiences who shall see this image 'back home.'

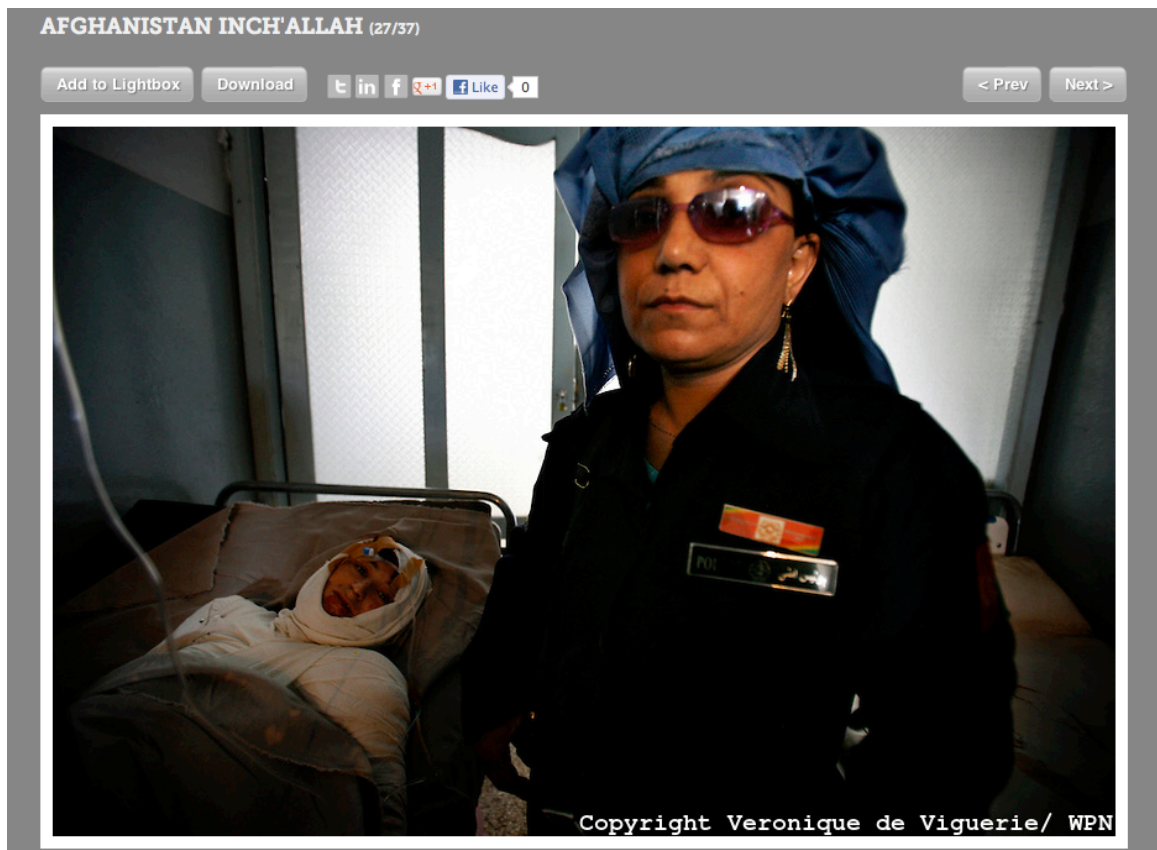


Illustration 5: Victim and Police Officer by Veronique de Viguerie

There are yet other moments in which subordination and subversion are depicted in the same image, as performed simultaneously by the same woman. These images have the most potential for challenging the dominant narrative in which Afghan women are either only subordinating or subverting the order of Afghan society. This at once opens the scope of perceptions of Afghan women, allowing us to consider that women can display agency while inhabiting norms, as well as when they are pushing against them, as

Saba Mahmood posits in her analysis of women engaged in the piety movement in Egypt (2005). Islamic religious practice in particular, is associated with the subjugation of women and with anti-liberal tendencies. Depictions of women engaged in Islamic practice who we also know to be engaged in working towards gender equality in Muslim societies, poses a fundamental challenge to Orientalist narrative in which Muslim societies use Islamic practice as a means of subjugating women, and therefore all Islamic practice subjugates women. The audience has come to associate symbols of Islamic practice (whether it is a fair or accurate depiction of Islamic practice), like wearing the burqa, or engaging in prayer, with women's oppression.

This is sometimes the inadvertent result of the desire to enfold what is seen in these images with the dominant narrative about religious belief and the inevitable oppression of Muslim women who subscribe to that belief, and the ways in which the Taliban were imposing that belief on women externally. When the presence of the burqa persists in public, even after the Taliban's fall, its continued presence contradicts the narrative that Afghan women have long awaited foreign intervention so that they may throw off the burqa, and that the only reason the burqa was worn was because the Taliban dictated it should be so. However, the desire to depict Afghan women engaging in political agency in order to enforce the depiction of Afghanistan's progress, means that images of women voting are in demand, even when they are still wearing the burqa. This is the case with an image by Paula Bronstein in her reportage for Getty images, which shows a young woman covered completely in a burqa, placing a ballot in a voting box. Similarly, Kate Brooks also features an image of the tops of women's covered heads

as they crowd around a door. Stephanie Sinclair features a similar image of “burqa-clad” women voting in Nazarabad in her essay, “Afghan Turning Point.”²⁸

Illustration

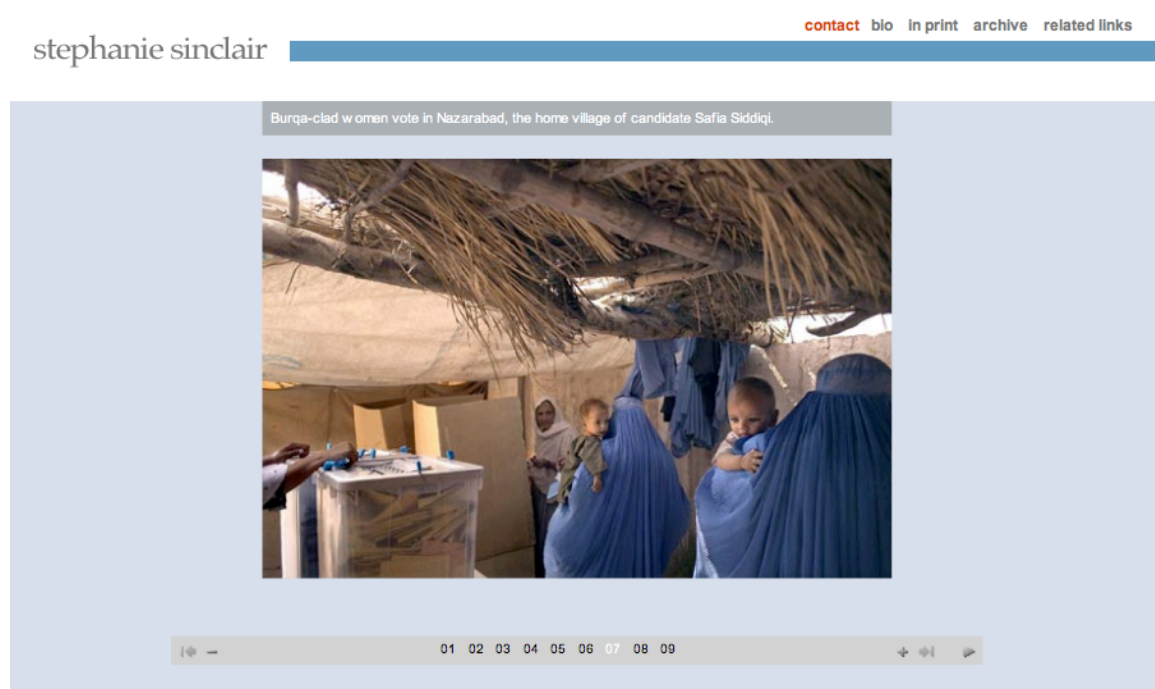


Illustration 6: Burqa Clad Women by Stephanie Sinclair

Though these women are subordinating, in the sense that they have not “thrown off” the burqa in the wake of the Taliban, they are using the burqa to be outside so that they can participate in their nation’s political process, an act of overt subversion to the order imposed by the Taliban. These images don’t disrupt the binary, in and of themselves, but do demonstrate some of the complexities associated with the portrayal of Afghan women in this period.

Another indication of this complexity are images of women who we ‘the audience’ know are engaged in subversion through their professional and activist activities, but who are shown in the image engaged in prayer. Prayer is a complex point,

²⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.stephaniesinclair.com/afghanturningpoint/>

as it references the adherence of these women to religious beliefs. Those religious beliefs are where many contributors to the discourse on Afghan women's liberation in North America and Western Europe locate the root of Afghan women's oppression. Brooks' image of Nasser, the human rights lawyer, is taken in her home as she is praying. Sinclair's images of the candidate Saima Khogiani includes one in which she sits on the floor praying alongside the caption, "...Khogiani prays inside her home before the parliamentary election in Jalalabad. 'Please God, help me to win,' she asked. 'I want to be a servant for my people.'"²⁹ In this situation, Khogiani's religious practice is in service of the aims of higher principles of gender equality, and women's participation in the political processes of this country. Using Islamic practice to draw strength from, in order to subvert the current order, challenges the basic perception that women in Afghanistan practice religion because they lack awareness or consciousness of how they ought to be.

These portrayals are not necessarily created by these journalists to challenge dominant Orientalist perceptions about Muslim women, Islam and agency. Rather, they are a byproduct of the desire to document all aspects of Afghan women's experiences. Religious belief is an inherent component of Afghan life and culture. Portraying women's experience without portraying religious belief, or the wearing of the burqa, would not be accurate. So, how is religious belief interpolated in the binary of subversion and subordination? It is seen through agents of subversion, who utilize religious belief to subvert the order created by the Taliban and enter the public sphere as professionals, advocates, and politicians. This is the ultimate form of subversion against the Taliban who use religion and its practice to justify excluding women from these very roles. It also

²⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.stephaniesinclair.com/afghanturningpoint/>

capitalizes on the ‘advantage’ these photojournalists have as the ‘third sex.’ As the ‘third sex’ these journalists have access to the private homes of these women who act subversively in the public sphere, and they are able to observe them in the private act of prayer. Not to photograph Afghan women in the home, or publish those images, would be to fail to capitalize on the marketplace value of the ‘third sex’s position.

Producing Images of Subordination and Suffering from the Perspective of the Third Sex

Like their print colleagues, these women also use the language of the ‘third sex’ to describe themselves. French freelance photographer Veronique de Viguerie explains to one interviewer, “As a foreigner and a woman, ‘you’re kind of a third sex... You’re not really a man, but not really a woman. It’s kind of convenient.”³⁰ Jacky Rowland a correspondent from the BBC also invokes the term the ‘third sex,’ saying that in the context of Muslim societies women like her are ‘different creatures.’³⁰ The experiences of these woman have as the ‘third sex’ becomes relevant because of the way in which the tropes about Afghan women are positioned in terms of their proximity to the experiences of women in North America and Western Europe who comprise, at least in part, the imagined audiences for these images. It is against the construction of this liberated woman that the actions and experiences of Afghan women are measured and seen. Her embodiment is in the reporter herself, who is an exemplar of this liberated woman, viewing the suffering and challenges faced by Afghan women.

³⁰ Friedman, D. June 12, 2010. “The World’s Bravest Photographer.”
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/06/12/veronique-de-viguerie-fearless-photographer.html>

³⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2002/06/female-war-correspondents-200206>

As women traveling from North America and Western Europe to the war zone, they are exercising an autonomy over their own mobility that most of the women they encounter do not have. They are working in a profession of their choosing that takes them out of the home, into the world –at –large, to the front lines of war zones. Their voluntary presence in the war zone speaks to their exceptional abilities, in contrast to the depictions of Afghan women who have no choice but to live in the war zone. This is a juxtaposition that emphasizes the distance of Afghan women’s experience from those of women in North America and Western Europe, the former is depicted as the ultimate in suffering and the authors of those depictions, the ultimate in autonomy. On the ground, the concept of the ‘third sex,’ translates to particular advantages for these photojournalists, as their colleagues in the previous chapter asserted it did for them. In explaining the complexity of navigating this landscape, Stephanie Sinclair offers this about moving about in Afghanistan:

When I work in Afghanistan I have to wear a headscarf, because you can’t just walk around without a headscarf, especially in rural areas. This one day my headscarf had slipped back so I was putting it back on. And the women pulled it back off me and wanted to make sure they had a photograph with me without it on. Even when I think I’m dressed very conservatively, I’m still not wearing the full burka. I was walking by a group of women in a park in Herat and they were saying in Dari, “Ah, I can’t believe she’s walking around that way. It must feel so good.”³¹

Though the reporter cannot eschew modesty or covering entirely, she is not required to cover in the way Afghan women are. The difference is tangible, and evident also to the Afghan women she encounters. They want to photograph her, document her, as much as she wants to document them, but they are simply a group of anonymous women who don’t have authorship in the way she does. The images taken of her by these Afghan

³¹ http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/flash_point/afghanistan/interview.html

women will circulate in the realm of personal communications and exchanges, and in contrast the images taken of these Afghan women will circulate in international news outlets. Their foreignness is actively deployed in the discourse, while a discussion of her foreignness, and the curiosity that she represents, will not make it into the same public discourse.

Their position also translates to a form of accessibility (as was documented in the previous chapter also), which can be of significant use to persons with their particular objectives, to get into restricted spaces and find the hidden story. This is especially true in Afghanistan, and when it comes to accessing Afghan women, as Lynsey Addario tells her interviewer at The New York Times:

In the Muslim world, most of my male colleagues can't enter private homes. They can't hang out with very conservative Muslim families. I have always been able to. It's not easy to get the right to photograph in a house, but at least I have one foot in the door. I've always found it a great advantage, being a woman.³²

Addario also asserts the overall advantage of being a woman in the war zone. In response to an interviewer's inquiry about the safety of female journalists like herself after a discussion of her own physical and sexual assault at the hands of Libyan military, she states

If a woman wants to be a war photographer, she should. It's important. Women offer a different perspective. We have access to women on a different level than men have, just as male photographers have a different relationship with the men they're covering.³³

What a female journalist can provide in terms of content to a news organizations is related specifically to gender, and the relationships they can develop because of it. These

³² Retrieved from <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/lynsey-addario-its-what-i-do/>

³³ Retrieved from <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/lynsey-addario-its-what-i-do/>

interview excerpts illustrate how their experience on the ground translates to an awareness of their difference from Afghan women in terms of citizenship, mobility, race, and socio-economic status, while their gender also functions as a ‘common cause’ through which they can relate to their subjects.

How does this perceived state of exceptionalism, the position of the ‘third sex’ impact how they go about creating images of Afghan women in terms of ‘who’ they choose to depict, and ‘what’ they choose to depict them doing? The subjects they select to portray, the acts they choose to capture, are not random. As this analysis shows, these journalists happen upon many of the same subjects, and their images focus on common themes, both of which serve specific purposes in this discourse. This is facilitated in part by the infrastructure of the War on Terror, where they must engage a number of networks of contacts in order to gain access to these subjects, like military units, drivers and translators, and organizations on the ground that are invested in getting the stories of these women heard. Additionally, their position as the ‘third sex’ creates an additional dimension to the relationship between observer and subject.

Mobility on the Ground, and the Infrastructure of the War on Terror

Though these women do not photograph Afghan women interacting with military units, references to their own interactions with these entities are scattered throughout. For example, CNN’s Atia Abawi describes her own elation in her reporting at learning she will have the opportunity to interact with Afghan women, as her time in Afghanistan is

spent primarily with “Afghan men and Western men.”³⁴ Abawi’s experience proves to be indicative of the norm for these journalists, as the stories and photographs produced by both photojournalists and television correspondents, show. Their primary interactions are with Western men and Afghan men because these are the populations who make up the military and security forces, guides/drivers and translators, who accompany these journalists as they travel around the country. Kate Brooks’ photographic essays on her time in Afghanistan, which began almost immediately in the wake of the declaration of the War on Terror, feature numerous images of Afghan and Western (British and American) soldiers. One essay shows starving and emaciated Taliban fighters held at Sheberghan Prison in late 2001. Erin Trieb’s images document her experience as an embed with an American platoon in Afghanistan. Embedding is one the new channels of entry created for journalists after the declaration of the War on Terror, and these journalists do not shy away from using military units as modes of travel in Afghanistan. ,

The additional appeal of embedding for photojournalists, television correspondents, and their writer colleagues, is the proximity it provides to front line action. Veronica de Viguerie’s photo essay, “Afghanistan Inch’allah,” similarly depicts troops and combatants from all sides, suggesting she spent time with British and American soldiers, and also had access to Taliban fighters³⁵. It is in her description of her ability to access Taliban fighters in particular, that de Viguerie invokes her position as ‘third sex.’ Access to the Taliban is described as “the Holy Grail for photographers in

³⁴ Retrieved from <http://afghanistan.blogs.cnn.com/2010/08/04/meetings-with-bibi-aisha-then-and-now/>

³⁵ Retrieved from <http://vero-de-viguerie.photoshelter.com/gallery/AFGHANISTAN-INCHALLAH/G0000ePj3LMOXypQ/>

the country.”³⁰ De Viguerie believes it may not have been possible had she not been female, perceived at once to be non-threatening, and also outside of the purview of the Taliban’s dominion over Afghan women who they consider part of their societies and communities. The intersection of gender, and her status as a foreigner, allows her proximity to a subject that has value for all war zone photojournalists, and her ability to capitalize on that intersection in this instance contributes to the perception of her as an exceptional, courageous reporter.

One additional note on this emphasis on men in the experience of these journalists is the way in which it is illustrative of how the War on Terror has changed circumstances on the ground. Their travel with military units signals a shift away from the ways in which female journalists accessed Afghan women prior to the invasion. Prior to the U.S./allied invasion the Taliban exercised strict control over the borders of Afghanistan and public spaces. During this time, atrocities against Afghan women were made known to these journalists by RAWA, who had the organization and access needed to record these atrocities³¹. RAWA is not involved in the publicization of Bibi Aisha’s story, signaling the alternative pathways of access to Afghan women created by the U.S./allied invasion. These are the experiences they then transpose to audiences ‘back home.’ In the wake of the invasion, there is an alternative structure in place and the women tend to travel with teams who are now negotiating the war zone.

Humanism, Heroism and the Third Sex

³⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/06/12/veronique-de-viguerie-fearless-photographer.html>

³¹ November 17th, 1999. Taliban Publicly Execute Woman. Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/murder-w.htm>

The complexity that is more visible in these latter portrayals speaks to the potential for photojournalism as a medium to pose a challenge to the dominant narrative. While these reporters must rely heavily on the infrastructure of the War on Terror to move around in Afghanistan, their presence on the ground, in the moment, and their desire to capture hidden narratives always holds the potential to move beyond the circumscribed narrative of subordination and subversion. The potential to move beyond the binary is also due to gender. This is not because they as women possess any essential ability to be more humane or moral in their perspective, but rather that the role gender plays in their reporting is related to the traditional perception of war zone journalism (and front lines of combat zones in general) as the purview of men. This viewpoint obscures histories of women's presence on the front lines of all conflicts (as soldiers, medical personnel, civilians, sex workers and reporters). (Enloe, 1983 & 2000) Historically, female photojournalists have had to push against barriers in news organizations and on the front lines to be seen as credible and to get assignments. the presence of these women also suggests an adversarial component to the patriarchal structures of Western societies, which sought to prevent them from being there to begin with. It is from the position of women who are now subverting the prevalent gender norms of their own societies that they portray Afghan women's experience, and as such, there is significantly more potential for them to portray Afghan women's subversion in ways that complicate the binary, or challenge the ways in which the burqa and/or religious observance are always aligned with the oppression of Afghan women in the discourse on the War on Terror.

Women's participation in war zone journalism evolved from the exceptional participation of one or two women to the more general presence of women amongst the

ranks of foreign correspondents and hard news journalists in the 1960's and 70's, at the same time that second wave feminism was forcing a reconsideration of women's roles in the workplace. In this discourse, the ubiquitous presence of female reporters in the war zone today functions as evidence of the progress that has taken place in the West in regards to gender. In the same way, these reporters' depictions of Afghan women as professionals or political actors function as evidence of Afghanistan's progress in the images they produce. In this way, the work of female photojournalists in the war zone is already inextricably linked to the notion of women's progress. Therefore, when they photograph women in other places who do not have the same ability to be educated, mobile, and to author the narrative themselves, they are always simultaneously 'present' in the images they produce. In this way, the women who take the photographs come to represent 'us' in two ways: by virtue of their presence, the portrayal of the relative liberation First World women enjoy, and also, in the way they orient these images towards audiences in the West. Further on, I will discuss the narratives they create using words about their experiences in Afghanistan, which are created for audiences in North America and Western Europe.

As a group, female photojournalists made significant inroads into war reporting only in the late 20th century on. Large numbers of women working as reporters on the front lines were uncommon in Vietnam, Korea and WWI and WWII³². But, there were already a few 'exceptional' women working as female war reporters before then. Martha Gellhorn and Margaret Bourke-White for example, were renowned for their reporting during the World Wars of the early Twentieth Century. Bourke-White's photographs

³² Retrieved from <http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=1513> Ricchiardi, S. (March 1994). "Women on War." Journalism Review.

circulated widely in publications like Life Magazine; she shot their first cover in November of 1936. Bourke-White documented some of the more gruesome aspects of war: death camps and beheadings of prisoners, earning herself a significant place in the history of wartime journalism as a whole. She also captured iconic images that have become embedded in the collective consciousness, including the 1946 image of Ghandi reading cross-legged on the floor, a hand loom at the forefront and the 1945 image of prisoners at Buchenwald concentration camp gazing out at the photographer through a barbed wire fence³³. While photographing the war zone however, Bourke-White adhered to the norms of the day and voluntarily submitted her work for state censors. This example not only illustrates a tradition in the United States of managing public perceptions of conflicts, but also the willingness of journalists to be complicit in these efforts. She is talked about as a pioneer of the field, and the example for the reporters who followed her. Written histories of these women's experiences enforce the notion that these women were exceptional, describing them as "a rare unusual breed."³⁴ The legacy of these exceptional women, and the documents of their experiences as intrepid reporters, characterizes the goal of female correspondents today who are competing with an exponentially higher number of journalists Bourke-White and her handful of colleagues ever were.

The femininity of the reporters themselves is ingrained in this history of procuring the story, and this becomes evident when we examine popular retellings of the narrative

³³ Retrieved from <http://life.time.com/history/liberation-of-buchenwald-the-story-behind-an-iconic-life-photo-1945/#1>

³⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.thehistorychannelclub.com/articles/articletype/articleview/articleid/67/ladies-behind-the-lens>

of women journalists in war zones. A 2002 Vanity Fair Magazine article, “The Girls at the Front” on the intrepid correspondents of today, inscribes femininity into the particular history and experience of female reporters in this way:

Colvin cringes at the notion that “women care about dying babies” and men don’t. And, to be sure, the point is often debated among female war reporters and their male colleagues. Nevertheless, it’s no coincidence that most members of the group revere Martha Gellhorn, the grande dame of women war reporters (once married to Ernest Hemingway), whose accounts of the Spanish Civil War and beyond reflected an interest not so much in bombs as in what lay beneath them—and a devotion to her own conscience. Patrick Graham, a longtime journalist who has met several of the women, admits that only someone like Marie Colvin would have hopped out of a car just because she saw a man sitting on the side of the road. As it happened, he was sitting by the grave of his young child and wife, who had warned him to leave town because Serbs were encroaching. “It was an incredible story,” says Graham. “And I think a lot of male reporters would have been too busy trying to find the next commander.”³⁵

These sentiments are part of an on-going conversation about the work of female correspondents and their ability to capture the ‘human’ element of conflict, to the point of attempting to locate this innate affinity scientifically, enlisting psychologist and scholars to explain this phenomenon³⁶. More importantly, the female journalists themselves agree with these assessments, despite wanting to be seen as equal to their male counterparts.

Though the women who work as correspondents work hard to be seen and treated as equals to their male colleagues, they are always simultaneously differentiating, and differentiated, by their gendered perspective on front line action. The purview of female correspondents then, is the human impact of the war. This is linked to the historical narrative of war correspondence and women journalists through Gellhorn’s reporting, implying that this is the common and continuous perspective of women who report on

³⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2002/06/female-war-correspondents-200206>

³⁶ Retrieved from www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=1513

war zones. Marie Claire published an article in late 2011 on the world “Through the Eyes of Female Photographers,” that celebrates both the bravado of female photojournalists in the war zone, “where fear and violence are standard occupational hazards,” and simultaneously proffers “the female lens” as a different viewpoint that allows these women to see “beyond the chaos and carnage” to find “extraordinary moments of humanity and heroism.”³⁷ In capturing humanity and heroism on the ground, these journalists reflect the values associated with their particular vision of women’s liberation. They too are present in these circumstances, and in many cases the attribution of heroism and humanity to the journalists themselves.

In an article on Veronica de Viguerie “The World’s Bravest Photographer” in June of 2010, heralds de Viguerie as a breakout star amongst the photojournalists of her generation. This is based in large part on the fearlessness she exhibits in her pursuit of documenting “the human cost” of violence. The article opens with a description of de Viguerie’s recent time with Somali pirates, “It wasn’t the first time the young French photographer had sought out a risky assignment, but this was perhaps the riskiest yet,” Danielle Friedman writes. This narrative is reiterated in the article’s description of de Viguerie’s experience of surviving a suicide bombing in Kabul “unscathed” and persevering, by deciding to remain in Afghanistan. De Viguerie is attributed further credibility because she chose to live in Afghanistan, having first been sent there by a small English newspaper to cover the war in 2003, rather than parachute in. Within this discussion of de Viguerie’s intrepid nature as a photographer, there is an explicit association between de Viguerie’s gender and her ability to access subjects other

³⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.marieclaire.com/world-reports/inspirational-women/female-photojournalists#slide-1>

photojournalists cannot. Her accounts of accessing both the Somali pirates and Taliban fighters, show that her perception is that her gender was invaluable to getting those subjects to agree to her presence. In the case of the Somali pirates, she inspired surprise and amusement she tells the reporter, “Her unthreatening demeanor, she believes, was part of what allowed her access to their rarely documented world,” and of herself she says, “she felt only, ‘a kind of apprehension, but not real fear.’”³⁸

This sense of fearlessness has a specific and practical purpose in the professional lives of these women, it is the process by which they establish credibility in a field that is considered naturally better suited to men. For these women then, it becomes a necessity to establish themselves as equal to their male colleagues in their willingness to travel to the most remote and dangerous locales in order to get the story. This is partly evident in the ways that their professional biographies are reported. Paula Bronstein’s website biography states that in 1998, she “chose to go freelance, basing herself in Bangkok,”³⁹ far from her original home base in the United States, ostensibly so she would be better positioned to go after certain international stories. Like de Viguerie, many of the photographers spend time living in the places they cover. A 2007 blurb published about Stephanie Sinclair indicates that she lived in Beirut for a time, covering the Israel-Hezbollah conflict⁴⁰. This entrenchment bolsters the credibility of the perspective of these journalists, and the confidence that they are portraying an accurate vision of what is happening on the ground. When their work contributes arguments either implicitly, or

³⁸ Friedman, D. (2010). The World’s Bravest Photographer. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/06/12/veronique-de-viguerie-fearless-photographer.html>

³⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.warphotold.com/?section=museum&page=2&item=2&author=28>

⁴⁰ Retrieved from <http://m.npr.org/story/5567884>

explicitly, to the case for ongoing occupation or troop withdrawal, these points of view are taken seriously, as evidence provided by experts.

