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<OPPRESSED>, <EMPOWERED>, <COMPATRIOT> WOMAN: RAWA'S ONLINE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDEOGRAPHS

by

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B.A. May 2005, Longwood University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

<OPPRESSED>, <EMPOWERED>, <COMPATRIOT> WOMAN: RAWA'S ONLINE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDEOGRAPHS

Heather L. Floyd
Old Dominion University, 2009
Director: Dr. Lindal J. Buchanan

In this paper, I define the ideograph and explain its central role in the strategic communication of two very different entities invested in the advancement of women's rights in Afghanistan: the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), an Afghan feminist organization, and the Bush Administration, during the early years of the war in Afghanistan. I employ the rhetorical conceptions of Lloyd Bitzer (1966) and Richard Vatz (1999) to explore the Bush Administration's and RAWA's intentions by analyzing textual and visual ideographs in the context of the rhetorical situation.

In its mission and goals, RAWA repeatedly champions women as vital partners in nation-building and rejects occupation by foreign military forces. Despite this, RAWA continues to represent Afghan women online as powerless, voiceless, and dependent on the external assistance that only American intervention can provide. The contradiction undermines RAWA's long-term objectives for secular democracy, women's rights, and national liberation.

Bush and RAWA both rely heavily on the ideograph <oppressed woman>—a textual or visual invocation of the Afghan woman as a faceless, voiceless victim—in order to create emotional appeals directed to American donors. RAWA uses <oppressed woman> as a short-term humanitarian strategy to raise funds. Other ideographs use

reinforce the ideology of <oppressed woman> to gain American sympathy and therefore fund RAWA's short-term humanitarian initiatives.

Introducing <compatriot woman>, an alternative ideograph of Afghan women that can be used in conjunction with its current humanitarian appeals—one in which they are politically active, equal to men, and co-shapers of their homes and communities—does more to promote RAWA's long-term goals. However, deeply rooted cultural suspicions against RAWA's association with the West make introducing <compatriot woman> an unadvisable task for RAWA. Rather, its cultivation in mainstream Afghan society would allow it to build the shared cultural meaning it needs to reach the status of an ideograph. Only then could RAWA use this culturally recognizable representation of Afghan women to balance the rhetoric on its Web site and corroborate the claims it makes there in terms of the organization's long-term goals.

This thesis is dedicated to the Afghan compatriot women who willingly risk everything so that women may be free to contribute to the liberation of their country and all its members. Your efforts great and small make a difference to women around the world.

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abilities and support my future goals. I appreciate the support of my parents-in-law, Jeff and Dale Floyd, and my brother-in-law Tim and his wife Stephanie, who understood when I left the pool or the dinner table for a book or computer screen. Thank you to my non-academic friends, who, beneath their teasing, realized my need to pursue my passion, and to my academic friends, whose unique understanding I appreciate so much. I love you all for your patience and encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDEOGRAPHS

Oh compatriot, Oh brother, no longer regard me as weak and incapable

With all my strength I'm with you on the path of my land's liberation.

My voice has mingled with thousands of arisen women

My fists are clenched with the fists of thousands of compatriots

Along with you I've stepped up to the path of my nation,

To break all these sufferings all these fetters of slavery,

Oh compatriot, Oh brother, I'm not what I was

I'm the woman who has awoken,

I've found my path and will never return.

Meena Keshwar Kamal, founder of RAWA

Excerpt of the poem "I'll Never Return"

First published in *Payam-e-Zan*, No. 1, 1981

Reaching through the ages and informing our present-day identities and attitudes are our shared cultural perceptions of our global cohabitants, handed down by our forebears and elaborated by our own individual experiences. Western perceptions of Afghan women likewise began with the convergence of Western and Islamic societies and evolved into today's accumulated cultural "knowledge" of Afghan women, coupled with our lived experiences that are interpreted through our own rhetorical choices or

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This paper follows the format requirements of the *Chicago Manual of Style* 15th edition by The University of Chicago Press.

through the meaning that is passed between the media and its audience via strategic representations of Afghan women. By examining the nature of shared cultural meaning, the function of Afghan women in the strategic use of visual and textual rhetoric invoking that meaning, and the social frameworks that make some representations of Afghan women beneficial in some ways and unfavorable in others, we can begin to understand how meaning is written onto and perpetuated in text and images on the Internet. This paper investigates the context of the emergence of a popularized representation of Afghan women as victims of oppression that has been perpetuated by the West and reflected by the Afghan feminist organization the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in order to engage a common Western audience. In my attempt to consider the complex ways in which the oversimplified representation of Afghan women benefits or compromises RAWA's goals for Afghan women and national progress, I focus on the rhetoric of two entities: the Bush Administration in the U.S. and RAWA in Afghanistan. By employing the strategic rhetorical representation of oppressed Afghan women that garners so much success in the U.S., RAWA targets the American audience online to fulfill its short-term humanitarian goals at the expense of its long-term political goals. The authentication of oppressed Afghan women's image by RAWA as an Afghan organization only serves to reinforce negative Western perceptions of Afghan women.

RAWA went online with its message in 1997. In 2001, after the September 11th terrorist attacks, the organization surged in global popularity because of its accessibility through its Web site. The Internet has risen as the greatest medium for the dissemination and storage of visual media—including but not limited to photography, video, and artwork—and is therefore an important vehicle for introducing images of and articles

about marginalized groups to a global audience. Where there is Internet access, it is especially beneficial "for activists in the Third World, [because] the Internet allows cheap access to sympathetic counterparts abroad" (Warf and Grimes 1997, 264). Among those who benefit from the dissemination of these representations abroad are humanitarians and social activists. RAWA was founded in 1977 by Meena Keshwar Kamal, author of the poem "I'll Never Return" and many others, and has been described as "the lone independent voice of women and of all peace- and freedom-loving Afghans struggling against fundamentalism and for secular democracy, women's rights, and human rights" (Brodsky 2003, ix). Although RAWA claims to present an unfiltered perspective of Afghan women and project the pride and independence of Afghan women and the people as a whole, its rhetoric is guided by its need to fulfill its short-term goals of fundraising, and the text and images it chooses to reproduce are most salient to this dominant interest.

The poem "I'll Never Return" (1981) illustrates a sentiment seldom represented in portrayals of Afghan women: women figuratively taking up arms alongside men to liberate their land. Afghan women's ability to rise and assist men in their goals as equals clashes with popular Western perceptions of Afghan femininity as vulnerable, voiceless, and often oppressed. "'The Muslim woman is being victimized' is the common axis undergirding a wide variety of Western representations," and this can be largely tied to the West's perception of Islam as innately oppressive to women (Kahf 1999, 1). In a country where 99 percent of the population is Muslim (Sunni Muslim 80 percent, Shia Muslim 19 percent) (CIA Factbook 2009), Afghanistan's women accede to the same characterization that much of the West assigns to Muslim women in general: the hapless victim of a patriarchal culture. In its many variations, the narrative in the West remains

the same at its core: "the [Muslim] woman may be a willing accomplice, or she may be escaping her victimization," but she is still a victim (Kahf 1999, 1). Afghan women have attempted to engage with negative stereotypes in their various forms by employing them or by challenging them outright. In her poem "I'll Never Return," Meena (as she is best known; last names are a recent development in Afghanistan) reveals the thousands of "awoken" Afghan women who are willing compatriots to men in defense of their shared homeland. She both acknowledges and rejects the characterization of Afghan women as "weak and incapable" by stating, "I'm not what I was."

"I'll Never Return" presents an idyllic picture of gender equity, but in reality, the ongoing battle for gender equity in Afghanistan has a long and tumultuous internal history that is often "reduced to the image of the Taliban and the burqa and a narrow five-year period of our history" as described by RAWA (Brodsky 2003, ix). This interpretation of events is commonly the limit of Western knowledge about the United States' involvement with Afghanistan and Afghans' own contributions to the state of women's oppression in that country. In reality, it took centuries of struggle against gender oppression for Afghan women to reach the relatively free life they enjoyed in the early 1970s. Although constrained by conservative social customs, women walked freely in the streets in fashionable clothing that left their heads bare without fear of reprisal to go to work, receive health care, attend college, and congregate with other men and women interested in the advancement of women's rights. Afghan women's condition severely worsened with the invasion of the Soviets in 1979, inciting anti-Soviet factions to resist occupation in a ten-year battle that continued even after the Soviets pulled out in 1989, as the mujahideen "freedom fighters" covertly funded by the U.S. fought the Soviet

"puppet" government until 1992 (Brodsky 2003, 5). With American support, Afghan fundamentalist religious fanatics rose to power and stripped women of their most basic rights. Even after the Soviets were ousted, a four-year civil war was waged from 1992 to 1996 as the various Afghan factions sought power. One of these factions, the Taliban, succeeded in 1996 and sparked one of the deadliest periods for women in that country. The Taliban remained in control until 2001, when United States overthrew them in November (ibid.). As of 2009, the U.S. continues to rebuff Taliban insurgents, who still maintain power over large swathes of Afghanistan. Many Afghans are still reluctant to call themselves liberated; the devastated economy drives many poor Afghans into poppy farming for the production of narcotics, innocent civilians are constantly in danger of being killed in the crossfire of U.S. air raids on the encroaching Taliban, and the women's condition, which played such a large role in justifying American involvement, continues to be the subject of much debate.

After the attacks by the al Qaeda terrorist organization on American soil on September 11, 2001, then President George W. Bush used the rhetoric of freedom to increase heightened American solidarity in the wake of the attacks and build support for the Bush Administration's "War on Terror," which led to the occupation of Afghanistan. Bush said to a Joint Session of Congress and the American people nine days after the World Trade Center attacks, "This will be an age of liberty here and across the world. [...] Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom [...] now depends on us" (Bush 2001b). Largely representative of Bush's war rhetoric, the choice between "freedom" and "fear" in this speech excerpt represents the oversimplified choice offered to Americans between the United States, the embodiment of freedom, and the terrorists,

who operate by spreading fear (Stuckey and Ritter 2007, 656). Americans were also asked to believe that freedom should not only be protected at home, but also advanced around the world in a revolution led by Americans; without American action, the two-thirds world[1] would languish in a state akin to slavery. This rhetoric positioned President Bush as a global moral authority, hero, and paternal figure. In his subsequent speeches, the victims of the evil presence in Afghanistan, the Afghan women, are rhetorically represented as oppressed, defenseless victims, co-opting Afghan women's real dangerous situation to appeal to the American mass consciousness and shore up the citizens' confidence in their leader. Reminding the public of America's perceived moral obligation to the oppressed effectively minimized negative public opinion about the war.

In the months after September 11th, the Bush Administration launched a campaign publicizing the horrific oppression of Afghan women under the Taliban and its enforcement of Shari'a, a fundamentalist form of Islamic religious law (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 171). Men, women, and children were all oppressed under the Taliban, but Bush's campaign highlighted crimes against women in particular. The women's liberation rhetoric of George W. Bush masked the "reasons that led the U.S. to enter Afghanistan (imperial prestige, stepping-stone to Iraq, demonstrating imperial democracy, election propaganda, war on terror demonstration)" and positioned the United States for longer-term "material interests (enhancing U.S. power, keeping NATO serving U.S. interests, dominating energy reserves)" (ibid., 250). The public outpouring of support for the very real human rights emergency in Afghanistan strengthened support for the war. A pervading cultural belief in American exceptionalism, or the historical notion

[1] A term used by Mary Queen (2008, 472) and preferred by the author. "Two-thirds world" respectfully offers a realistic description of a country's development without contributing to the bias and stigma associated with the term "Third World."

that the West has a humanitarian responsibility for the rest of the world, buoyed the Bush Administration's military presence in Afghanistan and demanded the installation of Western values there, among these democracy, women's equality, and participation in the free market economy. However, it was the representation of oppressed Afghan women that most effectively appealed to Americans' remarkable commitment to liberty.

The power and function of ideographs, a theoretical understanding of the way images and ideology operate rhetorically in communications, afford useful insights into the reception of Afghan women's representation in America as well as in Afghanistan and surrounding Muslim societies. Textual and visual ideographs invoke certain ideas and responses in the reader/viewer without requiring the work of explaining those ideas. In this chapter, I will define the ideograph and explain its central role in the strategic communication of two very different entities invested in the advancement of women's rights in Afghanistan. The first speaker, past U.S. president George W. Bush, is supported in his efforts toward Afghan women's liberation in the public speech of his wife, Laura Bush, and they in turn are echoed by mainstream American media outlets. Chapter 2 provides detailed examples of ideographs in the president's and first lady's speeches and in American media. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, or RAWA, an Afghan feminist organization with political and humanitarian goals, is the second speaker, reaching out to its common audience with the Bush Administration: the American public as part of a greater Western culture. Examples of its use of ideographs are presented in a Web site content analysis in Chapter 3. Through its online utilization of ideographs known to connect with an American audience, RAWA appeals not only to Americans' human empathy, but the general sense of American

responsibility for global human rights which is heavily emphasized in the president's speeches before and during the early years of the war in Afghanistan. The strategic portrayal of oppressed Afghan women employed by Bush and RAWA at once reflect and contribute to the shared cultural knowledge informed by history upon which most Americans draw to interpret representations of Afghan women.

