

Claiming Afghan Women

The Challenge of Human Rights Discourse for Transnational Feminism

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In 1997 . . . the Feminist Majority launched the Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan. Over 130 feminist and human rights groups joined the Campaign in its early days, including Planned Parenthood, the YWCA, the National Council of Women's Organizations, the National Organization for Women, and the American Medical Women's Association.

Janelle Brown, "A Coalition of Hope"

It is easy to condemn the "barbaric" men of Afghanistan and pity the helpless women of Afghanistan. It is this very logic that drives the Feminist Majority's "Gender Apartheid" campaign for Afghan women. . . . How "effective" would the Feminist Majority's campaign be if they made it known that Afghan women were actively fighting back and simply needed money and moral support, not instructions? It is for this reason that the Feminist Majority is not interested in working with RAWA.

"Saving' Afghan Women"

The videotape image lasts only a few seconds. It documents the murder of Zarmeena, a mother of seven accused of killing her husband; she was executed by a member of the Taliban in the center of Kabul's soccer stadium before a crowd of thousands. The shaking camera records the first gunshot through the back of the kneeling *burqa*-covered woman's head, then jerks downward to a blurred image of the ground as a second shot is heard followed by screams from the crowd. Less than twenty-four hours earlier, the nightly radio broadcast of Taliban evening news had announced that Zarmeena would be executed and the men, children, and especially women of Kabul were expected to attend. The members of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) Reports

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Committee, who were charged with collecting information about Taliban atrocities against women, quickly convened in secret to discuss how they would document the execution. Using firsthand testimonies, eye-witness reports, and photographs, RAWA's Reports Committee had documented a litany of floggings, amputations, and sexual violence, but they decided that for an atrocity of this magnitude they would, for the first time, risk finding and using a small video camera in order to capture a compelling image of the execution to show the outside world (Brodsky 13–17). Although the resulting image betrays the inexperience and emotional horror of the RAWA member who hid the camera beneath her burqa, the Reports Committee expected the brief but powerful video image to reach international news agencies. And it did. However, the execution of Zarmeena occurred in November of 1999, but the taped image of her death captured by RAWA members did not reach wider audiences until two years later when CNN broadcast it over and over again in the fall of 2001.

For two decades prior to September 11, 2001, RAWA had worked ceaselessly from their forced exile in the border areas of Pakistan and Iran to bring international attention and remediation to the trauma suffered by Afghan women under the occupation of the Soviet Union, the warlords of the Northern Alliance, and the extremists of the Taliban. Stripped of access to either legitimate political or military means within Afghanistan, RAWA relied almost exclusively upon the discursive power of human rights violations and feminist advocacy to mobilize the powerful West in general, and U.S. feminists in particular, on behalf of their cause. Claiming to represent the silenced voice of Afghan women, RAWA eventually became recognized worldwide by sovereign states and human rights organizations as the resistant force "behind the veil."¹ The events of 9/11 triggered an intense popular and political American interest in the plight of Afghan women. This, in turn, produced a struggle that challenged RAWA's authority to represent the "authentic" experience and interests of Afghan women.

Indeed, this seemingly transparent claim that RAWA is uniquely positioned to give voice to the experiences and interests of women suffering under the oppressive regime of the Taliban caught the organization's efforts in a tangled web of assumptions that currently inform the efforts of human rights advocacy in Afghanistan. Within contemporary human rights constructs, authenticating discourses are the primary means through which the social subject is able to counter oppressive violations. A conventional reading of the horrific execution video within existing human rights constructs places the responsibility of producing authentic representational evidence, primarily through the social-realist modes of visual documentations and firsthand oral testimonies, firmly within the purview of RAWA. Certainly the atrocity occurred, and, following the dictates of "just" advocacy, RAWA's images provide the evidence which compels external audiences to immediate intervention. However, a critical counter-reading of RAWA's strategic use of the video and its impact on external audiences helps us understand the ways in which current transnational human rights advocacy dis-

cursively theorizes, and potentially traps, the social subject in a position of passivity. Indeed, such a reading would help us to understand RAWA's subsequent disappointment with the external uses of their video after 9/11 and the ways in which those uses limited their own pursuit of social justice. As E. Patrick Johnson argues, the politics of such authenticity claims carry with them the danger of foreclosing possibilities of self-determined social justice for oppressed groups (3). That foreclosure leaves the legitimating power of the authenticating representations, including the footage of Zarmeena's murder, available to service a myriad of interventions which may or may not be motivated by the interests of the subject population.

Among that myriad of interventions were the efforts of the Feminist Majority, one of the first and most important U.S. organizations to respond to RAWA's representational strategies.² In 1996, the Feminist Majority initiated one of its most well known and successful campaigns, the Coalition to End Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan, with celebrity Mavis Leno as its spokeswoman. Initially, the interaction between RAWA and the Feminist Majority's coalition seemed to be mutually beneficial: RAWA profited by the wide U.S. exposure given to the problems faced by Afghan women; the Feminist Majority gained by a re-energized organization and the national recognition it earned after 9/11. Later, however, the Feminist Majority gave little or no credit to the women of RAWA; those women in turn criticized the "hegemonic" feminism of the Feminist Majority; and, finally, the Bush administration used and manipulated the data provided by both RAWA and the Feminist Majority for its own purposes. Obviously, the coalition was less successful than appearances first suggested.

The story of RAWA's attempts to generate and manage the support of the West through human rights and feminist discourse, and of the Feminist Majority's attempts to engage in global activism in Afghanistan, reveals the complexity of the politics of transnational feminist advocacy in contemporary global contexts. This chapter explores the work of *representation* by RAWA and by the Feminist Majority as each operated within the conventions of human rights and feminist discourses. This case study examines the ways the organizations struggled to establish themselves as the legitimate advocates for their causes, engaging in a dynamic negotiation among competing claims of authenticity and authority. Shaped by multiple *local* and *global* contexts, the experiences of RAWA and the Feminist Majority illuminate the complications of transnational feminist collaboration. The first section of this chapter addresses the ways in which local/global contexts shaped the strategic affiliations and articulations of need that RAWA used to generate international interest and concern for the plight of Afghan women. The second section analyzes how contemporary constructs of human rights discourse reinscribed a narrative of victimization and passivity that eventually left RAWA limited in its ability to determine external interventions on behalf of Afghan women. The third section explores the ways in which the Feminist Majority's attempts at transnational advocacy functioned to re-energize a

locally marginalized U.S. feminist movement at the same time its focus on international women-in-need reasserted a rhetoric of U.S. dominance. Finally, we discuss how, within these discursive limits, both RAWA and the Feminist Majority found their activism used as fodder for a U.S. expansionist foreign policy at odds with their own agendas. The work of advocacy, then, was never "just advocacy," neither in the sense of "just" as *simple* nor in the sense of "just" as *fair*. Rather, the work of RAWA and the Feminist Majority was complicated and sometimes had results, such as the Bush administration's use of "women" to legitimate its own foreign policy, that both organizations deemed clearly unjust and at odds with their own feminist politics.