Their travel to and coverage of Afghanistan is part of a specific demand for content on Afghanistan, and the U.S./allied War in Afghanistan, after 911. Some women, like Stephanie Sinclair, are sent to Afghanistan by a publication to document a specific aspect of Afghan women's experiences. In this case, Marie Claire assigned Sinclair to photograph women who have self-immolated in Afghanistan in 2003. Later on in the war, Jodie Bieber sent there by Time Magazine for the story by Aryn Baker, she was sent to photograph 18 women Baker had already interviewed, so her subjects were pre-selected. Other of these photographers come to Afghanistan on their own, knowing that the events taking place in Afghanistan will be in high demand. Kate Brooks came to Pakistan herself after the events of 911. She was in Russia when the attacks took place, and therefore well positioned to travel directly to Pakistan. Similarly, Paula Bronstein was already situated in Bangkok in 2001, when the attacks of 911 happen. Though she was freelance, her proximity to the conflict and willingness to live there means that by 2002 she is working for Getty fulltime in Afghanistan. Erin Trieb was interning in 2004 at a newspaper in Israel; after the declaration of the War on Terror, proximity dictated that she work in Afghanistan recording the war.

These photojournalists have received significant public recognition and accolades for this work, which further bolsters their credibility and entrenches their vision of Afghanistan. Their photographs appear regularly in major publications like The New York Times, Newsweek, Time Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, National Geographic and many, many others. As such, the images they take help create our perception of the

reality of warfare in Afghanistan, and these other places. Jodi Bieber is perhaps the most well known of these examples, Lynsey Addario received a Pulitzer in 2009 as part of The New York Times team reporting on Afghanistan, and for the series "Talibanistan." She also received the 2010 Overseas Press Club of America/The Olivier Rebbot Award for Best Photographic Reporting from abroad for magazines and books, for her series "Veiled Rebellion: Afghan Women" in National Geographic Magazine. In 2010, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship

For photographic essays on Afghanistan and Iraq depicting the underlying realities of war: the pain, confusion, and exhilaration of being a soldier; the daily struggles for civilians, especially children, living in a war zone; and the lives of Taliban leaders. As well as Addario's work is capturing the lives of women in male-dominated societies.⁴¹

Erin Trieb won a 2010 Pictures of the Year International Award for her photo essay on a U.S. military medical unit in Afghanistan; another example of Trieb's gravitation towards marginal, gendered spaces of warfare that are generally overlooked. Paula Bronstein was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 2011, for her contribution to a "compelling portrayal of the human will to survive as historic floods engulfed regions of Pakistan."⁴²

Beyond the images they produce, these women also use words in various ways to communicate their experiences in Afghanistan. Their recollections become important sources of knowledge, especially for other media producers. More specifically, these women are often asked to give their accounts of being female in these war zones, and in 'the Muslim world.' Stephanie Sinclair gives her account of her time in Baghdad to the newspaper that hired her to travel there and cover the war for it. She is interviewed by

⁴¹ Retrieved from <http://www.lynseyaddario.com/#!/info/awards-education>

⁴² Retrieved from <http://www.pulitzer.org/citation/2011-Breaking-News-Photography>

NPR about Lebanon in 2006⁴³ about the conflict there, and also interviewed by PBS about her experiences in Afghanistan.⁴⁴ Erin Trieb, Paula Bronstein, Jodi Bieber, Marie Colvin, Andrea Bruce and Kate Brooks all have their experiences recorded in interviews with various news outlets. Brooks' words and images are published by Foreign Policy Magazine under the headline "What War Looks Like," though of course, this is War from her perspective.

Certain accounts, of the perils that face women in 'the Muslim world' are always in demand, and global political historical events simply increase it. After the Abu-Ghraib scandal erupted in 2004, Molly Bingham's experience as a prisoner there became newsworthy. Iraqi police, still under the direction of Saddam Hussein, arrested Bingham as she covered the run-up to the War in Iraq. After the scandal, Bingham gives her own account of her time in Abu Ghraib, which she frames in this way

I had a plethora of choices on how to cover this war. I have been lucky enough to have a plethora of choices in my entire life. In fact, the only time I haven't had choices, I think, was during the eight days in Abu Ghraib prison, my life was out of my hands... I began to feel more convinced, after months of thinking I didn't want to be in Baghdad for the war, that it was the place for me to be... My professional situation was not fixed either, which gave me more freedom. I was pretty sure that if I could get into Baghdad before the war I would get an assignment.

I felt very strongly that being in Baghdad was the most important, significant place to be to cover the war, and the what happened to the civilians there during the bombing, and that I had the capacity to do that now; visa, preparation, timing, no boss to tell me I couldn't, and that these things had come together and I would go. So I did.

Through the eight days I spent in Abu Ghraib I never once questioned the decision I'd made, or wished I'd done it differently. That mental preparation over the months, and that final night, making that decision, somehow prepared me for

⁴³ Retrieved from <http://m.npr.org/story/5567884>

⁴⁴ <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2011/07/young-married-and-photographed.html>

being in prison. It is hard for me to know if I would have felt differently if I was tortured, I may well have. But as it is, as it was, the conviction of why I had been in Baghdad at all, and what I'd come to do, that conviction was never shaken in me, and I used it as my foundation every time I was interrogated.⁴⁵

The narrative that she lays out here has all the markers of the humanistic and heroic dynamic, while also maintaining a sense of the danger inherent in being a woman in 'the Muslim world.' Bingham's experience, and the particular location of Abu-Ghraib prison, proved to have a appeal to multiple networks; she was interviewed by Deborah Norville for the television cable network MSNBC, and by Barbara Walters for the ABC news network. Lynsey Addario and her captivity in 2011 during the conflict in Libya brought her similar attention, with interviews on Charlie Rose, NPR, articles in Marie Claire and The New York Times. The news outlets who interview her show particular interest in the details of sexual assault in Addario's story, illustrating a heightened anxiety amongst professional news organizations about women's additional vulnerabilities in the war zone. This is a tendency that Addario herself finds frustrating, asserting that what she suffered (sexual, as well as physical, assault) was not qualitatively more traumatizing than the abuse her male colleagues suffered.

Beyond this, these photojournalists have published their images and recollections as stand alone published projects. In some cases, these projects are specifically about their experience, as in Brooks' In the Light of Darkness: A Photographer's Journey, excerpts of which were published in Time Magazine. The interest in Brooks' story has a great deal to do with the how young she was when she first began going to this war zone (age 23). The vulnerability of gender is compounded by her age. Paula Bronstein has also published a memoir of her time in Afghanistan, Afghanistan: Between Life and War,

⁴⁵ Retrieved from http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0307/dis_bingham.html

originally titled, A Fragile Peace: Afghanistan. In a 2009 blog for The Digital Journalist, Bronstein explains the name change resulted from, “the deteriorating state of affairs in the country. I am definitely taking the word peace out and possibly replacing it with war.”⁴⁶ Her photographs she writes, document the “war wounded,” which she did at two hospitals in Kabul and the ICRC (The International Red Cross Orthopedic Center). Without embedding Bronstein explains, a journalist does not have access to the front while the wounding is taking place. She was relegated to the secondary location, the hospitals, where she met and photographed people injured in the fighting.

In these images, Bronstein documents the result of fighting ascribed to the U.S. forces and the Taliban. She includes many images of women and girls, savagely wounded by the impact of war, both from the Taliban and U.S./allied forces. But, even in documenting that impact, Bronstein’s lament for these women has more to do with the culture of Afghanistan in which these war wounded must now live. Jamalo, shown in her wheel chair, is now a paraplegic after her home was caught in the crossfire between foreign troops and insurgents. For this “beautiful young girl” Bronstein writes,

Her story is more tragic because she comes from Ghazni, one of many Taliban-infested towns where as a handicapped female she has little hope of education or marriage. The role of the Afghan female is to become a mother, raise the children and do the chores around the house. A handicapped female becomes a burden to the family if she can't be married off.⁴⁷

Though the war is responsible for her injuries, Bronstein locates the primary source of this young woman’s circumstances in terms of Afghan culture. She laments what appears to her to be the never-ending cycle of poverty and abuse in Afghanistan, but does not include a specific critique of the ways that war perpetuates those cycles, despite

⁴⁶ Retrieved from <http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0912/afghanistan-blog.html>

⁴⁷ Retrieved from <http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0912/afghanistan-blog.html>

documenting them for so long.

Bronstein also expresses a desire to “help” these women, as do many of their counterparts. And, there is evidence to show that they feel like helping is a part of what they do, part of witnessing. On Jodi Bieber’s professional site is a link to The Bibi Aisha Fund, set up to help the subject whose portrait brought Bieber a great deal of recognition publicly. The Fund is set up through Women for Afghan Women, to whom Stephanie Sinclair also provides a link to on her website, alongside other organizations set up to help Afghan women, and child brides in general. The statement provided for the website, states that Aisha is “the quintessential survivor: strong, defiant, determined,” and “poised, charming, witty” and despite her lack of education, she demonstrates “a powerful native intelligence.” Though other media accounts of Aisha describe her alternately as frightened, shy, child like, petulant and funny, this description describes Aisha in terms that clearly reference liberal conceptualizations of what a woman with agency is ‘like.’

Heroism and Humanism and Television Correspondents

The threads of humanism and heroism are also evident when we examine the history of women in television in journalism in the United States. When the history of women in television is told, it is told as a story of progress. In the early days of television, women were portrayed primarily in relationship to others, as wife and mother, and primarily in the realm of the home. Over time, portrayals of women have expanded, though there is still significant criticism to be made of these portrayals, and women’s roles in television have expanded. This is certainly true for television news, though again, challenges to women’s full participation remain, particularly for women of color. Female

television journalists began making headway in deeply masculinized industry, which was ambivalent about their presence. In the United States, prior to the 1970s network executives were not convinced that women would be taken seriously by news audiences, or be seen as trust-worthy. Because femininity was, and often still is, associated with a hyper emotionality and irrationality, the presence of women was considered antithetical to the act of disseminating important information to the public. Disseminating hard news about domestic and world events is characterized as the domain of serious, rational (and therefore male) discourse, despite the sensationalism and propaganda that is often the basis for reporting on the interests of the United States, at home and in the world.

This did not necessarily mean that women were absent from television news programming, only that their roles were limited to presenting information considered within the purview of women, such as household related advice and the weather. NBC's The Today Show employed "Today Girls" for these assignments. Addressing adult women in juvenile terms, and identifying them in terms of gender emphasized their peripheral function in the dissemination of information. These trends reflected the gender norms of the advertising culture on television, which bled into newscasts. Advertising heavily identified women with the realm of domestic work not civic contribution, and this reinforced the sense that women were not capable of delivering hard news. In the same period that the second wave feminist movement emerged and became visible in the United States, women on television began to transition out of the Today girl mold and into regular slots as news anchors. Yet, they were still co-anchoring the news with older, male anchors who were considered more trustworthy, and even their colleagues did not receive their presence well. When Barbara Walters became the first female co-anchor of a

network evening news show for ABC in 1976, her co-anchor Harry Reasoner was openly hostile towards Walters on air.⁴⁸ It is not until 2008 that a woman, Katie Couric anchors a network nightly newscast alone, after spending over a decade co-anchoring the morning news and entertainment show on CBS, *Today*; even by then, a female news anchor was still considered a daring experiment.

Many of the women in U.S. television of Couric's generation, followed a similar trajectory as Couric and Walters, transitioning from more traditional roles to being credible, highly visible television reporters. Diane Sawyer famously competed on the beauty pageant circuit before becoming a journalist. A 2009 photographic profile of Sawyer on The Huffington Post begins with a photograph of a smiling, newly crowned Sawyer in 1963. This slideshow captures Sawyer's rise from beauty queen to correspondent to morning show anchor in 1981, and television magazine journalist and evening news anchor in the mid-to-late 80's, until finally she became solo news anchor of the ABC nightly news broadcast in 2009. Her career evolved over a period of time in which women's roles on changed fairly dramatically, and one can chart these changes in her evolution from a peripheral figure to a respected journalist. There are several experiences in Sawyer's career that have helped this transition along. Her work as an assistant press secretary in the Nixon Whitehouse, and subsequently as his aide through the 1970's, is certainly one of those experiences. As a journalist however, she broke out of the mold of features and entertainment reporter by pursuing assignments such as covering women's oppression by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

⁴⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Walters-becomes-first-female-co-anchor-3215591.php>

It is important to note that Sawyer's interest in Afghan women pre-dated the War on Terror, and the emergence of Afghanistan as a place of geo-political importance in the imagination of global audiences. When Sawyer initially traveled there in 1996, Afghanistan was a Third World nation whose sole remnant of importance to the U.S. politically, was as a former site of struggle for power with the Soviet Union. Then, the Taliban's ascension to power and subsequent oppression of Afghans was treated as a human rights issue, for which there would be no repercussions from the state. Her report for the television newsmagazine show *PrimeTime Live*, was an opportunity for Sawyer to marry the human rights interests of newsmagazine journalism with the legitimacy of foreign investigative journalism. This meant that she would sneak into Afghanistan and surreptitiously interview six Afghan women about life under the Taliban, which she was able to do successfully.

After the 9/11 attacks, and the declaration that the Taliban, and Afghanistan would be the target for War on Terror military operations, Sawyer's existing experience in Afghanistan positioned her well to return there and report on what was in that moment the most focused on part of the world for U.S. audiences in particular. The War on Terror provided Sawyer, and other female television correspondents the opportunity to build credibility by traveling to the war zone. For some, like NBC reporter Ashleigh Banfield, this was a new opportunity that brought them much needed visibility in national markets, and established their career as serious journalists. For a veteran like Sawyer, reporting on the War on Terror helped her transitioned entirely out of the magazine style journalism she was doing in primetime and daytime television, into the most coveted spot on a major network for a journalist – anchor of the national nightly news broadcast at ABC News.

Prior to 911, Banfield was a local reporter in Canada and then the United States. In September of 2001, Banfield reported from Ground Zero in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Her live reporting from what was in that moment a front line established a high public profile in American television news, and launched her career as an international correspondent. Banfield then made her way to frontlines in various parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, including Afghanistan. She participated in the production of a special series, *Afghan Journal*, producing several episodes, which include her reflections on her time and experiences in Afghanistan.

Though her work in Afghanistan, and during the War on Terror in general had poised Banfield to ascend to the ranks of fellow correspondents Christiane Amanpour, Sawyer, and Couric, Banfield's career was cut short by a hostile contractual dispute with NBC. The dispute erupted after she made critical remarks on reporting and warfare at television networks in a speech at Kansas State University in April of 2003. After extolling the virtues of embedding with military units in the war zone, Banfield asked her audience,

But what didn't you see? You didn't see where those bullets landed. You didn't see what happened when the mortar landed. A puff of smoke is not what a mortar looks like when it explodes, believe me. There are horrors that were completely left out of this war. So was this journalism or was this coverage-? There is a grand difference between journalism and coverage, and getting access does not mean you're getting the story, it just means you're getting one more arm or leg of the story. And that's what we got, and it was a glorious, wonderful picture that had a lot of people watching and a lot of advertisers excited about cable news. But it wasn't journalism, because I'm not so sure that we in America are hesitant to do this again, to fight another war, because it looked like a glorious and courageous and so successful terrific endeavor, and we got rid of a horrible leader: We got rid of a dictator, we got rid of a monster, but we didn't see what it took to do that.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Retrieved from
http://www.alternet.org/story/15778/msnbc%27s_banfield_slams_war_coverage

These remarks so raised the ire of television news executives that she was essentially removed from her position as on-air reporter, and had to begin her career over. In 2003, when Banfield made her remarks, the pro-war atmosphere was so thick that a journalist who questioned the methodology of war reporting could be effectively banned. The consequences meted out to journalists critical of the status quo indicates where the parameters of criticism lie when it comes to women who report from the war zone. The purpose of the reporting is to illuminate the ills on the ground in Iraq or Afghanistan, and to focus on the swift and decisive victory. When these female reporters provide accounts of their experiences under the oppression of the Taliban, this type of journalism is welcome. However, their experience as reporters, and their evaluations of the U.S. infrastructure of military and news media and the way those two institutions intersect is considered outside of the scope of their journalistic commentary. Productive though the War on Terror may be for a reporter like Banfield, only particular kinds of content about the War are welcome. When Banfield was reporting on the plight of Afghans on the front lines, directing her focus to human-interest stories that highlight the brutality of the Taliban, and even of warfare, she is lauded. However, reporting on the value of warfare to media companies, and to the state, comes too close to making a critique of the mutually beneficial relationships created by the infrastructure of warfare, and consequently the ways in which those relationships may lead media companies to misrepresent the reality and costs of humanitarian wars. Though a dictator was removed, the cost to the civilian population was high, and yet this was not evident in the victorious tone of the news coverage.

IV. CHAPTER 3: Documentary Film and the 'Third Sex'

The last two chapters have examined the concept of the 'third sex' as it emerges in the experiences of female print, photo, and television journalists traveling from North America to Afghanistan. This chapter expands that analysis to think about the 'third sex' in the realm of documentary filmmaking. Female documentary filmmakers traveling to Afghanistan from North America and Western Europe during the War on Terror add another dimension to the experience of the 'third sex' in this context, due in large part to the different conditions that govern their travel to Afghanistan and the different processes by which they go about accessing Afghan women. Documentary filmmakers come to Afghanistan in pursuit of a specific story or destination, and/or to follow a specific subject or group of subjects as they travel to Afghanistan for their own purposes. This is in contrast to journalists who arrive in Afghanistan and then travel networks of guides, state, military and non-profit agencies to access Afghan women. Journalists often come in contact with the same Afghan women as they travel these networks. This was the case with the young Afghan woman Bibi Aisha whose mutilation by her in-laws in rural Afghanistan was featured by multiple journalists who came in contact with her in 2009 and 2010 while she was housed at a woman's shelter in Kabul by the organization Women for Afghan Women.

The documentary filmmakers whose work I examine in this chapter, however, generally come to Afghanistan to record the story of a specific woman or group of women they already have a developed interest in. As such, they travel different paths while on the ground in Afghanistan, and though they often interact with the same agencies and organizations female journalists find themselves interacting with,

filmmakers ‘see’ the bureaucracy of the occupation from a different perspective. Their perspective on the experience of the ‘third sex’ is thusly changed, as they simultaneously rely on the slippage around gender to be mobile in Afghanistan and yet, are more likely to develop critical perspectives on this form of privilege and the institutional network of occupation that affords it to them. The length of the feature they plan to produce about Afghanistan also raises the potential for filmmakers to approach the subject differently from journalists, who are crafting a story for a minutes long television segment, a newspaper or magazine length print article, or a single or multi paged publication of images¹. Relatively speaking, feature length filmmakers have more time and space in the context of their media production to relate the story of a particular subject. The space afforded them in the context of a documentary film creates opportunities for challenges to the straight linear narrative in which Afghan women’s oppression is a strict byproduct of Taliban rule and foreign intervention to ‘remove’ the Taliban from formal governance has resulted in improved conditions for Afghan women.

Unlike journalists who work under the cover of a larger organization, these filmmakers tend to be working for themselves and have no organization like The New York Times or the Cable National Network (CNN) sponsoring their presence there, though many of the women have, or develop after the fact, relationships with media organizations like the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) that allow them to distribute the film more widely. Only rarely, as in the case of Tanaz Eshaghian who is commissioned to make her film by the Home Box Office (HBO) network, are documentary filmmakers

¹ As seen in the last two chapters the brevity of the report they were producing formally for the news media organizations they worked for has led many of them to produce additional works to showcase the amount of information they gathered in Afghanistan about Afghan women.

working in affiliation with a major media organization while on the ground. The reliance on these major media organizations for distribution of their films after the fact, however, is elucidative of the ways in which independent documentary filmmaking by women, on issues directly related to women, are somewhat reliant on the demand for content from these major media organizations. Negotiating the necessity of maintaining relationships with major media distribution channels with the desire to make media that honestly voices the experiences of marginalized populations of women is at the crux of these types of projects.

In the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan, there was an increase in the demand from network and cable news and educational/entertainment channels for content about Afghan women. In that economy, work by women with connections to Afghanistan (the impact of which on the position of the ‘third sex’ is a main concern of this chapter), and/or work by women filmmakers whose projects are concerned with women’s issues and the everyday lives of women come to be in demand. Work that emphasizes the plight of Afghan women is that much more in demand, as is work that portrays the impact of interactions between agencies, organizations, and individuals from other parts of the world on Afghanistan in this precarious moment. Those making films about Afghan women and Afghanistan more generally must be aware of the demand for specific types of content and market their projects accordingly, but they also perceive themselves to be independent media producers whose responsibility is to portray the experience of Afghan women in this moment honestly. The degree to which the framework of occupation is obscured in the films is often dependent on the filmmaker’s approach to the task of making a film about Afghan women, and their perception of the role they play in the

discourse on militarism in Afghanistan. Most of the filmmakers whose work and professional trajectories are examined here are committed primarily to telling the stories of Afghan women, and/or women who are traveling to Afghanistan to help Afghan women. What political statements emerge as a result is often left to chance, and yet, the experience of making these films engages many of the filmmakers and invests them in the future of Afghanistan and its women.

Over the last decade or so, there has been a spate of films made by North American and Western European women about Afghanistan: *Sadaa E Zan - Voices of Women* (2003) by Renee Bergan, *Afghanistan Unveiled* (2004) by Brigitte Brault & the AINA Filming Group, Kathleen Foster's *Afghan Women: A History of Struggle* (2007) and *Love Crimes of Kabul* (2011) by Tanaz Eshaghian. Additionally, Liz Merman's *Beauty Academy of Kabul* (2004), *Enemies of Happiness/A Woman Among Warlords* (2006-08) by Eva Mulvad & Anja Al-Erhayem, *Beyond Belief* (2007) by Beth Murphy, *View from a Grain of Sand* (2006) by Menna Nanji, and *Once in Afghanistan* (2008) by Peace Corps volunteers Jill Vickers and Jody Bergedick. This list does not include films like Munizae Jahangir's *Search for Freedom* (2003), *Afghanistan: The Lost truth* (2003) by Yassamin Maleknasr. I omit them from this analysis because these women are not primarily based in North America and Western Europe when they made the films and this analysis specifically examines the work of women who ride the momentum of interest in Afghanistan to travel there.

Two films I pay particular attention to, however, are Sedika Mojadidi's *Motherland Afghanistan* (2007) and Saira Shah's *Beneath the Veil* (2001). These two women are firmly entrenched in their identities as women born and raised in the United

States and Britain, respectively. Neither is a resident of the area (at the time of initial filming) in the way that Jahangir and Maleknasr are, but they are ethnically Afghan and have familial ties to the nation. Shah is the daughter of famed poet Idries Shah. Though Idries Shah was born in India and raised in the UK, his Afghan ancestry figures prominently in his work and legacy. For the younger journalist Shah, the film (which she makes in 2001 just prior to the attacks of 911) is a personal passion project, framed as a means of bringing to life the stories her father told her as a child. The film finds Shah navigating the terrain of Taliban controlled Afghanistan to reach the places whose descriptions filled her childhood, only to find that the pristine spaces of her father's childhood memories cannot mask what several decades of warfare have done to the country.

Mojadidi is the daughter of Afghan physicians who left Afghanistan in 1973, shortly after their daughter was born. This was a year that saw a political sea change in Afghanistan that marked the beginning of decades of warfare in Afghanistan which have resulted from the role the nation came to play in the Cold War. Mojadidi was subsequently raised in Florida, though her father continued to travel back to Afghanistan and the borderlands of Pakistan in order to administer healthcare to Afghan women as an OB/GYN. Of the decision to make the film, she says

I was working in New York City as a field producer and cameraperson on labor and delivery medical shows for cable television. I learned quite a bit about maternal health, pregnancy and how a hospital functioned. But I felt I needed to develop an independent project of my own. I wanted to use my experience working on medical shows, and the opportunity presented itself when my father was asked to work at Rabia Balkhi Women's Hospital in Kabul in 2003. Since I was born in Kabul, I have always had a yearning to see what it was like for myself. And I wanted to personalize the maternal mortality crisis through the eyes of my father, an OB/GYN who had dedicated his life to working with Afghan women. Kraus, C. (Interviewer) & Mojadidi, S. (Interviewee). (2007).

Filmmaker Q & A [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from Independent Lens: Motherland Afghanistan Web site:
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/motherlandafghanistan/qa.html>

For Mojadidi, the making of this film is about seizing the opportunity presented by the invasion of Afghanistan (a formal invitation from the U.S. government to her father asking him to work in Kabul) to make a film that is her own. She is utilizing the fallout of a global political event to exert more control over her own professional production. And yet, making her own film and moving beyond working as a hired hand for television networks, is reliant on the broader demand for content about Afghanistan and its women. Her entry into Afghanistan is also a direct result of the war policies of the U.S. government in Afghanistan at this time aimed at developing certain elements of the healthcare and education infrastructure to demonstrate how this particular form of warfare is in service of gender equality. Mojadidi's father, Dr. Qudrat Mojadidi, is invited to Afghanistan as part of these initiatives and simultaneously gains his daughter a means by which to travel to Afghanistan. Because her father is the subject of the film, the story inevitably takes on autobiographical element. Portrayals of her family's history are mixed with portrayals of their present, which is largely characterized by her and her father's attempts to do their work within the framework of supervision and control by U.S. and Afghan government agencies.

