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Saving the Afghan Woman: USA in Afghanistan and the "White Woman's Burden"

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Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

To Allah, for everything,

*To Mama; OKBA Fatiha, the reason why I have never gave up, to Baba; GUEHEF Al-Sadek,
the source of tenderness and security,*

*To Khawla, Ali, Wahiba and Chourouk for their unspoken love and support that I needed the
most, To my nephew Yasser and nieces Assil and Touka.*

To me, because I deserve a dedication too!

To my friends and colleagues for making my —learning—journey memorable.

*To my mother, the role model and the source of pure inspiration, to my father, the constructive
critic and the caregiver*

To my sister, the listener who has been there since the beginning

To my brothers and my sister-in-law for their support and care

*To those who believed in the idea when it was scratch, who listened to my messy thoughts, and
who encouraged me to take the first steps*

To every friend and teacher who made me who I am today

We dedicate this honest work.

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By the name Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the concept of saving Afghan women throughout the US's War on Terror and feminism. It highlights the effects of white feminism and US's foreign policy on the life of Afghan women during and after the 20 years of War on terror. The aim of this study is to clarify the "White Woman's Burden" ideology and its impact on "Third World woman," especially those in Afghanistan. This study brings the attention to the fact that western feminists tend to impose their ideologies, beliefs and thoughts on women of color. A qualitative approach is used in this study, where it adopts historical, descriptive, analytical and comparative methods. First chapter provides a brief history of feminism and points out the emergence of White Woman's Burden ideology. The second chapter highlights the efforts US foreign policy has given toward the case of Afghan women and evaluate the impact of this policy, ending the chapter with the efforts of Afghan women to save themselves. In the third chapter, a comparison between the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan shows that Feminist Majority Foundation's attempts to save Afghan women were a mere orientalist and neo-colonial form of imperialism meanwhile the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan has more influence on Afghan women considering their rights and needs. Therefore, Afghan women's voice should be louder than western feminists to be heard.

Key words: white feminism, Afghan women, Orientalism, RAWA, FMF.

List of Abbreviations

FMF: the Feminist Majority Foundation

RAWA: the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

US: the United States

USAID: the United States Agency for International Development

A.P: Associated Press

P.O.: Post Office

KGB: Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, lit. Committee for State Security

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The General Introduction

1 Background of the Study

From the end of the nineteenth century to the present, the feminist movement has been refining its methods by addressing women's social and economic issues. However, over time, a "White Feminism" ideology emerged, shifting the view of feminism to a Gender equality premised on the accumulation of individual power rather than its redistribution. This discloses who is left on the margins, which are women of the third world, by demonstrating how corporate white feminism is ultimately a weapon for upholding capitalism.

In *Orientalism* (2003), Edward. W. Said believed that the essence of the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is based on classifying all which is not the "West" as an "other." Said, also, states that the Orient is a pure product of the West. Thus, he discussed how the West uses a historical technique known as stereotyping to present an inaccurate image of the Orient in all life domains in general and in politics in particular, and that is the situation of Afghanistan during the "War on Terror."

In 2017, Kilkenny's Cartoon Saloon produced the animated film *The Breadwinner*. One of the interesting scenes of the film is when the main character Parvana -11 years old- cuts her hair just to be able to provide for her family. Parvana has to give up on what symbolizes her femininity in order to be able to find her way in a patriarchal society that is controlled by the Taliban. The movie is a mere sample of the daily sufferings an Afghan woman goes through. This situation of Afghan women had shaken the western world, its media, and its feminists. Western Feminists, such as Feminist Majority Foundation, had a major effect on the situation of Afghan women as they aimed to save them from the Islamic fundamentalist group Taliban. On the other hand, Afghan women have not been sitting there waiting to be saved. Groups such as The Revolutionary

Association of the Women of Afghanistan has been fighting for the establishment of an independent, free, democratic and secular Afghanistan as since 1977.

2 Statement of the Problem

In the last twenty years, the U.S has launched a sacred war, a "war on terror," in the hopes of enlightening Afghanistan with civilization, marking by that an end to the extremist groups there. Moreover, calls for "saving Afghan women" were made by the former American president George W. Bush (2001) where he stated that the war on terror is a war for the rights and dignity of Afghan women. The mission of saving Afghan women has been a major goal that the U.S government and the white feminist organizations wanted to achieve. White feminist organizations, mainly the Feminist Majority Foundation, developed a great interest in liberating Afghan women and securing their rights as if it was a holy burden on their shoulders. Therefore, this research is devoted to examine whether this "White Woman's Burden" ideology has been effective in saving the Afghan women during the last twenty years.

3 Research Questions

The research intends to critically address the following central questions:

- What is the "White Woman's Burden" ideology and how did it emerge?
- What were the effects of the US "war on terror" on Afghan women?
- How did the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, the antithesis of FMF, help Afghan women?

4 Research Hypotheses

In response to the questions outlined earlier, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- The “White Woman’s Burden” ideology may be resulted from colonialism and white feminism.
- The “war on terror” may have caused more harm than good to Afghan women.
- The Feminist Majority Foundation’s efforts may appear as a mere extension of the “war on terror.” The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan’s efforts may be more effective in serving Afghan women’s needs.

5 Aims of the Study

This study aims at understanding the origins of the “White Woman’s Burden” ideology, as well as the tropes underlying it. Throughout the research, the study also examines the matter after twenty years of U.S. interference, analyses the impact of the “war on terror” on the Afghan women’s current situation, and assesses the roles of the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan during this period. All in the hope of providing an updated study that fills in the gaps left by the previous ones.

6 Research Methodology

A qualitative approach is proposed for this study. This approach enables the researchers to gather in-depth insights on the Afghan women’s situation. This study adopts historical, descriptive, analytical and comparative methods. In the first chapter, a historical method is utilized. In this chapter the lights will be directed on the foundation of feminism as a movement and slowly turning to White Woman’s Burden ideology and their efforts to help Third World women. Therefore, Afghan women are taken as a case study. Then, in the second chapter, a perspective method is used. Thus, reporting the environment and the situation of the Afghan women during the ‘War on

Terror.’ Also, concentrating on the efforts of US, White feminists and Afghan feminists to save Afghan women during the time. The third chapter uses an analytical-comparative method to analyze and compare both Feminist Majority Foundation and The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan through their efforts toward securing the rights of Afghan women.

7 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the fact that it is among the few works associated with feminism and specifically white feminism. This study has a huge importance to understand the situation of Afghan women before, during and after War on Terror. Furthermore, the topic is treated through shedding new perspectives on feminism, US foreign policy and also the western media toward Afghanistan and its women. Moreover, it is great help for researchers and academics who are interested in the topic to understand the most prominent issues of white feminism.

8 Literature Review

The literature review shows that there is an abundance of previous studies that tackle the situation of Afghan women during the Taliban rule and after the U.S intervention. These works try to answer many questions relevant to this research as they examine the efforts taken to save Afghan women whether from media, feminist organizations, and of course the US’s “war on terror.” Furthermore, several works attempted to unmask the U.S real intentions behind their interference, while others review the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan’s contributions in improving Afghan women’s situation. Such studies are closely related to the research problem and can be the well-established ground in which the research is built on.

In an article entitled as the Impact of U.S. Intervention on Afghan Women’s Right (2002), Sonali Kolhatkar started with a historical background on the foundation of the extremist groups in

Afghanistan and how they were the result of the U.S policy. However, the article is more devoted to tackle the RAWA's efforts in presenting the Afghan women's struggles and how the extremist groups and the outside world, mainly the U.S, reacted to their efforts. Despite the article's rich information, it can be considered outdated in relation to the events of the present day. Also, the article focused more on how the RAWA was ignored by the public rather than providing detailed information about their contributions in helping the Afghan women.

Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan (2005) looks at the U.S intervention in Afghanistan with reference to imperialism and Orientalism. At first, the article goes to the roots of the terrorist groups' emergence and how they controlled the lives of Afghan women. After such grounding introduction, the article examines how US politicians and media "discover" Afghan women and claim that their sudden interest in them is only to justify the U.S imperialist goals and that 'the representations of Afghan women in the days following 11 September 2001, and their cynical usage by US politicians, were solely aimed at supporting the US case for intervention' (Stabile, 2005, p.15.). Moreover, the article addresses the Afghan women's situation after the Taliban rule and how their rights are still denied even during the U.S mission to save them. Nevertheless, the paper does not give detailed information about the Afghan women's situation during the U.S presence. It also lacks statistics when it comes to the U.S efforts to help despite the fact that it provided a well-grounded statistic concerning the media's massive interest in Afghan women.

In her article, "Saving" Muslim Women: Feminism, U.S Policy and the War on Terror (2014), Janine Rich took Afghan women as a case study to look at the tendency white feminism has to save Middle Eastern women despite the fact that they did not ask for help. After looking at Afghan women and the work of the Feminist Majority to liberate them, the article reaches a conclusion on how white feminism marginalizes Middle Eastern women in its process of saving them. This comes as a result of white feminism consideration that everything that does not suit its

one-perspective views as discriminating and anti-feminist and it does not question whether Middle Eastern women want to be liberated on its terms or not. However, the article does not answer the question of how this trope was created in the first place.