IDEOGRAPHS AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The Bush Administration's strategic representation of oppressed Afghan women invokes the shared cultural meaning most Americans attribute to Afghan women and contributes to it by using ideographs to interpret them in specifically chosen current contexts, such as oppression under the Taliban. By ideographically representing textual and visual portrayals of Afghan women, Bush and the American media can impart certain ideas to its audience without doing the work of articulating them. Dana Cloud defines the ideograph as "a commonplace abstraction that represents collective commitment, it warrants power and guides behavior, and it is culture bound" (2004, 288). Michael McGee further distinguishes the ideograph by its following characteristics:

> An ideograph is an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction representing a collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief, [...] and guides behavior and belief. (1980, 15)

These characteristics show that the use of ideographs is ideal for political discourse and rhetorically establishing authority by excusing and guiding behaviors and beliefs in favor of the rhetor. James Jansinski narrows the clear case for ideographic representations in

political discourse, observing that they "constitute a structure of 'public motives' [and] are the terms we use to impart values, justify decisions, motivate behavior, and debate policy initiatives" (qtd. in Stuckey and Ritter 2007, 648). When ideographs are used in politically charged rhetoric, the collective meaning imparted to a motivated audience can have significant social and legal implications.

Defined as "culturally bound summary phrases that capture important ideological associations," ideographs rely on shared meaning and therefore are frequently used to "unify a diverse audience around a vaguely shared set of meanings" (Stuckey and Ritter 2007, 648). As an example, strategic communicative choices are used to express the ideograph <oppressed woman>, following the standard notation style for ideographs, by encompassing an entire history of past and current cultural experiences in one "summary phrase" or visual symbol. In the case of the Afghan <oppressed woman> ideograph used by Bush and RAWA, verbiage might be used to relay the impression of enslavement and violence, while images may portray Afghan women as victims by featuring women wearing the burqa or revealing self-inflicted burn wounds as visual evidence of gendered oppression.

The audience of Bush's ideograph <oppressed woman> is the American public, but pandering to the mass consciousness of a nation is a difficult, if not impossible, task. McGee remarks that "if a mass consciousness exists at all, it must be empirically 'present,' itself a thing obvious to those who participate in it, or, at least, empirically manifested in the language which communicates it" (1980, 4). Because ideographs are a deeper construct than mere words, it is unrealistic to speculate that a mass consciousness responds monolithically according to a surface definition of an utterance. Instead, rhetors

like the president use ideographs to appeal to the largest audience possible through a broad-based set of shared public motives "with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior" through persuasion, using the "prior persuasion" that marks ideographs via the shared history of its roots and by calling on the "a priori influence that learned predispositions hold over human agents who play the roles of 'power' and 'people' in a given transaction" (ibid., 5-6). Therefore, whereas the American people will already respond in a certain way to <oppressed woman> based on prior persuasion and the power of the rhetor, they are also more likely to respond in this way and in higher number by reacting to its predisposed role as subordinate to the president. Of course, the nature of ideographs belies the difficulty of appealing to a mass consciousness, as ideographs "exist in real discourse. [...] They are not invented by observers; they come to be as a part of the real lives of the people whose motives they articulate" (ibid., 7). The rhetor thus has some effect on the reception of the ideograph, but the basis for the ideograph must already exist for the rhetor to invoke the culture-bound meaning and build upon it.

Because ideographs develop through wide cultural acceptance and perpetuation, it is necessary for the concept to accumulate shared meaning over time to reach the status of an ideograph (Stuckey and Ritter 2007, 648). Given that ideographs are not static and are continually developing, they "do not create automatic reactions in audiences. They must resonate with how those audiences understand the political world and must seem to be deployed in a reasonable way to be recognizable and persuasive" (ibid., 649). For instance, Bush's ideographic use of <freedom>, described by George Lakoff (2006) as "America's most important idea," connected to deeply-rooted American cultural values

and brought many Americans closer together after September 11th. Bush reshaped the idea of <freedom> as a uniquely American idea and used it to cast the liberation of Afghanistan and <oppressed woman> as an American responsibility.

The Bush Administration appealed to the American public through repeated verbal and visual ideographs of suffering Afghan women to provoke feelings of empathy and, more importantly, responsibility; in so doing, it constructed a paternalistic role of savior for the listener/viewer to fulfill in relation to <oppressed woman>. The majority of Americans are already conditioned to accept this paternalistic role through a culturally-imbued sense of American exceptionalism and global moral authority. To be highly recognizable and therefore the most effective, the ideograph <oppressed woman> presented a clear, unmitigated depiction of deprivation and helplessness that begged an external savior while not seeming to be a ploy, because "ideographs work best when they are unnoticed—when their use seems so natural and so inevitable that the response is not so much persuasion as recognition" (Stuckey and Ritter 2007, 649). The clearest depictions of deprivation and helplessness are strategically communicated through the use of symbolic text or images that emphasize the gap between developing and developed countries. For instance, the recurrence of burqas in photographs of Afghan women and quotes from its wearers that describe the burqa as oppressive signify to the audience that the burqa is a primary tool of gendered oppression. In addition, the cultural "difference" signified by this garment to Western notions of dress and the garment's implications on social interaction are not investigated in balanced representations of the burqa in American media; rather, the burqa's "difference" is contrasted against configurations of Western modernity and effectively constructs the developing world as backward and its

people as "Other." The representation of this and other forms of gendered violence against Afghan women—murder, domestic violence, rape, self-immolation (suicide by self-burning), forced marriage, sex trafficking, and public beating or execution—are actions of gendered oppression and are also signifiers of Afghan "difference," at once Othering Afghan women and denying that these activities are part of American life.

The Bush Administration publicized <oppressed woman> following the invasion of Afghanistan in response to September 11th, leading a field of different parties to join the struggle to define and delimit women's oppression in Afghanistan through reflecting and reimagining her representation in similar, recognizable forms. President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush, via their position of power, guided popular and political discourse about women's oppression through their own strategic discursive choices. By linking women's liberation with <freedom> in his speeches, Bush came to be celebrated as "the first president bold enough to wage a war to save women" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 172-179), and humanitarian organizations quickly realized the enormous power of <oppressed woman> and used it to appeal to the empathy and feelings of responsibility in potential Western donors.

During this time, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), a women's rights organization native to Afghanistan, was also employing the <oppressed woman> ideograph on its Web site as a humanitarian appeal of a vastly different intent than the call to arms issued by Bush. By drawing on the shared cultural perception that most Americans have learned to hold of Afghan women as victims, RAWA used <oppressed woman> to function as part of the common humanitarian strategy of publicizing oppression and deprivation. Employing <oppressed woman> as

the dominant ideograph on its Web site fulfills the organization's short-term humanitarian goals: to draw world attention to Afghan women's struggle against oppression and to solicit funding for their humanitarian initiatives.

<OPPRESSED WOMAN>: RAWA'S DOMINANT IDEOGRAPH

On its Web site, RAWA repeatedly portrays the ideograph <oppressed woman> as a representation of all Afghan women, who are depicted as voiceless victims incapable of providing for their own basic human needs and protection. Just as Afghan women are invariably poised as victims of abuse in RAWA's online rhetoric, Afghan men are invariably depicted as abusers of women. Often, the presence of an Afghan male in the image or in the text strongly suggests the man's role as an oppressor, strengthening the understanding of <oppressed woman> as subjugated and endangered. The repetition of portrayals of Afghan men in this role and the common response shared by a diverse audience contribute to the <male oppressor>'s status as an ideograph and reinforces <oppressed woman>.

The <male oppressor> is supplementary to the dominant <oppressed woman> ideograph on RAWA's Web site, functioning rhetorically to reinforce perceptions of Afghan female oppression and vulnerability without necessarily relying on depictions of violence. For example, in Figure 1.1, a photograph posted on the Web site, women in burqas loom in the foreground, filing by a watchful Afghan man. His supervision and the disciplined conformity of the women in line suggest that the man has control over the women. Sensationalized representations of the burqa as the main symbol of women's oppression intensify the Western viewer's interpretation of the women as oppressed, and

the tilted camera angle emphasizes the focus on the burqa in the image. The multitude of text and images of women as victims on the RAWA Web site, combined with the text and images of men as violent oppressors, strongly suggests to the viewer that Afghan males do not have a role outside of oppressor, rendering them unfit for true nation-building in the Western reader/viewer's eyes. This compounds most reader/viewers' inclinations to accept the rhetorical invitation to become a "paternalistic savior of women," and asks reader/viewers to subscribe to the "belief in a clash between white, Western societies and inferior Others requiring policing and rescue" (Cloud 2004, 286).

Figure 1.1: An example of <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor> on RAWA's Web site.

Because Afghan men are often portrayed as violent oppressors on RAWA's Web site rather than partners in common suffering, the ideograph <male oppressor> is set at odds with <oppressed woman>, strengthening the ethos of the latter. However, nation-building can only be achieved by involved, dedicated citizens of both sexes, and is a task

that relies on the equal involvement of both men and women. RAWA advocates gender equity in the self-governing of the nation, stating that its objective is to

> involve an increasing number of Afghan women in social and political activities aimed at acquiring women's human rights and contributing to the struggle for the establishment of a government based on democratic and secular values in Afghanistan. (*About RAWA* 2009)

Paradoxically, RAWA widens the divide between Afghan men and women by strategically calling attention to conflict by overrepresenting Afghan men as oppressors and repeating verbiage and images that set the <oppressed woman> at odds with the <male oppressor>. Ideographs like the <male oppressor> scapegoat Afghan men by appealing to "emotional responses of anger and fear (against the savage enemy) and/or pity and outrage (at the treatment of women)" in the reader/viewer (Cloud 2004, 290). Although this binary may motivate some Western reader/viewers to donate funds, it doesn't fit RAWA's stated commitment to gender equity. Even when women's rights appear to be making progress, the struggle is invariably framed as "woman versus man." Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam instead suggests that a more successful approach would be to "engage male leaders, Afghan and international, and convince them that change for women will not occur in a gender vacuum. There is an urgent need to form an alliance of men who will stand together with women for their rights" (2004, 111). However, RAWA continues to participate in the perpetuation of the subjugated <oppressed woman> and dominating <male oppressor> to privilege its short-term humanitarian objectives over its long-term political goals for women's role in nation-building. The contradiction between the progressive rhetoric in its mission statement and the regressive visual and textual

rhetoric saturating its Web site undercuts the impact of RAWA's long-term goal for gender equity toward the effort of rebuilding Afghanistan's political and social infrastructures.

To attempt to understand why this paradox exists on the main vehicle for RAWA's global outreach and how its presence has developed RAWA's rhetorical strategies, RAWA's intentions as a rhetor must be examined. This also involves examining the intentions of the rhetors whose message came before and concurrent with RAWA's message: the Bush Administration and the American media, whose rhetoric draws upon the ideograph <oppressed woman>. This ideograph is found in the speeches of the American president and first lady, in its echoes in the media, and in its validation by the same audience targeted by RAWA: the American public. The rhetors' intentions can be discerned by analyzing verbal, textual, and visual ideographs in the context of the rhetorical situation, a rhetorical framework that claims that discourse is preceded by three prerequisite components: exigence, audience, and constraints. In the following section, I will consider the rhetorical situation of <oppressed woman> as it functions in the context of these three components.

<OPPRESSED WOMAN> AND THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Lloyd Bitzer maintains that discourse is always made in response to a rhetorical situation, which both invites the utterance and shapes its development (1966). Discourse is therefore called into existence by a rhetorical situation that determines why and how discourse reaches its audience and, as Richard Vatz adds, is determined by the

interpreter's perception and characterization of the rhetorical situation (1999, 226). Bitzer describes the rhetorical situation as the context created by

> persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character. (1966, 5)

The perpetuation of the ideograph <oppressed woman> by the American president and first lady and American media outlets as well as on RAWA's Web site can be understood as an utterance invited by the rhetorical situation. Rhetoric "comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. [It] is always persuasive" (ibid., 4), and RAWA's Web site uses humanitarian discourse online to persuade its audience of two things: that Afghan women are indeed oppressed, and that with assistance, RAWA can have a positive influence on women's condition in Afghanistan. Similarly, Bush's speeches at the outset of the war maintain that Afghan women are oppressed, and that the military intervention of the United States in Afghanistan can have a positive influence on women's condition.