Many of the filmmakers listed above had no prior interest in Afghanistan and became interested in the nation only after the attention of War on Terror policy was directed there, these two women had existing ties to Afghanistan, and knowledge of its particular political and social histories via the stories of their own families' fleeing or exile from the country. For Shah and Mojadidi, the selection of Afghanistan as the first

site of War on Terror militarism results in renewed interest in and distribution of their existing work on Afghanistan, and the sudden willingness of media institutions in the United States to fund new projects on the country and its people. This is an opportunity that these filmmakers seize on, though it is clear that interest in these women's films is in large part due to the fact that they are, to some degree, Afghan women themselves. As a result, they function not only as the producers of the films, but as subjects also. In contrast filmmakers Beth Murphy and Liz Mermin had no specific connection to Afghanistan prior, but were drawn in to making films in and about Afghanistan as a result of circumstances created by the September 11th 2001 attacks and the subsequent declaration of War in Afghanistan. Murphy comes to Afghanistan because the 911 widows she is following want to travel to Afghanistan for their charity project, her subjects are not necessarily the Afghan women but they become an important part of telling the story of two women from New Jersey. Mermin is also concerned with

Unlike Shah and Mojadidi, Murphy and Merman are not the subjects of their films and do not appear on camera. They film other women who have no prior experience with the region traveling from North America to Afghanistan, observing and recording others experience being a 'third sex.'

Mojadidi and Shah are another example of the bifurcation of a concept like the 'third sex' when it intersects not only with race, and class, but also histories of global conflict amongst imperial powers and the impact that has had on a nation like Afghanistan and its people. These women are foreign/Western and come from lives of relative socioeconomic privilege in North America and Western Europe. And yet, they are not non-Afghan. Their family histories show clear ethnic and historical ties to the

nation, but most importantly they do not see themselves as non-Afghan. This is evident in the way in which their projects are framed, as explorations of the personal via a broader explication of a current global historical conflict. Unlike the other women, filmmakers and subjects alike, explored in this chapter who are traveling to Afghanistan as an other place in the most complete sense, these women are affecting a 'return' to the nation through the process of making these films. Theirs is a return, despite the fact that neither woman has actually visited Afghanistan before. In the United States and Great Britain, their identities as women are impacted by the fact that their families were forced to leave Afghanistan and start lives in other parts of the world (which they make explicit in their films). In the countries they were born and raised in they are identified as occupying a separate ethnic category from whites and to some degree identified as foreign, and they experience a form of othering.

For these women, the experience of being the 'third sex' on the ground in Afghanistan is still relevant. Both Shah and Mojadidi are able to be mobile and visible in ways that Afghan women are not, and yet it is by virtue of their being female that they have access to Afghan women in specific spaces such as the maternity ward, and their identification as women can make them appear relatively benign to military and authorities when it assists them in with mobility and gaining access. Their identification as Afghan women, to some degree, complicates the juxtaposition of North American and Western European women with Afghan women that appears in other media portrayals of the oppression of Afghan women. Shah and Mojadidi's multiple identifications disrupt simplified binarizations of Western/Non-Muslim women and Eastern/Muslim women and their presence on-screen as primary subjects of the films. Beyond this, the project of

narrating their personal histories and using those histories as anchors in the films they are making about contemporary Afghanistan, interjects how historical global conflicts amongst imperial powers shape the conditions of the War in Afghanistan today.

Feminism, documentary, and visibility

Though the practice of documentary filmmaking pre-dates the 20th century, the 1960s and 70s saw documentary film evolve as a medium for personal storytelling, particularly for marginalized people². In response to recent historical events, namely mid-twentieth century civil rights movements within the U.S. and the impacts of U.S. and U.S. related foreign policies on other parts of the world (including WWI & II, the Korean & Vietnam wars), documentary filmmaking became an important refuge in contemporary discourse for the circulation of critical, dissenting and progressive ideas (Renov , Rabinowitz , Smail, Waldman and Walker 1999). This is due in large part to the claim documentary lays on the representation of reality and the audience's perception that they are able to apprehend a distant and unknowable reality through the film's close portrayal of the intimate existences of its subjects. These close narratives of individual experience shift political discussions to the impact of policy on human lives, allowing audiences to view how policies play out in the day to day.

For these reasons, documentary film has played a significant role in the propagation of feminist discourses in the United States since the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Paula Rabinowitz's *They Must Be Represented: The*

² Paula Rabinowitz adeptly points to a number of documentaries that 'speak back' to power by giving voice to people who would otherwise go unheard: Errol Morris' *Thin Blue Line*, Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*, and Barbara Kopple's *American Dream*, for example.

Politics of Documentary, and Diane Walker and Jennifer Feldman's *Feminism and Documentary* attest to the rich history of feminists using documentary to represent their private experiences publicly. Documentary film appealed to these women for specific reasons, "Relatively cheap, accessible, and lightweight 16 mm film and later video equipment enabled many females to enter media production for the first time and/or to turn their filmmaking skills to issues of particular concern to women." (Waldman & Walker 1999, p. 5). In the era of the War on Terror, documentaries are also now much more easily distributable through the Internet, and a growing independent film festival circuit looking for innovative, timely films. Many of the documentaries I examine here are readily available on the Internet. Shah's documentary is available on YouTube for free, as are many others; Foster's *Struggle* is available on the media sharing site Vimeo in its entirety, and several more are available for instant streaming from the web on distribution services like Netflix and Amazon.com, including *Motherland Afghanistan* and *Beyond Belief*.

The continued accessibility of the films years after their initial release provide resilient reference points in the ongoing discussion on Afghan women circulating amongst activists, aid workers, freelance journalists. The oppression of Afghan women may fall in and out of favor with mainstream news media outlets as policy shifts and historical events draw attention and resources elsewhere, but the availability of these films creates the enduring potential that these women's perspectives will be engaged with in the public sphere. When there are moments in which Afghanistan and its women become important (a rise in violence in Afghanistan, a troop surge, or discussion of troop withdrawals), the films and filmmakers are more likely to be utilized by larger media

outlets again if they are easily searchable and viewable on the Internet. The chances of this increase significantly if one already has connections in the world of news media as Shah does. Prior to making the film, Shah had worked as a freelance journalist for The Guardian in Britain. Shah is one of only a few filmmakers whose documentary is screened for television audiences when Cable News Network (CNN) broadcasts her documentary shortly after 9/11. In 2002, CNN was consistently the highest rated cable news programming in the United States and Shah's documentary had the potential to be seen by millions of Americans because of this opportunity.

However, the potential benefits and rewards for the women making these films are clearly not monetary. Documentaries do not traditionally make a significant amount of money at box offices and struggle to find venues for mass distribution. This is why these and most other filmmakers establish a website and determine means to sell physical DVDs directly, or negotiate distribution of the films on websites like Netflix. In some cases, filmmakers allow their films to circulate freely on YouTube or Vimeo suggesting that the goal of the filmmaker is primarily to have the film be seen whether it is bringing in revenue as a result, or not. On the web these films are presented in contexts that indicate the mission of the filmmaker and the desired intent of the film. Many of the films are embedded within websites that also publicize activist organizations. Beth Murphy's *Beyond Belief* maintains a presence on the website for the Beyond the 11th Foundation, whose founding is documented in the film. The express purpose of the Foundation, to assist Afghan women in developing economic self-reliance by financing sustainable small business ventures, an expressly feminist project. Alternately, the films are also available on sites whose primary purpose is marketing. Murphy's film is also available on

the website for Principle Pictures the production company distributing the film. Liz Mermin's Beauty Academy of Kabul has its own website where additional materials including the story of how the film came to be and interview materials with the filmmaker are also available. In some cases, their presence exists via a more mainstream, established media distribution channel, as in Mojadidi's Motherland Afghanistan on the PBS website. The ongoing visibility of these women's work is the goal, and though there may not be steady revenue streams available, the Internet provides that visibility.

This type of web presence is often what allows audience and filmmaker to broaden the conversation about the subject of the film, to consider the experience of the filmmaker. Readers can find Murphy's reflections on her filmmaking experience in a section titled "Production Notes" on the Beyond the 11th website, as well as that of the production company. This page contains several entries written by Murphy during filming in the Spring of 2006, ending with a last note written on the five year anniversary of the September 11th attacks (Murphy, 2006).³ The Beauty Academy of Kabul website hosts a "Director's Statement" explaining how Mermin came to make a film when she, "knew very little about Afghanistan and even less about beauty school" (Mermin).⁴ Amongst these texts are narratives written by the filmmakers themselves, which provide accounts of the emergence of these films in the wake of 911, or just before. Where does the idea for traveling to Afghanistan come from amongst these filmmakers? What opportunities arise that give them access to Afghanistan during the war and the process of nation building? What networks do they employ to access the resources they need to

³ Murphy, B. 2006. Production Notes. Retrieved from http://www.principlepictures.com/beyondbelief/production_notes.htm

⁴ Mermin, L. Director' Statement. Retrieved from <http://www.beautyacademyofkabul.com/>

travel to Afghanistan? The content of the texts allude to all of these aspects of making documentaries about Afghan women, and help to answer the primary question: How does their experience as women traveling to or “back to” Afghanistan impact their portrayal of the oppression of Afghan women and U.S. policy in Afghanistan?

The potential impact of these stories is not lost on the women who make them, or the state agencies involved in administering occupation and nation-building processes in Afghanistan. In 2011, the European Union commissioned a documentary by London based filmmaker Clementine Malpas, about Afghan women serving prison sentences for ‘moral’ crimes, most of whom are victims of rape and domestic abuse. Many have given birth to children in prison, and women who had children prior bring them to prison ensuring the children will also be shunned. Malpas’ film *In-Justice*, whose trailer is available on the web, at once gives voice to women who have had no opportunity to speak for themselves within the Afghan legal system and makes international audiences aware that the situation remains dire in Afghanistan a decade into the NATO occupation. For precisely this reason Malpas’ documentary presents a dilemma for the EU who champion women’s rights in Afghanistan in global political discourse, but who must also work with the existing Afghan power structure to coordinate its own bureaucratic and aid programs on the ground. Ultimately, the EU chose to block the film’s release and sued Malpas to prevent non-commercial screenings.

As a seasoned journalist Shah makes a poised contributor to U.S. news outlets because she is aware of the conventions, format and language of news reporting. However, participation in these films has also transformed women with no prior experience as public personae into savvy public speakers, interviewees and media

liaisons. Hairdresser Deborah Rodriguez, and New Jersey housewives Susan Retik and Patti Quigley, who had no professional media experience prior to 911, have now become accustomed to speaking publicly about their experience in Afghanistan in interviews, at events for specific audiences. Deborah Rodriguez has also begun writing and distributing her own narrative. She published her memoir, *Kabul Beauty School* (2007), followed by a fictional novel *Little Coffee Shop of Kabul* (2012). For the women who made the films they feature in, their roles as producers and directors have garnered them visibility in other media outlets and built additional professional connections, which result in further screenings and additional film work. Many of the filmmakers, including Foster, Mermin, Murphy and Mojadidi, continue to film, write and speak about Afghan women's experiences in the era of the War on Terror, as do the women who feature in their films. Many of the women engaged in the filmmaking endeavor remain engaged activists after the films come out; in some cases the filmmaking process is itself the entry point for becoming an activist in Afghanistan.

Coming to Afghanistan

Patricia Zimmerman argues that women have long been overlooked in historiographies of documentary filmmaking because those historiographies are primarily concerned with directors, authors and subjects, who have traditionally been men. However, stepping outside of this masculinist approach to a historiography of documentary film and thinking about these films as the result of collaborative efforts amongst a number of people reveals that women have been integral to the production of documentaries in roles other than the aforementioned (Zimmerman, 1999). The ample

examples of women as directors, producers and subjects of documentaries on Afghan women in the War on Terror, attests to the rising number of female filmmakers and the ongoing accessibility of documentary as a medium for women's personal and political expression. They are simultaneously examples of the collaborative nature of this type of filmmaking. Not only must they rely on additional personnel who they bring with them, in some cases, who are trained to actually film, they must also rely on guides to navigate their movement on the ground and the women, both Afghan and non-Afghan, who are the subjects of the films. To get the films made and distributed, they must rely on networks of professionals with the ability to see an independent documentary aired in national venues.

In order to produce these documentaries women based in North America must navigate several obstacles beginning with finding the funding and resources to make the film. Some of the documentary filmmakers were commissioned by a particular network to make a film. In interview with the HBO website filmmaker Eshaghian describes how she came to the topic of Afghan women:

[HBO Documentaries President] Sheila Nevins instigated doing something in Afghanistan. She had read an article about a girl and a boy who had eloped and tried to get to Iran to start a life together. But they were caught, brought back to their village and beheaded with the backing of their families. I did some research to see how we could get at the same kind of issues, women falling in love and getting in trouble for it. I found a clip about this woman's prison in Kabul. HBO (Interviewer) & Eshaghian, T. (Interviewee). [Interview Transcript]. Retrieved from <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/love-crimes-of-kabul/interview/tanaz-eshaghian.html>.

Because Eshaghian's project was the initial brainchild of the head of a major cable television network, she would not have funding concerns and also has the opportunity to capitalize on the resources that the network has available to them, as a media production

entity who have worked on a global scale. Beyond that, this film is a result of existing media interest in Afghan women and Muslim women's oppression. This is not the only documentary that comes from other news media. Liz Mermin described how she decided to make a film about the Beauty Academy of Kabul after reading an initial article about the developing project, "It seemed like such a perfect documentary subject – offbeat, political, aesthetic, controversial" (Mosby, 2008).⁵

But, how did Sheila Nevins know to approach Eshaghian for this project? It is because Eshaghian's first documentary feature, produced as a collaboration between British and French television production companies, found US distribution through the HBO channel. *Be Like Others* is Eshaghian's documentary on Iranian men transitioning to the female gender under the oppressive Iranian regime whose social edicts create a deeply hostile environment for these individuals. Eshaghian's access to these media production companies and opportunities to have her work aired on television date back to her earlier career as a filmmaker who has long focused on Persian identity and alienation in the United States, including the ongoing association of immigrant Iranian immigrants with international terrorism or an enemy Iranian government. Her initial forays into film exploring her own subjectivity as an Iranian immigrant was aired by PBS stations in cities across the country in the early 2000s. From there she went to make *Be Like Others*, and then on to HBO.

These professional connections are very important; Mermin's ability to make her film lies in the BBC and Wellspring Media acting as co-producing entities, alongside documentary filmmaker Nigel Noble. Mermin's ability to work with these organizations

⁵ Retrieved from
http://www.thewip.net/contributors/2008/01/the_beauty_academy_of_kabul.html

is due in large part to her reputation as a credible filmmaker. The biography on her website describes a history of making documentaries for ABC, Bravo, Court TV, Oxygen and The Discovery Channel.⁶ Her film is one of only a handful to get cinematic distribution, premiering at the high profile Tribeca Film Festival in 2004.⁷

Most of the filmmakers have existing careers as media producers and/or journalists, including Shah, Murphy, and Mojadidi; Murphy and Mojadidi have worked as filmmakers for many of the same channels that Mermin is associated with, though they are often producing content for other channels rather than creating their own. Mojadidi has discussed how she produced non-fiction medical shows for The Learning Channel and The Discovery Channel, which had prepared her well for filming in the Rabia Balkhi hospital's maternity ward. When she makes her own passion project on Afghanistan, Mojadidi draws on her existing connections to bring in co-producers Jenny Raskin and Catherine Gund, whose connections in turn provide her with additional funding, and bring her film to a wider audience. She is able to broadcast her documentary on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS)'s Independent Lens series because of Raskin's prior history with PBS and the Independent Lens series (Raskin has also worked for The National Geographic Channel, The Learning Channel, Discovery Channel and Sundance Channel).

Cable television channels are clearly a steady source of work and income for these female filmmakers. That does not change even after they return from Afghanistan, as in Mojadidi's case; she goes back to filming non-fiction medical dramas for ABC,

⁶ Bio. Retrieved from <http://www.merminfilm.com/>

⁷ The film festival's website continues to host a page featuring content on the film <http://tribecafilm.com/filmguide/archive/512d02541c7d76e04600253b-beauty-academy-of-kabul>

while also looking to continue working on projects about Afghanistan.⁸ The filmmakers' connections to these media outlets puts them in conversation with media distributors much more easily when they branch out to do independent projects based on their personal interests, experiences, and histories. Their status is in fact a precarious position of access. That access is limited, and contingent upon the willingness of media organizations to invite them to participate in their system of production and distribution if they are to pull the necessary resources for their projects. The freelance nature of the work, and these organizational configurations, keep these filmmakers from establishing true status as producers at any specific channel consistently over a period of time. They are contract workers whose films are distributed based on the particular needs of the network in the moment. The commingling of the passion project and investment in the lives of Afghan women, alongside the reality that there is a palpable desire to see images of Afghan women's experiences, often mean that these filmmakers return to the subject of Afghan women repeatedly.

Documentary is one of the most readily accessible forms of media production for women; yet we continually see a rather narrow group of socio-economically positioned women making films about Afghan women, whether the content of those films is progressive, critical, radical or not. These women are primarily white and college educated and working in professions that employ forms of institutional gatekeeping to maintain a narrow pool from which to take talent. Beyond their work with media companies, filmmakers may also have other institutional affiliations suggesting a

⁸ Beyond the Box (Interviewer) & Mojadidi, S. (Interviewee). (2010). [Interview Transcript]. Retrieved from <http://beyondthebox.org/director-sedika-mojadidi-on-filming-her-father-in-motherland-afghanistan/>

particular perspective from which the problem of Afghan women is being perceived.

Brigitte Brault, who directed *Afghanistan Unveiled* holds the title of “Media Project Manager for the French Foreign Ministry” and is a “writer and video journalist for France Television, and an author of documentary films and reports. She is also a volunteer video journalist for *Etats d’Urgence*, a production company of the French NGO”.⁹ Her work as a filmmaker is couched within her other positions working for state agencies and NGOs.

There is a lot of crossover again amongst the filmmakers themselves, as Raskin directed the documentary *On Hostile Ground* about abortion providers with Mermin, and produced by Gund, on the abortion debate in 2001.¹⁰ The prior relationships that exist amongst these filmmakers, and the instances in which they have worked together in the past, illustrate both how women as filmmakers must rely on collaborative professional networks to get their work made, and also that this is not a group of novice filmmakers who materialize after 911 to make these films. The topic of Mermin, Gund and Raskin’s prior collaboration, reproductive rights, also illustrates how feminist filmmakers tend to coalesce around particular issues identifiable with women, gender and sexuality on the domestic front. The War on Terror provides the opportunity to take that concern with women and gender to an international context. Sally Jo Fifer, who is President and CEO of the Independent Television Service (which distributes *Motherland Afghanistan* for streaming on Netflix), is also the Executive Producer of the *Independent Lens* series, and in that capacity was also Executive Producer on Eshaghian’s first film.

⁹ Filmmaker bios. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/afghanistanunveiled/bios.html>

¹⁰ Bio. Retrieved from <http://tribecafilm.com/filmguide/archive/512d02541c7d76e04600253b-beauty-academy-of-kabul>

Many of the women who have prior experience with filmmaking as independent media producers, do their filmmaking work in collectives and/or establish production companies that represent their work as individual filmmakers. Renee Bergan and Beth Murphy founded their own production companies, Renegade Pictures and Principle Pictures respectively, prior to making their films about Afghanistan. Mermin has Mermin Films. After her experience in Afghanistan, Mermin becomes a member of the advisory board for a non-profit collective whose focus is on Afghanistan. The Afghan Film Project is made up of a group of international filmmakers whose mission is to broadcast films about Afghanistan, and build Afghanistan's film industry by providing training, opportunity and resources to young Afghan filmmakers.¹¹ Eva Mulvad also has a production company, began with a handful of other filmmakers in Denmark, called the Danish Documentary Production.¹² Though they have access to media making tools that are relatively inexpensive, career feminist filmmakers also often establish an interface via a production company that allows them to have an organizational presence in the larger realm of media production.

Many of the filmmakers also function as narrator and in some cases subject. Mojadidi and Shah for example function as all three, this is because their experience as returning Afghan women is as important to the film's narrative as the Afghan women portrayed. But, there are also many women present in these films who are not media producers, but are volunteering their time and resources to aid Afghan women. For the women who go to Afghanistan as subjects in the films, these are also by definition

¹¹ Mermin. Retrieved from <http://www.afghanfilmproject.com/advisory-board/liz-mermin>

¹² Retrieved from <http://danishdocumentary.com/>

collaborative processes. Mermin's subjects in Beauty Academy of Kabul are Patricia O'Conner, who organized the hairdressers from the United States to travel over there, and the hairdressers themselves. They would not have documented their experience had Mermin not read about them in a local newspaper and contacted them. The same is true of Beth Murphy and the widows Retik and Quigley; these women are not media producers, and would not have documented the process of aiding Afghan women in the wake of their own losses had they not been approached by Murphy.

In some cases, as with Jill Vickers, the idea for a film emerges with them but another woman who is a professional media producer takes the material and transforms it into a commercially viable product. As a Bridgeport, Connecticut resident, Vickers took raw footage she had filmed at a Peace Corps reunion in 2004 to the Middlebury, CT Television Studios, where Jody Bergedick worked as the Youth Program Coordinator, and also taught community members of all ages how to edit film. Upon seeing the footage, Bergedick proposed they make a feature about the women's experiences¹³. Bergedick describes herself as a veteran of the film and media business and has the technical capacity to make the film, but the resources for the film comes from the peace corps volunteers who are the subjects of the film, because they wanted to "raise awareness of Afghanistan as we experienced it, and to raise money for a few trusted NGOs working in Afghanistan"¹⁴. That these experiences are suddenly relevant in a post 911 world is not discussed in Vickers' and Bergedicks' accounts of their desire to make

¹³ Flowers, J. Local Films Offers New Take on Afghanistan. Retrieved from <http://www.addisonindependent.com/node/1599>.

Dirt Road Documentaries <http://dirtroaddocs.com/filmmaker.php>

¹⁴ About Jill Vickers. Retrieved from <http://peacecorpsworldwide.org/once-in-afghanistan/about/>

this film, and there is no mention of how the War on Terror provides the women with the opening to enter Afghanistan and reconnect with the women they worked with decades before. In the narrative she offers, the Soviet Occupation marks the closing of Afghanistan to her, and the present represents a point of re-entry.

In making the film, Vickers also recounts her initial entry into Afghanistan, in 1968. The historical contextualization of her and her peace corps colleagues experiences in the latter half of the 20th century disrupts the narrative that most War on Terror documentaries present, that the interaction of Afghan women with the Western world has really only taken place after 911, and that the U.S. has had no presence there prior to 911. In 1968 the World Health Organization created a mission to Afghanistan whose purpose was to eradicate small pox through a vaccination program. In her own telling, Vickers was an “English major...shocked to be selected by the Peace Corps to serve as a vaccinator in Afghanistan,”¹⁵ where her team’s primary objective was to make contact with women and girls, encouraging them to be vaccinated.

Kathleen Foster also provides a more complex history of Afghanistan. The British born, New York based filmmaker has been making documentaries about social issues and grass roots organizations since the 1980s, “she has been making films for community organizations and producing independent documentaries that combine elements of history, current events and individual stories and focus on grass roots struggles for change.”¹⁶ Prior to that, her work as a photojournalist appeared in The New York Times, Time Magazine, Village Voice and Fortune Magazine amongst others. Foster has also

¹⁵ About Jill Vickers. Retrieved from <http://peacecorpsworldwide.org/once-in-afghanistan/about/>

¹⁶ Kathleen Foster. Retrieved from <http://www.kathleenfoster.com/bio.html>

had some significant visibility as a filmmaker, with screenings at major venues like the Museum for Modern Art, and she takes her film to be screened at college campuses across the country including New York University, Columbia University, Princeton University, Howard University and the University of California Los Angeles.¹⁷ Foster eventually makes a follow-up film on Afghanistan. *10 Years On: Afghanistan and Pakistan* looks at the impact of War on Terror militarism. Making a film about Afghan women often leads these filmmakers to considerations of this broader context, as Murphy does in her next film *The List* (2012), which follows a young American as he participates in the reconstruction effort in Iraq after the war is “over.” In it she also explores the “human moral obligation” the U.S. has to Iraqi civilians who assisted them during the war¹⁸. Murphy has since returned to Afghanistan to make a film about girls’ education¹⁹.

Networks

This is in part why these women are drawn to documentary film. As media producers and journalists making content for mainstream news outlets, they are only able to cover Afghanistan and Afghan women as long as Afghan women maintain interest and rhetorical value amongst viewers. Documentaries not only allow them to present longer, contextualized narratives of Afghan women’s experiences, as well as their own, but also allow them to report on Afghanistan in the latter years of the occupation when the interest

¹⁷ Foster, K. (2011). *10 years on, Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Retrieved from <http://www.kathleenfoster.com/>

¹⁸ Rothe, N. (2012). Beth Murphy’s *The List* at Tribeca: Out Beyond Ideas of Wrong Doing. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/e-nina-rothe/the-list_b_1461117.html

¹⁹ Torgan, Allie. (2012). Despite Deadly Risks, Afghan Girls Take Brave First Step. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/26/world/asia/cnnheroes-afghan-schoolgirls/index.html>

of mainstream news outlets is contained to stories that hold significant shock value, like acid attacks on schoolgirls or honor killings. These films follow more difficult subject matter, which turn a critical eye towards occupation and make ambivalent statements on the impact of that occupation.

As a group of women, their resumes illustrate the circuit of job opportunities available to professional documentary filmmakers, outside of exceptional moments like the War on Terror. An examination of their resumes also reveal significant education and in some cases graduate degrees, from well-known and highly respected academic institutions. Some of them also venture into academia, working as teachers at institutions of higher learning. Beth Murphy has a BA in History from the University of Connecticut, an MA from International Relations from Boston University. Her biography also notes that she has studied French at the Sorbonne in Paris and documentary film at George Washington University. Murphy is also an adjunct at Suffolk University and has visited as faculty at the American University in Paris. Mermin's biography lists degrees in Culture and Media and an MA in Cultural Anthropology from New York University, a BA summa cum laude from Harvard University in Literature. She has been a National Science Foundation Fellow, and a Fulbright scholar and she presents her films at Ivy league academic institutions and other universities across the US. Bergan also studied film in Paris in the late 1980s, and received a degree in film from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1993. Jody Bergedick received a BFA from New York University. Kathleen Foster received a graduate degree in media from The New School University. Saira Shah was educated in Britain; her affluent upbringing as the daughter of Sufi expert Idries Shah, eventually led to study at the School of Oriental and African

Studies at the University of London. Not only are these women educated, their education is in typically critical fields of study in which they would encounter and discuss the act of representation, the role of power in representation and the impact of histories of colonialism and imperialism. Certainly, in the context of these educational environments, these filmmakers would have at least been asked to think about the gaze, and the responsibility of communicating the experiences of others to an audience. Jenny Raskin went to Barnard and received MA from the Culture and Media Program suggesting she has been exposed to criticism of media and culture, and critical approaches to the analysis of media and representation of the other.