RAWA

The local concerns embedded in the historical development of RAWA help us understand the multiple themes that shaped and problematized their use of human rights discourse and collaboration with U.S. feminists as an effective form of transnational activism before and after September 11, 2001. These themes include RAWA's insistence on autonomy in determining appropriate local and global intervention on behalf of Afghan women, their suspicion that affiliation with larger political entities would strip them of their claims to authority and agency, and their primary focus on creating concrete local structures and practices with only a utilitarian interest in drawing unencumbered resources and influence from the larger global entities through the use of powerful discursive/representational strategies. RAWA was created in 1977 by Meena, a nineteen-year-old middle-class Afghan law student at Kabul University. Meena shaped the new organization within the context of a sweeping student movement centered in Kabul University following the uncertain end of a period of Western-influenced monarchist rule by King Zahir Shah (1933–1973). Within this array of student organizations, RAWA located itself as a broad-based independent women's organization designed to appeal to the widest possible range of women in Afghanistan. However, the location of its origins within the student movement meant RAWA had to fight the misperception that it existed primarily as a women's auxiliary to the male-dominated radical student movement throughout its early history. This was but the first of many struggles for self-identification which indelibly marked RAWA with a fundamental need to assert its claim to autonomous authority and agency on behalf of Afghan women throughout its history.

Shortly after the creation of RAWA, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, triggering a nationalist struggle for Afghan sovereignty.³ Soon, RAWA's claims to autonomous authority were deeply rooted within an immutable construct of authenticity which enabled RAWA to withstand continued attempts to affiliate their interests with competing forces during the Soviet occupation. Initially, RAWA aligned their struggle for women's rights with the struggle for national liberation and was central in organizing public opinion campaigns against the occu-

pying forces. Like Afghan women in general, those in RAWA provided urban civil resistance that supported the work of the *mujahadeen* (soldiers of God) fighting the Soviets from their bases in the mountains and the borderlands of Pakistan. As one RAWA brochure proclaimed, "In Afghan history there was no previous example where girls were able to travel around the country, going to different cities for the purpose of political activities. . . . In the villages [the Russians] were targeted by bullets of men, but in the cities they were surrounded by the anger of women" (Bernard 23). Despite such assertions of agency, RAWA's support of the indigenous opposition to the Soviet invasion was complicated by Cold War politics since the six regional groups that made up the mujahadeen received weapons, military training, and over \$1 billion in total funding from the United States that was matched dollar-for-dollar by Saudi Arabia. Adding to RAWA's problematic position was the fact that the Soviet-installed regime actually expanded a number of reforms for women's rights, but coupled these reforms with a brutal and massive repression of the nationalist opposition supported by RAWA. In response to these measures, extremist Islamic fundamentalism grew quickly within the ranks and leadership of the mujahadeen resistance and RAWA was again confronted with the threat of absorption into the agenda of a larger, and increasingly hostile, political movement. As a result, RAWA members were simultaneously accused of operating as communist sympathizers by the U.S.-backed fundamentalist resistance and as CIA operatives by the Soviet-supported government. Endangered by the twin threats of anti-woman fundamentalist violence within the U.S.-supported mujahadeen and the ever-increasing persecution of dissidents by the Soviet-backed Afghan secret police, Meena and most of RAWA's leadership were forced into hiding within the border areas of Pakistan and Iran by the end of 1981. Although only in its fourth year of existence, RAWA was driven into exile with a deep-seated aversion to political affiliation, even with seemingly sympathetic coalitions, and a defensive reliance on monolithic claims of authenticity on behalf of Afghan women incorporated into the basic tenets of the organization. Soon, RAWA identified itself as the "Voice of the Voiceless" speaking "on behalf of the agonized women of Afghanistan" (www.rawa.org/documents). As RAWA member Mariam explains, "During the two decades of war . . . RAWA has been the only defender of women's rights in Afghanistan. RAWA showed the world that this is the real face of Afghan women in its struggle and determination and sacrifice" (quoted in Brodsky 273).

By 1981, 1.7 million Afghan civilians had fled across the border. Conditions in the Pakistan refugee camps in Peshawar and Quetta quickly shaped RAWA's decision to anchor its own claims to authority, agency, and authenticity in empowerment projects based in the everyday experiences, concerns, and interests of Afghan women.⁴ The need to fund the localized work conducted in the refugee camps led Meena to turn her attention to appeals for financial and political support from the U.S. and European governments, the United Nations, international aid organizations, human rights organizations, and Western feminists. Meena's

basic model for attracting financial and political external support was through representations of oppression. That approach dominated RAWA's international strategy throughout the 1980s. After her assassination by the Afghan secret police (KhAD) in February 1987, Meena was enshrined as RAWA's mythic founding martyr, and the organization retained her strategic framework as a means of self-definition within and defense against the threat of potential co-optation and annihilation at the hands of both allied and antagonistic external entities. When RAWA turned its appeal to external audiences, the localized strategic constructs, assertions, and models that it had developed to situate itself within the specific social relations and political terrain of multiple contestations within Afghanistan now intersected with the transnational discursive practices of contemporary human rights advocacy. As a result, the basis of RAWA's interaction with any source of external financial, political, or military support relied on the strategic use of representations of oppression and the unwavering insistence that RAWA can legitimately claim the autonomous authority to represent both the authentic experience and the political agency of the women of Afghanistan. As such, RAWA's approach to external intervention powerfully reinscribed and fundamentally challenged the mutually expanding and delimiting parameters of contemporary transnational human rights advocacy.