Bitzer identifies three rhetorical prerequisites to discourse: exigence, the audience "to be constrained in decision and action," and the constraints that "influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon on the audience" (1966, 6). To show the complexity of the connections that these three prerequisites share in the rhetorical situation from which <oppressed woman> emerged, I will identify the exigence as the oppression of Afghan women, the imagined audience as the American reader/viewer, and the constraints as the

dangers faced by Afghan women who deviate from cultural norms by entering the public sphere to challenge women's oppression. The complexities are not limited the context within which the rhetors speak; rhetors may perceive or frame exigence differently, articulating the reality that "no situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it," describing the role of the rhetor's unique perspective in creating the features of the rhetorical situation (Vatz 1999, 226-228). Strategic discursive choices such as the employment of ideographs like <oppressed woman> can be used by any number of rhetors to evoke different responses from a variety of audiences through the different lenses of varied interpretations. Thus, the situation is partly created by "the translation of the chosen information into meaning, [...] a rhetorical act of transcendence" through the language available to describe the rhetorical situation (ibid., 228), leading to the visual and textual iconography of the <oppressed woman> that makes the ideograph readily recognizable and its meaning shared across diverse groups of people.

Exigence: Women's Oppression and <Oppressed Woman>

Bitzer maintains that "in any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the main controlling principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be affected" (1966, 7); however, the controlling exigence doesn't exist independently of its speakers. Ideographs can express an exigence differently through the unique interpretations of the rhetor. Therefore, two ideographs communicating the same exigence may function differently or speak differently and engage varying audiences in the rhetoric of each speaker. As the audience

addressed by the ideographs differs, so too does the change to be affected. For instance, President Bush constructed the exigence of Afghan women's oppression as the moral responsibility of Americans via <oppressed woman> in response to September 11th and as a reason to justify military intervention. Without a doubt, the exigence in RAWA's textual and visual rhetoric online is Afghan women's oppression, but RAWA constructs the exigence differently: RAWA uses <oppressed woman> visually and textually as a means of summoning shared Western cultural meaning to raise funds online. The result is a struggle to define the ideograph, a task determined largely by its imagined audience. This ideograph specifies the audience to be addressed—Americans as paternalistic savior—and the change to be affected—the liberation of Afghan women from oppression.

Exigence "can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (Bitzer 1966, 6); and RAWA's immediate goal in the use of <oppressed woman> is to raise the funds to relieve women's oppression in Afghanistan. The ideograph <oppressed woman> both obtains its character from the circumstances of the rhetorical situation in which it is introduced and has the capacity as a construct of shared cultural meaning to constrain human decision or action through its considerable influence (ibid., 3). An invitation to modify the exigence is extended to the reader/viewer of <oppressed woman>, giving the ideograph the potential to affect the reader/viewer's decisions or actions, ideally changing the reality of the representative figure positively, and by extension, the reality of all Afghan women.

RAWA believes that the best way to improve women's condition in Afghanistan is through online discourse, leaning heavily on images of oppressed Afghan women to

draw American empathy and responsibility to procure external humanitarian aid, thereby cultivating an environment where women can be freed of focusing on survival and instead concentrate on social activism. Because "an exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" (Bitzer 1966, 7), it is common for humanitarian organizations to embrace the rhetorical strategy of communicating oppression and deprivation through strategic discourse to encourage empathy and construct paternalistic roles for readers/viewers, who are themselves capable of the positive modification of the exigence. Most Americans have been conditioned to embrace their prescribed role as saviors, moral authorities, and liberators, so the ideograph <oppressed woman> circulated in American political and media discourse is likely to influence its audience toward humanitarian action; even if that action involves the use of force. By depicting suffering women as the subject of an image or text, the rhetor "seem[s] to argue for intervention toward nation-building, an allegedly humanitarian kind of control that is somehow worth the violence visited upon those being rescued" (Cloud 2004, 292). This is a problematic characteristic of <oppressed woman> in RAWA's online rhetoric. In its stated mission and goals, RAWA repeatedly champions women as vital partners in nation-building efforts and rejects occupation by foreign military forces; despite this, RAWA continues to represent Afghan women as powerless, vulnerable, and voiceless—and dependent on the external assistance that American intervention can provide.

Audience: <Oppressed Woman>, Language, and the Paternalistic Savior

President Bush and RAWA both slant their moral suasion at a shared target: the American audience as part of a greater Western culture. While the president is able to speak to Americans about Afghan women with the authority of his office, RAWA speaks to Americans from a position of authenticity; they *are* Afghan women speaking *for* Afghan women. Although the experiences of the two rhetors are very different, Bush and RAWA both recognize and seek to harness the power of their shared audience to bring about change.

A relative unknown in the United States before the war, RAWA was able to benefit from the country's sudden interest in Afghanistan through most Americans' accessibility to the Internet. As countries around the world gain increasingly easy access to the World Wide Web, "many politically disenfranchised groups [can] communicate with like-minded or sympathetic audiences, publicizing causes often overlooked by the mainstream media and offering perspectives frequently stifled" (Warf and Grimes 1997, 260); likewise, RAWA has taken advantage of the Internet's global forum as a means of perpetuating <oppressed woman> worldwide and attempting to modify the exigency of its rhetorical situation. RAWA's Web site does not simply give Americans the access to consume its online message; it also attracts "those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (Bitzer 1966, 8). Since change is only produced by the rhetorical manipulation of reader/viewers who are asked to "function as mediators of change" (ibid., 7), the RAWA Web site is designed to broadly appeal to benevolent, English-speaking Westerners with the ability to modify the exigence of <oppressed woman>. The appeals RAWA uses are salient to Americans who

have been preconditioned by historical perceptions of Afghan women as well as more recent ideology shaped by Bush. The overrepresentation of the ideograph <oppressed woman> on the organization's Web site is, in many ways, an effort by RAWA to speak to its audience in the audience's own language; its shared cultural meaning.

Language, in its most literal definition, also plays a significant role in identifying RAWA's audience. Approximately "97% of Internet host computers [are] located in developed countries" and because most Web content is generated in the United States, English is the dominant language of the Internet (DiMaggio et al. 2007, 312). On RAWA's *Homepage*, the main page of its Web site, the language options make it apparent that the site favors its English-speaking audience. Although the *Homepage* is in English, there are also options to view the *Homepage* in Italian, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Dari/Persian, and Japanese; however, these pages are not as elaborate in their textual or visual graphic presentation. Most news articles on the *Homepage* are in English only, some articles are offered in Dari/Persian, and still fewer offer the aforementioned range of languages (*Homepage* 2009). At the head of the page, RAWA is described in English as "the oldest political/social organization of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women's rights in fundamentalism-blighted Afghanistan since 1977" and opposite of the text box is a translation in Dari/Persian (ibid.). However, the motto, "If you are freedom-loving and anti-fundamentalist, you are with RAWA. Support and help us," is in English only, the only unlinked text on this page to ask for support and help (ibid.), clearly positioning

RAWA as a humanitarian organization directing its message to external sources of aid; namely, from its English-speaking audience.[2]

Language availability is key to determining RAWA's intended online audience, but it is not the only communication tool the organization uses on its Web site. The prolific reproduction of <oppressed woman> in textual and visual rhetoric not only communicates Afghan women's oppression to the reader/viewer, but also prescribes a specific response to the text or image being consumed that is shaped by the Bitzer's definition of audience as one capable of being a mediator of change (1966, 8). Rhetors choose or do not choose the words, images, and information that they feel are salient to the audience (Vatz 1999, 230). To construct the most salient representation of Afghan women to inspire monetary or material donation and consciousness-raising, RAWA invokes an audience by providing "cues which help to define the role or roles the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text" rather than addressing its message to an existing audience (Ede and Lunsford 1984, 160). In relation to the ideograph <oppressed woman>, the role defined by RAWA is essentially that of a paternalistic savior.

President Bush's representation of <oppressed woman> also depends on cues to invoke an audience by making its participation in <oppressed woman> merely a part of being American. McGee states that "each member of the community is socialized, conditioned, to the vocabulary of ideographs as a prerequisite for 'belonging' to the society" (1980, 15). According to this theory, most Americans, moved by Bush's

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[2] Similarly, a subscription to the RAWA news update is offered two to three times a month in English, as opposed news updates in Dari/Persian, where "you will hardly receive one message every month" (*Subscribe to Mailing List* 2009). This affirms RAWA's priorities concerning its audience and commitment to multimodal methods of contacting them.

connection of <freedom> to responsibility for Afghan women's liberation, will respond positively as paternalistic savior to oppressed Afghan women as a condition for their acceptance in society. If Americans do not respond to <oppressed woman> as the rhetor wishes, society may "inflict penalties on those [...] who refuse to respond appropriately to claims on their behavior warranted through the agency of ideographs" (ibid., 15-16). Rather than seem uncaring for oppressed Afghan women or inadequately committed to the American idea of <freedom>, the greater number of Americans will accept the "claims on their behavior" that <oppressed woman> invites. People's natural inclination to belong to a society can be observed in the constraints rhetors encounter in the rhetorical approach they take with their audience.

Constraints: <Oppressed Woman>, Purdah, and Social Stigma

Bitzer identifies constraints such as "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives, and the like" as part of the rhetorical situation because "they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (1966, 8). These constraints depend on the rhetorical choices of the rhetors interpreting the situation to retain their power to constrain decision and action. The rhetorical situation that informs RAWA's online discourse encompasses the patriarchal and religious fundamentalist hegemony of Afghanistan associated with women's oppression, constraints that are rhetorically wielded to stigmatize women who deviate from cultural norms and that expose them to the physical dangers women commonly faced by Afghan women who assert themselves in the public sphere. When RAWA, as a rhetor, chooses to perpetuate <oppressed woman> online, its "discourse not only

harnesses constraints given by situation but provides additional important constraints—for example [its] personal character, [its] logistical proofs, and [its] style" (ibid.). For example, RAWA adheres to Afghan cultural expectations imposed by its rhetorical situation by not depicting women in its rhetoric as seeking mixed-gender company or violating conservative dress norms. As an organization originating from that culture, RAWA is cognizant of the indigenous fraction of its audience which also originates in that culture, either within Afghanistan or in an Islamic society outside of it. In this respect, RAWA's rhetorical strategy is to employ the dominant use of text or images depicting women's oppression wherein women do not challenge patriarchy or fundamental Islam as opposed to balancing it evenly with images that empower women. This is a strategy designed to appeal to both the small segment of the audience made up of conservative Afghans and to Americans for whom freedom has been rhetorically linked with the responsibility to liberate oppressed people.

The looming presence of a conservative, fundamentalist audience of any size deeply affects the rhetorical choices of RAWA, an organization especially scrutinized because of its "radical" and feminist nature. Representations of progressive women challenge the established conservatism of Afghan culture, the politicization of Islamic law, and the traditional enforcement of purdah that stigmatizes the mixed-gender situations from which RAWA members originate and that the organization seeks to normalize (Brodsky 2003, 37). A practice wherein women are sequestered from exposure in the public sphere, purdah emphasizes

> the central importance of women's behavior, and in particular their sexual virtue, to the honor of the family, especially the men who are the heads of these families.

> [...] Men protect their own honor through the 'protection' of their female family members. (ibid., 37-38)

Thus, general representations of women by Afghan speakers for an Afghan audience abide by certain cultural constraints not only to protect women's virtue, but to preserve the honor of their male relatives as well. This practice touches every aspect of Afghan life, dictating women's mobility in society as well as the rhetorical choices available to RAWA for the representation of women on its Web site while maintaining credibility and the security of its members in its native country.

The implications of this stigma not only constrain RAWA in creating meaningful feminist discourse in gender-sensitive Afghanistan, but also its reception by its American audience over the Internet. "Westerners often see purdah only as an external imposition on women," when in fact this cultural separation is embraced voluntarily by many Afghan women who seek "freedom and control of space" (Brodsky 2003, 41). RAWA's compliance with purdah through textual and visual representations of women is perceived as a positive to its Afghan audience, to the Muslim audience outside of Afghanistan, and to RAWA's own female rhetors; yet, it is perceived as a negative to RAWA's American audience, who generally see the practice as regressive, causing the rhetorical choices available to RAWA for women's representation to diminish. While Americans may appreciate scenes of women interacting with men in the public sphere, RAWA could lose credibility and local support in and around Afghanistan if it posted such scenes or wrote about them. Conversely, if RAWA persists with depictions of women following purdah and supports the practice, it may turn away progressive Americans seeking evidentiary support for women's advancement on the RAWA Web site. However, although RAWA

rhetorically represents women as physically separated from men (except in situations of violence or punishment), RAWA's objective is "to involve an increasing number of Afghan women in social and political activities" and as an organization hopes to involve itself in "socio-political arenas including education, health and income generation as well as political agitation" (*About RAWA* 2009). Clearly, RAWA's aspirations for Afghan women surpass maintaining the traditional separation of the public and domestic spheres.