These educational credentials also cross lines of race and ethnicity, and political perspectives. Meena Nanji has a BA in Political Science from UCLA; a BA and an MFA in Film/Video from the California Institute of the Arts in Political Science and Film/Video. Eshaghian received an MA in media and film from The New School University in New York City, after earning a BA from Brown University. Sedika Mojadidi attended the University of Florida, getting undergraduate and graduate degrees (in film, theory and history) and eventually earned an MFA in Video from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Their affiliations with various educational and academic institutions also follow in academic and artistic residences, grants, and fellowships, that have alternately supported the endeavors of a number of these women.

The socio-economic homogeneity is contrasted by the relative ethnic heterogeneity. Filmmakers like Eshaghian have particular appeal for media outlets because of how she identifies herself as an immigrant from the Muslim world, recording the experiences of living as part of an othered community in the U.S. As an Iranian

woman, who is based in North America, Eshaghian's work is appealing to a post 9/11 media production complex as the work of an inside or native informant, whose eye is firmly culturally situated in the West. An Iranian-American woman depicting the oppression in Iran and Afghanistan also allows these distribution companies to circumvent the criticism of Orientalism. This is in part why, when the head of HBO documentaries would like to make a film about the oppression of Afghan women, Eshaghian is an appealing choice. A Muslim woman can cover the experiences of all Muslim women.

Similarly, other women like Shah, Nanji and Mojadidi, have filmmaking experience, connections to existing media production and distribution entities in the United States, and ethnic and familial ties to Afghanistan, or other Muslim nations often referred to as the Middle East. Shah as a journalist with internationally recognized news organizations like The Guardian, alongside her ethnic and familial connections to Afghanistan, make her an appealing spokeswoman for US audiences on the plight of Afghan women. Mojadidi, another Afghan-American woman also ultimately secures distribution for her documentary through the Independent Lens series on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) network, though she initially she funded principle filming in 2003 with her own savings²⁰. Of course, Mojadidi's presence there to begin with is based on the fact that her father has his own appealing combination of ethnic and personal ties to Afghanistan, including knowledge of language and customs, as well as his high profile

²⁰ Kraus, C. (Interviewer) & Mojadidi, S. (Interviewee). (2007). *Filmmaker Q & A* [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from Independent Lens: Motherland Afghanistan Web site: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/motherlandafghanistan/qa.html>

as a credible physician and health care professional in the United States that makes him an appealing choice for USA-AID and the Department of Health and Human services.

They are a more appealing subset of a larger category of women traveling from North America to Western Europe to Afghanistan. They add another dimension to the shock that is registered for spectators when women who are accustomed to living at a significantly elevated educational, economic and social status are brought into contact with Afghan women in dire circumstances including abuse, poverty, isolation and physical and mental illness. The Afghan-American, British-Afghan and Iranian-American women's return to the countries they may otherwise have been raised in, are documented in these films, and implicitly their presence as Muslim/Afghan women in Afghanistan, who socialized and educated elsewhere, asks the question what would their lives have been like had they remained in Afghanistan? They are now in a position to move about freely, to film, to have their voices heard in the public discourse, but this may well have not been the case had they never left. This perspective on these women's returns cast another light on histories of foreign intervention and conflict that have had such a profoundly negative impact on the women who remained in Afghanistan.

These news organizations and media companies are interested in the native perspective, and their desire to feature these voices often allow the filmmakers to portray a more complex Afghanistan, or depiction of who Afghans are, or a form of critique. PBS may be willing to air critical fare like *Motherland*, but CNN is interested in Shah's depiction of the brutality of the Taliban prior to the invasion. Sue Curry Jansen argues that Shah's film "broke with normal television programming practices both in the form (repeat broadcasts in short time intervals of a grainy, low budget, independently produced

documentary) and content (revolutionary feminism),” interjecting an otherwise marginalized voice into the public discourse. However, the feminist message insinuates itself, taking advantage of the cable network’s desire for programming:

Shah’s documentary provided the cable network with a ‘scoop’ of sorts. It made the enemy visible...Moreover, Shah’s documentary provided a good ideological fit with CNN’s and President Bush’s characterization of the Taliban as an “evil” enemy, who not only provided sanctuary for Osama Bin Laden’s network but also committed brutal atrocities of its own (Jansen, 2002).

Unlike CNN, a channel like HBO, which has been known to make documentaries that cover sensitive subject matter that are not covered in everyday news or popular culture. They are willing to fund a documentary on Afghanistan, because these types of documentaries do not violate its traditional format. Oppositional, counter-hegemonic, or critical content has a specific place on channels like these, and they offer the potential of wider distribution for film projects that may otherwise not be seen in a national venue.

Once funding is secure, they must negotiate how to get to Afghanistan to begin with, and once they are in country they must navigate a foreign place in order to access the Afghan women whose testimony they are recording. There are two particular ways in which these filmmakers make their way to Afghanistan and find people on the ground. The first option is to travel there with a contingency of people who are already en route. These contingencies tend to be aid or missionary organizations; some of whom are traveling to Afghanistan with the express mission of helping Afghan women and some who are interested in broader administrations of assistance. On the Renegade Pictures website, in a section titled Director’s Notes, filmmaker Renee Bergan explains how she came to travel to Afghanistan.

In January 2002, an unexpected fortune landed in my lap. I received an e-mail from Global Exchange, a San Francisco based human rights organization, advocating an all female delegation to Kabul, Afghanistan, in commemoration of the first International Woman's Day to be held there in six years (since Taliban reign). Here was the opportunity that I had been looking for: an entrance to the country. I applied that day and one month later I was on a plane.²¹

In this description we begin to see the collaborative networks that filmmakers must rely on in order to enter a nation like Afghanistan. The celebration of International Woman's Day in Kabul is part of a symbolic celebration organized by the US and its allies to signify victory over Afghanistan. This in turn gives entry to an US based human rights organization to gain entry into the country for a short while, they in turn seek out women whose human rights and feminist activism is known publicly to accompany them; and in the case of Bergan to film the historical journey marking a new era for Afghan women. Mermin provides a brief synopsis of her involvement in the filmmaking process on the website for her film *Beauty Academy of Kabul*.

Many of the women document the treachery of traveling to Afghanistan in the film, because traveling to the country is in and of itself a significant endeavor. A majority of the film *Beyond Belief* is concerned with the widows Retik's and Quigley's trepidations about their first trip to Afghanistan. The preparation for their trip and the concurrent anxieties that this process brings up for them is documented in some detail. As they describe their anxiety about leaving children, who recently lost one parent, in order to travel to a war zone, the audience has an opportunity to experience what it means to be confronted with the reality of traveling to such a place. In one of the most telling scenes of the film *Clementina Cantoni*, a young white Italian woman working with the aid

²¹ Bergan, R. Director's Notes. Retrieved from <http://www.renegadepix.net/Sadaa/notes.shtml>

organization CARE Afghanistan to whom the widows' organization has granted funds. Speaking to a group of women in one of their homes in New Jersey about the high numbers of widowed women, the cycles of poverty, and the lack of social support for these women. But, the widows also want to know what its like to be a non-Afghan woman traveling in Afghanistan asking if she feels like a "target" there. Cantoni describes feeling under scrutiny, and feeling a distinct unease when she walks the streets of Kabul. Cantoni presents an interesting figure; interviewed alone for the camera she describes her and her colleagues' skepticism about the veracity of the widows' intentions, which is quickly dispelled when she meets them. She feared they were working out of a strong emotional reaction to their personal losses rather than from a fundamental commitment to human rights and women's rights.

Shortly after Cantoni's visit, the film interrupts the narrative of the widows' grieving to tell the story of Cantoni's abduction by the Taliban. Retik expresses her incredulity at perpetrators who would target a young Italian woman there helping widows, "the lowest on the totem pole of life. "I don't even know how to make sense of why doing the right thing doesn't turn out right sometimes." The images of the widows speaking and narrating are interspersed with news reports of Cantoni's abduction and video images of Cantoni kneeling while two masked gunmen point their weapons at her. Cantoni does not express any distress directly, either in the images taken from her abduction video or in interviews. The experience communicated to the audience, is of women over here registering the lack of safety for women in Afghanistan. The incredulity of the widows and their inability to understand why a woman like Cantoni might be targeted by insurgents is left unanswered in the film. The event is never connected to the

larger political framework of occupation, or why foreign workers are in Afghanistan, or the value a European woman might have to kidnappers in Afghanistan. Nor do the filmmaker or the widows speculate that Cantoni may have been taken precisely because she is an aid worker. To introduce such an idea would introduce a discussion of the complex relationship aid workers have to the populations they assist when that aid comes in the midst of a foreign occupation.

In contrast to the anxiety displayed by the widows, who are cast in the role of activist by historical events and not by a particular desire to cover stories in dangerous parts of the world, or a pre-existing commitment to gender equality activism, we often see the figure of the intrepid reporter/filmmaker who travels to Afghanistan on the fly despite the danger. When filmmaker Eva Mulvad describes traveling to Afghanistan to film *Malalai Joya* while she campaigned for office, she maps a route to her film's subject that is much less organized. In a March 2007 interview with PBS' *Now*, Mulvad describes arriving in Afghanistan, not knowing whether they would be able to get to Joya or not. She describes the difficulty of traveling to a remote area outside of Kabul, a space that is well-traveled by foreign correspondents and already has established pathways of travel for journalists and filmmakers like her. Poppy farmers in surrounding local areas did not want her and her crew traveling through the area, and there were no direct planes to the US controlled province of Farah where Joya was. Finally, "we almost gave up, until we found some Danish soldiers who had a cargo military plane going there. And we charmed ourselves into that plane and right away we got out there".²²

²² Brancaccio, D. (Interviewer) & Mulvad, E. (Interviewee) & Malalai Joya (Interviewee). (2007). [Interview Transcript]. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/309.html>.

This is one of only a few references to the military presence of the U.S. and its allies, and the benefits their presence has for the women's mobility. Mulvad's and her crew's confidence in her ability to move around Afghanistan must have been high prior to their trip there, speaking to the sense of openness the invasion created around the borders of Afghanistan. Once there, her common nationality with allied troops allow her and her crew to "charm" their way onto a military transport. In this case the filmmaking takes place literally on the back of the invasion. Mulvad's experience was happenstance and indicates the spontaneous ways in which occupation creates networks filmmakers may employ. But, there are also instances in which the needs of the bureaucracy of occupation and development result in the recruitment of a filmmaker to the topic. This is what happens to Mojadidi in 2002 when her father, Dr. Quradt Mojadidi is called upon by the United States' Department of Health and Human Services to administer and oversee the new U.S. funded maternity ward at Rabia Balkhi hospital in Kabul. Afghanistan's maternal mortality rate is the second highest or highest in the world in any given year. Women's healthcare, and the Taliban's restrictions on women's ability to seek and receive medical treatment are cornerstone issues in the narrative damning Taliban rule. Restoring health care for women in Afghanistan is a priority of the development community in Afghanistan, amongst state agencies and non-government organizations.

Mojadidi decides to travel back to Afghanistan with her father, as she says in the film "Now with the US guaranteeing support my dad hopes to make a difference inside the country." Interspersed with voiceovers from George W. Bush and Colin Powell, in official speeches leading up to the War in Afghanistan. "We are determined to lift up the

people of Afghanistan.” Mojadidi tells the audience that her father is there working for the U.S. government; later in the film, we receive clues that the hospital is run specifically by the Department of Health and Human Services, under then Health and Human Services Secretary (and 2012 senatorial candidate in Wisconsin) Tommy Thompson. Though the state facilitates Mojadidi’s presence in Afghanistan, her piece contains the most complex and direct engagement with the gap between the rhetoric of nation building and the reality of state’s superficial investment in Afghanistan. From the time she begins filming at the hospital in Kabul, Mojadidi is documenting the lack of resources, the unhygienic conditions, and the obstacles imposed by the bureaucratic red tape on her father’s mission to care for women and educate other health professionals in Afghanistan. Many of the scenes of her father in the hospital portray him teaching other doctors how to complete basic procedures like suturing, illustrating the dire lack of education.

In Mojadidi’s film, the viewer sees the emergence of two narratives, one that was clearly expected and another, which took both the subject and producer of the film by surprise. The first narrative is about what Dr. Mojadidi calls “cultural influence” or “cultural problems.” The impact of cultural influence, which in this case refers to Afghan culture’s evaluations of women, and gender relations, is depicted when an already ill woman pregnant woman is brought to the hospital after her husband has beaten her for not fulfilling her wifely duties. After a frustrating exchange with a relative of the patient, Dr. Mojadidi declares Afghanistan to be in the midst of chaos, in the thirteenth century. In this way the film rises to expectations in their depictions of the abuses of Afghan women, and more importantly invokes the Orientalist language of temporal hierarchies in

which the travelers who come to Afghanistan in this era document the experience of being removed from modernity and placed in the ancient past.

Simultaneously, Mojadidi's film documents another passage of time between the initial statement of the U.S.'s guaranteed support and the realization on the part of her father and herself that their partnership with the HHS hinders medical care and filming itself. This is the narrative that unexpectedly unfolds in the course of the film, alongside the initial narrative of cultural difference. In the narrative of cultural difference, Dr. Mojadidi's mission to help women is hindered by Afghan society, which is trapped in an ancient period. The logic that the political, legal and educational systems in Afghanistan are calcified with the mindset of a pre-modern age and cannot therefore be trusted to value women or give them rights, has been employed by the state and by activists in North America and Western Europe throughout the span of the War on Terror to argue for ongoing military intervention and occupation by modern states. Mojadidi's depiction of the HHS's superficial investment in Rabia Bahlki hospital as evidence of lack of substance behind the state's rhetorical claim that the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan is a humanitarian democratic mission, brings into question the commitments of modern states to women's rights. The film picks up this narrative almost immediately in its depiction of the complete lack of resources, from medical supplies, to soap to working plumbing, and paperclips and continues as the U.S. government fails to close the gaps. Twenty minutes into the film, Dr. Mojadidi tells the audience in voiceover:

I'm trying to work but the supplies I have requested are still not here. I keep sending these emails to all of these people at Health and Human Services, with pictures attached and no response. Then I get this letter from Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson praising what a wonderful job I'm doing and making such a difference for the people of Afghanistan and President Bush is

sharing in this feeling. I wrote him back and said “sir, I’m not doing anything. I wish I was!”

The film continues to document Dr. Mojadidi’s growing disillusionment with the HHS, and declares the naming of the maternity ward The Laura Bush OBGYN Ward an embarrassment to himself as an American, “the American people will say ‘oh boy, our government is doing something to help Afghans.’” This is quickly followed by a statement from Mojadidi, “a few weeks later, my dad left the U.S. program, and we left the country.” The film fades to black leaving the statement “During Dr. Mojadidi’s four month tenure, HHS delivered nothing from his supply list.” The filmmaker and her father do return to Afghanistan in 2005, but this time through the Non-Government aid organization, Shahuda.

These are some the avenues of access available to female documentary filmmakers; soldiers who are willing to offer a ride, NGOs and aid agencies who fund travel to Afghanistan, and/or provide shelter, guides, translators and subjects for their films. These avenues are directly linked to the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan by the United States and NATO. Prior to the invasion, as Shah shows in the footage she took prior to 9/11, the borders were almost completely closed, particularly to foreign journalists. Her entry story is characterized by the trepidation of crossing Taliban controlled borders, where foreigners are considered especially suspicious. The invasion opened the borders to various organizations and individual working directly and indirectly with the state to participate in the structuring of a modern, Democratic Afghanistan. This is especially true for organizations who want to aid Afghan women. But, there are also other networks that these women take advantage of and they are not a byproduct of the occupation. Next, I will examine the role of Afghan women as

collaborators in the filmmaking, and the particular role of RAWA in assisting these filmmakers.

Feminist Collaboration

Professional networks are clearly imperative for the material production of these films, particularly when it comes to securing distribution once they have returned home. Media networks however, are not the only ones female filmmakers enlist. An analysis of these films that only examines the women who act as directors or who appear as subjects alone, does not adequately describe the full involvement of women in these films. To ignore the collaborative aspect of these filmmaking projects is also to erase the participation of many of the Afghan women who facilitate the production of these films. Viewing these films as modes of collaboration amongst Afghan women and filmmakers from North America and Western Europe reorients the narrative of Western women traveling to Afghanistan to observe Afghan women as immobile objects of fascination and horror; to the contrary it suggests that organizations of Afghan women, like RAWA, are actively engaged in publicizing the oppression of Afghan women and men by fundamentalist Islamists and warlords, their violence towards civilians in general, in the hopes that it will spur some form of public outcry, solidarity and change.

Feminist collaborators and women's activist organizations have proven to be important allies in the making of a number of these projects. There are specific benefits to allying with a feminist or women's organization: they are invested in accruing visibility for common concerns. The widows Retik and Quigley agreed in part to do the film with Murphy because it would publicize their foundation, Beyond the 11th, which was raising

money for Afghan widows. Women's feminist organizations are also adept fundraisers, having had experience with fundraising for specific projects at a grass roots level. Many of the filmmakers who are profiled here must often raise the initial capital for the film themselves, the exceptions being Esheghian who is contracted to make her film by HBO. Some, like Mojadidi, use their own money, but if a filmmaker does not have the initial funds then grassroots organization and funding remains an important source of revenue.

RAWA is an organization that fits both criteria: they have a salient interest in publicizing women's rights in Afghanistan, and they are also adept at organizing at a grassroots level. Their networks of supporter and allies are also willing to assist these filmmakers, as Bergan writes on her blog:

What was truly fascinating for me about this project was the keen public interest. Produced for about \$10,000, the film was financed almost entirely through community support. Being that I had only one month to prepare all my travel documents, research, film pre-production, and fundraise, I was very lucky to have the co-sponsorship of RAWA Supporters Santa Barbara. Thanks to them, the Santa Barbara community, women's support groups and friends, I was able to garnish \$6,000 in just one month. Upon my return, the Fund for Santa Barbara assisted in post-production funds. It is evident that without the help of these interest groups and the concerned public, that this film would not have been possible to make. Truly this became a grassroots documentary: made by the people, for the people.²³

These grassroots efforts require the efforts of multiple organizations working in tandem to fund the film and to support the filmmakers' travel to Afghanistan. It also speaks to the existing networks of women who are working with RAWA in the United States and in Western Europe²⁴. These pockets of feminist solidarity are rarely visible in mainstream

²³ Bergan, R. Director's Notes. Retrieved from <http://www.renegadepix.net/Sadaa/notes.shtml>

²⁴ This section of the RAWA website features a number of allied groups in Western Europe and North America, as well as chronicles the events they sponsor to raise awareness and funds. Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/sonya.htm>

culture, and an analysis of the films that does not consider where the funding came from, or how the filmmakers themselves get to Afghanistan, would also obscure their presence as producers of this discourse.

The Afghan based RAWA does not necessarily have the capital to fund films themselves, but there are other ways in which they participate in creating these films. On a practical level, an organization like RAWA is very useful as a conduit for female filmmakers to get into the country, to meet Afghan women activists and interview victims of violence and abuse. Prior to the invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, there was limited means of entering Afghanistan if you were a foreign journalist or filmmaker. The Taliban restricted the entry of international media producers, and the US government and international community had no real interest in forcing the issue. As a long-standing feminist activist organization RAWA remained committed to circumventing Taliban restrictions to have their stories heard on the global stage. Shah's film opens with now infamous footage of Taliban shooting a burqa-clad woman they claimed to have convicted of adultery. Members of RAWA attended the public execution and filmed it, smuggling the film out to foreign entities like Shah to broadcast globally. Once Shah is ready to travel to the country and film herself, RAWA are once again best positioned to assist her.

The opening scenes depicting Shah's personal journey to Afghanistan begins with the trepidation of crossing check points. Her anxiety emerges as she waits to meet with RAWA representatives inside the country. As she prepares to go "undercover" and live as an Afghan woman, Shah tells the audience that whatever privilege she may have enjoyed as a foreigner is dispersed once she is under the cover of burqa and perceived to

be a common Afghan woman. She takes this risk so that she can enter “the Kabul foreigners don’t see.” However, she is not able to access Afghan women on her own. The burqa may deindividuate her as a foreign woman, but it does not provide her direct access to Afghan women she can interview. For that, she must contact RAWA, who she describes as the “super secret opposition network” to the Taliban.

Shah also takes her cues for how to document the experience of Afghan women from RAWA. She describes to the audience how RAWA use hidden cameras to document the violence exhibited towards Afghan women by the Taliban. They record women forced to beg because they are prohibited to work, and starving children. It is with hidden cameras that they recorded the execution by the Taliban of a woman convicted of adultery in a stadium, direct evidence of the Taliban’s brutality. In Shah’s film, images of burqa’d women lined up and shot in the stadium are interspersed with images of the women of RAWA handling camcorders and other film equipment that they will hide in their clothing and film with. This is a vital component of women’s activism against the Taliban, Shah argues, as it is only by broadcasting these images to the world that change can be affected. Shah filmed these acts prior to 911, illustrating the existing media savvy of RAWA and their in place routines for garnering visibility of women’s abuses in Afghanistan, while maintaining their own anonymity.

Examples of RAWA’s assistance and influence are evident in multiple instances of documentary filmmaking²⁵. An interviewer asks Meena Nanji, “Your subjects include a doctor, a teacher and a rights activist. How did you find them? What drew you to their stories and how they as individuals fit into the larger fabric of Afghan society and

²⁵ Film Reviews. Retrieved from
<http://www.newday.com/reviews.lasso?filmid=FTqKD3v6U>

history?’’ She replies:

I first visited the women’s rights group RAWA – Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan – in a refugee camp, near Peshawar in NWFP Pakistan – I had heard them speak at a bookstore in Los Angeles, and told them I wanted to make a documentary about women under the Taliban. So they invited me to Pakistan and I interviewed quite a number of their members. Eventually, one woman, Wajia, emerged as someone who had an incredibly compelling story and who was willing to be on camera – and willing to allow me to follow her around over a number of years! I met the doctor and teacher on subsequent visits – basically I visited the refugee camps and talked to people. I must have interviewed over 50 women (Yang, 2011).²⁶

However, RAWA is not the only Afghan women’s organization that these filmmakers rely on. As a filmmaker who is aware of her political position, Kathleen Foster utilizes Afghan women to tell the story of Afghanistan’s recent historical and political upheavals which have come to greatly determine Afghan women’s experiences today. She partners with Fatimah of the Afghan Women’s Fund to speak on the history of Afghan women. Bergan also films Afghan women telling their own stories. Even in films like *Beyond Belief*, whose focus are primarily their Western white female subjects, there are opportunities for women to tell their stories. And, though they do not explicitly partner with a women’s or feminist organization to be in Afghanistan, they do work with the aid organization CARE to facilitate their time there.

No matter what their political orientation, or the level of critique taking place in the film, the women who make these films or who are the subject of these films understand their privilege in relation to Afghan women. They continually exhibit an awareness of this relative privilege in their depictions of the abject poverty that Afghan women live in. Once Retik and Quigley have traveled to Afghanistan, they remark on the

²⁶ Yang, C. (2011). *Cinema Asian America: Meena Nanji Discusses ‘View From a Grain of Sand.’* Retrieved from <http://xfinity.comcast.net/blogs/tv/2011/07/19/cinema-asian-america-meena-nanji-discusses-view-from-a-grain-of-sand/>

stark difference between viewing the poverty and suffering Afghan women on television and seeing it up close in real life. Their experience there imbues them with gratitude; though they experienced a profound loss on 9/11, they are certainly grateful not to be in the position of these widows, whose experience of widowhood has been especially economically and socially devastating. The experience of Afghan women is the converse of the outpouring and support shown to Retik and Quigley from family and community in New Jersey; the widows in Afghanistan are either shunned or imprisoned by in-laws after their husbands' death, they fear losing custody of their children, and they are not authorized to earn or function as participants of the economy under Taliban law.

These are some of the more obvious ways in which the disparity in lived experience is made viewable to the audience; but, even in embarking on the project of making these films at least some of the filmmakers are very aware that they occupy a position as a Western woman which could be counterproductive to their goal in making the film in the first place. As Bergan writes on her blog:

I was not quite sure how as a white American woman, I would be able to enter a country with such restrictions on women and obtain this information by myself. I did not want to undertake a project like this from a Western perspective. I needed an Afghan collaborator, someone who understood the cultural and unfortunately, I was not able to find such a person. But the idea of traveling to Afghanistan to meet these women never left me (Bergan).

Collaborators then, are not only necessary to facilitate movement, they are also necessary for mediating the Western perspectives of women like Bergan who do not live in the country. The self-reflexivity of Bergan and other filmmakers in and of itself suggests how independent documentary filmmakers perceive their modes of media production to be influenced and shaped by postcolonial and feminist concerns around representation, discourse and silencing the other. It appears to be important to many of these filmmakers

to exhibit cultural sensitivity. Both Liz Mermin and Brigitte Brault bring all female film crews to Afghanistan to make their documentaries. Their cultural sensitivity inadvertently translates to more opportunities for female film crew members to participate in the production of these films. Vickers and Bergedick employ only one other woman to act as camera operator. Their sensitivity in bringing an all female crew is compounded by the necessity of accessing women in private spaces, which are not always available to men.

The Third Sex, Afghan Women, the Logic of Humanitarian Warfare

Access to Muslim women had its currency then as it does now, as there is nothing that attributes more value to these documentaries than the direct testimony of Muslim women about their restriction from the public sphere. Quigley and Retik's journey throughout the film leads to the meeting in a house with veiled Muslim women. Shah's documentary finds its emotional epicenter in a scene featuring three young girls whose mother was killed in front of them. Ages 9, 11, and 15, they crouch on the ground and tell the story of the Taliban coming to the home and committing the murder. How long did the Taliban stay? Mojadidi, Mermin and Murphy, find their most poignant moments while filming women giving birth, interviewing them about the loss of a child or spouse in their home, or filming them while American women teach them to do hair and make-up so that they might be able to earn an income.

The impact of these forms of collaboration, and the use of Afghan women's voices, is a heterogeneity in the perspectives featured in these films around the reality of warfare. That diversity greatly impacts the way in which the viewer comes to understand the roots of Afghan women's oppression. The conventions of documentary filmmaking dictate *Beauty Academy of Kabul* and *Beyond Belief* embody a humanistic approach to

documentary filmmaking. Zeroing in on the lives of individual women, they interpret global political historical events in terms of the interpersonal. They personify the notion of portraying the impact of these events on the human populations who become caught up in global conflicts; they do so without adopting a particular political stance on the occupation of Afghanistan and the U.S./NATO alliance's presence there. However, the de-politicization of the framing of these stories does not in actuality depoliticize the content. The personal stories of these women comes up against the reality of traveling to and through Afghanistan; their presence, as foreign women in the country, is always linked to the larger foreign occupation that makes travel to Afghanistan desirable and possible to begin with.