In *Claiming Afghan Women: The Challenge of Human Rights Discourse for Transnational Feminism* (2005), Amy Erdman Farrell and Patrice McDermott tell the story of the horrific execution of Zarmeena that occurred in November of 1999 and how a RAWA member captured a video of the accident while hiding a camera beneath her burqa. The Reports Committee expected the video to spread like wildfire in international news agencies, but it did not reach international audiences until the fall of 2001 when CNN broadcasted it nonstop. From this accident, the authors compare the RAWA's work with that of the Feminist Majority Foundation especially that related to their campaign to stop Gender Apartheid during the Taliban rule. The article also highlighted the FMF's disinterest in collaborating with the RAWA due to their unshared view on the U.S foreign policy and how the RAWA needs both moral and financial support and not "instructions" from white feminist organizations.

In her bachelors' thesis *War on Terror as a "fight for the rights and dignity of women": a discourse analysis of the U.S. 'liberation' campaign for Afghan women* (2019), Jessica Pacwa uses critical discourse analysis in order to examine the U.S. policy and speech discourse on the Afghan liberation campaign for women specifically. This research work analyses points of view on Afghan women from the US government—mainly Bush's government—the NY Times and the Washington Post, the State Department, and the Congress in order to understand why "the war on terror" was justified.

9 Structure of the Study

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter entitled "Ain't I a woman: White Feminism and the Marginalization of women of color" is a theoretical framework of

White Feminism through defining it and tracking its emergence. The chapter also examines White Feminists' attempts to save the so-called oppressed women in the third world.

The second chapter, "This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer," is devoted to the US "saving" policy regarding Afghan women. The chapter unravels the true intentions behind "the war on terror," examines its impact on Afghan women, and reveals Afghan women's true needs.

Titled as "The Challenge of Saving Afghan Women: A Case Study of FMF and RAWA," the third chapter focuses on both the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Revolutionary Association's efforts toward Afghan women. The chapter highlights the organizations' different views, approaches, effects, and achievements

CHAPTER ONE:

Ain't I a Woman?:

**White Feminism and the Marginalization of women of
color**

Ain't I a Woman? :

White Feminism and the Marginalization of women of color

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Introduction

In *Brief History of Feminism* (2017), Puta and Antji Schrupp explain that every culture asserts a fundamental distinction between human genders. It is usually an issue of two: male and female, however, this is not always the case. Males are often associated with man as a whole in various cultures, homme in French for example. In every manner, males are seen to represent humanity, whereas women are thought to be derivative, inadequate, and inferior human beings (2017, p. V). Therefore, there has always been constant debates for centuries, about what is a woman, what are her rights and duties, and what role she shall play in society. These questions were mostly answered by men; hence, they were male-centered and lacked women's own perspectives causing a long dark era where women were marginalized in most parts of the world.

During the recent decades, women decided to stand tall and proud, speak up for themselves, and answer the women-related questions igniting what is known today as “feminism.” Feminism aims to restore women's rights and ensure their liberation in patriarchal societies (Hannam, 2007). In her book *Sex Matters: How Modern: Feminism Lost Touch with Science, Love, and Common Sense* (2018), Mona Charen argues that feminism has failed in its mission and has deviated from its original goals. Moreover, Charen says that ‘The idea that men have always oppressed women, and that feminism had to come along and free us — I just think it's overly simplistic,’ (Charen, *Has Modern American Feminism Failed Us?* 2018). It is claimed that today's feminism is merely a new form of white privilege that fulfils white women needs, further pushes women of color to the side, and passes political agendas that serve the white ideologies.

This chapter aims to define feminism and highlights the difficulty of this process, exhibits the historical background of feminism and its waves, and unveils the concept of the “white woman's burden” that is rooted in white feminism.

1.1 Defining Feminism

Giving feminism a universal definition can be challenging because the act of defining has an authoritative nature and it, from a postmodern view, places the defined term in a fixed realm beyond time and questioning (Thompson, 1994). Therefore, feminist theorists claim that it is invalid to define feminism as Alice Jardine wrote in *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (1985),

That word poses some serious problems. Not that we would want to end up by demanding a definition of what feminism is and, therefore, of what one must do, say, and be, if one is to acquire that epithet; dictionary meanings are suffocating, to say the least (p. 20)

This invalidity is the result of feminism's multiplicity and diversity. There is not a sole feminism, but rather feminisms, i.e., the first-wave feminism is not the same as the third-wave feminism. The first feminists may consider today's feminism as anything but feminism, for each wave has its own attitudes, concerns, and goals. Moreover, feminism aims to represent all the different women around the globe (Thompson, 1994). For this representation to be accurate, feminism must be as diverse as possible, hence, it escapes the constraints of universalism. As a result, the mission of defining feminism could be only accomplished through providing the basis that all feminisms agree upon.

To give the simplest definition, according to the international women's development agency, feminism is 'about all genders having equal rights and opportunities. It's about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights.' In her article, *Defining Feminism* (1994), Denise Thompson argues that,

Feminism is centrally concerned with questions of power, power in the sense of relations of domination/subordination, and power in the sense of ability, capacity and opportunity to control the conditions of one's own existence.

Thompson points out that feminism liberates women from the male supremacy and breaking the Oppressor (male)/Oppressed (female) dichotomy. According to her, feminism is about women gaining a fully human status and recognition that is not provided by and for men. Thompson's definition of feminism corresponds with most feminisms since the second wave. Therefore, despite its multiplicity and fluidity, feminism attempts to answer "what is a female?" and since women become women due to social constructions, as the French philosopher Simone De Beauvoir (1949) argues, feminists hope that it is possible to reconstruct the female figure beyond the limitations of fixed gender roles and the patriarchal social and political rules. However, in *Gendered Nations* (1998), Blom claims that,

Too often the priorities of white, middle-class Western women, in particular, the achievement of the vote and equal rights, are used as a lens through which to view feminism as a whole. The concerns of women in other parts of the world – for clean water, decent food and access to health care are then either marginalized or seen as somehow 'less feminist.' Comparative work draws attention to the ethnocentrism and racism of Western feminism and questions the notion of a 'universal sisterhood.' Comparisons between countries put national peculiarities to the test and highlight cross-cultural similarities and differences. They also shift the focus away from a definition of feminism that is based on an Anglo-American model. (quoted in Hannam, pp.1-2)

Nevertheless, feminism cannot be understood without looking at its historical background and waves so a complete comprehension can be drawn.

1.2 Historical Background

Some thinkers, like Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant (1977), believe that the origin roots of feminism go back to ancient Greece with Sappho (d. c. 570 BCE), the medieval age with Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) or Christine de Pisan (d. 1434). Nevertheless, it was not until 1837 that “feminism” as a concept emerged when Frenchman Charles Fourier first used the term *féminisme* (Kramer et al, 2019). Linda Nicholson claims that it is limiting and short-sighted to rely on the “wave metaphor” to accurately describe the history of feminism (2010). Rather, feminism is a continuous movement with wide range of strategies and goals that differ according to periods, contexts, and countries. Despite the fact that the “wave metaphor” eliminates the little attempts that women made throughout history; it is needed to draw a brief comprehensive image about the history of feminism. Feminism has undergone through four major waves for it to be the Feminism that is known today.

1.2.1 Women, Vote!: Late 19th and Early 20th Century Feminism

Martha Rampton states on her article *Four Waves of Feminism* that the first wave of feminism dominated the western world throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, owing to an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The wave formally began in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention (2008, p. 1). Organized by two white women, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the convention was attended by over two hundred participants. Their primary focus was the legal inclusion to suffrage—the right to vote—and to expand their political potential. At the end of the convention, a “Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances” was passed by the assembled participants in which Elizabeth Cady Stanton states,

We insist that women have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States. In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation,

and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object.

While the pioneers of first-wave feminism were (civil) rights activists, they focused on the rights of white women. This marginalization would haunt feminism for years to come.

1.2.2 My body, My choice (1960s~1990s)

De Beauvoir examines in her book *The Second Sex* (1949) the Western European cultural and philosophical history in order to show that gender roles are hammered out, not only on the level of legislation, but in literature, morality, and everyday custom. ‘[O]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ (p. 272) is probably her most famous line (Patu & Schrupp, 2017, pp. 43-44). Thus, in the United States, raising consciousness groups began to bring together the common concerns of white women across various divides of class, region, and religion in order to identify what Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) famously calls ‘the problem that has no name.’ Friedan awakened many white women’s suppressed desires to take up greater space, exercise their voice and power, and reshape social relations. Second-wave feminists concentrated on problems such as family, labor, abortion, and violence, with a special focus on spousal rape and safe birth control accessibility (Hokulani et al., 2001).

1.2.3 I Am the Third Wave: Mid 1990s Feminism

At the turn of the 1990s, some women considered feminism already outdated because their demands had been fulfilled; they started calling themselves ‘postfeminists’ (Patu & Schrupp, 2017, p. 77). However, to understand the Third Wave, it is essential to know about ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s, which was both a negative and positive feminist reaction to erotica and sexual activity. In the mid-90s, Rebecca Walker — a Black American writer, feminist, and activist— reacted to a court sentence acquitting Clarence Thomas to sexually harassing Hill Anita—an African American

lawyer. Walker wrote: *'I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave'* (1992). The third wave of feminism has emerged. In addition, it was also known with its rejection of the first two waves, on which Aikau et la comment,

This familial battle was rehearsed in various anthologies featuring third-wave feminists. Their critiques of the second wave focused on its erasure of women of color within the movement and its failure to create interracial feminist coalitions. While white women in these anthologies continued to find community in the ranks of feminist movements, women of color describe feeling alienated from their home communities and on occasion marginalized in feminist circles (2001, pp. 5-6).