Human Rights Advocacy

RAWA's need to claim authority, agency, and authenticity on behalf of Afghan women rests on a very specific and localized relationship to oppression within human rights discourse. Although those who are violated under repressive regimes suffer greatly, human rights are fundamentally moral abstractions. Article 1 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is usually cited as the inspirational source of human rights advocacy, but only Article 7 of the International Covenant of Civil and Politics Rights, which states, "No one shall be subject to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment," operates as a legally binding treaty. However, the treaty's commitment to subject human rights violators "to criticism, sanction, and, as a final resort, intervention" does not define what constitutes "inhuman" or "degrading" treatment, nor does it authorize specific agents with the power to hold sovereign states to its standard. Hence, the call to acknowledge and redress human rights violations involves the discursive and representational negotiation of many obstacles on the part of the oppressed. The purpose of human rights, according to Michael Ignatieff, is not simply moral, but political. Ignatieff argues that the charge to human rights is to "protect human agency and therefore to protect human agents against abuse and oppression" (ix). In many ways, this definition provides a useful starting point for understanding the complex ways in which RAWA has struggled to retain control of its own agency as it navigates the global terrain of U.S. foreign policy, human rights activism, and transnational feminist advocacy. In negotiating the politics of human rights advocacy, the vic-

tims of abuse are assigned one primary form of agency in the international exchange—the right to claim the authority to define authentic experience and produce representations of that experience at the local level. Within this discursive relationship, the "call for help" is authorized by the victim, but the nature and scope of protective intervention is determined by the more powerful "rescuing" entity—whether those entities are international human rights organizations, U.S.-based transnational feminist organizations, or the U.S. State Department.

Relying on these conventions of human rights discourse, RAWA turned to local "documentation" of oppression as their main means of attracting the attention and support of the international community. But this method of drawing attention to crimes against women and humanity is one that is embedded within a dynamic context of competing images calling for attention across the terrain of global conflict. After the end of Soviet occupation in 1989, the plight of Afghan women under the warlords of the mujahadeen drew only limited attention from the U.S. government, international human rights advocates, and Western feminists. In the spring of 1992 mujahadeen warlords captured Kabul and civil war raged among various factions in Afghanistan for four more years. According to U.N. reports, over forty-five thousand civilians were killed in Kabul alone during that period and women were systematically subjected to rape, forced marriages, and torture. The mujahadeen also introduced restrictive laws against women, including the requirement to wear the veil, that were enforced by floggings, amputations, and public executions. Despite these repressions, international aid to RAWA dwindled so dramatically during these years of internal strife after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan that they were forced to close the Malalai Hospital and replace their Watan boarding schools with hostels and small independent classes. According to RAWA reports, the years under the warlords were among the worst ever experienced by the women of Afghanistan. However, when the Taliban seized power from the Northern Alliance in 1996 and instituted their repressive policies toward Afghan women, RAWA was again able to achieve modest success with their representational approach.⁵

RAWA's use of visual evidence and oral testimonials documenting Taliban abuses were featured initially in progressive publications throughout the West, including Amnesty International's *Amnesty Now*, *Middle East Times*, *Sojourner*, and the *Nation*, and quickly spread to mainstream international, national, and regional publications, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Baltimore Sun*, *New York Times*, the *Times of India*, the *Daily Yomiuri*, the *Japan Times*, *Khyber Mail*, *BBC News*, and *Marie Claire Magazine*, and eventually reached popular media outlets, including the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in the United States. However, it is important to note that the representational strategies used by RAWA to gain external attention and remediation for the plight of Afghan women under the Taliban stood in marked contrast to those RAWA used to engage the attention of Afghan women themselves. *Payam-e Zan* (Women's Message) is a quarterly magazine published only in Dari and Pashtu—the two official languages of Afghanistan—by RAWA since

1981. Over the years, issues of *Payam-e Zan* railed against the PDPA (pro-Soviet Afghan Communist Party) government and the Soviet occupiers, provided political commentary by senior RAWA members, published and criticized the works of artists and intellectuals who supported the regime, and engaged in debate with fundamentalist political parties and organizations opposed to RAWA. Although each issue includes reports on atrocities committed against women, the *Payam-e Zan* has always contained a primary theme of self-empowerment for Afghan women and men as well as the success of RAWA as an independent agent for social change. To that end, *Payam-e Zan* dedicates most of its pages to publishing inspirational poems, accounts of RAWA's success, descriptions of RAWA projects, reports of "good news," lists of donations from within Afghanistan, and directions on how to take and write reports documenting the experiences of Afghan women. Using these discursive strategies as a means of constructing a representation of efficacy for Afghan women which calls them to redress their own social and material conditions, *Payam-e Zan* has proved to be RAWA's most successful recruitment tool within the local populations of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Brodsky 80–81).

In contrast, dissemination of representations of victimization through international media coverage draws external attention and resources to, or away from, women's suffering within a specific conflict. Media attention based on local reports of atrocities is the primary method of generating international public outrage against the violations. When international "outrage" reaches a consensus of crisis, aid organizations and international human rights advocates are joined by popular and state support. In turn, media attention and human rights organizational influence affect how governmental and non-governmental organizations treat gender experience within conflict-related claims. Those without such specific gender attention are, at best, marginalized and, at worst, ignored.

Thus was the plight of RAWA shortly after the initial reports of Taliban repression surfaced in progressive and popular media outlets in 1996 and 1997. All too soon the plight of Afghan women under the Taliban was eclipsed by reports of widespread rape and sexual violence in the high-profile European conflict in the former Yugoslavia. An examination of international coverage of abuses against the women of Afghanistan in leading human rights reports, including *Human Rights Watch World Report* and *Amnesty International Annual Report*, between 1993 and 2002 reveals that the attention of human rights advocates followed the same trajectory as U.S. foreign policy interests during that era. In effect, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and humanitarian NGOs (non-governmental organizations) were forced to engage in the same politics of advocacy vis-à-vis the United States that RAWA experienced in its attempts to engage the attention and support of humanitarian aid organizations. By March of 1998, RAWA felt compelled to issue the following plea on its Web site:

In consequence of the blinkered view of the Afghan scenario . . . RAWA has been deprived of all significant long-term aid. For this reason, some

of the educational, health care and income-generation projects run by RAWA in Pakistan and Afghanistan are facing imminent shut-down for lack of funds and support. Closure of these centers will spell the collapse of the educational and health services provided by RAWA for Afghan refugee women and children, as well as the material aid and social support particularly for families of victims of fundamentalist terrorism. (www.rawa.org, March 1998)

However, the charges of sexual violence in Bosnia and Kosovo that drew the attention of the international aid community away from Afghanistan became pivotal in garnering general international recognition of gender-based violations as a category worthy of legitimate human rights protection.⁶ With the early stages of the Bosnia and Kosovo conflict as the context for their demands, feminists at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna finally compelled individual states and international entities to commit humanitarian resources to relieve the gender-specific suffering of women within the conflict. Similarly, events in Bosnia prompted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Executive Committee to alter its set of basic guidelines to create new programs designed to provide legal, political, and physical protection for women war victims. Finally, the United Nations, the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Community (EC), and other international and regional human rights entities adopted a series of resolutions that specifically attended to sexual violence and the abuse of women and girls as part of Bosnia's crimes against humanity (Mertus 22).

