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**The Woman Behind the Man:
Politicized Portrayals of Afghan Muslim Women in Wartime**

by Faiza Hirji, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
March 13, 2003
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The Woman Behind the Man: Politicized Portrayals of Afghan Women in Wartime

submitted by Faiza Hirji, B.A.

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the degree of Master of Arts

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April, 2003

Abstract

This thesis examines ways in which misrepresentations of Muslim women in mass media may constitute the basis for arguments justifying military action in times of international conflict. Specifically, the notion of female oppression was central to media coverage of the war in Afghanistan. Empirical examples of such depictions are drawn from three different newspapers, *The New York Times* (United States), *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), and *Dawn* (Pakistan), within a specific seven-day period during the war. The newspaper articles are analyzed utilizing methodological tools such as critical discourse analysis, myth and ritual analysis, propaganda models and dramatism. The findings confirm, to varying degrees, the presence of politicized depictions of Afghan Muslim women in all three newspapers. These findings are discussed from various theoretical perspectives, including Orientalism and feminist theory, particularly in terms of the scission that has arisen in the latter due to postcolonial critiques of liberal feminist ethnocentrism.

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Introduction

Looking Beyond “Just the Facts”

September 11, 2001 was a cataclysmic event in many respects. One of these is the ability to stir controversy within and between various societal groups, particularly ethnic groups. Amongst those working as or with journalists in some capacity, one of the chief sources of tension is the accusation that the media have unfairly magnified the threat represented by Islam in their reports. This accusation has stemmed from many sources, including organizations that monitor media bias, political activists and academics. However, there is by no means a consensus regarding the possibility of media misrepresentation in general or specifically pertaining to Islam. Some commentators have suggested that the danger represented by extremist Muslims all over the world must be taken seriously, and that the media have a responsibility to discuss this danger in detail (for example, see Gee, 2002b; Pipes, 2001). Others concede the existence of a legitimate terrorist threat from militant groups that cite Islam as their inspiration, but critique the notion that Islam itself is the source of danger. For these critics, media coverage of this admittedly significant event has drawn upon existing stereotypes related to Islam and its followers, reducing a complex historical incident to a simplistic summary that views the West as positive and the East as negative. The very simplicity of this analysis arguably stokes divisive sentiment among the public in parts of that West, and feeds the belief that Muslims are inherently dangerous or extremist. Analyses of media coverage of Islam have often found confirmation that extremism and militancy shape the chief stereotypes associated with Muslims, particularly Muslim men (Hippler & Lueg, 1995; Karim, 2000;

Lawrence, 1998; Said, 1978, 1997; Sciolino, 1996). In fact, the tendency to view many men of colour as threatening is not an uncommon one in news reporting (Hartmann & Husband, 1974; Jiwani, 1993; Karim, 1993, 2000; Scanlon, 1977; van Dijk, 1991), though the depiction of Muslim men as fundamentalist, violent, and uncivilized is uniquely embedded in a scholarly tradition of Orientalism that views Eastern cultures as exotic, barbaric, and quite simply different from the normative West (Karim, 2000; Said, 1997; for examples, see Lewis cited in Grainger, 2002; Pipes, 1996). Several scholars have dedicated research studies and discussions to the topic of Muslim men and their misrepresentation in media, but less attention has been devoted to the creation of empirical studies evaluating the portrayal of Muslim women. The reason for this may seem straightforward: some academics and journalists propound the notion that Muslim women are so lacking in power, influence or the ability to articulate opinions that they occupy, at best, a role characterized by absence. This depiction of Muslim women is not the only one found in, or implied by, media, but it is the dominant paradigm and has become more prominent following the United States-led alliance's decision to wage war in Afghanistan. The same qualities of extremism and militancy often attributed to Muslim men are occasionally attributed to women as well, as in Margaret Wenthe's description of women fundraising for the Taliban (Wenthe, 2001a), but this does not tend to be the norm, particularly not in recent times. Moreover, when these qualities are seen in Muslim women, they are often emphasized for their very unexpectedness and for the sense of shock evoked, as in the case of veiled Iranian women carrying arms who became iconic during the Islamic Revolution in Iran (see, for example, Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, pp. 170-172).

Indeed, in the media coverage of the war on Afghanistan, Muslim women were far more likely to be depicted as oppressed and voiceless than as militant and violent. Arguably, Muslim women had never occupied such a central role in the news, though the Afghanistan coverage did build upon some recurring themes in previous media and academic commentaries. There may be several reasons for the sudden attention to women's issues in Afghanistan specifically, and Islam more generally. The optimist might suggest, and in fact several columnists did, that the war presented a golden opportunity for non-Muslims to learn more about the sad state in which some Muslim women live, and to correct this injustice (Gee & Salutin, 2002;¹ Wente, 2001e). There is undoubtedly some truth to this, and women's organizations such as the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), working devotedly for years to address the plight of Afghan women, received applause for efforts that had previously merited only fleeting attention in mainstream media (Kolhatkar, 2002). This thesis argues, however, that there are also less positive reasons for such emphasis on the embattled Muslim women of Afghanistan. Chief amongst these is the fact that the war in Afghanistan was able to take on the appearance of a humanitarian mission, rather than a violent exercise designed to further punish a people already subjugated by an extremist regime and by acute poverty. Such a characterization served concurrently to increase public support and to silence opponents of the war, who found that any criticism of the United States-led coalition triggered retaliatory accusations that dissenters were unpatriotic and opposed to the causes of democracy, freedom and liberation. This repressive climate was present not only at a political level, with White House press

¹ Note that this reference applies to one in a series of debates between *Globe and Mail* columnists Marcus Gee and Rick Salutin regarding the war in Afghanistan.

secretary Ari Fleischer going so far as to issue warnings to anyone who offered differing views, but also at the media level, where many editors, publishers and journalists across North America and in Europe adhered to Fleischer's guidelines for appropriate reporting (Haupt, 2001). The objective of this thesis is to assess whether or not portrayals of Muslim women as victims formed the basis of justificatory reasoning for war, a reasoning used to buoy public approval and strengthen the Allied position. Such an assessment occurs through an analysis of newspaper coverage focussing on women in Afghanistan, using methodology commonly employed in assessing racial bias in the media, and contextualizing the analytical findings through a discussion of relevant theoretical perspectives, including propaganda methods, feminist theory, Orientalism and bias in news reporting.

It is not, however, the aim of this thesis to suggest that media resources during the war on Afghanistan were entirely at the disposal of the United States government, nor is there any suggestion that media consciously set out to distort the truth when reporting on military conflicts. Further, despite the argument made throughout the work that the United States-led alliance and the media may have presented the issue of Afghan women's rights without sufficient social and cultural context, this is not intended as an example of the type of cultural dogma that Kumari Jayawardena critiques within "the recourse to and defence of indigenous religious traditions as part of the process of constructing a national identity" (1986, p. 254). However, this is a work that does scrutinize the link between political and economic forces, and the resulting pressures placed on journalists who may lack the training, resources or freedom to offer sufficiently detailed, thoughtful reports. Given the lack of such reports, this thesis also attempts to

provide some of the contextual information that might have offered readers a different, more nuanced perspective when absorbing news about Afghanistan. It questions some of the assumptions underlying depictions of Muslim women, assumptions that may well be as egregious and damaging as those underlying stereotypical representations of Muslim men, and identifies recurring errors that may serve to exacerbate cultural tensions and misunderstandings between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Such contextual grounding incorporates feminist arguments that the emphasis on deeply unequal gender relations within Islam owes less to biased portrayals than it does to the fact that gender equity within Islam, as in other religions, remains an ambition rather than a reality (Ahmed, 1982; Mernissi, 1975, 1986, 1991, 1996; Sabbah, 1984). This thesis does not seek to offer corrective strategies regarding gender relations and religion, but rather to provide contextual grounding that is often lacking in mainstream media commentary. This work argues that the representation of the threatening Muslim terrorist could not exist without an accompanying depiction of the Muslim woman as a subject of oppression, an emblem of a just cause for which the West must fight. In following this argument, the thesis will employ theory regarding propaganda, media bias, specific stereotypes of Islam and Muslims, and gender relations within Islam. These topics have been explored to some degree from Orientalist or feminist perspectives but this exploration has not yet produced an in-depth qualitative analysis of media texts regarding Muslim women, a lack that this thesis attempts to address.

This attempt commences with a theoretical overview, discussing concepts such as media bias and stereotyping of ethnic groups. The first chapter reviews key work focussed on ethnic stereotyping, then more specifically addresses media representations

of Muslims and Islam. Contemporary authors (Hartmann & Husband, 1974; Jiwani, 1993; Karim, 1993, 2000; Poole, 2002; Said, 1978, 1997; Scanlon, 1977; Shaheen, 1984; van Dijk, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1996, 1998) are cited throughout, as well as historical precursors such as Frantz Fanon (1959, 1963), whose arguments regarding the detrimental effects of colonialism and racism anchor debates over the legitimacy of speaking on behalf of oppressed groups, debates that have splintered academics and activists alike in recent years. As will be seen later, feminist theory has been strongly affected by this issue, as have scholars such as Edward Said. Said's theory of Orientalism (1978, 1997) has often been cited in ongoing commentary about Islam's assumed role in breeding violence and prohibiting progress. Karim H. Karim (2000) is among those who have drawn upon Said's work in documenting the racial and political tension infusing discussions of Islam, and his and Said's different interpretations provide the beginnings of a vocabulary with which to approach this issue.

This material on bias is supplemented by a review of literature related to the use of propaganda. Particularly relevant work is that of Chomsky (1997), Edelstein (1997), Herman and Chomsky (1988) and Ellul (cited in Karim, 2001). While this thesis does not make an argument for an automatic, unfiltered media effect on the audience, it does suggest that governments campaign to secure popular support for war efforts, utilizing propaganda techniques and co-opting the ideas of previously ignored or marginalized movements, such as feminism. Martin, in her discussion of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, suggests that such strategies for diluting the potency of a political movement have been employed by dominant political groups for some time: "at the ideological level [hegemony] consists of countering the resonance and appeal of alternative and

oppositional ideologies by addressing, accommodating, incorporating and sometimes even conceding to the viewpoints contained in these ideologies” (1997, p. 69). Though this may seem far more difficult than the simple exercise of political power enabled by a majority government or the use of brute force made possible by military strength, Richard Payne (1995) argues that governments must rely on such campaigns in a democracy if they wish to maintain the balance of power. He suggests that this is particularly true of the United States, which is home to a diverse population whose members do not always agree on the necessity of violent solutions to international political conflicts. Such a divided population therefore often needs to be persuaded that legitimate reasons exist for taking military action, and the strengthening of political or economic power does not always constitute legitimate reason in and of itself. Certain factions of the public are more inclined to show sympathy towards military action if they feel that the government’s motivation is affected by humanitarian factors (Payne, 1995).

In the case of Afghanistan, the impetus to establish power and to topple an undemocratic regime was directed at both the Taliban and at the more elusive Al-Qaeda. The need to eliminate Al-Qaeda was clear to many observers who felt that the group represented an obvious and potent threat to the rest of the world (see Freeman, 2001). The issue of bombing Afghanistan was perhaps less simply defined. Most Afghan civilians, after all, did not pose a threat to North Americans. Indeed, Afghanistan’s former king, Mohammad Zaher Shah, urged Afghans to reject “foreign, imposed terrorists,” but also emphasized his desire for a political settlement rather than a military conflict. In late September 2001, he “called on the United States not to bomb Afghanistan, since as many as six million people are already at risk of starvation,” and

encouraged the West to make attempts at rebuilding, rather than impeding, “peace and democracy” in Afghanistan (cited in Stackhouse, 2001). Rather than following his advice, the United States and their allies moved ahead with their plans to attack Afghanistan, but their response to calls such as the former king’s was not one of mere indifference. Rather, Northern politicians and media commentators attempted to justify the conflict in Afghanistan, using some of the very same points cited by opponents of the war. Rather than agreeing that war would further destabilize Afghans’ already shaky hold on survival, politicians and journalists instead sought to clarify the issues at stake, emphasizing the necessity of military action by dwelling on the Taliban’s brutality, their poor record of human rights, and the difficult circumstances under which the Afghans lived (for example, see Marcus Gee’s comments in Gee & Salutin, 2002, p. F19). These difficult circumstances were attributed almost exclusively to the Taliban and its harsh Islamist regime, with limited mention of the fact that Afghanistan had suffered hardship in various degrees in recent years, due at least partly to the consequences of military action by the United States, the Soviet Union, and warring tribal Afghan factions. As will be seen in the analysis portion of this thesis, the Taliban’s inhumanity was represented in many ways, including its refusal to allow women to work, the banning of various art forms and its strict policing of supposedly correct religious behaviour. In particular, one story that seemed to capture the imagination of politicians and media alike was the humanitarian emphasis on Afghan Muslim women living as victims under the Taliban.

The apparent subjugation of Afghan women, juxtaposed against the seeming emancipation enjoyed by non-Muslim or Western women, provided the justification that more liberal thinkers required. The oppression suffered by Afghan women, manifested in

their dress, lack of education and confinement to the private sphere, was seen by some as a situation that could be generalized to Muslim women in other countries. This sparked furious debate among some commentators and particularly among feminists who have battled over charges of ethnocentrism in recent years. The chapter devoted to feminist theory argues that mainstream media, in simplifying their depiction of issues in Afghanistan, promoted the viewpoint, largely derived from liberal feminism, that feminism is a Western commodity that must be exported to less fortunate women in the Third World. Accordingly, this section begins with a review both of liberal feminism as it relates to Islam (see Beck & Keddie, 1978; Mernissi, 1975, 1986, 1991, 1996), and subsequently discusses assorted scholars and activists who reject liberal arguments on the basis of ethnocentrism, suggesting instead that any critique of patriarchy in non-Western countries must acknowledge the oppressive role of cultural imperialism and the remnants of colonialism (see el Guindi, 1999; also see Narayan, 1997, for a more critical discussion of such a standpoint). The latter view is often derided or ignored in the media, but it is essential to a full understanding of social relations in predominantly Muslim countries. Similarly, intermediate feminist positions are discussed at length and form part of a discussion comparing portrayals of Muslim women in previous conflicts to those highlighted during the war in Afghanistan (Fernea, 1998; Khan, 1995, 2000; MacLeod, 1991; also see Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, for their comments regarding depictions of Iranian women during the Iranian revolution). Some of these analyses necessarily focus on the central role occupied by the Muslim female body throughout feminist theory, from the sexualized form so popular in Orientalist writings (see Kabbani, 1986; Khan, 2000; Lewis, 1996, Mernissi, 1975, 1991) to the shrouded and

mysterious body vilified and studied from colonial times to the present (Beck & Keddie, 1978; Fanon, 1959, 1963; Khan, 1995, 2000; MacLeod, 1991; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994). This body, like its concealment, has become such a politically charged symbol for proponents and opponents of female liberation that it must be discussed in some detail from varying perspectives. One useful approach is a feminist adaptation of Foucault's notion of self-discipline, which allows for study of the Muslim female body as well as a comparative analysis of the Western female body, and the differing definitions of emancipation embedded therein (see Bartky, 1988; Davis, 1997). In examining these specific and recurring representations of Muslim women, it becomes possible to theorize certain set stereotypes of Muslim women that can be routinely found in mass media, not unlike the familiar archetypes of Muslim men identified by other scholars (Karim, 2000; Said, 1978, 1997; Shaheen, 1984).

From these theoretical starting points, it becomes necessary to review relevant media coverage itself. One chapter is devoted to the methodological framework that forms the basis for such a review. Central to this framework is the work of Teun A. van Dijk (1988, 1991, 1993, 1996, 1998), whose critical discourse theory is widely used in media bias studies, particularly with regard to race and ethnicity. Van Dijk's work regarding ethnic stereotyping, and the specific means employed by media producers and consumers in forming and reinforcing conceptions of particular societal groups, joins with Hartmann and Husband's (1974) research to form the core of the current analysis. Van Dijk and Hartmann and Husband suggest, as does other research regarding media bias, that one of the problematic factors in misguided reporting is the tendency towards establishing simple dichotomies in order to dramatize news events and to enlist readers'

interest and empathy. One of the ways this technique manifests itself is in the application of myth and ritual to the reporting process (Chaney, 1986; Karim, 2000, 2001), a process very similar to the dramatism described by Jack Lule (1991). Examples of the latter, in which actors are designated as good or evil, hero or villain, abound in Canadian media analyses (Jiwani, 1993; Karim, 1993, 2000; Scanlon, 1977; Ungerleider, 1991).

The current work maintains a Canadian focus but the qualitative analysis portion is divided more or less equally between Canada, the United States as the undisputed leader of the war on Afghanistan, and Pakistan, a key U.S. ally in this particular conflict. The analysis section opens by examining *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's newspaper of record. Canada declared itself an ally in the war but this declaration was consistently undermined by internal tensions, including its status as a peacekeeping nation, its relatively weak military force and perhaps most importantly, its longstanding ambivalence towards the United States, whose politics often tend to be more socially conservative and economically driven. Those considerations aside, Canada was inevitably propelled into the war, attempting to meet the expectations imposed by its status as the United States' geographical neighbour and trading partner, and by the Canadian public's overwhelming sympathy for the United States following the events of September 11, 2001. An examination of *The New York Times*, the United States newspaper of record, follows the Canadian analysis. In answering the central objective of this thesis, analysis of *The New York Times* aimed to determine whether the idea of Muslim female oppression was most strongly emphasized in this medium, where the political stakes would presumably be the highest and where national and international reach are both extensive. The motivation for choosing *Dawn* for the third analysis rests in

an assumption that Pakistan's media might be less enthusiastic about touting war to a predominantly Muslim population even partially on the basis that Muslim women are the victims of severe oppression requiring an American-led rescue. Like Canada, Pakistan was a declared ally of the United States during the war, but its political position was markedly different. Unlike Canada, Pakistan is close enough to Afghanistan to feel some of the very real effects of the war on a constant basis, including the influx of refugees. It is also a nation whose high Muslim population, military leadership and experimentation with nuclear weapons could easily lead to its designation as an American foe rather than friend, a designation that its president, General Musharraf, seemed anxious to avoid. Whether or not these factors affected Pakistan's media depiction of the war is investigated through an analysis of *Dawn*, Pakistan's highest-circulation English-language newspaper.

The final stages of this thesis contrast findings from the various analyses, attempting to place these in historical, cultural and theoretical perspective, using concepts introduced in the previous chapters. It also offers a brief discussion of the comparison between current findings and depictions of Muslim women in previous international conflicts (Fernea, 1998; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994), and then provides an epilogue of sorts in its discussion of the attention and aid being offered to Afghanistan and to Afghan women in early 2003, as the United States withdraws from Afghanistan and strongly indicates the possibility of a war with Iraq. This discussion returns to, and answers as much as possible, the questions underlying this research: whether the news media drew upon established stereotypes to promote a point of view that tied in with political interests, whether these stereotypes are reflective of perspectives on race and

gender that have come to be seen as dominant among academics, activists and the general public, whether there is some indication that media bias can affect military policy and what such an indication could mean in a world that requires different cultures and political systems to come into contact more frequently than ever before. These possible meanings are by no means strictly academic questions: the media, the government and various educators must be able to address these points in order for democracy to function fully. The war, after all, may have resulted in an apparently rapid victory but recovery efforts are generally long and excruciating. Moreover, in terms of healing social and ethnic divisions, recovery is not a process that should or can be limited to Afghanistan alone. These issues are more relevant than ever as conflict in the Middle East shows no signs of abating, with the possible result that focus will turn to newer, fresher stories, rendering Afghanistan's political, social and economic problems nothing more than yesterday's news.

A Note on Spelling and Terminology

As noted previously, studies of race, Islam and the media have a well-established history. Different authors have approached these studies in varying ways. One of the complicating factors they have had to address includes the issue of vocabulary. Discussions of Islam and certain Middle Eastern or Southern cultures often require the use of Arabic and occasionally Indian languages such as Hindi. However, different dialects or preferences ensure that not all commentators utilize the same spellings or marking. Therefore, the word Qur'an can also be seen as Koran, *hijab* can be seen as *hejab*, and *burqa* can be seen as *burqah* or *burka*. These are only a few examples, but they demonstrate the difficulty, or perhaps the impossibility, of achieving spellings that

are universally acknowledged as correct. Spelling and formatting are not the only issues prevalent in debates over correct terminology. Certain words have come to be used frequently in discussions such as this one. For example, Western, Eastern, Northern, Southern, fundamentalist, extremist, Islamist, Oriental and Occidental all carry their own associations, and all are lacking in some ways as terms conveying the entirety of their respective areas. Contrarily, they are often used casually to connote implicit meanings (e.g. the West as the civilized world, the East as the backwards Third World) that can be simplistic and suggestive of monolithic entities.

The use of such terms seems inappropriate, but it is also necessary to draw upon some references in discussions of separate places, philosophies and conflicts. Therefore, this thesis will make use of many of these terms, while cautioning that this use undeniably omits to consistently acknowledge the diversity underlying each of these words. Traditionally, discussions of global conflict and culture most commonly require descriptors such as Western or Eastern to suggest a sense of geographical division, with concomitant binaries in philosophy, religion and levels of modernization. More commonly in recent scholarship of transnational issues, the terms Northern and Southern have been employed in favour of Western and Eastern (Karim, 2000; Razack, 1998).

Karim explains this tendency as follows, suggesting that while

both the North and the South consist of countries with substantial differences in levels of economic development as well as a variety of distinct cultures, it is legitimate to group them into two global regions in the context of the North-South geopolitical divide. Northern societies have Eurocentric world views and Southern ones generally share the cultural subordination (which comes from being former colonies of Northern powers) and the disadvantages of global economic structures that are largely weighted in favour of the North. (2000, p. 7)

He adds, however, that it is, at times, legitimate to cite the West as an entity independent of formerly Communist areas in Eastern Europe (2000, p. 7). I have attempted to follow this reasoning in my use of the terms Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western, though at times the East/West dichotomy is more commonly employed due to the subject at hand, which can include similar theoretical distinctions used by Edward Said (1978, 1988, 1997) in his discussions of the West as an entity cited by media, academics and politicians for its distinct characteristics; such references to the West, from media and other sources, may also be retained in the succeeding commentary for the purposes of consistency.

Though Fadwa el Guindi critiques the use of the word Islamist on the basis that it is a Western construct that fails to frame debate surrounding the Islamist or fundamentalist movement in an appropriate or culturally sensitive manner (1999, p. xix), I have followed the lead of other researchers in this area (Karim, 2000, p. 10; Khan, 2000, p. 146) by using Islamist or Islamism to indicate movements whose members present their political activities as based in what they consider to be literal interpretations of Islam, however self-serving or misguided these presentations may be. More specifically, Islamism and Islamist as used here

refer to those Muslims who adopt an ideologically reformist stance which promotes a return to an imagined ideal from the Muslim past. There is not only a geographic and cultural diversity among Islamists but also in their beliefs about establishing a utopic Islamic society and in their tactics. Islamism and Islamists therefore cannot be viewed monolithically. Those Islamists who embrace the use of violence in the pursuit of their goals are referred to here as militants. (Karim, 2000, p. 10)

Khan's description of the difference between traditional Muslims and Islamists is slightly different, but in essence she arrives at the same conclusions as Karim, emphasizing the need

to make a distinction between traditional Islamic and fundamentalist Islamist approaches. The former uses traditional methods for explaining social and political change, while the latter wishes to use as its model the original community of Muslims who were the companions of the Prophet in seventh century Medina. There needs to be a further distinction between the orientalist racist definition of fundamentalist Islam as the religion/culture of the Muslim Other and those social/political movements which seek to impose their agendas and views on people through coercive means. Although coming from very different traditions, the Islamic and Islamist views on the role of the ideal Muslim are often complementary. (Khan, 1995, p. 146)

As with Islamism, references to veiling occur repeatedly throughout the literature cited in this thesis, as well as the pieces selected for analysis. As Fadwa el Guindi points out, no one English or Arabic term encapsulates the many different forms of veiling (1999, pp. 6-10). She cautions, therefore, against overuse of words such as veiling or *hijab* when referring to various clothing items donned by Muslims or Middle Easterners, arguing that misunderstanding or oversimplification may be the result:

The absence of a single, monolithic term in the language(s) of the people who at present most visibly practice "veiling" suggests a significance to this diversity that cannot be captured in one term. By subsuming and transcending such multivocality and complexity we lose the nuanced difference in meaning and associated cultural behaviors. (1999, p. 7)

This is a reasonable fear, particularly given the tendency among some mainstream journalists and academics to treat all Muslim practices as identical when in fact Islam is the starting point for diverse forms of religiosity and cultural expression. I likewise note el Guindi's complaint that *hijab* is often used as a loose translation for the word veil, when in fact the word *hijab* was adopted by various activists during the colonial occupation in Egypt, at which point "the veil became the center of feminist/nationalist

discourse” (el Guindi, 1999, p. 153). Nonetheless, the generic term veiling will be used at many points throughout this thesis for the sake of consistency, though the words *hijab* and *burqa* also recur due to their frequent citations in related literature. In particular, *burqa* is used in many journalistic accounts of the war in Afghanistan with specific reference to the so-called shuttlecock, the all-encompassing blue garment worn by Afghan women during the reign of the Taliban. I have chosen to use the following common spellings of *hijab* and *burqa* throughout, though differing spellings in quoted passages have been replicated without changes.

Comments on Analytical Findings

As the next few chapters will discuss, there are many ways of viewing the stories focussing on women in the Afghanistan conflict. The analysis conducted here looked at a total of 78 news items, drawn from three different newspapers, and found confirmation that stereotypes and misrepresentations of Afghan women were frequently featured in the sampled news coverage. However, these depictions were not all the same, and they did not all uniformly endorse the notion that Afghan women represented subjects in need of salvation. *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail* did tend to subscribe to this notion more readily than Pakistan’s *Dawn*, but nonetheless, all three newspapers did occasionally question some of the myths that have arisen around the war. The variety of opinion expressed, in fact, was better than expected, and presented a possible basis for cautious optimism regarding the improved ability of media to offer more accurate depictions of minorities than has previously been the case. Despite this minor improvement, though, the chief findings do suggest that Afghan women and the religion of Islam were indeed central to news coverage of this conflict. Further, they offer

portrayals that are often misleading and frequently lacking sufficient context, presenting Afghan women mainly as victims of Muslim men, who are helpless to rescue themselves and require the aid of Northern forces, even if this aid is preceded by bombing and invasion. These depictions not only confuse notions of feminism and Islam, it can also be suggested that they supported a war effort that, ultimately, may not prove to be the making of Afghanistan, as so many have hoped. As the next chapter argues, examples of such reporting are far too frequent and can be seriously deleterious in advancing a true agenda of equality, freedom and progress. Despite the damage it can cause, biased and erroneous reporting remains commonplace, due to the complex web of structural, institutional and societal factors that ensure its presence and survival.

Chapter 1

All the News that's Fit to Print: Power and Bias in News Media

In recent years, criticisms of the way that mainstream media depict news events have been so numerous and varied that the notion of objectivity has acquired a mythical aspect for media analysts and perhaps even for some journalists. Some researchers object to the fact that media display political bias in reporting events; others argue that the real problem lies in the fact that media only deem some stories worthy of notice and ignore others of real international significance; still others suggest that the media may cover the right stories but in a glancing or erroneous manner. Unsurprisingly, all of these critiques overlap and occasionally support each other, a state of affairs that sometimes leads to an almost comical state of confusion when representatives of the political left and right alike accuse the media of unfairness and misrepresentation (Saunders, 1997).

This thesis draws upon all of these positions to some extent, addressing the structural limitations on news reporting that begin at the ownership level and continue throughout the production process. These structural limitations have numerous consequences, all of which become more pronounced when the news story under discussion involves a member or members of a racial minority group. In this age of convergence, many of the issues surrounding news bias are applicable to all forms of media, but this chapter and this thesis will devote special attention to newspapers. Despite repeated warnings that newspapers are outdated and that they will soon disappear in the face of a digital onslaught, many media consumers continue to consult the newspaper for the type of factual, reliable information Dornan describes (1996, pp. 60, 66-67; also see Damsell, 2002a, 2002b).

Whose Story is It? Political, Economic and Social Limitations on Telling the News

Concentration of ownership has been one of the defining factors in the mass media industry throughout the latter part of the 1990s and in the early 21st century as well. Ownership has always been a key issue for analysts dissecting the news industry from a Marxist perspective, serving as the means through which the ruling class exerts control over media (Martin, 1997, p. 51; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 230).² In Canada, attention has shifted from Conrad Black's Hollinger, with its previously overwhelming control of the newspaper industry, to a small group of conglomerates that embarked on a dizzying round of purchasing and converging following Black's decision to divest himself of his Canadian holdings. While CHUM, Torstar, Bell Globemedia and CanWest Global are all prominent on the Canadian media landscape, the latter has been particularly successful in expanding its national presence through various media outlets, including a national television network, *The National Post* daily newspaper, and major metropolitan dailies. As Hollinger once did, CanWest enjoys a virtual monopoly over daily newspapers in some of Canada's urban centres, including Vancouver and Saskatoon. Perhaps more significantly, the owners of CanWest Global have compensated for Black's absence by exercising the same type of control for which he was so well known. Like Black, who established the right-wing *The National Post* in order to combat what he disdained as Canadian media's uniformly "soft-left" focus (Siddiqui, 2000, p. A13), CanWest owner Israel Asper and his sons, CanWest executives David and Leonard Asper, have not shied away from declaring a pro-Liberal, pro-Israel position in their

² Though Shoemaker and Reese suggest that increasing emphasis on the profit imperative in the news industry serves to decrease objectivity and distort depiction of certain media events, they also caution against automatic assumptions that monopolistic control necessitates a decline in journalistic quality (1996, pp. 209-210).

newspapers. Indeed, despite a relatively busy news year that included the war in Afghanistan, the proposed invasion of Iraq, the Liberal party leadership controversy, the election of a new Canadian Alliance leader, the Kyoto Accord and the Romanow report on health care, one of the most prominent news stories of 2002 was the firing of *Ottawa Citizen* publisher Russell Mills. Mills was terminated by CanWest after he wrote an editorial denouncing Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (Aspers feel the ire of Southam readers, 2002; Fotheringham, 2002; Mills flouted principle, 2002; Mills, 2002; Simpson, 2002). While it may be possible to dismiss Mills' firing as an isolated incident, CanWest's willingness to terminate a long-time employee who disagreed with the owners' views could be seen as a warning for other employees throughout the chain. Moreover, the company refused to back down from its position despite thousands of complaints from readers, a sign that consumers are relatively powerless in this concentrated environment. In Ottawa, where the story had the most local interest, disgruntled readers did not, and do not, have a viable alternative to *The Ottawa Citizen*, excluding the tabloid-style *The Ottawa Sun*. Cancelled subscriptions, petitions and complaints had no discernible impact on the CanWest owners, an interesting example of the way in which political affiliations here were deemed of more importance than the economic imperative normally fundamental to the operations of such conglomerates, whose "aim is to generate capital" (Jiwani, 1993, p. 504).

The refusal to reverse Mills' termination does not indicate that CanWest is wholly indifferent to consumer feedback. CanWest has invoked several defence mechanisms in response to accusations of unethical reporting, and one such mechanism has involved the common strategy of going on the offensive. In a complaint that has become increasingly

familiar, Israel (Izzy) Asper lambasted some of the world's best known media outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), for what he saw as distorted and anti-Semitic coverage of events in the Middle East. Sue Montgomery, a columnist with one of Asper's own papers, *The Montreal Gazette*, showed rare courage in issuing a rebuttal to her employer's remarks, suggesting that "[w]hat is so disturbing about what Israel Asper says is the chill it sends through the newsrooms he owns, and he owns a very large number in this country. After reading Asper's latest speech, what journalist in the Southam chain isn't going to second-guess a story or opinion piece that may not reflect the world according to our boss?" (cited in Adams, 2002, p. R2). While Montgomery's forthrightness won plaudits from some, it was apparently deemed excessive by her employer(s). The statement quoted above was part of 150 words that were removed from Montgomery's column prior to publication (Adams, 2002, p. R2). Similarly, when Tony Burman, editor-in-chief of CBC news programs such as Newsworld, attempted to reply to Asper's comments in *The National Post*, the CanWest-owned newspaper refused to publish his response though it had devoted a large amount of space to Asper's original criticisms (Burman, 2002). Stephen Kimber, the director of the journalism program at University of King's College, resigned over a similar incident in which *The Halifax Daily News* chose not to run his column criticizing CanWest Global, the paper's owner, for its insistence that all editorials must agree with CanWest policy on certain political issues (Cox, 2002).

The threat of unemployment, then, is not the only one that ensures a certain level of uniformity in the newsroom. Journalism, like many industries, operates according to a set of norms, some overtly defined and some that are understood even if they are not

articulated. A reporter who wishes to be successful within a particular medium learns most of these norms and operates within them (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 304-305; Jiwani, 1993; Karim, 2000; Ungerleider, 1991; van Dijk, 1988, 1991). Failure to do so is met by editorial checks throughout the process, and repeated failure can result in demotion to a less prominent beat (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 170-171). The previous example also demonstrates the constraints placed upon media outlets that are independent of conglomerates such as CanWest. Accusations of racism or bias, particularly in times of heightened political and cultural tensions, are ones that publishers and editors are often anxious to avoid, and thus they may tailor their content by omitting stories or details that could have even the smallest potential for being deemed, in this case, anti-Semitic. The cases may vary depending on the details of the accusation. If publishing stories that urge both sides in a conflict to arrive at a resolution can be branded as anti-Semitic action, then editors and publishers may consider that omitting even-handed coverage or limiting coverage may be a small price to pay in order to avoid losing valuable subscribers. This is not universally the case—it is not uncommon for editors to adopt a strong stance and adhere to it despite controversy, but as Herman and Chomsky note, the pressure upon them to avoid such action is strong and sometimes insurmountable (cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 234).

Such limitations are not inscribed only in newsrooms, though certainly this would be the chief setting. In recent years, journalism and communication programs across the country have been increasingly hampered by budget cuts to education. In some cases, universities have turned to the private sector to finance those programs that graduate the next generations of aspiring reporters. It may be that these private sector donations are

made without any provisos and that they do not create any reluctance on the part of new journalists to probe deeply into stories involving corporations that serve not only as donors but as the source for coveted internships. However, the operational style of the Asper family, for one, casts some doubt on this hope. Currently McMaster University and Ryerson University are two of the programs that have benefited greatly from media owners' largesse, with the former's new Communication Studies program receiving a one million dollar gift from the CanWest Global Foundation and the latter locating its journalism program in the Rogers Communication Centre. The current government's insistence on balancing its budget through continual cutbacks to social programs make it unlikely that universities' dependence on the private sector will ease in the near future.

The education of budding journalists and the rules by which they operate raises a point regarding the hiring practices they face when seeking full-time employment at a major newspaper. Underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities in the media production process has been repeatedly noted as one of the possible culprits of unbalanced coverage (Cottle, 2000; Martin, 1997). It is not always the case that a newspaper employs more men than women, but it is quite often true that the distribution of women throughout the paper is based on an arbitrary distinction between men's issues and women's issues. Women tend to be equally or highly represented in sections of the newspaper related to style, food, gardening, or decorum. They are often, though not always, less prominent on the editorial page, in business, international affairs and sports. Critics who believe that balanced representation within the newsroom leads to a more balanced portrayal in the newspaper point to these tendencies, as well as to ones suggesting that visible minorities are woefully underrepresented in many sectors of the

Canadian news industry (Fleras, 1995). This being the case, it is perhaps unsurprising that coverage of visible minorities is often skewed or misleading (see Poole, 2002, pp. 52, 256 for British findings in this regard; see Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 67 for statistics suggesting that minorities are similarly underrepresented in United States newsrooms).

This thesis does not adopt a strictly instrumentalist—viewing the media as mere instruments of the state and capitalist entities—or social constructionist approach, in which more emphasis is placed on journalistic norms and practices, but agrees with Edward Silva’s proposition that each has a certain amount of relevance in analyzing media trends (1995). Concentration of ownership and the overtly partisan politics of media barons such as Conrad Black and Israel Asper do lend themselves to an instrumentalist argument, but as Poole notes, the news-making process is one inherently defined by certain limitations and norms. Among these are

the predominance of elite media personnel, the news selection/gathering process, the continued persistence of news values, and the privileging of elite and institutional news sources, which work to marginalize alternative voices. Structure and routine combine with the dominant interpretative frameworks of journalists, resulting in consensual output based on preconceptions and assumptions. (Poole, 2002, p. 52; also see Karim, 2000; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 91, 106, 109; van Dijk, 1988, 1991)

The functions of communication identified by Harold Lasswell still have relevance today: Lasswell suggested that the first function is “surveillance of environment,” in which the media warn the public of some kind of threat, followed by correlation, in which the problems identified are responded to in ways that are socially appropriate and that provide some direction in terms of interpreting the event under discussion. Naturally, this will be succeeded by transmission of what the media have defined as social norms (cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 29).

In Canada, the increasingly lean budgets of news media outlets have fostered a dependence on European and American news agencies and wire services (Karim, 2000, p. 14; see Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 118), which has the effect of ensuring that stories are mediated by another source prior to publication in the Canadian press, and also propagates the trend of delivering a limited number of stories which receive coverage in all the major media sources, since most are drawing on the same pool of information. This trend is further exacerbated by “pack” or “copy-cat” journalism, in which a large number of reporters pursue the same leads in order to ensure that their respective outlets do not miss a major story (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 123; Ungerleider, 1991, p. 159). Given the economic pressures on Canadian newspapers, in particular, some of which already operate on slim profit margins due to rising newsprint costs, it is not surprising that no editor wishes to risk losing the major story of the day. This is likely even more true in the wake of competition against television, radio and Internet-based news, but the unfortunate side effect is that news consumers do not receive appropriately diverse or detailed coverage (Ungerleider, 1991, pp. 161-163). Related to these competitive pressures is the stress of filing a story quickly, which may not allow sufficient time for in-depth research (Cottle, 2000, p. 20; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 119). However, a different pressure can arise when there are too few stories to report: salaried reporters assigned to a regular beat may be obligated to file a story even if no newsworthy events have occurred (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 119). Finances are not always the final arbiter of newsroom practices, however; in the United States, even *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* rely largely on the same sources as smaller outlets, despite their greater resources. These sources include official proceedings, news releases, press

conferences, leaks and reports from other news organizations, with markedly less emphasis on alternatives such as interviews, firsthand accounts, independent research and analysis (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 128).

Racism in the Mass Media

Gunther Kress argues that a “truly equitable society is one in which the mainstream groups see it as essential to have access to the linguistic and cultural resources of minority groups and demand such access as a matter of equity” (1996, p.18). Teun A. van Dijk agrees that this is the goal of an equitable society, but suggests that his own comprehensive analyses of news over the years have resulted in the finding that mainstream media demonstrate inherently racist behaviour. This is not, for the most part, the result of deliberate action or policy, but rather the natural outcome of a system that minorities often cannot access. The reasons for this vary but may include limited social and financial resources which would otherwise permit organized action such as press releases and conferences, persistent perceptions held by journalists of minorities as less credible sources than white institutional sources, and differences in communication styles between reporters and minorities (van Dijk, 1996, p. 93; also see Cottle, 2000; Poole, 2002; van Dijk, 2000). Van Dijk argues, in fact, that journalists may see themselves as holding relatively liberal viewpoints, but such an interpretation ignores the fact that “lack of media access by minorities is one of the most conspicuous properties of the symbolic dominance of white elites” (1996, p. 92). Nancy Fraser concurs, citing the public sphere as a space existing apart from the state and permitting equitable and democratic access for all citizens who wish to debate matters of public interest. This space, she suggests, was once one from which visible minorities were formally excluded, and this arena

remains exclusionary now on the basis of social markers and rules of “style and decorum” (1995, p. 290). Such protocols, she argues, serve “*informally* to marginalize women, plebeians, and members of subordinate racialized groups, preventing them from participating as peers *even after their formal incorporation*” (1995, p. 290, italics in original).