In the 21st century, the third wave took a political turn especially after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. Feminists started to communicate with other international feminists via internet and social media to work towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice.

1.2.4 #MeToo: The Online Wave

Kerri Lee Alexander voices in The National Women's History Museum (2021) that there is no fourth wave of feminism and it is just a part of the third wave, especially since the third wave did not have an ending date. She states,

These dates become increasingly more difficult when trying to discuss the third and fourth waves. Although the third wave never truly had an official "end," activists recognize that the 21st century has ushered in a new type of activism.

The fourth wave takes place online and it uses the developing forms of media and technology, such as Facebook and Twitter, for its benefit. Writing in The Guardian in 2013, Kira Cochrane argues that the fourth wave is internet based and 'defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online' (Cochrane, 2013). The wave focuses on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture. Social media helped the

victims of sexual assault from various ethnic backgrounds who began sharing their experiences on social media using the hashtag such as #MeToo, #YesAllWomen and #BringBackOurGirls. Until now, the wave is still raging.

1.3 The White Woman's Burden: How did imperialist feminism emerge?

In 1899, Rudyard Kipling wrote his poem the “White Man’s Burden” giving the United State a “moral” justification for its imperial conquest of Philippine. The poem demonstrates the long-held tendency the white imperialists have to civilize and enlighten other races. Due to their white supremacy and their high sense of superiority over the non-white populations, white imperialists view colonization, with all its different forms, as their sacred mission. Despite the fact that it has been more than a century since the poem’s publication, its main theme is still relevant to today’s ideologies and white feminism is not an exception to that.

Today’s feminism, which firstly founded by western white middle-class women, attempts to include all women around the globe. However, its white-centred perspective makes it challenging for non-white women to adopt the fixed frame of today’s feminism. In her book *Against White Feminism Notes on Disruption*, Rafia Zakaria defines a white feminist as a person who rejects to consider race, color and class as feminist concerns. Zakaria argues that,

[A] white feminist is someone who refuses to consider the role that whiteness and the racial privilege attached to it have played and continue to play in universalizing white feminist concerns, agendas, and beliefs as being those of all of feminism and all of feminists. You do not have to be white to be a white feminist. It is also perfectly possible to be white and feminist and not be a white feminist (2021, p. 6).

Kao Beck (2021, 1 9) reviewed in an interview with NBCBLK—one of NBC News Digital brands that tells stories from Black perspective—that, white feminism is an ideology that can be followed throughout the history of the feminist movement in the United States, from the

suffragettes to “girl bosses.” CEO women, who exclusively used feminism as a marketing technique, are the embodiment of this form of feminism. This worldview emphasizes individual achievement and views equality as something that women may accomplish largely via professional pursuits and the exploitation of women of color and the other. White feminism’s purpose is to flourish within oppressive systems such as patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism, rather than to change them. She also comments in her book *White Feminism* (2021) on the matter by how white feminism did marginalize women of color,

TELLING WOMEN AND OTHER marginalized genders what their feminism should look like has a very dark history. It’s essentially a powerful organization telling a disenfranchised one, “You should look like me.” This dynamic quickly backslides into an international history of colonialism and imperialism, conjuring scripts that have endured as methods to oppress people for not resembling their oppressors. White feminism can be elegant or euphemistic in its exclusivity. But sometimes it names its racial dominance in plain terms (2021, p. 41)

Moreover, Shabana Mir argues that ‘feminism is local, and has many colors, and isn’t always called ‘feminism’ because ‘feminism’ is owned and run by white women who bring white men in fighter planes’ (2009). Indeed, white women and men ignited, still, they currently are, the flame of war to save the oppressed women of color before even asking what these women really needed.

During the colonialization of Africa, Asia, and Australia, white women cooperated with white men in their mission of civilizing the “backward” non-white people. White women victimized women of color and pictured them as damsels in distress that are in urgent need of saviours (Syed & Ali, 2011). This gave colonialization a sense of rightness and the imperialist men’s ego something to feed on, as Syed and Ali argue, ‘the white appetite for stories of victimage is not a new phenomenon’ (2011).

In India, British feminists picturized Indian women as powerless oppressed creatures that are unable to speak for themselves emphasizing by that the stereotype of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ (Syed & Ali, 2011, p. 353). From their orientalist perspective, British feminists viewed Indian culture as oppressing to Indian women. With no attempt to understand their context or listen to their true needs, Indian women were otherized and spoken for.

Kohrs-Amissah (2002) sees that western feminists failed in depicting the true image of black African womanhood because they look at it from a negative prejudiced standpoint that foils their sense of superiority as white women. An example of this prejudice is the story of Sarah Baartman or Hottentot Venus, as imperialist Europeans named her. Sarah Baartman is a Khoekhoe woman who was exhibited in 19th-century to Britain as an object to be scientifically examined and exotically looked at due to her body shape (Adeleke, 2021). From the western standpoint, her body type was unfamiliar, therefore, worth to be sold in a freak show, touched out of curiosity, and studied by scientists till death. British feminists made no move to “save” her. Moreover, the prejudice of western feminism was displayed by white women who settled in the colonies and their racist treatment of African women and men (Syed & Ali, 2011).

Australia is no exception as well. Feminists fought for women’s rights and liberation in Australia, however, Aboriginal women were not included in this fight. They were denied access to society and full participation as decent citizens for many years. According to Bronwyn Fredericks,

Historically, Aboriginal women generally found little comfort or support from non-Indigenous women in Australia who were active participants in the marginalization and the denial of human, civil, political, legal, sexual and Indigenous rights of Aboriginal women. Their attitudes, like male attitudes, were and are forged within different race, class, sex, colonialist and neo-colonialist practices. Non-

Indigenous women have benefited and profited from past and continued marginalization and oppression of Aboriginal women (2004)

In their few attempts to stand for Aboriginal women, white feminists spoke for— rather than with—the Aboriginal women with a lack of knowledge about their culture and experience. They did not understand how Aboriginal societies were constructed and what roles Aboriginal women performed, hence, they failed in representing them without considering whether Aboriginal women wanted to be represented or not in the first place (Syed & Ali, 2011). Furthermore, the case of the stolen generation, where Aboriginal children were taken from their parents so that white imperialists could “civilize” them, emphasized the failure of white feminism.

Today, white feminists continue to fail women of color. The third world has been the target of many neo-colonial projects that feed on their natural resources, and white feminists continue to give the modern imperialist men a “moral” justification for that. They continue to bring white men in fighter planes to save oppressed women in African countries, India, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Feminism emerged as reaction to the patriarchal system, which sees males as representation of supremacy, whereas women as inferior human beings. Feminists indeed did fight for their existence and liberation through the years, but their fight was shifted from its main goals and took a white-centred orientation. Today's feminism aims to fulfill the white women's burden to save the women of the third world, which are considered oppressed, illiterate and helpless, by using white men's power. As in the case of Muslim women and mainly Afghan women which will be discussed on the next two chapters.

CHAPTER TWO:

**This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the
colonizer**

CHAPTER TWO: This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer

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Introduction

The case of ‘Saving’ Afghan women roots back to the definition of what Orientalism is. According to Edward Said (1978) ‘Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”’ (p. 2). Said opines that this occurs as an attempt to perpetuate a culture through the creation of a competing alter ego. Orientalism, in Said’s work, has caused the West to regard Islamic civilization as unchanging in time and place, allowing the West to feel superior in terms of culture and intelligence (1978). Thus, the west portrays Muslim women—and in this case Afghan women—as uncivilized and oppressed ‘others.’

Afghanistan has made and/or undone monarchs and politicians during the previous century through struggles relating to women’s status. The plight of women became an excuse the Western military forces used for war in the name of Afghan women’s liberation. However, the current state of women in Afghanistan is not only due to Taliban regulations. Subjugation of women has a long history dating back many decades (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). Elaheh Rostami-Povey in her book *Afghan Women’s* introduction (2007) states that: ‘Today, as under the Taliban, women in Afghanistan feel alienated as they face patriarchy and a lack of security. They have now found their culture under attack from an alien regime’ (p. 1). Afghan women have to face the western invasion, feminist beliefs, Taliban, and even their own community to protect their gender, ethnicity, and identity from perishing.

This chapter aims to shed light on the western perspective of saving Afghan women and how the US was willing to save them during the last twenty years of War on Terror. Moreover, this part highlighted the debate of whether Afghan women want to be saved or how to be saved.

2.1 The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women

The 11 September 2001 attacks were indeed a turning point in the contemporary American political, social, and cultural imagination, which directly led to the invasions of Afghanistan (Carlson, 2004). Thus, the US media has reviewed and reported life in Afghanistan since a country cannot be looked at without examining the situation of its people, mainly its women. Therefore, Afghan women received special attention by the media dominating articles by their stories and appearing on magazines covers, such as National Geographic and Time and others, with their burqa. According to the US Department of State comment on the situation of Afghan women: ‘in 1992 women were increasingly precluded from public service. In conservative areas in 1994, many women appear in public only if dressed in a complete head-to-toe garment with a mesh covered opening for their eyes’ (The US Department of State, 1995, as cited in Ahemd-Ghosh, 2003, p.7).