The tight focus on the personal stories of individuals often means that content allotted to provide historical context is reserved for telling the story of the woman profiled rather than the broader political context that brings both Afghan women and the women of these films, Patti Quigley, Susan Retik and Deborah Rodriguez. Retik and Quigley for example, are 911 widows. *Beyond the 11th* tackles the attacks of 911, but the narrative of the film focuses on the histories of the women and their spouses – where and when they met, when they married and began having a family. The film traces their relationships with their husbands, through the actual day of the attacks and the initial stages of grief, until we as an audience are brought to the present moment. This is a purposeful decision on the part of Murphy.

According to her statement in the press kit available on the *Beyond Belief* website, her interest in making a film about Afghan women began in 2000 while visiting the Amnesty International offices. Murphy tried on a burqa and felt what it was like to “be

invisible to the world.” The response to this state of invisibility was clearly to make the problem of women’s oppression by the burqa visible through documentary filmmaking. However, her desire to make a documentary on Afghan women was tempered by the practical need to sell it to the American audience. The events of 9/11, she writes, gave her the connection she needed to make a film about Afghan women. The film she first shot in late 2001 “failed to sell,” and Murphy was forced to find another angle, which she found in the stories of Retik and Quigley. In order to make the project worthwhile, it would be important to orient the content towards individual narratives with the ability to compel American audiences. For Murphy, the ability of two ordinary American women to overcome their own grief and find compassion for Afghans represents the project of “finding the common humanity in us all” (Murphy).²⁷

There is little to no discussion of the motives for the attacks, or the subsequent response of the United States government, and/or its allies. The emphasis remains on the emotional evolution of each of these women as they channel their grief into activism and fund raising for widows in Afghanistan. Navigating the experiences of Afghan women, and how these women in particular came to be widows, requires the telling of some recent history also and uses much of the same technique. I am particularly interested in how the emphasis on the personal and lack of articulation of the political impacts the juxtaposition of Afghan women’s experiences with the North American women who have traveled there to help them. These stories are particularly useful and compelling for arguments for foreign intervention in Afghanistan; the ongoing suffering of these women

²⁷ Murphy, B. Director’s Statement. Retrieved from http://www.principlepictures.com/beyondbelief/for_press.htm

appears to support the notion that the presence of foreign troops are necessary for the protection of Afghan women, and crucial to continuing to improve their situation.

In stark contrast are documentaries like Kathleen Foster's *Struggle*, whose entire aim is to contextualize the narrative of Afghan women's oppression historically and politically using the voices of Afghan women. Foster rarely focuses on the personal in the way that *Beyond* or *Beauty* do; contextualizing the oppression of Afghan women today in terms of complex histories of conflict and foreign intervention do not provide much opportunity for lengthy expositions of particular women's suffering and yet, the narrative provides the audience with. Foster's narrative pulls back to give a broad overview of the Soviet conflict, explaining women's relative freedom before Afghanistan became a pawn in the Cold War. Foster focuses much less on personal stories Foster openly discusses the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. government in assisting religious fundamentalists to power, and she makes clear that Afghan women are no better off today than when the Taliban were in power. This narrative format lends itself to the argument against foreign intervention.

Mojadidi portrays the experiences of a number of women who come to the hospital for reasons related to pregnancy and maternal health. Audiences get glimpses of the women's lives, hear the stories of how they ended up in the hospital to begin with, and these women are also seen in the context of their families including concerned male relatives. Afghan women's suffering is fundamental to the portrayals in her film; the depiction of abysmal health care in Afghanistan lends itself to the narrative of intervention. But, in telling this story in the context of her parents' return to Afghanistan, and in turn depicting the relationship of her father as hospital administrator as he

negotiates the bureaucracy of the US's aid agencies in charge of making resources available to the hospital and its staff, Mojadidi's film makes visible the gap between rhetorical commitments to women's rights by U.S. government agencies, and the material realities of working with U.S. International Aid Agencies, and government bureaucracies to implement better health care for Afghan women. Her film marks the intersection where the promise of the future of Afghanistan confronts the reality that strategic political alliances and economic considerations trump ethical commitments to gender equality. This narrative offers an alternative to the widely circulating logic in mainstream mass media; that the failure to establish a secure nation, and on-going incidents of brutality towards women and children in Afghanistan are evidence that the culture, society and people of Afghanistan are simply beyond the rescuing embrace of progress and modernity.

V. CHAPTER 4: Online Interactions and Feminist Discourse in the War on Terror

It is at the Eisenhower Hall Theatre at the United States Military Academy at West Point on December 1st 2009 that President Barack Obama articulates his rationale for the deployment of 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. This was the second troop surge he ordered in this period, following an initial deployment of 17,000 troops soon after he took office in February of 2009.¹ These surges were part of a campaign promise President Obama made in August of 2007 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington D.C. In that speech he also promised an additional \$1 billion dollars in funding for “non-military aid” for political and economic initiatives, should he become President, and reiterated the importance of establishing security in Afghanistan to ensure security in the United States. On December 5th, 2009 Newsweek Magazine’s online component the DailyBeast.com ran an article by Dana Goldstein with the headline, “Why Feminists Love the Surge.” In it, Goldstein describes the disappointment of a coalition she describes only as “women’s and human-rights organizations,” who were alarmed by the lack of emphasis on Afghan women in the President’s speech.

Their alarm, Goldstein argues, was intensified by the fact that even as President Obama made the case for additional troops, simultaneously established an eighteen month long timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. The lack of explicit mention of Afghan women, they argued, suggested the Obama administration was not prioritizing the advancement of women in the way his predecessor had, and that his commitment to withdrawing troops suggested that he did not comprehend how this

¹ “Afghanistan War Strategy During the Surge”
http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/afghanistan-war-strategy-during-the-surge/2012/06/22/gJQAd6eEwV_graphic.html

decision would impact women. Why are these women's (some feminist) and human rights organizations so concerned with the troop withdrawal and the end of the occupation? Well, as Goldstein describes in her article, their concern is practical: "under current conditions, aid workers describe themselves as reliant upon troops for their security." (Goldstein, 2009) ² The reliance of these organizations on troops to provide security so that they may go about doing the work of providing aid to Afghan women on the ground, binds the work of humanitarian agencies to an ongoing occupation of Afghanistan.

However, as Lindsey Beyerstein's rebuttal "Not all Feminists Love the Escalation in Afghanistan,"³ suggests, not all feminists in the U.S. and Afghanistan agree that militarism has been beneficial to Afghan women. Some women, like Sonali Kolhatkar of the Afghan Women's Mission met Obama's election with the hope that he would de-escalate U.S. militarism in the region and pull back on the occupation. For these feminists, the troop surges of approximately 50,000 additional soldiers over 2009 and 2010 disabused them of the notion that President Obama would be very different from his predecessor, and represented an escalation of War on Terror militarism. Beyerstein uses a statement from the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) to refute the notion that the ongoing presence of troops in Afghanistan benefits Afghan women. Copying directly from their website, she quotes:

RAWA believes that freedom and democracy can't be donated; it is the duty of the people of a country to fight and achieve these values. Under the US-supported government, the sworn enemies of human rights, democracy and secularism have

² Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2009/12/05/why-feminists-love-the-surge.html>

³ Retrieved from http://majikthise.typepad.com/majikthise_/2009/12/not-all-feminists-love-escalation-in-afghanistan.html

gripped their claws over our country and attempt to restore their religious fascism on our people.⁴

Using the words of a feminist Afghan group, these North American feminists articulate an alternative narrative in which Afghan women's liberation cannot be 'donated' via foreign intervention. Whereas pro-occupation feminist groups suggest that the advancement of Afghan women is contingent upon the presence of military troops, antiwar feminists push back by pointing out that the presence of U.S. and allied military troops have done nothing to curb violence by fundamentalists against Afghan women, and have in fact increased the threat by destabilizing the country and creating targets for violence wherever foreign troops are stationed.

Goldstein's article and Beyerstein's response gesture to the way in which President Obama's election, and the specter of the reduction of troops on the ground, resulted in a moment of revived vigor in the feminist discourse on the War on Terror. The liberal feminists she references were clearly making pushes in the public discourse to argue vehemently for ongoing occupation. The change in administration, and the policy shifts that change portended, also renewed an exchange between liberal and antiwar feminists on the role of U.S. militarism in the story of Afghan women's rights that was first debated publicly in 2002 (Hunt 2006). Almost a decade later, these same factions of liberal and antiwar feminists remained entrenched in their positions. By this time, liberal feminists working with women's and human rights aid organizations on the ground in Afghanistan had become invested in the infrastructure of the military occupation and the nation-state building project. Antiwar feminists meanwhile had been taking note of the

⁴ http://majikthise.typepad.com/majikthise_/2009/12/not-all-feminists-love-escalation-in-afghanistan.html

extent of the civilian casualties, as well as the other consequences of war that impact women including increased incidences of sexual violence, physical violence, forced marriages, and attacks on young girls attending school (Hunt 2006). The election of Barack Obama had both factions of feminists reinvesting in their perspective, and they are both compelled to go engage with one another in order to air their anxieties around this moment when the policies of President Obama have begun to be articulated, but are not yet enacted. The language of this moment comes from the administration. It is around the terms “troop surges” and “withdrawals” that the arguments about U.S. policy in Afghanistan are constructed by feminists in this discourse.

This moment of exchange and debate amongst feminists circulating online illustrates how various factions of feminists in the U.S. negotiate their position in relation to warfare, occupation, and peace, and the ways in which they bring Afghan women into the discourse in order to do that. It illustrates how feminists articulate the responsibility of both feminists and the U.S. government in Afghanistan, while illuminating the discursive pathways available feminists online looking to have their voice heard in this exchange. The realm of online media is somewhat more accessible than other forms of media production, inside and outside of the U.S. While RAWA do not often have the opportunity to appear on U.S. television and rarely appear in the pages of *The New York Times*, they do have a website up and available at all times where they can post missives for their audience, unmediated. This accessibility lends itself to a more heterogeneous representation of feminist voices, and even more opportunities for Afghan women to be heard. However, not all online venues are equal, and this narrows the field of authors who come to represent the “feminist” mantle in mainstream online discourse. Rather than

jockey for airtime or space on the page, however, antiwar feminists engage those liberal feminists who do have access to widely seen media platforms to force a public discussion of these issues. So, though they may not get to author a piece for these media outlets themselves, their position gets some visibility in these venues when liberal feminists address their criticism. An analysis of the ways in which feminist organizations use different venues to address one another on their position on Western militarism, allows us to see how it is that Goldstein can make the claim in mainstream discourse that “feminists” love the surge, and the ways in which other feminists push back against this.

The War on Terror, and Online Exchange

This chapter examines how contemporary feminist discourse online on Afghan women’s liberation is shaped by the interplay between the War on Terror and the simultaneous rise of the Internet and independently produced online discourse. As the War on Terror has grown and shifted over the last decade or so, there has been a concurrent growth in the use of the Internet as a source of information, as a venue for communication, and as medium that offers the possibility of exchange between individuals and organizations. As a mode of communication and exchange, the Internet has proven to be an efficient way to buy and sell consumer goods and has given rise to a number of social media vehicles that encourage sharing personal information. Beyond these uses there is a growing recognition about the ongoing and expanding uses of online media and digital technologies to facilitate and grow social movements and political uprisings. Many popular, political, and scholarly commentators argue that online media, social media, and the ways in which individuals used online media to circumvent

attempts by the state or other powerful actors to suppress dissent, made mass revolutionary action possible.

The ways in which online media has also been utilized to support the status quo, however, suggests the technology itself provides a venue for individuals to communicate and engage in exchange but whether that is for revolutionary purposes or to further entrench consumer culture in the digital age depends on the user. In this instance online media does not create a new phase of feminist action in and around Afghanistan, but it does provide a venue for feminists to engage one another about militarism in Afghanistan directly that is largely absent from other media platforms. The virtual sphere has exhibited great potential to establish networks amongst like-minded individuals, like feminists advocating for Afghan women. The networks fostered amongst different factions of U.S. and Afghan feminists make these virtual spheres into dynamic spaces, and an exploration of these spaces in turn helps to identify the relationships amongst feminists in Afghanistan and the U.S., and the particular importance of these networks for Afghan women who oppose occupation and who want to have their perspective heard widely by North American audiences.

Online discourse produced by these feminists about Afghan women already has the potential to encompass a broader spectrum of perspectives because of the relative accessibility it promises at the point of production. While one does need some resources to create content for online consumption (a computer, access to an Internet connection, and enough computer literacy on the part of the user that they can employ this technology) they are significantly less than those one would need to make a film. Though online users are not guaranteed space in publications like The New York Times online,

they do have the opportunity to create their own spaces online in which they can articulate their message unmediated and directly, should they be able to attract online audiences to their site. Goldstein's article suggests there is a homogeneity in the feminist discourse on militarism in Afghanistan, but this homogeneity is challenged in part by the access otherwise marginalized postcolonial/anti-racist/Third World feminists have to their own venues of distribution in online media. They are not only able to challenge statements like Goldstein's, but they are also able to do with an immediacy that makes it difficult for nationally known and established feminists who support militarism in Afghanistan to ignore their criticisms. Also, online discourse produced by these feminists includes Afghan women in ways that other forms of media do not. There are many more opportunities for Afghan women to not only have their perspectives represented in the discourse, but also to work as co-authors and media producers themselves, and to assert their own varied perspectives on foreign occupation. The relative visibility of Afghan women in this media venue, and their partnerships with U.S. based feminists, appears to support the notion that new technologies are facilitating a new era of transnational feminist engagement that has the potential to transform the project of feminism as a whole. Before we come to this conclusion, however, it is important to examine the specific ways in which these partnerships develop and falter that has nothing to do with the medium of the message itself and everything to do with fostering partnerships with like-minded women who support and agree on one's position on militarism.

The use of the Internet, as well as the time period in which this exchange takes place, creates more space for feminist perspectives that would otherwise compete for

limited space in mainstream venues of news media like ABC News and Time Magazine. In that respect, the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of women engaged in the virtual discourse is more varied here than in any other medium examined in this analysis, with documentary film providing the most comparable diversity of authors. Both are realms of media production well suited to independent media producers, and the Internet has the potential to reach a wide-ranging audience. All the feminist organizations examined here view a presence on the Internet as integral to their participation in important discourse on foreign policy and feminist politics in general, no matter what their political stance. As demonstrated by all parties in this discourse: The Feminist Majority Foundation, and Women for Afghan Women, Kolhatkar's U.S. based organization Afghan Women's Mission, and RAWA, maintaining visibility via a web presence has become integral to doing feminism in the digital age. These online sites are used by feminists to respond and speak to political actors they would otherwise have no way of accessing. They use these spaces to support or decry policy, to tell the stories of women, and to fundraise for their organization.

All of the women profiled in this chapter have a multifarious web presence. Smeal is also the publisher of Ms. Magazine and can be found all over their website, she also contributes to The Huffington Post, as does Esther Hyneman. Kolhatkar's byline can be found on Alternet.org, and she is host and producer of her own show on Uprising Radio, an independent, progressive political radio show broadcast that is archived on the Internet. Gayle Tzemach Lemmon a reporter who advocates with Smeal, Hyneman and the FMF for ongoing occupation, has a website of her own where her journalism, commentary, and activism are housed together branding her as an expert on foreign

policy in the Middle East in the era of the War on Terror. It not only provides an archive of her work as a freelance journalist, it also functions as a venue for the sale and distributions of her book, The Dressmaker of Khair Khana. The book tells the story of an Afghan woman who resists Taliban control by establishing her own business and defying the restrictions of the Taliban on women earning their own income to support her family. Lemmon's presence is also apparent on the website for the Council for Foreign Relations, where she is an advisor on women's issues. A series of position pieces authored by her on foreign policy, women, and entrepreneurship in the Third World are available on their site. Unlike these women and the organizations they belong to, RAWA's message is most often conveyed through an intermediary like Beyerstein, or Kolhatkar, or Frau Sally Benz at feministe.us who hosts a video interview with a member of RAWA (interviewed under a pseudonym). Though RAWA's emphatic statement in opposition to the presence of foreign troops and their call to the U.S. government to rescind support for the government of Hamid Karzai and his warlord allies are clearly articulated in this video, the women themselves must rely on interested parties in North America and Western Europe to provide them with opportunities to state their positions.

In this chapter I focus on an exchange that takes place amongst these feminists from 2008 on, because it allows us to see how feminists read and speak to one another through the Internet. In their responses to one another they are not only arguing the correct path of U.S. policy in Afghanistan, or the correct means of liberating Afghan women, they are also negotiating what it means to be feminist in the era of the War on Terror. Whether arguing for or against troop surges and withdrawals, these feminists are ultimately articulating what the responsibilities are of Western feminists to women in the

Third World, and establishing what it means to “do” transnational feminist solidarity in the War on Terror. What becomes apparent in these exchanges is that feminists in North America and Western Europe cannot divorce what they do from the actions of their government. The rescue narrative about Afghan women perpetuated by these feminist organizations in the 21st century is directly addressed by other feminists, who then put the question to the feminist community at large online.

Personal Narratives

Though their standpoints on policy vary, online feminists use similar modes of appeal to speak to viewers. One common feature is the inclusion of personal narratives of individual women and of prominent women as examples of idealized feminist action and behavior. These biographies are often intertwined with the missions and histories of the organizations they work with. RAWA, who are an organization comprised of Afghan women, feature the biography of their founder Meena; and when being interviewed or interjecting in the exchange, they often refer to their own experience as Afghan women to add credibility to and substantiate their perspective. After all, shouldn't the desires of Afghan women themselves be the basis on which North American and Western European feminists form solidarity and show support? This is the position taken by Kolhatkar and the Afghan Women's Mission, who are an organization created to partner with RAWA and explicitly support their position in the discourse circulating in North America. They tout RAWA's role as activists and long time feminists who have opposed all forms of tyranny against women whether it is meted out by Soviet and Soviet backed forces, Islamists, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Smeal and Hyneman who are based in North America but who oppose RAWA's stance, also include Afghan women who support their position in the information they produce in order to authenticate their position and avoid the criticism that theirs is an imperialist imposition. In the resulting discourse two types of Afghan women emerge to support the ongoing presence of foreign military for these feminists: educated reformers and victims of Taliban abuse. Smeal works closely with Dr. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and former Minister of Afghan Women's Affairs (2001-2003). She often refers to Dr. Samar's advocacy for the ongoing presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan expressly for the purpose of protecting Afghan women. Dr. Samar's position as a long time activist for women's rights, a physician who has worked in Pakistan and on the Afghan border administering healthcare to Afghan women refugees since the 1980s, and who has since returned to Afghanistan to take a position in government so that she can work to establish gender equality, makes her a credible advocate for long-term occupation. The other woman is Bibi Aisha, a young woman who was mutilated by her in-laws for disobedience and attempting to escape her husband. Bibi Aisha's narrative works in a very different way from the narrative of the women of RAWA, or that of Dr. Samar. Bibi Aisha represents the most vulnerable of Afghan women, and representations of that vulnerability make a compelling argument for ongoing intervention in Afghanistan. Her image and her story appear repeatedly in the appeals made by Smeal, Lemmon, and most often Hyneman.

The troop surge was a point of conversation as far back as 2008, during the George W. Bush administration. The Bush administration had employed a troop surge strategy in Iraq in 2007, and it was largely thought to have been successful in curbing the

insurgency; there was speculation that the Bush administration would apply similar tactics in the ongoing chaos in Afghanistan. And so, the language of surges had been traveling the discourse in the War on Terror for a couple of years by the time President Obama announced formally that he would send an additional 17,000 troops to Afghanistan in February of 2009 to “contribute to the security of the Afghan people and to stability in Afghanistan.”⁵ On March 27th, 2009 the Obama administration released a white paper announcing the administration’s policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan. This paper suggested a shift of focus away from the War in Iraq to focused military missions aimed at Al Qaeda and the Taliban on the Afghan-Pakistan border, and a desire to end the War in Afghanistan having stabilized the country.

In December of 2009, Obama ordered an additional 30,000 troops at the behest of military generals, bringing troop totals (including NATO) close to 100,000.⁶ Simultaneously, throughout 2009 the Obama administration works on formulating an eventual troop drawdown initially setting the date for mid 2011. In April of 2009, even military generals were encouraging the deployment of more non-military personnel, “economists, agriculturists, lawyers and other civilian advisors” to refocus on development, creating what is now referred to in the discourse as the civilian surge.⁷ Concurrent to the rhetoric of military drawdown, the rhetoric of nation building, development and progress emerge and alongside it the concept of replacing military

⁵ Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Statement-by-the-President-on-Afghanistan/

⁶ The Council for Foreign Relations War in Afghanistan timeline. Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/us-war-afghanistan/p20018>

⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/nonmilitary-commitments-needed-nato-afghanistan/p19027>

forces with a population of civilian agencies fostering the foundational principles the U.S. claimed to be exporting when they first invaded Afghanistan.

In March of 2009, the Office of Management and Budget,⁸ issued a memo declaring that operations once referred to as The Global War on Terror would now be referred to by all Obama administration officials as The Overseas Operation Contingency.⁹ The newly named OOC houses the current military operations in Afghanistan (Enduring Freedom) and ending operations in Iraq (New Dawn), as well as ongoing unnamed operations in Pakistan. The budget issued by the executive branch for the Overseas Operation Contingency in 2012 illustrates how the funding is divided between Department of Defense spending related directly to military operations, and the Department of State and United States Agency for International Development aimed at civilian projects. It also illustrates a reduction in DOD spending in Iraq from close to a 100 billion dollars in 2009 (90% of which was dedicated to military spending, less than 10 to development), to just over 10 billion in DOD spending, and just over \$5 billion on State/USAID in 2012. The spending trend in Iraq supports the current frame of the dominant discourse, in which large-scale military operations in the War on Terror are winding down and we are entering a new phase focused on establishing security, stability and infrastructure by partnering with government and civilian agencies in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰

⁸ An executive-branch agency responsible for reviewing the testimony of administration officials prior to its public delivery

⁹ Wilson & Kamen. 'Global War on Terror' is Given New Name. Washington Post. March 25th, 2009.

¹⁰ The State/USAID OCO budget of \$5.2 billion meets the needs associated with the transition to civilian leadership and sustains the gains made by the military.

DOD spending in Afghanistan has conversely increased since 2009 from approximately \$60 billion (less than 5% of which was dedicated to State/US Aid) to \$107 billion, with approximately \$2 billion budgeted to State/USAID in 2012. The discourse on Afghanistan however, is still focused on bringing military operations to an end there despite evidence that spending earmarked for military operations in Afghanistan suggests that US and allied military presence in Afghanistan will continue in the immediate future. Also, in the case with Iraq, while military spending may decrease the spending on development will consistently remain a fraction of that budget. Spending on development and aid will never come close to equaling the amount spent on combat. However, it remains important to the U.S. administration that the perception that aid will flow to Afghanistan remain apparent in order to continue to perpetuate the narrative that the War in Afghanistan is a humanitarian and just effort. Women are of course integral to the discourse of militarism in Afghanistan's recent history, where the oppression of Afghan women has provided justification for foreign imperialist interventions by the Soviet Union in the late 1970's and again by the US and its allies in 2001. These justifications are the direct result of Orientalist characterizations of Muslim society, which emphasize the barbarity of Muslim men over objective historical, and political economic analyses connecting the oppression of Afghan women to broader trends of warfare, poverty and continued lack of access to healthcare and education.

-
- Includes \$1.0 billion to train the Iraq police and \$1.0 billion for assistance to Iraqi security forces, both programs previously led by DoD.
 - Expands embassy and consulate facilities to support all U.S. government agencies in Iraq <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/fs/2011/156555.htm>

The Orientalist character of the War on Terror has created such strange bedfellows that a Democrat President who would otherwise be viewed as a friend to feminists, who also describe themselves as peace activists, becomes a source of anxiety for them because he is committed to ending the War in Afghanistan. The additional falsehood that is perpetrated in these anxious missives is that U.S. military withdrawal in the sense it is being discussed in these conversations does not mean the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region, and really only refers to the reduction in the number of combat troops stationed there. Under the guise of a “support mission” thousands of U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan, and if the history of U.S. warfare in the 20th century is any indication, the U.S. will maintain a permanent military presence in the region, as it has done in Japan, Germany and Korea. This discourse also belies the far reaching influence private and civilian actors will have in restructuring the economic and political institutions in Afghanistan, as well as the aid agencies who will remain there. The anxieties of feminists who do not support the withdrawal of troops stem from their belief that the U.S. will take a passive role in the region allowing the Taliban to resume some control, not that there will cease to be U.S. influence in the region at all.

Feminist In Chief?

The cover of Ms. Magazine’s Winter 2008 Inaugural Edition features an image of the newly elected President Obama as a superhero. In the image, he is adopting the iconic stance and motion that in U.S. popular culture invokes the shift that the everyman Clark Kent undergoes to become his hero alter ego, Superman. When Kent ripped away his shirt, an S for Superman was revealed underneath his suit; when Obama rips away his

suit, the phrase “This is What a Feminist Looks Like” can be seen written across his chest. Nothing about this image is casual or unintended; in fact it is particularly meaningful because Obama is the first man to grace the cover of Ms. Magazine.



Illustration 7: Feminist in Chief, Cover of Ms. Magazine January 2009

The cover was meant to “capture both the national and feminist mood of high expectations and hope as the 44th President of the United States takes office,” writes Smeal in a blog for The Huffington Post on January 13th, 2009. Smeal describes meeting with the President where he “offered” the statement, “I’m a feminist.” The Ms. Magazine website is littered with positive affirmations of Obama’s domestic policies: pushing health care reform (which includes securing affordable birth control for women), passing the Dream Act by Executive Order, his stance in favor of same-sex marriage, and his decision to sign The Lily Ledbetter Act for Equal Pay, are several noteworthy

accomplishments that speak to the President's commitment to feminist issues on the domestic front. As a political actor, it does not cost the President to support explicitly feminist positions. The voting blocks he may alienate by doing so are likely conservative and would not be inclined to vote for the liberal candidate to begin with. There is also a clearer bifurcation of the feminist and non-feminist positions on these issues. The issue of Afghan women's liberation and the role of militarism in this process becomes an increasingly complex issue as the President's aims may actually contradict those of feminists who support him otherwise. In the realm of foreign policy, and specifically on the issue of Afghan women, the feminists at Ms. Magazine take a cautionary approach to the President's policies and the changes to the military projects of the War on Terror that he will implement in those policies. If, as he stated he would in his 2009 speech, he decided to move towards ending the War in Afghanistan, it may disrupt the existing processes and networks these feminist aid organizations rely on to assist Afghan women on the ground there.