Attempts to generate effective transnational feminist alliances during the last two decades have relied on many of the same problematic premises and politics as contemporary human rights advocacy. Transnational feminist coalitions based on a human rights bipolar construction of the local and the global engage groups like RAWA solely in terms of their specific experience of oppression and their claiming the unique ability to produce documentary representations of that experience as the powerless. At best, according to M. P. Smith, this "transnationalism from below" creates an accurate account of "everyday practices of ordinary people, their feelings and understandings of their conditions of existence," that, in turn, can be used to define and modify those conditions (493–494). The power of the oppressed in this seemingly sympathetic discursive framing still limits the authority to represent authentic experience in transnational feminist alliances. Debra Mindry argues, in her study of South African NGOs, that the terms "local" and "grassroots" are often used by those with access to legitimate power and influence within a globalized context to both authorize and delimit the influence of those who are excluded from sharing in that power. A number of Third World feminist scholars argue that a more useful construction of activism within globalized contexts is to address "the manifestations of the global in a particular local" (Naples and Desai 7). At the same time, Sarah Mahler points out this construction

of the "local" and "grassroots" fails to capture the politics of accountability and the extent to which the authenticity claims of "so-called grassroots organizations" necessarily exclude some local voices in favor of others (70). Afghan women are divided by class, education, ethnicity, and tribal linkages. Rural and urban Afghan women express quite different degrees of support and opposition to fundamentalist rule like that of the Taliban. RAWA's identity as an organization that promotes modern, secular forms of democracy and citizens' rights is further complicated by the degree of resentment those who remained in Afghanistan feel toward refugee women—and much of RAWA's work has been conducted from the border camps in Pakistan.

All intervening international agencies and NGOs take on the surrogate work of documenting the experience of the oppressed. Hence, RAWA's main strategy was to produce authoritative representations to which only they had access (the hidden video camera under the burqa) as a means of compelling international agencies, Western powers, and transnational feminists to use those same representations as a way of providing resources and influence to RAWA to remediate Taliban oppression. In the end, international aid agencies, human rights organizations, and U.S. feminist activists conceded the power of representation to RAWA, but retained the power to shape the terms of intervention for themselves. It is at this point that the Feminist Majority's own need to assert its authority in arbitrating the terms of intervention of U.S. government's policy toward the women of Afghanistan and the local concerns of RAWA collided with the local concerns of a post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy and the "post-feminist" local concerns of the Feminist Majority.

The Feminist Majority

In the spring of 2002, the Feminist Majority published the thirty-year anniversary issue of *Ms.* magazine. *Ms.* had been published since 1972, as a commercial feminist magazine for nearly twenty years, then under various for-profit and not-for-profit owners in the last decade. The spring 2002 issue marked the first issue under the new ownership of the Feminist Majority, a change that brought together some of the most influential, and certainly some of the most visible, U.S. feminists of the twentieth century, including Gloria Steinem and Eleanor Smeal. In their introductory letter, Steinem and Smeal promised that the "synergy" of *Ms.* and the Feminist Majority was an unbeatable combination, particularly in the potential to advocate for, and to provide an "insiders" perspective on, global feminism.

As a special section for the spring issue, *Ms.* ran "A Coalition of Hope: How the International Feminist Community Mobilized around the Plight of Afghan Women," a "behind-the-scenes look at the [Feminist Majority's] efforts to bring the plight of Afghan women to the attention of the country and mobilize support for a change in U.S. policy toward Afghanistan" (Brown 65). In this article, the Feminist Majority positioned itself as the primary force behind the shift of U.S.

policy toward the Taliban, pointing out the largely unrecognized work it had done since the late 1990s to alert the United States, particularly the president's office, to the plight of Afghan women and the horrors of the Taliban. As Peg Yorkin, Feminist Majority Foundation Board chair, said in an interview in the *Los Angeles Times*, "If we had not prevented the U.S. from recognizing the Taliban, think of how much worse this all would be" (quoted in McNamara E1). Indeed, Feminist Majority president Eleanor Smeal perceived the foundation's Campaign to End Gender Apartheid, and its work connected to Afghanistan, as one of their greatest victories. As she put it rather succinctly, "We will never again think of ourselves as unable to affect foreign policy" (quoted in Brown 66).

Clearly, of course, the events that have transpired since Smeal made this announcement—the ongoing war in Afghanistan, the dearth of women's representation in the new government there, the United States' invasion of Iraq—demonstrate that the Feminist Majority was not particularly effective in shaping U.S. foreign policy. Even before these events occurred, however, what the congratulatory material in *Ms.* and the interviews with major newspapers did not reveal was the antagonism that it stirred up with RAWA. Ironically, the Afghan article ran side by side with "A Feminist Family Tree," a lengthy, annotated listing of U.S. feminist groups. Any listing of a family tree suggests, by omission, those not deserving of inclusion, posing the risk of alienating and angering groups excluded. The most explicit resistance to the *Ms.* Feminist Family Tree, however, came not from any U.S. group, but rather from the RAWA, which vociferously and articulately objected to the feminist history provided by *Ms.* on the grounds that it was both inaccurate and arrogant.