Such tensions are exacerbated by traditional news-gathering practices, in which official sources, e.g. presidents, federal and local officials, those labelled as “knowns” by Herbert Gans, are most often consulted for their views of media events and are most prominently featured in news stories as the voice of reason or authority, while “unknowns” such as protestors, victims, voters and alleged criminals are less likely to be used as sources for stories (cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 48-49). These known sources are viewed as sufficiently reputable that the information provided is presented as fact, rather than the opinion of an individual or a group of individuals (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 181), limiting the range of possibilities to which media consumers are exposed. If the media are viewed as possible manifestations of the public sphere, through which citizens voice problems or dissent, the exclusion Fraser describes has grave social consequences for a large portion of society. Said’s (1997) work on media bias suggests that the media, in some ways, merely reflect a larger American inability to comprehend or accurately depict foreign cultures, a trend seen in academia, film, television and literature.

Racism in Canadian Media

Van Dijk’s findings in European media are similar to those of researchers of the Canadian press, including Karim H. Karim (1993), who notes the tendency in Canadian

media to call attention to immigrant status, even if this is not necessarily relevant in the context of a story, and to emphasize non-Canadian birth if the person under discussion is being portrayed in a negative light. For example, sprinter Ben Johnson quickly lost his status as a Canadian hero and was represented instead as Jamaican-born following the appearance of evidence that he had used steroids in winning his Olympic race (Karim, 1993, p. 205). Ungerleider confirms that Canadian journalists generally prefer to affirm the existing social order, minimizing potential threats by characterizing minorities as villain or victim, in contrast to the perennially superior Anglo-Celtic white male (1991, pp. 159-161). The trends identified by Karim and Ungerleider have a precursor in Joseph Scanlon's 1977 work, which focussed on depictions of the South Asian community in the Vancouver media. Like van Dijk's study of European media, Scanlon's research produced findings suggesting that minorities' racial origins are often emphasized in stories of their criminality. Their cultural difference from the norm is also widely reported, while more standard stories, when they occur, are less likely to focus on race (Scanlon, 1977, p. 239). As Jiwani suggests, visible minorities are most likely to be featured in the media when they "fit prevailing stereotypes of their groups" (1993, p. 10), with a tendency towards criminal behaviour serving as one of the primary stereotypes.

One interesting aspect of Scanlon's study is that the reporters interviewed do not identify organizational pressures as the reason for their superficial or biased coverage, though it is also worth noting that the organizations in which they worked would have been somewhat differently structured in the 1970s than in the present. Instead, reporters claimed that the Vancouver community expected a shallow approach to the issues involving minorities, and would have reacted angrily if journalists had attempted to

employ a framework that did not reinforce existing societal biases against minorities (Scanlon, 1977, p. 245). Such an explanation, while appearing to be self-serving, should be taken into account when assessing the possible causes of biased reporting.

Part of the framework used by Scanlon's subjects involves the portrayal of minorities as monolithic groups. For example, different sects within Islam, Hinduism, etc., are not discussed or are not explained in sufficient detail. Instead of explaining that South Asians, for instance, are a diverse and large group practicing many different religions and observing different traditions, journalists often tend to simplify by treating minorities as members of loosely defined groups (Scanlon, 1977, p. 252). Such inattention to detail only serves to further confuse, or as Jiwani terms it, dehistoricize, relevant issues (1993, p. 123). Razack provides an example of this type of dehistoricization in citing the example of Nada, a Saudi Arabian woman who achieved Canadian prominence for her refusal to veil. Nada continually emphasized the fact that her decision was not based on a rejection of Islam. Rather, she insisted that Islam was not in any way relevant to the discussion of her situation, but the media ignored her denials, instead framing her case as a prime example of Islam's supposed capacity to subjugate all women who follow the religion (1998, pp. 119-120).

Islam in the Media

The media spotlight has recently been particularly harsh on the subject of Islam, depicting it in very much the same terms Edward Said deplored in his 1997 work on the representation of the faith, *Covering Islam*: Muslim men are seen as violent, fundamentalist, extremist, terrorists, barbaric, uncivilized and primitive (Said, 1997; for more recent studies, see Karim, 2000; Poole, 2002). Unlike *Covering Islam* (1997),

Said's landmark study (1978) of the way in which the Orient is viewed by the West does not focus explicitly on media, but many of the stereotypes of Islam identified by media researchers owe their origins to images embedded in the Orientalist tradition. Said acknowledges the difficulty in fully defining Orientalism, but offers suggestions such as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European, Western experience" (1978, p. 1), adding that beginning with the late eighteenth century and continuing to the present,

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. (1978, p. 3)

Said argues (1978, 1997) that the impressions Orientalists gathered of Muslims, Islam and a vaguely defined East throughout history have come to define the way the Occident, or West views Islam today, with very little recognition of the different sects within Islam or the changes the Arab world has undergone. The Occidental view, in colonial times, was largely that of the French and the British, but the United States presently approaches questions regarding Islam much the way these colonial powers once did (Said, 1978, p. 4). Thus, Said's following comment regarding traditional Orientalist impressions demonstrates little rupture from present-day interpretations:

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or...taken over. The point is that the very designation of something as Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgement... (Said, 1978, p. 207)

As Poole notes, covering Islam is no easy task for the media, even the more conscientious members, “given that actors do claim religious motives for their actions,” but she adds that “failing to make a distinction between Islam and Islamists has negative implications for all Muslims because it implies that the problem resides in the religion and in the people who follow it, rather than in alternative factors” (2002, p. 9).

Questions of racism in the media are often treated as merely academic, but Poole, among others, argues that distorted portrayals of Muslims have very real and dangerous consequences. She notes that there appeared to be an increase in crimes directed at British South Asians during the Gulf War (p. 20), an observation that is also true of Canadian Muslims following September 11, 2001 (Foss, 2001). Poole further adds that “the media as an instrument of public ideology demonizes Islam, portraying it as a threat to Western interests, thus reproducing, producing, and sustaining the ideology necessary to subjugate Muslims both internationally and domestically” (2002, p. 17).

One of the chief aims of this thesis is to address Poole’s assertion that there are some consistent stereotypes of Muslims, but these portrayals are often adjusted slightly to suit different needs at different times. As an example, she cites “the image of the oil-rich Sheikh with his harem, which dominated the 1970s following the oil crisis but has diminished in recent press constructions of Muslims” (2002, p. 43). I would agree, noting that certain characteristics recur in depictions of Islam—for instance, the perception of the religion as extreme and as perpetuating inequity—and would suggest that the range of images available for the Muslim man, from oil sheikh to gun-toting terrorist, does not represent a linear trajectory so much as a handful of convenient characterizations that can be summoned depending upon circumstance. A similar series of stereotypes exists for

Muslim women, including black-clad Iranian women marching on behalf of anti-Western figures such as Khomeini, members of the harem presenting themselves sensually, and meek wives expected to conform at all times to strict Muslim law.

These stereotypes are especially potent because of the ease with which they are believed and accepted into popular consciousness. Andrea Lueg, like Edward Said (1997) and Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (1998), suggests that unfamiliarity with issues surrounding the Middle East leads not only to biased reporting, but to uninformed media consumption (1995, p. 7). As Said points out, copious coverage on Islam leads many observers to believe that they know a great deal about the subject when, in fact, they are often hearing from journalists and experts whose own knowledge may be limited or may consistently conform to particular political interpretations (1997, p. 1).

Propaganda Theory

Theories of news bias can sometimes lead to claims that the media operate as disseminators of propaganda for political and economic elites. Though such accusations can border on the excessive, there are aspects of the propaganda model that can be applied in analyses of news coverage, particularly during wartime. Many analyses of biased reporting suggest that the processes leading to such portrayals are largely unconscious, dictated by underrepresentation of minorities in newsrooms and overrepresentation of reporters whose values may align closely with those of the political elite, by a news format that favours simplified summary over detailed, complex analysis, and by a level of competition that causes many news outlets to follow the same stories and rely upon the same sources, some of which may originate from governments or major corporations (Jiwani, 1993; Karim, 2000; van Dijk, 1991). However, while Herman and

Chomsky (1988) acknowledge many of these factors, they also seem to imply that the process leading to biased reporting is based on a conscious attempt by the state to control media discourse, an attempt in which the media aid and abet powerful political interests rather than subverting them. Such an analysis finds support among reporters and observers who argue, dismayed, that many of the usual beliefs about freedom of speech and of the press may be suspended in the interests of appearing patriotic and supporting the war effort (see Houpt, 2001; Lapham, 2002, 2003; Roberts, 2002, p. D2). The suppression of alternative and oppositional discourse, and the ability of the government to shape the parameters within which discussion could take place during the so-called war on terrorism does demonstrate some of the elements of propaganda identified by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988), Alex Edelstein (1997) and Jacques Ellul (cited in Karim, 2001). However, I am not arguing that the biased portrayals perceived in the analysis conducted here are due solely to a propaganda campaign conducted by the United States government, or any other government. Rather, I suggest that certain aspects of propaganda theory are applicable here, particularly the silencing of dissent and the tendency of the media to report on many of the same stories, with very similar themes. As the analysis chapters show, this tendency is very visible when comparing *The Globe and Mail* to *The New York Times*.

World War II is perhaps one of the most memorable examples of the excessive use of propaganda on both sides, but it is certainly not the first, according to Noam Chomsky, who identifies Woodrow Wilson as the founder of the modern United States government propaganda operation. According to Chomsky, Wilson wanted to participate in World War I but knew that the population was not uniformly enthusiastic about war.

His solution was the establishment of a commission called the Creel Commission to convince the public that war was necessary (1997, p. 7). The American public has not always been so docile and easily convinced of the justice of a war effort, however, and the media have been central to determining how much information the public has when making its judgements. The Vietnam War, for example, was one that many politicians bitterly believed had been lost by the media, which provided the public with graphic images that quickly led to anti-war sentiment within the American population (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 169-170). This sentiment persisted for some time and still lingers among a certain faction of the public, which can only be convinced that war is necessary if a humanitarian cause is at stake and if the United States alone can provide an adequate solution. Though many analysts have pointed to the violent history of the United States and the propensity of its people to resolve conflict through the use of force, part of the population does not subscribe to these tendencies, eschewing war in favour of the comfort of isolationism and/or attention to domestic policy (Payne, 1995). In such a context, it is hardly surprising that the Cold War kept all of North America in a state of tension, fearful of nuclear war at any moment though in fact the Cold War was fought at least partly with words, rather than action. The message from the government and the media, however, was that danger was omnipresent and attack was imminent, a message that the U.S. government attempted to reproduce prior to and during the war in the Persian Gulf.

During the Gulf War, the U.S. government was adamant that the press should not have the same opportunity as they had in Vietnam. The media received limited access to stories, though this did not stop major American outlets from filling in the missing spots

with endless conjecture and speculation. Despite the abundance of stories available, however, particularly on the Cable News Network, which broadcast Gulf War news all day long, stories about a possible peaceful resolution were not seen in the media. Chomsky suggests that the United States did have an opportunity to find a different solution to the crisis in Iraq, aside from war, as members of the Iraqi democratic opposition offered alternative methods for the restoration of order in Iraq, but they were rebuffed and the story was never made public on a large scale. This, Chomsky argues, occurred initially because Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was still a trading partner of the United States and had been an ally during the Iran-Iraq conflict. Later refusals to negotiate with a democratic opposition occurred, according to Chomsky, because the United States saw war as a more profitable avenue than any peaceful resolution could be (1997, pp. 46-48).

Similar suppression of anti-war sentiment took place in the more recent war on Afghanistan, also referred to as the war on terrorism. Critics who suggested that dropping bombs on a country already decimated by poverty and strife was inhumane, or even unwise if the stated purpose was the capture of elusive Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, were severely and swiftly punished by mainstream media, and in some cases, the government. Bill Maher, the host of the U.S. talk show *Politically Incorrect*, received a public rebuke from White House press secretary Ari Fleischer and subsequently witnessed the swift cancellation of *Incorrect* when he posited, on the air, that dropping bombs from thousands of miles away was a more cowardly action on the part of the United States than flying into the World Trade Center towers was for the terrorist hijackers (Salutin, 2001). Similarly, editors and reporters at newspapers across the U.S.

were often chastised in print by publishers and owners if they dared to question any American actions following September 11 (Haupt, 2001, p. R5). Documentary filmmaker Michael Moore pressured his publisher HarperCollins by notifying the public of HarperCollins' attempt to cancel the planned fall 2001 launch of his book, *Stupid White Men*, because of its criticism of high-profile U.S. politicians, including President Bush (Lee, 2002). In Canada, former National Action Committee on the Status of Women president Sunera Thobani was pilloried in media across the country for her suggestion that the United States, given its imperialistic policy towards numerous poor countries, should assume some responsibility for the desolate state of women in the developing world. Her additional comment that women should not feel coerced into supporting any action the U.S. government planned to take following September 11 was less widely reported although it constituted one of the pillars of her argument (cited in Valpy, 2001).

In all of these cases, the fury that erupted against these speakers undoubtedly served as a detractor for further anti-war sentiment to be voiced aloud or in print, particularly as anti-war sentiment came to denote anti-Americanism, and in some cases, was even classified as support for terrorism. In such an environment, when the possibility of punishment similar to that already witnessed is very real and can have concrete negative effects, it is not surprising that journalists and academics often retreat into what Noelle-Neumann has called a "spiral of silence," censoring themselves on the assumption that a consensus already exists and that contradictions of that consensus may lead to external censorship or punishment (cited in Katz, 1987, p. S32). Some very courageous commentators ignored death threats and public criticism by continuing to question the merits of war with Afghanistan, but they were often marginalized or derided, lessening

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couple of body parts sticking out of a 15-foot-high mud heap,” as well as “[s]ome military analysts are worried that the absence of measurable success [defined in this article as being able to see the bodies of bin Laden and other senior al-Qaeda leaders] will erode the American public’s still rock-solid support for the war” (Koring, 2002, p. A10). The Afghan children piece underneath turns attention away from this definition of military success, or lack thereof, and towards positive aspects such as female education.

All of these techniques do not necessarily attest to the claim that the media join forces with the government in a conscious conspiracy, but the fact that the upper ranks of North America’s major newspapers are staffed by some of the same elites who dictate economic and political policy helps to ensure a certain ideological consensus (van Dijk, 1988, pp. 155-157). The voices lacking in the media, then, are arguably those of the most affected. They may not have access to the media and may not speak of issues most journalists are equipped to understand. For instance, while some argue that media tend to favour the Judeo-Christian tradition when they cover religion, there is also an argument to be made that the media are staffed by journalists who are by and large trained to operate within a secular tradition. Thus, North American reporters do not always possess the appropriate credentials for covering religious issues, a major handicap when so many of the world’s major modern conflicts have cultural, historical and religious underpinnings (Karim, 2000, p. 184; also see Poole, 2002, p. 51 for a similar argument, though non-specific to North American media). These underpinnings will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter, specifically in regard to women and newer strains of feminism that are deeply conscious of the links between culture, politics and gender relations.

Chapter 2

Islamic Feminism: The Search Continues?

Female genital mutilation and the wearing of the veil, the two arch-symbols of Southern inferiority, undeniably oppress women. However, when these symbols are constructed as uncontested cultural practices and are oversimplified, and when they dominate the news and scholarship of the North, they function in similar ways to the tom toms and stories of racial defects...in Fanon's description of the colonial encounter. That is, as markers of difference, they are stories that identify the bodies of Asian and African women, both in the North and in the South, as bodies to be saved by benevolent and more civilized Europeans (Razack, 1998, pp. 6-7).

Rescue Me? Muslim Women and Myths of Salvation

Edward Said's work on *Orientalism* (1978) has been both critiqued and adapted in terms of feminist theory (for example, see Khan, 2000, p. 5, for her reminder that *Orientalism*, like Islam itself, is not monolithic, and is sometimes practised by feminists and/or non-Westerners; Ahmed, 1999, raises similar objections, though both acknowledge the foundational role Said played in deconstructing the assumptions of Orientalist scholarship). Admittedly, some of Said's work on the subject is dated; moreover, he did not set out to write a feminist analysis, instead limiting himself to the observation that gendered relations with Islam are widely misunderstood by Orientalist scholars and that men are often demonized as sexual, sadistic aggressors (1978, pp. 263, 286-287, 311). Though criticisms of *Orientalism* are addressed by other scholars, here it seems that Said's remarks regarding the barbaric, sensual male, a notion which assumes the existence of women who must meet the male's demands, serve as an appropriate starting point for a discussion of women in Islam, and more specifically, media perceptions of women in Islam. In fact, Said makes an observation regarding the

dichotomy between subject and voyeur that is curiously applicable to gendered representations of Islam: “in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist’s presence is enabled by the Orient’s effective absence” (1978, p. 208).

Themes of presence and absence are consistently in the foreground of Orientalist discourse, and are particularly apt in imagery and discourse regarding Muslim women. Said tends to devote his work to the angry Muslim terrorist figure who has dominated so much media coverage in North America and the United Kingdom in recent years, as does Karim H. Karim (2000) in his Canadian analysis.

Recent political events have continually emphasized the threat of this figure, but one of the ways in which the Muslim man’s presence has been deemed more threatening is through the absent or voiceless female Muslim. Attention to the Muslim woman is not entirely new. Several theorists have observed that travellers to the Orient have historically been fascinated with images of the Muslim woman waiting for her European prince to come (Kabbani, 1986, pp. 7, 26, 127-128; Karim, 1997, pp. 174-175). However, in these Orientalist constructions, the Muslim woman may be seen as subjugated because she must obey her husband and tolerate his other wives, but she is also distinguished as much by her sensuality as by her submissiveness (Kabbani, 1986). In more recent interpretations, the emphasis seems much more heavily concentrated on the Muslim female’s victimhood and inability to save herself from the primitive society that encases her. Arguably, this shift is due more to an increased focus on the brutality of the Muslim man than it is due to a change in the Muslim woman’s circumstances. Her plight has suddenly commanded so much attention that she is now essential to this portrayal of the

Muslim man, and vice versa. In this symbiotic, symbolic relationship, the idea of the Muslim man as threat rests on an assumption that there is an oppressed Muslim woman in the background, even if she is absent from a particular story. In short, “the inquiry into the Orient always implies a need to investigate its women” (Yeğenoğlu, 1998, p. 73).

This investigation has often involved what Ella Shohat terms a “rescue fantasy” that Western men indulge in, seeing themselves as the “colonial presence rescuing female subjects...from the brutality and ignorance of the Arab person” (cited in Al-Solaylee, 2001, p. R3; also see Khan, 1995, p. 149). This is by no means a recent fantasy, stretching back to the early Orientalist scholars; the most scathing denunciation of such constructions has been proffered by opponents of colonialism such as Frantz Fanon (1959, 1963). Feminist scholars such as Leila Ahmed (1982, 1999) have mounted double-barrelled critiques of racism and patriarchy in their discussion of these attempted rescues of the colonized woman. Ahmed expresses suspicion of the argument that Muslim women must be saved by non-Muslim feminists, observing that “our salvation entailed not arguing with and working to change our traditions but giving up our cultures, religions, and traditions and adopting theirs” (1999, p. 292). Razack agrees, suggesting that while Western feminists may believe that their motives are entirely altruistic, it is nonetheless convenient for Western women to join the movement towards saving their African and Asian sisters, thereby helping to “affirm their own positional superiority” (1998, p. 6; also see Lewis, 1996, p. 22). However, the Third World woman is not only “a necessary backdrop” for “the universal woman of Western feminism” (Razack, 1998, p. 94), she is arguably also a necessary backdrop for two important male figures, the

Othered man and the dominant Self. The condemnation of the first and the valorization of the second relies on her existence.

Women and Islam

The role of women in Islam is a problematic one, not least because Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, is a religion with numerous branches, all with differing modes of behaviour and precepts. Again, as with Christianity and Judaism, it is not remarkable to note outright contradictions in the ways the different sects of Islam interpret and practise the faith. Interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, and of the word of God as found in Islam's holy book, the Qur'an, is a process that has belonged largely to male clerics and scholars who have rarely managed to achieve a consensus within the *umma*, the global Muslim community. Interestingly, though some of the strictures presented by these scholars are astonishingly specific and rigidly enforced in everyday life, passages in the Qur'an regarding women are often vague and open to widely varying interpretations. This inner tension has only been exacerbated in recent years by external attention to the role of women in Islam. This attention sometimes springs from humanitarian efforts, such as those of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), but can also be presented by media and politicians who do not necessarily understand that the plight of some Muslim women cannot be generalized to the global Muslim female community, nor does it always follow that a Muslim woman's oppression can be traced directly to the dictates of her faith. Given the continued growth of Islam and the prominence of religion in conflicts such as the Gulf War and the so-called war on terror, this confusion regarding women and Islam has occupied Muslim and non-Muslim feminist scholars alike.

Even before the publication of her landmark work, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1982), Leila Ahmed had distinguished herself as a Muslim feminist who continually engages in attempts to reconcile the contradictions inherent in the way Muslim women are universally perceived by those living outside the culture, and the oppositional picture seen in some of her own experiences. After many years of living in the United States, far away from the geographical and political reality of her native Cairo, Ahmed continues to puzzle over the fact that the assumptions made regarding her adopted country do not match her memories, as she does not recall “an ethos in which women were regarded as inferior creatures, essentially sex objects and breeders, to be bought and disposed of for a man’s pleasure,” though she adds a rider noting that her perspective is female and she cannot speak for the male (1999, p. 100). However, she does point out that “given how powerful the cultural imperative of respect for parents, particularly the mother, was among those people—even for men such a view could not have been altogether uncomplicated” (1999, p. 100). Ahmed is not, however, in denial regarding problematic aspects of gender within Islam. She acknowledges the ways in which male interpretations of the Qur’an and of the Prophet’s sayings have disadvantaged women, but suggests that there are other forms of Islam that are less discussed but no less seriously believed. She argues, in effect, that women have their own version of Islam, in which they subscribe to the “dictum that ‘there is no priesthood in Islam’—meaning that there is no intermediary or interpreter, and no need for an intermediary or interpreter, between God and each individual Muslim and how that Muslim understands his or her religion” (1999, p. 125).

Ahmed bemoans the fact that sexist interpretations of Islam have come to tarnish the faith for so many, who come in contact only with the interpretations and are unaware

of what she considers the Qur'an's chief messages and values: "mercy, justice, peace, compassion, humanity, fairness, kindness, truthfulness, charity" (1999, p. 126). "No wonder," Ahmed says, "non-Muslims think Islam is such a backward and oppressive religion: what these men [i.e. scholars, clerics] made of it *is* largely oppressive" (1999, p. 126, explanatory note mine but italics in original; also see Mernissi, 1996, for a similar argument). Ahmed is not, then, in disagreement with the fact that certain aspects of the way women are treated in the Muslim world need to be changed. What she does object to are erroneous assumptions that the faith itself is at fault, and she further objects to ethnocentric preconceptions held by feminists who speak out regarding women and Islam without any factual basis for their comments. Ahmed, now a professor of Women's Studies, looks back on her move to the United States in the 1970s and her introduction to the discipline of Women's Studies, stating that "...such sessions on Muslim women as there were left me nearly speechless, and certainly in shock at the combination of hostility and sheer ignorance that the Muslim panelists, myself included, almost invariably encountered. We could not pursue the investigation of our heritage, traditions, religion in the way that white women were investigating and rethinking theirs" (1999, p. 292).

Ahmed acknowledges that the colonial presence in the Middle East had myriad implications, one of which may have been inciting further discussion regarding the treatment and role of women. However, she critiques the background to that discussion. Behind these positive movements towards liberation for women, there was an underlying suggestion from colonizers that Muslim societies must attain the advanced status of Western culture. Ahmed rejects this suggestion on the basis that the "Western legacy of

androcentrism and misogyny, though differing in its specificities, is nevertheless, generally speaking, no better than that of other cultures, including the Islamic” (1982, p. 128; also see Razack, 1998). Ahmed’s willingness to address the ways in which Muslim and non-Muslim feminists alike have hindered progress towards achieving human rights is representative of a larger movement in feminist scholarship towards acknowledging cultural difference and specificity. The Western feminism that Ahmed recalls from the 1970s has been heavily critiqued, like other forms of activism and scholarship, for the Eurocentric bias embedded in its attempt at universalizing female issues and dilemmas. Nonetheless, despite increased attempts at addressing the varying needs of individual women, there still remains a strong contingent of feminist scholars who see all women as having one central source of oppression—patriarchy—and who believe that emancipation involves the achievement of certain freedoms as defined by Western standards.

This being the case, it is perhaps no surprise that media depictions of feminism and Islam greatly simplify the manner in which cultural difference and political agendas may hinder any move towards supposed liberation for the Muslim woman. This simplification is a natural byproduct of the fact that the different strands of feminism, like the different strands of religion and culture, are too complex to discuss in a brief article. Moreover, they require a higher degree of comprehension and interest on the part of journalist and reader alike. Therefore, the conception of feminism most often associated with gender issues within Islam conforms more or less to the liberal standard, that is to say, a Western liberal standard not unlike that identified by Ahmed upon her arrival in the United States, though this standard has evolved somewhat over time. This presentation of liberal feminism as the dominant paradigm becomes problematic on several levels, one

being that liberal feminism has been accused of essentializing the notion of womanhood and women's issues, failing to recognize that universal solutions cannot effectively address the individual problems faced by women in vastly different situations. Another problematic element has to do with the very tendency to link liberal feminism to Westernized modes and norms,⁴ and this problem has been addressed at length by feminists whose work I will very loosely define as postcolonial,⁵ though in fact their positions may vary widely on epistemological particulars. The postcolonial designation groups them only insofar as they share a commitment to promoting indigenous solutions for equality and to rejecting external attempts at imposing imperialistic notions of morality and behaviour. Ali Mohammadi's explanation of the colonial legacy may provide some insight regarding the resistance to a Westernized notion of equal rights for women:

When the colonial powers packed their bags and removed their nationals from administrative positions directly running the government and the economy, that was not the end of their influence... They left behind European values and attitudes, including religion, ways of organizing public life, styles of politics, forms of education, and professional training, clothing styles, and many other cultural habits, none of which had existed prior to colonial domination. All of these phenomena continued to have effects long after the formal, direct, political rule of the colonies was ended, and have created a new kind of model called neocolonialism. In turn, neocolonialism has sparked new struggles to eradicate this enduring cultural influence in the Third World. (1995, p. 366)

⁴ Despite this association, it is not uncommon for Muslim feminists to adopt certain liberal viewpoints. For example, Fatima Mernissi, one of the foremost feminists whose work is specific to Islam, often espouses similar arguments to those of Western feminists (see el Guindi, 1999, p. 25).

⁵ Note that Shahnaz Khan rejects the use of the term postcolonial, viewing it as representative of an assertion that the inequity induced by colonialism no longer exists (1995, p. 151). Instead, she chooses to employ the term neocolonial, while I have continued to use postcolonial in deference to its relatively wide use among theorists working in this field.

Analyses such as these and the feminist analyses to follow suggest that John MacArthur may not be entirely correct when he says that “the U.S. has succeeded Britain in the Great Game of diplomatic manoeuvre—minus the colonial pretensions of civilizing the natives” (2002, p. A11). Such colonial pretensions now assume the form of humanitarian concern for Afghan women enslaved by uncivilized, oppressive men. The Taliban regime which went on to treat women and children in such a brutal fashion achieved its standing partly through United States support in the conflict with the Soviets, but that type of history is the kind most commentators have either disregarded or have been criticized for mentioning.⁶ In the aftermath of struggles such as the 1979 conflict in Afghanistan, or the Iran-Iraq war, or the Gulf War, and now the broader, ill-defined war on terrorism, there is consistently a refusal to address the consequences of war, and the possibility that invading in the interests of peace often creates or exacerbates long-term economic and social unrest. It is this failure, some contend, that is at the root of women’s oppression today in Afghanistan, but this is a notion that has been vigorously attacked by many in the mainstream media.

Marcus Gee, in fact, writing in *The Globe and Mail*, argues without any apparent sense of irony, “[I]f Sept. 11 taught us anything, it’s not that we should stop trying to export modern, Western ways. It’s that we should try harder to do so,” and goes on to criticize the lack of democracy that has resulted in sweatshops and poverty in the Third World (2002a, p. A19). Having drawn a clear line between the progressive West and the backwards East, he further rebukes the apparent folly of those who accept that Saudi

⁶ For examples and discussions of such criticisms, see Blatchford, 2001; Gee and Salutin, 2002; Houpt, 2001; Hume & Vallis, 2001; Joyce, 200; Just another chance to berate the Americans, 2001; McLaren, 2001; Murphy, 2001; Pollitt, 2001; Salutin, 2001; Thobani, 2001; Valpy, 2001; Wente, 2001b, 2001d.

Arabian women, for instance, should continue to veil rather than adopting Western practices (2002a). In a separate column, he adds that for religious purists, “New York is the axis of evil, the petri dish for all the alien germs that threaten to contaminate the Islamic world—secularism, materialism, rationalism, feminism, capitalism, democracy” (2002c, p. A13).

Appropriating Movements of Resistance: How the West Has Won

Gee is certainly not alone in expressing the opinions cited in the previous section, and his comments have myriad implications, none of which are positive for promoting women’s rights. First, the implication is that New York, and by extension North America, need not progress any further, having already attained an enviable nadir in terms of equity for women and for human beings in general. Such depictions gloss over very real societal problems which do still exist in the U.S. and in Canada, such as unequal pay, higher poverty rates for women, unpaid domestic labour, continually high rates of domestic abuse, and racism. His argument suggests that feminists in the U.S. and Canada can cease the war against sexism, as the chief battles have already been won. Western feminists need not complain about any inequities they espy, as they enjoy innumerable benefits, including the freedom of an unveiled, independent existence. Through means such as this, dominant ideology continually asserts itself by demonstrating a superficial level of respect and understanding for resistance movements such as feminism. A second byproduct of such comments is the propagation of the erroneous notion that Muslims had never heard of feminism before the West introduced the concept. In actual fact, prior to, during and after colonialism, women in the global South have been fighting to better the status of women. It is likely that Gee, among others, does not recognize this brand of

feminism because it often continues to embrace religious values while suggesting that misguided interpretations of Islam are the true oppressors of Muslim women, though not the sole oppressors. The elevated value Gee and other Western commentators place on the value of secularism ensures a failure to recognize that the type of feminism practised by prominent Muslim theorists such as Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Fadwa el Guindi, Rana Kabbani, Fatna Sabbah and Nawal el Sadaawi, among others (see Jayawardena, 1986, for other examples of feminism in the Third World), is equally valid. It likewise ensures ignorance of the strands of feminism that emerged in Muslim countries such as Egypt as early as the 1900s (Ahmed, 1982, p. 172).

Another disturbing factor in Gee's commentary is the implication that the practice of Islam automatically translates into repression and oppression. Undeniably, in some Arab countries and in some Muslim communities, women are subject to reprehensible treatment as second-class citizens, treatment that violates some of the most basic human rights. However, the notion that this is the fault of the religion is one that often leaves some Muslim feminists frustrated and angry. This anger is understandable given the fact that their starting points in the battle for women's rights have been the original text of the Qur'an and the *hadiths*, or sayings, of the Prophet Muhammad in order to determine what behaviour is actually decreed by Islam, and they are now, more than ever, reaching the conclusion that their oppression does not stem from rules suggested by the Prophet or by the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an itself does not require that women veil themselves, but rather calls for modesty. It also calls for fair treatment of women and offers special rights in terms of owning property and possessing the right to divorce a husband if necessary.

As Beck and Keddie point out,

basic patterns of male domination...existed in the Middle East and in other parts of the world long before Islam was born. Even veiling is not original to Islam: the earliest iconographic depiction of it dates from Palmyra in the first century A.D., and it was practiced in the Byzantine Empire and adjacent areas before Islam, although it is not known to what degree. As Muslim converts and Arabs extended this Near Eastern custom, they interpreted certain Quranic passages as referring to veiling..." (1978, p. 25)⁷

It is certainly true that male scholars in certain societies have interpreted the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in ways that serve their own interests, but these interpretations are not dictated by the religion itself, something that is rarely explained in the mass media. Moreover, different sects of Islam adhere to different principles, a crucial point often omitted in much of the media coverage, implying instead that there is only one form of Islam and that it is unchanging. Unfortunately, when coverage of different sects is included in the news, there is sometimes a privileging of those sects that have more successfully adjusted themselves to secular norms and values, as some Muslims have discovered to their cost. Mussarat, an interviewee in Shahnaz Khan's study of Muslim women living in Canada, recounts an incident in which a non-Muslim co-worker inquires as to whether she is a good Muslim or a bad one. Upon questioning the criteria constituting a good Muslim, Mussarat discovers that her co-worker identifies good Muslims as "the people who believe in Aga Khan" rather than those "who believe in Khomeini" (Khan, 2000, p. 80).⁸ Mussarat responds by classifying herself as a member

⁷ For similar arguments that women's oppression and/or veiling are not suggested by adherence to original Islamic texts, see el Guindi, 1999, pp. xvii, 11, 14-19, 31, 57, 69, 83, 149-151, 153-156; el Saadawi, 1986, pp. 271-272; MacLeod, 1991, pp. 98-99; Mernissi, 1975, pp. xii, xv-xix, 106, 108; Mernissi, 1996, pp. xii, 81-95; see Pillsbury, 1978, p. 658 for a Chinese Muslim interpretation that the face is not intended to be veiled.

⁸ Mussarat's co-worker seems to be suggesting that Shia Ismaili Muslims, led by the Aga Khan, are more acceptable to him—perhaps because they are perceived as more moderate or more secular—than the supposedly fundamentalist Muslims living in Iran following the Islamic Revolution, but this is an overly simplistic demarcation.

of the latter group, and therefore a “bad Muslim” by her co-worker’s definition, but the very fact that such simplistic divisions are possible in a religion containing numerous sects speaks to the inability of many Northerners to accept that Islam is a complex, fragmented entity, comprised of numerous elements that embrace some of the same values while differing in other ways.

Gee joins other media commentators in discussing feminism and liberation of women as though there is only one good interpretation of feminism, and in adopting this model of feminism to indicate the liberal, democratic principles underlying the war effort. The Western-produced liberal feminism he discusses has been critiqued severely for its seeming endorsement of masculine structures of power and/or its refusal to address various limitations faced by women of different classes, races or abilities (Barrett, 1999, pp. 112-115; Felski, 1989, pp. 220-221, 226; Harding, 1998, pp. 73, 76, 81-83; Hawkesworth, 1989, pp. 534-537, 545-546; Mohanty, 1992, pp. 74-75, 78-84, 88-89); many postcolonial or Third World feminists have suggested that liberal feminism is inherently ethnocentric in its implication that the ultimate truth of things is the same as it was when European colonizers first marched into the heart of darkness—the colonized need to take on the attributes of the colonizers in order to join the modern world, and there is no reason why they should not want to join the modern world. Such a model, Razack suggests, “seems to eclipse racial domination” (1998, p. 89), allowing readers to perceive the injustice of barbaric patriarchy without viewing that injustice in the context of a larger global discourse of unequal racial relations (also see Khan, 1995, p. 147). Recognition of this “erasure of histories of genocide and exploitation” (Razack, 1998, p. 93) has prompted the outgrowth of a strand of feminism that does recognize some of the

goals of liberal feminism, but that rejects its universalizing image of woman and of oppression. This strand would agree with Ahmed's statement that the "study of Muslim women in the West is heir...to colonialism, to colonialism's discourses of domination, and to its cooptation of the ideas of feminism to further Western imperialism" (1982, p. 245; also see Jayawardena, 1986, pp. 2-4; Lewis, 1996, pp. 22, 129).

Whether or not there is any validity to the accusation that the Western crusade to save Muslim women stems from imperialist motivations, there does seem to be some justification for Razack's suggestion that "advanced, more civilized people can reconfirm their own superiority by helping those who are less advanced" (1998, p. 23). These offers of assistance are rendered problematic by a consideration of the history underlying the situation of Afghans, including women. Even Margaret Wente, the consistently conservative *Globe and Mail* columnist, has admitted that it is entirely true that "[t]he U.S. abandonment of Afghanistan after the Soviet defeat was one of the greatest human-rights catastrophes of the decade, especially for women, and the United States didn't give a damn about the Taliban's brutal oppression of women or anyone else until Sept. 11" (2001b, p. A15), though she is fervent in her insistence that the past is irrelevant and that the United States' foreign policy errors are minor in comparison to the barbaric behaviour of Third World dictators. Razack contradicts Wente's dismissal of this and other examples of the United States' intervention in Third World women's lives, avowing that Western feminists "must talk about First World complicity if the lives of refugees are to make any sense to us...if we are to make any sense of the interlocking systems of patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism that produce refugees. By complicity, I mean

the West's implication in the contemporary patterns of global economic exploitation and the political contexts that produce the world's refugees" (1998, p. 91).

One of the key objections to the construction of Afghan women as victims centres around a belief that the plight of these women should not suddenly be deemed newsworthy in an attempt to justify war. Afghan women, in many ways, are suffering, but the sudden attention to this situation evokes suspicion in postcolonial theorists who recognize a familiar opportunism in the increase in media coverage. Ironically, while heated discussions arose following a controversial speech by University of British Columbia professor Sunera Thobani about the role that the United States plays in oppressing women around the world, those commentaries largely neglected her suggestion that the West's struggle to save Afghan women has echoes of the colonial past:

it's really interesting to hear this talk about saving Afghani women. Those of us who have been colonized know what this saving means...In the West [Afghani women] became nothing but poor victims of this bad, bad religion, and of [these] backward, backward men. The same old colonial construction. They were in the frontline, we did not take the lead from them then, where we could see them more as victims, only worthy of our pity and today, even in the United States, people are ready to bomb those women, seeing them only as collateral damage. (Thobani, 2001, para. 21)

These same themes are detectable in Leila Ahmed's discussion of Muslim women's history, which recognizes that "[t]he idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples" (1982, p. 151; also see Fanon, 1959, for a similar commentary on Algerian women and French colonizers). Razack adds that the West is complicit not only in its participation in political, economic and military

structures that subjugate Third World women, but also in its “production of a discursive apparatus that entrenches notions of Western superiority and Third World inferiority,” a process she dubs racialized knowledge production (1998, p. 91). During the war in Afghanistan, this process has arguably located itself in the Muslim female body.

Differentiated Oppressions: Women’s Bodies as Battleground

[The veil] is attacked, ignored, dismissed, transcended, trivialized or defended. This reaches hysterical proportions in the media, where a hostility has developed against the veil (often under the guise of humanism, feminism or human rights) from Saudi Arabia (after the Gulf War contact) to Iran (after the Islamic Revolution), and is now concentrated on the Taliban as they consolidate their power over Afghanistan. (el Guindi, 1999, p. xi)

The Muslim woman’s body has traditionally been an object of inquiry for Orientalist scholars, and with the publication of works such as Fanon’s (1959), detailing the ways in which French colonialists focussed on symbolically unveiling the Muslim woman, the Muslim female body has taken on meanings that are linked not only to race but to politics and power as well. Khan suggests that present-day confusion regarding those meanings has only exacerbated the extent to which the “body of the Muslim Woman often becomes contested terrain between competing visions of authenticity” (Khan, 1995, p. 146). The discourse surrounding the veil, which has been so evident during the war in Afghanistan, is very much a part of these competing visions, as the veil is viewed as a cultural signifier that emphasizes the Otherness of Muslim women and by extension, their oppression, though this discourse often ignores the fact that veiling can be voluntary and is not always embedded solely in religious values. Mainstream media in North American have typically associated the veil with female exclusion from the public

sphere, seclusion, silence, subjugation, backwardness, primitivity and religious fundamentalism.⁹

Margaret Wente, among others, continually cites veiling as a symbol of everything that is wrong with Islam, commenting that the only way to get along with Muslim extremists is to “adopt the veil” (2002, p. A15). She fails to mention the cultural reasons why women—and less commonly, men—wear the veil in some countries. Reasons can include sartorial demonstration of social status, affirmation of national and/or religious identity, desire for privacy or the ability to participate in the public sphere without being viewed as a sexual object,¹⁰ and conforming to cultural—as opposed to strictly religious—pressures.¹¹ Wente certainly does not mention one interpretation placed upon the wearing of the veil by people like Nelofer Pazira, the star of the movie *Kandahar*, who opposes the Taliban but also says that filming in Afghanistan made her become attached to the *burqa*, for the simple reason that it provided a sense of security in unsettled times: “I realized I preferred to be under the cover because it was safe. That’s what it does psychologically to women. You lose your will to fight. By dropping bombs on Afghanistan we are not going to free women from the *burqa*, because after a while you don’t want to take it off” (cited in McLaren, 2001, p. F3). While some journalists do acknowledge that the veil has served other purposes for

⁹ For examples, discussions and critiques of these constructions, see Al-Sayyid Marsot, 1978; Beck & Keddie, 1978; el Guindi, 1999; Fanon, 1959; GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 109-111; Khan, 1995, 2000; MacLeod, 1991; Mernissi, 1996; Razack, 1998; Wikan, 1982; Yeğenoğlu, 1998.

¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that MacLeod (1991, pp. 137-140) and Mernissi (1996, pp. 182-183) effectively dispute the perception of advantage here by suggesting that the need to veil to ward off male advances can be seen as an unpleasant admission that the public sphere is a place for sin, sex and harassment. This entirely valid point can be seen as the precursor to an argument that the veil is used as a strategic means for battling the symptoms of sexism without eradicating the problem itself.

¹¹ Beck & Keddie, 1978; Chatty, 1978; Davis, 1997, p. 12; el Guindi, 1999; el Saadawi, 1986, pp. 271-272; Fischer, 1978; GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 109-114; Khan, 2000; Mince, 1978; Peters, 1978; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, pp. 12, 89, 156-173, 183, 187; Yeğenoğlu, 1998.

Muslim women throughout history, from defining status to protecting modesty to shielding women from advances from strange men (Nolen, 2001), these interpretations are few and far between, appearing infrequently in comparison to articles that either explicitly or implicitly operate on the assumption that veiling is oppressive. Ahmed critiques the manner in which the latter notion has taken hold of popular consciousness, stating:

That so much energy has been expended by Muslim men and then Muslim women to remove the veil and by others to affirm or restore it is frustrating, and ludicrous. But even worse is the legacy of meanings and struggles over issues of culture and class with which not only the veil but also the struggle for women's rights as a whole has become inscribed as a result of this history and as a result of the cooptation by colonialism of the issue of women and the language of feminism in its attempt to undermine other cultures. (Ahmed, 1982, p. 167)

One of the underlying messages behind the drive towards Muslim women's salvation is that Western women are not similarly oppressed. There is, in fact, almost a surrendering of the Western struggle, and an inability to recognize the ways in which Western feminists are distracted from their own battleground. As Yasmin Jiwani notes, "white women's responses to articles on Muslim women and the veil included the sentiment that in comparison to Eastern women, Western women should consider their own men 'as gems of enlightenment and kindness'" (cited in Razack, 1998, p. 83), a viewpoint that has come to dominate discourse surrounding the conflict in Afghanistan, turning attention from the very real ways in which women are still disadvantaged in the West. It is difficult for many feminists to compare the two because the exterior expression of oppression is so different: "We find it difficult," Razack agrees, "to compare the veil's restriction of women's movements to the wearing of high heels and tight skirts" (1998, p. 7). The latter has been normalized in myriad ways for Western

feminists, including images from advertising, television and film, while the former still retains aspects of the exotic and inexplicable. Therefore, Michel Foucault's reference to "docile bodies" may seem naturally applicable to the Muslim female body, but not to the Western one (cited in Bartky, 1988, p. 62). Nonetheless, several feminists have borrowed from the work of Michel Foucault to explain the way in which the female body becomes central in a struggle over power, and perhaps more obliquely, the manner in which discipline is exercised over the female body (for another example, see McNay, 1992).

While veiling seems an obvious means of restricting women, Sandra Lee Bartky notes that Western women are not necessarily any less restricted. The beauty of the discipline to which the latter submit is that this discipline is invisible, like the observers in the prison of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon design. The presence of those observers, imagined or real, serves to subdue prisoners who tailor their behaviour in accordance with the belief that they could be under observation from all quarters at any given time (Bartky, 1988, pp. 62-64). Existing in a state where they consider themselves to be constantly observed and criticized, women diet, attempt to minimize facial expressions that could cause wrinkling, apply cosmetics, remove body hair and continually purchase, maintain and wear clothing considered appropriate for their sex and station. This is all despite the fact that these practices are often exhausting and, Bartky suggests, far from natural (pp. 64-82; see Davis, 1997, pp. 2, 6). If Bartky is correct, it seems strange to suggest that Western women see their own position as vastly superior to that of Muslim women, but Bartky anticipates such questions by suggesting that these disciplinary practices, however tedious, provide women with a sense of mastery, allowing them to feel that they possess a degree of control, even if they recognize that this control is

centred in the body, not in other skills (pp. 77-79; see Davis, 1997, p. 11). Yeğenoğlu (1998) borrows from the same theoretical perspective to address the body in Orientalist thought. Like Bartky, she cites the Panopticon's "omnipotent gaze" (1998, p. 43) and the constant surveillance of women, but she goes on to suggest that part of the Western opposition to veiled women may have arisen as a negative reaction to the fact that "the Oriental woman is considered as not yielding herself to the Western gaze and therefore imagined as hiding something behind the veil" (1998, p. 44). This type of woman, then, flouts the accepted truth that "[w]oman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other" (Bartky, 1988, p. 72). Mernissi summarizes the dichotomy between Western and Eastern attitudes to female exploitation with the dry observation that the "striking characteristic of Western sexuality is the mutilation of the woman's integrity, her reduction to a few inches of nude flesh... While Muslim exploitation of the female is clad under veils and buried behind walls, Western exploitation has the bad taste of being unclad, bare, and over-exposed" (1975, p. 101).

The attention to women's bodies as a symbol of oppression is therefore not entirely new, though it tends to enjoy more popularity in politically charged times. The specific emphasis on Muslim women's bodies has a long history, though again not a consistently addressed one. Leila Ahmed, looking back at the various points in time when colonizers sought to subdue their subjects, notes that "[t]he debate over women became a dominant mode through which these other profoundly divisive matters [nationalism, culture] were contested. It was at this point that the veil emerged as a potent signifier, connoting not merely the social meaning of gender but also matters of far broader political and cultural import" (1982, p. 129). Yeğenoğlu similarly notes in her discussion

of colonialism that it “was women who were constructed as the discursive instrument of this border-drawing and nation-building, and it was through regulating their bodies and subjectivities that the borders were maintained and the nation was built” (1998, p. 136; also see pp. 12, 39-40). In the ensuing struggle faced by women attempting to simultaneously assert their identity and their liberty, Khan notes the irony of the fact “that the *hejab*, which is not one of the mandatory requirements in Islam, has become for many Muslims one of the most visible symbols of the ‘authentic’ Muslim woman and for many Muslim women, not only a spiritual response but also a personal statement about their identity as Muslims” (1995, p. 146). This is perhaps more understandable given the fact that “when one is thought to have a dead, dying, or dysfunctional culture, emphasizing cultural values and practices is an important oppositional strategy” (Razack, 1998, p. 21). Fanon details the movement in Algeria that saw the veil adopt powerful nationalistic overtones, with women using the veil to express Algerian patriotism and to resist French imperialism in ways both symbolic and concrete (1959; also see Khan, 2000, 9-10; Minces, 1978, pp. 160-164; Yeğenoğlu, 1998, pp. 39-40). These overtones were no less present in successive political struggles, such as the ascension and subsequent deposition of Reza Shah in Iran, and have only become more potent with the passage of time: “the more western and westernized interests were against the veil, the more the nationalists, some of whom were also westernized, took up its cause...The veil became both a symbol of ‘Islamic oppression’ and an icon of ‘Islamic resistance’” (Khan, 1995, p. 147; also see Jayawardena, 1986, pp. 33, 38-40, 68-69, 72). That dual symbolism, argues Khan, is the conundrum that is the genuine source of Muslim women’s oppression (1995, p. 147).

Fadwa el Guindi (1999) agrees with Khan's conclusion that the veil itself is not inherently oppressive, and further concurs that the attention to veiling as an abhorrent Muslim practice is perplexing, given the fact that veiling often arises from cultural norms rather than from any religious dictate. As she addresses the disparate meanings of the veil in her in-depth anthropological study, she considers the question of religion peripheral to the veil's history, pointing out that the practice of veiling preceded Islam and has become synonymous with it largely through a series of re-interpretations and misinterpretations. Though she emphasizes that veiling should be considered a matter of choice, ultimately she locates many positive aspects of the practice by tracing it back to its historical, cultural and political roots. Ahmed's discussion of the veil is not as detailed, nor are her conclusions necessarily so optimistic, but she also notes the evolving status and meaning of the veil. Upon her return to Cairo after many years, she finds that:

the veil no longer meant what it had in my day. The women wearing it were quite likely to be educated professional women, working women, upwardly mobile women. The veil did not connote for them, as it had for my grandmother, women's seclusion, invisibility, confinement to the home. Quite the contrary—it meant exactly the opposite: it was affirmation of their right to work and to be in the public world pursuing professional and working lives. (1999, p. 300; also see Fischer, 1978, pp. 189-190, 196 for his similar conclusions in a historical study of Persian women)

Interestingly, even the historical account presented by Lady Mary Montagu following her travels in Turkey suggests the possibility that the veil could be liberating. Lady Montagu noted that veiled women were sometimes allowed more freedom than their corseted and girdle-encased Western counterparts, a notion that probably seemed as unusual then as it apparently does now (cited in Yeğenoğlu, 1998, p. 89; see el Guindi, 1999, p. 35).

For many Muslim women, the veil has granted similar freedoms, an interpretation that is understandably baffling to non-Muslims and even to some Muslims whose own

sect does not require veiling. One particularly troubling aspect of the decision to shine the spotlight on Muslim women's struggles has been the propagation of the notion that all Muslim women practice the same form of Islam and that the faith is inherently negative for women. This notion has been particularly evident in discussions of veiling, which is by no means the only or most important way in which some Muslims choose to express their faith, but it is by far one of the most visible ways. It is also, apparently, one of the most repugnant markers of cultural difference to many Northerners. Muslims who choose to veil, rather than being forced, find themselves on the defensive as Islam comes under attack and women are expected to demonstrate resistance to their own culture, rather than a more selective resistance to a repressive extremist regime. Resistance, in this scenario, is defined as the rejection of nearly all things religiously or culturally specific, followed by an enthusiastic embracing of Western norms. Canadian Muslims, for instance, were astonished to discover the degree of hostility they evoked merely through the practice of their religion, a hostility which should be alien in a multicultural society (for examples, see Grewal, 2001; Khan, 2000).

In her own study of the way Canadian institutions treat cultural difference, Razack refers to the "paradoxical assumption that, in choosing to come here, immigrants relinquish their right to the conditions under which their cultural identities might flourish. Such an argument...sidesteps the point that immigrants seek protection from oppression, a protection that can come from maintaining their own cultural practices" (1998, p. 28). The means through which Muslim women exercise resistance, or decide not to do so, is ultimately discredited. In the presentation of Muslim women as ones who must be spoken for, there is a contradictory theft of agency, "leaving little room for their resistance to

oppression” (Razack, 1998, p. 33) and shifting focus to questions that are seen as extraordinarily important to non-Muslims, whose understanding of those may be limited, from more basic questions of living. As Adeena Niazi argues,

[i]nstead of fighting for the rights of Muslim women in other countries to own property, to be educated, to have access to health services, to be active in public life, which, along with the idea of absolute equality, are all fundamental to Islam, we have to explain that covering does not equate to oppression. It would be like saying men who wear pants are oppressed. It should be a matter of choice, but now many Muslim women in the West don’t cover because they don’t like the false perception. (cited in Grewal, 2001, p. L9, see GhaneaBassiri, 1997, pp. 109-113 for similar conclusions from American Muslims)

Niazi’s comment on choice may seem peripheral, and in most media stories, this is indeed the impression left on the Western reader, who is often led to believe that veiling—or subscribing to any different cultural practices—can only be wrong. The question of choice, which many postcolonial theorists have emphasized in their discussions of whether veiling is restrictive, is frequently neglected, and thus women who veil because they wish to are seen as anomalous and misguided.

This inability to respect the complicated nuances of cultural practices such as veiling has had, some might suggest, the unfortunate result of linking the shedding of the veil with the shedding of one’s culture. Many postcolonial theorists have critiqued the fact that attempts at introducing feminism into Muslim and/or Eastern societies have been accompanied by a tendency to impose non-Muslim, non-Eastern culture upon those societies. While these efforts are doubtless often well-intentioned, they also strongly evoke memories of a time when “the Victorian colonial paternalistic establishment appropriated the language of feminism in the service of its assault on the religions and cultures of Other men, and in particular on Islam, in order to give an aura of moral justification to that assault at the very same time as it combated feminism within its own

society” (Ahmed, 1982, p. 152; also see el Guindi, 1999, pp. 35, 45, 181; Fanon, 1959, p. 103; Lewis, 1996, p. 153; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). As Ahmed notes, the complicated relationship colonized societies developed with European powers made the veil a symbolic weapon for colonized and colonizer alike:

The veil came to symbolize in the resistance narrative, not the inferiority of the culture and the need to cast aside its customs in favor of those of the West, but, on the contrary, the dignity and validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack—the customs relating to women—and the need to tenaciously affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination. (1982, p. 164; also see Fanon, 1959, pp. 47, 49)

This resistance grows stronger, not weaker, as cultural tensions increase and differences are exacerbated, and this leads to the type of entrenched political dogmatism that Uma Narayan (1997) deplores. As an American of Indian origin fighting to achieve emancipation for other women in the Third World she has physically left behind, Narayan is dismayed to find that hostility towards the Western feminism portrayed in mainstream media inevitably affects the way her own efforts are viewed. Feminism comes to be seen as a strictly Western construct, a movement embraced by those who are less culturally authentic, and thus those who might benefit most from feminist efforts feel alienated from the cause. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea’s similar observations (1998) during a visit to Iraq are even more disturbing in light of the unrest surrounding international relations with that country in 2003. The women she interviews reject suggestions that they are subjugated by Saddam Hussein’s supposed terrorism against his own people, and repudiate the notion that they must be saved by Western intervention. Feminism, they inform Fernea, is the kind of luxury that only those in the West can afford. This kind of attitude, then, is the inevitable result of misinformed discussions and reports regarding the struggles of Muslim women. Muslims, and indeed members of other Eastern

religions, harden their resistance not only to Western ideals but to forms of political and social activism that they perceive as Western in origin (see Khan, 2000, pp. 52-53; MacLeod, 1991, p. 9), even when the historical evidence demonstrates the East is home to a thriving feminist tradition of its own. Such resistance may strengthen patriotic fervour and save dying cultures in the manner Razack describes, but it may also seriously impede efforts to improve the lives of Muslims living in difficult conditions. These are the very real and very disturbing byproducts of cultural misunderstanding.

The Other Within: Muslim Women and Western Media

There are different, though intersecting, stereotypes available of Muslim women, but this thesis will attempt to discover if the idea of Muslim woman as a resident of a backwards society, needing to be saved by a civilized man of the West, has become dominant in recent times, never more so than in the war in Afghanistan. Though the image of victimhood may initially seem contradictory, it is in fact a natural progression of other Orientalist views of “[t]he Middle East or the ‘Orient’ as a highly romanticized landscape of mystery, a hotbed of lust and carnal indulgence, paradoxically symbolized by the image of the submissive, veiled woman” (Al-Solaylee, 2001, p. R1). Reina Lewis, drawing upon older, more openly racialized tropes of the Muslim woman, also evokes the lustful and romanticized Orient, adding that travel writers in the 19th century often portrayed Muslim women as sexualized objects, reclining in the harem without any interest in work, friends or societal affairs (1996, p. 149). Rana Kabbani locates Orientalist Richard Burton’s fascination with the region in his view of women, suggesting that the “Orient for Burton was chiefly an illicit space and its women convenient chattels who offered sexual gratification denied in the Victorian home” (1986,

p. 7). The stereotype mentioned by Lewis still prevails to a lesser degree in today's media, though the smouldering sexpot of the harem is rarely evoked directly. It is now more common to imply, through articles depicting young women partaking in supposedly forbidden delights, that veiled women are merely concealing a powerful, latent sensuality (Cernetig, 2001). This figure is so very mysterious and enticing that she actually evokes fear of inability to resist her wiles in Muslim and non-Muslim men alike. Interestingly, such constructions of Muslim women are not dissimilar to the reasons fundamentalists cite for limiting display of the female body and for curtailing interaction between men and women. Even more interestingly, historical and present-day accounts do exist that counter the notion of the indolent harem girl, instead propounding that harems are characterized by a sense of feminine community and sisterhood, containing many instances of life lived fully (Ahmed, 1992). These first-hand accounts are rarely noted in mainstream commentaries regarding the harem, but if they were to be cited, they would present an interesting counterpoint to conventional notions of a Muslim woman's life.

The submissive, veiled woman is the figure more likely to be addressed in contemporary media, a possibility that Emrys Peters notes in her argument that "the uninformed impression in the West is still that all Arab women occupy a position of unmitigated servility: they are completely dominated by their men and kept out of sight most of the time, only to appear in public when they are completely veiled" (1978, pp. 311-312; also see Wikan, 1982, p. 5). This woman's concealment of her face and/or body is generally equated with a complete inability to voice her thoughts or to demonstrate agency. This preferred interpretation rests upon a refusal to address the historical fact that Muslim women have often participated in military and political action aimed at

indigenous and colonial powers alike.¹² This image is best described in Fatima Mernissi's description of the Sunni Muslim ideal of femininity:

Such a woman does not challenge laws and orders. She veils her body and keeps it available for the husband only. Veiling goes together with a key attribute, modesty, and is the expression of the spatial confinement of women. Spatial confinement is the physical expression of women's exclusion from the public sphere, the sphere precisely of knowledge and power. (1986, pp. 100-101; also see Sabbah, 1984, p. 118)

When women's struggles on behalf of Islam and nation are disclosed, they are often framed as deluded acts, performed by victims of false consciousness, naïveté or ingratitude to the liberating powers. As Khan notes, "Muslim women are deemed to be active promoters of religious ideology, or passive recipients of prescriptions of religious texts. The history of women's struggle both in the country of origin and in Canada is denied" (Khan, 1995, p. 148). In the first case, it may seem unsurprising that Muslim women expressing religious or nationalist sentiments would be belittled; it may seem stranger that images depicting Muslim women as independent or opinionated to the smallest extent would be rejected completely by 19th century colonial powers, which openly avowed a desire to see Muslim women liberated. According to Lewis, this is not as paradoxical as it may appear: "Considering that female interest and influence in politics was precisely what the West wanted to avoid in its own women, it is not

¹² See Ahmed, 1982, pp. 173-174 for Egyptian examples from the early twentieth century; el Guindi, 1999, pp. 129-145, 168, 180, 182-184, and MacLeod, 1991, pp. 14, 102-115, 127-130 for late twentieth-century Egyptian examples; el Guindi, 1999, pp. 170-173, Fanon, 1959, pp. 33-34, 46-47, 49, MacLeod, 1991, p. 104, Mince, 1978, pp. 160-164, Moruzzi, 1993, and Yeğenoğlu, 1998, pp. 39-40, 136-143 for examples from the Algerian Revolution; el Guindi, 1999, p. 175, MacLeod, 1991, pp. 103-104, 129, Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, pp. 156-173, 183, 187 for a discussion of the ways in which Iranian women alternately demonstrated support for Khomeini and opposition to some of his more stringent dictates; MacLeod, 1991, pp. 103-104 and Yeğenoğlu, 1998, pp. 127-136 for Turkish examples; Jayawardena, 1986, for 19th century examples from various Eastern countries.

surprising that when Oriental female power is represented by men it figures as a spectre of evil” (1996, p. 153).

Indeed, while this Oriental female power can assume several forms, it is demonized when mentioned at all. Khan acknowledges the participation of some women in Islamist movements, even those that are unfriendly to the concept of female liberation (2000, p. 8). It is these women, described by Wente as “matrons of jihad,” (2001a, p. A19) who occupy centre stage in the media when Muslim women with strong nationalist beliefs are allowed to speak at all. Though Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi’s discussion of the Islamic Revolution presents Iranian women as politically conscious individuals engaging in organized protest for the purpose of achieving reasonable demands such as the right to choose or reject the veil (1994), one of the iconic images of the time remains that of Iranian women clad in an all-encompassing *hijab*, carrying guns in order to carry out the Ayatollah Khomeini’s orders. This, then, is the feminine counterpart to the demonized Muslim male terrorist figure, and it is the construction that annuls any sense of reason attached to Muslim women advancing political demands or engaging in protest.

Particularly in the latter two constructions, Muslim women assume a greater significance as a symbol of nation by nationalists and colonialists alike. Fanon (1959) describes in detail the way in which Algerian Muslim women are targeted by French colonialists who wish to establish French norms in Algeria, and see the veil as a potent signifier (also see Khan, 2000, pp. 9-10; Mincea, 1978, pp. 160-164; Yeğenoğlu, 1998, pp. 39-40, 136-143 for related discussions). The removal of the veil is the first step in rescinding some of the Muslim man’s power and in weaning Muslim societies from

adherence to indigenous practices. There is, of course, the potential for overlap in these three categories, and el Guindi argues that conflation is more common than not: “veil, harem, seclusion and unbridled sexual access constitute a linked whole. This is particularly so in the colonial construction of the colonized East” (1999, p. 23). These shifting approaches to viewing Muslim women are perhaps less bizarre than they appear, as there seems to be a strong historical basis for this confusion: “Europe’s feelings about Oriental women were always ambivalent ones. They fluctuated between desire, pity, contempt and outrage. Oriental women were painted as erotic victims and as scheming witches” (Kabbani, 1986, p. 26).

Embedded in all of these portrayals is a corresponding degree of dependence upon the West, though these stereotypes, when cited in the media or in academia, are generally not presented in ways that fully contextualize historical and political reasons why such a dependence or interrelationship might exist. All stereotypical constructions of Muslim women emphasize, to some extent, the Orientalist/Occidentalist dichotomy that so many postcolonial scholars have critiqued. The attendant implication is that Muslim women will either be saved by detaching themselves from their Orientalist roots and ascending to civilized Occidental levels, or they will remain forever chained to their fates as long-suffering wives or vacuous residents of the harem. The analysis undertaken in this thesis examines whether or not such stereotypes, so notoriously evident in past media coverage and scholarly works, can still be found and utilized in newspaper discussions of a current, complicated conflict such as the war in Afghanistan, or as it is more nebulously defined, the war on terrorism. The following chapter investigates the various means and methods that will be employed in conducting this analysis.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Question

In order to assess whether or not the media emphasized the stereotype of the Muslim woman as victim in need of salvation during the conflict in Afghanistan, this thesis looks at selected newspaper coverage within that time period. The analysis of the newspapers in question is qualitative, drawing from the work of several scholars who have performed similar analyses while utilizing related themes in order to construct categories for evaluation. This analysis attempts to answer several questions regarding the possible stereotyping of Muslim women in the newspaper articles under examination. One of the primary questions asks whether the following observation is equally applicable to the representation of Muslim women during the war in Afghanistan:

“Representations of Muslim as Other affected as well as constructed the social and political context in North America in which the Gulf War was waged in 1991, indicating an increase in Orientalist influence and, in particular, its ability to prejudice and reinforce political and military decisions” (Khan, 2000, p. 5). The extent of such ability is virtually impossible to fully assess in a quantitative sense, but it is often possible to draw parallels between the political and military decisions Khan mentions and an increase in Orientalist or otherwise biased depictions of Muslims.

The attempt here to identify stereotypes of Muslim women is motivated not only by a desire to link skewed representations to political and military action, but also by a desire to determine whether or not these portrayals are harmful in their very attempt to reverse the supposedly deleterious effects of living in accordance with practices that can

be considered Islamic. The project undertaken herein examines whether or not discussions of Muslim women during the Afghan conflict took place in a context such as that described by Shahnaz Khan, “where nonwhites frequently find themselves categorized as minorities devalued and excluded from mainstream life. The negative images of culture and community can lead to a self-negation and devaluation and/or to more rigidly enforced rituals drawing on the myths of the past” (2000, p. 14). There is some evidence to suggest that the consequences Khan cites are already visible among certain Muslims. The current study of major newspapers utilizes qualitative analysis techniques in order to determine whether the labelling and excluding of minorities mentioned above also take place.

Medium under Analysis

In these globalized, media-saturated times, media consumers have many avenues available to them if they wish to learn about current events. Media events, major happenings that draw audiences on a large scale (Dayan & Katz, 1992) such as September 11, 2001 often seem peculiarly suited to television, with its immediacy, capacity for graphic reproduction and swift analysis. However, the focus here is on newspapers because people still turn to newspapers for legitimate information and appropriate context, despite suggestions that newspapers are irrelevant in the digital age. As Dornan suggests, newspaper information is still considered substantial and serious for the consumer who wishes to attain a certain level of education regarding an unfamiliar topic (1996, pp. 60, 66-67). Even Conrad Black, who once defended his then-dominance of the newspaper industry on the basis that newspapers’ influence was diluted by the proliferation of television, radio and Internet-based news sources available, subsequently

mounted an entirely contradictory argument, boasting that “had it not been for the *National Post*, there would be no serious debate in this country about tax reduction and the brain drain” (cited in Siddiqui, 2000, p. A13). Newspapers, Siddiqui concludes, “still largely set the political agenda” (Siddiqui, 2000, p. A13). In the case of Canadian coverage, this study employs *The Globe and Mail* because it remains the national newspaper of record, with national readership at nearly one million, approximately 300,000 more than *The National Post* (Damsell, 2002b, p. B4).

Critical Discourse Analysis

The pre-existing stereotypes identified by Jiwani (1993, p. 10) are explained by van Dijk as models, “mental structures of information which, besides the new information offered in a news report, feature information about such a situation as inferred from general knowledge scripts” (1991, p. 74). He suggests many ways in which features of news reports, such as lexical choice, placement and structure combine to create and reinforce notions of “white superiority” (1993, p. 128). Critical discourse analysis allows researchers to deconstruct the type of language used in the description of minorities, assessing some of the biases that may be embedded within a discursive sample, e.g., a news article, in the cases currently under study. “Language use, text, talk and communication (together subsumed here under the overall term of ‘discourse’),” van Dijk states, “are needed and used by group members to learn, acquire, change, confirm, articulate, as well as to persuasively convey ideologies to other ingroup members, to inculcate them in novices, defend them against (or conceal them from) outgroup members” (1998, p. 6).

Van Dijk suggests that discourse has to be analyzed at two levels, the more specific “local, micro level” and the “higher level, societal orders of discursive practices” (1993, p. 122). The latter issue is addressed, at least partially, by the discussion of bias in the newsroom in the first chapter. In terms of the actual news articles themselves, headlines serve as a significant starting point for analysis, given that many readers consult headlines and first paragraphs in order to determine their interest in a particular article. After absorbing information supplied in the headlines and first paragraphs, they may cease reading for lack of interest or conversely because they feel they have already grasped the essential facts of the article (van Dijk, 1991, pp. 50-51). That being the case, headlines are significant in that they serve as a type of filter for readers determining which articles are of interest. However, they are also significant because the words in the headlines may leave a lasting impression, even if the actual story provides an entirely different context than that supplied by the headline.

Within the story itself, “rhetorical structures are studied as means to emphasize or de-emphasize meanings as a function of ideological opinions. Metaphors may be chosen that highlight the negative character of our enemies, comparisons in order to mitigate the blame of our own people, and irony to challenge the negative models of our opponents” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 208). This division between friend and foe can apply at an individual level and can be generalized at a national level, as Cottle points out: “Essential ideas of (demonized) national character and (tribalized) ethnic differences are often mobilized by state and media in times of war and conflict” (2000, p. 5). In the Afghanistan conflict specifically, the following observation is particularly appropriate: “the actions of white elites that are defined as ‘positive’ for minorities are usually covered prominently...’our’

helping ‘them’ is a very newsworthy topic” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 93). Cottle adds that contrasting “Their lack of initiative and emphasizing Our help” is also a frequently employed technique (2000, p. 40).

Such tactics are a direct expression of ideology and a more specific evolution of group members expressing “our” beliefs (van Dijk, 1998, p. 239). The use of words such as “we,” “us” and “our” is frequently found in articles arguing a firm ideological standpoint and attempting to minimize resistance to that point of view (Cottle, 2000, p. 2; see Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 1999, p. 324; van Dijk, 1998, p. 203; also see Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 208, for discussion of the way U.S. media routinely referred to “we” and “ours” in regard to the U.S. military during the Gulf War). In this particular conflict, distinctions between Us and Them, Self and Other, are already clear, having been emphasized by President Bush at the very beginning of his declaration of war against terrorism. Some of the news reports honed in on this difference by clearly articulating the difference between what “we” think, as opposed to what detractors may wish to say. This is one way of collecting evidence of the failures of the public sphere, as noted by Fraser in her interpretation of Habermas’ notion of that democratic space (1995)—such demarcations in political thought between elites and those with differing viewpoints, described by van Leeuwen as differentiation (1996, p. 52), serve as reminders that debate on crucial issues is not alive and well, even in the most ostensibly pluralistic societies. Van Dijk posits that “the social others, as part of the targeted outgroup, may be talked *about* but at the same time indirectly, socially and ideologically *addressed*” (1998, p. 225, italics in original).

In theory, interviews with social others would mitigate the damage that uninformed reporting about others might inflict. If words spoken in an interview are taken out of context, this may be difficult to assess here with any degree of exactitude. However, by looking at the selections of text that are provided, it is possible to apply, to some extent, van Dijk's theory that "[m]ost forms of quotation...are indirect or a mixture of direct and indirect speech. This allows varying degrees of distance, marked in different linguistic ways, between the quotation and what was actually said" (1991, p. 152). It is often the case that the quotation provided will have been selectively edited in order to provide a particular impression—the sample news articles will contain numerous quotes from both ingroup and outgroup members. The challenge will be assessing whether or not the tenor of a quote seems to have been changed or emphasized for particular purposes. This is one area in which "relative incompleteness," the omission of relevant information, may occur, though van Dijk notes that it is also possible to have relatively "overcomplete" discourses, ones in which information is included though it does not assist with comprehension of a particular event (van Dijk, 1998, p. 268). In such a case, he suggests, this information is provided when it "negatively reflects back on outgroups (or positively on ourselves)" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 268).

Lexical style can be suggestive of many aspects of position and power, van Dijk says, adding that the "choice of words will also reveal who is in control and what the relations are between writers and readers, or between writers and the people they speak about" (van Dijk, 1991, p. 211). Some of those people can be represented in ways that indicate the groups in which they hold membership and their corresponding norms and values (van Dijk, 1998, p. 259). Such indications of power relations are typical in what

van Dijk refers to as an “ideological square” consisting of four main strategies. These strategies involve placing emphasis on any positive information regarding the ingroup and, conversely, on negative information related to the outgroup, while suppressing positive information about the latter as well as negative information about the former (1998, p. 267).

While lexical style focusses on specific presentation of subject matter, topic selection can also “...influence the representation readers construct in their mind of specific ethnic events and situations. Such mental representations of events are called ‘models’” (van Dijk, 1991, p. 74). These models, van Dijk explains, “are mental structures of information which, besides the new information offered in a news report, feature information about such a situation as inferred from general knowledge scripts” (1991, p. 74). In accordance with this general knowledge that members of the ingroup are assumed to possess, controversial claims are often couched in terms of presuppositions, so that they can assume the weight of fact accepted by all (1991, p. 76). Likewise, Deacon et al suggest that positive arguments for the war or for American ideology can be advanced under the guise of “‘common sense,’ or as commonly and universally applicable, certain conceptions and assumptions supportive of existing patterns of social power, authority and privilege” (1999, p. 316). Accordingly, van Dijk mentions that one common technique of the Dutch press is a subtle suggestion that minorities’ comments are not especially important, while minorities’ “social and political organizations, as well as their cultural activities, are virtually ignored. Instead, white organizations or ‘experts’ tend to appear as ‘representatives’ for ethnic groups in many topics” (1991, p. 115). Another way of minimizing the impact of statements or movements by minorities is the

use of a divide and conquer strategy, wherein ethnic groups appear to be plagued by internal rivalries (van Dijk, 1991, p. 197).

In essence, the use of critical discourse analysis allows a search for terms that evoke certain images or stereotypes in newspaper coverage. As one Canadian Jewish woman, previously an Iranian Muslim, suggests in an interview, “[i]n Iran, control of women and the sexualization of women were overt, while in Canada they are in coded language. The practices are different, but the message is the same” (cited in Khan, 2000, p. 32). It is these codes and messages that are examined here, using some of the techniques described by van Dijk. These techniques, in combination with studies of myth and ritual and Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) propaganda model, will investigate the possible occurrence of “various forms of manipulation, with strategies that manage or control the mind of the public at large, and with attempts to thus manufacture the consent or fabricate a consensus in the interests of those in power” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 274).

Myth and Ritual

Lewis Lapham, commenting on the propaganda being issued by the US government, notes the 90% approval rating the previously shaky Bush government garnered in the months following September 11, 2001, and says that “the mythologizing of the plot requires the collaboration of a news media eager to bring urgent bulletins, every hour on the hour, from the frontiers of dread” (2002, p. 8). A casual observation of major American and Canadian newspapers prior to the war in Afghanistan suggests that the American government may have benefitted from just such a collaboration and such a tendency towards mythologizing. In a more general sense, Karim also notes the importance of applying mythic elements to a situation where right and wrong might not

otherwise be as clearly bifurcated: “In order to motivate people, ideology necessarily has to link itself to myth” (Karim, 2001, p. 123).

Karim carries this observation further by noting the debt that propaganda owes to myth. As Edelstein (1997) notes, the nature of propaganda has changed in some areas, evolving from the outright direction of opinion seen in World War II, for instance, to a gentler, less discernible form that is perhaps even more effective. In his commentary upon Jacques Ellul’s discussion of propaganda, Karim states that the “evidence of propaganda’s effects is to be found not only in totalitarian states but also in western democracies, which use the myths of peace, freedom and justice to ensure obeisance to the ruling elite. Democracy, which is supposed to foster the expression of opinions, itself has been turned into a myth” (2001, p. 122). Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi draw a similar comparison, though they are speaking specifically of radio and television in Iran, suggesting that they “are far more subtle carriers of ideology than a state propaganda unit, because they infiltrate private space with an illusion of being value-free, yet establish very powerful mythologies” (1994, p. 15).

The tendency to employ myth is an understandable one. Mythical structures applied to a story increase the likelihood that people will understand and empathize with the side characterized by the “right” virtues. Myth enhances a story’s appeal as recognizable dichotomies are applied—there are heroes and villains, good causes and bad ones, the just fight and the evil one. Arguably, in Afghanistan, the myth centred around victims in need of salvation. As Jack Lule says in a different context, “[t]he victim is a symbol used by terrorists to represent a people. News reports, recognizing and affirming the symbol, use the victim as a vital dramatic link with readers” (1991, p. 31).

Ungerleider agrees that this is a common journalistic technique, suggesting that the imposition of narrative structure simplifies the issues at stake and results in an assignation of roles that are typically dictated by race, i.e., minorities are generally more likely to be portrayed as villainous (1991, pp. 160-163; see also Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 114).

Lule also notes that “[s]uch stories are the stuff of myth. Different from popular usage that refers to myth as a false or fabulous tale, myth here is seen as an integral aspect of culture, a symbolic narrative that attempts to explain and give meaning to events and beliefs” (1991, p. 31). Lule draws upon Burke’s dramatistic analysis and the pentadic method, which examines “five questions: ‘What was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)’” (cited in Lule, 1991, p. 32). Adding that one term can dominate and organize an entire text, Lule suggests that Burke’s pentadic method is especially suitable for analyzing a news report “as a dramatic act, in the context of culture” (1991, p. 33). Like Lule’s study of the way terrorist victims are depicted in the news, this study of Muslim women as victims aims to answer the question, “[t]o what extent can the news reports be seen as dramatic enactments that shape and are shaped by the context of culture, which draws from and gives to social order and cohesion?” (Lule, 1991, p. 34).

It is perhaps not coincidental that Lule’s description of victims in this type of storytelling has echoes of the acted-upon woman mentioned by Razack (1998): “In dramatistic terms, the victim was depicted not as an agent—one who acts—but as an element of scene, part of the situation” (Lule, 1991, p. 35). In the particular case that Lule describes, he argues that “[the *Times*]’ insistence on the victim as scene assured that the

symbolic power and emotional drama of the victim would become part of the cultural context for understanding...” (Lule, 1991, p. 36). He then goes on to suggest that the “stirring and potent” references to the victim’s disturbing situation, as well as to the inhumanity of his attackers (Lule, 1991, p. 37) helped to mobilize sentiment and action promoting national vengeance against these attackers (Lule, 1991, p. 38). This cannot be generalized completely to the situation in Afghanistan, where much of the initial rage stemmed from the sense of American victimization, but a different wellspring of empathy arose once the issue of subordinated women was highlighted. This, then, may at least partly answer the question of the relative significance of the media’s emphasis on victimhood: “Burke sees the process of victimage as central to social life. Through the shared sacrifice of victims, Burke says, individuals achieve identification and integration within groups. He asks ‘whether human societies could possibly cohere without symbolic victims which the individual members of the group share in common,’ and calls victimage ‘the very centre of man’s social motivation’” (cited in Lule, 1991, p. 42). This, then, has some resemblance to the function of ritual identified by Chaney. Hugh Duncan notes this connection as well, suggesting that “victimage is the ritual unburdening of a people that takes place through great social dramas of purgation and purification, sacrifice and salvation” (cited in Lule, 1991, p. 42).

David Chaney quotes Philip Elliott’s definition of ritual, “rule-governed activity of a symbolic character involving mystical notions which draws the attention of participants to objects of thought or feeling which the leadership of the society of group hold to be of special significance” (cited in Chaney, 1986, p. 115), and supplies some properties of the performance of ritual: “repetition; acting; ‘special’ behaviour or

stylization; order; evocative presentational style—staging; and the ‘collective’ dimension” (Moore and Myerhoff, cited in Chaney, 1986, p. 116). While ritual has historically been associated with a sense of the sacred, Chaney argues that it has equal relevance in creating and confirming secular communities “because identity has now to be invented,” rendering ritual “*more salient* as a mode of dramatizing the community” (1986, p. 116, italics in original).

Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, Chaney goes on to suggest that newspapers can play a significant role in the imagining of a community, presenting a narrative containing common concerns that allow the mass of readers to become members of a symbolic public. This ritual takes place not once, but repeatedly, as the newspaper is produced and distributed at set intervals. To Chaney, then, ritual functions as part of mass communication in three ways: “First, there are rituals which are to be reported; secondly, there are ways of reporting which are themselves rituals; and thirdly, the medium may itself be a ritual or collective ceremony” (1986, p. 117). In this role, the media function both on a personal and public level, appealing to individual interests and values while simultaneously operating on the assumption that its audience is “a national political community” (Chaney, 1986, p. 131). Ritual, then, arguably functions to enforce existing norms, catering to mainstream expectations. In such a case, it would come as no surprise to see signs of ritual reporting in what Chaney calls “a climate of deliberate consensus” (1986, p. 118). In this particular study, the ideas of ritual and stereotype are both being examined for their applicability, but it is worth noting that Cottle perceives the notion of ritual as a more useful one than stereotyping for the investigation of ethnicity in media (2000, pp. 12-13).