Although men have been documented by Anne Brodsky as a growing demographic of RAWA supporters (2003, 194), this very strength for the organization has threatened the integrity of the practice of purdah that offers mutual protection for RAWA female members and RAWA male supporters. If the reputation of an Afghan woman is called into question in the slightest, the woman can face fatal consequences. In Afghanistan, Internet communication allows RAWA to bypass some of the physical risk involved faced by women distributing more traditional media in mixed-gender settings and yet still operate in the public sphere. Through the global forum of the Internet and shaped by the institutional context in which its messages are produced, RAWA seeks to persuade its imagined audience that through monetary and material donations and voluntary labor, it can improve Afghan women's condition. This supplication is the preferred solution communicated on RAWA's Web site and is furthered by the organization's use of <oppressed woman>, an ideograph used by both the Bush Administration and reflected by RAWA that has grown to be RAWA's most dominant online rhetorical strategy.

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Co-opting and sensationalizing two-thirds world women's struggle is not a new strategy in development discourse, as this perspective has been known to launch many successful campaigns. However, the success of these campaigns has been defined in Western terms—in the raising of funds and the economic impact humanitarianism has on communities who would, truly, die without external assistance. Unfortunately, the most successful appeals remove authority, autonomy, and agency from the group in need to intensify the motivation for donors to contribute to the cause. In its development discourse, the Bush Administration and RAWA both rely heavily on the ideograph <oppressed woman>, a textual or visual invocation of the Afghan woman as a faceless, voiceless victim, an emotional appeal to generally shared Western humanitarian sensibilities and Americans' culturally ingrained responsibility to defend and propagate <freedom>. The use of Afghan women's images to further Western goals is not limited to humanitarian interests; they are also linked to political agendas. The evidence on RAWA's Web site that the organization has observed and moved to capitalize on the success of this ideograph in Western culture as an appeal especially salient in the United States is troubling because while it too achieves humanitarian ambitions, leading to the saving of poor women's and children's lives, it also mitigates the weight behind and success of its political goals for Afghan women and the country of Afghanistan.

The war in Afghanistan has created a rhetorical situation that invites the global sharing of textual and visual media, which is shaped by transnational and local exigence, audience, and constraints, as well as by rhetors through the language available to express their interpretation of events. Much of American citizens' reaction to the Bush

Administration's and RAWA's discourse stems from past as well as recent representations of Afghan women and their context in historical or current events, as well as the amount of influence inherent in the rhetor's relationship with the audience. In the chapter to follow, I examine the post-September 11th speeches of then President George W. Bush and place the president and the context of his rhetoric in a metaphorical framework that clarifies the relationship most Americans have with their political leader. This metaphoric relationship plays a large role in preconditioning Americans' response to ideographic appeals from their president. The interactions of First Lady Laura Bush with the mainstream media and with the audience at large both impact and are impacted by the president's relationship with his constituents. Despite their commonalities and differences, these rhetors all participate in a shared communication strategy: the use of ideographs.

To analyze the dominance of <oppressed woman> in American political rhetoric as a strategy for justifying military intervention in Afghanistan, I will examine George Lakoff's "nation-as-family" metaphor in Chapter 2 as a framework for understanding how the paternalistic stance the United States assumes with developing nations has informed its moral imperialism throughout history (Easterly 2006; Gott 2002) and how it continues to inform the rhetoric of liberation and the American idea of <freedom> (Lakoff 2006). Speeches by George W. and Laura Bush and the rhetoric of the American mainstream media are dissected further to examine how the ideograph <freedom> is used to connect to deeply rooted American cultural values by linking it to human rights, suggesting that the moral uplift of underdeveloped societies is a uniquely American responsibility. Chapter 2 also emphasizes Laura Bush's part in the campaign to publicize

Afghan women's plight, using her own authority to deliver speeches specific to Afghan women. This narrowed focus on <oppressed woman> carried into the American media, creating an overrepresentation and oversimplification of <oppressed woman> that is largely reliant on the burqa as a primary symbol of oppression.

Ostensibly, <oppressed woman> is a discursive strategy that has a potentially positive influence on Afghan women's truly dire condition. However, <oppressed woman> has been used to serve the short-term goals of its rhetors at the expense of their long-term goals. I put forward that both President Bush and RAWA desire two principal outcomes of their discourse: that Afghan women are understood to be truly oppressed, and that by introducing discourse to the situation, they could have a positive influence on Afghan women's condition. The pursuit of these rhetorical goals leads to the shared use of a very effective strategic tool, <oppressed woman>. President Bush's ability to prove that American military intervention is necessary to liberate oppressed Afghan women depends on the rhetorical persuasion that American influence is the only positive influence. Likewise, RAWA's ability to prove itself as the only viable positive influence on oppressed Afghan women depends on rhetorically discrediting the American military occupation of Afghanistan and persuading the American audience to support RAWA as the only possible positive influence for oppressed women. Unfortunately, both rhetors over-represent <oppressed woman> to quickly procure the most short-term support that they can muster, leading RAWA in particular to undercut its long-term political goals.

The imbalance of RAWA's short- and long-term goals is investigated further in Chapter 3 in a Web site content analysis of RAWA's Web site. This analysis reveals RAWA's use of <empowered woman>, another ideograph that, like the aforementioned

<male oppressor>, augments the dominant ideograph <oppressed woman>. The <empowered woman> ideograph encapsulates the ideologies that color the rhetorical situation of <oppressed woman> and enrich my understanding of the representations of Afghan women available in humanitarian and political rhetoric as well as why certain representations of Afghan women are missing from this discourse. Therefore, in the chapters to come, I identify and analyze this major ideograph used online by RAWA, the <empowered woman>, and find that one vital representation of Afghan women is absent from its Web site: the <compatriot woman>.

In Chapter 4, I investigate the impact that the rhetorical situation has on RAWA's discourse in terms of gender equity versus gender equality and what this means for Afghan women's role in nation-building, the Western/Islamic binary that affects RAWA's efforts at social progression and modernity, and the far-reaching effects that ideographs such as <empowered woman> and <male oppressor> have in reinforcing <oppressed woman>. Chapter 4 also examines <compatriot woman> as a fitting response to the rhetorical situation surrounding RAWA's representation of Afghan women at home and worldwide as an exposition on Afghan women's role in nation-building. When Meena Keshwar Kamal founded RAWA, she pictured the battle for liberation and progress as a joint effort by male and female compatriots. Her poem "I'll Never Return" (1981) depicts Afghan women joining their compatriot brothers who are already progressing toward liberation. Nearly thirty years after the writing of Meena's poem, progress has been slow. The "thousands of arisen" Afghan women are still not regarded as equals on the path to Afghanistan's liberation as Meena had hoped, and their Afghan brothers are painted as obstacles to achieving that ideal. Hoping to tear away from the

stereotype of "weak and incapable," the strong and vocal women of Afghanistan have not yet been able to gain social status as compatriots "to break all these sufferings" and "fetters of slavery" alongside their brothers. Meena's vision cannot become a reality until Afghan women and men both have agency and a shared commitment to nation-building.

While images of oppressed women and male oppressors convey truths about the realities of life for women in Afghanistan, Chapter 4 posits that the rhetoric that promises to relieve women's oppression cannot be successful by creating further gender division. The repetition of the harmful ideograph <male oppressor> on RAWA's Web site undermines the organization's ultimate goal of promoting the independence of Afghanistan and its women by impeding the necessary step of gender equity in the task of nation-building. Chapter 4 further examines the ideograph <male oppressor> as an impediment to RAWA's credibility in its claims for supporting gender equity and gives the male supporter shape and form in the women's movement to counter the <male oppressor>'s rhetorical argument that all Afghan men are oppressors of women.

While the men and women of Afghanistan are perceived as espousing starkly separate ideologies for nation-building and continue to be rhetorically positioned as opposing groups on unequal platforms of power, the invitation to external liberators remains open and Afghanistan cannot break free of occupation. Reinforcing the Western stereotype of all Afghan men as oppressors of women and all Afghan women as oppressed by men also denies the reality in Afghanistan that some Afghan men oppress other men and that some Afghan women oppress other women, and certainly denies that Afghan women can oppress or seek to oppress Afghan men. The polarization of <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor> also perpetuates gender inequity in

Afghanistan and ultimately reinforces Afghanistan's dependence on the United States, thus undermining true nation-building and RAWA's long-term vision for Afghanistan.

Projecting an alternative ideograph of Afghan women that can be used in conjunction with its current humanitarian appeals—one in which women are politically active, equal to men, and co-shapers of their homes and communities—does more to promote RAWA's true objectives for secular democracy, women's rights, and human rights. This characterization of this alternative ideograph leads me to refer to it as <compatriot woman>. However, the rhetorical constraints inherent in introducing <compatriot woman> into the rhetorical climate of Afghanistan potentially prohibit such a move without first introducing this alternative into mainstream Afghan society. The introduction of <compatriot woman> in mainstream society would allow it to build the shared cultural meaning it needs to reach the status of an ideograph. Only then could RAWA can use this culturally recognizable representation of Afghan women to balance the textual rhetoric on its Web site and corroborate the claims it makes there in terms of the organization's long-term goals.

Ideographs are not quickly created, changed, or easily identified as Mary E. Stuckey and Joshua R. Ritter (2007), Tasha N. Dubriwny (2005), and Dana L. Cloud (2004) explain. The introduction of the <compatriot woman> idealized by Meena and absent from the online rhetoric of her legacy, RAWA, is complicated by the "complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence" (Bitzer 1966, 6). In its place is the <oppressed woman> reinforced by <male oppressor> and <empowered woman>. The harmful effects of these current sensationalized ideographs "can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so

constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (ibid.). It would take time to propagate an alternate ideograph for Afghan women, one inspired by Meena's insight into the needs of her country, which positively represents the Afghan woman as man's compatriot in liberation and nation-building. If successful, it could potentially break the cycle of Afghan dependence on foreign assistance and allow Afghanistan to progress culturally at its own pace, trusting the women of Afghanistan and the male supporters of gender equity to claim their own voices and identities in making history. The complications surrounding <compatriot woman>'s introduction and acceptance in Afghanistan's currently fundamentalist, patriarchal society—as opposed to its possible rejection if it is introduced by the marginal, feminist voices of RAWA—prove that the struggle over "who speaks and for whom" dramatically changes an ideograph's potential. Given the saturation of <oppressed woman> in Afghan humanitarian and political discourse, it is reasonable to speculate that the introduction of the <compatriot woman> would have an eventual impact. In time, the ideal response to the ideograph <compatriot woman> would potentially be an acceptance of women's role as a partner in nation-building and co-shaper of domestic and public life.

I propose the <compatriot woman> not as a replacement, but as an alternative ideograph to current representations of Afghan women such as those that dominate RAWA's Web site. Despite my contention that RAWA's long-term goals for women in Afghanistan are being compromised by the perpetuation of <oppressed woman> and its supplementary ideographs on RAWA's Web site, Chapter 4 explores the cultural and physical constraints that complicate the option of RAWA's pioneering <compatriot

woman> as a way to support its long-term goals. The dual mission of the feminist organization to provide immediate humanitarian services to women as well as work toward women's increased political participation and equal access to public services in the future is not the only complexity involved. Deeply rooted cultural suspicions against the West and patriarchal interpretations of Afghan women's role compounded with Afghanistan's unstable economic and political state make introducing the ideograph <compatriot woman> to inspire diverse groups of Afghan women to participate in nation-building an uphill battle requiring an army of voices that goes far beyond RAWA's capacity.

CHAPTER II

<OPPRESSED WOMAN> AND THE AMERICAN IDEA OF FREEDOM UNDER THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

> In Afghanistan, America not only fights for our security, but we fight for values we hold dear. We strongly reject the Taliban way. We strongly reject their brutality toward women and children. They not only violate basic human rights, they are barbaric in their indefensible meting of justice. It is wrong. Their attitude is wrong for any culture. Their attitude is wrong for any religion.
>
> George W. Bush
> Remarks by the President at Signing
> Ceremony for Afghan Women and Children
> Relief Act of 2001

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 drew Americans together out of fear and fortitude and made the nation particularly receptive to the rhetoric of the then new president, George W. Bush. In his speeches to American citizens drawn closer to one another in their heightened sense of shared nationhood, Bush transformed the traditional American idea of freedom into a scenario in which the survival of human rights and the liberation of the oppressed worldwide depended exclusively on collective American action. The evolution of the American idea of freedom under the Bush Administration was carefully crafted; first by emphasizing freedom as an idea and its roots in America's birth as a nation, and then by using these roots to make the case for America's moral

authority and leadership in the fight for global human rights and liberty. Bush's advocacy for the oppressed in developing countries extends his moral authority in the United States into the global community with the United States posing as a moral authority over developing nations.