In an open letter to *Ms.*, RAWA accused the magazine of being a "mere mouthpiece of hegemonic, US-centric, ego driven corporate feminism," one that failed to give "any credit to the independent Afghan women who stayed in Afghanistan and Pakistan throughout the 23 year (and counting) crisis in Afghanistan and provided relief, education, resistance, and hope to the women and men of their country." The letter described the mutual efforts of RAWA and the Feminist Majority to protest conditions in Afghanistan, then asked, "Can they not stand to share the credit with this independent organization, which, while appreciative of the support of their non-Afghan sisters (and their Afghan and non-Afghan brothers), has never acted in the name of any other organization nor allowed outsiders to steer their course?" In the letter RAWA further challenged the Feminist Majority's highlighting of Northern Alliance women, arguing that this was probably a ploy to avoid angering the U.S. powers that were supporting the Northern Alliance. Finally, and most importantly for this discussion, RAWA criticized the discursive power of the Feminist Majority, and *Ms.*, to claim and to define feminism: "But what is troubling is that in carving out their version of reality they not only fail to give any credit to RAWA and others but they also claim to represent some sort of feminist majority. Their version of feminism, however, which blatantly ignores 25 years of work by their RAWA sisters in Afghanistan and ignores

atrocities committed against women by groups the Feminist Majority has aligned themselves with, seems a blow to feminism and a blow to the building of a truly representative, principled, and effective feminist majority." Moreover, RAWA lamented the use of *Ms.* for these "self serving purposes." "It is . . . a sorry indication of the future of hegemonic feminism in the U.S., not to mention the future of *Ms.* magazine, the once proud, independent and inclusive voice of the women's movements the world over" ("RAWA's Open Letter").

While *Ms.* was never quite the "independent and inclusive voice of the women's movements the world over" that RAWA invokes, it is quite interesting that RAWA would revive such a (false) memory in order to underscore the severity of its critique of the magazine and the Feminist Majority. It is also notable that, with the exception of the commentary about the Northern Alliance, the root of RAWA's critique focuses not on the bureaucratic or political work of the Feminist Majority or the Campaign to End Gender Apartheid, but on the *work of representation*. It is the telling of the story that excludes many, the drawing up of a "family tree" that only includes certain branches, the claiming of the term "majority," and the use of a magazine that historically had promised inclusive and democratic feminism that troubled RAWA.

Ironically, the Feminist Majority worked diligently to effect U.S. foreign policy, to transform American relations with other countries, relations that lead to the problems that women face globally. Indeed, they are one of the most powerful organizations to try to build a U.S. women's movement and one of the only women's organizations that has any ear within the higher levels of U.S. government. Interestingly, however, groups outside the United States, like RAWA, see the Feminist Majority and *Ms.* as claiming a position in the global movement of women. It's not difficult to see why they would do this. The name "feminist majority," as RAWA suggests, certainly indicates something beyond the borders of the United States. The subscription renewal letter for *Ms.* describes the magazine as "not just a magazine—a movement" and explains that *Ms.* "*brings people together around a welcome table that is national and worldwide. As a member, you already have a seat at that table.*" It is certainly understandable, then, that RAWA would object to being left out of the "table" of feminism, that it would think of itself as a legitimate and authentic member of any feminist community.

In reaction to RAWA's criticism, *Ms.* and the Feminist Majority responded in a private letter, not posting it on the Internet or publishing any reply. They explained that the article was meant to be read as an introduction to the work of the Feminist Majority, not as an introduction to the oppression and activism of Afghan women. "It was a mistake for the debut issue of [the newest] *Ms.* to focus solely on the Feminist Majority's work on Afghanistan," explained Eleanor Smeal (personal interview). The rhetorical choice to introduce the Feminist Majority by focusing on the Campaign to End Gender Apartheid was a poor one, Smeal pointed out, because the organization does a range of work on women's rights. She insisted that no insult was meant to the women around the world who also

worked for the rights and freedom of women. In defending the "Feminist Family Tree," Smeal explained, "We are trying to build a U.S. women's movement, which is why we emphasized U.S. women's organizations" (personal interview).

Of course, the issues of *how* feminism is represented, *who* claims ownership of the movement, and *what* gets defined as feminist are certainly not specific to the context of international feminist organizing. From the outset of contemporary feminist scholarship, feminists have struggled with these complex issues within the U.S. context—in the competing discourses of feminist knowledge produced within feminist academic journals like *Signs* and *Feminist Studies*, for instance, and in the 1980s in challenges to "white" feminist history posed by African American feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* and by Native American feminist scholars like Paula Gunn Allen in "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism." We have even seen this in the history of *Ms.* itself as individual feminists, such as Sarachild in the 1970s, challenged the way *Ms.* claimed ideas like "consciousness raising" as its own invention and activist groups, like the radical feminist group Redstockings, accused the magazine of "rewriting the history of the women's liberation movement" (Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood* 65; Redstockings 8–9). What is particularly salient in the discussion of the RAWA/Feminist Majority exchange, however, is the way that these claims of "ownership" now extend to the international arena, with implications for foreign policy and coalition building in a global context.

The exchange and criticisms between RAWA, *Ms.*, and the Feminist Majority underscore the importance of our exploration of the work of representation, the significance of the context in which those representations are produced, and the ways that such representations produce and reproduce power relations within the international feminist arena and constitute the very idea of what is meant by "American feminist" or "global feminism." Such a critical exploration of the Feminist Majority's involvement in the Campaign to End Gender Apartheid and in the liberation of Afghan women does not suggest that the Feminist Majority or *Ms.* should have stood by silently when the situation of Afghan became apparent. Nor is it to suggest that U.S. groups should stick to internal feminist issues, engaging solely in navel gazing. It is, however, to suggest that "looking outward" is not as easy as the *Ms.* article suggests, that the struggles that groups like the Feminist Majority face within their own local context certainly shape the activism they engage in internationally, and that the process and results of activism can be tangled, complex, and reinforce the very power relations that these groups had meant to challenge.

Numerous scholars have pointed to the importance of the intersections between the local and the global within transnational studies of feminism and gender. These excellent studies generally situate the local as the postcolonial environment or the Third World context. The global becomes variously defined as the attempted articulation of shared feminism transnationally or transculturally by the United Nations and its various agencies like UNIFEM or, as Inderpal Grewal

defines it, "the hegemony of First World women's groups . . . affects women's lives and women's groups worldwide by their interests and their policies" (518). Interestingly, however, we would argue that what is under-theorized and under-discussed is the local, First World context for the shaping of global (i.e., in Grewal's terms, internationally focused) U.S. feminism. That is, groups like the Feminist Majority do not, and have not, articulated their internationally focused feminism solely out of a blundering or arrogant position, but within a specific context and set of struggles that have created clear constraints and dilemmas. Attention must be paid to these local contexts if we are to understand and critique the claims for women's rights as human rights within an international context.