Propaganda Model

It may also be helpful here to employ some elements of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1988), though with some necessary changes given the passage of time. Like Herman and Chomsky, I hold that propaganda is by no means the primary or sole function of the media, but I do suggest here that in the coverage of the war in Afghanistan, it is likely that some propaganda elements will be present. Herman and Chomsky's original model offers five essential ingredients: 1) ownership and profit motivation of mass media organizations, 2) advertising as the media's main source of revenue, 3) media reliance on information provided by state and economic interests i.e. the "knowns" described by Gans (cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 48-49), 4) "flak" as a tool to control the media and minimize dissent, with flak referring to negative reaction to media stories in the form of letters, complaints and press releases, and 5) desire to retain an "anti-communist" designation, rather than risk offending the public, state, religious or business interests (1988, p. 2).

Clearly the risk of appearing sympathetic to communism is no longer as pronounced as it once was, but equally clearly, there are still certain political views that are deemed unacceptable in today's politically tense climate. Herman and Chomsky's model, then, is largely adaptable to the conflict in Afghanistan, once "anti-terrorist" is substituted for the "anti-communist" qualifier. The following commentary on anticommunism, with contemporary updates indicated in brackets, demonstrates the ways in which such control mechanisms can be transmogrified as required to demonize dissidents:

The anti-Communist [anti-terrorist] control mechanism reaches through the system to exercise a profound influence on the mass media. In normal times as

well as in periods of Red [terrorist] scares, issues tend to be framed in terms of a dichotomized world of Communist [terrorist, anti-American, extremist] and anti-Communist [anti-terrorist, pro-American, democratic] powers, with gains and losses allocated to contesting sides, and rooting for 'our side' considered an entirely legitimate news practice. (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 30-31)

It is these kinds of dichotomies that the current analysis will examine, as well as additional manifestations of the propaganda model, such as Herman and Chomsky's claim that the model "will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as *worthy* victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be *unworthy*" (1988, p. 37, italics in original).

Analytical Terms and Categories

Hartmann and Husband (1974), Karim (2000), Said (1978, 1997), Scanlon (1977), van Dijk (1991, 1996) all suggest characteristics that are commonly associated with minorities. At times, they are specifically referring to characteristics assumed to apply to Muslims or Arabs, and there are many readily available traits that journalists and academics can employ (el Guindi, 1999; Karim, 2000; Khan, 2000; Razack, 1998; Said, 1997). Said notes that in "the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics" (1978, p. 177). It may also be said that women in the Orient fulfil the same role, and it is the specific set of references applied to Muslim women that are under investigation in this analysis. The news articles in this sample will be examined for references to the stereotypes mentioned in previous chapters, particularly that of the subjugated woman, which Bruce Lawrence observes "has acquired the normative status of a cliché" (1998, p. xiii).

One way in which the media have narrowed their focus on the issue of Afghan women is by dwelling on the wearing of the veil. This focus is not as recent as it may

seem, as evidenced by el Guindi's prescient comments here, but it is certainly intensified and politically charged:

A reaffirmation of tradition and culture might again be played out in the near future through the idiom and politics of the veil. It is of course being played out now in Afghanistan, as the Taliban are consolidating their power. The hysterics in the Western media about women in Afghanistan feeds from ethnocentrism and arrogance, and feeds into a reaction of extremism. The emergent regional landscape that merges nationalism, cultural pride, and Islam is perhaps what the veil has come to represent in the 1990s. (el Guindi, 1999, pp. 184-185)

Cottle lists several categories common to coverage of minorities, but in this particular instance, only two or three are especially relevant, such as cultural characterization, which he sees as a means of describing and emphasizing differences, and integration conflicts immigrants experience in their adopted countries (2000, p. 38). Likewise, Hartmann and Husband provide numerous categories for the study of minorities, such as racial harmony and crime (1974, pp. 129-131), but not all of the categories are entirely relevant in this instance, though they do suggest more generally that articles concerning minorities can be expected to emphasize negative qualities and to create an impression of conflict and difference between races. Van Dijk echoes this suggestion and some of Hartmann and Husband's findings, commenting that "immigration and expulsion, discrimination, demands, dissent, social and cultural problems" may be some of the scenarios or categories used to represent minorities in the news (1988, p. 188). Karim lists characteristics and stereotypes common in coverage of Islam (2000, pp. 96-97), but many of these, like topoi suggested by Said (1997), are specific to the image of the Muslim terrorist or extremist. Although such references are also important and are noted in the analysis, the primary focus is terms that evoke the oppressed Muslim woman.

To this end, many of the authors cited in the previous chapter more or less agree on the characteristics and words most frequently applied to the Muslim woman, particularly in recent times. Lueg comments that the “harem, the veil and the Turkish cleaning lady with a headscarf are the clichéd images that the West associates with women and Islam” (1995, p. 17). Fernea adds oppression, hiding behind veils, suffering abuse from men and living in a backwards society to the list of typical descriptors (1998, p. 92; also see GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 11), while Khan cites polygamy, sexual exploitation, the need for a white European defender (1995, p. 149), a life “totally determined by religion” and the implication that liberation from Islam comes in the form of unveiling (1995, p. 151). It is also relevant to note comparisons between Muslim and non-Muslim women that may be drawn within these news items, as Muslim women are so often pictured against “the unequivocal acceptance of Western feminists’ lives and achievements as democratic, advanced, emancipated, in short as the *norm*” (Yeğenoğlu, 1998, p. 101). Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi also point to the veil as the sign of a “new traditionalism” (1994, p. 12), given the veil’s status in relation to nationhood and supposedly, in resistance to modernity. Until modernity is achieved, Mernissi sees Muslim women existing in a state of exile where they are virtually non-existent (1991, p. 21), and she adds that the veil can be seen as punishment (1991, p. 97). Peters contributes traits such as “unmitigated servility” (1978, p. 311) while el Saadawi reasons that religiosity is always singled out in relation to Muslim women’s struggles, distracting from economic and political factors (1986, p. 271). El Guindi (1999) provides a list of characteristics most commonly associated with the veil, such as fundamentalism (p. xix), subordination, seclusion (p. 3), female weakness (p. 10), submissiveness (p. 18), shame

(p. 83), anonymity (p. 93), militancy (p. 129) and inferiority (p. 157). Related to these, MacLeod (1991) adds female inequality (p. xiii), downtrodden objects of pity, constraint (p. 17), sexual beliefs and restrictions on public life (p. 99), and Sabbah suggests that Muslim women are denied an economic identity and are instead portrayed as wholly sexual beings (1984, p. 13). The following analysis will examine whether these portrayals are given unwonted emphasis, and whether articles offering alternative views of Muslim women are available.

Items for Analysis

All items are drawn from the same one-week period, November 17-24, 2001. Though this covers a Saturday-Saturday period, it nonetheless equates to a full seven-day cycle since Sunday was eliminated. Though *The New York Times* publishes a large edition on Sundays, *The Globe and Mail* offers no edition at all on Sunday. Thus, in order to maintain consistency, Sunday coverage was not considered in the study but the extra Saturday was added to create a full week. This particular time period was chosen on the basis that a search, using LexisNexis and the 2001 version of *The Globe and Mail* CD-ROM, of the terms “women” and “Afghanistan” between October 7, 2001 and December 6, 2001 yielded matching items in every week, but provided slightly higher volume, particularly for *The Globe and Mail*, between November 17-24, 2001. There are several possible reasons why this week might yield a high number of items, but the most likely has to do with the fact that many journalists hailed that week as marking a decisive turning point. The actual official dates are difficult to mark as the Afghanistan conflict did not involve a date of surrender, or a victory day for the history books. Rather, journalists based this assessment on the news that the Taliban had fled key strongholds

and that a temporary government would soon be formed. This being the case, discussion in the newspapers turned to the purpose and outcome of the war. The search was limited to October 7-December 6, 2001 on the basis that the period between these dates marked the highest level of Allied activity in Afghanistan, with British and United States forces launching the first missile strikes on October 7, and an agreement on the surrender of Kandahar having been reached on December 6, 2001. There is arguably some justification for examining coverage prior to October 7, as increased levels of commentary on women's issues might signal an attempt to commandeer support for a war effort, and high levels following December 6 might suggest an effort to justify all that had gone before. However, in the interests of concentrating on the war itself, I have limited myself to the dates above, though I do cite other relevant media items elsewhere in the thesis.

It should be noted that while "women" and "Afghanistan" occasionally produced items that were not entirely relevant to the study, given that both terms were mentioned in the same article but without any relation to one another, the reverse was also true. In the process of examining issues of these newspapers, I found several articles that were relevant to the issue, but did not mention both "women" and "Afghanistan" in the text. For example, articles concerning Islam, or the veil, or American foreign policy were discovered, but in the interests of maintaining consistency, these were not included if they did not contain the search terms. The decision to avoid searches of terms like "veil," "*burqa*," etc., was made consciously in order to make a fair assessment of the newspapers' portrayal of Afghan women. Searches using those terms would inevitably produce articles that might skew the overall findings. As mentioned previously, there was

no dearth of items to be found in either *The Globe and Mail* or *The New York Times*, while *Dawn*, due mainly to limited availability, was not specifically searched for the time period in which the volume of related articles was at its highest level. Instead, this time period was selected using *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times*, then used for accessing and searching those specific editions of *Dawn* for relevant items. However, in the case of the first two papers, many of the news items for the week in question were found to be interesting but irrelevant for the purposes of this study, upon closer examination. In some cases, the words “women” and “Afghanistan” appeared in the news item, but not in relation to one another. These items were then discarded, while any items appearing within that week that did discuss Afghan women, whether in passing or in detail, were retained for analysis. As might be expected, given the bulk of *The New York Times* in comparison to *The Globe and Mail* and *Dawn*, *The New York Times*’ coverage was greater, in quantitative terms. The analysis chapters discuss whether or not the increased amount of coverage translated into more probing or detailed coverage than that provided by *Dawn* or *The Globe and Mail*. The latter’s news items are analyzed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Our Friends and Neighbours: Analysis of Canada's *The Globe and Mail*

Canadians also mark themselves as the peacekeepers of the world, as living in a country that welcomes immigrants and as having few imperialist pretensions. (Razack, 1998, p. 89)

If the above statement is true, it may be that the Canadian coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan can be expected to demonstrate markedly different themes than those seen in United States coverage, or even Pakistani coverage. The best way to assess this is by consulting a newspaper read on a national basis, and respected for its insights. Indeed, despite the fact that Canada has two national daily newspapers, the other being CanWest Global's *The National Post*, *The Globe and Mail* remains the country's newspaper of record on the basis of longevity and a reputation for in-depth, quality writing (Dornan, 1996, pp. 62, 86). Moreover, circulation numbers consistently demonstrate that *The Globe and Mail* is more widely read than *The Post*, with national readership at nearly one million, a difference of roughly 300,000 (Damsell, 2002b, p. B4; also see Damsell, 2002a).

As in the case of the other two newspapers, the period under study was November 17-24, 2001, with Sunday, November 18, 2001 omitted due to the fact that *The Globe and Mail* publishes Monday-Saturday only. The Saturday edition of *The Globe and Mail* tends to be its largest, featuring in-depth articles on various topics in its Focus and Review sections, as well as its weekly "Books" insert. Since *The Globe and Mail*, unlike *The New York Times*, is a national paper in a literal, not merely symbolic sense, it attempts to address issues of national scope and interest in its news stories, though its Toronto location often reveals itself in city-specific articles, such as those discussing

upcoming events or local attractions. For the most part, however, the latter tendency manifests itself more commonly in soft news items, rather than hard ones, and is seen nationally in varying degrees, as *The Globe* does print slightly different editions for different regions of the country.

Though *The Globe and Mail* is not nearly as large as *The New York Times*, either in terms of circulation or sheer size, it nonetheless provided a fairly high number of articles specific to Afghanistan and women during the period October 7, 2001 to December 6, 2001, in comparison to the scarce number of articles on this topic previously. November 17-24, 2001 was the seven-day period that demonstrated a slightly higher number than in other weeks, with 25 articles in total, two of which were letters to the editor. Given that *The Globe and Mail*, even the Saturday edition, is not an especially bulky paper in comparison to major American papers such as *The New York Times*, it is significant that so many articles citing Afghan women can be found in a single seven-day period. For comparison purposes, it may be useful to note that a search of *The Globe and Mail* 2000 CD-ROM for the term “women” in conjunction with “Afghanistan” yielded 44 total matches for the entire year. Moreover, based on the current research items, which needed to be examined individually for appropriate content even after a computerized search, it seems likely that not all 44 were completely relevant, with relevance defined in terms of actual references, however passing, to Afghan women, rather than the terms Afghanistan and women being juxtaposed within an article with no relation to each other. This demonstrates a stark contrast to the news year 2001, which could produce 25 relevant articles within seven days alone. The initial search actually produced even more articles in this time period but not all were relevant; though all mentioned women and

Afghanistan, one or two articles discussed these topics in entirely separate contexts from one another. The 25 articles retained for the study all mentioned Afghan women, though not necessarily with a focus on that topic. Of the 25 articles, seven appeared on Saturday, November 17th, two on both the 19th and 20th, three on the 21st and 22nd, and four on the 23rd and 24th. They are discussed below in chronological order.

November 17, 2001

The first article (Nov17a¹³), entitled “Can bin Laden escape capture?” is by Stephanie Nolen, who frequently wrote on matters related to Afghanistan during the height of the conflict there, and still writes prominently featured pieces regarding international affairs. This particular piece is not about Afghan women specifically, but instead discusses the possible escape routes available to Osama bin Laden. Nolen suggests that bin Laden is no longer welcome in many parts of Afghanistan, partly due to the fact that his presence was the precursor to U.S. military action: “people recognize he is the root cause of the relentless U.S. bombing.” Lexical choice here—people *recognize* that bin Laden is responsible, rather than merely believing this—implies that this is an unshakable truth, and accords legitimacy to the decision to bomb Afghanistan. Bin Laden’s instigatory role here, however, is not the only reason that he has become distasteful; in part, Nolen argues, the Taliban soldiers who surround bin Laden have conducted themselves badly in a social sense: “Arab Taliban soldiers are known for harrasing women and throwing their weight around, which is not appreciated in

¹³ Note that bibliographic information for the articles analyzed in this thesis can all be found in the appendix. Each item has been identified using an abbreviated form of the date. In the case of *The Globe and Mail* articles, this form is Nov, followed by the specific date, then an assigned letter to separate it from the other items on that date. For *The New York Times*, the form is No, followed by the date and the letter, and for *Dawn*, the form is merely N, followed by date and letter.

traditional Afghan society.” The tribalized ethnic differences that Cottle suggests are so often utilized in wartime (2000, p. 5) come to the fore here, with emphasis on the negative behaviour of the Taliban as opposed to the other Afghans, who the United States will endeavour to help.

In Nov17b, long-time Afghanistan correspondent Kathy Gannon addresses the myth that liberation from the Taliban automatically translates into unveiling. Given the emphasis van Dijk places on headlines (1991, pp. 50-51), it is interesting to note that the article headline is “Tradition favours burqas” (no italics in original).¹⁴ As Rick Salutin observes in another news item in this chapter, there is a certain irony to the fact that the word *burqa* is now ubiquitous—and, I would suggest, symbolically resonant—in coverage of Afghanistan, though it was virtually unknown to Canadians prior to October 2001, when the United States and Britain began launching airstrikes on Afghanistan. Here the word is so familiar that it can appear in a headline and a reader is likely to know that the article will be about veiling, indicating the presence of a particular topos, “which operates as the referential basis of interpretation and is essential in making a textual account seem coherent within a particular culture’s norms” (Karim, 1997, p. 153). Given the repeated emphasis on topoi of oppressed women during this conflict, manifested in an intense interest in the veil, it is also not surprising that an article specifically discussing *burqas* would appear in the newspaper’s prominent first section. Despite the fact that the November 17, 2001 issue marks a news week that could potentially address numerous

¹⁴ Though “Tradition favours burqas” was the headline produced both by a LexisNexis search and a *Globe and Mail* CD-ROM search, at least one edition of *The Globe and Mail* used the headline “Burqas won’t leave with Taliban” instead. The discrepancy may be due to the fact that *The Globe and Mail* usually publishes more than one edition, such as a classroom edition, metropolitan edition and regional edition, though normally international news stories are not altered. Regardless of the reason, the body of the article is the same.

aspects of Afghanistan's devastation and reconstruction, the focus on veiling has been so intense that the placement of this article now seems natural, which would likely not have been the case in 2000.

Gannon addresses the desire of many *burqa*-wearing women to stop wearing the garment but she also emphasizes the many obstacles that remain, such as "fear and tradition," which she believes will continue to delay not only unveiling, but a larger struggle for women's rights. Though Gannon is to be applauded for the fact that she does not downplay the challenges these women face, she also phrases her criticism in a manner that implies tradition must be a hindrance, rather than a help; this lends itself to the kind of modelling noted by van Dijk, in which current information combines with previously acquired impressions to create a simplified model that can be recognized as a way to understand an event or behaviour (1991, p. 74). Though the word tradition can be used in several ways, in this context there is a possible implication that tradition is associated with backwardness and constraint. It is not clear which tradition(s) would be under discussion, as Gannon suggests that the Northern Alliance does not appear to be much more sensitive to women's issues than the Taliban were. These are the groups that have traded power in the region over the last few years, but it may be that her critique extends further back historically. The failure to specify is significant given the fact that the wearing of the *burqa* is often attributed to religious tradition, when this is not entirely the case. Certainly some, as in the case of the Taliban, may consider veiling a religious requirement, but veils were worn in Afghanistan even prior to the forced imposition of the so-called shuttlecock, due to cultural practices that had become commonplace in Afghanistan and surrounding areas. In a later paragraph, she does go on to say that

“Afghanistan remains a conservative society,” and to add that social pressures are more crucial than political ones in determining whether or not Afghan women remain veiled. One male interviewee comments upon the social disgrace that unveiling would constitute for these women, while one woman expresses elation over the fact that children can be educated, but adds that she herself will not be removing the *burqa* for some time, as this would be contrary to tradition.

This adherence to cultural mores, then, contradicts the notion, cited by Gannon, that the *burqa* is considered the “best-known symbol of the Taliban’s harsh restrictions on women.” It is not simply Taliban power that has maintained the *burqa*’s use, though this may be the implication some readers absorb. Gannon does not question whether or not the symbolic power she mentions is entirely deserved, but she does note the removal of other, less-discussed restrictions, such as the ability to work, pointing out that the Taliban’s retreat from Kabul allowed at least four Afghan women to return to their jobs at a United Nations refugee agency. The Northern Alliance’s subsequent hold over Kabul, however, does not necessarily put the residents’ mind at ease, given the group’s own history. Though Gannon does not mention it in this article, the Northern Alliance’s seizure of Kabul occurred despite prohibitions from U.S. President George W. Bush, signalling a possible reason to be even more distrustful of the Alliance’s ability to cooperate.

Gannon does note that RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) has consistently expressed criticism of the Alliance, and doubt that the Alliance differs substantially from the Taliban in its beliefs regarding women. She quotes a specific RAWA member who characterizes the Alliance as “fundamentalists,” another

mention of the word that suggests that the Taliban and the Alliance locate their oppressive strictures in religious fundamentals. In fact, as discussed in previous chapters, both groups may justify their oppressive activities on their own interpretations of Islam, but they are not truly referring to fundamental rules embedded in the religion. The quoting of RAWA here can be interpreted in at least two interesting ways: the first is that Gannon is seeking expert opinion from a group that has worked in the region for years and understands the problems of its women. The second is that RAWA is a feminist organization that has more or less adhered to mainstream orthodoxy in its media comments, unlike, perhaps, more controversial feminist scholars such as Sunera Thobani. RAWA may direct rebukes at the Northern Alliance but it will not question the assumption that freeing women from patriarchal restrictions is the central question at stake in this conflict. In the second interpretation, RAWA is a safer, more predictable choice as expert commentator, and experts are often consulted in order to confirm the already-existing views of journalists and, perhaps, readers (van Dijk, 1991, p. 115).

Gannon notes that the Alliance's deputy prime minister does not sound significantly different from Taliban rulers in his views, which include the belief that women should not vote, should stay veiled and should not associate with men in public. Given the Alliance's coalition with the United States and the United Kingdom, this seems particularly ironic in the face of Gannon's concluding sentence: "Meanwhile, Laura Bush, and Cherie Blair, the wife of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, are to spearhead a campaign to highlight the treatment of women under Afghanistan's Taliban regime." There is no comment made regarding the commitment of these two women, or their husbands, to ensuring that Afghan women are provided with representation in any

governing body following the Taliban's removal. However, it is unsurprising that Bush and Blair's contributions to raising the profile of oppressed Afghan women are mentioned in this article, and subsequent ones, as significant. Though their work in the area might be considered minimal in comparison to that carried out by activists with a long history of lobbying for women's rights in the developing world, their celebrity lends a new cachet to the fight for equality, and also increases their own stature: "the actions of white elites that are defined as 'positive' for minorities are usually covered prominently... 'our' helping 'them' is a very newsworthy topic" (van Dijk, 1996, p. 93). Likewise, Cottle comments that it is common to emphasize how helpful the ingroup members have been in comparison to the outgroup members, who may not have initiated any attempt to help themselves (2000, p. 40).

Overall, Gannon's article is probably one of the more balanced on the subject, a fact that is likely related to her long experience reporting from the region. Factors such as journalistic experience and a newspaper's ability to fund foreign correspondents over a long period of time are among the higher level, macro structures that affect the way stories are covered. Though the analysis being conducted here focusses more centrally on local, micro levels of discourse, the importance of macro level factors should always be considered (van Dijk, 1993, p. 122)

If placement is also awarded some consideration, editorials are generally displayed in a high-profile section of the newspaper, and arguably offer an effective means of assessing the newspaper's overall stance on an issue. Nov17c, the editorial printed by *The Globe* on the same day as Gannon's article, sounds a much more unequivocally triumphant note than Gannon's commentary: "Unjustified, a sure-fire

recipe for upheaval across the region, and ultimately unwinnable. Such was the collective criticism of the U.S.-led onslaught on Afghanistan when it began on October 7. On the first two counts, the critics are thus far proving to have been badly wrong.” Again, as in Nolen’s article, lexical choice indicates absolute certainty, silencing contrary viewpoints. Lest the previous statement leave any residual doubt regarding the war’s obvious rightness, the writers argue “that the difficult decision to attack Osama bin Laden and his Taliban protectors has, to date, been thoroughly vindicated.” It goes on to add:

Widespread elation is evident in the northern towns and cities being liberated from Taliban rule. Gone from those towns is a *bloodthirsty regime* that enforced its edicts with *totalitarian savagery*. But it was not because the Taliban *hate human rights*, not because they *reduced their women to chattel* and not because they destroyed the priceless statues of Bamiyan and much else that military intervention was called for. Rather, the core justification remains that for years the Taliban nurtured and exported a terrorist virus...” (italics mine).

It is notable that the editorial dismisses the idea that human rights and gender issues formed bedrock issues for the waging of war, but nonetheless mentions them. I would argue that the very reference indicates that the writers know what prominence these questions have held in discussions of what they call the war’s “core justification.” This method of acknowledging the perceived central role of these justifications, while simultaneously downplaying their importance, bears some resemblance to the practice of disclaiming racist implications while offering the racist commentary nonetheless, so that the message lingers but the writer bears no responsibility (van Dijk, 1998, p. 240).

In following this line of thought, it is not surprising that the editorial provides a mythical, or ritualistic, reading of the situation, suggesting freedom from “totalitarian savagery” followed by “[w]idespread elation.” The notion of salvation again rears its head, suggesting Northern supremacy and benevolence. Unlike Gannon’s article, the

editorial's writers do not refer to the possible problems arising in post-war reconstruction. They do not appear to equate the Northern Alliance's history of repression with that of the Taliban, instead referring positively to the Alliance's "triumphant march into Kabul" while describing Al-Qaeda trainees as "hundreds of zealots...trained in the use of explosives, mines and a variety of weapons." Likewise, the terms used to describe the Taliban, such as their hatred of human rights, their thirst for blood, their treatment of women as chattel and their savagery, all combine to confirm that the Taliban are the consummate example of Muslim terrorists, as described by Karim in his description of topoi historically constructed around Islam (1997, pp. 157-159, 164, 166-167, 177). Here is a further example of the divisiveness Cottle notes (2000, p. 5), and another example of accepting some actors into the ingroup while relegating others to the outgroup (van Dijk, 1998, p. 6). In what is presented here as a clearly delineated conflict, the Northern Alliance has the good fortune to belong to the right, winning side, and thus the brutality Gannon alludes to is irrelevant, for the moment (see Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 2, 30-31, 37 for their comments on the valourizing of the right side and demonizing of the opposing side).

Nov17d returns to journalist Kathy Gannon, but this time she is the subject of a profile in *The Globe's* Focus section, where in-depth stories often focus on individual figures. Gannon, the Afghanistan bureau chief for Associated Press, adopts a low-key approach to the region's issues that is in stark contrast to the more polemical stance evinced in the editorial above. Gayle MacDonald opens her article with the statement: "Gannon has been in the region since 1988. She was the first Western journalist the Taliban let back into Afghanistan after it threw out all media in the days immediately

after September 11. She returned to her office on October 25. How did this woman from a small mining town in Northern Ontario secure the misogynist Taliban's get-into-Afghanistan-free card?" She is answered by Gannon's calm reply that she has been subject to some harassment from Taliban officials and soldiers, but is not especially bothered by it. "Through it all," MacDonald says, Gannon "rejected the *burqa* and wore simply a shawl." It is unclear if this is mentioned here to carry symbolic weight, demonstrating her independence by rejecting an icon of repression such as the *burqa* has apparently become.

Gannon does mention the way in which she tried to use her status as a reporter, and perhaps as significantly, a Northerner, by attempting to reason with soldiers who opposed education for girls, preferred sons and forbade their wives to work. What renders this intervention more complex than a standard scenario of Occidental reason juxtaposed against Orientalist irrationalism is Gannon's method of building her argument. She points out that Prophet Muhammad's only child was a daughter, so the emphasis placed on male sons seems contradictory. She also makes reference to the Prophet's wife, Khadija, a business woman, inquiring why Afghan wives cannot follow Khadija's example and work as well. Ironically, Gannon is asking many of the same questions that feminists like Mernissi (1996) and Ahmed (1982) have posed of their faith, and further demonstrating that the history of Islam has been distorted or ignored in some of the practices commonly found in Afghanistan.

Even more significantly, Gannon is unmoved by the good/bad, just/evil dichotomy that is in evidence in the editorial cited previously. She "finds it repugnant that Afghan women were stripped of their right to work, to education, to basic human

rights. But she does not hate the Taliban.” Her reasoning, of course, does emphasize the notion of cultural difference, as she points out that Afghanistan is not her country, but while it highlights the divide between Canada and Afghanistan (or North/South, Occident/ Orient), it also speaks to postcolonial arguments that outsiders cannot fully assess the complicated, historical truth of a country’s predicament. She makes a glancing reference to these complexities, pointing to the Western world’s responsibility for some of what has occurred in Afghanistan, and adding that “not all Taliban supporters are evil. And the Northern Alliance is not all good. There is nothing black and white here.”

She further notes bluntly that the “Afghan Arabs are nut cases. But they were nut cases before September 11. Osama wasn’t suddenly a nut case, he’s always been a nut case. Just like the militant Pakistanis. The difference is the rest of the world suddenly has woken up to these facts.” The article concludes, perhaps significantly, by veering away from questions of women’s clothing, sexism or the Northern Alliance’s trustworthiness, by countering objections raised by those people who suggest that the Afghans should have staged an uprising against the Taliban. Gannon, who has lived amongst the extreme poverty of Afghanistan for 13 years, long before the U.S.-led coalition and the world’s media entered the area, parries, “Jesus, if you can’t feed your child, how do you rise up against anyone?”

Unlike the profile of Kathy Gannon, Nov17e is a piece that does return to assessing the war’s effects. A rematch of a previously held e-mail debate, it features Marcus Gee, a columnist whose commentary regarding the war has tended to be almost uniformly positive, and Rick Salutin, who has held a much more critical view. Gee opens his side of the argument by invoking women almost immediately, defending the war by

saying “this week, the Taliban pulled out of Kabul, women were pulling off their *burqas*, men were shaving off their mandatory beards and music was being played in the streets...” He goes on to say that the war’s purpose was twofold—first, there was the need to eliminate a terrorist mastermind, and second, the need “to overthrow one of the world’s most oppressive regimes and give Afghans a chance at a better life,” adding that “half the country is free from the Taliban’s ridiculous medieval strictures.”

Salutin takes aim at this sudden interest in Afghan women’s rights, responding, “so now it was about liberating Afghan women from wearing the *burqa* (a word few knew when the bombing began).” He inquires why this interest has not extended to Saudi Arabia, where equally medieval notions of human rights prevail, and questions the larger significance of women’s unveiling: “Look at the desperate need Americans felt this week to be told the latest plane crash was accidental [referring to the airplane that crashed in Queens, New York, due to malfunction]. Do you think they’ll be reassured about flying or their daily lives by eliminating *burqas* in Kabul?” In his response, Gee again cites gains for women, arguing that “[w]e are witnessing the collapse of a regime that represents the antithesis of everything that you (and for that matter, I) hold dear. A regime that denies women the right to work and keeps girls out of school.” This suggestion of fellowship and commonly held values again points out ingroups and outgroups, and a defence of those beliefs that members of the ingroup should all adhere to. Such techniques of arguing the right way for “Us” to feel, as opposed to “Them,” are common methods of invalidating opposing views (van Dijk, 1998, pp. 6, 203, 239; also see Cottle, 2000, p. 2; Deacon et al, 1999, p. 324; Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 30-31; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 208). As van Dijk remarks, “there are few words in the

language that may be as socially and ideologically ‘loaded’ as a simple *we*” (1998, p. 203, italics in original). Gee adds that regardless of whether or not it was intended, Washington appears to have liberated Afghanistan, meaning that women “will be able to show their faces in public again without fear of being flogged by ‘religious police,’” which could not have “happened unless the United States had launched this campaign.” This hearkens back to nationalist, and colonialist, myths and rituals, in which the United States, as the Northern world’s major superpower, has pulled Afghanistan out of the darkness. In fact, Karim’s observation that “ideology necessarily has to link itself to myth” in order to foster motivation (2001, p. 123) can also be adapted for the situation under discussion here, where Gee observes what may be the final stages of war, and seeks evidence that Canada was not misguided in its original motivation for providing aid. In this myth of heroic rescue, the debt Afghanistan owes the North is clearly emphasized, but the debt the United States owes Afghanistan, after helping install the Taliban regime several years ago, is not mentioned. As van Dijk suggests, Gee allots special importance to those elites who helped the Other (1996, p. 93; see Cottle, 2000, p. 40).

Salutin acknowledges that women’s rediscovered ability to work is positive, but expresses skepticism as to whether or not women really will have all the rights they have been promised. He again raises the issue of fleeting, opportunistic interest in women’s rights, arguing that the “U.S. showed little concern about Afghan women having to wear the *burqa* on September 10. The big powers always describe their interventions in altruistic terms, which always cover reasons of state and naked power grabs. These ‘well-intended’ interventions almost never work out well for the locals.”

Though Heather Mallick's Saturday column (Nov17f) adopts a much lighter tone, she, too, apparently has cynical thoughts regarding the outcome of the war in Afghanistan. In a column discussing political leaders' varying degrees of attractiveness, she offers the satirical proposition that the Ontario Tories and the Northern Alliance are not particularly different, given that they "both dislike women at the levels permissible in their social circles (very high levels). Ontario Tories would love to put *burqas* on welfare mothers, for instance." Since she does not elaborate on this last sentence, the reader is left to infer, in all likelihood, that the *burqa* is an appropriate choice because of the lack of dignity and personhood it conveys. The fact that she does not need to comment further again serves as a reminder of how central, and politically charged, the *burqa* has become in mainstream discourse. Turning her attention to the United States' history of military interventions, she manages to reiterate Richard Payne's thesis (1995) with pithy aplomb: "I have noticed that Americans never bomb people who look like themselves."

Nov17g, by Doug Saunders, is also relatively light in tone but offers some dark commentary on Afghan men. A piece discussing movies related to the last instance of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan, it recounts the plot of *Rambo III*, reminding readers of the way in which Rambo "quickly befriended the future Taliban and embraced their cause. He armed and assisted his new friends, Mousa and Hamid, young mujahadeen who presumably would soon be beating women and banning music." Though the article is clearly intended to be playful in tone, it is nonetheless significant that the men in the movie are described in terms of their treatment of women. It is also, perhaps, somewhat expected, given the emphasis in the media regarding the treatment of Afghan women.

November 19, 2001

Nov19a is actually an article about the resumption of education for girls, but the headline, "Emerging from the darkness," evokes some of the common references that have been made to Afghan women discarding the *burqa*. Moreover, immediately beneath the headline reads the line: "Two women take off their *burqas* and speak with hope about reopening schools for girls." The decision to refer to *burqas* so early and so prominently, when in fact the focus of the article is apparently education, suggests that the practice of unveiling is necessary for the completion of other important activities, such as restoring education for female pupils. Referring to school principal Munija's dumping of confetti on the head of a male education official, the writer remarks on Munija's "amazing chutzpah," though with the qualifier, "for a woman in small-town Afghanistan." The writer, Alan Freeman, says that this act of defiance "was Munija's way of celebrating the defeat of the Taliban regime and what she hopes will be the imminent reopening of Taloqan's schools for girls." Discussing the fact that school was prohibited for girls in Taloqan under Taliban rule, Munija says that such a restriction "was part of the regime's policy of keeping women absent from every aspect of public life. Women were forbidden from working outside the home and were subject to beatings if they dared to venture out in public unaccompanied by their husband or an elder son." Rather than describing women as victims, however, Munija insists that Afghan women have to be brave, which is an interesting inclusion in the article when so many commentaries have not seemed to focus on Afghan women's courage, but their luck in having Northern protectors. It also seems to counter the earlier comment regarding her chutzpah in dumping confetti on a man's head; her own words, rather than a third party's, seem to indicate that she has

demonstrated much greater courage in the process of everyday survival than she showed in the throwing of confetti at a disliked official.

Freeman appears to be favourably impressed by Munija—whose self-confidence is apparently anomalous when compared to his model of Afghan women—and her fellow principal, noting that both women cover their hair but do not wear *burqas* during the interview. As in the Gayle MacDonald profile of Kathy Gannon, the fact that *burqas* are not worn seems to have special significance, conferring even more admirable qualities on these intelligent, determined women. When the women do put their *burqas* on following the interview, Freeman considers them reduced, “invisible to the male world around them,” an echo of Mernissi’s suggestion that the “veil is an expression of the invisibility of women on the street, a male space par excellence” (1975, p. 51). Ironically, an article published before the period under study, written by Freeman’s colleague Stephanie Nolen, at least partially contradicts the notion of invisibility. Nolen, interviewing women in Afghanistan, is surprised to hear them say that the *burqa* is not always particularly concealing: “A husband always knows his wife from the way she is walking, even in a *burqa*. It’s difficult to hide” (2001, p. F8).

Nov19b is a letter to the editor written by Duminda Wijeysondera, printed beneath the title “A true victory.” Wijeysondera’s letter demonstrates the fact that some readers, like some columnists, have seized upon certain significant phrases in describing the victory of the Northern Alliance: “One, however, cannot deny the joy of people playing music for the first time in years, men finally shaving off Taliban-enforced beards and women removing the *burqa*.” These words are very similar to those used by Marcus Gee in his lauding of the Northern Alliance’s seizure of Kabul, and the overall attitude is

similarly optimistic, noting that under the Alliance, “[w]omen’s rights have at least a chance of returning; with the Taliban, those freedoms were dead and gone.” Again black and white dichotomizing of the kind described by Herman and Chomsky takes place (1988, pp. 30-31), suggesting that Afghan women have been liberated by Northern benevolence, and that the Taliban, contrary to Kathy Gannon’s suggestion, is wholly malignant.

November 20, 2001

Nov20a is another piece by Stephanie Nolen, this time referring to the movie *Arouj* (1995) playing in a freed Kabul. The film, she says, is the story “of a brave troop of mujahadeen who drive the Soviets back across the border. It features fighters with chiseled cheekbones and soulful eyes, and brave women with loose white veils blowing around plump cheeks.” The mention of veils occurs again here, though in a somewhat more positive context, since the veil is not the all-encompassing *burqa* but a loose veil worn by a brave woman. Although the viewing of this movie would seem to represent the loosening of Taliban-imposed restrictions, Nolen is nonetheless harrassed by throngs of teenage boys outside the theatre, even with the protection that is ostensibly afforded by her wearing of a black head veil. It is difficult to say if this harrassment arises due to her nationality or to her gender, though Nolen does suggest that perhaps her presence as the only woman attracts attention; Nolen’s only observation reflects some ambivalence, pointing out that some of the boys appear to be merely curious while others are more threatening. For the most part, however, her article illustrates the excitement experienced by a city able to engage in activities such as watching films again, though Maureen

Dowd, in the following chapter, will view this example of a newly found freedom somewhat differently.

In Nov20b, Marcus Gee returns to the issue of women in Afghanistan, attempting to encapsulate feminist arguments for and against war. He comments critically that "...many of [Cherie Blair's] fellow feminists oppose the war, even though one of its aims is to overthrow a regime that has oppressed women like no other." He suggests that rather than "condemning the Taliban or cheering its ouster from much of Afghanistan, they have been aiming their wrath at the United States and arguing that the war will achieve nothing." As van Dijk argues, "[m]ost forms of quotation...are indirect or a mixture of direct and indirect speech. This allows varying degrees of distance, marked in different linguistic ways, between the quotation and what was actually said" (1991, p. 152). Gee uses very brief excerpts of comments by notable feminists in a way that does not properly explain the points these women are attempting to make, a technique van Dijk dubs "relative incompleteness" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 268). This incompleteness, in combination with other methods discussed below, allows Gee to leave the impression that the feminists who oppose war subscribe to extreme and inexplicable views. I am not arguing here that the activists Gee has quoted are extremists or radicals, but I am suggesting that he presents them to the reader in this guise, "in order to facilitate ridicule or attack" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 96). Attack is necessary, for minorities' "accusations of the host society and its elites, when quoted at all, never go unchallenged" (van Dijk, 1996, p. 93). One of Gee's challenges takes the form of describing these speakers in ways that do not accord them as much legitimacy as they are perhaps entitled to; for instance, he refers to University of British Columbia professor Sunera Thobani as a "feminist teacher," a title

that does not indicate the authority of her position as a professor at a post-secondary institution. Moreover, the other label of feminist is not one that always wins approbation from readers, as the failure to differentiate between different types of feminism or to otherwise explain the term can create misunderstanding. Likewise, Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy, who writes newspaper columns on many international issues, is described as “feminist author Arundhati Roy.”

He uses somewhat different tactics to cast aspersions on Sheila Tobias’ argument, citing her statement that “women’s issues are being swept aside and their advancement stalled” in conjunction with the observation that recent events have ensured that “women in Afghanistan pulled aside their veils and started going back to work.” He follows all of these comments with arguments mounted by Cherie Blair and Laura Bush, two people Gans would describe as knowns: state and economic interests upon whom the media rely for information, and whose views would convey a considerable sense of authority (cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 48-49; also see Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). Gee quotes the U.S. president’s wife saying that only terrorists and the Taliban forbid education to women, though neither Gee nor Mrs. Bush comments upon the fact that the re-installed Northern Alliance is, according to some accounts, similarly unenthusiastic about educating women. Referring to the fact that Cherie Blair and Laura Bush are leading an organized campaign to focus on unequal gender relations in Afghanistan, Gee says that the “point of the campaign is clear: to answer the critics and justify the war on humanitarian and feminist grounds.” He cites women who are still wearing “the head-to-toe *burqa* in public” as good examples of those who still need to be liberated, and describes women “behind the veil” as imprisoned. This description ignores the fact that

some women choose veiling, and do not consider the wearing of the veil—which need not necessarily be the type of *burqa* worn in Afghanistan—to be imprisoning. Such essentialized binaries (good/bad, free/imprisoned) are the kind that underpin racist reporting (van Dijk, 1998, pp. 224-226, 240), while the dismissal and misrepresentation of feminist voices that do not conform to Gee’s norm, or Laura Bush or Cherie Blair’s norm, is a clear example of unbalanced coverage that discredits dissenting views (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 30-31).