Because so many Americans were drawn together after the terrorist attacks, they reconceptualized their relationship with one another as one of the nation as a family to express their solidarity and reimagined the president as a father figure relied on for protection and leadership. In this chapter, I will use George Lakoff's metaphors "nation-as-family" and "nation-as-person in a world community" (2006) as a guide to illuminate Bush's ethos in his speeches and the American response to representations of Afghan women. As a religious conservative, Bush was characterized as a strict father, leading the family of the United States as its ultimate moral authority (Lakoff 2006, 203). In his speeches, Bush calls on Americans to heed his moral authority, much like a strict father figure in the "nation-as-family" conceptual frame. Then, Bush gained more power by positioning the United States as a paternalistic force over Afghanistan by perpetuating representations of the Afghan <oppressed woman>. Representations of Afghan women as profoundly oppressed extend the conceptual family frame and prompt a paternalistic response from the American audience.

Having linked <freedom> and human rights, the Bush Administration introduced Laura Bush to essentially act as the president's spokesperson on Afghan women's issues. She performed radio addresses, speeches, and gave interviews on behalf of Afghan women, invoking most Americans' shared understanding of <oppressed woman> and reshaping it to provide justification for her husband's declaration of war. Her small

collection of radio addresses and philanthropic appearances aptly augmented the Bush Administration's campaign to publicize Afghan women's oppression. The campaign was quickly picked up by American news media and Americans' demand for information about the Taliban's mandate on women to wear the burqa, a garment with a far-reaching cultural history, transformed into an oversimplified perception of the burqa as a popular symbol for <oppressed woman>. The head-to-toe veil's pervasive image denied Afghan women the agency to voice their own opinions on the burqa and this rhetorical act of silencing contributed to the construction of a paternalistic role embraced by increasing numbers of American viewers. The appropriation and (un)veiling of Afghan women's image advanced the Bush Administration's depiction of the war as a human rights issue, and Afghan women were denied the right to self-representation and the opportunity to speak for themselves against oppression and American occupation. The American idea of freedom grew dependent on the faceless image of the mute burqa-clad woman unable to throw off her veil without American assistance. However, the burqa image also raised American interest in and empathy for Afghan women's plight, a positive for women's rights advocates in Afghanistan.

The intense focus on the burqa reflects America's desire to see immediate, visible progress of women's liberation in Afghanistan. However, such representations disregard Afghan women's individual accomplishments toward their own liberation, deny Afghan women the agency to relate their struggle to the world, widen the gender divide in Afghanistan, and ultimately reinforce Afghanistan's dependence on American aid. Despite widespread public support by both Afghans and Americans for Afghan autonomy and independence, visual and textual representations of <oppressed woman> are still

used as the most effective way to gain international attention and to educate the public on two-third's world women's issues.

This chapter traces the rhetorical development of the American idea of freedom in then President George W. Bush's speeches from its perception as a uniquely American inheritance to an American global responsibility. The application of Lakoff's "nation-as-family" and "nation-as-person in a world community" cognitive metaphors provide a clearer understanding of how Bush's moral authority was generally accepted and how this reinforced Americans' general self-perception as a moral authority in the world. I also provide an analysis of President Bush's landmark speeches after the September 11th attacks about the Taliban "regime at war with women" (Bush 2001d) and follow with then First Lady Laura Bush's testimonies to the success of the American liberation of Afghan women to explain how she contributed to the media's focus on certain representations of <oppressed women>. As Bush's spokesperson on women's issues, Laura Bush's addresses also advocated for the liberation of Afghan women from oppression by any means available to the United States. The development of <freedom> into a militaristic intervention for Afghan women's liberation has impacted American solidarity, reified American exceptionalism, justified the use of force, and turned a struggle for women's rights into an oversimplified burqa obsession in America. After examining representations of Afghan women by George W. and Laura Bush, I turn to the American mainstream media's use of the ideograph, focusing on its obsession with and oversimplification of the burqa and its removal as the main indicator of Afghan women's liberation. Lastly, I highlight America's burqa obsession to account for one way in which <oppressed woman> is portrayed.

GEORGE W. BUSH AND THE NATION-AS-FAMILY

All thought uses conceptual frames, and in this section, I share two that provide a framework for how many Americans viewed their relationship with President Bush and the United States' relationship with developing countries like Afghanistan (Lakoff 2006, 10): "nation-as-family" (65) and "nation-as-person in a world community" (205). These metaphors enable us to better understand the history of freedom and human rights in the United States through an analysis of the changing meaning of <freedom> in Bush's "9/11 Address to the Nation" (2001a), "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People" (2001b), "Address on Initial Operations in Afghanistan" (2001c), "Remarks at Signing Ceremony for Afghan Women and Children Relief Act" (2001d), and "Second Inaugural Address" (2005). Within all of these, deeply-rooted cultural meaning can be traced which has significant social implications for Americans plied with the <oppressed woman> of Afghanistan.

Heightened American solidarity post-September 11th was a major advantage for Bush in regards to mustering support for the proposed war, but his paternalistic position as America's moral leader and protector—as a father figure to the nation—was even more salient in his addresses to the nation. Although ideographs are built on shared meaning and are frequently used to appeal to large, diverse audiences, metaphors do the same rhetorical work faster and more covertly. George Lakoff uses the "nation-as-family" metaphor as a framework for understanding the paternalistic stance the president takes toward American citizens (2006, 65), and the "nation-as-person in a world community" metaphor to explain how the United States assumes a paternalistic role among two-thirds world nations (205). To more completely understand the ways in which

the American public responded to President Bush's rhetoric and his emphasis on freedom, I will explain the powerful existence of the metaphors that allowed Bush to lead from a position of generally accepted moral authority and that gave the United States the power to assert its version of human and women's rights in the global community.

The "nation-as-family" metaphor stems from our concept of the nuclear family as our first experience with authority. This conceptual frame, the family frame, summons the broadly shared understanding of basic familial roles (Lakoff 2006, 10). In the nation-as-family metaphor, the president is the representation of the authoritative father and the nation's citizens are regarded as obedient children. As the father, the president rules as the uncontested moral authority of the family that, in order to be protected the citizens represented as children in the nation-as-family, must allow itself to be governed (ibid., 202-207). The family frame appeals to Americans—particularly receptive in the wake of the September 11th tragedy—as the vulnerable children of a threatened nation-as-family chiefly governed by one male paternal figure, President George W. Bush. As the leader and protector of the greater family of the United States, Bush embodies the role of "strict father," who "is the moral authority in the family; he knows right from wrong, is inherently moral, and has the authority to be head of the household" (ibid., 96).

Bush is a religious and conservative Republican, embodying the "strict father" role described in Lakoff's nation-as-family metaphor as one who "sees evil as a strong, tangible force in the world. There is a clear and strict good-evil dichotomy and the need for an overpoweringly strong strict father (who is inherently good) to protect against evil" (Lakoff 2006, 203). Bush's rhetoric in landmark speeches after the September 11th attacks refers to the Taliban regime as "evil" (2001a), "enemies of freedom" (2001b),

"killers of innocence" (2001c), a "waking nightmare" (2001d), and "oppressors" (2005), while describing America as "the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity" (2001a), a place in "a world where freedom is under attack" (2001b), showing "generosity" (2001c), "determined to lift up the people of Afghanistan" (2001d), and "the force of human freedom" (2005). This image of Bush as inherently good bolsters Bush's moral authority as the "strict father," the only figure competent to protect the threatened family, and configures America as the embodiment of freedom and benevolence. Contrasting pure American values with the tyranny of the Taliban, Bush states,

> In Afghanistan, America not only fights for our security, but we fight for values we hold dear. We strongly reject the Taliban way. We strongly reject their brutality toward women and children. They not only violate basic human rights, they are barbaric in their indefensible meting of justice. It is wrong. Their attitude is wrong for any culture. Their attitude is wrong for any religion. (Bush 2001d)

The traditional American idea of freedom is repeatedly represented as endangered while oppression exists anywhere else in the world, indirectly justifying the use of force to defend <freedom> as an ideographic American idea by acting proactively on behalf of Afghans rather than reactively to the September 11th attacks.

In the global framework of nation-as-person, the United States assumes a position of moral authority in its relations with Afghanistan, expanding the family frame to establish the United States as the protective father figure in a world of nation-families. Lakoff calls the nation-as-person in a world community "one of the central metaphors of American foreign policy" (Lakoff 2006, 205). In the nation-as-person metaphor, "there are adult and child states. The industrialized states are the grown-ups and the developing

and underdeveloped nations are the children" (ibid.). The children are best represented by the vulnerable and the defenseless; in this case, oppressed Afghan women are the most salient example, portrayed as indefinitely repressed in a childlike state. Afghan women are continually depicted as unequal to men and are denied the agency to represent themselves. As such, oppressed Afghan women are "spoken for" by Western advocates through rhetorical remarks and images that strategically represent <oppressed woman>. Western reproductions of this ideograph rhetorically frame women as an inherently good but oppressed group in need of liberation from the forces of evil, as a consequence constructing a space for American forces of good to intervene. In the nation-as-family metaphor, "the strict father is the ultimate moral authority, and it is his moral duty to assert that authority," so just as children must first be under the discipline of the father to learn right from wrong, two-thirds world nations in the nation-as-person in a world community must first be ruled by the United States, learning how to build a democratic government and establish a military before gaining autonomy (ibid., 204-206).

Consistent with the paternalistic motives of a strict father, Bush's initial reaction was to assert his moral authority over Afghanistan and Afghan gender relations. Bush's rhetoric characterizes "women's oppression [as] a marker of an inferior society," and therefore the promise of women's liberation imposes the Western version of modernity as Afghanistan's model for success (Cloud 2004, 289). The moral imperialism in Bush's rhetoric exercised the paternal protection and moral guidance of children in learning right from wrong, part of the role assumed by the United States within the metaphoric nation-as-person in a world community.

Bush underscores the dangers faced by innocent Afghan women and the evilness of the Taliban to cultivate a sense of benevolence toward Afghanistan and the goodness of the American public. The emphasis on benevolence has proven to be effective in gaining the support of the general public in the name of human rights in order to covertly advance moral imperialistic motives abroad. This ideology has a long history; it "emerged from the West's self-pleasing fantasy that 'we' were the chosen ones to save the Rest," the "Rest" being William Easterly's preferred moniker for non-Western people (2006, 23). The early period of "the Enlightenment saw the Rest as a blank slate—without any meaningful history or institutions of its own—upon which the West could inscribe its superior ideals" (ibid.). This inclination toward guidance and teaching is embedded in paternal inclinations to nurture and tutor a child. In contemporary depictions of Afghanistan, women's history in the advancement of rights is presented as a blank slate, but a deeper investigation reveals that Afghan women have their own history of struggle—a history that includes the struggle against American moral imperialism. Historically, industrialized nations have imagined themselves as responsible for the moral uplift of "uncivilized" societies, the "children" of the world's nation-families, disregarding the ability and the necessity of developing nations to address their own needs.

In Bush's rhetoric, the extension of American values abroad is rated as important as defeating a regime whose "central goal [...] is the brutal oppression of women—and not only the women of Afghanistan. The terrorists who help rule Afghanistan are found in dozens and dozens of countries around the world" (Bush 2001d). The liberation of Afghan women translates into the restoration of human rights to all Afghans to forestall

the danger of liberties being revoked by terrorists all around the world. Bush calls the Taliban rule a "regime allied with terrorists and a regime at war with women," but he acknowledges that work remains to be done "for a new era of human rights and human dignity in that country" (ibid.), implying that American military occupation is necessary for imparting superior American values, a paternalistic function of the family frame. That this "new era" can only come through American military intervention echoes the long-held sense of American exceptionalism, the belief that Americans have a moral obligation to root out human rights violators in the world and to liberate and bring "civilization" to oppressed peoples (Stuckey and Ritter 2007, 655). This sense of American exceptionalism is rooted in an imagined responsibility, representing

> America as an exemplar—a shining city on a hill, a beacon of freedom's light in a world made dark by tyranny—[as] one way of connecting human rights to that myth. But the notion that America must play a more active role, that it must fight for oppressed people everywhere, that it will "bear any burden" in the cause of human freedom, also depends on the national commitment to human rights. (ibid., 662)

The rhetoric of Bush and of his administration linked <freedom> with a responsibility for human rights during his eight years of wartime presidency, gradually changing the American idea of freedom by wielding it as a tool of fatherly guidance and moral superiority. Taking responsibility means using one's power to remain at the "head of the household," where one can do the most good for the "family" at any cost. Bush acknowledges that the power the United States has in the world will be wielded against the less powerful: "America's influence is not unlimited, but fortunately for the

oppressed, America's influence is considerable, and we will use it confidently in freedom's cause" (2005). Any dissent is dismissed by Bush as illogical:

> Some, I know, have questioned the global appeal of liberty—though this time in history, four decades defined by the swiftest advance of freedom ever seen, is an odd time for doubt. [...] Americans, of all people, should never be surprised by the power of our ideals. (ibid.)

This passage reprimands Americans who would question the success of the War on Terror and the "liberation" of Afghanistan. This statement also recalls Michael McGee's reflection on the nature of mass consciousness, that "the society will inflict penalties on those who use ideographs"—in this case, <freedom>—"in heretical ways and on those who refuse to respond appropriately to claims on their behavior" through the use of ideographs (1980, 15-16). Bush labels those who question <freedom> or are surprised by the strength of <freedom> as "doubters," essentially attacking their nationhood through his strong association of <freedom> with being American.