The archives of press releases and public statements are maintained on The Feminist Majority Foundation's website. The website is a discursive space that is under the purview of members of the organization, rather than an external editorial body; the women are themselves responsible for publishing their work. Ostensibly this results in their ability to articulate precisely the message they intend to and not risk having their message diminished. The website is also a medium that favors immediacy, and immediacy is a key component of participating in the cycle of feminist discourse as it works its way through the peripheries of mainstream news organizations, and occupies significant discursive space in loci of feminist exchange online. The FMF's press releases

also act as discursive fodder for other news outlets looking for immediate access to feminist perspectives on “women’s” issues. Much of the commentary produced by the FMF on President Obama’s policies in Afghanistan are presented in the format of press releases; statements crafted to be readily available to print, television and mainstream online news media looking for the feminist perspective on stories about troop surges and withdrawals.

Smeal and co-founder Mavis Leno began the Campaign for Afghan Women and Girls, as an extension of The Feminist Majority Foundation, in early 2009, shortly after Obama’s election. On March 27th, 2009 The FMF published a press release entitled, “FMF and Sima Samar Announce New Campaign for Women and Girls,” which begins with a statement from Dr. Samar:

Afghan women and girls want education. Many risk their lives to go to school. People want accountability, transparency in the flow of aid to Afghanistan, and justice not impunity and support for those who violate human rights. Human rights are not a western concept, but universal and necessary for all human beings.¹¹

The second portion of the statement announces the launch of CFAWAG chaired by Mavis Leno, wife of American talk show host Jay Leno and longtime advocate for Afghan women. Smeal includes her own statement:

We warned in 1998, and over and over again ever since, the women and girls in Afghanistan are the canaries in the mine. We cannot forget them if we are ever to gain peace and global stability. The United States has a new opportunity to change direction in Afghanistan we believe that this time, with the leadership of President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, women and girls will not be left on the periphery, but placed in the central focus of our new policy. We are determined to galvanize the public will and support to help make this happen.

¹¹ Retrieved from <http://feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=11603>

And finally, the statement ends by referencing to President Obama's public address earlier in the day announcing his administration's strategy in Afghanistan. Smeal and the FMF are buoyed by Obama's specific mention of Afghan women and girls in the address, and his statement that a return of the Taliban would be detrimental to all Afghans. Clearly, the FMF timed the announcement of their own renewed mission in Afghanistan with the President's statement. At this moment, the aims of the FMF and the Obama administration appear to line up, particularly in regards to the Taliban.

The next mention of Obama in relation to Afghan women comes in April of 2009, following up on news stories by CNN and The Guardian announcing the passing of a new Shia family law in Afghanistan severely restricting the movements of women outside of the home. It restates the President's statement to CNN that the law is "abhorrent" and that while cultural sensitivity is important, that "basic principles" of respect for women, respect for their freedom and integrity ought to be insisted upon. In these initial concurrent public assertions, the President echoes the logic of feminists like Smeal and the representatives of the FMF to articulate a rescue narrative that displays an awareness of "cultural sensitivity," and then reasserts the imperial logic of intervention and the white man's burden. That the people invoking the white man's burden are neither men, nor white, does not overshadow the position that's taken.

This particular edition of the rescue narrative exhibits specific characteristics which result from the confluence of several factors: thinking in relation to the "Muslim world," the context of the War on Terror, and the impact on public discourse of progressive anti-colonial, anti-imperial movements and scholarship. As shown in the statements from both the administration and the FMF, there is an awareness that the U.S.

interfering too closely with the governance of Afghanistan may be considered imperialism, and the imposition of Western values. The FMF utilize the statement of an Afghan woman to assert that gender equality is a universal principle, and point to a similar statement by the President to reassert this universality. There is nothing to object to in the notion that women's rights ought to be a universal, basic principle. The objections of other feminists however, are to the methods by which basic principles are established, and the ways in which feminist principles are given significant rhetorical play in the discourse while resources are rarely deployed at the same rate or volume as language.

After these initial articulations of common rhetorical goals and aims for women in Afghanistan, the discussion turns to the processes by which the administration and the feminists at FMF seek to establish that basic principle of equality. The President's announcement that he will send additional troops comes as welcome news to the FMF because the ongoing presence of foreign troops and the bureaucratic infrastructure of occupation facilitates their presence on the ground. The FMF's public support for this policy directive is the genesis of the feminist exchange I examine in the next section. In that exchange, feminists who support ongoing and increased militarism are questioned by feminists who consider the occupation to be a primary source of Afghan women's ongoing subjugation. But, an additional tension is also apparent in that President Obama's decision to send additional troops is couched within the conversation of withdrawal and ending the War. On December 1st 2009, the President offered an explicit timetable for ending the War in Afghanistan, emphasizing a move into a transitional

phase in the war that focuses on civilian aid and nation-building.¹² Though the FMF, and feminists who similarly support the troop surge and military presence, are also in favor of a simultaneous and full scale investment in civilian aid and development; they believe the building of that infrastructure is contingent upon the presence of military troops.

On the same day as President Obama is making a public statement on his administration's policy directions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the FMF once again issue a statement. This entry is entitled, "Keep Pledges to Afghan Women and Girls." Here, the FMF, via a statement authored by Smeal, state that President Obama must continue his commitment to Afghan women by increasing "humanitarian and development programs of education, healthcare and employment." These actions will not only benefit the Afghan people, Smeal states, but it will thwart terrorism, because adequately paying jobs will drain the Taliban's labor pool. Smeal even offers data to show that as an employer the Taliban are more attractive than the Afghan military or police because they simply pay more. A small piece of information like this displays the potential for independently produced feminist discourse to interject critically on War on Terror discourse that looks no further than a rabid and essential ideological affiliation with fundamentalism and terrorism as the sole basis on which Afghans choose to join the Taliban. This emphasis on civilian development is not lieu of military intervention, but alongside as the President's comprehensive strategy, "not only military assistance" but also additional civilian resources.

The statement begins however, with a tally of some of the Taliban's worst abuses towards women:

¹² Stolberg, S.G. & H. Cooper. "Obama adds troops, but maps exit plans." <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/02/world/asia/02prexy.html?pagewanted=all>

Hundreds of girls' schools have been destroyed. Teachers have been murdered - some right in front of their students. Girls are being attacked with acid thrown in their faces on their way to or from school. Atrocities are regularly committed by Taliban forces against women. And we cannot forget, when Afghanistan was ruled by the Taliban, women and girls were not allowed to be educated, employed, go outside their homes without the company of a close male relative, go to a treatment by male doctors. Women were beaten and killed for violations of intolerable restrictions.¹³

It concludes with a statement by Samar and statistics of violence against women and children,

Dr. Sima Samar, the chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has told us that no place in Afghanistan is safe. We remain extremely concerned about the increase in severe violence against women in Afghanistan. For example, today some 35% of the 6 million school children (some 55% of all children) are girls, but in the southern province of Kandahar, where the Taliban insurgency is strongest, some experts estimate only 3% of the school children are girls. Nearly 1,000 girls' or co-ed schools have been attacked, arsoned, or destroyed by Taliban insurgents or militia. Teachers of girls as well as women political leaders have been assassinated; most recently a Kandahar woman provincial council member who was a fighter for women's rights was shot and killed.

Circulating the narratives of women's suffering in Afghanistan is a cornerstone strategy of feminists who advocate long-term intervention in Afghanistan. In their relationship with the President, they use these statistics and incidents to apply pressure to the Obama administration. It is not that feminists like Kolhatkar or RAWA deny that women in Afghanistan are subjected to atrocities and abuse, compounded by cycles of isolation and poverty. It is that when they articulate these injustices, they also include the toll of occupation on Afghan women. In an interview posted to the RAWA website on July 31st, 2008, Kolhatkar echoes Smeal's statements when she states, "where the Taliban are strong; girls schools are blown up, civilians are killed in suicide bombings, and

¹³ Retrieved from <http://feminist.org/news/pressstory.asp?id=12098>

journalists, teachers, and elected officials are harassed or murdered.” But she adds, “In the parts of the country with the heaviest concentrations of US/NATO troops, Afghans are frequently rounded-up, detained, tortured, bombed, or shot by foreign troops just as in Iraq.” This is a direct connection to the violence created by the occupation that is absent from the feminist advocacy for longer-term military presence in Afghanistan.

The Exchange

The policy announcements of Obama regarding Afghanistan in 2009 created an opportunity in War on Terror discourse for feminists who do not support military intervention in Afghanistan to push back against the dominant narrative using the online media. Tracing how this exchange moved through different online forums, from Alternet.org to the RAWA, Feminist Majority Foundation and The Huffington Post websites, where women author their challenges to the logic espoused by supporters of both positions. This discourse extends outward also to other websites who “pick up” on the exchange on sites like the Daily Beast and Pink Tank. In mapping the constellation of websites who engage in this phase of exchange we begin to see where feminist discourse travels on the Internet in turn identifying sources of information for feminist audiences. As well as making visible where feminists read discourse on the web, this back and forth makes apparent that these feminists do “read” the discourse produced by one another. It also makes visible which women have access to mainstream venues of online media and which women function on the margins; not all online venues are equal. Simply identifying which news venues each author in this exchange utilizes to critique or respond to critique illustrates a disparity in the access different feminists have, which also

divides these feminists politically; Kolhatkar and Rawi publish on Alternet.org, which receives approximately 2.3 million unique visitors to its site each month according to its own website, while Smeal and Hyneman publish in The Huffington Post, which receives approximately 36 million unique visitors each month, following its merger with media conglomerate AOL.¹⁴

It also becomes apparent that methods differ, and target audiences differ, depending on how much access these different women have. Smeal and FMF use press releases, timed alongside President Obama's announcement, to make a feminist perspective readily available for news outlets reporting on U.S. policy in Afghanistan. A savvy strategy for a prominent feminist organization who has worked in the realm of policy and public discourse before FMF are attempting to reaching a broad national audience, in the hopes of maintaining public interest and support in the U.S.'s assistance of Afghan women. Kolhatkar and Rawi on the other hand are directing their discourse towards other feminists. They use essays, op-eds, to pose questions directly to Smeal, as they have in the past on RAWA's site, which I discuss further below. Both entities use collaboration, but in different ways. And both feature the voices of Afghan women, in different ways.

What is clear is that this is a rare media moment in the War on Terror; when feminism is presented in public discourse as a multi-faceted movement with internal as well as external conflicts, rather than a homogenous perspective that is represented by one organization like the Feminist Majority Foundation. RAWA and allies like Malalai Joya have long called for the end of the occupation, but their critiques of U.S.

¹⁴ <http://techcrunch.com/2012/02/02/huffington-post-streaming-network/>

government receives little attention from the administration or from media venues.

Because Kolhatkar and Rawi direct their message at an established feminist organization who feed information regularly to a number of online news outlets, their criticism garners some response and visibility. On the other hand, when Smeal and the FMF make a critique of the administration, they may very well expect a response from the Obama administration. They figure enough in the public spectrum of power to have garnered a face- to- face meeting with the President, and they have access to widely read media platforms that have the chance to reach these powerbrokers.

For organizations like RAWA collaboration is always necessary to participate in the discourse to begin with. There is a clear practical need for discursive collaborators, contacts and facilitators in order to reach those same audiences when your organization is not only hampered by a lack of resources, but even more so when being a member of that organization must be kept secret. All RAWA contributors to the media do so under a pseudonym as Miriam Rawi, Kolhatkar's co-author, does. The only RAWA members who use their real names are allies based in other countries who will not be subject to retaliation. The anonymity of RAWA members facilitates the movement of its members in Afghanistan. However, when working with North American and Western European news outlets that same anonymity does not lend itself to visibility. They have used their invisibility to facilitate foreign women's movement and media production in Afghanistan. As I have shown in previous chapters, the RAWA organization are important collaborators for foreign women producing print/online and television journalism on Afghan women, and for documentary filmmakers. They have long been a point of connection for Western feminists who enter Afghanistan and need assistance

moving about on the ground, suggesting another reason why they occupy such a significant portion of the space allotted to Afghan women's voices in the discourse.

Prior to the War on Terror, RAWA and the FMF worked together to bring members of RAWA to the U.S. to publicly protest their treatment by the Taliban; the RAWA website's archive shows images of an organized transnational protest in Washington D.C. and in Islamabad, Pakistan on April 28th, 2000 to mark the "Black Day of entrance of the criminal fundamentalists in Kabul in 1992."¹⁵ The protest in Washington D.C. was sponsored by the FMF and the National Committee of Women for a Democratic Iran, and Eleanor Smeal gave a speech in which she praises RAWA for their work and cites their common causes and goals for women in Afghanistan. At this moment in time RAWA's critiques of international policy regarding Afghanistan are directed towards institutions like the UN, and not at U.S. policy specifically. They are attempting to get the attention of U.S. policymakers, which the FMF's sponsorship is able to provide to some degree. Senator Harry Reid sends a message of solidarity to the rally in 2000, condemning the Taliban and commending RAWA; New York Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney also speaks at the rally, telling them "To the women of Afghanistan, I say, We remember you, We will not forget you, we will fight for you!"¹⁶

The archives of press releases and articles at feminist.org show a number of articles from 1999, which mention or are about RAWA. In July of 2000 the FMF publish a short article on feminist organizations and the Internet. "Women's rights organizations all over the world, including (RAWA), have seized the power of the Internet in advocating women's issues that are often not a focal point of international media," they

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/28ap00re.htm>

¹⁶ et. al

write, the potential for the Internet's use already apparent to organizations who must strategize to make their message visible in mainstream media. Of their own use they write, "The Feminist Majority's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid website is a proven organizing tool to pressure the United States Government and the United Nations, through American public action, not to support the Taliban"¹⁷. And finally, they intertwine the missions of both organizations, "Thanks to the websites and ongoing issue raising by groups like the Feminist Majority and RAWA, the catastrophic situation of Afghan women and girls brought on by sadistic Taliban laws are included in U.S. and U.N. humanitarian and foreign policy matters."¹⁸

However, this cooperative spirit dissipates quickly in the wake of 9/11. The next mention of the Feminist Majority Foundation, and its affiliates, appears on the RAWA website in April of 2002. The letter is written to the editors of Ms. Magazine, who recently published an 11-page spread on saving Afghan women. It is by Elizabeth Miller, and it is unclear how Miller is affiliated with RAWA but she takes the FMF and Ms. to task for reproducing hegemonic U.S. discourse on Afghanistan by perpetuating the myth that militarism is fostering democracy and equality, and for excising RAWA from the narrative of Afghan women's liberation and taking full credit for that progress themselves. At the same time that RAWA issues this critique, they are also announcing a blunt opposition to U.S./allied militarism. Smeal's response to the letter is recorded by writer Noy Thrupkaew:

Asked about the letter, Smeal chuckles, then sighs. "The idea [behind the insert] was to introduce us by one of our campaigns," she says. Part of the insert's role was to tell "the pre-September 11, U.S. feminist story behind the campaign,"

¹⁷ Retrieved from www.feminist.org/afghan/intro.html

¹⁸ Retrieved from www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=5063

according to Jennifer Jackman, the Feminist Majority's director of research. That story necessarily highlighted the unsung work of UN feminists, the two women appointed to the interim Afghan government and Afghan expatriate activist Sima Wali. The omission of RAWA was not political, Smeal insists. "We felt everyone knew RAWA," she said.¹⁹

From that point on, there is no mention of RAWA on the Feminist Majority Foundation website, but Dr. Sima Samar becomes a regular presence. Samar, who had been living in Pakistan, running a hospital that catered to refugee Afghan and Pakistani women, returned to Afghanistan in the wake of the invasion and was appointed Minister of Women's Affairs by the newly installed government. Samar is a former member of RAWA, who for a short time had a formal voice as an advocate of women's rights in Afghanistan. Now she functions as the head of an Independent Human Rights organization, and advocating for investment in the development of Afghanistan, and works as an ally of the FMF. While the FMF begins its new alliance with Samar, RAWA find an alliance with another U.S. based organization, Kolhatkar's Afghan Women's Mission, which she founded with co-author James Ingalls. Founded in January of 2000, the Mission describes itself as "A Project of Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs." Their mission statement expresses an overt political and humanitarian allegiance with RAWA, "to support health educational and other programs for Afghan women."²⁰ From the early 2000s on, Kolhatkar and the Afghan Women's Mission work as collaborators with RAWA in terms of media visibility in the United States, utilizing Kolhatkar's existing connections with U.S. news outlets to express opposition to U.S. policy that the FMF embraces.

¹⁹ Retrieved from <http://prospect.org/article/what-do-afghan-women-want>

²⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.afghanwomensmission.org/about/>

RAWA are themselves loaded symbol in the discourse as one of the only visible organizations of Afghan feminists. As Afghan women they receive very little mainstream coverage in the U.S. on their own in comparison to other voices commenting on policy in Afghanistan.²¹ Simultaneously, the limited discursive space available to feminists in Afghanistan are given to RAWA in this conversation, which Krista Hunt argues may obscure the existence of other Afghan women's rights organizations.²² The centralization of RAWA in the discourse may result in an overemphasis of this organization as the native voice of Afghan women,²³ but conversely they are often also the targets of criticism, and when they are it becomes apparent that they occupy a relatively invisible role in the discourse, illustrating the need for collaborators in the United States and Western Europe.

In 2002, two articles appear on RAWA's website in response to the critiques of Western feminists in articles by Noy Thrupkaew and Wendy Mcelroy in American Prospect Magazine and on Fox News respectively. They accuse RAWA of being Maoists and radicals, launching "smear campaigns against other Afghan women who rise to prominence," particularly Sima Samar who RAWA accused of working with fundamentalists and warlords to remove their names from lists of war criminals,²⁴ and imply that RAWA are misappropriating funds raised by American donors including the FMF.²⁵ The responses that RAWA publishes appear on their own website because their critics refuse to publish their responses, which emphatically deny the misappropriation of

²¹ Hunt 2002, 2005

²² Puar, Spivak

²³ Hunt 2005

²⁴ Retrieved from <http://prospect.org/article/what-do-afghan-women-want>

²⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,60806,00.html>

funds, or that they receive any funds from FMF to begin with, and restates that they will refuse to support anyone who supports the role of fundamentalists in government. Both responses begin with similar statements, “The answer was sent to the American Prospect Magazine on September 18, 2002 but it was not published in the magazine. It appeared on EquityFeminism.Com on October 18, 2002,”²⁶ and “The answer was sent to Wendy McElroy, Fox News and ifeminists.com on October 14, 2002, but they neither acknowledged its receipt nor published it though we resent it later. It appeared on EquityFeminism.Com on October 18, 2002.”²⁷ When their critics refuse to publish their responses, they find collaborators in the world of online feminism who can help them circulate this message and push back against that silencing.

In the realm of post 911 politics then, RAWA are simultaneously the most widely discussed organization of Afghan feminists, and in that way overemphasized in the representation of Afghan feminism in the discourse, and yet continue to occupy a marginal role in international discourse and are under threat of prosecution and death for participating in their own national discourse. That they are targets of both liberal and right wing feminist critiques in the United States, also speaks to the peculiarity of post 911 feminist politics and suggests why they are taking up as much space in the discourse as they are. As with RAWA in Afghanistan, the FMF’s overemphasized presence in mainstream media can potentially obscure other feminist organizations in the U.S. This overrepresentation is directly linked to the ways in which women access media, and the ways in which women accrue that access over time. Both RAWA and the Feminist Majority Foundation are well established; RAWA’s inception dates back to the 1970s in

²⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/prospect.htm>

²⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/wendy.htm>

Afghanistan. The FMF was established in 1987, by women like Smeal who were already well established through organizations like the National Organization of Women, and Ms. Magazine. Prior to 911, these organizations already had fully functioning websites, whose function in part is to provide fodder for other media organizations, and a process in place for writing and publishing timely statements.

The FMF specifically has media contacts for the East and West Coast on their website, indicating the presence of a staff, who are trained to have content prepared for media circulation. Unlike RAWA, the FMF's leadership do not need to collaborate with other women's organizations to access the editorial page of major online publications in North America and Western Europe. When the FMF access these sites they advocate for the ongoing presence of allied military as well as greater investments in the foreign civilian development bureaucracy on behalf of Afghan women's security and progress. To do so, they also bring in the voice of Afghan women through the supportive statements of Dr. Samar, implying a mandate for their position. In the past, they had partnered with RAWA, but in a discourse in which they find themselves opposed to RAWA it is that much more important to have a native voice supporting their call for foreign intervention.

Smeal's and the FMF's recognition of the importance of including native voices in Western feminists' arguments for intervention speaks to the recognition of postcolonial feminist criticism of liberal feminism's uses of Third World women historically. The dismissal of this type of criticism does not prevent an organization like the FMF from strategizing about how to overcome such criticism. This configuration of partnerships, between all parties involved in the discourse, also illustrates how post colonial feminist

criticism, and liberal feminists' responses, have come to impact the ways in which native voices now function in global feminist discourses. At most they may be co-authors as RAWA are, if they find collaborators who are willing to work with them in that way. Most often, they appear as support for the positions of feminists in the U.S. who require legitimation. What is apparent is that it's important for all feminist factions participating in this discourse to position themselves as partners to Afghan women on the ground; each organization argues their policy position on militarism in Afghanistan in terms of Afghan women's wellbeing, and each cites the voices of Afghan women in support of their own. This is true when feminist commentary on Afghan women's liberation surfaces in War on Terror discourse in 2002, and is also true when the exchange emerges online amongst these feminists in the wake of Obama's election.

RAWA, as an organization, has been espousing the critique that launches this phase of the feminist exchange since the inception of the War on Terror. Their website is a repository of consistent statements opposing the invasion, which also do the work of refuting the various logics employed to justify militarism in Afghanistan from 2001 to the present.²⁸ Those logics range from quashing terrorism with overwhelming military might, to establishing long-term democracy to combat terrorism in the long-term to elevating the status of Afghan women in an effort to modernize and moderate Afghan society, thereby reducing terrorism in the long-term. This includes a May 2002 editorial by Kolhatkar,

²⁸ As a vigilant watchdog of Soviet invaders, fundamentalists, warlords and allied occupations, RAWA's website is also a record of U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan going back to 1992. In November 2001, Kolhatkar conducts an interview with RAWA member Tahmeena Faryal who states, "We welcome the combat against terrorism. In fact, this combat should have started years ago in terms of preventing incidents like September 11. But this combat against terrorism cannot be won by bombing this or that country. It should be a campaign to stop any country that sells arms or supports financially the fundamentalists' movements or fundamentalist regimes."

“‘Saving’ Afghan women,” in which she deconstructs the narrative of barbaric Afghan men and cowering Afghan women and the fascination with the burqa. She questions the currency of that narrative not only for the Bush administration, but for fellow feminists as well, gesturing to the ease with which feminists in North America and Western Europe embraced the War on Terror as an opportunity to assist Afghan women and promote themselves in the public discourse. In that editorial, she addresses the FMF’s promotion of the “gender apartheid” campaign, noting the symbols they use to sell Afghan women’s oppression:

Far more interested in portraying Afghan women as mute creatures covered from head to toe, the Feminist Majority aggressively promotes itself and its campaign by selling small squares of mesh cloth, similar to the mesh through which Afghan women can look outside when wearing the traditional Afghan burqa. The postcard on which the swatch of mesh is sold says, "Wear a symbol of remembrance for Afghan women", as if they are already extinct. An alternative could have been "Celebrate the Resistance of Afghan Women" with a pin of a hand folded into a fist, to acknowledge the very real struggle that Afghan women wage every day, particularly the women of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), who are at the forefront of that struggle. Interestingly enough, 50% of all proceeds go toward helping Feminist Majority in promoting their campaign on "Gender Apartheid" in Afghanistan.²⁹

A central question these authors raise is, “Whose purpose does this serve? How “effective” would the Feminist Majority’s campaign be if they made it known that Afghan women were actively fighting back and simply needed money and moral support, not instructions?”³⁰

The initial critique in this phases of the feminist exchanges put forth by Kohlhatkar and her co-author, RAWA member Miriam Rawi was published on

²⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/znet.htm>

³⁰ et. al

Alternet.org on July 7th 2009, a website to which Kolhatkar is already a contributor.³¹

Alternet is an independent online news magazine publishing original investigative journalism that consciously works to “inspire action and advocacy,” and to that end publishes stories on grassroots movements, inspirational personal narratives and “hardhitting critiques of policy.”³² The critique published here is part of larger push on the part of RAWA and Kolhatkar to generate a critical conversation about militarism in Afghanistan under the Obama administration. Kolhatkar produces and hosts the Uprising Radio show on the Pacifica station, a venue for progressive and radical politics in the U.S. Kolhatkar dedicated an entire program to a discussion with Miriam Rawi about the consequences of a troop surge take place on the 16th of January, 2008. During this program, Kolhatkar and Rawi both assert that adding to the 42,000 allied troops in the region would be counterproductive to ending violence and create a meaningful stability for the Afghan people. Alternet provides the next logical step for publicizing their perspective on the surge since the site regularly funnels programming from Kolhatkar’s radio show. The archives of Alternet show several articles with Kolhatkar’s byline featuring content from her radio show, and she has contributed to Alternet on Afghanistan since 2005.³³

This article reiterates the question Kolhatkar asked in 2002 (what is the purpose of generating a stereotypical burqa clad figure of the oppressed Afghan women for liberal feminist organizations in North America and Western Europe) in the context of 2009

³¹Retreived from
http://www.alternet.org/story/141165/why_is_a_leading_feminist_organization_lending_its_name_to_support_escalation_in_afghanistan?page=0%2C0

³² Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/about>

³³ Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/authors/sonali-kolhatkar>

policy, “Why is a Leading Feminist Organization Lending Its Name to Support Escalation in Afghanistan?” Feminist support for the escalation of foreign troops in Afghanistan relies on the existence of vulnerable Afghan women, and in both cases the question Kolhatkar and her collaborators pose is not only about the investments of liberal feminists in oppressed Afghan women and boisterous militarism, but is more so a query into the character and logic of a feminist politics that creates those investments. The election of President Obama has not shifted the fundamental issues in the feminist exchanges on how best to assist Afghan women, because his election has not shifted U.S. policy in Afghanistan, but has shifted the rhetoric to significantly more benign language focused on ending the war and encouraging nation-building. It is the degree to which that rhetoric has shifted, and the complicity of feminists in making this rhetorical shift, that prompts this particular moment of critique.