From the Oval Office in his Address to the Nation, the former US president George W. Bush believes that ‘America was targeted for attack because we are the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.’ The main concern of Bush’s government was that Taliban will spread its terrorism to the American reigns. Hence, the US needed to launch a War on Terror as Bush states in his Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress: ‘this is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight. This is a fight of all who believe in progress, pluralism, tolerance and freedom... The civilized world is rallying to America’s side.’ Moreover, Bush’s government looked at the Afghan woman as dismal in distress who needs to be rescued (Pacwa, 2019) and also that as a noble cause that is essential to the peace of the world. The focus on Afghan women became a strategic tool, where the Bush administration used a feminist discourse in an effort to influence the public opinion about the War on Terror. (Hatef & Luqiu, 2020).

On the other hand, delivering the weekly radio presidential address, First Lady Laura Bush says: ‘Life under the Taliban is so hard and repressive, even small displays of joy are outlawed. Children aren’t allowed to fly kites, their mothers face beatings for laughing out loud.’ Afghan women have been forced to be covered from head to toe, no makeup or fancy shoes are allowed and they have been denied any access to education or even to visit male doctors (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003).

On her *War on Terror as a “Fight For The Rights And Dignity Of Women”*: A Discourse Analysis Of The U.S. ‘Liberation’ Campaign For Afghan Women (2019), Jessica Pacwa tallies the volume of news reports about Afghan women from The Washington Post and The New York Times from the 1980s to the present as shown in the figure below (**Figure.2.1**). The figure reflects a noticeable dramatic increase in media coverage centered on the issue of Afghan women between 2001 and 2003. This uptick in media coverage reflects the U.S. administration’s involvement in shaping the agenda.

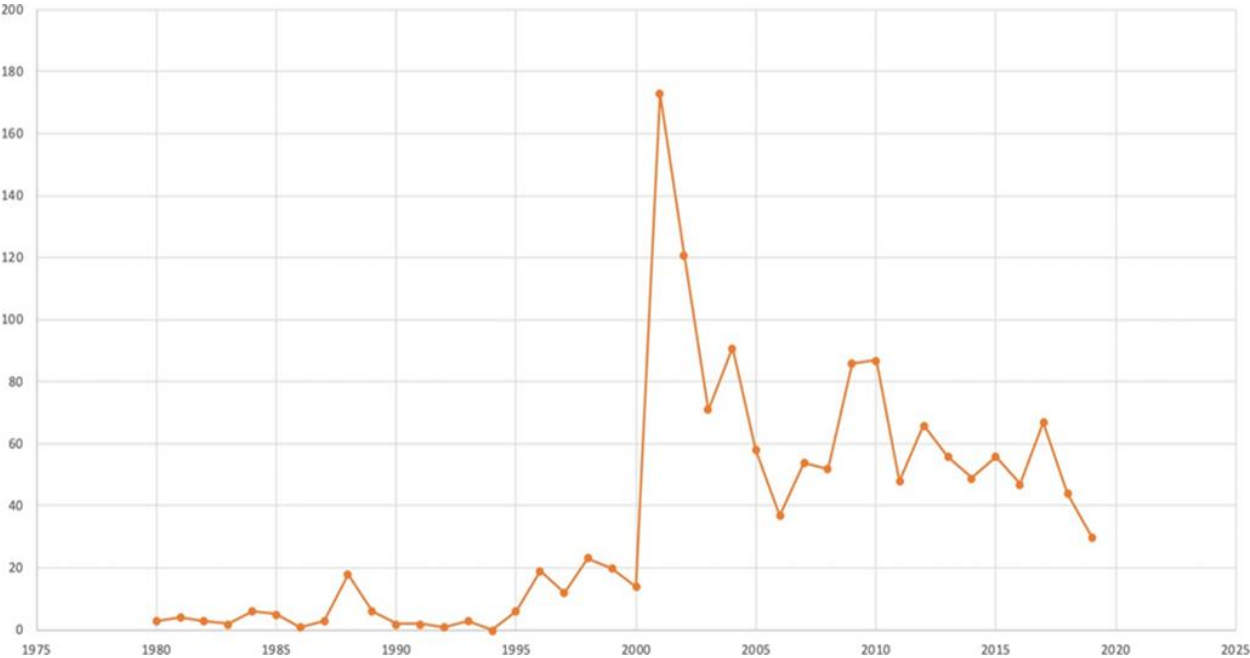


Figure 2.1: Volume of News Reports from The New York Times & Washington Post (Pacwa, 2019).

Yet, this media attention came as a one of the cornerstones on which elites attempted to persuade the American public to support the war. Carol Stabile and Deepa Kumar argue on this matter commenting: ‘As the ‘War on Terror’ continues, and as the Bush administration turns its rapacious eye on other ‘rogue’ nations, the use of women, children and their ‘human rights’ as justification for US aggression needs to be interrogated and challenged’ (2005, p. 766).

Shahira S. Fahmy highlights in her *PICTURING AFGHAN WOMEN: A Content Analysis of AP Wire Photographs During the Taliban Regime and after the Fall of the Taliban Regime* (2004) notes;

It is important to note that because most of the women are completely covered up, the images failed to humanize the subjects. They did not communicate an emotional state or an imaginary contact with the viewer. The overwhelming number of completely covered Afghan women in the photographs made it impossible to identify contact and emotion. Almost 90 percent of photographs in both time-periods fail to establish a contact with the viewer, and 60 percent of photographs fail to depict an emotional state for the women portrayed.

In essence, veiling has become a political and military matter as well as an ideological one just as Frantz Fanon (1959) states ‘this woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer’ (*A Dying Colonialism*, p.44). With a particularly concentrated attention on the burqa, the Afghan woman came to symbolize a visual expression of a civilization perceived to be the opposite of everything Western culture holds dear. Even before the War on Terror was declared, the veil had come to symbolize oppression, while uncovering had come to symbolize freedom and democracy (Rich, 2014). This orientalist ideology was even rooted back in the nineteenth century by the European colonizer’s thoughts about the Islamic World. Janine Rich explains that in her “Saving” Muslim Women: Feminism, U.S Policy and the War on Terror: ‘Veiled women were mysterious, removed from political and public spaces, and thus beyond the immediate sphere of

control of European colonizers. They were symbolic of the Orient, construed as a paradoxical place of simultaneously indulgent, degenerate sexuality and deeply religious repression' (2014). Meanwhile, in the contemporary atmosphere of Islamophobia in the West, woman's 'hidden faces frustrate expectations; they cannot or will not communicate-yet we claim they convey volumes about the condition of women, the repressive nature of traditional religious practices and the backward nations in which they live' (Zeiger, 2008). Within this framework of Muslim women in general, and Afghan women in particular, as helpless victims who Taliban forces them to wear burqa and chadri, The USA attempts to play the role of the savior to bring civilization and free women from oppression.

The following images are a series of photographs shot by the Associated Press (AP) after the Taliban rule fell in 2001; they depict Afghan women as cheerful and at ease to reveal their faces and return to work and daily life.



Figure 2.2: an Afghan woman smiling after lifting her burqa in Kabul following the fall of the Taliban regime (Shahira S. Fahmy, 2004).



Figure2.3: a group of Afghan female doctors walking through a corridor of a hospital for women in Kabul after the fall of Taliban Regime(Shahira S. Fahmy, 2004).



Figure2.3: an image of a woman reading a newscast at Radio Afghanistan in Kabul (Shahira S. Fahmy, 2004).

2.2 To Veil the Threat of Terror: the US Saving Policy of Afghan women

After giving their promises to end the Taliban rule and to save Afghan women, the US sent its troops to Afghanistan to stop terrorism before it spreads. The US aimed to restore women's rights once a new government is established after this war (Stabile, 2005).

In *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy* (2019), Clayton Thomas reports that Afghan women's literacy rate was 6% in 2001 and has increased to be 16% in 2017, Afghan women represent 22% in civil service, 3.5 million Afghan girls enrolled in schools and even in Taliban-controlled areas girls were allowed to attend primary school. In the defense force, Afghan women represented almost 2% of Afghanistan in November 2018, and Article 83 and 84 of the Afghan constitution gave Afghan women representatives seats in both houses of the parliament. Additionally, three per cent of 6.7 million girls (for ages 0-14) were able to get access to education in 2004 (ALVI-AZIZ, 2008). Hence, women's rights organizations believe that women in Afghanistan now have a number of rights that they did not have previously. In reality, however, it is clear that the improvements enacted by the administration's upper echelons have not yet reached the grassroots. The work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan, for example, is greatly impeded by the current atmosphere of insecurity. The administration has yet to be successful in restoring a sense of security and stability. In fact, human rights campaigners say they have been threatened and intimidated by the Taliban (Sakeenah, 2010). Indeed, Afghanistan still ranks 163rd of 164 countries on its 2017 gender development index according to the UN (Thomas, 2019). One reason for that may be the US policy of "saving."

Saba Gul Khattak argues in her article *Bombed to be Liberated?* (2002) that the US did not have the Afghan women's best interest in mind, rather its policies reveal that it was trying to fulfill a neo-colonial project. Khattak claims that after Bush's speech and within the course of one month

only, over half a million tons of bombs—approximately 20 kilograms of high explosive for every Afghan man, woman and child in the country was dropped by the US. As a result, and after just one year of the US invasion, Afghanistan ranked as the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world (Stabile, 2005). Despite the United Nations stating that ‘Women and girls suffer disproportionately during and after war, as existing inequalities [are] magnified, and social networks [break] down, making them more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation’ (2003), the US continued its war in Afghanistan.