Bush uses liberation rhetoric in order to ostensibly uphold the well-regarded principles of self-rule and de-colonization, while continuing to frame the two-thirds world as childlike and dependent on the United States. There was a definitive shift in Western rhetoric and thought after World War II, wherein

> verbiage about racial superiority, the tutelage of backward peoples, and people not ready to rule themselves went into the wastebasket. Self-rule and de-colonization became universal principles. [...] There was a genuine change of heart away from racism and toward respect for equality, but a paternalistic and coercive strain survived. (Easterly 2006, 24)

Conversely, rhetoric about "the tutelage of backward peoples, and people not ready to rule themselves" returned under the Bush Administration.[1] The *Washington Post* reported in 2006, roughly five years after the fall of the Taliban, that "the U.S. government is increasingly allowing Western allies, or Afghans themselves, to take on the tasks of rebuilding [the] country," but admitted that "Washington has no plans to pull out altogether" and quoted U.S. Ambassador Ronald Neumann as saying, "We shouldn't leave them without critical support before they're strong enough" (Witte 2006). The political legacy for the United States of forming a stable democracy, building an Afghan military as yet "in its infancy," and the liberation of oppressed women continue to be touted as reasons for continued American occupation and the right to definite "victory" (ibid.). The resulting impression of Afghanistan as a "blank slate" gives further credence to the Western view of women's rights in Afghanistan: that like governance and defense, Afghanistan depends on the West's benevolence for the advancement of women's rights. This view of Afghanistan reinforces American perceptions of Afghanistan as backward and uncivilized and especially infantilizes Afghan women. Popular acceptance of this view helps to construct a paternalistic role for the United States to occupy in the nation-as-person in the global community as a moral guide and strict disciplinarian, as well as to take the time that America decides is needed for building governance and defense structures for Afghanistan.

Bush's moral authority as a strict father figure in the nation-as-family is reinforced in his description of the War on Terror as a black-and-white battle of morals,

[1]It is important to acknowledge that Bush has rejected language overtly implicating American superiority, advising Americans that "no one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith" and addressing "Muslims throughout the world," saying, "We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends" (Bush 2001b).

emphasizing the evil nature of the enemy and oversimplifying the complex geopolitical history of Afghan-American relations. He puts it very clearly, proposing a simple choice for world leaders—"the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right"—and adding that "America will not pretend [...] that women welcome humiliation and servitude" (2005). As Bush signed the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act in December 2001, he said that "America is beginning to realize that the dreams of the terrorists and the Taliban were a waking nightmare for Afghan women," insinuating the falsity that the oppression of Afghan women was unknown to the United States before the attacks (2001d).

Bush calls the liberation of Afghanistan the "calling of our time," insinuating that freedom can only be advanced by Americans in a period of time marked chiefly by the American effort to liberate the oppressed worldwide, reinforcing America's self-perception as a moral authority in the global community. Bush advises Americans: "We have found our mission and our moment. [...] The advance of human freedom—the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time—now depends on us" (2001b), implying that freedom can have no other source. Suggesting that any American with "common sense" should arrive at the same understanding of events, Bush deduces: "We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world" (2005). Bush sees the United States as responsible not only for its own security and that of oppressed Afghan women, but for the liberation of oppressed societies worldwide. This resonates with Lakoff's interpretation: "*E pluribus unum*, the ideal of a united America, is made possible

through empathy, which connects us to each other and insists that freedom for me is possible only if there is freedom for you" (2006, 89). Bush's idea of <freedom> changes from Lakoff's noble vision to something beyond the liberation of oppressed Afghans in the global community; it extends to the protection of the nation-as-family's liberty as well. The urgency of liberating Afghan women increases exponentially when the implications of failure become more ominous for Americans, a fear already stoked by the terrorist attacks on American soil.

When so many Americans rallied together in support of one another after the September 11th attacks, they were drawn to images of the American flag, the country's most widely recognized symbol, to communicate their common identity and resolve to protect their country. Like the profuse display of American flags, the repeated representation of Afghan women as oppressed communicates the need for Americans to unite in defense. In the reproduction of flag images, most Americans "want to show solidarity with [other] Americans affected by the tragedy"; however, some feared that "an excessive display of flags means an implicit endorsement of war," a commitment not all were ready to make (Journal Staff and Wire Reports 2001). Similarly, the reproduction of Afghan women as <oppressed woman> not only indirectly justified the war; it also constructed a paternalistic role for the viewer by inviting them to liberate and protect Afghan women and their human rights. Just as the rhetorical use of the flag makes it difficult to participate in the American idea of freedom without endorsing the war, the rhetorical use of <oppressed woman> by the Bush Administration makes it difficult to oppose the war and simultaneously support Afghan women's liberation.

Visual ideographic symbols, such as the flag or <oppressed woman>, hold the power to influence moral and political decision-making. Lakoff said that "ideas are not abstract things"; they are also "components of action. [...] They characterize right and wrong, and accordingly change our understanding of the past and present, our vision of the future, and even the laws of the land," especially when certain phrases or images invoke shared cultural meaning and become ideographs (2006, 17). One illustration of this idea is the connection between publicizing Afghan women's oppression and the implicit endorsement of militaristic intervention. When the United States perceived that <freedom> was endangered by the suppression of women's human rights, that idea became a component of action and allowed Americans to accept the use of as much force and violence as necessary to secure <freedom>.

Repetition of Afghan women as defenseless denies them the agency to communicate their own oppression to either refute or accept external assistance. Bush does not create a dialog with Afghan women; instead, he asked other international humanitarians for their assistance in fighting the oppressors and liberating the oppressed. Although <freedom> is a universal concept, Bush associates <freedom> with America, turning many phrases in which one word could easily be substituted by the other: "we go forward to defend freedom and all that is just" (2001a), we live in "a world where freedom is under attack" (2001b), and terrorists are "enemies of freedom" because "they hate our freedoms" (2001b); as well as, "there is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretentions of tyrants, [...] and that is the force of human freedom" (2005). In short, Bush's rhetoric forces a choice: "you either you are with us [America]," and therefore on the side of <freedom>, "or you are with the

terrorists" (2001b). This decisive rhetoric defies the complexity of foreign affairs and the conflicting ideologies between the United States and Afghanistan that make up the rhetorical situation.

The trend of extending the conceptual family frame from that of the nation-as-family to strengthening the United States' position as a lead nation-as-person in the global community takes its momentum from the presidential rhetoric that appropriated the representation of oppressed Afghan women. By pressuring Americans to assume responsibility for global human rights by starting with women in Afghanistan, the Bush Administration wrested Afghan women's right to define freedom for themselves and used the <oppressed woman> ideograph to put a human emotional "face" on the war effort and to justify the use of militaristic force for the American public. The Bush Administration assured Americans that "America [would] not impose our own style of government on the unwilling" and that they would "help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way" (Bush 2005). In the end, nonetheless, Bush's careful manipulation of <freedom> led to the military occupation of Afghanistan, installing its government and training its troops, that continues after eight years to the present with no end in sight. Current president Barack Obama, George W. Bush's successor, was inaugurated in January 2009. In May 2009, Obama convened with the presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan and pledged "21,000 more troops and trainers to Afghanistan [and] committed a surge in U.S. civilian personnel and aid to boost domestic support for both leaders" (CNN News 2009). Despite warm hopes for the leaders to cooperate with the United States as "full partners" (ibid.), a precedent has clearly been established for America's continued role in the global community as a protector and enforcer.

LAURA BUSH AND THE RHETORIC OF AFGHAN WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Soon after September 11th and President George W. Bush's initial speeches, First Lady Laura Bush addressed the American public as his unofficial spokesperson for women's issues in Afghanistan. Whereas George W. Bush worked to link <freedom> with responsibility, Laura Bush took it a step further to focus more specifically on the hardships of Afghan women's lives as part of the Bush Administration's campaign to justify the war in Afghanistan. Even as Laura Bush contrasted the terrible oppression of women under the Taliban with examples of women's liberation after American intervention overthrew the fanatical regime, she framed women in domestic roles, relegating them to positions inside the home and within a family context. Through "her blending of liberal and maternal feminism" by arguing for "limited rights for Afghan women outside of the home while maintaining a traditional understanding of women's roles in Afghan society," she was able to appeal to the diverse American audience, much like her husband did: feminists were mollified by her participation in women's advocacy, and conservative women were pleased with her concern for restoring Afghan women's value in the home and family (Dubriwny 2005, 85). In both of these initiatives, Laura Bush's rhetoric reinforces the president's goal to secure America's role in the global community as a protector and enforcer, and also constructs a paternalistic role for the American audience who are led to view Afghan women as voiceless and defenseless.

In Laura Bush's November 12, 2001 radio address, she states that "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women," leading the listener to believe that military intervention is a prerequisite for the advancement of Afghan women's rights and dignity (2001). The rhetorical construction frames the two ideas—

fighting terrorists and supporting women's rights—as an inseparable effort, a strategy repeatedly observable in the president's speeches. The combination of these two ideas makes it difficult for one to oppose the war and still show support Afghan women's rights.

Similar to the president's rhetoric, in Laura Bush's speeches, the plight of Afghan women and especially the motivations of their oppressors are portrayed in terms of "good versus evil." For example, she makes the claim that "the oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists. [...] The plight of women and children in Afghanistan is a matter of deliberate human cruelty, carried out by those who seek to intimidate and control" (Laura Bush 2001). In contrast, America's efforts to liberate women are characterized as "the acceptance of our common humanity—a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent," implying that ignoring women's oppression in Afghanistan is tantamount to endangering the freedom of the world (ibid.). Liberating Afghan women is portrayed as not simply the releasing of oppressed Afghans for the safety of the global community, but also for the protection the American nation-as-family and nation-families worldwide.

Laura Bush's use of <oppressed women> reifies Afghan women's place in the domestic sphere and indirectly contributes to the existing gender divide in Afghanistan. By arguing for women's rights in the context of the home, she "do[es] not challenge the inherent oppressiveness of modern sex/gender power structures" that divide the domestic and public spheres in Afghan culture, but rather she "provide[s] a powerful, if limited, justification for the protection of women's rights abroad and at home based on women's difference" (Dubriwny 2005, 97). Laura Bush adds to the ideograph <oppressed woman>

by promoting a perception of Afghan women "based upon an understanding of women as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters *first* and individual *second*" (ibid., 101, italics original). Laura Bush's representation of Afghan women "values women precisely because of the values they learn/impart/share as mothers, sisters, and wives" (ibid.), telling her audience: "We may come from different backgrounds and faiths—but parents the world over love our children. We respect our mothers, our sisters and daughters" (Laura Bush 2001). In her radio address on November 12, 2001, Laura Bush constantly intertwines womanhood with motherhood, saying: "*children* aren't allowed to fly kites; *their mothers* face beatings for laughing out loud"; "*women* are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach *their daughters* without fear of punishment"; and "one in every four *children* won't live past the age of five because health care is not available. *Women* have been denied access to doctors when they're sick" (ibid., italics added). Even when women are not called "mothers," "sisters," or "wives," they are juxtaposed with "children" or "daughters" or are placed within a familial or domestic context. While part of her motivation for using the family frame may originate in her desire to accommodate Afghan culture, her speeches nevertheless confine Afghan women to a non-threatening space that does not challenge the fundamental Afghan view and places women's value beneath men's and on par with children's.

This framing of Afghan womanhood made Laura Bush's advocacy non-threatening to American and Afghan conservatives, but also earned the approval of feminists simply by addressing women's rights at all. Western feminists enthusiastically publicized Laura Bush's accounts, embracing a paternalistic responsibility for Afghan women (Dubriwny 2005, 85-86). The representation of a Western, "civilized" society

"striving to save women and children from the grasp of barbaric, premodern men, and then to uplift them, is a familiar theme"; and yet, "generations of Americans have repetitively advanced it as a fresh and unique testimony to their own special enlightenment" (Rosenburg, qtd. in Dubriwny 2005, 98).Therefore, it was expedient to depict Afghan women as a leaderless and powerless group in order to advance the Bush Administration's moral authority.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan, Laura Bush consistently contrasted representations of <oppressed woman> to women's advancements to characterize women's progress as the direct result of American military intervention, documenting America's liberation of Afghanistan and promoting the advisability of continued American occupation. This is apparent in the dramatic shift in her rhetoric from immediately after the attacks in 2001 to the end of President Bush's presidency. In 2001, Laura Bush repeatedly invoked <oppressed woman>, saying:

> The Taliban and its terrorist allies were making the lives of children and women miserable. [...] Women have been denied access to doctors when they're sick. 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. Women cannot work outside the home, or even leave their homes by themselves. [...] The Taliban forbid education to women [and] threaten to pull out women's fingernails for wearing nail polish. (2001)

This passage calls attention to the range of life-changing and as well as minor infractions for which Afghan women can be punished, from seeking healthcare to laughing out loud.