November 21, 2001

Nov21a is a third piece by Stephanie Nolen, this time about life in Kabul and the ways in which it is returning to a state defined as normalcy. To illustrate this, she discusses the story of a “liberated woman” back on the job. The lexical choice, which evokes second-wave feminism, recognized by some as the women’s liberation movement, may be deliberate. In any case, the liberated woman, Jamila Mujahid, is a local journalist, now able to return to her job. Notably, Nolen’s description of Mujahid’s excited rush to the radio station includes Mujahid’s pause to take both shoes and *burqa* with her. It seems unlikely that another garment would be referred to quite so specifically, but the *burqa* has acquired such importance in descriptions of Afghanistan that it is perhaps unsurprising to see the mention, an example of what van Dijk calls overcompleteness, a type of “functional irrelevance” that may strengthen already existing models of a particular group (1991, p. 185). Again, women’s newly-recovered freedom to work is emphasized, though it is possible that Ms. Mujahid is still somewhat exceptional in the prominence of her role. However, Nolen reports that in 1996, 23 of 50 on-air personalities at Afghan Television were female. Only four have returned to work at the

time of the article, with the others having fled the country. A call for new on-air personalities yields a crowd of more than 100 people, described by Nolen as a group of young women waiting “to take the voice test, their body-enveloping *burqas* pulled back to reveal their once-banned faces.” The joy of liberation is again evident in these descriptions, rather than any possible problems faced by those for whom work is scarce or insufficient. Similarly, Mujahid dwells on the way in which the Taliban made life impossible for her and for other women, commenting on how heavy drapes blocked any hint of sunlight, emphasizing the extent of the degradation suffered by Afghan women. The day the Taliban claimed Kabul, Mujahid says, an edict was delivered forbidding women to leave their homes without their husband or father. This rendered school and work impossible, but now, Nolen’s article implies, any such difficulties are in the past.

Nov21b is a very short Associated Press news item included in the “In Brief” section, merely discussing the plan of Ismail Khan, a warlord in power prior to the Taliban, to hold a local election. He is described here as “a liberal who supports education and work for women,” who “was welcomed as a returning hero when the hard-line Islamic Taliban lost control of Herat last week.” Interestingly, the treatment of women, combined with the appropriate politics, seems to serve fairly consistently as a marker of whether or not a person is civilized or good i.e. on the right side. The irony lies in the fact that these judgements are made by societies that are not always entirely aware of or sensitive to the issues faced by their own women, one of the points made in Mallick’s satirical piece.

Nov21c is another editorial, and this time women are the central focus. It begins with a subtle insertion of the mythical or fabulous, describing as miraculous the fact that

“[w]omen were seen chatting and laughing together on the street” in Afghanistan. The notion of cultural difference, and of civilized groups in opposition to uncivilized ones, arises in a section stating that “in Afghanistan, the presence of bare-faced women, unaccompanied by men, triply in violation by their laughter, raises hopes that the end is near for that country’s dark ages.” The notion of Afghanistan as a backwards society in need of salvation again evokes representations of Orientalism.

“Women,” the editorial goes on to say, “were forced into invisibility during the six-year rule of the Taliban. Hidden from sight by the tent-like *burqa*, and by laws keeping them in their homes unless accompanied by their husband or an elder son, they were treated as non-persons. Even the most fundamental right, the right to life, was undermined.” However, the positive aspect is that the U.S.-led liberation of the country has ensured that “women are stepping into the light,” an interesting metaphor given the many colonial constructions that have been placed upon darkness as negative, primitive, native, and light as positive, civilized, and Western or European.

Unlike the previous editorial example, Nov17c, this one does sound a cautionary note, pointing out that “the fall of the Taliban does not ensure freedom for women. Yesterday, hundreds of women in leather jackets, skirts and flowered headscarves who had gathered to march towards a United Nations office in Kabul were told by Northern Alliance officials that they must postpone the march for a week. The Alliance includes factions that view women much as the Taliban did.” The passage of time provides the knowledge that a comment by Angela King, advisor on gender issues to United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan, may prove overly optimistic: “women must have a seat at the table and a say in the rebuilding of their country.” Arguably, these rights are as much

or more important than the ability to walk around unveiled, but they seemed to fall by the wayside once it was established that women could show their faces again.

Despite its initial unalloyed enthusiasm and approval for the process that led to the ouster of the Taliban, the editorial does express some ambivalence, then, and particularly towards the end, when an important clarification is made regarding the role of women prior to the Taliban:

women constituted the majority of teachers, 50 per cent of government workers and 40 per cent of medical doctors. They were 15 per cent of legislators. Before the Taliban, the *burqa* was a garment of choice, not worn by the ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks, and far more common in rural communities than in the capital. The decline in women's freedom revealed just how that country had been poisoned by extremists. Neither Islam nor Afghanistan's social conventions require such restrictions on women.

This final distinction is an important one, representing a significant alternative to some of the unalloyed optimism displayed previously and a distinct break from the idea that Muslim women's lives are determined by religious dogma.

High importance is placed on the symbolism of women's participation: "[i]f the country is to find long-term stability, and to entice educated Afghans around the world to return, women's fundamental freedoms must be guaranteed. They must be permitted to go to school, and to work; they must have a voice as the fate of their nation is worked out," and, the editorial concludes, the world must not permit "these freedoms—including the women's right to show their faces—to be sacrificed to political expediency."

November 22, 2001

Nov22a shows that the emphasis on women's issues has not been overlooked by those who are not journalists or politicians. In an article on the difficulties of delivering food and clothing to Afghanistan, the concluding remark comes from Joan Semple, an

organizer from Community Afghanistan Relief Effort, who tells the reporter that “[i]t’s the plight of the women and the oppression over there—that’s what prompted me to get involved in the whole thing.” This demonstrates the success that the media have had in evoking the image of the subjugated female Muslim, to the extent that Semple does not need to elaborate on her comment. Lawrence’s suggestion that the repressed Muslim woman image “has acquired the normative status of a cliché” (1998, p. xiii) appears to be more relevant than ever in this situation.

Running counter to this is Nov22b, a letter to the editor by reader Penney Kome. Kome’s letter is interesting because she provides a response to Marcus Gee’s column (Nov20b) on the lack of support shown by some feminists for the war. Kome rejects Gee’s comments by suggesting that Cherie Blair should not be presented as a model feminist in support of the war, since her position makes it impossible for her to be unbiased. She dismisses Gee’s citation of Laura Bush as another like-minded feminist, arguing that Bush is not a feminist of any kind. More generally, she criticizes the U.S. and Britain for their refusal to express stronger insistence that a new Afghanistan government treat women “decently,” and suggests that those who listen to Afghan women’s own articulated sentiments are aware that the Northern Alliance is not friendly to women. She critiques Gee’s failure to comment on demands by RAWA and other feminist organizations that women be included in negotiations regarding the establishment of a new government. She then concludes by stating pointedly that General MacArthur gave Japanese women the vote during post-World War II rebuilding, and by asking why the United States and Britain do not insist on the same from Afghanistan.

Nov22c is another letter to the editor, this time in response to the articles extolling the new freedom in Afghanistan. The letter-writer, David Blackwell, agrees that this is entirely positive, but asks if it is “too much to hope that we will also see laughing ‘bare-faced women, unaccompanied by men’ on the streets of a country such as Saudi Arabia.” Interestingly, the double standard perceived by some readers in regard to the treatment of Saudi Arabia, as opposed to Afghanistan, is also mentioned in *The New York Times* in the next chapter, demonstrating that many readers generalize the conflict in Afghanistan to a more global concern with oppression of women caused by Islam.

November 23, 2001

Nov23a is not specific to Afghan women but does make one or two brief references to them. In essence, this is an article about the brutality of Taliban jailers, and the tortures their prisoners endured. Abdul-Jamil, the former prisoner being interviewed, does mention his wife, but only in terms of her visits to the jail in which he was imprisoned. Despite her best attempts to see him and to deliver food to him, she was barred from actually visiting Abdul-Jamil. Again, the Alliance (and by extension the U.S.-led coalition) is portrayed as saviour, since Abdul-Jamil points out eagerly that the Alliance’s advance on Taloqan forced the Taliban to move their prisoners to Kunduz, after which Abdul-Jamil managed to escape. The brutality of the Taliban, already described as worse than that of the Russians, is further emphasized by another interviewee’s suggestion that “Taliban troops captured young boys and women and sexually abused them at their encampments. ‘They would keep the women for four or five days, then let them go.’” Again, violence against, and exploitation of, women serves as a reminder of the Taliban’s primitivity. In this particular instance, as well, the idea of

these women as victims of sexual savagery conforms to what Karim calls a “core image” of Muslims (1997, p. 171).

Nov23b is another letter to the editor, this time discussing the *burqa* specifically. The writer, Iain F. Clayre, says that despite the wealth of attention directed towards the topic of saving Afghan women from the “dreaded *burqa*,” the garment is not necessarily as dreaded as one might think. As someone who previously worked all over Afghanistan, prior to the Taliban, Clayre frequently saw the *burqa*. This could have been worn for various reasons, including satisfying the Qur’an’s suggestion of modesty, but Clayre seems to feel that the reasons and the practice are not for others to question. “Notions of appropriate modesty differ from culture to culture,” he reminds, “and we should be wary lest our zeal to see Afghan women emancipated does not disguise a deluded self-righteousness about the superiority of our own dress code.” This letter serves the dual purpose of pointing out the media’s preoccupation with the *burqa*, and of issuing a gentle warning regarding the possible dangers of attempting the type of “ethnocentric imposition on Arabo-Islamic culture” that el Guindi so roundly condemns (1999, p. 83).

In contrast, the article Nov23c does mention Afghan women, but not with any particular focus on them. Written by CARE president and CEO John Watson, it argues against the suggestion that civilians in Afghanistan should be starved in the interests of securing cooperation from rulers. He protests that thousands of men, women and children would starve along with the very rulers whose cooperation Washington desires, and mounts a strong claim for basic rights, such as food and shelter, for all non-combatant men, women and children. Given the focus on women, it is interesting to note that one of CARE’s strategies for distributing food and Canadian government money includes taking

them directly to widows, who will then ensure the feeding of the most needy. Similarly, CARE medical clinics will treat women and children, but soldiers are excluded.

Nov23d is even shorter than the preceding two items, but manages to touch on women's rights. A review of the movie *Kandahar*, it summarizes by saying that director Mohsen "Makhmalbaf's cry for help focuses on two issues—the fierce and absurd oppression of women and the carnage wrought by landmines." The mention of women is expected, while the problems caused by landmines, despite their life-threatening implications, do not appear to be discussed at great length in the coverage examined. The film's focus, then, highlights the fact that other issues besides the plight of women could be addressed at length in newspaper discussions of Afghanistan.

November 24, 2001

In Nov24a, a *New York Times* article reprinted by *The Globe*, Amy Waldman discusses some of the specifics of this fierce and absurd oppression. She recounts some of the legal rules found in the registry of Taliban records, as determined by Mullah Mohammed Omar's penal code. "The code's first article," Waldman notes, "says that if a woman leaves home with her face unveiled, 'her home will be marked, and her husband punished.'"

Dictates such as the insistence that "[f]emale doctors must wear old clothes and no ornamentation," while "[m]ale doctors who must treat a female patient because of a medical emergency 'can only look at the part that the patient needs looked at; nowhere else can be touched or seen,'" do indeed seem absurd, though they are not the ones mentioned most frequently in other articles on the subject. Instead, one rule that particularly seems to resonate with some of the commentators on gender issues is a

prohibition against women singing during a wedding. Violation results, according to the code, in the punishment of the owner of a house. Merchants were also subject to very specific regulations; for example, “[m]erchants importing such products as shampoo would find that Taliban customs officials had gouged out the eyes of the female models on the boxes. The merchants were then required to display the products with black tape over female faces, or be subject to a beating or jailing.”

The article continues by emphasizing the fact that few Taliban were well-educated except in a religious sense. Doubtless, lack of education did contribute to the Taliban’s repressive tendencies—though some oppressors can be very well-educated indeed—but the remaining impression is that Taliban officials have devoted themselves to religious learning. Waldman does not point out that many of the rules laid down in this article are not grounded in religious fact, but in distorted interpretations, thus rendering even the claim of advanced religious education suspect.

In Nov24b, “Refugees decry deaths,” Alan Freeman is now writing about refugees who have suffered the effects of the U.S. bombing in Afghanistan. The subject matter is interesting, given that several of the news items reviewed to this point tend to dwell on the positive aspects of war, rather than the deleterious effects. It is worth noting, however, in regard to van Dijk’s view of the importance of headlines, that the headline does not assign responsibility for the deaths, neither blaming a specific country nor even an action. For instance, the headline does not say that the refugees decry deaths caused by U.S. bombs, or even deaths caused by bombs. A casual reader, skimming the headlines, might not find anything particularly unusual about a headline, grouped with other international headlines, that associates refugees with death, since death could be caused

by myriad factors. Leaving aside the question of the headline, however, the story itself contains some poignant details. The personalization Lule speaks of (1991, p. 31) is in obvious evidence, as one female refugee is quoted discussing the death, due to bombing, of a neighbour's teenage daughter. Some fairly specific details are evoked as well. Freeman, who displayed his fascination with the *burqa* in Nov19a, the article about girls' education, again inserts the fact that the woman he is quoting is dressed "in an all-encompassing *burqa*," though the relevance is not clear, instead appearing to serve as another example of overcompleteness.

What is clear, though, is the extent of the hardships these women endure. The woman he is interviewing, along with two other women, has been walking for hours in search of refuge. This description of the difficulties encountered by Afghan women, apart from those imposed upon them by Taliban men, is relatively unusual. There is the possibility of placing indirect blame on the Taliban, whose protracted refusal to surrender is the reason for the continued bombing, but this connection is not made explicit. In the case of Hasiva, "another woman in a *burqa*," her flight from Khanabad occurred after an attack by U.S. bombs and rockets from the Alliance, following an invasion the previous day by the Taliban, which seems to spread the responsibility fairly evenly. Nonetheless, this depiction of the war's negative aspects represents some potential for an alternative discourse.

In that sense, Nov24c, "Will we sell out Afghan women?" represents a slight departure for Margaret Wente, as well. This article does not demonstrate the undiluted optimism seen in some of Wente's other articles cited in this thesis in regard to the war, though it does open with the positive statement that the "women have thrown off their

shrouds. We have seen their faces, and they are radiant.” The dramatism inherent in this statement evokes Chaney’s rituals, with their symbolism, ceremony and sense of the collective, all of which can be seen as an affirmation of the norm (1986, pp. 117-118). A lack of context also contributes to this, leaving the reader to infer that nothing could be more life-affirming than the removal of the so-called shroud, a term that seems even more negative than *burqa* in its implication of complete concealment of identity and, perhaps, the very act of being. No context is provided regarding women who choose to veil, including those women in Afghanistan who continue to wear their *burqas* out of habit and/or conformity to social norms. In the dichotomy Wente establishes, the overcoming of those practices that constitute a cultural difference from Northern behaviours is the central mission. Overlooking women who may not agree, she turns to one who talks about her joy at burning her *burqa*, and her depression when wearing it. She then describes women still wearing the *burqa* using the following analogy: “The Taliban tried to turn 15 million women into faceless, voiceless creatures from *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Those creepy images in Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel of female servitude were not entirely an act of her imagination. She wrote the book after a trip to Afghanistan.”

For women who do choose to veil, this comparison belittles their values on the basis of difference, and manages to conjure the image that Peters finds so recurrent and mistaken, that of “unmitigated servility” (1978, p. 311). Moreover, while Wente’s image may be apt on some levels, it is irresponsible on others. Atwood’s novel does tackle sexism and women imprisoned by biology and a patriarchal order that cites religious tenets for its own ends. However, if Atwood was greatly inspired after her visit to

Afghanistan, it is interesting that the religious dogma underpinning the system of handmaids forced to conceive and bear children on behalf of their barren mistresses in her novel does not spring from Islam but from Christian fundamentalism. The extreme nature of the metaphor Wente utilizes here is unsurprising, given van Dijk's suggestion that biased reporting often involves the choice of metaphors that will most efficiently emphasize opponents' negative traits (van Dijk, 1998, p. 208). As noted previously, it is also expected due to the fact that veiled Muslim women have come to constitute their own model, in which the very mention or sight of the veil causes commentators to recall an association with other characteristics, such as fundamentalism, subordination, submissiveness, invisibility and militancy, as well as constraint so pronounced that it provokes pity (el Guindi, 1999, pp. xix, 18, 93, 129, 157; MacLeod, 1991, pp. xiii, 17, 99).

Having moved into the realm of dystopia and women valued for their breeding ability, Wente suddenly shifts to the analysis of what she considers the Afghan women's primary modes of resistance, encompassing acts such as wearing makeup and high heels and operating beauty parlours, health clinics and schools for girls. Undeniably these are all courageous acts in the face of oppression, but Wente's praise— "They wielded their lipstick and mascara as a gesture of freedom"—seems to trivialize the real struggles that have taken place and that continue into the present. In a country wracked by poverty, military action and political instability, simple survival for these women has probably included larger battles than wielding cosmetics. Wente does, as mentioned, allude to health clinics and schools, but her interest seems to return repeatedly to the issue of appearance.

Where Wente does depart somewhat from her script of Afghan women as newly freed and utterly triumphant is in her discussion of the future. To assess the viability of a Northern Alliance-headed government, Wente consults Tahmeena Faryal, a spokeswoman for RAWA, who characterizes both the Taliban and their opponents as criminals. Wente notes the absence of women in the attempts thus far to create an interim government, and claims that Northern Alliance leader Burhanuddin Rabbani has been accused of raping, torturing and abducting women, as well as forcing some into marriage.

Over the course of the war, RAWA has acquired a new, widespread legitimacy in its role as a spokesperson for Afghan women, as evidenced by the number of times it is cited in these *Globe* pieces alone. Wente pays tribute to their efforts, begun even before the arrival of the Taliban: "...RAWA was fighting a losing battle to hang on to women's rights. In 1989, Arab militants fighting the Soviet Union issued a fatwa stating that Afghan women would be killed if they worked for humanitarian organizations. In 1990, another fatwa, signed by 200 mullahs and political leaders, forbade them from attending school." She adds that in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, a school for Afghan girls was "sprayed with machine-gun fire," and notes that the Rabbani regime, not unlike the Taliban, made women give up government jobs and wear the veil. One warlord, now returning to the region, once led a "militant Islamic student group in Kabul that threw acid in the face of unveiled women students."

Having listed all these problems, Wente then goes on to utter one of her strongest statements against the U.S. in terms of its history in the region: "The U.S. didn't give a damn about the rights of women (or anyone else) when it was helping arm Mr. Rabbani and his gang against the Soviets." She notes that Karen Hughes, Bush's communications

strategist, originally conceived the idea of creating the public relations campaign that was “launched last week to link the fight against terrorism with the rights of women.” Adding that Laura Bush, Cherie Blair, Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice have all spoken out in conjunction with this campaign, she wonders if these tactics are merely an example of courting the women’s lobby. However, she says, they may also be “good intentions” which “will be subverted by the messy realpolitik of nation-building.” More positively, she suggests the possibility that “Mr. Bush, a man who seems to have no ego problems taking advice from strong, determined women, will be able to accomplish more for women’s rights and freedoms than any other modern leader”; however, she follows this with the pessimistic comment, “[t]hat would be a shock.”

Wente returns to a point that Marcus Gee evoked, stating that in the event of Bush’s success, “he will prevail by the very means that feminists have so vehemently denounced—by muscle and by force of arms, and by asserting the superiority of American values in the world.” The general nature of this reference to the feminist movement suggests that all feminists held the same opinion on the war, which is certainly not the case, and also posits that the feminists, as a whole, may be proven wrong in their opposition to the use of violence and imposition of values in the attempt to establish women’s rights. The tendency to group individuals together and negate the effects of their distinct arguments can be seen as an example of what van Leeuwen calls categorization (1996, p. 52). Wente does not consider the possibility of other means of achieving women’s rights, exclusive of military action. If women’s freedoms were the sole focus of Bush’s intervention, then the United States would have taken action in Afghanistan long before.

Nonetheless, Wentle extols the virtue of the actions currently being carried out, painting the “fight against terrorism” as the conduit which “has turned the spotlight on women’s status throughout the Muslim world. In Bangladesh and Turkey, where democracy prevails, women are marching toward equality. Where the sheiks and sultans, kings and emirs and tribal warlords rule, they dwell in the shadows of the patriarchy. Only an injection of democracy will free them.” This is an interesting interpretation, given that Turkish women’s struggles for liberation have a long history independent of the fight against terrorism (see, for example, Yeğenoğlu, 1998), something which is not entirely clear in Wentle’s comments, and that democracy has not always provided a safe haven for women. As noted previously, the attempt to establish democratic and modern norms in certain countries has sometimes created new issues surrounding women’s rights. In countries with predominantly Muslim populations, for example, unveiling has been carried out forcibly at times and against the will of the people, in an attempt to modernize the indigenous population and its institutions. Nonetheless, the word democracy has acquired grandiose implications that cause it to occupy a specialized place in the pantheon of mythologized discourse, to the point, Karim argues, that democracy itself has become a myth (2001, p. 122).

Wentle notes here that:

Under the Taliban, the owner of a house could be punished if women were heard singing during a wedding. Those days are over. But Mr. Bush will have to use all his warrior clout to make sure women are heard as partners in nation-building. The job won’t be done until women in Saudi Arabia are allowed to drive and women in Kuwait are allowed to vote. It won’t be done until women who don’t cover up are freed from beatings by the religious police, and women who displease men are freed from honour killings by their fathers and brothers. The West cannot tolerate terrorists against women, or those who harbour them.

This final sentence, a play on Bush's own notorious comment that the United States would tolerate neither terrorists nor those who harbour them, introduces a new level of rhetoric in describing those who oppress women, and according to Wenthe, their numbers are widespread and it is the obligation of the civilized West to correct their behaviour. The means they use can apparently be as forceful as required, given her mythical reference to Bush as a warrior, and to Condoleezza Rice as Bush's "warrior princess."

Despite the paternalistic note sounded by her encouragement of United States intervention—for that seems to be her overall message, despite the possible doubts expressed earlier—Wenthe does end her article with an acknowledgement of the Afghan woman's indomitable spirit. She quotes an Afghan woman who, incensed by the fact that schools would not re-open until the spring, argued that it was a warm enough winter to resume schooling immediately. *The New York Times* article from which Wenthe culls this anecdote will be discussed further in the next chapter, presenting a slightly different view of Afghan women's ability to exercise agency on their own behalf.

Ironically, given Wenthe's reference to women in Turkey and Bangladesh, Heather Mallick has a Turkish reference of her own in Nov24d. Her column, ostensibly about the wearing of hats, allows her to make reference to cultural reasons for headgear, beginning with the fascination this accessory apparently holds for both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, who she says both "despise women." The headgear she mentions in reference to Kemal Ataturk is the fez that he banned, referring to it as an "emblem of ignorance" during his modernization drive in 1920s. Though this may seem extreme, it is certainly not isolated, Mallick notes, arguing that what "makes hat-wearing so much worse is that it is often mandated out of orthodoxy: The *burqa*, the turban..." The ironic note she

sounds is doubtless an appropriate one to conclude this analysis with: “People, it’s just a hat, I want to say, but you might as well have stuck them with a giant hatpin. No, it’s my religion/my identity/my passion/my reason.”

Discussion

Mallick’s note is an appropriate one to end with because of the main findings of this analysis: the first is that, as suspected, the image of the veiled Muslim woman is overwhelmingly predominant in the coverage sampled here. Certainly women in Afghanistan have been oppressed, and their plight was worthy of coverage before and during the war. However, the reporting seems to be focussed strongly on the *burqa* as a symbol of that oppression, when there are so many other problems Afghan women deal with aside from the veil. Indeed, there is more than one hint that not all Afghan women would classify veiling as problematic, though these inferences are not discussed in the same depth as the need to free Muslim women from the subjugation they endure. This fascination, which makes itself evident through references to the *burqa* as the prime determinant of oppression even when the subject of the article is only slightly relevant to veiling, hearkens back to the Western obsession with icons that signify the exotic Other, as described in Kabbani (1986) and Yeğenoğlu (1998). There is distinct irony in the fact that Northern journalists criticize the obsession that Taliban men and other Muslim men may have with the veil, but there appears to be a certain level of fixation experienced by reporters as well. For instance, some of these articles feature repeated references to women wearing *burqas*, even though the subject of the article at hand might be the search for refuge following bombings, or the fight to resume education. This serves as a good

example of reporting that evokes seemingly irrelevant details and as such, propagates the notion that these details are of critical importance.

It is entirely true that the veil, and Muslim female victims, have served as objects of fascination for Northerners in the past. However, in this particular conflict, the repeated references to veiling and oppression could be considered signs of a desire to impose order on a narrative in which order is seemingly antithetical. Afghanistan has experienced disruption for years on end, and is home to warring tribes, scattered exiles and conflicting traditions, as well as poverty, carnage and confusion. Bombing Afghanistan, as some commentators may suspect, has not reversed any of these phenomena. That being the case, there may be a desire on the part of observers to mold Afghanistan's post-war story into one more comprehensible, and more closely aligned to pre-war expectations. The assignation of heroes (the United States, the Northern Alliance, RAWA) and the villains (the Taliban, Muslim extremism, Afghan tradition) helps "explain and give meaning to events and beliefs" (Lule, 1991, p. 31). If this is indeed one of the motivations for the consistent emphasis on women's issues and on victimization in particular, it is likely an unconscious factor. However, its recurrence is significant and can be expected to manifest itself in *The New York Times*' coverage as well, perhaps even more strongly. After all, the findings from *The Globe and Mail* do not suggest blind loyalty to the United States or to the war itself. They do demonstrate some key themes: the positive aspects of the war are often emphasized; Muslim women are an object of focus regardless of whether the focus is positive, negative, or even appropriate to the overall story content; Muslim women are often defined in relation to veiling, and sometimes more implicitly, to primitive norms that are juxtaposed against the modern

democracy of the West or North; perceived religiosity is emphasized even when it constitutes perhaps the least important feature of a story.

Nonetheless, despite the consistent appearance of some of these themes, the coverage is not characterized entirely by endorsement of the war or the United States, or by ethnocentric approaches to Afghanistan's foreign customs. On the contrary, some journalists make thoughtful attempts to differentiate between religion, culture, and politics, incorporating history at times, though briefly. The profile of Kathy Gannon is a good example of this, as are the comments of Rick Salutin, and the contributions in the Letters to the Editor section that counter omissions or assumptions in previously printed articles. Though *The Globe and Mail* does not write these letters, editors make the decision to print them, and they are to be commended for including letters that attempt to deconstruct those myths surrounding coverage of Afghan women. A letter to the editor expressing an alternative viewpoint may lack the authority of an article contributed by a staff reporter, but its inclusion nonetheless indicates some semblance of the type of dialogue that Nancy Fraser (1995) says should be found in the public sphere, which has too often been guilty of silencing dissenting voices. The importance of letters to the editor should not be overstated but it is nonetheless heartening to see that readers with different points of view are provided with an opportunity for self-expression and discussion. These signs of progress do not excuse an overall and overwhelming preoccupation with notions of cultural difference, attempts to simplify complex issues in ways that neglect crucial problems, and a tendency to overlook contextual factors that would make stories more complete and would enrich understanding of the Other, rather than exacerbating tension and assumptions of superiority. The latter factor is one that can

be attributed partly to the limitations of the newspaper format, which dictates story length and time allotted for research. Nonetheless, the examples of responsible journalism found in this analysis indicate that cultural sensitivity and dedication to presenting fact, rather than propagating fable, are attainable goals. The findings, then, do exhibit some of the trends detected so often before in discussions of Muslim women and conflict, but they also offer signs of hope. The following chapter attempts to build on these findings by investigating their possible relevance to *The New York Times*, and analyzes its coverage more generally for signs of the stereotypes and myths discussed throughout this thesis.

Chapter 5

The Leader of the Pack: Analysis of the United States' *The New York Times*

Jack Lule, in his analysis of myth and storytelling, turns to *The New York Times* for examination. There is nothing random about the choice, as Lule notes: “One of the world’s elite newspapers, the *Times* is the most widely read newspaper within the U.S. government, the most widely quoted, and is invaluable for research of U.S. news and international affairs” (Lule, 1991, p. 34; see Chomsky, 1988, p. 103; Said, 1997, pp. 88-89). Likewise, Shoemaker and Reese observe that editors across the country often consult *The New York Times*, along with *The Washington Post*, in order to determine what is considered newsworthy by these two leading outlets and therefore what should be covered in their own papers. Particularly in regard to international stories, *The New York Times* is a trend-setter and is valued for what has been characterized as its high standards of professionalism (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 124-125). If the United States is a leader in influencing the course of foreign affairs, *The New York Times* is arguably a leader in charting the course that many media outlets will follow in their reporting of global events. In Lule’s study of the 1985 hijacking of a TransWorld Airlines jetliner, which involved a murder that assumed highly symbolic implications in subsequent media coverage, he finds that “as an elite newspaper of political power and influence, the *Times* helps shape and is shaped by cultural context. Its insistence on the victim as scene assured that the symbolic power and emotional drama of the victim would become part of the cultural context for understanding...” (Lule, 1991, p. 36). The current study aims to

discover whether similar themes can be detected in *The New York Times*' coverage of women in Afghanistan during the war.

As noted previously, it is difficult to make a chronologically strict comparison between *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail* because *The New York Times*' Sunday edition, which is not included here due to *The Globe*'s pattern of publishing Monday-Saturday, is generally its largest and most comprehensive. Indeed, upon selecting November 17-24, 2001 as the time period, it was evident that many stories regarding Afghan women appeared in the Sunday, November 18th edition, though the rest of the week also displayed consistent representation of this topic. An initial search for the terms "women" and "Afghanistan" during November 17-24 produced 71 matches. Of these, 20 were published on November 18th alone. These stories were not included since there does not seem to be any effective way to reconcile *The Times*' extensive Sunday coverage with *The Globe*'s lack thereof, but the omission is noted here in order to demonstrate the degree of *The Times*' attention to Afghan women during this period. Moreover, the omission is also noted in order to acknowledge that any patterns detected in the remaining days are necessarily incomplete because the Sunday coverage is not included here; in any case, the process of conducting qualitative research on a small sample of a daily newspaper is rarely perfect and does not provide the basis for making definitive generalizations.

Part of what renders the process imperfect is the fact that searches of electronic databases—in this case, LexisNexis—do not always produce relevant matches. For the most part, the search conducted here was accurate but a small number of articles were omitted for the same reason that certain *Globe* articles were eliminated: they mentioned

women and Afghanistan, but not in relation to one another, thus it would be misleading to include them in the study. The final tally of articles in the seven-day period of study was 38, 13 more than *The Globe and Mail* produced in the same time period. This could be attributed to one of two factors, or both: first, *The New York Times* is physically a larger paper, and usually does feature more articles on high-profile global events than *The Globe and Mail*. Second, the central role of the United States in leading the war on Afghanistan may have proportionately affected *The New York Times*' level of coverage in relation to that of other newspapers. Over the seven-day period, *The Times* produced three articles on the first Saturday, November 17th, six on the 19th, five on the 20th, a week-high eight on Wednesday the 21st, six on the 22nd, five on the 23rd and five on the 24th. Sheer volume, of course, need not necessarily translate into in-depth coverage. The number of matches for the searched terms indicates their presence in the articles, but it cannot be assumed that the articles are devoted to the topic of women in Afghanistan. The depth of coverage is examined more closely in the qualitative analysis below.

November 17, 2001

No17a is written by Amy Waldman, whose name will recur in stories about Afghanistan. This particular article discusses "legendary" warlord Ismail Khan's return to the city of Herat, and focuses on his suggestion that the aid of the West is no longer needed. Though Khan is dismissive of British peacekeeping forces and United Nations aid in forming a new government, the writer suggests that "not everyone sees his previous rule as a halcyon era." This is an interesting article with which to begin the analysis, as Waldman is careful to note improvements for areas freed from Taliban rule, but she does not minimize the instability that remains in a city still ruled by the gun. She

quotes an engineering student who says “that Mr. Khan’s officers had been allowed to act with impunity, insulting women in the street, for example, then punishing ordinary people who did the same.” She also suggests that the armed men in the street could create problems, and draws a picture of general volatility. In the press conference at which Mr. Khan implied that the West’s role was now at an end, he apparently did not address the difficulties Waldman mentions, rather promising “a government under which girls would go to school and women would work once again.” Along with those promises, Waldman notes other improvements that have taken place. Like the writers in *The Globe and Mail*, she points out the flying of kites, the playing of music, the shaving of beards, and says that “[m]any women do still walk the streets wearing burkas,¹⁵ the pale blue head-to-toe shrouds. But now it is by choice.” Her phrasing here—many women *do still* walk the streets—acknowledges that this is a question readers might expect to see addressed in the list of achieved freedoms, and that the failure to eradicate the wearing of the *burqa* is indicative of a delay in progress.

In No17b, Douglas Frantz tells the story of different freedoms, recounting the ordeal of Christian aid workers who were arrested in Afghanistan and then freed. The title, “U.S. relief workers tell of fear and faith,” appears to put the workers’ faith in a more positive light than has been the case in discussions of the Muslim faith in relation to Afghans. Discussing the way in which the workers effected their rescue, Frantz describes “an act at once practical and symbolic,” in which the six female members of the group “pulled off their mandatory head coverings and used them to start a fire,” with the result

¹⁵ Though I have attempted to use the “*burqa*” spelling as consistently as possible throughout the thesis, “*burka*” appears to be the standard spelling at *The New York Times*. I have replicated quotes from *The Times* using the spelling provided, but have continued to use “*burqa*” in all other cases.

that American soldiers spotted them and rescued them. It is not hard to imagine what this symbolism is; Khan's description of misperceptions associated with the veil cite the need for a white European defender (1995, p. 149), a life "totally determined by religion" and the implication that liberation from Islam comes in the form of unveiling (1995, p. 151). In this context, the fact that the workers are Christians who have been accused of proselytizing where an extraordinarily restrictive form of Islam is practised lends further colour to the image of liberation by unveiling. Moreover, the symbolism is complicated further by the fact that two of the relief workers are Americans, and it is they who are being interviewed in the present article. Their position as Americans who have come to save the souls of the indigenous population melds easily with the role of the United States as military superpower, rescuing the beleaguered people of Afghanistan in conjunction with the white European defender Khan recognizes from historical interventions. The two workers' positions as heroines and proselytizers seem singularly appropriate in the face of the accusations of cultural imperialism and domination so often posed by postcolonial theorists. Their heroic status falls well within the parameters of the type of myth discussed by Lule (1991), as they describe a rescue that could not, they suggest smilingly, have been better executed by Hollywood itself. Though they were freed by opposition soldiers, the rescue carried out by American soldiers is where the true drama seems to reside.

Discussing their ordeal in a Taliban women's prison, though, both women are prepared to point out facts that do not align with common belief. For instance, they contradict "the often demonized portrait of the Taliban in the Western press" by explaining that they were "treated with respect and allowed to pray and sing hymns."

However, despite the fact that some of the Taliban apparently treated them like sisters, they note that “Afghan women in the prison did not fare as well,” citing women who were arrested for fleeing abusive husbands, while others were beaten until blood was drawn. Upon their release, the women saw “acts punishable by beatings under Taliban orthodoxy,” such as the shaving of beards and “women...pulling off their burkas.” These acts evoke the same improvements that Waldman noted in her article.

In No17c, a summary of news events related to the war in Afghanistan, the aid workers are mentioned again briefly in a simple statement that the workers spent weeks in the women’s prison in Kabul and fought off boredom, but were treated well for the most part. The inclusion of the last piece of information in a very short news summary likely reflects the fact that readers would expect the workers to have undergone brutal treatment, and would be surprised and perhaps interested to learn otherwise. Again, placement and inclusion are crucial in signalling which stories, and what aspects, a reader should note.

November 19, 2001

No19a is an article that does focus specifically on women’s issues. Written by Elisabeth Bumiller and entitled “The politics of plight and the gender gap,” it begins by quoting American women who are apparently overwhelmed by the Bush administration’s public relations campaign to highlight Taliban brutality towards women, as well as a promise to insist upon female representation in the new Afghan government. Meeting with an under secretary of state for global affairs, the women, representatives of various activist groups, are told “that the Bush administration believed there could be no civil society in Afghanistan without the full participation of Afghan women, who once held

important positions in government, education and medicine.” Their endorsement and stunned appreciation evokes the admiration evident in *The Globe and Mail* editorial praising the outcome of the war. Moreover, as representatives of activist groups, these women are especially important, since their approving remarks can be cited to counter objections from other activists who may protest that the community was not consulted, or that the measures are insufficient. This is typical of patterns applied to reporting of visible minorities, in which “moderate spokespersons will be quoted who share the opinions or perspective of the majority” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 93). Later attempts by less moderate representatives to voice objections will then be more easily dismissed or marginalized.

Karen P. Hughes, senior presidential adviser, is credited as the person “who dreamed up the information campaign publicizing the plight of Afghan women” and is quoted as saying that a peaceful society is not possible if half of the society is trapped in the house. However, as Bumiller notes, critics have pointed to the fact that the White House’s drive to liberate Afghan women is at odds with its opposition to abortion, as well as its refusal to address the fact that Kuwaiti women do not have the vote and “women in Saudi Arabia cannot even drive.” All the same, the two women’s group representatives who are actually quoted in this article are too impressed by the White House’s position on Afghanistan to criticize other shortcomings, and neither, Bumiller says, was interested in discussing “any questions of White House motivation. Political cynicism is out of fashion right now in Washington, particularly when an administration appears to be so obviously doing and saying the right thing. Who could be against rights for the long-oppressed women of Afghanistan?” Bumiller here recognizes the same stereotypes of

oppression and suffering that Fernea cites as typically associated with Muslim women (1998, p. 92), and also recognizes the possible political gains associated with them.

Bumiller notes the positive effect such campaigns have had on the Republicans' standing with female voters, a group that did not support Bush very strongly in the 2000 election. "By July," she says, "the Republican National Committee had started a major initiative, 'Winning Women,' to lure them back." It appears to have worked, based on "the reaction to its campaign for Afghan women. 'I think this is a great chance for them to do a gender gap number without rubbing up against the right wing,' one senator said on the condition of anonymity." Another senator agrees, pointing out that the traditional Laura Bush is able to appear supportive of women's rights "without having to go very far out on a limb." Hughes' response to questions on this matter is delicately worded, but clearly indicates her awareness of the possible advantages for the Republican party: "If through this initiative women who might not have previously wanted to support the president can see him in a different light,' she said, 'then I hope they will see his compassion and his sincere concern for human dignity.'"

Unlike the women's rights representatives in Washington, Gloria Steinem is not averse to stating her opinion, suggesting that Bush's motivation is embedded in an attempt at gaining a political edge, and arguing that women are too intelligent to be fooled by "the difference between rhetoric and reality." She also points out that the United States helped install the "fundamentalist mujahedeen" in Afghanistan, at the expense of education for women. Bumiller adds that some of these mujahedeen now constitute part of the United States' coalition force as well as the Taliban, and that there are worries surrounding possible attempts these fighters may make at regaining power.