One of the first *local* contexts that must be examined is the historical moment when U.S. feminists began to look systematically outside their own borders, most easily dated to the original publication of Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Global* and the establishment of the Sisterhood Is Global Foundation in the late 1980s. Indeed, as sociologist Temma Kaplan points out, in the international arena at large it was not until the 1990s that general discussion of "human rights abuses" included any substantive inclusion of issues relating to women. Organizations like Amnesty International and the United Nations felt pressure from groups like Sisterhood Is Global and feminists working transnationally to redefine the parameters of their agendas and to challenge notions of cultural relativity that had bracketed issues related to women. The Feminist Majority's decision to design and implement the Campaign to End Gender Apartheid, then, must be understood partly as stemming from a desire to use U.S. resources and networks to help women in non-U.S. countries. (Indeed, feminist activists frequently used the term "sisterhood," invoking powerful notions of female solidarity and interconnections across culture and nation.)

The decision to focus on the human rights abuses faced by Muslim women, however, must also be understood as having emerged in a U.S. context that was largely hostile to the feminist movement. Since the late 1970s, the women's movement in the United States was facing backlash from conservative forces and stagnation, with few recruits from the younger generation. The continued problems that U.S. women faced in the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes more subtle but no less real—of workplace harassment, the double day, sexual violence, poverty—proved to be stubborn and very complicated to eradicate. The enthusiasm of the 1970s proved difficult to maintain as activists burned out trying to maintain advances that had been won in earlier decades, and younger women found the issues boring, passé, or seemingly irrelevant. Activism happened in splintered and institutionalized contexts, as feminists took jobs within universities, businesses, law firms, the military, and religious organizations. Conservative court appointments served to undercut and repeal the gains women had made in affirmative action, reproductive health, and education. "Commercial feminism," the claiming of feminism by corporations and ad agencies, overpowered the work of feminists

engaged in prison reform, economic justice, and anti-racist activism (Faludi; Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood*; Evans; Dicker and Piepmeier).

Within this divisive and conservative environment, "international activism" served a strategic function. The problems seemed so obviously oppressive—the cutting off of a clitoris, the insistence on full bodily coverage with a burqa, the systematic rape of young and old women. Mainstream U.S. feminist organizations could use these causes to mobilize their constituencies, attract new and younger members, gather resources, and, perhaps most importantly, legitimate their existence in the United States within a "post-feminist" era. Celebrities like Mavis Leno, who on behalf of the Feminist Majority spoke frequently and energetically for the plight of Afghan women, could further invigorate the U.S. women's movement, bringing in both participants and financial resources. American women could feel good about sharing their money and their status as they helped their compatriots across the world. From this perspective, then, one can see not only how "international feminism" and the plight of African, Bosnian, and Middle Eastern women were key to keeping the U.S. movement alive, but also how this activism and the emphasis on the victim status of Third World women were central to the very construction of American feminism in the late twentieth century. Protecting Third World women formed these understandings of American womanhood and feminist struggle.

Feminist scholars and activists have worked diligently to connect feminist perspectives to issues of international development, security, peace, and the military. Despite this, however, major strategists and policy makers in the national and international arena have generally viewed feminist perspectives as irrelevant to their work (Enloe, *Bananas and Maneuvers*; National Council for Research on Women). Indeed, Eleanor Smeal emphasized the years of behind-the-scenes work that the Feminist Majority did in order to be recognized as a "player" in foreign policy (personal interview). One of the ironies of the tragedy of 9/11 is that U.S. feminist organizations, particularly the Feminist Majority, experienced a level of recognition and legitimacy that they had been fighting for since some of the early victories of the 1970s. The president, the mainstream press, charitable organizations—all looked to the expertise and experience of feminist organizations to understand the situation of Afghan women. This was a moment when U.S. feminists could feel "a part" of international strategizing and lay claim to their importance in matters of security and conflict resolution. As Smeal said in the *Ms.* spring 2002 issue, "No one could have predicted this could happen, but if you are ready to mobilize when the opportunity arises, you can make a difference" (quoted in Brown 66). Robin Morgan, founder of Sisterhood Is Powerful and strong ally of *Ms.* and the Feminist Majority, argued, "It's . . . important for organizations like the Feminist Majority Foundation to acknowledge their influence, to remind people that, as with the situation in Afghanistan, they were right in their condemnations. . . . And we need to learn to claim our victories. There's still an idea

that 'nice women don't brag.' But too often the substance of a win gets separated from who initiated it. We need to say: 'We did this, and here's what we're going to do next'" (quoted in McNamara E1).

Robin Morgan's comment—that feminists need to "claim our victories"—makes sense within the context of U.S. activism, where resource allocation and publicity flow to those who are recognized "winners." Yet it is also no surprise that the Feminist Majority's articulation of this "win" within the cover story of *Ms.* would rankle activists within RAWA. As Anne Brodsky has argued in her path-breaking study of RAWA, *With All Our Strength*, the women who founded RAWA emphasize the importance of successful project completion over the importance of individual or even group recognition. Part of this reluctance over recognition might stem from a context where "recognition" could land one in jail or in front of the execution squad. On the other hand, part of the reluctance also stems from an ideology that emphasizes the collective good over individual gain. Once RAWA began to interact with groups like the Feminist Majority, however, the "rules" of representation changed; it should come as no surprise that RAWA would perceive the Feminist Majority as arrogant and selfish in its self-representation, while the Feminist Majority would see itself as simply "claiming our victories" (Brodsky 154).