The US established the most notable and the largest aid program, Promote, to help Afghan women as The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) states:

The U.S. government and international donors have considered the investment in Afghan women to be a top priority of foreign assistance goals for the past 15 years. A focus on opportunities for women has been mainstreamed across the extensive USAID portfolio in Afghanistan. Activities in health, education, economic growth, agriculture and democracy and governance have always addressed women and continue to do so (2019)

The USAID also claims that Promote has assisted over 50,000 young women across Afghanistan. Nonetheless, Pacwa argues,

I ran into some difficulty with attempting to analyze USAID program for Afghan women’s empowerment, Promote, mostly because there was surprisingly little material to examine that specially addresses how the program is achieving its objective of leadership development, civil service training, economic empowerment and civil society advocacy (2019, p.31)

Moreover, the program was scrutinized in 2018 after the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, John L. Sopko, says ‘we cannot find any good data that they [are] helping any women’ (Nordland, 2018).

Focusing mainly on women’s access to education and liberation from the burqa, most of the US programs neglected millions of Afghan refugees, outbreaks of diseases like polio and measles, dreadful poverty, high rate of widowhood, and chronic starvation (Stabile, 2005). Indeed, the US even prevented any act of feeding Afghans and hindered efforts to transport aid to Afghans. Many aid agencies asked the U.S. to pause in the bombing to allow food distribution, while five countries even suggested sending international troops so food can be delivered securely to populations at risk of starvation. However, the United States refused (Kolhatkar, 2002).

Meanwhile, the US and its media paid special attention to the Afghan burqa to the extent that it became an ideograph that represents the Taliban’s oppression of Afghan women as Polly Toynebee states in *The Guardian* that ‘for the west, the burka was the easy symbol of Taliban oppression, a shorthand moral justification for liberating Afghanistan’ (2002). The media portrayed Afghan women as an exotic other that has been veiled with “tent-like burqa” by barbaric ideologies, hence, Afghan women taking off their burqas equates liberation’s achievement in the media. An abundance of stories and pictures of Afghan women unveiling their face and headlines such as the *Post*’s “Afghan Women Discard Veils to Discuss Future” or the *Times*’ “Lifting the Veil” dominated newspapers and magazines (Pacwa, 2019). A reporter based in Kabul for the *London Observer*, Chris Stephen, reveals:

Foreign newspaper photographers, under pressure to produce images of the city’s rejection of the Taliban, can be seen each day persuading a few women to remove these garments. What the photos do not show is the women putting them back on-again moments later (quoted in Pacwa, 2019, p.15)

According to the US media, the first move some of them did was removing their burqa, get education, and jobs. However, statistics say that approximately 60 percent of women in both time periods (before and after the Taliban) were completely covered up (Fahmy, 2004). Looking at such articles, the expressions describing Afghan women seem orientalist prejudiced and such reports tend to ignore the religious and cultural connotations of the burqa.

In *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013), Lila Abu-Lughod, a Palestinian-American anthropologist, did not deny the oppression of women by the Taliban. The way Afghan women are portrayed in Western media, she argues, is a far cry from the complex realities they face every day. Such representations minimized these women to a series of contextless images. While blaming culture or Islam, they overlooked the long history of foreign involvement in Afghanistan that contributed to the current situation—from the disintegration of society during the Soviet occupation to the sexual violence that ensued during the subsequent civil war and mujahideen rule.

In its attempt to veil the threat of terror, the US did nothing but unveiling Afghan women and worsening their situation as the UN declared that Afghanistan ranked last (170 out of 170 countries) on the Global Women, Peace and Security Index in 2021. Shinkai Karokhail, member of parliament, states:

After the fall of the Taliban everyone wanted to come and work for women's rights, they were proud to say they were here to help Afghan women. Slowly, slowly this disappeared. Maybe the international community saw that we had two or three women in the cabinet, and thought, it's ok, now they have their rights. But we have lost everything, from those cabinet positions to the donor attention. Women are not a priority for our own government or the international community. We've been forgotten (Kabul, June 4, 2009)

Today, Taliban got Afghanistan back and Afghan women's rights are not secured yet, meaning that the US failed in its mission to save Afghan women as it promises twenty years ago.

2.3 The 19th century missionary work of saving Muslim women needs to be left behind

It is undeniable that Afghan women suffered violent injustices under the Taliban rule, therefore, the west believes that Afghan women are in need of a savior. Despite its supposed contradiction, this message has found common ground on both sides of the political spectrum and is even an example of the language of feminism and the language of colonialism speaking with one voice (Elhinnawy, 2021). Moreover, in an interview, Abu-Lughod claims that ‘the problem, of course, with ideas of “saving” other women is that they depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by westerners’ (2012). Accordingly, it is essential to leave the 19th century missionary work of saving Muslim women behind, and to view whether Afghan women want to be saved or not in the first place.

Before examining the current situation of Afghan women, it is significant to look at the roots of this situation. The U.S and Western feminist organizations seem to be silent about the U. S’s role in the creation of the difficult situation Afghan women face. Afghanistan remained non-aligned during the Cold War, but Soviet troops overthrew the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and installed a communist leader in 1979. The U.S. decided to indirectly support the mujahedeen, whom Ronald Reagan once named “freedom fighters” (Rich, 2014). However, The US media often overlooks the fact that Afghan women experienced various patriarchal controls from the government before the Taliban took over. In Pakistan’s refugee camps, such controls began to tighten more than 20 years ago. It all began when the US-backed mujahideen captured Kabul (Khattak, 2002).

But for a long time, not after both Mujahideen (1992-1996) then Taliban (1996-2001) took over Kabul, Afghan women did not live suchlike life. Since 1950s, many women had their education and they made up 70 percent of Afghanistan’s teachers, 40 percent of its doctors, and 30 percent of its civil servants and even held some important political posts. Most women did not

wear the burqa. Even many devout Muslim women wore headscarves and long dresses, but not the burqa. In the early 1990's, women participated in many work fields and public life (Smeal, 2001).

Additionally, Saba Gul Khattak argues that it is important to observe several ruptures in the Taliban's repression of women, not to excuse them, but rather to show that Afghan women, even when severely restricted, retained some agency. In her article *Bombed to be Liberated?*, she examines women's attempts to secure their rights despite the Taliban's grip on the country. Several women were able to work in hospitals under the Taliban and there were schools for girls in people's homes. The Taliban also allowed Afghan women to run bakeries from which the World Food Program supplied bread to Afghan people. Many Afghan women continued to work, attend school, and negotiate with the ruling clergy to continue their professional work. After the removal of Taliban, Afghan women continued to wear the veil despite the Taliban being removed from power (Khattak, 2002).

Afghan women have a great deal of problems to handle aside of their public appearance, Fahmy states that 60% of women where pictured as to cover their whole body during and after the Taliban regime. The following table (**Table 2.1**) provides 284 photographs of Afghan women taken by the Associated Press (AP) which explains that burqa was never an issue to Afghan women as the west assumed (2004). The results show that body revealing was never an impediment for their freedom as is the way western media illustrates it.

Table.2.1: a comparison of percentage of 284 photograph of women between During and After the Taliban Regime,

	During the Taliban Regime N = 142	After the fall of the Taliban Regime N=142
Cover the entire body	61.3%	59.2%
Showing face or eyes	38.7%	38.7%
Showing face and hair	0%	2.1%

Note: Adopted from (Shahira S. Fahmy, 2004)



Figure 2.5: two Afghan boys and a woman wearing the burqa are portrayed riding a bicycle through the streets of Kabul during the Taliban regime (Shahira S. Fahmy, 2004).

Based on the above, Afghan women had rights before the Taliban, fought for their rights under its rule, and even established their own organizations to speak for themselves. This deconstructs the U. S's image of Afghan women as mute, ignorant and forcedly-veiled subjects who need to be spoken for. Indeed, Afghan women want a peaceful country where they can practice their rights as Soraya Parlika, a prominent activist in Kabul, states: 'The burka (veil) is not the main problem of women.... first women should find work and improve their economic situation,' and Dr. Rahima Zafar Staniczaio comments: 'First we need peace. Then we need a central government. Then we need education. After all that we will be in a position to make a decision on the burka' (quoted in

Kim Berry, 2003, p.155-156). Indeed, Nancy Dupree notes in *Afghan women under the Taliban* (1998),

Women are already making their own fashion statements [in their choice of chaddari] ... Burnt orange and forest green are fashionable in Jalalabad; various shades of blue accented by an occasional canary yellow flit about Kabul ... the veils shimmer and billow with a certain mysterious seductiveness. This, of course, is far from the intent of the authorities (1998, p.160)

The future of women in Afghanistan may challenge the prevailing narrative on citizenship and feminism as defined by the West, providing an alternative that can bring social justice and economic equality to all non-western countries and minorities in western countries (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). For Afghan women, participation in the economic reconstruction of the country is essential to recognize their dreams of a cohesive and peaceful nation; becoming victims of Islamic burqas and Western liberation is the least of their concern. In Afghanistan, as in other traditional societies, women do not exist outside the family and community (ibid).

Ahemd-Ghosh (2003) mentions, for women's status to improve in Afghanistan, the area that is the most vulnerable and needs immediate remedying is an emphasis on rural reconstruction. She writes,

Within the country thousands of women have been widowed, abandoned, divorced and rendered unmarried. These women survive in poverty as single women, or heads of their households. Education, skill training, and employment of these women could create a class of women who would then be economically empowered. This empowerment could translate into political power, which in turn could impact the need to change women's situation in the emerging Afghan society (2003, p.11)

Nevertheless, Afghan women who embrace fundamentalism as a way of life blame the corrupt government, patriarchal rules, and false readings of the Quran for their destitute and oppressed lives, not Islam (ibid).