This leaves Afghan women's groups with manifold worries, and though they believe that their pleas for help are being listened to by the United States, they feel unsure that talks will translate into positive and concrete action. Bumiller's article, like Waldman's, is frank in its discussion of some of the difficulties faced by Afghan women, but Bumiller is even more direct in her suggestion that the United States' motives in helping those women may not be entirely altruistic. Thus, Bumiller's article acknowledges the help that the United States is providing, but does not align itself with the myth of the white male elite invading the land of the Other with the benevolent motive of staging a rescue.

No19b is another article on the rebuilding of Afghanistan, though not specific to women alone. Significantly, it is entitled "Trimming beards and ideologies in Afghanistan," from the editorial desk, written by Steven R. Weisman. The title indicates that the focus on cultural differentiation will be similar to the focus demonstrated in *Globe and Mail* editorials. However, it opens with a forthright discussion of the instability in the region, unlike the more optimistic commentary offered by the *Globe*. Weisman points out that the Afghans' enthusiastic welcome to the U.S.-led coalition is not entirely unlike the welcome once offered to the Taliban, but after sounding this note of caution and before commenting on the difficulties of understanding Afghan politics, he stresses the importance of fairly judging "a country of beleaguered men and women who have spent generations trying to survive the waves of invaders washing through their history." Discussing the similarities between Islamic extremists and Communists—an interesting comparison in light of the fact that Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1988) was designed in a time of Communist threat, but seems entirely adaptable to so-called Islamic fundamentalists—Weisman recalls a time when Islamists and Communists

held simultaneous rallies on university campuses. Women attending the Communist rallies, Weisman claims, “sometimes had to dodge Islamic extremist assailants who tried to throw acid at their faces because they went about uncovered.” The Communists’ later attempt to seize control of Afghanistan met with resistance triggered by “confiscating land and forcing men to attend school with women.” This story manages to accomplish two goals at once, recounting atrocities against women so that the Islamic extremists’ barbarism is understood, and evoking a comparison to Communists, another group whose very name elicits generally negative reaction from American readers. In this way, the two groups share responsibility for the conflict that has ravaged Afghanistan, while the United States is included as an actor in this scenario only insofar as it is now offering assistance to Afghanistan. This is a different kind of incompleteness, as it erases responsibility through omission of facts while providing a certain level of overcompleteness in the description of Islamists and Communists.

In No19c, “Pakistan fears 3,000 pro-Taliban troops have slipped in,” another article by Douglas Frantz, the subject is a rising concern that Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters are entering Pakistan following the fall of Kabul. “In an intriguing twist, five Yemeni women were detained on Saturday as they tried to cross into southwestern Pakistan at the Chaman border gate, United Nations and other officials said. The women were not identified, but their exit from Afghanistan is a reminder of the close links between Osama bin Laden and Yemen.” Though this excerpt appears to be relatively straightforward, it does point out the additional complexities this war contains for allies such as Pakistan, which may not be in a position to offer the same kind of military or financial aid as the United States but will inevitably be affected in practical terms, as

refugees and fighters flee from Afghanistan. At least in part, it is these complexities that separate *Dawn*'s coverage from that of *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times*, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Jane Perlez does describe some of the catastrophic effects of the disorganized politicking occurring in Afghanistan in No19d, entitled "The corrupt and brutal reclaim Afghan thrones, evoking chaos of Somalia." She describes the ways in which former warlords have re-assumed power in Afghanistan, then offers her one mention of Afghan women, suggesting possibly favourable outcomes: "In Herat, Ismail Khan was greeted on his return last week as a favourite son, and as the man residents had been waiting for the last seven years. He is considered a more liberal warlord, perhaps because he has ensured that the antiquities of his ancient city are not exported and because he has always encouraged the education of girls and women." Nonetheless, despite the positive effects hinted at here, Perlez does not minimize the chaotic atmosphere prevailing in Afghanistan.

In No19e, *The New York Times*' regular recounting of events in Afghanistan that have usually already been discussed in full-length articles, a summary called "What women want" does return to the idea that Afghan women have been freed and that their situation is one of unalleviated joy: "After enduring nearly a half decade of petty brutality under the Taliban, Afghan women are now sketching an impressive record of resilience, even crafty defiance. They say that for the first time in years, they have hope that their treatment will improve, that they will be allowed to work and that their daughters will be allowed to attend school." The liberation myth here is potent and clear, and also makes itself evident in the next summary, which refers to an article discussed previously

(No19a), and is tagged “The Oval Office”: “The women coming out of the State Department last week were using words like ‘amazing’ and ‘unbelievable’ to describe what they had heard. The Bush administration was not only publicizing the brutality toward women under the Taliban—no news there—but promising that the United States would insist that women have power in a post-Taliban Afghanistan.” The lexical choice here is telling in more ways than one: “no news there” acknowledges how pervasive the story of Taliban abuse of women’s rights has become, so that it is no longer news but an accepted fact that can be incorporated into mental models of the Taliban and of Afghan women. Since this idea is so well understood, it is interesting that so many news stories continue to mention it, and usually in the same way, in terms of women’s salvation from the Taliban, achieved with considerable assistance from the United States.

Amy Waldman’s next article (No19f) returns to these very themes, though the title, “Behind the burka: Women subtly fought Taliban” offers the possibility that the women here will be presented as actually possessing the initiative that Cottle says minorities are not often credited for possessing in stories of the salvation myth (2000, p. 40). Waldman profiles a woman, Soheila Helal, who secretly operated a school for girls in her house, defying the ban against women working or learning. The love for her students, Waldman says,

no longer needs to be hidden behind an adobe wall. The school where Mrs. Helal worked before the Taliban came to power is reopening now that they are gone from Herat and much of Afghanistan. In areas now controlled by the Northern Alliance, the petty brutality that women endured for nearly a half decade has ended. When Ismail Khan, the commander now in control here, arrived last week, he made clear that he believed that women should be in school and at work.

Waldman acknowledges the distrust that women feel, saying that freedom is too new and wounds too fresh for instant belief, but “for the first time in years, women here

say they have hope—that they will be treated like human beings, not wayward cattle; that they will be free to leave their homes and to work; that their daughters will be able to learn.” Though she quotes one female doctor who expresses hope for the future, Waldman does point out possible signs that progress is slow: “Herat is still full of women in burkas, the full-length shroud that covers even the face, rendering a woman more column than human, and making it impossible for close friends to recognize each other on the street. But now many of the burka-clad women are on their own or with other women. A week ago, that would have brought a lashing.”

Women who did demonstrate defiance

showed off bruises and scars earned for going it alone or daring to speak in a government office. They described the cruel illogic of the Taliban: male doctors were not allowed to treat women but female doctors were not permitted to be trained; many widows here who were the sole support of their family were barred from going to work. Many of them resorted to shelling nuts or washing clothes at home, barely earning enough to fill their children’s stomachs.

Waldman’s article is out of the ordinary in that it demonstrates both women’s victimization and resistance: “Women also showed resilience, even crafty defiance, for those who were expected to be neither seen nor heard. Knowing they would be lashed, they went out alone anyway. Confined to their homes, many taught their daughters to read. They started secret schools or secured small concessions—permission to open a nursing school, for example—from the Taliban bureaucracy.” This then represents a slight departure from Lule’s description of victims who lack agency: “In dramatic terms, the victim was depicted not as an agent—one who acts—but as an element of scene, part of the situation” (1991, p. 35)

As well, the distinction between religiosity and the Taliban’s own set of rules is made here by the story of a woman named Nouri, who was beaten for leaving the house:

“‘Why are you doing this?’ she said she shouted. ‘Aren’t you Muslim? Aren’t you afraid of God?’” Her beating is now a thing of the past, as she searches for work, along with other women, like Sima Rezahi, a 22-year-old who needed work in order to support her elderly parents, “but had been allowed to work only in a relief distribution center since her family returned from Iran two years ago. She has been well educated, she said, and being restricted to such a lowly job smarted.” Rezahi’s younger sister, Zahra, had not left the house in two years, instead cooking all day. Having left the house for the first time since, she “removed the veil, let the sun hit her face and allowed herself to think about a life outside four walls and after the Taliban,” as Waldman dramatically describes it.

“Today,” Waldman reiterates, “the prisoners were free.” She describes other women who desperately need work to help them and their families escape from poverty, as well as others who faced retribution for trying to use their education to help less fortunate women. One such woman, Kobra Zeithi, “was briefly imprisoned by the Taliban for traveling to Pakistan to pick up educational materials. She saw the Taliban threaten to beat her daughter, then 13, for not covering her face. She saw the opportunities for Afghanistan’s women narrow unbearably.” However, Zeithi asserts her refusal to stop fighting, recounting the story of her founding of a sewing program for women with the Taliban’s permission,

although the permission took a month to get. She got permission to teach the Koran to women at a new cultural center, although the permission was then revoked. Her organization was one of the only places in Herat that women could get jobs [sic]. For 80 jobs at the cultural center she received 1,500 applications, mostly from educated women. Her activities were financed by international organizations. She and other employees had to swear to the Taliban that they would continue to uphold the Islamic values.

Now, Waldman says, jobs are more widely available, and women are free to choose their careers, rather than select from the only option previously offered, nursing school. Even that was not easily achieved, and the nursing school director is quoted as saying “she expected that applications would drop now that women have other options. But the problem that took root during Taliban rule remains: Doctors here say the lack of female surgeons and specialists working over the last few years has led to a higher mortality rate among women.” Waldman points out that Afghanistan’s high illiteracy rate makes education even more valuable, and like Rezahi, educated women were bitterly disappointed to find that their schooling was either under-utilized or not utilized at all.

Marriage became the only option for some young girls whose families could no longer support them, but the Taliban’s ouster now provides other options. Despite all these positive changes, the widowed Helal is still quoted saying that “one thing will not change—she will continue to wear her burka in public. Her husband’s family would be very upset if she did not, she said. Showing her face in public would suggest she was looking for a new husband.”

Commendably, Waldman contradicts the outsider’s notion of the *burqa* as “the most obvious and chilling symbol of Taliban rule.” She says that its “meaning here is more complicated, which helps explain why women have not thrown it off en masse. Many women here said they would like to return to wearing a chador, which leaves the face exposed, but are frightened that the Taliban may return.” She quotes one woman who is waiting to see what others will do, while others did not seem to make a distinction between wearing the *burqa* prior to or after the Taliban: “other women, usually poor or less-educated, said that they would continue to wear the burka as they had done before

the Taliban came to power. 'I wore it then and I'll wear it now,' said Maryam Nazhamat, 55. 'I'm a Muslim.' Nonetheless she said she was thankful the Taliban were gone: she wanted her 11-year-old, who she had taught to read at home, in school."

The division Waldman establishes between poorer, less-educated women who continue to wear the *burqa* and less poor, better-educated women suggests that retention of the *burqa* arises mainly from ignorance. Though the *burqa* worn here differs somewhat from the *hijab* reassumed in 1970s Egypt, it is interesting to note that the Egyptian reclaiming of veiling began among university women (el Guindi, 1999, pp. 103-104). This is a significant departure from the idea that practising veiling and endorsing education are antithetical, an idea evoked in Waldman's references to Afghan men, as well. While many Afghan men support the idea of women working or going to school, Waldman says, a larger number also still endorse the wearing of the *burqa*, citing tradition. Ismail Khan is quoted as saying that he will neither enforce nor ban the wearing of the *burqa*—if he provided this answer in response to an inquiry, it is interesting that the latter question would be raised, since banning the garment would seem as restrictive as forcing women to wear it. He adds that progress will still be slow, since he has no wish to accelerate women's societal integration to the point of inciting resentment:

"'Afghanistan is a backward country,' he said. 'There's a kind of patriarchy in most families, especially in the villages, in which men tell women what to do and what to wear.'" Like the preceding comment about the retention of the *burqa* being particularly prevalent among women who are poor or uneducated, this reinforces the notion that veiled women represent a failure to embrace modern and democratic values.

Having confirmed Afghanistan's status as primitive and uncivilized, Waldman acknowledges the relative superficiality of women's choice of apparel in the face of the other problems Afghans face:

for most women here what they wear is the least of their worries. That is certainly true for Parigol Abdulrasul. She is 50, with no schooling, eight children and a dead husband. Unable to leave the house under Taliban rule, she shelled nuts in the dark at home, her eyes weakening from the strain of working with no electricity. Even now, she wonders how she will be able to earn enough to feed her family. "It doesn't make any difference who rules here," she said. "We are hungry."

Waldman provides a type of epilogue for Parigol by noting that she did visit "Herat's main hotel to look for a person powerful enough to help her get food for her family from relief shipments entering the country. She assertively corralled journalists and buttonholed government officials—male officials. It was a mission she could never have undertaken under the Taliban," Waldman notes, concluding without apparent consciousness of the pathos the sentence inspires, "[n]ow, at least, she is free to beg." Though Afghanistan remains mired in poverty, the Northern world can at least congratulate itself on having restored freedoms such as these.

November 20, 2001

As with *The Globe and Mail*, the prolonged and intensive attention to women's rights provoked feedback from readers. Several of the news items here are letters to the editor, published under the headline "Women in Afghanistan, and Here." No20a refers to Elisabeth Bumiller's article on the White House's positions regarding Afghan women's suffering and representation in future governments. The letter from Cornell University professor Anna Marie Smith calls upon George W. Bush and his party to ensure equal rights for women both in Afghanistan and in the United States, arguing that the

Bush administration must continue its efforts to ensure that leading Afghan women will be included in any transitional government negotiations, and that women's rights will be vigorously protected under the new regime. Feminists have been calling for international action to support women and children in Afghanistan for years. But will the Bush administration now prove that its use of feminist rhetoric is not simply a cynical propaganda technique by reversing its antifeminist positions on abortion and the elimination of welfare rights? And would Attorney General John Ashcroft pass Laura Bush's women's rights test?

The writer evokes the same suspicion that would be raised within the propaganda model (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2) regarding the interest of the state in using the media to conduct a publicity campaign that glamourizes the war effort. Smith calls attention to the dissonance between the Bush administration's (late) pledges of aid to Afghanistan's women, pursued under the banner of feminism, when its domestic actions and previous lack of interest in global women's issues expose the administration as one that adopts many positions distinctly opposed to gender equity. Herman and Chomsky (1988) would also likely characterize the government's tactics here as a classic example of turning attention towards a chosen cause in order to distract the public from more fundamental issues at home and abroad. It is impossible to prove that the Bush administration's motives have such cynical undertones, but clearly this letter writer is not the only one feeling some skepticism. The next letter, No20b, addresses an older article about Laura Bush's comments on the plight of Afghan women, and responds by saying:

Since Sept. 11, the Bush administration has shown a sudden interest in the gross violations of human rights perpetrated by the Taliban against Afghan women. This newfound concern is hollow at best and manipulative at worst. The United States has known since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan about the organization's human rights policies. There are several apparent motivations for the United States' military campaign; concern for the human rights practices of the Taliban—or of the Northern Alliance, for that matter—is not one of them. We should not pretend that it is.

Like the first, the letter writer here, Tristan Anne Borer, is another academic, but in this case is a visiting fellow at University of Notre Dame in an institute for International Peace Studies. The status of these writers as academics may be seen as contributing to the authority behind their comments, and may in fact constitute part of the reason for their inclusion in the newspaper. However, in a battle of the so-called knowns (Gans cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 48-49), it seems likely that a name such as Laura Bush's would still carry more weight.

However, not all reaction is so negative. In No20c. letter writer Bill Marsano perceives further possibilities for the spread of what he refers to as understanding and tolerance, suggesting that

it would be useful to erect in the liberated cities of Afghanistan powerful television transmitters so that their newly freed populations could broadcast their joy to their co-religionists. Live images of Afghans who are Muslims but who nevertheless shave their faces, accept some ordinary freedoms for women, listen to music and fly kites without the threat of public floggings and executions might foster understanding and tolerance.

This suggestion is problematic on two levels, firstly implying that the idea of Muslims enjoying minor freedoms is so extraordinary that its depiction needs to be broadcast to Muslims everywhere, as they would not have other experiences of such a phenomenon. Despite the fact that the writer is almost certainly well-intentioned, he manages to fall into the trap of describing Islam as a monolithic entity, characterized by some of the core images Karim (1997) cites in his discussion of enduring stereotypes: fundamentalist (p. 156) and barbaric (pp. 157-159).

Such characterizations deny the actual pluralism seen in the practice of Islam globally, practice that often does embrace freedom, rights for women, cultural appreciation and above all, tolerance. The writer's proposal, while no doubt stemming at

least partly from whimsy, also offers the notion that other Muslims need only be introduced to the idea of freedom in order to embrace it. This ignores the fact that those countries or sects subscribing to extremist forms of Islam often have complex motivations, embedded in historical conflicts, political machinations or socio-cultural factors. Those Muslim countries that have marginalized themselves, according to Northern perceptions, are not unaware of the fact that many Americans share this writer's view that equal rights and loosening of so-called religious restrictions would allow them to experience democracy. On the contrary, the governments of these countries often consciously place themselves in opposition to these values, rejecting any possibility of aligning themselves with what they see as colonial or imperialist practices. In such cases, the writer's encouragement of democracy can be seen as naïve but perhaps understandable given the fact that so many Northern discussions of Islam do not provide enough background for attaining complete comprehension of the issues involved.

In No20d, "Military tribunals needed in difficult time, Bush says," Elisabeth Bumiller returns to the role that the United States will play in the further liberation of Afghan women: "Secretary of State Colin L. Powell spoke to a group of 150 American and Muslim leaders about the inclusion of women in any future coalition Afghan government." Addressing the group, which included "members of Congress, leaders of women's advocacy groups and Christie Whitman, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator," Powell stated that "[t]he rights of the women of Afghanistan will not be negotiable." He added that the United States "is committed to working to ensure not only that the women of Afghanistan regain their place in the sun, but they have a place in their future government, as well." These promises, which seem overly sanguine given the fact

that Afghan women did not all enjoy a “place in the sun” under the previous Northern Alliance regime, constitute “part of a continuing campaign by the White House to publicize the brutality suffered by Afghan women under the Taliban, and to insist that women have a role in the future of the country. Mr. Powell’s remarks were met with strong applause.” As opposed to the letter writers who detected some contradictions in the government’s sudden interest in gender equity, a listener here is quoted comparing the speech to comments that might have been made by Hilary Clinton or Madeleine Albright, both of whom “have tried to make women’s rights an important issue in American foreign policy.” Again, as in Bumiller’s earlier article (No19a), the fact that these listeners express their approbation can be seen as signifying agreement from a larger body, and lessens the possibility that expressions of dissent will be viewed seriously.

While the overall tone of No20d is more or less approving, another letter to the editor (No20e) again speaks to the fact that the scope of the Bush administration’s interest in women’s rights has been narrow at best: “If Laura Bush is truly interested in addressing the plight of women, she ought not just fixate on their treatment by the Taliban, but should also focus on how women are treated in Saudi Arabia. It is high time that the American government recognize that Saudi Arabia is not our ally and that it does not conform to civilized standards of treatment for women.” The choice of the word “civilized” is by no means incongruous, given the constant emphasis on the North’s civilized mores and the South’s lack of same, particularly in predominantly Muslim areas. “Like women under Taliban rule,” the writer, Wallace Greene, continues, “Saudi women are beaten by the religious police if they are not fully covered up. They must endure polygamy, they must obtain permission from a male relative before venturing out

alone, they may not initiate divorce and they are not allowed to drive. These are but a few examples.” Though the writer’s letter can be interpreted as a legitimate challenge to inconsistent policy statements, it can alternatively be seen as an extension of an imperial mindset that dictates the spread of Northern values, an unsurprising viewpoint given the fact that Muslim women are consistently urged to treat Northern women’s behaviour and ideals as normative (Yeğenoğlu, 1998, p. 101).

November 21, 2001

No21a, “U.S. ready to send additional troops to hunt bin Laden,” by Thom Shanker and James Dao, is not about women’s rights. A story about military tactics, it mentions women only in the context of potentially killing them. One “senior military officer” speaks frankly of the advantages of being able to look “the guys you want to kill in the eye,” whereas “dropping a bomb from 17,000 feet” means that “all you can do is hope that the women and children get out of the way.” Though this article demonstrates the cruel realities of war, it is written matter of factly, without any apparent contradiction seen between debating the best ways of wreaking military havoc in a country, and endeavouring to save women amid the rubble.

In fact, in No21b, “U.S. and 21 other nations vow to spend billions on Afghanistan,” Joseph Kahn and Stephanie Flanders make a smooth transition to the topic of aid for Afghanistan. They quote the undersecretary of state for economic affairs’ promises in regard to “improving irrigation to create viable farms and to building schools that would be open to girls and women, both as students and teachers, as projects that had the potential to deliver quick benefits to large numbers of people.” As has been the case throughout, the idea of providing education for female students—certainly a valuable

idea—is emphasized in order to demonstrate the help the U.S.-led alliance has given to Afghanistan, rather than discussing the type of devastation hinted at in the previous article.

No21c does provide some space for those who oppose the war. Amy Harmon profiles protestors who, despite being geographically dispersed, are organizing themselves through the use of the Internet. Alyssa Erickson organized a teach-in at her university to suggest alternative means of conflict resolution, handing out information from RAWA about the Northern Alliance. She argues that the women of Afghanistan themselves are criticizing the Northern Alliance, which is being imposed upon Afghans as the new government rather than being chosen. The number of Afghan refugees and starving Afghans, she opines, will not decrease due to the rise of the Northern Alliance.

No21d also draws attention to some of the negative consequences of the United States' intervention. Amy Waldman reports on food drops that accidentally landed on houses. In one of these, four women and three children were sleeping in one room “when a crate of food plummeted through the ceiling of the adjoining room.” However, in No21e, Kandahar lives with an entirely different problem, the fear of whether or not the Taliban will retreat or continue to fight. Jane Perlez describes a situation in which “[e]veryday life in Kandahar barely exists, according to the people. About half the shops were open. Women were conspicuously absent from the streets, having been either sent here for refuge or to refugee camps in Pakistan.” Again, the burdens that Pakistan will have to bear in this conflict, and in the rebuilding stages, are mentioned, and will become significant when reviewing *Dawn*'s coverage.

No21f, Maureen Dowd's column, refers back to the question of food drops that failed to land where intended, a problem that takes on symbolic value for her: "We are pulverizing our enemies even as we try to show them a little compassion, crushing our foes even as we try to understand and address some of their grievances against us." Dowd's blunt assessment of the ironies and contradictions she sees around her is not softened in her observations on the United States' work in terms of ensuring gender equity:

Condoleeza Rice urged that women be included in the post-Taliban government in Afghanistan and have equal rights. "When women are fully incorporated, a country is better off for it," she said. This even as our allies, the Northern Alliance, did not let any women into the reopened 600-seat movie theater in Kabul to see the Afghan film "Uruj," about three mujahedeen heroes who fought the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. (No date movies or chick flicks for these guys.)

Rice's comments are significant in the light of prior criticism that the United States' position on equal rights domestically requires substantial improvement, while Dowd's satirical reference to the Northern Alliance indicates cynicism regarding the actual liberties that will be available to the women of Afghanistan.

David Rohde takes a somewhat more optimistic view in No21g, but still makes reference to the reluctance some Northern Alliance members may feel regarding emancipation of women. The headline for Rohde's article—"The women, veils shed, demonstrate"—again points out the political value that Northern writers have invested in the veil, continuously identifying the removal of the veil with entry into the public sphere in a manner reminiscent of the fascination and import that the veil held during the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, pp. 12, 89, 170-172, 180). Rohde opens by stating that "[s]everal hundred Afghan women demonstrated for

women's rights here today for the first time in at least five years, demanding peace for the country, education for their children and power for themselves.” Despite this hopeful note, the “march ended abruptly after Northern Alliance security told the organizers that they could not assure their safety. The women vowed to march again early next week and said they would one day become powerful voices in Afghan society. ‘We want to march again,’ said Saraya Parlika, the director of a once-secret women’s rights organization that planned today’s protest. ‘We will follow our desires.’”

The demonstrating was not limited to Kabul, where Rohde filed his story. “In Herat, near the country’s western border with Iran, it was also a day for women to lobby for more rights. About 60 women—teachers, students and school directors—met with Ismail Khan, the newly proclaimed governor general of the region, to press for the immediate resumption of education for girls and for greater rights for women.” Again clothing is central in a description of these women: “Many had come in sandals, which were forbidden under the Taliban, and during the meeting they lifted their burkas to show their faces.”

“Sina Karamzadeh, 22, said she wanted girls’ schools opened right away. She wanted national television and radio to allocate time to women to educate the population about women’s rights. ‘We want to be free when we go to school,’ she said. ‘We don’t want to wear the burka.’” Khan meets these arguments with a speech of support regarding the right to education, arguing that it “was the most crucial route to more open minds on the rights of women,” and adding that “‘I was in prison for three years, but you were in prison for six years under more difficult conditions,’ he said. He encouraged the educators to organize a women’s movement.”

Despite this show of support, Rohde notes the objections posed by the women, who are eager for the change that has been promised. Here is the exact anecdote that caught Margaret Wente's attention in her column on ensuring that Afghan women receive the rights to which they are entitled: "Still, whatever Mr. Khan offered, it did not go far enough, and was not planned fast enough. Afghan schools usually close for the winter months, and so Mr. Khan said that the girls' schools would open in the spring. 'It's a really warm winter,' one woman said. 'We can start now.'" Likewise, a pledge of \$25,000 for the restoration of girls' schools vandalized by the Taliban was deemed insufficient, as was a proposal that only two schools be opened initially. The final action taken was "the selection of a five-woman committee to continue the push for more rights."

"Afterward, Sina Karamzadeh explained what had moved her to action. 'Because they beat us on the head so much, because they oppressed us so much,' she said of the Taliban. 'An animal was freer than us because a woman could not even go out of the house herself.'" This dramatic metaphor is only slightly more emotional than the caption accompanying the picture included in the article: "Women chanting slogans yesterday at a gathering in Kabul calling for women's rights in Afghanistan. For the first time in more than five years they shed their full-length veils and showed their faces on the street." In both the headline and the picture's caption, the symbol of the veil reigns supreme, though the subject of the article is ostensibly a struggle for education, which the women apparently have to fight for even though the United States and the Northern Alliance have continuously made assurances that education for women will be implemented.

No21h is another letter to the editor but entirely different from those previously mentioned. Written by the President of American Jewish World Service, Ruth Messinger, the letter opens by saying that “American Jewish World Service is glad to see that the courage of women resisting the Taliban is being recognized,” adding, “[w]e are proud to have been supporting the secret education of girls in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan for the last two years.” The letter then details the ways in which American Jewish World Service has contributed to Afghanistan, providing aid in education, health, income generation and human rights. The tone is almost that of an advertising or public-relations piece, and is perhaps written for the purpose of raising the organization’s profile.

November 22, 2001

In No22a, another collection of summarized news stories about the war, there is an entry entitled “Urging intervention”: “The International Rescue Committee and the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children called for an international military force to be sent soon to Afghanistan to ease the way to a post-Taliban government that is more just to women.” Such calls are repeated throughout *The Times*’ coverage, including the next item for analysis.

No22b is yet another letter to the editor, printed under the headline “The road to a new Afghanistan” and demonstrating the importance that the issue of women has had for readers. In this case, Fairfid M. Caudle, a professor of psychology and member of the women’s studies faculty at College of Staten Island argues:

A transitional Kabul government that is “multiethnic and fully representative”... can live up to this description only if women’s voices are heard in its formation. The inclusion of women, perhaps drawn from those forced to give up professions when the Taliban seized power, would be of incalculable value, both symbolic and practical, in reinstating women to their rightful roles in a postwar Afghanistan.

Certainly the value is inarguable, and the symbolic aspect of this would be extraordinarily powerful in exhibiting a tangible sign of the war's success, whereas processes like restoring education and health services are slower, yielding delayed results.

No22c, by David Stout, is the full version of the story alluded to earlier in No22a, devoted to women's rights and entitled "Relief groups seek a peacekeeping force for Afghanistan": "Human rights organizations urged today that an international military force be sent soon to Afghanistan to prevent chaos and bloodshed and ease the way to a post-Taliban government more fair to women." The International Rescue Committee and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children are quoted warning of the dangers of "factional violence," which could further ravage the country in the absence of "a stabilizing force under United Nations auspices."

Stout quotes Mary Diaz, the executive director of the latter organization, stating that "[r]ecent events have finally opened the door to a restoration of the rights of Afghan women," and arguing against what "would be a tragic loss if this opportunity were not fully supported by the international community and women were once again forced to hide behind the burka out of fear for their safety." The liberation story is clearly in evidence, with the United States-led intervention serving as the path to salvation, and in a discussion of women's rights, the worst scenario that could occur is the restoration of the *burqa*. Again, attention is focussed so closely on the veil that other issues, such as poverty and health, can be overshadowed.

Stout provides some balance by noting that while Taliban oppression has been well documented, critics of the Northern Alliance are unimpressed by their record regarding gender equity. Diaz is quoted commenting on the rape and abuse perpetrated

against civilians by warring factors in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She urges that a peacekeeping force be installed in Afghanistan “to allow the development of a coalition government that allows the full participation in civil society of all people, regardless of sex or ethnicity,” and stresses the need to pressure the Northern Alliance regarding their gender policies. “Women and girls are tasting freedom for the first time in many years,” she added, “but to be truly free, they need peace.” This is an important statement, and one that is perhaps not explored enough in the news coverage, Canadian or American.

No22d is actually an article that also appears, in essentially the same form, in *The Globe and Mail* (see Nov24a). Written by Amy Waldman, it details some of the strict rules included in Mullah Mohammed Omar’s penal code, beginning with prohibitions on unveiled women leaving the house, female doctors wearing attractive clothing or accessories and male doctors touching or viewing women in areas other than those requiring immediate medical attention. Other banned activities include singing by women during a wedding, or for merchants, the display of female faces on beauty products. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is suggested that some of the problems with the Taliban arise from their obsession with religious education, rather than the secular variety. However, the article does not clarify the fact that many of the rules laid down in this article are grounded in distorted interpretations of Islam rather than in religious fact, thus rendering even the claim of advanced religious education suspect.

In No22e, “Bush says war may go beyond Afghan border,” Elisabeth Bumiller quotes President Bush on the subject of Afghanistan’s new government: “‘We’re urging them to move quickly toward a government that is broadly based, multiethnic and protects the rights and dignity of all Afghan citizens, including women,’ he said.”

Bumiller adds that other members of the administration, such as Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, have already made similar remarks, but this occasion was the first time that “the president himself made it so clear.” This is another example of the emphasis the Bush administration placed upon women’s issues. An uncharitable view might suggest that the decision of the administration to issue such encouragement to the groups working on Afghanistan’s new government was a convenient way to maintain focus on the United States’ support of human rights while actually committing little in the way of action, but a kinder interpretation might be that Bush wished to convey support for gender equity at the very highest level of American government.

Such support would likely merit widespread approval from Americans, who Gene Sperling says “are pained by the simple reality that any government would ban school for girls” in No22f, “Educating the world.” This article points out that the emphasis on girls’ education does not always take into account the only slightly less perilous situation of Afghan boys: “Afghanistan is moving beyond the Taliban, but schooling may remain inaccessible not only to many of its girls, but to their brothers.” He cites reasons that children around the world are not in school, including lack of buildings, textbooks and qualified teachers, among others. “In Afghanistan,” he says, “education was hard to get even before the Taliban regime: in 1996, 90 percent of girls and nearly two-thirds of boys were not going to school.” This distinction is an important one, as it clarifies the fact that the Taliban are not solely responsible for the difficulties experienced in Afghanistan. It also points out the extent to which Afghan boys have suffered, even if the lack of education for girls was significantly more pronounced.

November 23, 2001

No23a, entitled “Adjusting to a world less ready for a party,” changes contexts completely but still manages to slip in a reference to women’s rights. Discussing the fact that many New York-based special events companies have seen reduced business following September 11, writer Jayson Blair mentions that some events still took place with changes to reflect the mood. For example, *Glamour* magazine, originally intending to stage a sexy and bold gala, adopted a more subtle motif with patriotic overtones: “Several women, including those struggling to expand women’s rights in Afghanistan, were honored.”

Women’s rights are also mentioned in No23b, a review of the film *Kandahar* by critic A.O. Scott, who says, “I was transfixed by its images and moved by its story of an exiled Afghan woman venturing back into her native country to search for her sister. The world it depicted seemed, to me and to other Westerners in attendance, far away and even—in part because of the lyricism [director] Mr. Makhmalbaf brings to his grimmest pictures of war and deprivation—exotic.” This evokes some of the comments made by Kabbani (1986) and Said (1978) in their respective description of the fascination that the Orient has always held for voyeurs and visitors, but Scott does demonstrate some self-awareness of the connections he has been trained to make, admitting that exoticism “has long been part of the appeal of what we parochially call foreign films, but our tendency to perceive the beauty and drama of other lands through the veil of mystery has its dangers.”

Interestingly and perhaps ironically, the Afghan-Canadian heroine’s concealment of her tape recorder—into which she whispers her story—in her *burqa* is reminiscent of the stories of women who participated in the Algerian resistance using their veils to

conceal weapons, as retold by Fanon (1959). Scott does not offer such connections but says that *Kandahar* meets a need on the part of Americans to find out anything they can about Islam and the Middle East, praising the movie as “it illuminates not by offering analysis but rather by bearing witness to the brutality of the war and to the condition of women under Taliban rule.” He finishes by describing the last shot in *Kandahar*—one “of the sun, seen through the mesh of a burka” as a “powerful visual symbol,” as indeed it has proved to be. It is worth noting the variety of venues in which mentions of women’s issues have arisen throughout the coverage, from film reviews to discussions of party planning to, in the next item, stories about vehicles.

No23c is an article by John F. Burns on the popularity of certain four-wheel-drive trucks among the Taliban. The story points out the ironies of the simple life, divorced from Northern values, that the Taliban espouse in comparison with their vehicles of choice: “From their Land Cruisers and Hiluxes,” Burns remarks, “the Taliban were ready to leap down and beat women for showing a glimpse of ankle or to lock a man in a shipping container for three weeks until his beard grew to the approved length.” As with Heather Mallick, the satire plays upon familiar themes and succinctly re-states ideas that may already be held by others, including models of the Taliban—and perhaps other Southern or Muslim men—as perennially poised to launch an attack against women.

No23d is more serious in tone. Entitled “Helping countries, and people, to heal,” the item offers a profile of Paul van Zyl, a program director for the International Center for Transitional Justice. Van Zyl reiterates what so many others have said, “that any public reckoning in Afghanistan must give special attention to the repression of women.” Though van Zyl’s comments are relatively inoffensive, the decision to focus on figures

like him, white male elites, rather than speaking to grassroots political or feminist activists, for instance, recalls van Dijk's contention that "the actions of white elites that are defined as 'positive' for minorities are usually covered prominently... 'our' helping 'them' is a very newsworthy topic" (1996, p. 93).

Though there is no discussion of help from elites in No23e, another film review by A.O. Scott, Fernea's images of oppression and confinement to a backwards society are highly apt here (1998, p. 92). This particular review is focussed on the movie *Jung (War) in the Land of the Mujahedeen*, one which "provides ample evidence of the Taliban's cruelty. Women whose villages have, in the film, been liberated from Taliban control still wear their burkas just in case their oppressors return." This is yet another echo of Khan's notion that liberation from Islam comes in the form of unveiling (1995, p. 151), and of Northern fascination with this topic when so many other misfortunes surround the villages and the women of whom Scott speaks.

November 24, 2001

In No24a, "Afghans in U.S. seek role in forming homeland government," Sarah Kershaw returns to the issue of Americans and Afghan governance, but with a difference: this time the Americans under discussion are originally from Afghanistan, and they are attempting to participate in the new government. Eventually, through what appears to be a somewhat fractious process, delegates are elected in various parts of the United States for the purpose of securing a role in Afghanistan's new government. In the case of the Northeastern part of the U.S., ten delegates are selected for the Northeast for the electoral college, and of these, six are male, four female. One of the women is a doctor who came to the United States as a refugee and rarely paid attention to politics, but now finds it

obligatory to do so, given how dire the situation is. This article seems to indicate that on the American side, at least, contributions to the reconstruction effort are taking gender into account.

If Kershaw's article discusses the process of rebuilding for the future, David Rohde's No24b ("On paper scraps, talk of Judgment Day and words to friends at home") looks to the past, describing the contents of letters written by Al-Qaeda members and now available to reporters for viewing. One Afghan member addresses his family with the following words: "My great father, don't be upset, this is the men's task, not the women's, who are sitting in the houses. We will meet each other in paradise." Another apparent member of Al-Qaeda living in Afghanistan mentions in his letter that his free time is being spent with his wife and children. This is one of the few references to women, and a far more benign one than is often found when Al-Qaeda members are quoted on the topic of the opposite sex. Nonetheless, the overall effect of the article is to strengthen the impression of Al-Qaeda, but also the Taliban, as radical and irrational, confirming the topos of the Southern Muslim man as savage and incomprehensible (Karim, 1997, pp. 156-159, 166, 177).

No24c is particularly interesting in that, like *The Globe and Mail*, it provides an editorial—"Liberating the women of Afghanistan"—that discusses women's rights and affirms that

America did not go to war in Afghanistan so that women there could once again feel the sun on their faces, but the reclaimed freedom of Afghan women is a collateral benefit that Americans can celebrate. After five years of Taliban rule, women in Afghanistan are uncovering their faces, looking for jobs, walking happily with female friends on the street and even hosting a news show on Afghan television.

In other words, the situation of Afghan women must be vastly improved because there are ostensible signs that it has moved closer to one that can be recognized by Northerners, though underneath the surface lie more pressing issues, which are addressed as the editorial moves on. First, however, dress as a symbol of oppression is cited yet again:

The Taliban leadership did all it could to erase the dignity of women. Women were banned from working or leaving the house without a male relative. The burka, a full-length body tent that left women barely able to see, became required outdoor dress. About 50,000 Afghan widows were in danger of hunger, as they had no relative to support them and for most of the Taliban's rule could not work or even beg. Women doctors were often prohibited from practicing medicine, and men were limited in their ability to treat women. It was not always so. The 20th century brought great gains for some Afghan women. Women have been members of Parliament and cabinet ministers, and some recent constitutions have called for equal rights. Before the Taliban, half of university students and government workers were women, and 50 percent of doctors. But Afghanistan has never been Sweden. Freedoms have been available mainly to the small urban middle class, and have always been limited by traditional customs and underdevelopment intensified by war. Many women in Kabul still wear their burkas—because they always have, or because their families demand it.

This distinction is again an important one, as is the fact that Afghanistan has never really enjoyed total freedom that was lost with the Taliban's rise to power. However, it is noticeable that no mention is made of the turmoil caused prior to the Taliban's installation, turmoil that can be attributed to both the Soviet Union and the United States.

"Rural women will benefit little from the Taliban's fall," the editorial comments frankly, debunking some of the myths that have arisen elsewhere. "Education and health care will not suddenly appear in the countryside because they were never present there, even before the Taliban. Few Americans would be shocked to learn that only 6 percent of school-age Afghan girls attend school, but in 1990, the figure was only 19 percent—and only 35 percent for boys..." Here is where discussion of some of the most important issues finally deepens:

Poor countries around the world have found that spending money on health, education and income-generation programs like microcredit for women is the most efficient way to reduce poverty. This is because a woman's progress also helps her family. Women spend their money on their children. As women get education and health care, enter the work force and increase their power in the family and society, they have fewer and healthier children. Also, because women are poorer than men, each dollar spent on them means proportionately more.

The writers add that

[w]omen's political participation will make Afghanistan a more democratic and less radical nation, as women prefer a more moderate form of Islam. Plenty of women have skills and experience running programs, in pre-Taliban Afghanistan and currently in refugee communities and in exile. Afghanistan's new administration not only must be committed to women's freedom and well-being, it also should include women in positions where they can influence their country's future.