The subheadline “Waging war does not lead to the liberation of women anywhere – even if you call soldiers ‘peacekeeping forces’,” reiterates the critique of militarism, and speaks to the ways in which liberal feminists like the FMF have shifted how they speak about militarism in the discourse on the War on Terror since the election. The reference to peacekeeping forces comes from language Kolhatkar and Rawi note on the website for newly launched Campaign for Afghan Women and Girls, where “the first stated objective” is “to expand peacekeeping forces.” They also note that, “Not even the Pentagon uses that language to describe U.S. forces there,” and that the campaign itself revives “the tired claim that one of the chief objectives of the military occupation of

Afghanistan is to liberate Afghan women,” which is “absurd” and “offensive.”³⁴

Kolhatkar and Rawi debunk the claims of women’s progress in Afghanistan as a result of U.S./allied military presence since 2001: the Ministry of Women’s Affairs is an ineffective, largely symbolic, organization; the numbers of women in parliament belies the presence of progressive thinking in Afghanistan’s new government, as many of them are pro-warlord. These “paper gains” they write mean little when violence and instability threaten women’s safety, security and economic productivity in the day to day, and when the judiciary continues to make laws diminishing women’s status in the home and in society.

Describing themselves as “humanitarians and feminists,” Kolhatkar and Rawi take issue not only with the call to keep U.S. and allied forces in country (they are careful to make the statement that the invasion has been a failure, and extending that invasion will not undo the destruction) but the rhetorical turn towards referring to those troops as “peacekeepers.” The terminology used to describe military forces deeply impacts whether a military action is perceived as a humanitarian effort or not. In public discourse, particularly in the United States, the association of a military action with a humanitarian cause in the discourse denotes a more noble effort, and insinuates a more compassionate military will descend on the largely civilian populations, resulting in less injury. In this scenario foreign military presence is welcome. Utilizing this terminology is purposeful on the part of FMF, who want to communicate that they are advocating for troops to stay on behalf of Afghan women.

³⁴ Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/story/141165/why_is_a_leading_feminist_organization_lending_its_name_to_support_escalation_in_afghanistan

The term “peacekeepers” simultaneously erases the violence of combat and occupation, and the various tolls those circumstances take on civilian, and specifically female populations. The bombing of Kosovo by U.S. and allied forces in the early 1990s is considered to be the first of these NATO humanitarian wars, and a successful human rights intervention by a U.S. led allied coalition. Serbian forces were committing acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing against Bosnian Muslims, including employing the systematic rape and torture of women. The intervention was framed as an incursion against evil, and in the wake of a bombing campaign, which effectively ended the war, soldiers from a number of nations remained in the area to act as peacekeeping forces. The presence of foreign troops has had mixed results for women there, as a headline from The Guardian articulates, “NATO force ‘feeds Kosovo Sex Trade.’” The article reports on Amnesty International’s 2004 finding, that the presence of “Western troops, policemen, and civilians are largely to blame for the rapid growth of the sex slavery industry” over the handful of years they’d been present, with some peacekeepers found to be acting directly as smugglers and pimps of women and girls.³⁵ In the wake of severe conflict civilian women face few opportunities to provide economically for themselves and their children; adult male populations decimated by the violence of war. These circumstances converge with the presence of foreign military and civilian personnel from other parts of the world who bring with them a demand for sex work, creating an economy of exploitation, which relies on the continued vulnerability of women and girls.

Similar trends have emerged in Afghanistan, with an increase in prostitution amongst Afghan women who are attempting to supplement their income. They range in

³⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/may/07/balkans>

circumstance, from young girls, to widows, to married women whose husbands force them into prostitution.³⁶ The women serve Afghan men, but they are also meeting the demand for the military and civilian bureaucracy that has established itself in the wake of the occupation. Kolhatkar and Rawi reference this in their initial statement to the FMF and broader feminist community, which had excised the impact of occupation on Afghan women from their own assessments of women's progress in Afghanistan:

In our conversations arguing this point, we are told that the U.S. cannot leave Afghanistan because of what will happen to women if they go. Let us be clear: Women are being gang raped, brutalized and killed in Afghanistan. Forced marriages continue, and more women than ever are being forced into prostitution -- often to meet the demand of foreign troops.³⁷

This is a direct challenge to the rationale of feminists at the FMF and their allies, that the ongoing brutality towards women in Afghanistan warrants the ongoing presence of foreign troops. Echoing a point RAWA and their allies have made repeatedly throughout the War on Terror in other forums, Kolhatkar and Rawi point out that Afghan women are abused despite and in some cases because of the occupation. They do not argue that women have gained equal rights in Afghanistan, so the occupation is no longer necessary; they identify the occupation as an active contributor to cyclical oppression of women.

They identify the United States as a complicit actor in the oppression of Afghan women:

The U.S. military may have removed the Taliban, but it installed warlords who are as anti-woman and as criminal as the Taliban. Misogynistic, patriarchal views are now embodied by the Afghan cabinet, they are expressed in the courts, and they are embodied by President Hamid Karzai. Paper gains for women's rights mean nothing when, according to the chief justice of the Afghan

³⁶ Tang, A. June 14th, 2008. "Poverty pushes Afghan girls into sex trade." USA Today. http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-06-14-afghanprostitution_N.htm?csp=34

³⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/rawa/mobile.php/2009/07/08/why-is-a-leading-feminist-organization-lending-its-name-to-support-escalation-in-afghanistano.html>

Supreme Court, the only two rights women are guaranteed by the constitution are the right to obey their husbands and the right to pray, but not in a mosque. These are the convictions of the government the U.S. has helped to create. The American presence in Afghanistan will do nothing to diminish them. Sadly, as horrifying as the status of women in Afghanistan may sound to those of us who live in the West, the biggest problems faced by Afghan women are not related to patriarchy. Their biggest problem is war.

But, beyond the reiteration of the realities that Afghan women face, Kolhatkar and Rawi also use the editorial to object to the ways that the FMF's public position lays claim to the voice of feminism in the discourse on the War on Terror. "Feminists around the world must refuse to allow the good name of feminism to be manipulated to provide political cover for yet another war of aggression."³⁸ And, they are also careful to respond to the FMF using the voice of another Afghan women, the dissident Malalai Joya who has also consistently called for an end to the occupation of Afghanistan, in an effort to not only insert another native voice into the discourse, but to also insert a heterogeneity into the concept of feminism in the context of the War on Terror. Given that the FMF has been critiqued by both Kolhatkar and RAWA before, and that these criticisms circulate in relatively marginal news outlets in comparison to the realms of public discourse available to Smeal and the FMF, it is curious that their critique would spark an exchange to begin with. Especially when we consider Smeal's "chuckle" in response to RAWA's critiques in 2002.

One indication of why the 2009 critique is more difficult for Smeal and the FMF to ignore, is the hyper-transmission of that critique. Though Internet use and access was there in 2002, in 2009 there appears to be a much more immediate dissemination of Kolhatkar and Rawi's pieces amongst feminist blogs and other outlets that Smeal and the

³⁸ et al.

FMF find difficult to ignore. As feminist news site Pink Tank (“The Political is Personal”) writes in their blow-by-blow account of the exchange between Smeal and Kolhatkar and Rawi, “The piece was posted everywhere, including here, and the FMF was not too pleased.”³⁹ Pink Tank’s article indicates not only that feminists read content that other feminists publish online, but that they do so because content is so easily reproduced and re-disseminated online; additionally, there are other peripheral feminist enclaves of knowledge production online observing and commenting on these exchanges, and doing so in the immediate present and not days, or weeks later. The Pink Tank piece comes only one day after Smeal publishes her rebuttal to Kolhatkar and Rawi’s piece on July 15th, 2009.

The main similarity in Smeal’s approach to this exchange are the use of a co-author, FMF board member Helen Cho, and the reliance on the authentic voice of Afghans to support their perspective on foreign troops in Afghanistan. As Kolhatkar relies on her existing relationship with Alternet where she is a regular contributor to make her critique, so does Smeal rely on her existing relationship with The Huffington Post where she has made several contributions between 2008 and 2010, all specifically in relation to domestic electoral politics and reproductive, with the exception of the rebuttal. In the other pieces she has authored, Smeal is often speaking back to politicians on the right, like Senator and Presidential candidate John McCain on behalf of “the feminist left.”⁴⁰ The FMF’s response to the criticism of their support of the troop surge is to “answer” the question posed by Kolhatkar and Rawi. Their main argument for

³⁹ Retrieved from <http://codepink.org/blog/2009/07/smeal-strikes-back-the-fmf-response-to-kolhatkars-piece-on-afghanistan/>

⁴⁰ An Open Letter to Senator McCain. Oct. 22nd 2008. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eleanor-smeal/an-open-letter-to-senator_b_136985.html.

maintaining U.S. military and civilian presence in Afghanistan rests on “the promise” the U.S. made to Afghan women, and by concluding that U.S. withdrawal would mean the Taliban’s ascension to power. What Afghan people want, they assert, is to make sure the Taliban never return, “58% (of Afghans) think they pose the biggest danger to the country” according to a BBC/ABC Poll from December 2008.

The authors ground their position in a history chronicling Afghanistan’s invasion by Soviet troops, the subsequent civil war and the Taliban’s victory in the mid-1990s, in which Smeal and Cho blame the rise of the Taliban on President George H.W. Bush’s broken promise to help rebuild Afghanistan after the expulsion of the Soviets, and his decision to “walk away.” When Smeal refers to the criticism of Kolhatkar and Rawi, she does not address them directly initially, saying only that “some feel that we should just walk away.” Instead, the FMF speak about the “responsibility” the U.S. and they, as feminists, have in Afghanistan. Even acknowledging the failures of the U.S. invasion and occupation adds to this narrative of U.S. responsibility in Afghanistan; we cannot withdraw until we have achieved the stability, using military forces, that the presence of military forces has failed to provide thus far. They also provide a history of their own involvement in Afghanistan; reiterating that their interest in the region and the women there preceded 9/11, even going so far as to mention their efforts to have the Taliban designated a terrorist organization without success.⁴¹

Smeal and Cho’s response writes out the logic through which liberal feminists who began 2001 in opposition to the Bush administration on a number of issues, have come to support military intervention in Afghanistan, and the Obama administration’s

⁴¹ Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eleanor-smear/why-is-the-fmf-refusing-t_b_234595.html

decision to escalate that intervention. The authors describe themselves as “peace activists” opposed to the bombing of Afghanistan after 9/11, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. They go on:

Given that non-violence is part of our mission statement, we, at the Feminist Majority, never expected to be asking for more security in the form of international peacekeeping troops (ISAF) back in 2002. (It is this outdated fact sheet that Sonali Kolhatkar and Mariam Rawi cite and we thank them for reminding us how important it is to keep our website updated.) But when we traveled to Kabul after 9/11 to find out what the U.S. could do, security is what Afghan women wanted first and foremost.⁴²

The call for U.S. intervention they are making then, is not on their own behalf, but strictly on behalf of the Afghan women they have interacted with. These nameless people they refer to throughout ask the authors, “Where were you (the U.S.) after we defeated the Soviets?” In this retelling of their decision to support militarism, they are reluctant but practical supporters of Afghan women. In this narrative, resisting militarism is a form of progressive idealism on the part of feminists like Kolhatkar and Rawi, while the reality on the ground in Afghanistan has brought these avowed peace activists into the mode of war supporters. Most importantly, the authors situate the call for military presence outside of themselves and frame it as the presence of Afghan women’ voices in the discourse. As with other content, they end their editorial with a statement from Dr. Samar, and the goals she states they must have for long-term investment in Afghanistan. Commentators on Pink Tank point out that the goals they articulate on behalf of Dr. Samar, human rights, the U.S.’s decision to act as partner and refusing to support propagators of violence, security, job creation and efficiently and ethically distributed aid, do not actually call for the increase of foreign troops.

⁴² et. al

Repeatedly, Smeal and Cho make the association between polls in which Afghan peoples list security as a top priority (alongside access to food and healthcare) interpreting this desire for security as an endorsement of the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan. These security concerns extend to the aid agencies and humanitarians who are working in the country, “Last year, 92 aid workers were abducted and 36 were killed, double the number from 2007,” despite the facts that these events have all taken place troops are on the ground. They return to the Taliban’s abuses of women, citing a recent flogging of a young woman, acid attacks on schoolgirls and the case of an elderly woman who was tied to a tree. Though the history that Smeal and Cho provide properly attributes the rise of the Mujahadeen to U.S. government and the CIA during the Cold War, there is no discussion of the negative impacts of U.S. presence in Afghanistan today. In this editorial, foreign military are a source of peace, and the source of stability, not violence. In fact, their rationale for the ongoing presence of U.S. and allied troops in Afghanistan are prior foreign policy failures of the U.S. in Afghanistan, which in this historical narrative amounts to the U.S.’s decision at different points of Afghanistan’s history to “walk away.”

However, militarism is only one component of the appeal the FMF would like to make. They lament that they are unable to support an entirely civilian aid effort, because their true position is in favor of a Marshall Plan style rebuilding effort. The Marshall Plan or European Recovery Program refers to the post World War II policy of the U.S. to fund development of war ravaged European nations, in an effort to stem the spread of Communism. The 1947 \$13 billion dollar reconstruction plan funneled money into modernizing European industry and economies, in part so that they would be able to

purchase American made goods. Smeal and Cho advocate a similar investment in Afghanistan, with an emphasis on humanitarian aid and development. If the presence of military troops in Afghanistan are a source of peace and stability in Afghanistan, the bureaucracy of U.S. civilian aid in foreign Afghanistan is the mode of progress, modernization and architect of equality in Afghanistan. The FMF position themselves as significant actors in this collaborative process:

We are grateful for our many friends and colleagues in the peace movement who have joined the effort to support the courageous women and girls of Afghanistan. Together, we have helped designate substantial U.S. funding for women and girls programs in Afghanistan -- \$367 million to date. Right now we are working for passage of the Afghan Women's Empowerment Act with \$100 million for critically needed education, employment, and health care programs and we continue to emphasize the need to fund Afghan women-led programs of Afghan nonprofits.

In this editorial, it is also important to note that they express support for President Obama's decisions in regard to Afghanistan. As the conversation turns to withdrawal in late 2010 and in 2011, the relationship to the Obama administration's policies in Afghanistan becomes much more ambivalent.

Just as the editorial by Kolhatkar and Rawi was not an isolated discursive product, the rebuttal also works in conjunction with a number of media appearances emphasizing the need to remain in Afghanistan, and invest there, in the Spring and Summer of 2009. One woman whose work provides opportunities for feminists like Smeal to say their piece, and makes apparent the author's agreement with that position, is that of freelance journalist and business expert Gayle Tzemach Lemmon. Former ABC producer and contemporary expert on Third World women and development, and advisor for the Council on Foreign Relations, Lemmon archives much of her journalism and commentary on her professional website. A spate of articles she publishes between

August and November of 2009 in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times* and on *The Daily Beast* website, exhibit Lemmon's reporting on the business acumen of Afghan women, as well as the failures of previous efforts at development. By November, she is clearly espousing the perspective that the ongoing presence of U.S. military troops is necessary, and making claims to representing the true wishes of Afghan women.

Even while some political activists and pundits in Washington and London sound the call for a full troop withdrawal, women here argue that a complete pullback would only exacerbate the battery of formidable problems plaguing their struggling nation. Though nearly all say the international community could have done a far better job in securing a teetering Afghanistan, where practically every citizen can now rattle off a personal tale of corruption, few women say they believe foreign forces should go. In a series of conversations with a dozen women leaders spanning a range of sectors, from health care to business to politics, some of whom rarely speak to journalists, the consensus was that existing troops must stay for now—if only because things would be far worse were they to leave. Insecurity would rise, the Taliban would gain power, and women and girls would immediately lose ground. “Pull out, get out, give up is not the way to solve Afghanistan’s problems,” Afghan parliamentarian Shukria Barakzai told *The Daily Beast*. She and several other women leaders say that while they are not convinced Afghanistan needs more American soldiers, there is no question the future of their country depends on those forces already there. “We want the troops here,” said Huma Safi, a program manager with Women for Afghan Women, which runs women’s shelters and family counseling centers in three provinces of Afghanistan. “Women are in danger already; if the troops go, the people who will be most affected will be women and children.”⁴³

In an article entitled, “What the Surge Means for Women,” Lemmon conflates the dire experiences of young poor women in Afghanistan who escape abusive fathers, husbands and in-laws with the ongoing presence of military troops:

But some women’s rights groups, including Women for Afghan Women, the organization that oversees the shelter where Naseema lives, greeted President Obama’s speech Tuesday night—and his vow to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan—with a modicum of hope, and a call for a long-term American commitment to the country. “Without security, the Taliban will engulf the country and return women to the hell of rape, domestic captivity, denial of education and health care—to the erasure of their very humanity,” the group’s

⁴³ <http://www.gaylelemmon.com/journalism/afghan-women-leaders-demand-support/>

leaders said in a statement.”

Like the Campaign for Afghan Women and Girls at the FMF, Women for Afghan Women are a U.S. based feminist organization raising money to assist Afghan women on the ground. They were founded shortly before the 9/11 attacks in Queens, NY and state on their website “9/11 catapults WAW into participation in a global exchange. We take the position that along with a global coalition of nations organized by the U.N., the United States must exert force in Afghanistan to oust the Taliban.”⁴⁴ This position is reiterated again during this same period, when a leader of Women for Afghan Women, Esther Hyneman becomes involved in an exchange with feminist journalist Ann Jones. In an article for *The Nation*, Jones is critical of WAW and the organization’s decision to have a young woman, Bibi Aisha, who was mutilated by her in-laws, photographed for a Summer 2012 *Time* Magazine cover, whose headline declares “What Happens If We Leave Afghanistan.”

Women for Afghan Women had assumed responsibility for the 18 yr old since her arrival at one of their shelters, arranging for her to come to the U.S. for surgery and clearly, they had orchestrated her use for the *Time* Magazine cover, as they also acted as a gateway to media outlets. In her article, Jones argues that a “creeping Talibanization of Afghan life” is taking place under the Karzai government, whom the current presence of military troops protect, and takes WAW to task for utilizing an Afghan woman’s suffering to openly advocate for militarism.⁴⁵ Hyneman uses *The Huffington Post* to address Jones’s criticism:

⁴⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.womenforafghanwomen.org/index.php/home/history>

⁴⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/article/154020/afghan-women-have-already-been-abandoned>

The world once knew about these horrors but seems to have forgotten. The point of the photograph of Aisha, one single photograph, was to remind them, to shock them into recall, and to encourage them to consider what would revisit Afghan women and girls, 15 million of them, if the Taliban regain control of the country. Therefore, Jones is correct to say that we were trying to influence public opinion in favor of continuing the military presence in Afghanistan although we take strong exception to her description of this intention as shameless and manipulative.⁴⁶

Besides the exchange between Hyneman and Jones, there is clear evidence that the exchange on militarism in Afghanistan continued on, and continues into the present moment. The feminist organizations who continue to advocate for U.S. troops in Afghanistan begin to appear more coherent in their approach to public advocacy for this position in the years following President Obama's election, continuing to emphasize whatever positive effects of militarism for Afghan women they can. In January of 2010, Lemmon publishes an article for The New York Times entitled, "U.S. Military Experiments with Empowering Afghan Women," describing a program in which the Pentagon has set aside significant dollars to train Afghan women to make clothing for the new Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army. Here, the discourse has come full circle; the invasion and restructuring of Afghanistan itself providing the economy that brings poor Afghan women back into productivity and earning power.

How do Kolhatkar and Rawi respond to feminists like Smeal, Hyneman and Lemmon who cite the experiences and voices of Afghan women as the origin of their call for the ongoing presence of U.S. troops? First, Kolhatkar returns to Alternet to author her response. She notes that the original title for Smeal's response was "Why the Feminist Majority Foundation Supports Engagement in Afghanistan." Kolhatkar challenges their

⁴⁶ Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/esther-hyneman/staying-honest-about-afgh_b_732185.html

position as “peace activists,” because they never publicly opposed war in Afghanistan or Iraq, identifying their position as “tacit support of the war,” and pointing out that “Today that support for war continues by equating the security craved by all Afghans with the war being waged by US troops.” It is important for Smeal, Cho, Hyneman and Lemmon to assert that as feminists they are fundamentally opposed to war in theoretical terms; however, they are able to rationalize their support for militarism as feminists, when the humanitarian goal of aiding women and establishing gender equality in Afghanistan ‘supercedes’ their own disdain for conflict. But, Kolhatkar’s and RAWA’s critiques become important inclusions in the feminist discourse on militarism in Afghanistan because they are able to directly refute the popular notion that U.S. militarism in Afghanistan will have those consequences, and because they point to a heterogeneous feminist perspective on the liberation of Afghan women and the War on Terror.

What becomes apparent in a broader examination of this discourse, however, is that while there are instances in which feminists like Smeal and Hyneman are forced to engage with feminist critics like Kolhatkar and Jones, the differential in the access to mainstream online venues for media production means there are times when they are not required to engage with them at all. In those cases, feminist discourse on the troop surge and Obama’s policies in Afghanistan is represented as a much more homogeneous perspective. This is particularly apparent in late 2011 through 2012, when President Obama’s announcement that troop withdrawals would begin and be completed by 2014, spurs another round of discourse by feminists who are opposed to leaving. In these articles, the perspective of feminists like Kolhatkar, RAWA and Malalai Joya are absent, and the feminist perspective is entirely occupied by organizations like FMF and WfAW,

In November of 2011, Lemmon writes an article for the online publication Foreign Policy in which she expresses her own skepticism, and that of many feminists who support troop presence in Afghanistan, at Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's promise not to abandon Afghan women, while the Obama administration engages in talks with the Taliban and all factions in Afghanistan to negotiate the military exit of the United States. These discussions are tied to the broader question of what role Afghan women will play in determining the direction in which the nation will go, and the ways in which foreign aid will be deployed. Events like the Bonn Conference in December of 2011, and the annual Kabul Conference, echo historical conferences amongst the U.S. and the nations in which it is engaged in development. The original Bonn Conference took place in 2001, ex-patriot Afghan women activists like Dr. Sima Wali were included to signal the new era in Afghan society, and the inevitable modernization of Afghanistan in the wake of foreign intervention. Lemmon credits Clinton with getting women into the Kabul conference, but, these feminists worry, who will ensure the presence of Afghan women at future conferences if the U.S. is not there to demand it?

As Human Rights Watch noted, "The Afghan government and its international backers say that women's rights are one of their 'red lines' as they plan for the withdrawal of international forces. If this is the case, why are Afghan women struggling to get a seat at the table in Bonn?"

Conversation about troop withdrawal by the Obama administration, and decreased U.S. involvement in Afghanistan overall, is interpreted by feminists advocating for military presence as an abandonment of Afghan women. This is particularly true for these feminists because withdrawal from Afghanistan requires negotiating with Taliban factions who have retained power in specific regions of Afghanistan. For feminists like

Kolhatkar, Jones and the women of RAWA, this was an inevitability of the U.S. invasion; the support of Hamid Karzai's government and warlords in Afghan government already signaled that the U.S. would not sacrifice their own interests in the region to the establishment of women's rights. Lemmon argues that the Obama administration in particular does not see the role of Afghan women as being as integral in the War on Terror than their predecessors. She references a March 6, 2011 article on US AID in Afghanistan, and the lessening of requirements to include Afghan women, in which "a senior U.S. official" states that gender equality is a "pet project" and that the U.S. will never be successful if these "pet rocks in our rucksack" take us down.⁴⁷ Lemmon reiterates this with her own highly placed, anonymous White House official who asserts that "These guys don't get it."⁴⁸

To argue the administration's wrong policy in this instance, Lemmon cites feminists who work on the ground with Afghan women to support the position for more troops. These feminists are Eleanor Smeal, Mavis Leno and Esther Hyneman. Negotiation with the Taliban is out of the question they argue, but more than that they express frustration with the public discourse on Afghan women, and the administration's position:

I am at my wit's end at the lack of discussion by the media, by our government, by our president on the issue of women's rights in Afghanistan." Of Obama, Hyneman says, "I am appalled that he has not mentioned Afghan women's rights since his speech on withdrawing US troops.

Leno adds: "Perhaps the tremendous unpopularity of the war puts [President Obama] in

⁴⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/05/AR2011030504233.html>

⁴⁸ Retrieved from http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/21/afghan_women_are_not_pet_rocks

an awkward position,” but, “I just don't understand why the fate of these women has to be considered as special pleading.”⁴⁹ The suspicion of the Obama administration in the wake of the announcement of a timeline for withdrawal signals a slight shift in their discourse, but it falls in line with what these feminists have argued since 2001. In this piece, the perspective of feminists, and of aid workers, is represented entirely by women who advocate for the presence of troops, demonstrating that though online media provides a venue for postcolonial anti-imperialist feminists to engage in the public discourse on Afghan women's liberation, they remain marginalized when feminist authors who disagree with them, use their access to mainstream media to excise their critiques from the exchange.

This absence trickles out into other venues for public discourse on feminism and Afghan women online. This is again apparent in the December 2009 article by Dana Goldstein for *The Daily Beast*, “Why Feminists Love the Surge.” Reporting on “the left's latest divide,” Goldstein, a fellow at the New American Foundation and *The Nation* Institute, asserts that liberals and the President want to see an end to the war in Afghanistan, but feminists do not. Citing Smeal, Lemmon, and Women for Afghan Women co-founder Sunita Viswanath, Goldstein asserts that feminists, women's rights and aid organizations are disappointed in the President's lack of reference to Afghan women in his recent speeches (as Hyneman points out above) especially in comparison to his predecessor President George W. Bush. Goldstein does include Palwasha Hassan, an expert at the United States Institute for peace, who states that additional troops alone are not the solution to women's issues in Afghanistan; rather, a holistic approach to

⁴⁹ et. al

restructuring and development is required. Still other progressives, Goldstein reports, think these activists “naïve” for considering the U.S. government’s commitment to Afghan women’s rights during the War on Terror to be a sincere effort.⁵⁰ She does not name or include those progressives, nor does she identify them distinctly as feminist progressives.