These infractions also profoundly affect children's lives, which Laura Bush juxtaposes with the suppression of women's personal freedoms.

Seven years after American occupation, Laura Bush made her case for American-led progress in Afghanistan to suggest slow but sure American success. After a much-publicized incident on November 12, 2008, in which male fundamentalist radicals threw acid in the faces of a group of young Afghan girls walking to school, Laura Bush released a statement offering her support and claiming that the incident was isolated (2008a). Out of the 165 words in her brief speech the day after the acid attacks, 101 were dedicated to reminding the American people of the progress in Afghanistan that she attributes to American intervention (ibid.). She states, for example, "The United States and our Allies are working with the Government of Afghanistan to build more schools where children can learn, open additional roads so that commerce can grow, and provide basic healthcare for the Afghan people," emphasizing infrastructural improvements that do not directly relate to the victims of the acid attack (ibid.). This depiction of Afghanistan contributes to the American perception of the developing nation as a "blank slate" that encourages the intervention of the stronger United States for moral guidance and protection. Laura Bush also attested that "today, Afghan women are attending school, running for political office, and serving as police officers" (2008a), although weeks later in her interview on *Meet the Press*, she admitted that women still fear entering these roles "to some extent" (2008b).

Laura Bush acknowledges the continued victimization of Afghan women, but mainly takes advantage of her status as first lady to showcase American successes in Afghanistan years later to support the continued occupation of Afghanistan by the United States. To do so, she relies on ideographic representations of <oppressed woman> and

contrasts these with signs of progress she credits to the American military intervention led by the president. Despite her advocacy for women's rights and calls for women's equal access to the public sphere, Laura Bush subtly relegates Afghan women into submissive and familial roles in the domestic sphere, denying Afghan women the autonomy to make their own efforts toward a public life as co-shapers of their own society in nation-building and in the home. This continued appropriation of the representation of Afghan women's struggle for equity in their community shifts agency to Americans and reinforces the case for American moral leadership in Afghanistan.

THE BURQA OBSESSION

The liberation rhetoric of George W. and Laura Bush depended on two things to justify the War on Terror for the American public: portraying Afghan women as truly oppressed women, and persuading Americans that they could have a positive influence on Afghan women's condition. This argument depended on satisfactory evidence of improvement in women's condition following American military intervention. As a part of this initiative, the Bush Administration launched a campaign to "widely publicize Afghan women's suffering under the Taliban and indirectly justify war" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 171-172).

In this political campaign, mention of the "extreme mistreatment of Afghan women by U.S.-funded Mujahideen in the years right before the war" was avoided entirely (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 171-172). Removing the history of American involvement presents woman's oppression as entirely the responsibility of the Taliban. The ostensible "discovery" of woman's oppression under the fundamentalist regime is

therefore portrayed as a surprise and images of <oppressed woman> may be freely publicized without the risk of criticism in the media. The campaign conceived by Bush counselor Karen Hughes "involved media training for a handful of Afghan spokeswomen who functioned as token brown female faces that would lend the campaign legitimacy [...] and were trained in the art of giving media interviews" (ibid., 172). If other Afghan women were allowed the agency to voice their unfiltered opinions, the Bush Administration would be vulnerable to criticism and Bush's legacy as a liberator would deteriorate. Vocal and independent women are more difficult to control, negating part of the paternalistic agenda "to 'civilize' and control subaltern peoples" (Gott 2002, 19). To filter Afghan women's message and focus on the oppression that justified American military involvement, the Bush Administration chose to emphasize <oppressed woman>.

The news media picked up on the campaign's thread of <oppressed woman> and reported extensively on Afghan women's plight, echoing the ideographs observed in the Bush Administration's rhetoric and capitalizing on the visual ones. Images of the burqa, a head-to-toe covering with only a small mesh grille to allow for vision, rhetorically functioned as the ultimate silencer to allow President Bush and the United States to maintain their paternalistic stance toward Afghanistan and Afghan women. After September 11th and as the Taliban's oppression of women was "discovered," the media began churning out articles that invoked images of the burqa with such titles as "Veil Is Lifted in Mazar-e Sharif; New Freedoms Embraced as City Emerges From Taliban Rule" (*Washington Post*, November 12, 2001); "Women Shedding Cloak of Taliban Oppression" (*Boston Globe*, November 26, 2001); "Veil Lifts on Afghan Women's Future" (*Denver Post*, November 27, 2001); and "In Kabul, Still a Veil of Fear"

(*Newsday*, November 28, 2001). In "Veil of Tears" in *People* magazine, one Afghan woman says, "It felt terrible the first time I had to wear it. [...] The burqa was like a prison, both physically and mentally. It was like a cage and very hot" (Norman and Finan 2001). The article is meant to inform Americans that women before the Taliban were used to public lives and implies that the burqa is not a historically cultural or religious garment, but only a recent gendered tool of oppression. As recently as April 7, 2009, a CNN news article condemning a proposed Afghan law that appeared to sanction marital rape turned to a lengthy history of the burqa only halfway into the piece, even including a personal story about the humiliation of wearing the garment and the dangers women face by not wearing one in public (Abawi 2009). No similar testimonials were offered concerning marital rape, even though the article is entitled, "Afghanistan 'Rape' Law Puts Women's Rights Front and Center" (Abawi 2009). This example confirms that Western outrage over the perceived regression of women's rights in Afghanistan and obsession with the burqa are still being used to bolster support for the United States' continued military involvement in that country.

Long before the general American public learned about the nature of Afghan women's oppression, the burqa was sensationalized by Western liberals and feminist groups. It has been displayed and worn for various demonstrations and fundraisers to raise awareness about women's oppression. Protesters from the Feminist Majority Foundation wore the burqa as a symbol of women's oppression while protesting the Unocal Pipeline in 1997 with Campaign Chair Mavis Leno, a project which would have financially benefited the Taliban (Feminist Majority Foundation 2008). Additionally, the organization's Gender Apartheid Campaign "constantly used images of mute burqa-clad

women on the campaign's Web site and literature," even selling the mesh eyepieces of burqas which American women "were urged to wear [as] a 'Symbol of Remembrance for Afghan Women,' as though they were paying tribute to the dead" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 179). In the spring of 2001, before the terrorist attacks on September 11th, a film about women's oppression called *Beneath the Veil* was aired in England. This film publicized the Taliban's burqa law, but "the documentary stirred little interest on the part of the government, the public, or the rest of the media" (McMorris 2002). However, when CNN aired *Beneath the Veil* on September 22 and 23 of 2001, days after the terrorist attacks, "five and a half million viewers tuned in, making it the network's most-watched documentary ever" (ibid.). This indicates that as Americans absorbed Bush's message of women's liberation as a moral battle, their interest in reaffirming their beliefs and embracing responsibility encouraged them to step into a paternalistic role to support American moral authority in the global community. President Bush was able to capitalize on the newfound interest in Afghanistan, and soon writers and historians followed in his wake. They unleashed an influx of what Sonali Kolhatkar and James Ingalls, co-directors of the Afghan Women's Mission in California and co-authors of *Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, Warlords, and the Propaganda of Silence*, call "Blue Burqa Books," books whose covers usually feature a woman in a blue burqa and play on the word "veil" within the title (2006, 180).

The circulation of images of Afghan women wearing the burqa and rhetoric valorizing the abandonment of the burqa raised the consciousness of Americans who were uneducated about the Taliban and women's oppression in Afghanistan, but they also reinforced negative Western stereotypes about Muslims and ignored the garment's

cultural origins. "The origins of the garment, its pervasiveness in pre-Taliban Afghanistan, or its context as one of many draconian Taliban edicts," especially edicts that oppressed Afghan men, were given little attention in the media (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 178). According to Kolhatkar and Ingalls, the burqa still finds wide acceptance in conservative Afghan culture despite its repressive nature (2006, 179). Also, the multitude of women who wear many different variations of hair- or face-coverings as well as women who wear no head covering at all are also women at risk under the fundamentalist patriarchy which prevails in Afghan culture today, but their image is not as dramatic to the Western audience. "Images of Afghan women have been shamelessly exploited" by politicians, the media, and humanitarians, which Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam calls "'self-interested' groups, providing an unbalanced, inconsistent, and unfair view of Afghan women [as either] vocal, jet-setting, lipstick-wearing superwomen in the limelight [… or] downtrodden, burqa-wearing, vulnerable widows in the shadows" (2004, 100). It is the latter image which evokes the most empathy from American viewers, and it is their liberation which makes Americans feel positive about the war and justifies Americans' role in the violence in Afghanistan. As a rhetorical strategy, "women and children make cameo appearances as *emblems* whose symbols of oppression (the burka[2] [*sic*], for example) can rally sentimentalized, self-congratulatory support" when those symbols (of which the burqa is but one example) are removed from the oppressed by their liberators (Rosenburg, qtd. in Dubriwny 2005, 99-100).

[2] Variation of the word "burqa." The author chose to use "burqa," the most common variation encountered in her research.

Figure 2.1: Actress Nelofer Pazira lifts her burqa in the movie *Kandahar*, set in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Two months after September 11th, Bush encouraged Americans to watch the film (Weber 2005). The lifting of the veil has been widely used to represent Afghan women's liberation to the Western audience.

After the American invasion of Afghanistan, the news media's obsession with the burqa in its representations of <oppressed woman> led to false media reports and misinformation. For the most part, because the Taliban had been ousted from power and most of its edicts rendered impotent (at least by law), many Americans fully expected women to discard the burqa immediately (Clark 2004, 92). They did not consider that women would continue to wear it for protection, for religious reasons, and/or under pressure from fundamentalists and/or family members. The logical result of perpetuating this oversimplification of <oppressed woman> was that Americans developed an expectation for one solution: "topple the Taliban and remove the laws on forced veiling, and Afghan women would be free" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 179). This led to highly pressured media journalists prematurely reporting the removal of burqas as a natural part of the sequence of liberation. On November 11, when the city of Mazar-e Sharif fell, "journalists who had never set foot in the city [reported] that women were discarding their face-covering veils—the burqa" (Clark 2004, 92). The *Washington Post* reported

that "women walked in the streets without veils for the first time in more than two years in Mazar-e Sharif today as the city in northern Afghanistan began to emerge from Taliban rule" (Struck 2001). Although journalist Kate Clark maintains that this was untrue, the Western journalists "assumed that unveiling was the main preoccupation of Afghan women living under the Taliban [and] it must have seemed obvious that they would throw away their burqa at the first chance" (2004, 92). The textual and visual rhetoric was so dramatic that *The London Observer* reported: "Foreign newspaper photographers [...] 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" (qtd. in Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 206). This is a clear indication of how American intervention for Afghan women's liberation impacted American solidarity by cultivating group expectations, reified American exceptionalism by expecting Afghan women to abandon an aspect of their culture for Western standards of freedom, sought justification for the use of force by demanding visual evidence of women's liberation, and overall turned the struggle for Afghan women's rights into an oversimplified burqa obsession.

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The emotional power connected to <oppressed woman> resonated with Americans who were already receptive to the metaphoric family frame after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Fears that women's oppression could lead to another attack on America encouraged the American public to exercise their paternalistic empathies and assert their moral authority in Afghanistan as the main front on the protection of worldwide freedoms. However, the international aid gained by the publicity negatively impacted Afghan women, who were witness to the seizure of their individual voices and

appropriation of their individual identities. More often than not, their individual identities were shrouded by the burqa as a symbol of gendered oppression.

Because the burqa had been sensationalized to such a degree by politicians, journalists, and women's rights groups under pressure to provide proof of improvement in Afghanistan, many Americans accepted <oppressed woman> as the dominant representation of Afghan women and responded to the ideograph's intense emotional appeal of rather than seeking the views and opinions of informed Afghan women (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 2004, 101). Instead, women were "accommodated within [the media's] structure as victims, collateral damage, and media icons" generally communicated through verbal and visual ideographic representations of <oppressed woman> (ibid., 105). The suppression of women's rights, public record of violent abuses, and privately-suffered domestic assaults suffered by women under the patriarchal power system of Afghan culture are a part of daily life for most women in Afghanistan. However, the rhetorical choices made to represent Afghan women as voiceless, faceless, and unable to help themselves rob Afghan women of their right to express their own individual identities and experiences, assert themselves in the advancement of their own culture, and criticize the government of Afghanistan and those who appointed its members.

The use of <oppressed woman> by George W. and Laura Bush as well as its use in the administration's publicity campaign sparked its repetition in the media. The omnipresent image of <oppressed woman> was also picked up by humanitarian groups created in response to women's oppression in Afghanistan in the form of woman-centric groups predominantly organized by women for the distribution of basic food and

medicinal aid to women and children, the establishment of civic institutions such as women's hospitals and orphanages and schools, and in some cases the lobbying of the government for women's rights reform. In Chapter 3, I will focus on the use of <oppressed woman> online by one such group in particular—the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). The continued representation of Afghan women as <oppressed woman> is perpetuated in part by humanitarian groups like RAWA who are genuinely interested in women's rights in Afghanistan, but whose immediate priority is keeping their organizations in the international spotlight and procuring external aid for women in the form of money and voluntary labor.