The comment regarding the potential for Afghanistan to become less radical due to women's preference for moderate forms of Islam may be true, though it seems a rather sweeping generalization. Certainly it would seem like one to Margaret Wente, in her column labelling Taliban-supporting women in Pakistan as "Muslim matrons of jihad" who, she is appalled to say, are "turning to the certainties of fundamentalist Islam. They are voluntarily donning the veil and the *burqa*, voluntarily giving up their professions and returning to their homes, voluntarily withdrawing their daughters from Westernized private schools and sending them to study the Koran" (2001a, p. A19). To some degree, the characterization the editorial provides does align well with descriptions such as Ahmed's, in which she argues that there "are two quite different Islams, an Islam that is in some sense a women's Islam and an official, textual Islam, a 'men's' Islam," though it should be noted that Ahmed is offering her experience of the men and women she recalls from her childhood in Egypt (1999, p. 123).

Thus, there may be some justification for arguing that women practise Islam differently than men, but there is also the potential, in endorsing the notion that women do not subscribe to radical forms of Islam but instead suffer from its effects, for validating topoi of Muslim women as ones who are robbed of choice. This is not to say that the editorial writers are incorrect, but the evidence that leads them to such a broad conclusion about the thousands of Muslim women in the world is not apparent, and unsubstantiated generalizations are what feed the myths discussed so far, and may continue to perpetrate them. MacLeod's comments in relation to Middle Eastern women may be applied here, as well, to the extent that both women and Islam are more complex than what is conveyed in the editorial's suggestion that Muslim women's collective attitude can be known:

From the Western vantage point, women in the Middle East have been pitied as the victims of a difficult and oppressive cultural milieu, usually mechanically equated with the Islamic religion. They are perceived as downtrodden, repressed, and severely constrained victims, and the ultimate symbol of their oppression is the veil. Yet, as anyone who has known Middle Eastern women quickly realizes, this picture is impossible to reconcile with the assertive behavior and influential position of women in many Middle Eastern settings. (MacLeod, 1991, p. 17)

This quote does not deny that Afghan women may be committed to a more moderate form of Islam than, for example, the Taliban or even members of the Northern Alliance. In fact, it is to be hoped that this is true, but MacLeod's comment should serve as a reminder that it is impossible to effectively express these women's beliefs for them, and it is useful to avoid the trap of assuming that Muslim women's silence on many issues necessarily translates into moderation, no matter how neatly this assumption conforms to the twin images of the subjugated female and extremist male of Islam.

As in the editorial, No24d by Anthony Lewis addresses the war's outcome, and praises its "military and moral" success, saying that it is clear that "this is a necessary war, a just war." He contradicts those who

have depicted America as a bully targeting Afghanistan without adequate justification, careless of its people because they have different religious and cultural values. The truth, we know now, is that most Afghans were the victims of Taliban cruelty so harsh that it has to be called psychopathic. Beating women for going out of their homes alone to get food, for example. The photographs taken in cities freed from Taliban rule show exultant faces.

The model of victimization at the hands of the Taliban, with women cited as the obvious and immediate example of such victimization, is strengthened by the mention of the psychopathic cruelty so typical of the fundamentalist, vicious Muslim man. The freedom that is accompanied by unalloyed joy appears to align with the notion of myth, offering an implication that Northern liberators should be praised and that no other obstacles need to be addressed. It should be noted that Lewis is not uniformly uncritical of the Bush administration, following his glowing tribute with criticism of the encroachment on civil liberties proposed by Bush's military tribunals. The passage praising the war's success contrasts the government's democratic values abroad with its infringement of those same values at a domestic level.

No24e, an article entitled "In Herat, TV man is king, veil seller is lonely," returns to the mundane realities that underscore an existence no longer controlled by the Taliban in Herat, where televisions are selling briskly but *burqas* are not: "Many of the burka merchants opened their shops when the Taliban came to power. But now that the Taliban are gone, so, too, is a captive market. In the past two weeks, prices have dropped in half, and the average number of burkas sold each day has slipped to 5, from 20." Taliban strictures ensured that "burkas were made to be cheap, since every woman had to buy

one. They sold for \$6 to \$10, although there were also finer handmade ones that cost as much as \$30. Most women would buy only one burka, using it until it wore out, although a bride traditionally would be given one by her own family and one by her husband's." This last mention reminds the reader that the *burqa*, however vilified it has been in the media as a symbol of Taliban control, does have a role in the cultural traditions of Afghanistan, and need not be seen as an evil when its use is not dictated.

The writer notes that "[t]he number of burka shops had already been declining over the last six months because roads to some cities, including Kabul, had become hard to travel, making it difficult to fulfill orders. But now, with reports that women in Kabul were tearing off their veils, things were really looking bad," then says humourously that "somehow, many of Herat's men seem to be scraping up enough cash for another hot commodity on Pay Hassar Street—pictures, akin to baseball cards, of mostly Indian actresses and singers. The faces of the Afghan women passing by as the men flip through the cards are still covered up. The faces of the women on the cards most definitely are not." The dramatic description of Kabul's newly emancipated women "tearing off their veils" is perhaps an appropriate way to conclude the coverage of this news week, as it demonstrates yet again that many details of so-called liberation can be cited in ways convenient for journalists and politicians. Like *The Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times* consistently returns to the issue of women's rights and specifically to veiling as a method of reducing Afghanistan's myriad problems to the meanings inscribed on the bodies of its women. *The New York Times*, however, has the ability to do this in even greater volume and to reach an even higher number of readers.

Discussion

In many ways, the findings of the *Times* analysis are expected, but they do contain some surprises. It was unsurprising to find that the sheer volume of articles referring to Afghan women was higher than that found in *The Globe and Mail*. Within these articles, the stereotypes identified in previous chapters are evident, but there is a greater degree of ambivalence than might be expected from a newspaper based in, and highly representative of, the United States. Naturally, the omission of the November 18 coverage may be significant here, but a tendency to offer well-rounded reporting throughout the week cannot be completely negated by skewed commentary on a single day, even if the edition published on Sunday is known for its in-depth stories. Omission aside, these articles do still demonstrate many of the trends that scholars of race and media so deplore. The very intensity of *The New York Times*' spotlight on the topic of women and Afghanistan is significant in and of itself, leading one to suspect that el Saadawi knew whereof she spoke when she said that the "West, in a sense, encourages Islam—not its most progressive aspects, but its most reactionary and superficial aspects, such as the veil. Political and economic struggles are interpreted as religious, although they are not really religious at core. This often diverts attention from the real issues of liberation which are at stake" (1986, p. 271).

This statement rings true more often than not in the coverage, at least as sampled here. However, it is not always correct. Some of the news items examined do make an attempt at discussing "the real issues" and several succeed. The extra space devoted by *The Times*, and the variety of articles available, may be two of the reasons that *The Times* actually seems to exhibit slightly more diversity than *The Globe and Mail* in its

comments regarding the problems faced in Afghanistan. However, despite the fact that it is successful in some significant ways in addressing context and history in the issues dividing Afghanistan, *The Times*' sample also does not seem to possess a single article that displays the kind of depth and, arguably, the comprehension of Afghanistan's deeper issues found in items such as the profile of Kathy Gannon, discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, the criticisms that are raised are phrased delicately and do not carry the weight or biting quality of the objections raised by dissenters such as Rick Salutin.

Conversely, *The Times* mentions facts that *The Globe* almost entirely ignores, at least in the sample reviewed for this study. The public relations campaign launched by the Bush administration in order to raise the profile of Afghan women is discussed much more extensively in *The Times*, triggering a response from readers. *The Globe*, contrarily, makes only passing references to this story that do not address the issue of possible political motivations in the same detail employed by, for instance, Elisabeth Bumiller. A reader of *The Globe*, in the news week examined here, would be unlikely to suspect that the attention devoted to issues surrounding the female population of Afghanistan was at least partly the product of careful media management, and would be even less likely to speculate that this attention might be linked to poor polling numbers for President Bush with women voters.

Arguably, *The Globe* cannot be expected to exhibit such detail with regard to another country's administration, but its articles and editorials suggest that it has already identified itself with the United States in its comments regarding women. In fact, *The Globe* sometimes seems to approach the United States' actions concerning Afghan women less critically than does *The Times*, a somewhat surprising finding given the fact

that *The Globe*, as a Canadian newspaper, is less substantially involved in the conflict and might be able to use its distance to its advantage in offering critical interpretations of important issues. In fact, the opposite seems to occur: the consistent recurrence of certain phrases and stories in the two newspapers appears to indicate that *The Globe* has merely reprinted or borrowed some of its material from *The New York Times*. These similarities are by no means uncommon amongst many newspapers, given the high level of dependence on a limited number of news wire agencies and increasingly slender budgets that often cause smaller newspapers to draw upon other media sources for their stories, rather than employing more correspondents and operating more foreign news bureaus. The next chapter will analyze *Dawn* closely in order to determine whether its coverage reiterates many of the themes already discussed, or whether, in this case, geographical distance from the United States combines with proximity to the scene of the conflict to provide an entirely different perspective on the war in Afghanistan, and the role of women.

Chapter 6

Too Close for Comfort: Analysis of Pakistan's *Dawn*

Dawn is Pakistan's largest English-language daily, and was included in this analysis on the basis that Pakistan's unique situation might result in a different approach to the issue of Afghan women than that seen in major North American newspapers. Pakistan, located next to the Afghan border, faced the possibility that thousands of Afghans would seek refuge in Pakistan, as well as the potential for discord within its largely Muslim population. Though Pakistan officially declared itself an ally of the United States during the conflict in Afghanistan, there was a distinct risk that not all of the population would support this stance. Al-Qaeda's attempt to rally support from Muslims around the world had the potential to resonate with Pakistani Muslims, in the event that some disputed the view that the United States was a friend to their country. Unlike Canada, which shares a border and many similar cultural values with the United States, Pakistan might find more similarities with its Taliban neighbours than with a distant North American superpower that does not normally look to Pakistan for aid or partnership. Moreover, the human rights scenario that won favour with many North Americans might not be as convincing in Pakistan, where women often do veil or cover their heads to varying degrees, though generally not to the extent seen in Afghanistan. Thus, Pakistanis might not react in the same way as Northerners regarding the reported injustices suffered by Muslim women generally and those who wear the veil specifically.

To this end, *Dawn* was selected as the third newspaper in this analysis. Unlike *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times*, *Dawn* was not searched electronically to

determine a time period in which its coverage of Afghan women was highest. Given its relative inaccessibility in Canada through traditional databases such as LexisNexis, *Dawn* had to be retrieved through its website (www.dawn.com). Searching by topic proved to be cumbersome, and was abandoned in favour of determining the time period through electronic searches of the other two newspapers, then returning to *Dawn*'s Internet-based archive in order to search the stories from that particular period. The results produced a total of 25 articles that mentioned both "women" and "Afghanistan," of which four appeared on the first day of coverage, November 17th, followed by one on the 19th, three on the 20th, two on the 21st, six on the 22nd and one on the 23rd. On the final day, November 24th, eight articles were published, the highest number of articles for the week. It may be useful to note beforehand that the following articles contain several minor grammatical errors. Though these have been indicated where necessary, they do not impede comprehension and are likely due to the difficulties of writing for an English-language audience when based in a country where other languages, such as Urdu, are more commonly used. Likewise, abbreviations occasionally appear in place of words that would normally be spelled out fully in either *The Globe and Mail* or *The New York Times*, but these seem unlikely to affect understanding.

November 17, 2001

In N17a, Saleem Shahid quotes Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, the Secretary-General of what appears to be an activist group opposed to the war, Jamiat Ulema Islam. Haideri criticizes American actions, stating that "United States President Bush was responsible for killing [sic] of thousands of innocent Afghans, including women and children. He said history would never forgive the US president." This is the first of

several mentions of Afghan women in an almost completely different context than that seen previously in *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times*. While there is still some emphasis on victimization, it is not necessarily limited to women only, and it is not victimization caused by Muslim men, which is another significant departure. The next article, likewise, does not evoke the Muslim female victim seen so frequently thus far. In N17b, a staff correspondent¹⁶ discusses the need to monitor the border strictly for signs of armed people attempting to cross into Pakistan, stating that the “border with Afghanistan was sealed but, under the government policy, Pakistan was allowing only old, women, children, disabled and injured to cross into Pakistan and a temporary protection camp was established with the help of the UNHCR at Killi Faizo, Chaman, for them,” and adding that “[t]he government has registered 794 Afghans in the relief centre during the last four days—137 men, 262 women and 395 children under 12 years of age,” according to a spokesman for the Baluchistan¹⁷ government.

In N17c, however, the issue of women’s rights surges back into the spotlight. The article is actually an Opinion column by Arundhati Roy, significant in two respects, the first being that she is cited by Marcus Gee in *The Globe and Mail* analysis (see Nov20b) for her feminist objections to the war, and the second being the fact that her condemnation of the war has been well-publicized, possibly due to her celebrity as a bestselling, critically acclaimed novelist. It is also worth noting that Roy’s column is included in *Dawn* despite the fact that she is Indian and India-Pakistan relations were

¹⁶ *Dawn* differs slightly from *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times* in the respect that it will sometimes attribute stories to Our Staff Correspondent or Our Staff Reporter without providing a specific name. I have tried to provide authorial information wherever possible.

¹⁷ Note that I have used Baluchistan here as it is a commonly recognized spelling, but the spelling used in *Dawn* is Balochistan.

especially tense during this time period. The inclusion may be due simply to her fame, or to the fact that an editor at *Dawn* finds her views particularly relevant or important. In this piece, Roy opens by pointing out the role that the United States and the former Soviet Union played in installing the Taliban in Afghanistan, then continues by elaborating on the consequences of the Taliban's

regime of terror. Its first victims were its own people, particularly women. It closed down girls' schools, dismissed women from government jobs, and enforced sharia laws under which women deemed to be 'immoral' are stoned to death, and widows guilty of being adulterous are buried alive. After all that has happened, can there be anything more ironic than Russia and America joining hands to re-destroy Afghanistan? The question is, can you destroy destruction?

This is certainly a much more acerbic approach to the war than that offered by any of *The New York Times* writers, and is even more direct than the questions posed by *Globe* writers such as Kathy Gannon or Rick Salutin. Roy delves into historical reasons for the Taliban's ascent to power in Afghanistan in a way that is not addressed even peripherally in *The Times'* coverage. It may be significant as well that Roy is one of the few commentators who refers to women's oppression without instantly invoking the veil as a symbol of that oppression.

Roy's column will be the only one of the day to mount such an impassioned argument against the war, but N17d does return to women's rights, though briefly. In this Agence France-Press article, the unnamed reporter interviews residents of Kabul for their feelings regarding the meaning of Ramadan¹⁸ in the light of recent events, including the apparent defeat of the Taliban. One woman, Rashila Kurshid, is quoted as saying that for

““Afghan women this week has already been all about a feeling of renewal, of turning a

¹⁸ Ramadan is another commonly recognized spelling, thus its use here, but it differs slightly from *Dawn's* spelling of Ramazan. Where choice was available, I have used Ramadan, but in cases of direct quotation, I have used *Dawn's* spelling.

new page, and that is what Ramazan means,’ said Kurshid who, despite the ousting of the Taliban, was still dressed in Burqa.”¹⁹ This is the first reference to the *burqa*, and it is unclear if any covert meaning is intended. It is possible that this may indicate one of the failures of the war, in that veiling has not ceased, or it may indicate approval that the practice of veiling persists. However, the mention is so brief that it is impossible to interpret whether or not it carries any special meaning. Nonetheless, it does indicate that the *burqa* holds enough importance in Pakistani coverage to be mentioned in *Dawn* as well as in Northern media. This article is also worth noting in that the questions about Ramadan mention the Muslim religion in a more dispassionate context than in discussions of extremism.

November 19, 2001

N19a, “Afghans unwilling to go back home,” is an Agence France-Presse article about the difficulties faced by refugees and exiles returning to Afghanistan to rebuild following what, in some cases, has been a protracted absence. In Pakistan alone, the government estimates that “three million Afghans have crossed the border since the 1979-89 Soviet occupation and ensuing civil war.”

One of the difficulties lies in the anticipation of a cultural clash, as an interview with one doctor in Peshawar demonstrates. She cautions that returning exiles must show patience and display modesty, rather than expecting that Afghans will have suddenly changed their behaviour: “‘Afghanistan is and will remain an Islamic country. Women in particular must not expect a rapid change in mentalities,’ commented the doctor before a

¹⁹ As noted in previous chapters, I have replicated “*burqa*” in each of these news items as it appears; in this case, the capitalization and lack of italics appear to represent the only difference between the cited version and that used throughout this thesis.

friend added: 'If she was at her home in Nangarhar she would not even be allowed to sit in the same room as the men.'" The article reminds the reader that "[t]he treatment of women was a symbol of the ultra-conservative Taliban, but many observers highlight that even without them Afghan society remains very traditional."

Even in *Dawn*, there is a clear demarcation between traditional and modern values, as defined by an Eastern/Western split: "'I am Afghan, my roots are Afghan, and I will probably die in this country,' said another woman in her thirties, who has lived in the United States for a long time. 'But I know more than ever that I could never marry an Afghan, I am too free and independent,' she added. 'People like me brought up western-style will have difficulties getting back into this society.'" Such distinctions, then, between the independent and free West, rather than a repressive East, are not the sole preserve of Northern/Western journalists.

November 20, 2001

In N20a, Syed Refaat—a former lieutenant-general in Pakistan's army—returns to the difficulties of governing a country that has been racked by instability and that has had previous negative experience with the Northern Alliance. Despite his foreboding title, "The political vacuum in Afghanistan," Refaat does provide a note of optimism, adding that in Mazare-i-Sharif, there is confidence among the people: "Confident, locals [sic] males ran to the barbershops to shave off their beards, and women have come out of the suffocation of solitary, segregated confinement imposed upon them by the Taliban." The description of Muslim women as oppressed, then, is common to Pakistani media as well as North American media, though thus far it is neither as frequent, nor as quickly generalized to Muslim extremist tendencies.

Rather than dwelling as strongly on the figure of the downtrodden Muslim woman as did *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times*, *Dawn* seems to devote more attention to the consequences and aftermath of the conflict in Afghanistan, highlighting the almost universal plight of the beleaguered country's people. N20b is another good example of this, quoting UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson's request that the Northern Alliance demonstrate more respect for human rights. Robinson's comments follow reports of Alliance fighters killing Taliban soldiers who had already surrendered, as well as raping women and looting. No critical commentary is attached to this report, which appears to have been provided by Agence France-Presse, but the facts alone do indicate that the tendency to polarize, placing the Alliance on the side of good works and reconstruction efforts, as opposed to the evil and destructive Taliban, appears to be misguided.

N20c, an Associated Press of Pakistan item, demonstrates the difficulty Pakistan is experiencing in patrolling its border, and also points out the dire straits that many Afghans find themselves in following the war. The news item recounts that Baluchistan authorities arrested suspects at the border, some of whom were armed, and adds that others were recently arrested, including five women, one of whom was Afghan. The story estimates that 6,000 of the new refugees in Baluchistan are being housed in a staging camp, 70 percent of whom are women and children. Only sick, handicapped and other people in need of urgent help are permitted to stay in the camp, which suggests that a fairly high number of people fit this category, while an even higher number require assistance of a less urgent kind.

November 21, 2001

N21a, by a staff reporter, demonstrates some contradictions between its headline and the actual content of its story. The item is titled “Taliban not to be part of future setup: US sure of broad-based govt,” and does quote a spokesman for the Coalition Information Services, identified as Mr. Keith. Keith stated that “women formed 60 per cent of the Afghan population and added that in any new political dispensation he wanted ‘in the very least’ the same role for them that they enjoyed before the Taliban came to power.” Having confirmed the same view that the Bush administration has stated repeatedly in its comments to the media, Keith then adds a qualifier: “we are not in a position to dictate how a society should develop.” The broad-based government that the United States is so sure of in the headline, then, may or may not become an eventual reality, but the certainty expressed in the headline may leave a lingering impression in the mind of readers, given that not all readers scrutinize entire articles, relying instead on the headline to provide a barometer of the subject’s importance and relevance (van Dijk, 1991, pp. 51-52).

In N21b, “No solution in sight,” Dr. Iffat Malik’s opinion piece returns to the question of the political instability so evident in Afghanistan, apparently a central concern in Pakistan. The latter is not only in a convenient position for the close observation of Afghanistan’s problems, but may also feel a stronger degree of interest in the details as these problems can become, to a certain extent, those of Pakistan as well. Despite his list of concerns, Dr. Malik does not regret the fall of the Taliban, saying that

[t]here is little [sic] to mourn the passing of the Taliban government. They did bring peace and order to the regions that they conquered. But they extracted a terrible price out of the people for it. The compulsory “shuttle-cocking” of women, men being forced to grow beards and pray, ban on music, chess, TV and

innumerable other pursuits—all these were the lighter burdens of Taliban rule. There were many far more brutal, far more horrific aspects. Saira Shah's film "Behind the Veil" aired recently on CNN, [sic] gave a glimpse into Taliban brutality. Recall the summary execution of a burqa-clad woman, and the young boy skinned alive. The Taliban will not be missed.

Dr. Malik's interpretation is remarkable in the sense that few commentators have suggested that the wearing of the *burqa* is among the "lighter burdens" faced by Afghans under the Taliban. As seen previously, North American coverage has treated this practice, on several occasions, as one of the worst examples of suffering that can be contemplated, and have subsequently emphasized this issue to the extent that it overshadows all other aspects of being a Muslim woman. The difference in perspectives may be due, however, to the fact that head coverings and some degree of veiling are far more common in predominantly Muslim Pakistan than in North America, so that the wearing of the head-to-toe *burqa* prescribed by the Taliban could seem extreme, distasteful or even wrong, but it would not appear alien to the same extent as in North America.

November 22, 2001

N22a again returns to the issue of the disaffected following the military and political turmoil that has further ravaged Afghanistan, as indicated immediately by its stark headline. The article, entitled "Kandahar bombing creates more refugees," is written by Jonathan Steele. Interviewing a man who has left his home due to continued U.S. bombing, Steele is struck by the fact that the man's wife also contributes a comment, "in a break in the tradition among uneducated Afghans which prevents women from addressing male strangers, even in their husband's presence." "Desperation," however, "bends the rules and she pleaded with us for help," Steele says. The inclusion of this break from tradition may demonstrate the fact that the refugees' desperation is such that

they depart from normal practice, or Steele may have cited it merely in order to accentuate the extent of the difference between cultural norms in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In N22b, entitled “Four groups to attend Afghan talks in Bonn,” Masood Haider introduces more specific details about the process of establishing a temporary Afghan government than those found in the *Globe* or *Times* coverage. He lists the processes, as they are called, that will be included in talks sponsored by the United Nations to help create an interim government for Afghanistan. The processes are the Northern Alliance, the Rome process anchored by the former King Zaher Shah,²⁰ the Peshawar Convention and the Cyprus group, a combination of refugees and members of the Afghan diaspora. Haider notes that “an aide to the king said he would send a high-ranking delegation which could include a woman—marking a distinction with the fundamentalist Taliban which kept women at home.” There is thus some consciousness of the importance placed on the status of women in this particular conflict.

N22c is an article about an agreement reached between the Northern Alliance and the United Nations regarding security for the latter’s staff, but also mentions other points discussed between the two groups. For example, UN Regional Coordinator for Afghanistan Michael Sackett said that Northern Alliance foreign minister “Dr. Abdullah welcomed the Afghan women’s participation in society’s affairs and assured the UN that there would be no restriction on the employment of Afghan women by the UN agencies. Dr. Abdullah also agreed that the chador was acceptable street attire for Afghan women and burqa was no longer mandatory, he said.” Again, veiling is a crucial issue, and here a

²⁰ Again, note a small difference in spelling here. *The Globe and Mail* uses Zaher Shah while *Dawn* uses Zahir Shah for the former king’s name.

representative of the Northern Alliance has issued reassurance that the *burqa* will not be required, though there is no suggestion of the complete elimination of head coverings.

N22d (“JI leader’s detention challenged in SHC”), by a staff reporter, is another article about a religious party opposed to the war, though there is not a great amount of context provided so it is unclear what kind of actions the party has taken to express their objections. What is clear is that Liaquat Baloch, the deputy chief of Jamaat-i-Islami, was detained, a detention that he is now protesting. The lack of history in the article suggests that his party is often a source of news and thus need not be discussed at length, while his detention also implies that the protests mounted by the party have not been received kindly. In his appeal, Baloch “contended that thousands of innocent men, women and children had been brutally killed or have [sic] maimed and millions have been rendered homeless and chastity of Muslim women and dignity of human beings was at stake.” As mentioned previously, the selected *Dawn* coverage includes 25 articles mentioning Afghan women, equal to the number of articles in *The Globe and Mail*, but this does not necessarily reflect an equivalent amount of interest in the topic of women as victims. Instead, *Dawn*’s citations of Afghan women seem to be divided more evenly than in the other two newspapers, and one category that recurs frequently is a concern with the effects of the war on these women. Though *Dawn*’s writers do acknowledge the freedom that Afghan women have now achieved, they also mention the losses that Afghanistan has endured in human terms, and the hardships that its survivors now face.

It is clear that such concerns extend far and wide, with the Punjab chapter of the Pak-Afghan Council discussing the situation in which displaced Afghans find themselves, in N22e, “Provincial chapter of Pak-Afghan Council.” The staff reporter

opens by saying that the Council's Punjab chapter has now been announced, and discusses resolutions at the council's first meeting: "the council's Punjab chapter condemned the government for what it said disallowing Afghan people including women and children to enter Pakistan. All such refugees should be welcomed to mitigate their sufferings, it demanded." This illustrates the concern that various groups in Pakistan feel for the Afghans' plight, but also demonstrates the fact that Pakistan's government feels a need to impose restrictions on the number of refugees flowing over its border. The level of attention devoted to the topic serves as a reminder that Canada and the United States will not necessarily have to confront the consequences of the Afghan people's problems, but Pakistan will find itself coping with many of the repercussions even if it does not officially volunteer aid. Perspectives, including the extent to which it is possible to feel support for the war, can be affected by such realities.

N22f, entitled "Kabul TV back on air," is an editorial about the recently restored Kabul TV, a restoration seen as a positive sign of social change in the newly liberated Afghanistan:

On the Afghan state television, female newscasters appeared wearing the traditional headscarf and dress conforming to the cultural norms of a Muslim society. Which made one wonder why the Taliban had banned the television in the first place. There has been no public display of profanity in Afghanistan since the lifting of the ban on TV, radio and cinema, and on women's right to work or be seen at public places—rights that women enjoy across the Muslim world.

This editorial represents a significant departure from other pieces in North American media that have implied that the Taliban's repressive regime was merely one example of widespread restrictions on Muslim women everywhere. This is particularly true of articles such as Margaret Wente's (Nov24c) in *The Globe and Mail*, or two letters to the editor and the editorial in *The New York Times* (No20c, No24c, No24e).

Since comparisons have been made in the Northern coverage between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, and the differing treatment allotted to each by the United States, it is worth investigating the connections drawn by *Dawn*:

TV and radio are not banned even in a country like Saudi Arabia, where the Shari'a is the supreme law of the land. Clearly, the Taliban's obsessive moral policing of the Afghan people had less to do with enforcing the precepts of Islam and more with their ignorance of the spirit behind these precepts. In fact, it seemed the Taliban saw and practised religion more as a tool of political oppression, subscribing to a minoritarian narrow interpretation that could only be sanctified by primordial tribal customs rather than by any informed religious scholarship.

This excerpt offers a contradiction of what sometimes appears to be a common Northern belief, that the Taliban established their strict rules by basing them upon very traditional interpretations of Islam. This myth suggests their other educational shortcomings did not limit the Taliban's ability to engage in the study of religious fundamentals. Another myth, which emphasizes the necessity for Afghan women to move into modern times by rejecting tradition, is pointedly addressed in the following commentary:

Thus, the lifting of these senseless restrictions in the Northern Alliance-controlled territories is a welcome step. However, some western media commentators, who continue to complain that the Afghan women are not yet fully "liberated," need to be circumspect: Afghan women will remain Afghan and will refuse to fit the cultural and political moulds cast for them by foreigners.

This final statement can be seen as a word of warning to perceived outsiders, advising them of the fact that their cultural and political examples are neither useful to, nor wanted by, the people of Afghanistan, or it can be seen as a more gentle extension of the argument against ethnocentric tendencies, and a reminder that cultural sensitivity is required in dealings with Afghans. Contrarily, it can also be seen as a potential warning to the people of Afghanistan, advising that they make every effort to avoid conforming to those moulds created by foreigners.

November 23, 2001

The ambivalence experienced by other Muslims and Southerners regarding the war is clear in articles such as N23a, entitled “Seminar slams USA, Taliban.” The writer, a staff correspondent, relates that “[s]peakers at a seminar on elimination of terrorism and violation of human rights held here the other day by Human Rights Network Sindh (HRNS), an affiliate of Jamaat Islami, strongly condemned American bombardment on Afghanistan and termed it terrorism.” However, “[o]ther speakers also condemned human rights violation [sic] in Afghanistan but some of them were also critical about the narrow mindedness of the Taliban regime regarding women and modern education.” In Pakistan, as in North America, observers of the war are sharply divided on the issues of greatest importance in the war.

November 24, 2001

N24a, written by Jawaid Bokhari, reveals the details of the World Bank strategy for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, which

would have both short-term and medium-term components. Short-term priority areas include: Agricultural recovery, generation of livelihoods for returning refugees and displaced people, supporting existing communities through provision of basic services and small-scale development and empowerment programmes, rapid rehabilitation of main road network, expansion of de-mining programme, massive short-run employment generation through public works programme, re-starting and expanding key social services like education and health with a focus of reaching girls and women and human capacity mobilization for social services, infrastructure and public administration.

Again, there is an emphasis on the rights of women, though Bokhari is careful to note that education and health levels are poor for males and females alike. He cites statistics that place primary school enrolment for boys at a rate of approximately 39 percent, while girls register an even more dismal three percent, with secondary level enrolment even poorer.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan is home to the world's highest rate of infant mortality, coupled with a life expectancy of 41 years. Moreover, war has another outcome that has not been discussed at length in any of the articles examined so far in this study: "The country has the largest population of disabled [sic] in the world because of direct or indirect consequence of war."

Bokhari goes on to list some of the further disadvantages under which Afghans labour:

The background information provided by the W[orld] B[ank] paper describes Afghanistan as landlocked, mountainous, remote, sparsely populated, ethnically diverse and yet geopolitically important country. It has long been the poorest country, falling near the bottom in terms of average per-capita income and UNDP's²¹ human development index. Afghanistan was at peace between 1930s and 1970s and underwent a modest degree of economic and social development.

Clearly, despite the fact that Afghan women are indeed entitled to more freedom and equal rights, they must also overcome life-threatening challenges that exist in part because of misguided interventions in the past by the very same people who now claim to be liberating them.

N24b is another Opinion piece, written this time by Masud Mufti and headed "Lesson from the fall of Kabul." Like Kathy Gannon and the human rights organizations that find themselves torn in two directions, Mufti also reaches the conclusion that the war has been simplified to an unrealistic extent in an attempt to erase obvious contradictions. He attacks Bush's polarized us-or-them proposition, saying that many thinking people are capable of objecting to both war and to the Taliban's extremism. Mufti demonstrates a recognition of the mythic structures and dramatic elements framing this story, commenting that the fall of Kabul "may signify the fall of the Taliban, but is in fact the

²¹ United Nations Development Programme

first scene of a gradually unfolding drama, which portrays the Muslims as villains and the ‘American interests’ as the hero. With the rise of each curtain future scenes will show the villain being subjected to as much poetic justice as the moralistic jargon and the sadistic nature of the hero can inflict.” In more general criticisms of the war, he says that “the mightiest superpower on earth is pouring hell from the skies on innocent men, women and children (whose number for [sic] exceeds the innocent deaths of September 11); and the apparently defeated government of the poorest country in the world is vowing to destroy the invader, in spite of its near zero military capability and nil arsenal.”

M. P. Bhandara, a former member of the National Assembly, therefore a personality who might be considered a known (Gans cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 48-49) in the Pakistani context, also contributes to the Opinion page in a separate item, N24c, called “Deeper into Afghan chaos?” Again, Bhandara notes that the Taliban was not always the enemy, and that some Afghans once saw it as an organization that would bring peace:

The zeal and devoutness of the Taliban—young, starry-eyed, refugee camp raised madrassah students—was welcomed by the populace as relief from the chaos in 1996. But their zeal soon turned into fanaticism which brought about its own nemesis...Hitler saw the devil in the Jews; Stalin in his class enemies, the Kulaks; Pol Pot in anyone not sharing his brand of communism; and Mullah Omar in women, minorities and the pre-history of his own country. Germany, Russia and Cambodia have since learnt that democracy is the best of worst governments. Now after two decades of revolution, civil war, drought and famine, it remains to be seen if Afghanistan’s warlords have learnt this lesson.

Here is another evocation of democracy, but not in the same sense as that suggested by more generalized descriptions that equate democracy with a larger adoption of Northern values, nor in a sense that valorizes and mythologizes democracy, as Karim argues has been the case elsewhere (2001, p. 122). Bhandara’s description of democracy as “the best

of worst governments” seems to be in keeping with a mood of acceptance—in some cases, a reluctant acceptance—that pervades *Dawn*’s coverage, as opposed to the buoyant mood of hope found in Northern coverage.

For instance, there is obvious cynicism in N24d, a short piece on the one-day delay of the conference scheduled in order to discuss Afghanistan’s new government. The final line of the news item says simply, “Both the alliance [sic] and Shah have polished their credentials with the UN by saying their delegations at Bonn will include women.” The byline on the article is actually AFP (Agence France-Presse), so the story did not originate with a staff reporter, but nonetheless the use of this phrasing indicates a recognition that the inclusion of women does not necessarily stem from a commitment to democracy and gender equity, but may instead be born of a politically driven determination to win public support and gild images that might otherwise be far from impressive. If the incorporation of women can be credited to such factors, the demonstrated awareness of the importance of public relations demands comparisons to the United States, which appears to have derived immense short-term and long-term benefit from similar exercises. Privileging women’s rights, in fact, is another way of ensuring differentiation from the Other, a technique that recalls Herman and Chomsky’s arguments regarding the importance of indicating in seemingly crucial ways the inherent superiority of one side and its absolute contrast from the opposition (1988, pp. 2, 30-31); whereas Herman and Chomsky base much of their discussion on the contrast between capitalism, frequently conflated with democracy, and communism, here the contrast is often between Northern-style democracy and Islamist terrorism. A useful technique for differentiation involves gauging a regime’s treatment of women, as gender equity is

clearly one mark of a free society. The difficulty arises, of course, from the existence of diverse barometers of what constitutes gender equity in a given society.

In N24e, “A hollow ‘victory’ in Afghanistan,” Seumas Milne addresses the same issue that *The Globe* and *The New York Times* have debated as well, and completes his analysis of the war’s success by producing a considerably different opinion. “Aid agencies confirm,” Milne writes, “that six weeks of US bombing—which even the British government concedes has killed hundreds of civilians—has sharply exacerbated what was already a dire situation and Oxfam warned that they were ‘operating on a precipice.’” Milne, like so many other reporters, is aware of the impossibility of ignoring the issue of women, but the view he does advance is far more distrustful than that found in Northern coverage:

What has been hailed in the west as a liberation for women from the Taliban’s grotesque oppression is being treated very differently by Afghan women’s organizations. The widely praised Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, for example, described the return of the alliance [sic] as ‘dreadful and shocking’ and said many refugees leaving Afghanistan have been even more terrified of their ‘raping and looting’ than of US bombing.

Having said this, however, Milne does not neglect to discuss military action as well, claiming that

[t]he US government appears to be increasingly impatient with any kind of restraint on its use of naked force. In the past week or so, it has repeatedly bombed areas known to be free of Taliban or Al Qaeda forces—such as the town of Gardez, where at least seven civilians were killed in one raid; rocketed the offices of Al-Jazeera, the freest television station in the Middle East; threatened to sink any ship in the Arabian sea that resists being boarded; and ordered the setting up of domestic military tribunals, with powers to try secretly and execute suspected foreign terrorists.

This succinct description, unlike any found in the Northern coverage analyzed, neither celebrates nor vindicates United States intervention, and Milne’s next comment is

significant in assessments of the lasting impact of the war: “The case against the Afghan war was never that the Taliban would turn out to be a latterday Vietcong, but primarily that it would lead to large-scale civilian suffering, fail to stamp out anti-western terrorism, create a political backlash throughout the Muslim world and actually increase the likelihood of further attacks.” Milne concludes that the case for this argument is stronger than ever before.

N24f, by M. Ismail Khan, would seem to support Milne’s thesis, but again the impossibility of assessing reliable sources in the coverage of this conflict is clear. The newspaper quotes a Taliban spokesman’s assertion that dozens were killed and injured during US bombing on the outskirts of Kunduz: “‘Civilians in Khanabad (east of Kunduz) area are in a bad condition due to bombardment and fighting. Children, women and men are rushing towards Kunduz,’ he said.” Other sources are quoted throughout and there are conflicting reports on facts such as numbers of soldiers, but the inclusion of the Taliban quote serves as an important reminder that all the political parties and military alliances cited in coverage such as this have underlying motivations, and their comments need to be read cautiously.

Politicking is also evident in N24g, though in a different sense. Titled “Zahir Shah sending two women to Bonn talks,” the article opens by stating that “[t]he former king of Afghanistan is sending two women to national unity talks in Germany and is confident that the meeting will prove successful, a senior adviser within the royal entourage said on Friday.” Once again, the role of women has a centrality possibly unequalled in the history of media coverage of Afghanistan.

The writer reiterates that “[e]x-king Zahir Shah, 87, is sending an eight-member team to next week’s talks between Afghan leaders in Bonn, including the two women, to give a clear signal that both sexes have an important role to play in the new Afghanistan,” and adds that the “two women delegates in the ex-king’s team were named as Rona Yusuf Mansuri, who is based in Germany, and Sima Wali, who lives in the United States.” According to the same adviser, both women “were prominent Afghan activists.” In an interview with Reuters Television, the adviser is quoted as saying that correcting gender inequity “is one of our targets. To go and reinstate the rights for the women of Afghanistan.” Again, there are attempts to elevate the political process by emphasizing the humane goals driving the king’s efforts. If the salvation myth was prominent in Northern coverage, there also seems to be a certain democracy myth present in *Dawn*’s coverage. However, *Dawn* does not always accept the tenets of this myth, such as the insistence that representation of women in high-profile political talks will translate into actual equity, or that increasing representation and decreasing use of the *burqa* will assist Afghan women substantially in fighting their most crucial battles.

In N24h, “PWA to hold demo,” the Progressive Women’s Association (PWA) appears to have its own objections to many of the actions that have taken place against women, pledging to “hold a peaceful demonstration on Sunday to commemorate the International Day on Violence Against Women, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women.” Unlike Northern articles that have profiled Afghan women fighting to be free of veiling and the home, and demanding the right to education, this article cites “Kashmiri and Afghan women refugees” who seem to be voicing their anger at the many ways in which war has affected them. The purpose of

the assembly, the writer says, is to “condemn the atrocities perpetuated against Afghan and Kashmiri women.”

The reporter—who is not named but is a staff reporter—adds a note of unofficial editorializing, opining that “[w]omen, the world over have been subjected to carnage and violence. Be it a state of peace or war, woman is the only sufferer and bearer of the outcome and consequences.” This is another view of women as victims, certainly, but a far different one than those seen previously. Women face numerous forms of violence, but the overall impression of the article is not that women are helpless or in need of rescue from the extremist men with whom they live. Rather, these are women who are protesting the many ways in which the world has not subjected them to humane treatment, and they are actively demonstrating agency and voice over the course of their project. Such actions deconstruct the myth of silence and absence that surround Muslim women, and provide further evidence for the rejection of the notion that feminism is alien to them, and must be imported from the West. Notions like these, Mernissi says caustically, leave the impression of a “semi-idiotic submissive subhuman who bathes happily in patriarchally organized degradation and institutionalized deprivation” (1996, p. 13), an impression that is hardly confirmed by stories such as these. Sonali Kolhatkar’s work with Indian and Afghan women leads her to detect some of the same trends in media and academe that Mernissi finds in descriptions of Arab women, in direct contradiction to Kolhatkar’s own experiences with Afghan women asserting their independence and stating their demands. Kolhatkar muses over the reasons for depicting these women as victims when her own contact with them suggests a much more positive picture: “What good is it to flaunt images of Afghan women marching militantly with

fists in the air, carrying banners about freedom, democracy and secular government?