In their *Exploited by whom? An alternative perspective on humanitarian assistance to Afghan women* (2002), Sultan Barakat and Gareth Wardell believe that Afghan women do not need the west to work *for* them, but rather work *with* them. They claim that,

Consideration should be given to a number of possible interventions that offer either direct or indirect benefits to women. For example: support for home-based schooling initiatives of the kind that flourished under Taliban restrictions may help to improve uptake of education by girls (2002, p.925).

Rural electrification can also free up women's time from involvement in traditional tasks like water collection and firewood gathering, thereby enabling them to participate in other activities, literacy programs, etc. That can enhance the quality of their lives. Other possible areas for intervention include micro-credit programs to finance small business (ibid, pp.926-927).

Thus, Afghan women view on women's rights may be different from that of the westerners and feminists as Abu-Lughod (2012) points out in her interview,

We might still argue for justice for women, but consider that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or choose, different futures from what we envision as best. Among the most difficult things for American feminists to accept is that these futures might involve women in developing within a different religious tradition, or traditions that do not have as their primary ideal something called "freedom" (2012)

Abu-Lughod also reveals that these differences are present even among the few Afghan feminists and activists as revealed by reports that came out of the Bonn peace conference in

November 2011. On the one hand, such as the representative of the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), conciliation was not given to any notion of Muslim governance. Others, however, looked to Iran as a country where women were making significant gains within an Islamic framework (2012).

In the July remarks of the US President Joe Biden on the drawdown in Afghanistan, he states that ‘the U.S. will not save Afghan women. But this does not mean the U.S. government and its allies have no responsibility toward them.’ Marya Hannun wishes in her article ‘Saving’ Afghan Women, Now (2021) that this statement means that the U.S will not repeat history and will—finally—stop looking at Afghan women as a “saving project” and give them, instead, a space of self-expression. However, Hannun also conveys Afghan women frustrations about not been included when America engaged in talks with the Taliban as one activist claims ‘we deserved a responsible withdrawal. We needed a responsible withdrawal’ (ibid).

Conclusion

11 September 2001 marked a turning point in Afghanistan's history. Shortly after the attack, the U.S invaded Afghanistan in a sacred mission to save Afghan women. From Bush's government to Biden's government, the U.S, backed by its media, spoke for Afghan women and decided for them how they can be saved. Because of this, the U.S "saving" mission was an absolute failure as it did not provide Afghan women with what they needed. Afghanistan has been torn apart by war, which has left Afghan women longing for a safe, peaceful, independent country that protects everyone's rights. This mismatch between the U. S's view on saving and that of Afghan women is apparent in the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) different approaches to helping Afghan women. A point that will be thoroughly discussed in the third chapter.

CHAPTER THREE:

The Challenge of Saving Afghan Women:

A Case Study of FMF and RAWA

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A Case Study of FMF and RAWA

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Introduction

Throughout its history, Afghanistan has suffered wars in which its people had no say, starting with the Soviet invasion and continuing with fundamentalist jihadists and the Taliban. Soon after the Taliban took over Afghanistan, white feminists sought to liberate Afghan women from the shackles of this terrorist group despite the fact that Afghan women were enduring all kinds of abuse long before the Taliban. Additionally, Afghan women fought for their rights and spoke up for themselves, but their voices were ignored.

This chapter applies the previous information about feminism in general and feminism in the Afghani context to compare between the US-originated Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) and the Afghanistan-originated Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). This comparison aims to shed light on the differences between how white feminists think Afghan women should be saved and how Afghan women themselves want to be saved, if they want to be saved in the first place.

3.1 The Feminist Majority Foundation: A Mere Mouthpiece of Hegemonic, US-centric, Ego-driven Corporate Feminism.

3.1.1 What is the Feminist Majority Foundation?

According to its official website, the Feminist Majority Foundation was founded in 1987 by Eleanor Smeal (the former president of the National Organization for Women), Peg Yorkin, Katherine Spillar, Toni Carabillo. The Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) has put women's equality, reproductive health, and non-violence at the forefront of its activism (About FMF, n.d.). Through research and action, FMF empowers women financially, socially, and politically across all spheres as its president Eleanor Smeal answered in an interview when asked about the mission of the Feminist Majority Foundation: 'equality for women and equal justice. We are fighting in many areas' (2021).

The Feminist Majority was named after a Newsweek/Gallup poll conducted in 1986, in which 56 percent of American women identified themselves as feminists. Eleanor Smeal, the president and one of the founders, chose the name to indicate the majority of women are feminists (About RAWA., n.d.).

The FMF has several campaigns and programs that assist women and promote reproductive rights both domestically and internationally, including National Clinic Access Project, Campaign for Women's Health, Feminist Campus (Choices Campus Leadership Program), Global Reproductive Rights Campaign, National Center for Women and Policing, Education Equity Program, and Campaign for Afghan Women and Girls (Our Work, n.d.).

3.1.2 Their Efforts for Afghan Women

One cannot talk about The Feminist Majority Foundation's efforts in Afghanistan without referring to its Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid. In 1997, the Feminist Majority developed its Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan to call on the United States and the United Nations to help Afghan women and girls regain their human rights. Over 200 human rights and women's organizations contributed to the campaign, which was aimed at confronting the Taliban's abuses of women and girls, as well as putting pressure on the United States and the United Nations to end gender apartheid in Afghanistan (Leno, 2001).

During that time, Mavis Leno, an American philanthropist, and her husband Jay Leno, the former host of *The Tonight Show*, hosted a celebrity gala and fundraiser in support of the Feminist Majority's campaign to end the Taliban's brutal treatment of Afghan women (Rich, 2014). Celebrities wept as they read testimonies from Afghan women at this event, which was undoubtedly well-intentioned. A hundred thousand dollars was contributed by the Lenos alone for a public awareness campaign, and Mavis Leno addressed Unocal's, the California oil company, shareholders and the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee to discourage investment in Afghanistan (ibid). As Mahmood elucidates:

Even skeptics who are normally leery of Western feminists' paternalistic desire to 'save third world women' were sympathetic to the Feminist Majority's campaign. This was in part because the restrictions that the Taliban had imposed on women in Afghanistan seemed atrocious by any standard (Hirschkind & Mahmood, 2002, p.03).

Additionally, Eleanor Smeal acknowledges in her testimony before Congress that the United States is righteous to determine Afghanistan's fate (Russo, 2006). The Feminist Majority claims it was their advocacy that persuaded Bill Clinton that the burqa-clad body of the Afghan

woman is a visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatens not only the citizens of the West, but all of civilization (Rich, 2014).

On its official website, the FMF claims that through the Campaign, public awareness of the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan was raised, the US and UN refused to recognize the Taliban, Afghan women and girls were admitted as refugees, humanitarian aid was increased and UNOCAL abandoned its plan to build an Afghan oil pipeline that would have generated over \$100 million annually in royalties for the Taliban (Afghan Women and Girls Campaign, n.d). The campaign was an absolute success; therefore, the Feminist Majority Foundation renamed its campaign after the fall of the Taliban regime to ‘Afghan Women and Girls Campaign’ and began working on conveying to the world that Afghan women play a crucial role in the future of Afghanistan (ibid.).

The Feminist Majority Foundation Campaign for Afghan Women and Girls has four major goals: Public Policy Research and Strategy Development, Public Education and Community Organizing, National and Global Outreach, and support of Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan, especially to programs serving Afghan Women and Girls (ibid).

3.1.3 Evaluating Their Efforts for Afghan Women

In her article, Ann Russo (2006) argues that the justification for the invasion of Afghanistan and the Feminist Majority Foundation’s campaign to support women’s rights in Afghanistan are based on imperial feminism and built in and through the discourses of contemporary US imperialism, which contributes to the stereotyping of Third World cultures as “barbaric” and “uncivilized.” Moreover, Russo (2006) suggests that rather than criticizing the Bush administration’s cynical appropriation of gender inequality to justify the ‘war on terrorism,’ FMF welcomed the focus on the Taliban’s gender segregation and punitive restrictions on women. The FMF even claims in an article published in volume spring 2002 of Ms. Magazine (a magazine the FMF now owns) that

the feminist rhetoric espoused by the Bush administration is evidence of FMF's ongoing 'successful' efforts to end 'gender apartheid' (Brown, 2002). Russo (2006) also points out that,

The FMF establishes itself as the leading feminist voice in the USA for the women in Afghanistan with the power and the authority to provide the feminist basis for US policy. In this way, the FMF re-affirms the ideas that the USA is in a position to judge gender inequality in Afghanistan with a consistent and persistent assumption that 'we' in the US embrace and practice gender equality and women's human rights. Further, the FMF presents its feminist framework as a universal one resonant with the US government and the majority of the people in the US. Thus, the FMF's campaign uncritically aligns itself with US foreign policy and affirms its rhetoric of spreading 'democracy' and 'freedom' in Afghanistan (p.08)

The FMF continues to operate without recognizing the impact of US bombings and militarism on the people of Afghanistan on a daily basis. There are no mentions of thousands of civilian casualties, the Afghan prison abuse reports, US soldiers' involvement in raping Afghan women, etc., in Feminist Majority press releases, news reports, or campaign materials. Thus, FMF does not consider these issues to belong in the realm of women's human rights. There can be no accountability without this explicit recognition. Rather, the FMF campaign continues to portray the USA as a benevolent and omniscient 'savior' of women and girls in Afghanistan (Russo, 2006). Hence, Hirschkind and Mahmood (2002) wonder,

Why were conditions of war, militarization, and starvation considered to be less injurious to women than the lack of education, employment, and, most notably, in the media campaign, Western dress styles? (p.08).