It soon became clear that the Feminist Majority's successes were more limited than the celebratory articles might suggest. Within the emerging post-9/11 "culture of security," President Bush was able to harness the "liberation" of Afghan women as fodder for legitimating the bombing of that nation while little money was actually allocated to ameliorate their situation. By December of 2001, Bush successfully created "commonsense" discursive links between the plight of Afghan women under the Taliban and his global "War on Terror":

As we drive out the Taliban and the terrorists we are determined to lift up the people of Afghanistan. The women and children of Afghanistan have suffered enough. This great nation will work hard to bring them hope and help. In Afghanistan, Americans not only fight for our security and for the values we hold dear. We strongly reject the Taliban way. We strongly reject their brutality toward women and children. A central goal of terrorists is the brutal oppression of women and *not only women of Afghanistan. The terrorists who helped rule Afghanistan are found in dozens of countries around the world. And that is the reason this great nation with our friends and allies will not rest until we bring them all to justice.* (Voice of America News Report, italics ours)⁷

The president spoke just moments before he signed legislation that committed the United States to provide educational and medical aid to Afghan women and children. The bill contained no dollar amount, but simply underscored the United States' intention to help. In a parallel construction just eighteen months

later, Bush tried to use the same commonsense perspective of liberating the Iraqi people, including the down-trodden women, as justification for the invasion of Iraq. The female voice which gained most attention after September 11 was not Robin Morgan's or Eleanor Smeal's, but that of First Lady Laura Bush, who successfully invoked the documentations of horrific Taliban abuses against women as the legitimating source of the United States' own claims to authority and agency in pursuit of a preemptively aggressive foreign policy to ensure its own national security: "Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror—not only because our hearts break for the women and children of Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us."⁸ As social movement scholar Valentine Moghadam argues, women's groups clearly did not win in the post-9/11 era: "September 11 and the responses to it—especially the bombing of Afghanistan—remind us that despite the long existence of women's groups that have worked to enable women to be considered legitimate participants and to provide women's perspectives on peace and human security, very few of the norms that guide this area reflect their contributions" ("Violence" 7).

Conclusion

Many U.S. feminists emphasize the gains women have made within the international arena, despite the limited power of groups like the Feminist Majority. They point out that resources have been channeled to women, that public awareness about women's problems internationally has increased, and that some restrictive and dangerous laws and customs have been changing. Why, then, should we mull over the politics of representation? Why should we concern ourselves about the ways that the Feminist Majority simultaneously used the spectacle of Afghan women while ignoring their activism if some women's lives improved, if some foreign policy was changed? Indeed, this is the point of view of Eleanor Smeal, who argues that well-meaning, liberal Americans are too concerned with being considered "ugly Americans," that they are unwilling to live up to their responsibility to engage with the world (personal interview).

The Feminist Majority worked to represent their causes in ways that would engage and propel activism. This proved particularly difficult to do, however, when it was self-interested national "policy" that had to be understood and resisted. That is, it was much easier to discuss the "plight of Afghan women under the Taliban" than it was to explain the complex machinations and U.S. policies that led to the establishment of such a draconian situation for women. As RAWA explained, "But unfortunately we must say that it was the government of the U.S. who supported Pakistani dictator General Zia-ul Haq in creating thousands of religious schools from which the germs of Taliban emerged. In the similar way, as is clear to all, Osama Bin Laden has been the blue-eyed boy of CIA. But what is more

painful is that American politicians have not drawn a lesson from their pro-fundamentalist policies in our country and are still supporting this or that fundamentalist band or leader" ("Statement by RAWA" 266).

Not only does the focus on the "victimized" Muslim or African woman simplify what are often very complex policy issues, but it also deflects attention away from glaring U.S. domestic problems, such as the abuse of women in the growing prison complex and the problems women face in the military. Scholars like Mahnaz Afkhami argue that U.S. feminists need to pay attention to the connections between the problems Muslim women face and the rise of fundamentalism internationally, including U.S. Christian fundamentalism. (Afkhami 235; Kemsley; Trounstein 205). Moreover, focusing on the "problem of the Muslim woman" also can hide our own problems that seem more complex, murky, and divisive, like the huge plastic surgery and diet industries in which U.S. women "freely" participate (Farrell, "Shrinking"). Other scholars argue that the U.S. feminist focus on the Muslim woman allows U.S. feminists to ignore fundamental issues of equality, wealth, and fairness, issues that might threaten the comfortable status of middle-class U.S. women. As Valentine Moghadam argues,

U.S. liberal feminists have not called for economic and political transformation. The demands for sexual rights and equal opportunities in education and employment are entirely compatible with the capitalist system. What liberal feminists have not called for is a change in the system of taxation and in development policy that would alter American foreign policy and the distribution of wealth, transforming the lives of low-income women in the United States and elsewhere. In fact, one may suggest provocatively that those Islamic feminists who question the exclusive right of clerics and the *faqih* to interpret the Islamic texts and to define and implement Islamic jurisprudence are more subversive to the existing political system than are their U.S. liberal-feminist counterparts. ("Islamic Feminism" 1159)

International feminist activism can also backfire in unexpected ways, particularly when the narrative of "savior" and "victim" overshadows the need for accurate and up-to-date information. For instance, in the case of many African women, female genital mutilation does not necessarily "head the list of wrongs that need to be righted to improve the status of women"; scarce water and land, heat and dust storms, general bad health care, and overall poverty threaten the women of Africa, but these are not as easily nor as powerfully represented as female genital mutilation (Gunning 225). Like female genital mutilation, the threat of death by stoning has also gained the attention of U.S. feminists, particularly the case of Amina Lawal. Ironically and disturbingly, however, as the letters from the Nigerian group Balboa attest, American enthusiasm and letter-writing campaigns, particularly when quoting the misinformation posted by Amnesty

International, risk undercutting the Nigerian system of appeals that did actually work on behalf of Lawal (Sengupta). Similarly, RAWA has repeatedly objected to U.S. feminists' seemingly exoticized obsession with "the veil" in Islamic societies; an obsession which, RAWA asserts, is obscuring the real threat the U.S.-sanctioned interim government poses to women in post-9/11 Afghanistan.⁹

Finally, the very representation of non-Western women "in need" constructs and reinforces a narrative in which all that is Islamic/Muslim/non-Western is painted as "uncivilized" and "barbaric," the women are seen as "victims," and Westerners, as providing a "civilizing" effect (Bacchetta et al. 306). Whenever Americans position themselves as saviors, their rhetorical devices can then be wielded by conservative forces to legitimate whatever kind of horrific policies they choose to enact, particularly when those policies are wielded against Arab and African countries which we "know" to be backward because we have been working to liberate them. These are the powerful discursive quandaries that progressive feminist organizations in the United States face, even if their intentions are good, and even if they are run by Third World or Muslim women.