Those women wouldn't need saving as much as the burqa clad women seem to" (2002, para. 5).

Discussion

Though *Dawn's* coverage does address some of the same themes found in *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail*, it is nuanced differently, and this is where Pakistan's complicated subject position as the United States' unequal ally, as Afghanistan's neighbour, and as another Muslim country exerts a strong influence over the tone of *Dawn's* reporting. *Dawn's* reporting counters the Western tendency that el Saadawi critiques so heavily in her comment that the West encourages Islam to view important political and social issues through a religious lens (1986, p. 271; also see Grewal, 2001, p. L9), but it also counters a similar tendency that Mernissi espies on the part of Arab states. She accuses them of emphasizing the importance of veiling in an attempt to distract their citizens from genuine, pressing problems of unemployment, illiteracy and high birth rates (1996, pp. viii-x). If the real issues of concern that el Saadawi and Mernissi cite are life-threatening problems such as poverty, health and lack of food or shelter, *Dawn* offers a corrective at some level in its focus on these essential questions. Its coverage is rarely as detailed as that found in *The New York Times*, but nonetheless, it manages to continually evoke and successfully convey the importance of key problems, such as the difficulty of finding refuge coupled with the anxiety of returning to an unstable land, poor levels of health and education and the risk posed by living in a region under attack from all sides.

Certainly, the almost fetishized preoccupation with the veil seen in Northern coverage is not nearly as evident in *Dawn*, though this does not translate into neglect of women's rights. *Dawn* appears to support Beck and Keddie's thesis that "the veil is probably much less important in women's lives in many contemporary environments than most people think" (1978, p. 9). Women's rights are certainly mentioned, but not with the same emphasis on the importance of veiling as that demonstrated in *The Globe* and *The Times*, perhaps because Pakistan, a country familiar with the concept of veiling, is not subject to an idea that el Guindi says is embedded in the discourse of Western feminists, the notion that "'veil' is politically charged with connotations of the inferior 'Other,' implying and assuming a subordination and inferiority of the Muslim woman" (1999, p. 157). Instead, the treatment of the *burqa* suggests that its wearing should not be enforced, but the coverage is not devoted to it and does not adopt hyperbolic overtones regarding the *burqa*'s chief role as the oppressor of women. Rather, it locates the oppression of Afghan women—and many of its comments are specific to Afghan women, rather than generalizing to Muslim women—in a variety of factors, including patriarchy, tradition, poverty and numerous consequences of warfare, tribal violence and political manipulation.

This is reflective of the fact that *Dawn*'s criticism of factors limiting gender equity is far more varied and blunt than that expressed in Northern newspapers. It seems unlikely that a North American newspaper could condemn United States action as explicitly as some of the writers here do; in fact, as the chapter on news bias notes, those commentators who have attempted to mount such criticisms in Canada and the United States have been roundly condemned for their efforts, which are characterized as anti-

American or pro-terrorist in a revisiting of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 2, 30-31). This is not to say that *Dawn's* staff reporters are all opposed to the war. Some opinion pieces do indicate opposition, but other articles merely comment on the difficulties the Afghan people face without passing judgement.

However, it is clear that the general tone of *Dawn's* reporting is distinct from that of the other two newspapers. It is rare indeed to find examples of some of the models commonly applied in Orientalist literature and racialized reporting. In part, this is due to the fact that this sample does not exhibit many signs of conflating Afghanistan's situation with the state of the Muslim world in general. The removal of religion as a key signifier of difference is an important method for delimiting examples of racially charged reporting. This is not to say that *Dawn* does not address religion. Religion recurs consistently, in parties that oppose the war, in descriptions of what the Taliban used to justify their code of law, and simply as the stuff of everyday life in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it is not cited as the reason for the problems which *Dawn's* reporters see around them, and they certainly do see numerous problems.

This awareness of the challenges faced by Afghans may have its roots in the fact that Pakistan cannot avoid them, as Afghanistan's problems are, to some extent, its own. It may also spring from latent anti-Americanism, but even if this is the case, the statistics and facts cited by some of its reporters, as in N24a, are still relevant and do depict a scene marred by chaos and difficulty. In the recitation of Pakistan's difficulties, however, there appears to be some cynicism and sometimes indifference to the furore that has erupted over women's rights. *Dawn's* writers all affirm that women's rights are of primary importance, but they do not devote nearly as much space to the topic as Northern papers,

and they do not dwell on the image of victimized Muslim women to remotely the same extent. There are several possible reasons for this: as a country largely populated by Muslims, Pakistan may be wary of any characterizations describing Muslim women as downtrodden, since this could incite anger in some of its citizens and lend more validity to activist organizations; again, its identity as predominantly Muslim and Southern may mean that it has previously been subjected to what postcolonial feminists would call ethnocentric discourse regarding the topic of women's rights, and *Dawn* may consider that there is nothing new about such incessant emphasis on gender equity; lastly, as a country that lives in closer proximity to the poverty and suffering experienced by Afghans, Pakistan may sense that a different ordering of priorities should dominate the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Although neocolonial discourse may consistently stress the importance of imposing "modern" and "Western" values, there is a strong possibility that *Dawn's* writers would reject that discourse in favour of opinions such as MacLeod's: "No longer is modernization seen as a smooth or inevitable path; no longer is development pursued as linear progress, and no longer is positive social change seen solely as secularization, democratization, and the creation of Western-style political institutions" (1991, p. 12). Modernization, MacLeod adds, "does not inevitably liberate women but rather challenges them..." (1991, p. 12). Appropriately, *Dawn's* coverage here presents a challenge to traditional ways of viewing people in the Southern part of the world, and exposes some of the weakness of Northern media coverage. The conclusion reached, then, is not that *Dawn's* reporting is superior to that of *The Globe* or *The Times*, but that the perspectives it privileges, and those it diminishes, provide a basis for comparison for Northern readers

who are consistently exposed to specific models of the Other. Having identified these trends, it is now possible to discuss their attendant implications in the following chapter, and to assess their importance in a world that still appears perpetually divided.

Chapter 7

On Stony and Infertile Ground: Whither the Fight for Democracy?

What I have been arguing is that Muslim identity is not waiting to be discovered in the pages of the sacred or in stereotypical descriptions. It emerges from women's narration of their lives, and their testimonies are not accounts of a history of dominance but subaltern, contradictory histories of collusion and resistance. (Khan, 2000, p. 130)

As may be expected—and perhaps hoped for—when researching numerous articles on a topic with relevance to various societal groups, the findings have been mixed. The research question aimed to discover whether stereotyping might be at work, and if so, whether that stereotyping could have political undertones in a conflict where each of the engaged powers attempted to secure a claim to high moral ground. Admittedly, the sample examined here consists of only seven days' worth of news articles from all three newspapers, and it would be dangerous to generalize too extensively on the basis of these findings. Nonetheless, there are some remarkably consistent trends that can be discussed in terms of their possible implications. For instance, the findings suggest that stereotypes, along with mythic structures, misconceptions and decontextualization, are indeed at work. The mythic structures, as in Jack Lule's (1991) analysis of a 1985 TransWorld Airlines hijacking, include the grounding of a situation in the persona of victim, a tendency to describe victims in emotive terms that evoke revulsion, disbelief and a sense that retaliatory or corrective action is required, and related to this, a consistent avowal of the moral rightness of those who support the victim while fighting the ethically deficient oppressors of the victim. Specifically, some of the stereotypes and myths most relevant to portrayals of Muslim

women were evident in this coverage, such as the suggestion that Muslim women will find freedom through the efforts of a benevolent, advanced North (though generally this is referred to as the West in media coverage), and that their ultimate goal must be to emulate the right way of women in more democratic countries. Perhaps more significantly, the articles studied here demonstrated an overwhelming focus on the wearing of a veil, and an emphasis on male control of the body, as a defining characteristic of Muslim women, Islam in general, and in some cases, of extremism. These stereotypes are by no means uniformly visible in the coverage, and interestingly, they are not in greater evidence in *The New York Times*, the United States' paper of record, than in *The Globe and Mail*, the paper of record for Canada, which has been a United States ally but not with the same degree of conviction or military strength provided by, for example, Great Britain.

Even more significantly, it is worth noting that some of the writers analyzed here in all three newspapers do make attempts, though often limited ones, to make useful distinctions about questions of religion versus cultural tradition, or political intentions versus military outcomes. Some researchers might dismiss these attempts as cursory, possibly insincere nods to political correctness, and may also point to the fact that attempts at explanation are often juxtaposed with egregious comments about the state of Islam, gender relations and the need for reform in parts of the world that practise a conservative form of Islam. The history of reporting on issues concerning visible minorities suggests that skepticism regarding apparent attempts at providing balanced coverage may be justified. Nonetheless, I would hope, and am indeed suggesting, that these attempts represent the tentative beginnings of more responsible and well-

intentioned journalism, which may eventually lead to rounded portrayals of minorities, including those of Muslim women as complex agents in a multi-layered struggle for equality, rather than victims of male supremacy.

What You Don't Know Really Can Hurt You—and Everyone Else

In the absence of responsible reporting, unfortunate results can occur. In the case of the media's unrelenting focus on the blue head-to-toe *burqa* uniformly worn by Afghan women under Taliban rule, misunderstandings arose regarding veiling in parts of the Muslim diaspora, including Canada. Concurrently, a more generalized confusion and suspicion regarding Islam grew deeper. In some cases, this confusion is relatively benign and can be assuaged by a well-placed question. In others, the implications were far more ominous, as evidenced by an Ipsos-Reid poll conducted almost a year after September 11, 2001. The poll found that "Canadians are more suspicious of people of Arab descent, or Muslims from the Middle East, than they were immediately after the terrorist attacks" (Walton & Kennedy, 2002, p. A11). Another poll suggested that the majority of Canadians supported the idea of limiting the entry of Muslim immigrants into the country (Blanchfield, 2002; Sevunts, 2002). In a country that claims to be committed to a multicultural ideal, suspicions about immigrant communities often remain private and do not manifest themselves overtly. Such findings lend colour to the assertion of law professor Khaled Abou el-Fadl that bigotry aimed at Muslims is "spreading like wildfire" (cited in Siddiqui, 2002, p. B2). Unfortunately, in more extreme situations, these suspicions result in racist behaviour such as threats, slurs and, as indicated in the poll, support for a politics of exclusion. While the poll addressed questions regarding potential entry into Canada, other studies have focussed on the challenges faced by Muslims or

Arabs who are already citizens but do not enjoy the full benefits of this privilege, such as access to work.

For instance, a 2002 study of Toronto's hiring practices found that employers tended to favour unveiled women over veiled women in numerous instances, with a quarter of the employers investigated denying the women wearing *hijab* even the opportunity to apply for a position (Smith, 2002; see Khan, 2002; Permitting the hijab, 2002). Although hate crimes, like discriminatory hiring practices, are not always reported to the authorities, there was evidence in some countries following the 1991 Gulf War that hate crimes against South Asians increased (see Poole, 2002, p. 20 for a discussion of this specific to Britain). Therefore, it is not surprising that police forces across Canada confirmed that reported hate crimes against Muslims and people of Middle Eastern origin increased in the weeks following September 11, 2001. These took the form of death threats, wrenching of head scarves from Muslim women practicing *hijab*, and spray-painting on mosques,²² to the extent that women wearing scarves and veils were afraid to appear in public dressed in the clothing that they consider integral to their faith and/or culture (Foss, 2001). *The Toronto Star* printed a thought-provoking and sensitive article on the discomfort and even the fear experienced by both veiled and unveiled Muslim women living in Canada. In that article, Muslim women of different nationalities, members of different sects of Islam, offered a universal avowal that they were distressed by the negative comments made by non-Muslim Canadians regarding Islam. In particular, they found that some non-Muslims were quick to criticize Islam for unequal gender

²² The same article also notes that spray-painting on synagogues increased during the same time period. While this does not lessen the impact of the finding that hate crimes against Muslims rose, it serves as a reminder that cultural misunderstandings are rarely, if ever, limited to one group alone, and also points to the exacerbated racial tension of that time period.

relations, and equally quick to berate Muslim women for willingly following Islam when it is so clearly oppressive. These women felt far more oppressed by such denigration than by their religion (Grewal, 2001; Khan, 2002).

The Toronto Star article appears to be a relatively rare example of news items addressing the problems of bias and feelings of ambivalence towards war faced by Muslims living within or outside Afghanistan. In a familiar example of the ways in which editing can greatly alter or reduce the impact of political commentary, *The National Post* reprinted Sunera Thobani's speech but deleted certain remarks, including her criticism of the way President Bush framed the war as a crusade. She spoke of a familiar West/East dichotomy that was presented to the general population, leaving—in her opinion—a clear impression that people of colour are the target (Thobani, 2001). This impression was so profound that attacks on Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims commenced and both Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien were forced to assert that the war in Afghanistan, or the war on terrorism, was not equivalent to a war on all Muslims (see Sallot, 2001). Likewise, a public relations campaign launched by the United States regarding the plight of women under the Taliban pointed out that women in some Muslim countries do enjoy many freedoms and rights, though these may differ from those enjoyed in non-Muslim countries, and added that Islam itself respects humanity even if the Taliban does not (cited in Stout, 2001). Though Bush and Chrétien made laudable attempts at clarification in some ways, their support for racial profiling and tightening of immigration controls provided direct and forceful contradictions to their repeated insistence that they did not view people of colour as a threat. Kathy Gannon, discussing the change in thinking she

perceived following September 11, 2001, says “because we’re scared, it’s made us mean. We want things to be simple, to be black and white. They’re not” (2001, p. F5).

The type of black and white thinking suggested by Bush’s initial, and now infamous, crusade comment tends to further harden ideological positions on both ends of the spectrum. When this occurs, people are more likely to see some truth in the West/East dichotomy Thobani (2001) describes. The so-called clash of civilizations thesis then becomes more attractive, with the entire world forced to choose between the modern, civilized West and a primitive Other; it becomes, in fact, an extension of Said’s Orientalism, the study of the East that divides West from East and views the West as inherently superior. Chomsky’s description of George Bush Sr. seems equally applicable to George W. Bush, who can no longer treat Communists as the ultimate threat. Thus, “he’s got to make up new ones, just like the Reaganite public relations apparatus did in the 1980s. So it was international terrorists and narco-traffickers and crazed Arabs and Saddam Hussein, the new Hitler, was going to conquer the world” (Chomsky, 1997, pp. 37-38). In the case of Afghanistan, of course, Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and the Taliban filled the role that Hussein played during the Gulf War, but many of the patterns used to emphasize a sense of risk from these men are the same. The attack on the World Trade Centre demonstrates the existence of a concrete terrorist threat, but there are hints from the Bush administration that it will launch preliminary action against even the intangible, unproven dangers.

The kind of rhetoric employed in the Afghanistan conflict, which focussed strongly on differences in values and standards, not simply on the Taliban’s decision to harbour Osama bin Laden, further polarized North from South in a manner that only

seems to minimize the chances of establishing dialogue and opportunities for change and cooperation. Masud Mufti remarks on this in his Opinion piece in *Dawn*, describing himself as a moderate Muslim who nonetheless feels increasingly alienated from Western society because of President Bush's insistence that one must choose between only two sides in the Afghanistan conflict. Such narrow thinking and use of force against a poor country combine, Mufti argues, to nudge even moderate Muslims towards admiration of extremists who demonstrate their defiance of a superpower that wields its might with a heavy hand: "There is a rising sympathy and respect for the bearded Taliban and the militant Osama bin Laden even among the clean-shaven moderate Muslims. The West does not understand this visible swing of Muslim heart because the oppressor always remains oblivious of the views of the oppressed" (2001, para. 4).

Mufti's comments run the risk of supporting one of the themes that Abou el-Fadl identifies as a bedrock of anti-Muslim bigotry, the "sleeper jihad" theory, which suggests that any Muslim is capable of being infected by violent and extremist tendencies (cited in Siddiqui, 2002, p. B1). However, they also point to some of the failings of a supposedly democratic society. In an atmosphere that is truly marked by cooperation, freedom and democracy, without the oppression Mufti cites, difficult questions may be asked regarding crucially important matters such as the goals and methods of a war. In this particular case, failure to ask such questions may have affected some of the war's results, including the killing of Afghan civilians at a rate four times higher than that of the NATO bombardment of Kosovo and Serbia three years previous. For instance, the use of laser-guided bombs was eventually curtailed in favour of so-called dumb bombs. The latter were less expensive and equipped to function better in various weather conditions, but

were also less accurate than laser-guided bombs. Their use, which was not as widely reported in Northern media as the discussion of veiling, meant that 12,000 bombs dropped over Afghanistan and killed between 1000-1300 civilians, according to the Project on Defense Alternatives (Campbell, 2002). The number of dead, injured and disabled was referred to and even emphasized in the *Dawn* coverage, but merited far less comment in Northern media. It can be argued that Northern media discussed such statistics in days outside the sample period, or that they did not consider those numbers worthy of special attention. It is also possible that the numbers of war dead were discussed in other articles that were not included in the study as they did not contain the key terms “women” and “Afghanistan.” If, however, it is merely the case that Northern media did not find it necessary to report on the negative aspects of the conflict as extensively as they reported on the benefits, then there is an argument to be made that readers in North America, at least, did not receive a comprehensive portrayal of events. This is perhaps a natural consequence of an atmosphere that, as previously mentioned, had not been particularly open to questions, challenges or deviations from the mainstream support for a war in Afghanistan, more positively depicted as the war on terrorism.

Accentuating the Positive: Hopeful Signs in Reporting Trends

All of this, however, is not to say that media were uniformly biased in their reporting of this conflict, or that none of the journalists cited here provided thoughtful, in-depth writing. Several did, and others made attempts with assorted results. In cases where these attempts were less than successful, the limitations of the format may also be considered as a contributing factor, though certainly in many cases the use of dramatic reporting or reference to commonly acknowledged stereotypes or models transcends the

newspaper article format. Overall, however, one fact remains: the world has changed in crucial ways since previous historical conflicts such as World Wars I and II, though some Cold War reporting patterns still seem to be evident. If Muslims and other Southerners have replaced Japanese, Germans and Russians as the North's chief enemies, lobbying groups and media monitoring organizations have also replaced poorly organized, ad hoc protests, allowing for a fast and efficient response to apparently racist or hateful commentary in the media. This is not to say that such groups and organizations do not remain marginal to some degree, but certainly several have mastered techniques for spreading their messages and engaging in dialogue with major media outlets. Margaret Wentz notes the influence of such groups with slight disdain, suggesting that organizations such as the Canadian Islamic Congress have achieved an attention to "correct speech" that may promote pluralism, but also "leads us to the awkward spot where it's permissible (in Canada, at any rate) to say any terrible thing you want about the United States, but not permissible to be critical of any aspects of Muslim societies or cultures" (2001c, p. A17).

Some of the findings here suggest that Northern media have, on more than one occasion, felt no constraint in criticizing Muslim society and culture, but Wentz's point, even if it appears to be exaggerated, does serve the purpose of acknowledging those organizations that have helped diminish hateful or distorted references to specific ethnic groups. Their visibility does suggest progress, as does the careful distinction that some journalists make between religion and tradition, or religion and politics, in their reporting. In some cases, the distinction may seem perfunctory, an example of the classic disclaimers van Dijk notes so often in racist discourse (1998, p. 240), but hopefully it is

more often the case that such specificity stems from a genuine desire to provide a complete and fair depiction. It must be noted that this is often difficult to judge not only because of the brevity of the newspaper format, but also because the situations under discussion are often so complex and the information provided so contradictory.

One area where the media exhibited mixing reporting patterns was the question of whether or not the salvation promised to Afghan women had actually been achieved. Though many journalists emphasized the negative aspects of the Taliban and applauded the installation of the U.S.-supported Northern Alliance in cities from which the Taliban retreated, the Northern Alliance has hardly been kind to women, either: as Rick Salutin points out, “women were far better off under the regime that preceded the U.S.-financed civil war of the 1980s than they ever have been since” (Gee & Salutin, 2002, p. F19; also see Gannon, 2001). Moreover, *Dawn* was the only one of the three newspapers to emphasize that the Northern Alliance had been accused of mistreating Taliban soldiers who had surrendered, in contravention of the Geneva Convention detailing fair treatment in such conflicts. Such insinuations of Alliance viciousness did not bode well for the promised spread of democratic and egalitarian values, which perhaps explains why those allusions were virtually unmentioned in the North American samples studied. Alternately, however, the close ties that Pakistan, like the United States, has had to the Taliban must be taken into account as well. Although General Musharraf established Pakistan as a United States ally almost immediately when it became apparent that Afghanistan would be the site of war, not very much time had passed since Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence had fought alongside the Taliban in opposition to the Northern Alliance, further complicating an already fractious situation for Pakistan (Girard, 2002).

Hollow Victories: Moving On, Moving Away

In fact, far from emancipating the women of Afghanistan, the perception that Western might would save women actually impaired the agenda of Third World or postcolonial feminists significantly and perhaps irrevocably. Their comments were pushed to the margins and their criticisms of imperialist actions as chief oppressors of women were ignored. Many would, and did, question those who expressed skepticism of the supposed Western desire to introduce human rights to Afghanistan. Michael Ignatieff, at the beginning of 2003, noted the apparent absurdity of those “human rights groups [that] seem more outraged by the prospect of action than they are by the abuses they once denounced. The fact that states are both late and hypocritical in their adoption of human rights does not deprive them of the right to use force to defend them” (2003, p. 26). As logical as this argument may seem to those who favoured the use of force in Afghanistan, much of the criticism launched by feminists, human rights groups and other activists has arisen in response to witnessing historical attempts at imposing democracy on other nations, attempts sometimes accompanied by clear examples of cultural imperialism and often unaccompanied by a long-term commitment to maintaining peace and stability in these regions. There is, indeed, a danger that incursions such as the one in Afghanistan are popular for a time, followed by a slow fade out of the public consciousness and off the policy agenda for many developed nations.

In the case of Afghanistan, critics of the war have watched anxiously for signs that the region’s problems are, in fact, losing importance for policy-makers and the public. Polly Toynbee, writing in *The Guardian* more than a year after the U.S. and Britain initiated military action, notes with concern that Afghanistan has not seen the aid

it was originally promised.²³ Some children are being educated and some freedoms have been introduced, but Afghanistan cannot rebuild itself without appropriate funds, especially since the feudalism that previously ruled the country is still at work and could overrun any attempts at political reform. Reporting from Afghanistan, she notes dryly that the ranks of “buccaneering freelance journalists and photographers” are thinning, in accordance with “grumbling that the story has gone cold here: work is drying up. Fox News has already pulled out and the other US networks are off soon, itching to move on to Iraq” (Toynbee, 2002, para. 39). Toynbee confesses to ambivalence regarding the question of whether or not the story truly has gone cold. She does not deny the virtues of peace befalling Afghanistan’s troubled frontiers, but the concurrent inability to meet Afghans’ most basic needs leads her to predict ominous consequences:

the story growing cold may also mean that the world forgets and walks away bored, looking for the next hot new war. If the west turns its back now and lets the country slide back into tribal warfare and despair, there will be no moral justification for any future great interventions in the name of human rights. History will write this episode down as no more than a brief, self-interested expedition to eliminate al-Qaida training camps, another bunch of outsiders fighting their own battles on Afghan soil. Forget Tony Blair's impassioned vision of a western world committed to spreading freedom across the globe. There may be no more stony and infertile ground than this for planting democratic ideals, but if Afghanistan remains a miserably poor and oppressed place, then all that high-minded talk will be exposed as self-serving hypocrisy. (Toynbee, 2002, para. 41)

Toynbee acknowledges the *burqa*’s importance for many observers who considered it “the battle flag of last year's brief war,” (2002, para. 8) and she applauds the fact that so many Afghan women have achieved new rights, but she also sees the *burqa* as symptomatic of far greater problems faced by these women, in a society that often

²³ In response to the problems experienced by Afghanistan in the months following the American withdrawal, both Canada and the United States have agreed to provide aid, though it is too early to assess whether or not the resources pledged will be sufficient (Saunders, 2003).

treated them as lesser people even prior to the advent of the Taliban: “the truth is that the burka is the very least of their problems, mere outward garments, easily discarded. The inner scars of the way women are treated here in this darkly savage place will be harder to erase” (2002, para. 13). Removing *burqas* does offer symbolic and easily visible resolutions to longstanding problems, but it reiterates the notion that societies can rebuild by reconfiguring their entire cultural history. Moreover, the sudden wellspring of attention devoted to one particular detail in the greater landscape of Afghan women’s problems suggests, as Toynbee uneasily prophesies, that this attention can fade as quickly as it swelled. “This is my problem with the West,” announces Nelofer Pazira, the Afghan-Canadian star of *Kandahar*, “[t]hey are going into this only for their own interest. For seven years this country has been oppressing women—now they suddenly care! The moment the bombardment is over, they will forget all about it. All this rhetoric about helping the poor Afghans, it’s not sincere.” Despite her opposition to the Taliban, Pazira remains unimpressed by the United States’ formula for emancipation, and foretells of the risks in an unpalatable echo of Mufti’s warnings, “[w]e are creating generations of fanatics without even knowing it. We are giving birth to it now” (cited in McLaren, 2001, p. F3). Pazira, then, is unconvinced that removing the *burqa* is the most important aspect of women’s liberation.

Even if she is mistaken, the result of the pressure to discard the *burqa* is clearly not a happy one for those women who have not removed it and those who never will, for a variety of reasons. Moreover, removing the *burqa* does not feed people, nor does it shelter them, nor does it provide them with education or employment. These are tasks that the U.S.-led force committed to at the same time that it committed to attacking

Afghanistan, though the evidence suggests that those tasks are being fulfilled only partially or poorly (Gall, 2003; Ignatieff, 2003; see Saunders, 2003, for suggestions that the North has acknowledged these problems by again committing to provide aid). Sonali Kolhatkar, railing against the image of Afghan women as ones requiring unveiling and white male assistance for their liberation, points to the shortcomings of the United States' intervention:

Today, as the US sponsored government in Afghanistan which legitimizes the same Afghan fundamentalist war lords supported by the US throughout the 1980s, gets ready to convene a government, over a thousand Afghan refugee women have applied for a scant number of seats reserved for them in the Afghan grand assembly! Clearly Afghan women are tirelessly struggling in the face of a fundamentalist tilted government which has already promised Islamic Sharia law, misogynist in its formulation, even before the assembly has met (2002, para. 9).

Kolhatkar applauds Afghan women for their courage and persistence, but resists the image of a U.S. saviour, either in the guise of Bush's military force or an allegedly universal feminism. Though Kolhatkar's denunciation of imperialist motives would seem to place her in the same category as other postcolonial feminists mentioned throughout this work, such as el Guindi (1999), her frustration with the paternalism shown by Western feminists echoes some of Fatima Mernissi's critiques.

"Sisterhood," argues Mernissi, "will be global when it cuts through both class and culture" (1996, p. 16). Coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan more than once made an attempt at just such claims of global sisterhood, achieved at last, united by a desire to adopt the same ideals around the world. *Dawn's* insistence that Afghan women will not revoke their Afghan beliefs, values and traditions is a direct rejection of an ethic of global togetherness that relies upon the elder, wiser sister, as it were, dictating correct standards of behaviour to a helpless younger sister as part of an offer of assistance. Though such a

scenario is not uniformly mentioned in *Dawn*'s coverage, it is nonetheless made far more explicit than in the parallel Northern coverage examined, arising no doubt from a politically charged awareness in Pakistan of the wariness some developing countries always retain towards their colonizers. Not only does the endorsement of the feminist struggle by colonizers, past and present, undermine indigenous culture, it also undermines the feminist movement itself, tearing out its native moorings and thus diminishing one of the aspects that could provide legitimacy (see Ahmed, 1982, pp. 165-167).

Ahmed protests that the real "issue is simply the humane and just treatment of women, nothing less, and nothing more—not the intrinsic merits of Islam, Arab culture, or the West" (1982, p. 168). Sweeping comments such as Margaret Wente's, then, stating that "[n]owhere in the Muslim world are women treated equally" (2001, p. A17) do not foster understanding, instead reinforcing the reality that Muslim women are besieged from every corner. If they wish to meet the Northern world's standards of liberation, there are implications that they must renounce their culture and religion. If they comply, they lose both a sense of self and, presumably, the approval of fellow Muslims or Southerners. If they sacrifice their cultural and religious identity, they still have no real community to which they can belong, as their ethnicity marks their difference to Northern eyes, even if they have attempted to eradicate that difference. In the case of countries such as Afghanistan, women find themselves at risk not only because of such dilemmas, but also because they must wage these struggles in the face of military and political violence. This violence may come from tribal conflicts, but may also originate with bombs dropped by the same U.S.-led forces that claim to be ushering in peace and new

dignity for Afghan women. Afghan women, like other Muslim women before them, emerged from a situation in which their challenges were neglected for many years, only to occupy a central position in a paradox that allowed different groups to wage war on women in the interest of protecting ideological values, including democracy, religious tradition, cultural authenticity and political affiliation. In more basic terms, such wars may also be waged in order to acquire or consolidate power that will remain out of reach even for those in whose name it is fought.

You've Come a Long Way, Baby...Haven't You?

The trends noted above precede coverage of this conflict. Ahmed's comments demonstrate that she and other writers such as el Guindi and Mernissi have previously perceived negative media coverage of Muslim women, or more precisely, coverage of Muslim women that can be discussed in a way that reflects poorly on them and on Muslim men, as well. Writing as far back as the early 1980s, Ahmed notes the effects that such claims can have upon Arabs or Muslims who already feel isolated:

There can be few people of Arab or Muslim background (including, and perhaps even particularly, the feminists among them) who have not noticed and been disheartened by the way in which Arab and Muslim 'oppression' of women is invoked in Western media and sometimes in scholarship in order to justify and even insidiously promote hostility towards Arabs and Muslims. (Ahmed, 1982, p. 246)

Though women were not as central to the Gulf War coverage as they have been during the war in Afghanistan, it is clear that media have often wished to avoid depicting Muslim women as central to, or empowered within, such conflicts. For instance, Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (1998) is astonished to learn from Kuwaiti women themselves that several served in the army during the Gulf War. Her surprise arises from the fact that she did not see any news stories in the United States showing these women, which would

appear to be anomalous given how detailed the coverage was of the Gulf War. Fernea suggests that it would be virtually impossible for all American media to have overlooked these women; instead, she offers an explanation in the form of a story recounted by a former female soldier. Coming into contact with an American reporter who refuses to publicize the role of Kuwaiti women in the army, the soldier is told that such an inclusion would counter the popular American image of unequal gender relations in a restrictive Muslim world. This image, the reporter explains, is what Americans wish to see in the news, in order to strengthen their belief that Muslim women lag far behind American ones in every way (Fernea, 1998, pp. 191-192). Such observations seem natural in light of the puzzlement exhibited by commentators such as Margaret Wente, who seems to feel that all women who subscribe to any aspect of Islamic tradition, such as veiling, automatically adhere to any and all extremist tenets (2001a, 2001b).

Fernea's anecdote also seems natural given the confusion experienced by some commentators following the conscious decision on the part of some Iranian women to veil in protest against Reza Pahlavi's failed modernization project, an expression of political activism and cultural affirmation that eventually helped to precipitate the Islamic Revolution and its unanticipated consequences (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994). Likewise, those Algerian women who equated unveiling with the loss of their personal, cultural and national identity and even used the veil as a weapon of war during the Algerian Revolution seem similarly incomprehensible for some (Fanon, 1959). Wikan also fails to experience surprise in response to the horrified fascination that veiling, as one of the most visible expressions of faith and identity, has for non-Muslims: "Our preconceptions of veiling are likely to be further colored by dramatic stories in the press

or history books about strong-willed women boldly revolting to rid themselves of this presumed vestige of male tyranny...But all the women in the past and present who have voluntarily adopted the veil, they make neither news nor sense to us" (1982, p. 105).

Depictions of Muslim women in wartime do not centre exclusively around the veil and the body, but this is often a principal focus. A more recent example of the ways in which Muslim women use their supposedly powerless bodies to wage war was demonstrated by a young suicide bomber's attack in Israel. Unfortunately, the suicide bombing itself was not the source of the extraordinary alarm experienced, given the increased frequency of such tactics among Palestinian fighters. The shock and confusion experienced by the international media arose principally from the fact that the bomber was a young woman, directly contradicting traditional images of male terrorist figures and passive Muslim women (Agence France-Presse, 2002; Copeland, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2002; Wente, 2003).

Moving Forward: The Real Struggle Begins

The longevity of the Israel-Palestine conflict, as well as the repeated warnings from the United States that Iraq represents a distinct menace, may well herald the continued propagation of myths regarding specific ethnic groups, including but not limited to Muslim women. However, the fact that international harmony does not seem in any way imminent may also augur a commitment on the part of media outlets around the world to improve their coverage of any conflicts that may arise. If, indeed, media outlets fulfil, or at least aim to fulfil, some of the functions of the public sphere as Fraser described it in her critique of Habermas' conception (1995), then they have a responsibility to attempt inclusivity. However, the responsibility cannot be unilateral. In individual human terms, media consumers can exercise caution upon exposure to

generalized negative portrayals of ethnic groups or other minorities; they can express their displeasure with such portrayals when they find them to be unmerited; members of groups considering themselves to be unfairly depicted can open a dialogue with the media in order to clarify issues and explain any inaccuracies. After all, it is unlikely that most journalists submit their stories with the actual intention of misrepresenting their subject matter. In many cases, simple education is called for, and extra effort may be required by the consumer—in the case of this study, the reader—to highlight and correct errors effectively. Such techniques may require diligence, tact and persistence, but they are far more worthwhile than moving, as Masud Mufti (2001) discusses, towards intolerance and extremism in reaction to the frustrations of racial bias or distortion.

Similarly, the media have a role to play. Some of the actions Wentz describes, such as the ban imposed by certain media organizations regarding the use of potentially inflammatory descriptions such as terrorist, are steps in the right direction (2001c). They are also responsible for acting upon feedback and complaints, and for attempting to obtain as much context as possible from various sources before publishing an article, though it is acknowledged that the very structure of the media industry often limits the amount of time and money a newspaper may be able to devote to a story. Nonetheless, the responsibility still exists, as these issues are in no way trivial. The way media report on stories like the conflict in Afghanistan can exercise an effect on concrete matters such as donations, aid, interest and comprehension. The latter is an entirely valid concern, as Afghan refugees and immigrants in Northern countries deserve some level of understanding and acceptance upon their arrival, while Afghans still living in their war-ravaged country need aid, not judgement. Brief, highly intensive attention resting on a

limited number of questionable assumptions will not help women who have been guaranteed help in their complicated struggles, nor will it help Afghan men who want food, shelter and safety, and who cannot understand why they wish to return to what they perceive as normalcy should be challenged by others.

Ahmed, Mernissi and Sabbah are likely correct in their suggestions that some Muslims do need to re-evaluate their treatment of women. However, this is not the focus here; rather, this thesis examines the role played by the media in propagating misconceptions and misunderstanding. One of the ways in which the media fail to support Southern feminism is by speaking on behalf of Southern women, and by indicating which solutions are the correct ones. These notions of correctness often spring from culturally determined values, an approach that Ahmed says is not useful in resolving women's issues:

what is needed now is not a response to the colonial and postcolonial assault on non-Western cultures, which merely inverts the terms of the colonial thesis to affirm the opposite, but a move beyond confinement with those terms altogether and a rejection or incorporation of Western, non-Western, and indigenous inventions, ideas, and institutions on the basis of their merit, not their tribe of origin (Ahmed, 1982, p. 237).

Another way in which the media do not acknowledge the voices of Southern feminists is by collapsing all of the categories of feminism into a collective that should speak in conformity with one set of values. From Marcus Gee's confusion regarding Arundhati Roy and Sunera Thobani's arguments regarding the consequences of colonialist actions, and their refusal to adhere to the so-called feminism adopted by a conservative figure such as Laura Bush (2001), to Margaret Wente's horror at the thought of women wearing the veil by force or by choice (2001e), the media often ignore the fact that feminism is firstly a term that

encompasses different branches of adherents, and secondly that describing a woman who suddenly and uncharacteristically joins in an orchestrated public relations endeavour to promote gender equity as a feminist debases the worth of that term. However, Southern media are not necessarily less complicit in clouding the meaning of the term feminism, or in defining parameters for gender equity. In this analysis, *Dawn* endorses the idea that Afghan women have been singularly oppressed and deserve the right to veil by choice, food, shelter, work and respect. Nonetheless, *Dawn*'s emphasis on the fact that Afghan women may not necessarily conform to American ideals of freedom can be seen as a laudable example of supporting feminism grounded in cultural specificity, or more dangerously, it may serve as implicit support for those political leaders who wish to place limits on Afghan women's independence.

Whatever the case, Ahmed's assertion that "we need a feminism that is vigilantly self-critical and aware of its historical and political situatedness if we are to avoid becoming unwitting collaborators in racist ideologies whose costs to humanity have been no less brutal than those of sexism" (1982, p. 247) can be applied equally to the need for media that depict feminism with just that kind of self-criticism and awareness of context. Moreover, the media and their consumers would be well-served by adopting, in every instance, Isabelle Gunning's suggestions "for achieving a respectful First World-Third World dialogue," such as "1) seeing oneself in historical context; 2) seeing oneself as the 'other' might see you; and 3) seeing the 'other' within her own cultural context" (cited in Razack, 1998, p. 97). Ultimately, the findings of this thesis echo Gunning's

propositions by rejecting those mythical, dichotomized stories depicting right and wrong, heroes and villains in their narrative. Rather, careful analysis of selected media coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan offers evidence for the tentative establishment of a dialogue between groups occupying the authoritative centre and those consigned to the periphery. The results, certainly, are imperfect at best. However, they demonstrate signs of progress, and further progress must be the goal, as indeed it must be for the political entities upon whom the media report. Anything less threatens to mire not only the media in the past, but the subjects they discuss as well.

Oversimplifying issues, even with the very best of intentions, serves to further delegitimize the struggles of already marginalized peoples, who can be robbed of agency by physical oppressors and by those who use discursive structures to reduce “subaltern, contradictory histories of collusion and resistance” to mere shadows of the original (Khan, 2000, p. 130). Too often, commentators seek to hone the sharp edges of complexity for the sake of understanding, but these edges are often the constitutive elements of what may be considered truth. Truth, of course, is relative, and perhaps unattainable in a world defined by the postmodern consciousness of fragmented and varying realities, but it is a far more worthy goal for media commentators than fostering division and the perpetuation of separate spheres of culture. At the very least, it may be less presumptive and more achievable to aim for a fair representation, one augmented by appropriate contextualization and completed by the contribution of the subject’s voice. Uma Narayan (1997) mounts a strong argument for the assumption of responsibility on

the part of postcolonialists and Westerners alike, brooking no abdication on the basis of cultural immunity or presumptions of superior knowledge. The final word on this subject, then, belongs indirectly to Narayan in her quoting of Indira Karamcheti. Though Karamcheti's comments are specific to Indian women, they can be applied to all possible subjects of media, and human, interrogation:

"Neither I nor anyone else can deliver a representative, authentic Third-World woman to academia or elsewhere. Even in India, there is no such thing as *the* Indian woman—there are only Indian women. And the individuals are far more interesting than any assumed stories of authenticity" (cited in Narayan, 1997, p. 146).

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