Through its emphasis on 'the veil' and gender segregation as symbols of women's oppression and the implicit assumption that the US represents gender equality and women's human rights, the FMF campaign assumes 'Western' superiority (Russo, 2006). Loretta Kensinger

compares the use of the veil on the Feminist Majority Foundation's web site as the "first and primary visual representation." It reveals how the FMF's extensive and decontextualized reliance on the veil as its dominant symbol of female oppression motivated action based on a belief that "passive" Afghan women must be saved by American feminists. Kensinger discusses that FMF's over-reliance on images of the veil and chador's mitigated history, agency, complexity, context, and mutuality, all of which are crucial to building effective transnational feminist coalitions (Kensinger, 2003).

Through the Feminist Majority's oversimplification and misrepresentation of facts, the organization's attempt to draw a neat line of blame between the Taliban regime and the horrific situation of Afghan women overlooks causal factors and how the Taliban was raised in the first place, just like the Bush administration did (Rich, 2014).

Another drawback of the FMF is its refusal to work with Afghan-led organizations, mainly the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) (McDermott & Erdman Farrell, 2005). Indeed, RAWA accused the Ms. magazine in an open letter of being a 'mere mouth-piece of hegemonic, US-centric, ego driven corporate feminism' (Miller, 2002). A feminism 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 (McDermott & Erdman Farrell, 2005).

3.2 RAWA: The Voice of the Voiceless

3.2.1 What is Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan?

According to the official website of Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), RAWA was founded in 1977 as an independent political/social organization of Afghan women fighting for human rights and social justice in Afghanistan (About RAWA., n.d.). The founders were a number of intellectual Afghan women under the sagacious leadership of Meena Kishwarkamel (ibid). In A Short Biography of Martyred Meena founding leader of RAWA (n.d.) by their website, Meena (1956-1987) left the university to devote herself as a social activist to organizing and educating women and for this purpose she established RAWA in 1977 to promote her goal of securing the right to freedom of speech and participation in political activities. She was assassinated in 1987 by Afghan agents of the then Russian KGB (About RAWA., n.d.).

The association is now based in neighboring Pakistan, where it runs clinics and schools for the many Afghan refugees living in camps there (Knox, 2001).

Anne E. Brodsky highlights in her *With All Our Strength* (2003) that RAWA's goals are to aid and empower Afghan women and to further the peaceful creation of a free and secular Afghan democracy. They have focused on women's rights and human rights for all as they have responded to one brutal regime after the next: the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and consequent rise of fundamentalist jihadis (1992); the Taliban (1996); and the return of jihadi warlords to positions of power in the interim and now transitional governments (2001-2002) (Brodsky, 2003). Brodsky also states that,

Despite the violent images that the word revolutionary conjures up for many in the West, and the violence with which their enemies have responded to them, RAWA's battle for democracy, freedom, and women's and human rights is fought without

violence. Their weapons are their voices and their pens; their self-sacrifice and sense of community; and their commitment to social change (p. 2)

In contradistinction to the absolute majority of the Islamic fundamentalist “freedom fighters” of the anti-Soviet war of resistance, RAWA from the outset advocated democracy and secularism (About RAWA.). Demonstrations against the Soviet invaders and their stooges and later on against the fundamentalists, and unrelenting exposure of their treason and heinous crimes has been a hallmark of RAWA’s political activities (ibid).

3.2.2 Their Efforts for Afghan Women

In their *‘Claiming Afghan Women’* (2005), Amy Farrell and Partrice McDermott explain that, for two decades prior to 9/11, RAWA has worked tirelessly from their forced exile in borderline areas of Pakistan and Iran to bring worldwide attention and remediation to the trauma experienced by Afghan women under the occupation of the Soviet Union, Northern Alliance warlords, and Taliban extremists (2005).

The WomenAid International’s website states that RAWA has always raised its voice against successive regimes in Afghanistan which have violated basic human rights. But RAWA has also been providing help for Afghan refugees. According to the same website, in 1986 the organization set up a hospital and in 1987 founded two schools for Afghan refugee children. To enable refugee women to earn a living, RAWA set up a workplace where the women are taught tailoring, embroidery and other skills. Financial constraints have brought these ventures to the point of closure (ibid). RAWA raises its funds from membership fees and supporters’ donations. Some funds are generated from the sale of traditional handicrafts and carpets (ibid).

RAWA has captured some of the most violent photographs of fundamentalist atrocities, ranging from limb amputations to public executions (Brodsky, 2003, pp.2-3). And, they have been able to spark some of the most profound changes in the mind-set of a society where many have been taught that a woman is worth literally only half of a man (ibid, p.3). Brodsky states,

They distribute humanitarian assistance, including food, quilts, cooking oil, and medical care; run underground literacy classes, schools, and income-generating projects; inspire other women and men to join their cause; publish documentary and political materials in multiple languages, and hold protest rallies and public functions in Pakistan to publicize the plight of Afghan women and of all Afghan people. Imbued in all of their activities is a community-based effort to build empowerment, self-efficacy, hope, resistance, and resilience in girls and women, and to inspire boys and men to also work toward these and other RAWA goals (ibid, p.02).

Besides their local efforts, Brodsky (2003) also notes that RAWA informs and seeks the assistance of the international women's and human rights communities through interviews with the press, speeches at international conferences, and their multilingual website, where meticulous multimedia documentation of Afghan women's conditions and resistance activities of RAWA members and supporters can be found (ibid, p.3).

Farrel and McDermott (2005) claim that '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 US feminists in particular, on behalf of their cause' (p. 34). As a result, RAWA, which supposedly represents the muted voice of Afghan women, was eventually recognized internationally by sovereign governments and humanitarian groups as the resisting force "behind the veil" (ibid).

In feminist-nation building in Afghanistan Due to this, RAWA members coordinated anti-Soviet occupation rallies and grew more worried about the amount of financial backing the extremists received from the US over more politically moderate parties (ibid).

During this period, RAWA's rise as an organization was characterized by both private and public acts of disobedience, such as public marches and political rallies against the Soviet occupation and fanatical Jihadis (Fluri, 2008). In 1980, RAWA also began publishing *Payam-e-Zan* (Women's Message), a political magazine, which until now continues to publish as a political mobilization tool and a venue for analyzing Afghan politics and providing its own ideological alternatives (ibid).

By 1981, 1.7 million Afghan civilians had fled across the border. Conditions in Pakistan's refugee camps in Peshawar and Quetta soon influenced RAWA's choice to ground its own claims to authority, agency, and authenticity in empowerment projects based on Afghan women's everyday experiences, problems, and interests (Farrell & McDermott, 2005). Meena, the first founder of the organisation, turned her focus to pleas for financial and political assistance from the US and European governments, the UN, international aid organizations, humanitarian organizations, and Western feminists in order to fund the localized work done in refugee camps (ibid). Although, it is worth to note that the Pakistan-based and Afghanistan-based groups were founded in Kabul in 1977, RAWA did not receive worldwide recognition until U.S. feminist campaigns for Afghan women's rights hit their stride in the late 1990s (Thrupkaew, 2002). Farrell and McDermott reveal that,

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 (2005, p. 38)

Notwithstanding these repressions, international support of RAWA decreased severely throughout the years of internal conflict that they were obliged to close the Malalai Hospital and replace its Watan (homeland) boarding schools with hostels and tiny independent classes (ibid). According to RAWA reports, the years under the warlords were among the most difficult for Afghan women (ibid). When the Taliban gained control from the Northern Alliance in 1996 and implemented restrictive measures against Afghan women, RAWA was able to achieve minor success with its representative strategy once more (ibid). Farrell and McDermott add,

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' (2005, p. 39)

Since the United States bombing of Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance has prevented the fast-growing Union of Women of Afghanistan from demonstrating in Kabul. RAWA opposes US military involvement in Afghanistan, stating that their feminist cause did not require US "assistance" in the form of bombs and military occupation (Cloud, 2004). Their continued rejection undermines the United States' grounds for war based on humanitarian relief for oppressed women (ibid). RAWA in their website addresses the intervention of the U.S. in *The US Bares its Fangs to its Flunkies* (1998),

RAWA roundly condemns the US air strikes against Afghanistan because the impoverished masses of Afghanistan — already trapped in the dog-fighting between the US's Taliban and Jihadi flunkies — are the ones who are most hurt in the attacks, and also because the US, like the arrogant superpower she is, has violated the sovereignty of the Afghan people and the territorial integrity of the Afghan homeland'

In RAWA statement on the terrorist attacks in the US (2001) in their website about the events of September 11, 2001, RAWA expressed their sorrow as the rest of the world. They have previously warned the US about those Islamic fundamentalist parties because

[...] after both the Jehadi and the Taliban have committed every possible type of heinous crimes against our people, they would feel no shame in committing such crimes against the American people whom they consider “infidel” ... But unfortunately we must say that it was the government of the United States who supported Pakistani dictator Gen. Zia-ul Haq in creating thousands of religious schools from which the germs of Taliban emerged... (RAWA, 2001)

The advantages that RAWA deliver to Afghan families in the form of healthcare, education, and income generating also serve as a springboard for gaining men's trust and allegiance (Fluri, 2008). RAWA is an interesting example of a nationalist-feminist political organization that negotiates and reconfigures men and women's responsibilities both inside family groupings and in relation to the country (ibid).