As in other instances in this discourse, feminists who are aware of the complexity in feminist War on Terror discourse use online media to challenge Goldstein’s assertion that “feminists love the surge.” An article by investigative journalist Lindsay Beyerstein is published on her own blog the day after Goldstein’s piece entitled, “Not All Feminists Love Escalation in Afghanistan.” Beyerstein points immediately to RAWA’s statements and the statements of Malalai Joya about the government of Hamid Karzai and the lack of support for Afghan women under U.S. occupation. She even cites the statements Joya made to another Daily Beast reporter, Michelle Goldberg, a month prior criticizing the Karzai government. Beyerstein concludes that, “Maybe RAWA and its allies would have a better shot at power if the occupation wasn’t shoveling billions of dollars to the most reactionary elements in society.”⁵¹ Beyerstein’s article is reprinted on the RAWA website on the same day⁵². Progressive feminist website Jezebel.com also publishes a follow-up challenging Goldstein’s piece four days later on December 9th, 2009, entitled “Afghan Women, Feminism, And the Problem with Limited Options” which provides a re-articulation of the exchange amongst feminists, beginning with Goldstein’s piece,

⁵⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2009/12/05/why-feminists-love-the-surge.html>

⁵¹ Retrieved from http://majikthise.typepad.com/majikthise_/2009/12/not-all-feminists-love-escalation-in-afghanistan.html

⁵² Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/rawa/2009/12/06/not-all-feminists-love-escalation-in-afghanistan.html>

including quotes from Smeal and Cho's piece for The Huffington Post in response to Kolhatkar and Rawi's critique, through Beyerstein's response to Goldstein, ending with a video clip of "Zoya," a RAWA spokesperson whose face is burred as she refutes the notion that foreign occupation has improved the lives of Afghan women.

In independent feminist media outlets like Jezebel, the criticisms of RAWA, Joya and Kolhatkar, make it into the conversation. The editors at Jezebel, Beyerstein and other feminists bring them into the conversation when Goldstein and Lemmon leave them out. Without these collaborators, the voices of RAWA in particular, would have a difficult time being heard. Hunt is correct that RAWA is the most often discussed Afghan feminist organization, but mere visibility is not enough. The women of RAWA are cited in feminist and mainstream discourse when they support the critique of the Taliban, but their criticism of U.S. policy and militarism in the region does not often make it into the most widely available feminist discourse. In those moments, they must rely on those collaborators to make their perspective visible to audiences in North America and Western Europe. But, no matter how often they, and other Afghan women like Dr. Samar emerge in the discourse, the overall content about foreign intervention comes largely from Western feminists producing knowledge about Afghanistan for the West.

Ultimately, it is the discursive pathways open to different factions of Western feminists, which becomes apparent in this discourse. This is important to the Afghan women who rely on their Western counterparts to make their voices heard, and the difference in the kind of online media they have access to impacts not only who articulates the feminist perspective on the War on Terror, but which Afghan women are brought into the discourse through their collaborations with them. The national

recognition and credibility that Smeal, Hyneman and Lemmon enjoy as career activists and media producers in the United States who have worked in mainstream feminist movements and in mainstream media venues mean that they have access to online venues like The Huffington Post and the editorial page of The New York Times. Their presence in these publications acts as reinforcement for their particular feminist perspective on War on Terror militarism in Afghanistan, and over-represents that position as the feminist voice in public discourse. When Kolhatkar and RAWA successfully get the attention of the online feminist activist community with their critique of Smeal and the FMF, it creates a moment of visibility in the public sphere of the existence of heterogeneous feminist movements in the United States.

VI. CONCLUSION

The traveling women I have discussed throughout this project make up a cadre of authors, and producers of media, whose work on Afghan women, Afghanistan, the occupation and “the Muslim world” will continue to circulate in discourse about the War on Terror in the long-term. This is partially evident in the ways that these women utilize various forms of distribution channels to circulate their work. The New York Times for example, archives all the articles written by reporters like Amy Waldman on Afghan women and those articles will be referenced in future research about the state of Afghan women during the U.S./allied invasion and occupation. Freelancers like the photojournalist Stephanie Sinclair, filmmaker Beth Murphy and writer Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, all utilize online interfaces where they can house their media and make it available for display and distribution, in the context of the other work they do and have done. Because their work is widely circulating and has longevity, and because of the ways that these women’s participation in the discourse produces them as experts, it is important to understand how they come to be in Afghanistan, and why. Like their historical counterparts, these women function as part of a broader impetus to gather information about the “the Muslim world” in order to determine the origins of the conflict at the core of the War on Terror.

Since the narrative of the War on Terror is most often begun with the attacks of September 11th, 2001 (which is also the event that eventually leads to the declaration of War in Afghanistan, and so marks the emergence of a demand for information about Afghanistan, its people and of course, Afghan women’s subjugation) the ensuing pursuit for information is framed according to the statement made by President George W. Bush,

“why do they hate us?” The ‘they’ in this case, are Muslims, and specifically Arab Muslims. So, the pursuit of knowledge about the ‘new’ threat facing the United States, and all liberal secular societies, begins in the context of rooting out the cause for these events in the culture and social configurations of Muslim societies. The women who travel to Afghanistan in the context of the War on Terror are not traveling there in a vacuum, but as part of a mass, global redirection of attention to Afghanistan. They are traveling there in a moment when there is a coordinated effort by news agencies and state actors to determine how the roots of the conflict emerge from the rule of the Taliban and the influence of Islamic fundamentalists on Afghan society. Coverage of Afghan women’s oppression then, is not just about Afghan women and the obstacles they face, it is about providing the exculpatory evidence to North American and Western European audiences that proves how incompatible Muslim societies and Islamic practice are with liberal secular societies in the West. The work of these particular producers is all the more convincing as it comes from the perspective of women, and is phrased in terms of a commitment to universal humanitarian values, and from the benevolent perspective of a liberated woman who wishes the same for her Afghan counterparts. This is a particularly insidious way in which Orientalism is perpetuated in contemporary discourse.

There are however, challenges and disruptions to this logic that are also evident in the discourse, particularly when the number of voices representing the feminist perspective increases. Though it may seem counterintuitive, even when the inclusion of a greater range of voices results in internal conflict amongst feminists and causes conflict, it is beneficial to the project of feminism and particularly for the discussion of how feminists in North America and Western Europe can demonstrate solidarity with Muslim

women trans-nationally in the context of the War on Terror. Any account of feminism that hopes to be useful in the world, and that seeks to avoid recreating conditions of subordination and oppression for women in other places, must contend with the complexities that arise when we must consider transnational and global feminist projects do not exist outside of the overarching frameworks of global political militarized conflicts and must always be wary of the ways that feminism is deployed by various political and religious elites to incite anger. For example, not only is feminism utilized by the U.S. government and its allies to justify War and ongoing occupation, but when feminism, or feminist principles, become visible in places where they have previously not been as visible there is a simultaneous disavowal of feminism as an imperialist and foreign construct by repressive Islamic political regimes (which is perpetuated in the narratives circulated by Western liberal feminists and Western states who often take credit for creating the conditions in which women's rights movements emerge) which in turn obscures the existence of healthy feminist movements in Muslim and Arab states that have their own rather lengthy histories.

A multiplicity of voices challenges the ways in which feminism is deployed in these contexts to support militarism (as humanitarian intervention) and challenges the idea of the on-going subjugation of women as an inherent part of Muslim culture. When Muslim, and in this case Afghan, feminists are included in the discourse they illustrate the existence of 'native' feminist movements in Afghanistan and part of the work they do is to record and disseminate histories of feminist action. In Afghanistan, the RAWA website maintains a record of the history of the women's movement in Afghanistan through the story of how RAWA came to be. They identify the greatest threats to

women's liberty as the influence of domestic Islamic fundamentalism and foreign military incursions that continually destabilize the country and make it possible for fundamentalists to gain and retain power. A multiplicity of voices in feminist discourse also allows feminists to engage with the inevitable conflicts and challenges that arise when there is an attempt to speak in terms of the universal experiences of women and strategies to overcome structural inequality. In order to discuss the experiences of women, feminists must engage with race, class and sexuality and the ways in which those identifications complicate the experience of difference and how that in turn impacts the rhetoric and strategies used by feminists. This is exacerbated in a transnational context, especially when a construct like the clash of civilizations provides the broader context in which transnational alliances are articulated.

In this project I look at how feminist discourse on the War on Terror creates space for a multiplicity of feminist voices (or not) by examining how and where feminist discourse emerges in different media platforms. The scope of feminist voices that appear in mainstream print news publication is much narrower than the scope of feminist voices available online, which is a byproduct of the ability to access these forms of publication. In the virtual sphere, feminist Orientalism does not circulate as easily or with as much credibility. Progressive, radical post-colonial critics based in North America and Afghanistan, who are otherwise rarely seen in mainstream print, online and television news do have online outlets through which they can assert a critique of Western feminisms and rescue narratives of Third World women. As I have shown, there are ways in which those critiques are marginalized, particularly because they appear largely in alternative news media outlets, but they do appear.

Examining the work of these women in a medium specific framework, also allows me to explore the specific networks that women utilize to enter and move around in Afghanistan, and most importantly facilitate their access to Afghan women. The role of Afghan women in this discourse is central, of course. Not only because they are ostensibly the focus of the coverage, but because in the discourse about U.S. /allied militarism in Afghanistan Afghan women offer the native voice on which the perspectives portrayed in the discourse are based. Which Afghan women appear in the discourse, and whose experience they portray, greatly influences the perception amongst audiences about whether or not militarism is necessary and/or beneficial. When portrayals of extreme violence committed against Afghan women by Taliban and fundamentalists only (and not, for example, depictions of women injured by warfare or allied fire) are repeatedly circulated, they make the case for the necessity of ongoing intervention. When portrayals of Afghan women overcoming oppression are circulated, they are interpreted as a result of foreign intervention.

Apart from the portrayals of Afghan women, the native voice is also employed by women's and humanitarian organizations to bolster their arguments for and against ongoing militarism. Advocating for the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan as a humanitarian project means that it is important to include the voices of Afghan women, who give credibility to the narrative that militarism has engendered some liberation for Afghan women and ought to continue. For anti-war feminists, it is important to include the voices of Afghan women who contradict that narrative and who point to degrading conditions for Afghan women as the occupation progresses. As this analysis shows native voices that support the narrative receive significant attention. Bibi Aisha is one example,

though there is a question of the degree to which it is her voice that articulates her story for these news media outlets. Conversely, voices that do not support the narrative must often push their way into the discourse. Malalai Joya, for example, was a darling of media outlets based in Western liberal secular societies when she first made a statement calling out warlords in the newly established Parliament and then fell out of favor with those outlets as she began to openly critique and call for the end of the U.S./allied occupation.

The concept of native takes on additional importance in the context of this discourse because of the role of the ‘third sex’, who derive their exceptional status in Afghanistan from their position as foreigner. Throughout the analysis of this discourse it has become apparent that this is an exchange between ‘foreign’ voices, and ‘native’ voices only appear in it. The closest exception is the example of the partnership between RAWA and the Afghan Woman’s Mission, who work together to access media and attain visibility for their position, however, without a counterpart in the United States who can work with them to provide that platform, RAWA would largely be excised from the discourse and relegated to offering short statements in support of their position as a counterpoint to arguments by multiple U.S. feminists for ongoing occupation. Much of the discourse produced about Afghanistan is truly about what it means to be at once foreign and female in Afghanistan. Though native voices have value in the discourse of war as humanitarian endeavor, the resulting writing and images that are produced

The configuration of the ‘third sex,’ her freedom and mobility, her ability to penetrate aspects of the war zone that are unavailable to foreign men (without the use of military force), can only exist in relation to the oppressed Afghan woman. As Barbara

Hodgson states was the case in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, women traveling to the Middle East were working under the assumption that they were unfit and they had to prove that they would be capable of navigating their way through these foreign lands.¹ Histories of women's participation in each of these media, and the entry of and common presence of women making media in the war zone, show a similar trend in which women have been presumed to be unfit for this kind of work, and have changed that perception over time via pure achievement. The presence of the women working in the war zone in Afghanistan already positions them as having overcome histories of subjugation in the places they come from. Their mobility and achievements are not contrasted to populations of women 'back home.' That contrast might illustrate how uneven the establishment of gender equality is in North America and Western Europe, and the roles race, class, sexuality and religion play in determining the parameters of liberation for women in those places. Their liberation is presented in contrast to Afghanistan who in the War on Terror comes to symbolize the worst forms of subjugation women can be, and are subjected to, in the present.

Feminism, the 'third sex' and the War on Terror

This project emerged from my desire to understand better how the 'feminist position' in the discourse of the War on Terror came to be represented as pro-militarism. The 'third sex' may not always identify as feminists, but their presence in the war zone, and in the media they make about Afghan women, represents the position of feminist in the field. Both in her own ability to be there and in her focus on the subjugation of

¹ (2005). Dreaming of East: Western women and the exotic allure of the Orient. Greystone Books.

Afghan women. This is represented also in the humanistic angle their coverage takes on in regards to the War on Terror, focusing on Afghan women's suffering and in some cases, their subversion. No matter how the women of Afghanistan are portrayed, the 'third sex' always occupies the position of subversion. There is the implied subversion of their having overcome ingrained ideas about women's limitations historically in their own societies, and also in their presence in public in Afghanistan in defiance of fundamentalist edicts that prohibit Afghan women from being in the public sphere and in the realm of work outside the home. The discourse tends to reify this perception, and though portrayals of Afghan women sometimes portray them as partially inhabiting the role of subversive the only way in which they can do this in a broader sense is to demonstrate modes of subversion that are recognizable to the 'third sex' who record and disseminate these portrayals to audiences. The question is whether or not it is possible for Afghan women to ever actually be portrayed as subversive on a consistent basis when the 'third sex' already so completely occupy that position on the continuum. If the women of Afghanistan were consistently acting in ways that are recognizably subversive and their subordination was not the primary focus of the coverage, they would not have as much value in a discourse that needs their suffering in order to substantiate the rationale of humanitarian War on Terror militarism.

Saba Mahmood challenges dominant, naturalized conceptualizations of agency in her analysis of the women's piety/mosque movement in Egypt. She does so by examining the 'dilemma' women who participate in religious, social movements that support patriarchal and often overtly oppressive systems of power present to liberal, secular and poststructuralist feminists. Her analysis rests on the premise that she rejects the notion

that women's participation in the mosque movement in Egypt is a display of false-consciousness (that once identified, must be re-educated by some intervening force). Instead, she aims to extend the concept of agency beyond a simple synonym with resistance, to instead think of agency as "a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable."² What is most useful here is how her work disrupts the tendency to binarize women's experiences, interpreting them as always either engaging in subversion or subordination.³ This binary places these acts as distant from one another and asynchronous, but the lived experience of women offers a more complex perspective on the ways that women often simultaneously engage in forms of subordination and subversion.

How does this impact the conceptualization of the burqa? Women who are seen wearing burqas are thought to be either trapped by oppressive religious fundamentalists and in need of rescue, or a victim of Stockholm Syndrome (i.e. trapped in a false consciousness of religious belief that enables her to participate in her own subjugation). This is why burqas so often come to stand in as symbols of subversion or subordination in the discourse. That binarization is the basis on which the French government can argue for a ban on the burqa, and argue that it is not Islamophobic but in fact, a humanitarian act aimed at aiding Afghan women. Those women who are forced to wear the burqa will be freed by the intervention of the state, and those women who are forced to unveil will come to understand the oppressiveness of the burqa, and Islamic practice in general, given the opportunity to interact more closely with liberal secular society. The

² Meari, L. (2005). Rethinking agency: Saba Mahmood's politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject. *Review of Women's Studies*.

³ (2005)

conceptualization of the burqa as a barrier against Muslim women's participation in the public sphere and the importance placed on penetrating that barrier in the War on Terror echoes the colonial logic of the British and French in the 18th and 19th centuries, who believed bringing women out of the harem was key to modernizing Arab countries.⁴ Critiques of the enforcement of the wearing of burqa are valid, equally as valid as critiques of the enforcement of the burqa ban. The reason this does not represent a progressive shift is not only because the burqa ban is borne of an Islamophobic trend in Europe at the moment, but also because the ban on the burqa is as much about regulating the bodies of Muslim women as an edict that requires women to wear them.

The ban on the burqa is evidence of one way in which liberal secularism, while conceptualized as a liberated and moderate space, can engage Orientalist conceptualizations of Muslim sexuality and society in ways that ultimately are brought to bear on yet another edict that is focused on the regulation of Muslim women's bodies. And, the burqa ban is often described and adopted as a liberal secular feminist project. When the passing of a state law whose sole focus is to prohibit a group of women from wearing a particular garment as part of their religious practice can be phrased as a feminist project, it behooves us to interrogate the ways in which feminism is deployed in the War on Terror. The women traveling from North America and Western Europe at this time to report on, document and aid Afghan women come to the field as exemplars of women's achievements. Their exceptional professional lives, their willingness to travel to remote and dangerous places, including the war zone, and their talent for writing, making images, making films, and creating networks of advocacy, position them as feminists

⁴ Mitchell, 1988

whether they overtly claim to be or not. Certainly, their presence in the war zone is due in part to the role feminism has played in making the argument that women can be on the front line also, and can work jobs in the realm of media production that have historically been the purview of men.

In the coverage, and in stark contrast to burqa clad Afghan women, these women exemplify the notion of subversion as it is conceptualized in that binary. Not only are they products of resistance on the domestic front, but they are also engaged in resistance against the Islamic fundamentalists, challenging their prohibition on women in public spaces just by being in Afghanistan. The term the 'third sex' encapsulates this resistance, indicating that they have transcended traditional categories of identification altogether and are operating under a different set of conditions than many women. The demand for content from the women about their experience, interviews, memoirs, scholarship, illustrates clearly how audiences interpret them very much in these terms. The trope of the intrepid adventurer bolsters this all the more. But, the intrepid reporter is something of a caricature, and the identification of these women in this way obscures the ways in which the work they produce contributes to a discourse that justifies militarism in Afghanistan.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American Anthropologist*, 104(3): 783-791.
- (2001). Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies. *Feminist Studies*, 27 (1): 101-114.
- Achter, P. (2008). Comedy in unfunny times: News parody and carnival after 9/11. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25 (3): 274-303.
- Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Alloula, M. (1986). *The colonial harem*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Apel, D. (2005). Torture culture: Lynching photographs and the images of Abu-Ghraib. *Art Journal*, 64 (2): 88-101.
- Applebaum, A. (January 12, 2005). The torture myth. *The Washington Post*. p. A1.
- Barry, J. et.al. (2004). The roots of torture. *Newsweek*, 143 (21): 26-34.
- Bennett, L.W., Lawrence, R.G. & S. Livingston. (2006). None dare call it torture: Indexing and the limits of press independence in the Abu-Ghraib scandal. *Journal of Communication*, 56 (3): 467-485.
- Broder, J. M. (December 17, 2002). Facing registry deadline, men from Muslim nations swamp immigration office. *The New York Times*.
- Cohler, D. (2006). Keeping the home front burning: Renegotiating gender and sexuality in US mass media after September 11. *Feminist Media Studies*, 6 (3): 245-261.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6): 1241- 1299.
- Danner, M. (2004). *Torture and truth: America, Abu-Ghraib and the War on Terror*. New York: New York Review Books.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2004). What Abu-Ghraib taught me. *AlterNet*, <http://www.alternet.org/story/18740>. Posted May 20, 2004.
- Eisele, J. C. (2002). The wild East: Deconstructing the language of genre in the Hollywood eastern. *Cinema Journal*, Summer, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 68-94.

Eisenstein, Z. (2004). Sexual humiliation, gender confusion and the horrors at Abu-Ghraib. Association for Women's Rights in Development. www.awid.org. Originally posted to WHRnet.org, July 2004.

El Guindi, F. (1999). *Veil: Modesty, privacy, resistance*. Oxford, UK: Berg.

Enloe, C. (2007). Feminist readings on Abu-Ghraib. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9 (1): 35-37.

(2004). Wielding masculinity inside Abu-Ghraib: Making feminist sense of an American military scandal. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 10 (3): 89-102.

(2004). Abu-Ghraib: Ceremonies of nostalgia. Open Democracy, www.opendemocracy.net. Posted October 18, 2004.

(2000) Maneuvers: The international politics of militarizing women's lives. Berkeley: University of California Press.

(1983) Does khaki become you? London, UK: Pluto Press.

Feldman, A. (2005). On the actuarial gaze: From 9/11 to Abu-Ghraib. *Cultural Studies*, 19 (2): 203-226.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge & the discourse on language*. Translated from French by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books.

(1990). *The history of sexuality: Volume I, an introduction*. Translated from the French by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.

(1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Translated from French by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.

Fowler, C. (2007). Journalists in Feminist clothing: Men and women reporting Afghan women during operation enduring freedom, 2001. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8(2). www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Feb07/index.htm

Gauch, S. (2007). *Liberating Shaharazad: Feminism, postcolonialism, and Islam*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gole, N. (1996). *The forbidden modern: Civilization and veiling*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Gordon, A. F. (2006). Abu-Ghraib: Imprisonment and the War on Terror. *Race & Class*, 48 (1): 42-59.

Hasso, F. S. (2007). "Culture knowledge" and the violence of Imperialism: Revisiting The Arab Mind. MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies, 7(Spring): 24-40.
<http://web.mit.edu/CIS/www/mitejmes/intro.htm>.

Hilton, I. (April 28, 2002). Behind the Veil. The New York Times.

Hirschkind, C. & Mahmood, S. (2002). Feminism, the Taliban, and the politics of counter-insurgency. Anthropological Quarterly, 75(2): 339-355.

Hodgson, B. (2005). Dreaming of East: Western women and the exotic allure of the orient. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

Hunt, K & Rygiel, K. (Eds). (2006). (En) Gendering the War on Terror. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company

Huntington, S. P. (1993). The clash of civilizations? Foreign Affairs, 72(3): 22-49.

Isikoff, M. (2004). Brooklyn's version of Abu-Ghraib? Newsweek, 143 (21): 5.

Karim, K.H. (2000). Islamic peril: Media and global violence. Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Kaufman-Osborn, T. V. (2005). Gender trouble at Abu-Ghraib? Politics & Gender, 1 (4): 597-619.

Lewis, B. (1990). The roots of Muslim rage. The Atlantic Monthly. 266(3): 47-60.

Lewis, R. (2004). Rethinking Orientalism: Women, travel, and the Ottoman harem. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

(1996). Gendering Orientalism: Race, femininity and representation. New York, NY: Routledge.

Lewis, R. & Micklewright, N. (Eds.). (2006). Gender, modernity and liberty: Middle Eastern and Western women's writings: A critical sourcebook. London, UK: I.B. Tauris.

Lewis, R. & Mills, S. (Eds.). (2003). Feminist postcolonial theory: A Reader. New York, NY: Routledge.

Little, D. (2002). American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Lockman, Z. (2004). Contending visions of the Middle East: The history and politics of Orientalism. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mamdani, M. (2002). Good Muslim, bad Muslim: A political perspective on culture and terrorism. *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3), 766-775.

Macdonald, M. (2006). Muslim women and the veil: problems of image and voice in media representations. *Feminist Media Studies*, 6 (1): 8-23.

Macmaster, N. (2004). Torture: From Algiers to Abu-Ghraib. *Race & Class*, 46 (2): 1-21.

Marshall, L. (May/June 2004). The misogynist undercurrents of Abu-Ghraib. *Off Our Backs*, 34 (5/6): 10-11.

McAlister, M. (2005). *Epic encounters: Culture, media, and U.S. interests in the Middle East since 1945*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Meari, L. (2005). Rethinking agency: Saba Mahmood's politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject. *Review of Women's Studies*.

Mernissi, F. (2001). *Scheherazade goes West: Different cultures, different harems*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press.

(1987). *Beyond the veil: Male female dynamics in modern Muslim society*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

Mitchell, T. (1988). *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Mowlana, H. (1995). Images and the crisis of political legitimacy. In Y. R. Kamalipour (Ed.), *The U.S. media and the Middle East: Image and perception* (pp. 3-15). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Murdock, M. (2005). 'A thousand and one photographs': A discussion of Abu-Ghraib and the Orientalist homoerotic. On Politics, web.uvic.ca/~ups/onpolitics/autumn2005_issue.html.

Murphy, A. (2007). The missing rhetoric of gender in responses to Abu-Ghraib. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8(2). www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Feb07/index.htm

Nagel, J. & Feitz, L. (2007). Deploying race, gender, class and sexuality in the Iraq war. *Race, Gender & Class*, 14 (3/4): 28-45.

Naghibi, N. (2007). *Rethinking global sisterhood: Western feminism and Iran*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Niman, M. I. (2004). Strange fruit in Abu-Ghraib: The privatization of torture. *The Humanist*, July/August 2004: 18-23.

Philipose, L. (2007). The politics of pain and the end of empire. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9 (1): 60-81.

Puar, J. K. (2005). On torture: Abu-Ghraib. *Radical History Review*, 93 (Fall 2005): 13-38.

(2004). Arguing against exceptionalism. *Feminist Studies*, 30 (2): 522-534.

Pugilese, J. (2007). Abu-Ghraib and its shadow archives. *Law and Literature*, 19 (2): 247-278.

Rajiva, L. (2005). *The language of empire: Abu-Ghraib and the American media*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Richter-Monpetit, M. (2007). A queer transnational feminist reading of the prisoner 'abuse' in Abu Ghraib and the question of 'gender equality.' *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9(1); 38-59.

Rugh, W.A. (2006). *American encounters with Arabs: The "soft power" of U.S. public diplomacy in the Middle East*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.

Said, E. (1994). *Culture & imperialism*. New York, NY: Vintage

(1981). *Covering Islam: How the media and experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

(1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Sarikarkis, K. (2002). Violence, militarism, terrorism: Faces of a masculine order and the exploitation of women. *Feminist Media Studies*, 2 (1): 151-153.

Sexton, J. & Lee, E. (2006). Figuring the prison: Prerequisites of torture at Abu Ghraib. *Antipode*, 38 (5): 1005-1022.

Sha'Ban, F. (1991). *Islam and Arabs in early American thought: The roots of Orientalism in America*. Durham, NC: The Acorn Press.

Shaheen, J. G. (1984). *The TV Arab*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Sjoberg, L. (2007). Agency, militarized femininity, and enemy others. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9 (1): 82-101.

Sontag, S. (2004). Regarding the torture of others. *The New York Times*. May 23, 2004.

Spurr, D. (1993). *The rhetoric of empire: Colonial discourse in journalism, travel writing, and imperial administration*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Stabile, C. & Kumar, D. (2005). Unveiling imperialism: Media, gender, and the war on Afghanistan. *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 27, No. 5, pp. 765-782.

Stoler, A. L. (1997). Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures. In A. McClintock, A. Mufti, & E. Shohat, (Eds.). *Dangerous liaisons: Gender, nations, and postcolonial perspectives*. (pp. 344-373). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Toor, S. (2012). Imperialist feminism redux. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 36 (3-4): 147-160.

Wilkins, K. G. (1995). Middle Eastern women in Western eyes: A study of U.S. press photographs of Middle Eastern women. In Y. R. Kamalipour (Ed.), *The U.S. media and the Middle East: Image and perception* (pp. 50-61). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Yoshihara, M. (2003). *Embracing the East: White women and American Orientalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.