RAWA continues its struggle within the deeply complicated representational morass created by multiple parties' competing claims to authenticity and authority on behalf of the women of Afghanistan. At the writing of this chapter, Afghanistan is governed by a transitional coalition, led by Hamid Karzai, which is dominated by members of the former mujahadeen Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance claims that they have changed their fundamentalist position on women's rights despite its horrific record of abuse from 1992 to 1996. Even the seemingly Westernized President Karzai, who was placed in power by the United States, is implicated in Afghanistan's recent fundamentalist past since he served as deputy foreign minister in the first mujahadeen government. A handful of women associated with the Northern Alliance have been recently appointed to governmental positions; however, a member of RAWA who was invited as a member of the king's delegation to participate in deliberations concerning the formation of the new government was barred from the table by fundamentalists within the coalition (Kolhatkar 22–23). *Human Rights Watch* reports that recent dramatic increases in violence, political intimidation, and attacks on women and girls by fundamentalist sympathizers of both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance are discouraging female political participation and endangering gains made on behalf of women in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban.¹⁰ With less than a year to go before national elections, these men are engendering in Afghanistan a climate of fear that threatens efforts to adopt a new constitution that would embrace the advancement of women's rights. The atmosphere of anti-woman violence has driven girls out of school and into their homes at rates that rival those during the reign of the Taliban.

In response, RAWA is again documenting human rights abuses against women committed by gunmen and warlords who were propelled into power by the United States and its coalition partners. But now, RAWA's assertions of authority, agency,

and authenticity on behalf of Afghan women have been fractured and subsumed within a cacophony of international and indigenous advocacy claims, including those of numerous international human rights organizations and refugee aid agencies as well as the Afghan government's Ministry of Women's Affairs and the U.S. State Department-sponsored U.S.-Afghan Women's Council. RAWA continues to operate within the common discourse of international human rights activism as it takes on a universalizing language. Indeed, the end of the twentieth century saw a diffusion of rights language take the form of abstract individual rights as globalization altered the face of the geopolitical map. Within this context, human rights activism was often cast as a form of antipolitics that espouses moral claims in order to defend the powerless from ideological, sectarian (i.e., political) legitimations of abuse. As Ignatieff explains, "Because human rights activists take it for granted that they represent universal values and universal interests, they have not always taken as much care as they might about the question of whether they truly represent the human interests they purport to defend. They are not elected by the victim groups they represent, and in the nature of things, they cannot be. But this leaves unresolved their right to speak for and on behalf of the people whose rights they defend. A more acutely political, as opposed to moral, activism might be more attentive to the question of whom activists represent and how far the right to represent extends" (10). In the end, the story of RAWA's experience with transnational feminist alliances, such as the Feminist Majority, and human rights advocacy illustrates the degree to which such work is inescapably political because protection necessarily invokes some sort of authoritative intervention that redistributes or reinscribes power within the oppressive context. The politics of advocacy complicates the ability of local/indigenous advocates to retain their authority and agency beyond the authority of specific "authentic" experience when they pursue social justice within existing constructs of human rights advocacy and transnational feminist collaboration.

NOTES

1. RAWA has received honors and recognition for its work from a wide-ranging list of governments, human rights organizations, feminist groups, and popular media outlets, including the French Republic's Liberty, Equality, Fraternity Human Rights Prize; the Asian Human Rights Award; the Spanish Twentieth International Alfonso Comin Award; honors from Amnesty International; and the *Glamour* magazine Women of the Year Award.
2. The Feminist Majority was founded in 1987 to promote women's equality with men, reproductive rights, and nonviolence.
3. Zahir Shah was deposed through a bloodless coup by Mohammed Daoud, who had entered into a tenuous alliance with the Parcham branch of the pro-Soviet Afghan Communist Party (PDPA). Affiliations with the PDPA and fundamentalist opposition to it had been growing among intellectuals and students since the 1960s, and the student movement reflected the larger political fabric of affiliations in Afghanistan ranging from Marxist and Maoist leftist organizations to right-wing Islamic traditionalists and revival-

- ist groups and a few left-of-center socialist and pro-democracy movements. Soon after the creation of RAWA, the Daoud government split with the PDPA and was overthrown by a violent coup staged by the Soviet-backed party. After two years of turmoil, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan on December 28, 1979 (Brodsky 41–42).
4. RAWA's first project, the Quetta Handicraft Center, allowed Afghan widows to earn a living and achieve basic levels of literacy within the refugee camps. With funds raised through the Handicraft Center, RAWA established the Watan (Homeland) Boarding Schools for refugee boys and girls, which operated from 1984 to 1994 and provided education beyond basic literacy in the areas of geography, mathematics, and history. The Watan schools were eventually replaced with fifteen RAWA-operated primary and secondary schools, nine orphanages, and numerous literacy courses for adult women. The Maladai Hospital provided nursing training and health education as well as full inpatient and outpatient care to Afghan refugee women and children from 1986 to 1996. All of these grassroots endeavors were framed by RAWA's "Cultural Projects," which included production of anti-fundamentalist cassettes of songs, "Nights of Poetry," "Nights of Stories," and the staging of dramatic skits.
 5. Under the Taliban, women and girls were banned from participation in formal education, forbidden to work outside the home, and required to have a male relative escort them in public. Violators were subjected to severe punishment, with amputations, beatings, sexual violence, and executions. Decades of war had already produced more than fifty thousand widows in Kabul alone, leaving many women isolated without male protection and support. Poverty, death, sexual violence, abuse, and loss of family had shaped the lives of Afghan women under Soviet occupation, the rule of the warlords, and the Taliban's atrocities.
 6. According to Julie Mertus, these international attempts at protection and assistance yielded mixed results in Bosnia. Despite the extensive media campaign against rape, women from all sides of the conflict were assaulted during the war. In addition, late in the war there continued to be reports about international peacekeeping personnel being involved in abuse of women (Mertus 34).
 7. "Bush Signs Relief Act for Afghan Women and Children," December 12, 2001. www.voanews.org.
 8. "President's Weekly Radio Broadcast," November 17, 2001. www.voanews.com.
 9. Loretta Kensinger's comparative content analysis of the Feminist Majority Foundation's (FMF's) use of the veil as the "first and primary visual representation" on its Web site, which was designed to raise awareness about the situation of women living under the Taliban from 1998 to 2002, reveals that FMF's extensive and decontextualized reliance on the veil as its dominant symbol of female oppression motivated action based on a view that "passive" Afghan women must be saved by U.S. feminists. Kensinger argues that FMF's over-reliance on images of the veil and chadari mitigated against "mutuality, agency, context, history, and complexity," which constitute the foundation of effective transnational feminist coalitions (Kensinger 18).
 10. "Afghanistan Warlords Implicated in New Abuses," September 9, 2003. www.hrw.org.press/2003.

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