3.2.3 Evaluating Their Efforts for Afghan Women

In *The Silence Surrounding RAWA* (2002), Wendy McElroy accuses the RAWA of taking fund money as RAWA gives an e-mail address for inquiries as well as a P.O. (Post Office) Box in Pakistan where money should be sent. Funds can also be donated to the Afghan Women's Mission, a non-profit organization based in California. However, accountability appears to disappear when

the money is placed in a FedEx envelope sent to Pakistan. McElory (2002) also criticizes the unavailability of the RAWA members when it comes to questioning them; ‘RAWA does not invite questions. If you are a member of “the media,” you are asked to contact rawa@rawa.org, with the warning: ‘It may be difficult to contact a member of RAWA as they are overwhelmingly busy right now. There are no RAWA members permanently stationed in the United States’ (2002).

Unlike relief agencies such as the Red Cross, RAWA has time to take political stands. RAWA declares itself to be ‘a political/social organization of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women’s rights ...’ (ibid) The struggle appears to include “slandering” notable Afghan women who disagree with RAWA such as, Sima Samar, whose non-profit organization, Shuhada, operates hospitals and schools for Afghan girls. Serious allegations were levied against Samar through RAWA interviews and an e-mail campaign run by a RAWA supporter; an investigation later dropped the claims (ibid).

In her article, *What Do Afghan Women Want?* (2002), Noy Thrupkaew quotes the saying of Sayed Sahibzada, an Afghan officer at the United Nations Development Programme who has worked with more than 40 Afghan women-led NGOs, ‘I have not heard one group that goes along with RAWA. They say, ‘If there is a RAWA participant [in a training], we are not going to participate’’ (2002).

RAWA has criticized a number of other Afghan women’s organizations for being too soft on extremism. It has also publicly chastised notable Afghan women activists, some of whom have voiced concerns about RAWA’s own political ties (ibid). As a result, Thrupkaew (2002) argues, ‘Afghan women’s nongovernmental organizations and Afghan feminist expatriates have expressed concern about a radical, lone-wolf organization garnering so much Western attention.’

Working with others, forming alliances, and employing methods consistent with the more moderate “Afghan norm,” according to Sima Wali, an Afghan expatriate human rights activist, are all critical abilities for transitioning from resistance to rebuilding – qualities that RAWA appears

to lack (ibid). Masuda Sultan of Women for Afghan Women lauds RAWA's "long and committed history" of bravery. But she notes that "most Afghan women don't feel that RAWA represents them," because of the group's revolutionary rhetoric and alleged ties to Maoism (quoted in Thrupkaew, 2002).

In addition to the campaign against Samar, RAWA has frequently ignored other women's organizations. Saba, a RAWA member, criticized all of the renowned Afghan and Afghan-American women Thrupkaew highlighted, claiming that they were members of the Northern Alliance, the Soviet dictatorship, or had not taken a firm stance against extremism. This stance did not win over many Afghans: one activist refers to RAWA as "Talibabes" because of its harsh judgment (Thrupkaew, 2002).

But to effectively counter RAWA's perceived intolerance, opposing feminist groups need to build coalitions themselves (ibid). Wali says: "I'm not trying to bring [RAWA] down. We have to work across political boundaries and viewpoints. They are one of the diverse voices of Afghan women." She also adds,

We are trying to influence the men, many of whom still have Taliban ideology, and they say, 'You are part of these extremists.' It's not time yet. We can't do something extreme and leave Afghan women to deal with it. [RAWA has] a very Westernized radical approach. They are revolutionary. The Afghan people are saying we don't need a revolution, we need a democracy (quoted in Thrupkaew, 2002).

As a reply to Noy Thrupkaew's claims against them, RAWA responds to her in RAWA's Answer to Nay Thrupkaew (2002). RAWA believes it is not their fault for not wanting to go backward and expose the world to the true face of extremists. RAWA is certain that its effort would eventually increase awareness and change the attitude of specific women's organizations toward extremists. RAWA also recognizes that if Afghan women's organizations do not prioritize the

fight against Taliban and Jehadi radicals, their very survival would be called into question (RAWA's Answer to Nay Thupkaew, 2002).

Conclusion

During the last twenty years, the plight of Afghan women drew the attention of western feminists. The Feminist Majority Foundation was the most feminist American organization that believed that saving Afghan women was its burden. The FMF has its own definition of women's rights and what they should look like. Therefore, its attempts to force its own perspective on the Afghani context were an absolute failure. Not only does the FMF ignore the perspective of Afghan women, but it also plays a crucial role in facilitating the US invasion of Afghanistan. On the other side, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) is an Afghani organization that claims to be the voice of Afghan women. Due to its real-world experience, the RAWA was capable of making the changes that Afghan women really wanted even before the Taliban rise. Despite its demerits, the RAWA proved that Afghan women are capable of speaking for themselves and having a vivid look at how their country should look like. Accordingly, the mission that white feminists held as their sacred burden was often not in the interest of the troubled ones- the uncivilized muted other, but rather a continuation of their neo-colonial projects.

General Conclusion

The withdrawal of the United States troops from Afghanistan on August 30, 2021 marked the end of the US "war on terror" in Afghanistan. A war that was launched with the blessings of white feminists in the hope of saving Afghan women from the Taliban. This research is devoted to revealing the theoretical framework, i.e., White Woman's Burden ideology, that white feminists follow when attempting to save women of color. Additionally, the research examines the US "war on terror" and its effects on Afghan women while highlighting the real needs of Afghan women. Furthermore, the work compares between the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan's efforts in helping Afghan women.

The first chapter attempted to define feminism and highlighted the struggles that emerge in the process of defining such concept. The chapter followed the birth of white feminism starting from the first wave to the fourth focusing on the key events of each wave. The chapter also traced the origin of the White Woman's Burden ideology which was present during the western imperial projects. White feminists' tendency to save women of color backed the previous colonial projects and continue to back the neo-colonial ones too.

The second chapter reflected the reasons the US used to justify its "war on terror" in Afghanistan. By describing the US efforts and evaluating its programs in Afghanistan, the chapter unraveled the narrative the US adopted to disguise its neo-colonialism. Moreover, the chapter depicted the Afghan women's perspective regarding "war on terror" and foregrounded their attempts to secure their own rights before and after the Taliban.

The third chapter introduced both the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan as a case study for the research. Their approaches and their contributions to the Afghan women's situation were thoroughly examined. The chapter

compare between the two organization as one the FMF reflects the white feminists' voice, while the RAWA reflects the Afghan women's voice.

Backed by its media, the US government has advocated on behalf of Afghan women and made decisions about how to save them. The US foreign policy and the Feminist Majority Foundation's efforts toward women in Afghanistan seem to be helpful on the surface as media depicted it. However, as this research looks beyond the surface, it uncovers the orientalist roots and the neo-imperial intentions the US government and white feminists have. Hence, Afghan women should be given the opportunity to speak for themselves and should be heard by the world.

Extra research would be highly beneficial as the current situation of Afghan women and Afghanistan in general worth further investigations. White feminists' next steps regarding the matter should be evaluated and criticized as well.

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الملخص

يعالج هذا البحث إنقاذ الأفغانيات من خلال حرب الولايات المتحدة على الإرهاب والنسوية. كما يسلط الضوء على آثار النسوية البيضاء والسياسة الخارجية للولايات المتحدة على حياة النساء الأفغانيات خلال وبعد عشرون عاماً من الحرب على الإرهاب. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو توضيح أيديولوجية "عبء المرأة البيضاء" وتأثيرها على "نساء العالم الثالث"، لا سيما في أفغانستان. تلتفت هذه الدراسة الانتباه إلى حقيقة أن النسويات الغربيات يملن إلى فرض أيديولوجياتهن ومعتقداتهن وأفكارهن على النساء ذوات البشرة الملونة. في هذه الدراسة، تم استخدام منهج نوعي يتبنى الأساليب التاريخية والوصفية والتحليلية والمقارنة. يُقدم الفصل الأول تاريخاً موجزاً للنسوية ويشير إلى نشأة أيديولوجية عبء المرأة البيضاء. يستعرض الفصل الثاني على الجهود التي بذلتها السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية تجاه قضية النساء الأفغانيات وتقييم تأثير هذه السياسة، وينتهي الفصل بتسليط الضوء على جهود النساء الأفغانيات لإنقاذ أنفسهن. يُقارن الفصل الثالث بين مؤسسة الأغلبية النسوية والرابطة الثورية لنساء أفغانستان مبيناً أن محاولات مؤسسة الأغلبية النسوية لإنقاذ المرأة الأفغانية كانت مجرد شكل من أشكال الإمبريالية الاستشراقية والاستعمارية الجديدة بينما كان لجمعية الثورية لنساء أفغانستان تأثير أكبر على المرأة الأفغانية من ناحية حقوقها واحتياجاتها. لذلك، يجب أن يكون صوت المرأة الأفغانية أعلى من صوت النسويات الغربيات كي يُسمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية البيضاء، النساء الأفغانيات، الاستشراق، راوا ، اف ام اف.