RAWA has recognized the emotional value of <oppressed woman>, which has proven its success in the Bush Administration and in the media by capturing the nation's attention and empathy, allowing writers, filmmakers, and historians to capitalize off of <oppressed woman>, and initiating a general feeling of justification for the war in Americans concerned for Afghan women and the security of their own freedoms. The ideograph <oppressed woman> is heavily utilized on RAWA's Web site in hopes of garnering global attention, undercutting its mission for women's participation in achieving peace, freedom, secular democracy, and women's rights in fundamentalist Afghanistan, without the interference of an American military presence.

CHAPTER III

<OPPRESSED WOMAN> AND THE REVOLUTIONARY ASSOCIATION OF THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN ONLINE

> RAWA strongly believes that there should be no expectation of either the U.S. or any other country to present us with democracy, peace, and prosperity. Our freedom is only achievable at the hands of our people.
>
> RAWA
>
> Statement on the 7th Anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan
>
> October 7, 2008

The ideographic representation of Afghan women in scenes of oppression and deprivation is an appropriation of the victimized Muslim women's image that has been historically perpetuated in Western civilizations to justify military and humanitarian intervention in underdeveloped countries. The ideograph <oppressed woman> works chiefly by appealing to Western sensibilities about upholding hegemonic ideas of <freedom> and responsibility for human rights in other countries where it perceives moral injustice and the oppression of a group. Unfortunately, because the influence of representations of oppression and deprivation over the Western audience is so powerful, it has been overused by political, media, and humanitarian campaigns in the West able to offer aid, as well as by indigenous political, media, and humanitarian groups supplicating for aid. The positive rhetorical use of the ideographic <oppressed woman> of

Afghanistan educates foreign audiences about the oppression of Afghan women, communicates Afghan women's needs, and encourages foreign entities to get involved. Among the several negative effects of its rhetorical use include the suppression of Afghan women's agency by dehumanizing them as faceless and/or voiceless figures, the emergence of supplementary ideographs that function to reinforce perceptions of <oppressed woman>, and the implication that basic human rights and protection for all (and only) women is denied by all (and only) men. This opposition widens the gender gap that thwarts successful indigenous nation-building efforts and reinforces Afghanistan's reliance on the United States for humanitarian relief and infrastructural assistance.

It is intriguing when Afghan-led humanitarian groups, such as the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), replicate the Afghan <oppressed woman> to achieve short-term goals of their own, when its use has such potentially high negative implications for Afghanistan socially, politically, and economically. Misdirected humanitarian campaigns initially targeted two-thirds world women solely as economic producers and human reproducers (Wilkins 1999, 49), but development discourse has made tentative steps toward the consideration of the gendered context of and power dimensions within discourse. The ideograph <oppressed woman> constructs a paternalistic role for the reader/viewer, an aspect that strengthened Americans' sense of exceptionalism and bolstered the reputation of the United States as a liberator and as the leading nation-family in a global community of nation-families. RAWA has objected to U.S. involvement in Afghanistan's struggle for freedom, maintaining that "freedom and democracy can't be donated; it is the duty of the people of a country to fight and achieve these values" (*About RAWA* 2009), yet the perpetuation of <oppressed woman> in

RAWA's humanitarian rhetoric online reinforces Americans' sense of paternalistic duty and moral authority in the world. Realizing the hegemonic and gendered context of the transnational exchange of resources and ideology can help to the interpret ways in which RAWA reflects hegemonic and gendered stereotypes in order to shape its humanitarian appeals and raise social consciousness.

As Internet technology has developed and become more accessible, humanitarian organizations have taken advantage of the capability to communicate through cyberspace. As a plea for "the solidarity and support of all people around the world" (*Homepage* 2009), RAWA's Web site is designed for an international viewership. In 1997, the year in which the Web site was launched, reporter John Motavalli interviewed Sohaila Danish, one of the RAWA members in charge of the Web site (Queen 2008, 477). Regarding the Web site's audience, Danish affirmed:

> [It] informs the world about what is going on in our country. This is a powerful means for communicating with the outside world and telling people what is going on inside our country. [...] Unfortunately we cannot hope to use the Internet to bring any information to our own people. Can you use the Internet to communicate with the 11th century? (Danish, qtd. in Queen 2008, 477)

Danish's remarks invoke the Western perception that Afghanistan is a backward culture mired in a sort of time vacuum in which Internet technology is accepted as part of the standard of modernity and progress. This representation of a clash of civilizations used to compare Afghanistan to the West "reinforce[s] neoliberal beliefs that equate women's liberation with progress and modernity and women's oppression with stasis and tradition," leading Danish's listeners to believe that all Afghan women are oppressed and

all Western women are social equals to men (Queen 2008, 477). Rhetorical constructions of the clash of civilizations also bolstered President Bush's message of attaining Afghan women's liberation through U.S. intervention and continues to use <oppressed woman> as "a call for us to 'save' these women from their patriarchal and religious oppression" (ibid.). As Internet access increases in Afghanistan, not only does Internet technology decrease as a criteria for "modernity" that is too often characterized by the West, but also the audience for RAWA broadens, complicating the reception of a message that originated as a plea for aid targeting benevolent American empathizers.

In this chapter, I will analyze the content of RAWA's Web site to argue that RAWA's mission and goals as they are stated online are being compromised by the profusion of the dominant ideograph <oppressed woman> which is represented both textually and visually on its homepage and secondary pages. My findings show how representations of <oppressed woman>, which proved so successful for their rhetors in the United States, are being wielded by Afghan women themselves, RAWA, to appeal to a common audience, while negotiating the constraints of reaching an increasing global audience. RAWA's core message of gender equity and secular democracy (*Homepage* 2009; *About RAWA* 2009; *Social Activities* 2009) is not advanced by the <oppressed woman> ideograph used so prevalently on its Web site; in fact, it comprises that core message. RAWA seeks to empower women as participants in their governance and expose the male oppressor, frequently naming specific human rights violators in the global forum of cyberspace and locally in the streets of Afghanistan. It is quite counter-intuitive, then, for the feminist women of RAWA to perpetuate textual and visual

ideographs developed in part by Americans which have proven to be so effective in subjugating Afghan women in human rights and development discourse.

First, I provide an overview of the rhetorical situation that surrounds RAWA's humanitarian background before I discuss RAWA's Web site as its transnational medium of choice. Next, the textual and visual rhetoric on the RAWA Web site depicting Afghan women's oppression and liberation are analyzed, interpreted, and categorized as it might appeal to an American audience. I focus on portrayals of violence against women in the domestic and public spheres, women's self-abuse, and the suppression of women's rights, as well as on representations of women's empowerment. Among the representations of <oppressed woman> that I expected to dominate the Web site, my findings also reveal ideographic representations of <empowered woman>, vocal Afghan women demonstrating in public without burqas. To Western audiences, this ideograph symbolizes the progress resulting from the West's presence in the country and from the positive influence of RAWA funded by Westerners. The ideograph <empowered woman> is crafted to appeal specifically to Western audiences, at the risk of alienating Afghans and other Muslims, who are truly responsible for nation-building. These images of vocal Afghan women demonstrating without burqas shed light on the myriad and subtle ways in which RAWA represents Afghan women overall as oppressed, but they are also symbolic of the West and its progressive means of political participation. This Western association, combined with the fact that the representations of Afghan women on RAWA's Web site are designed to appeal to the West, taint the empowerment of women through demonstrations with association with the West and immobilize RAWA's nation-building efforts.

The next section examines the history of RAWA's humanitarian media choices in light of its nation-building efforts, which range from the short-term to the long-term. Today, RAWA's online representation of Afghan women is dominated by representations of the oppression and abuse of women, but it has augmented <oppressed woman> with supplementary ideographs that further magnify the perception of Afghan women as oppressed. Through careful crafting, RAWA's rhetorical strategy to court its audience's prejudices toward its own ends is as effective in its short-term goals as it is destructive to its long-term goals.

RAWA: A HISTORY OF HUMANITARIANISM

RAWA believes that "freedom and democracy can't be donated; it is the duty of the people of a country to fight and achieve these values" (*About RAWA* 2009). Its noble nation-building efforts toward these powerful ideals at home range from grassroots organization and political agitation to humanitarian acts such as school-building and teaching literacy to women and girls, providing free mobile health care to women and children, publishing accurate media reports about human rights violations, providing an accepting venue for cultural arts, and offering financial and entrepreneurial assistance, among others (*Social Activities* 2009). These initiatives increase the quality of life for women and raise women's status in their communities. All of RAWA's indigenous efforts clear a path for gender equity for empowered, intelligent Afghan women through its political activism and humanitarian initiatives. What is so curious, therefore, is RAWA's reliance on the ideograph of the passive, defenseless <oppressed woman> that

is perpetuated in RAWA's textual and visual media online and which negatively influences its audience in the long-term.

RAWA was created by Afghan women and for Afghan women in response to a lack of female representation in government (Brodsky 2003, 43). Meena Keshwar Kamal, then a twenty-year-old student, founded the association in 1977 as a feminist organization "whose sole purpose and aim was the advancement and equality of Afghan women" (ibid.). Today, it is known as "an independent political/social organization of Afghan women fighting for human rights and for social justice in Afghanistan" and has quickly gained appeal and influence, expanding into the areas of "education, health, and income generation as well as political agitation" (*About RAWA* 2009). As the oldest feminist organization taking great risks to speak out for women's rights in fundamentalist Afghanistan, RAWA has a strong legacy to live up to in order to continue the progress it has made for Afghan women. Beyond the cultural and ideological battle for women's equity, RAWA provides humanitarian assistance to the poorest women of Afghanistan whose needs are more immediate than others'; however, in addition to pursuing these humanitarian goals, "RAWA's objective [is] to involve an increasing number of Afghan women in social and political activities aimed at acquiring women's human rights and contributing to the struggle for the establishment of a government based on democratic and secular values in Afghanistan" (ibid.). Thus, its ambitions go beyond the feeding and sheltering of Afghan women and ask women to participate as equal partners in the nation-building task that RAWA perceives as a uniquely indigenous responsibility.

RAWA's first foray into mass media was in 1981 through a bilingual Persian/Pashtu magazine called *Payam-e-Zan* (Woman's Message), also published in

Urdu and English upon request (*About RAWA* 2009). Selling the magazines presented a severe security risk for Afghan women; for example, "unaccompanied women selling the magazine have been attacked by pro-Taliban fundamentalists in Pakistan, and activists [...] have taken to carrying sticks under their veils for protection" (O'Connor 2001). Today, "along with *Payam-e Zan*, the Web site is cited as a significant means of documenting atrocities and eliciting aid" (Brodsky 2003, 199-200). With the advent of Internet technology, RAWA suddenly was able to reach a global, literate, and powerful audience without the daily risks associated with flouting conservative Afghan social norms on the streets of fundamentalist Afghanistan.

By establishing an online presence, RAWA claims agency for Afghan women both as a group of women in a patriarchal society and as a marginal voice in a hegemonic world. "Access to e-mail and the World Wide Web allows many politically disenfranchised groups to communicate with like-minded or sympathetic audiences" (Warf and Grimes 1997, 260), such as other Afghan women or Muslims in neighboring countries with increasing access to the Internet or empathetic Americans whose interest in Afghanistan and Afghan women's liberation increased after September 11th. Although RAWA became much more internationally visible after launching its Web site in 1997, it was not a prominent group in the American media until after September 11th, 2001, when it received "more than 2,000 unique visits every day, compared to previously receiving approximately 150 per day" following the spike of American interest in Afghanistan (Hunt, qtd. in Queen 2008, 474). The organization's expansion into cyberspace has been described as "probably the single most instrumental factor in RAWA's ability to gain international recognition and support," and it was quickly flooded with requests for

interviews and speaking engagements (Brodsky 2003, 160). Journalist Kate Clark observed that when faced with their increase in popularity, RAWA

> manage[d] the media spectacularly. [...] Through websites, focused lobbying, and the release of clandestinely made films from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, they succeeded in becoming the spokespeople for Afghan women. RAWA is a group of brave and eloquent women, but in terms of Afghan opinion, they are completely marginal. Nevertheless, their feminist-type views were what many in the West wanted to hear; they got the ear of the media. (2004, 87-88)

By dint of its access to the Internet and consequently its growing Western support system, RAWA is frequently designated by its progressive audience as the *de facto* speaker for all Afghan women; this is all the more reason for RAWA to court its interest.

Post-September 11th was a decidedly convenient time for the American media to discover an anti-Taliban, feminist Afghan group accessible online, as the Bush Administration was only just developing its own liberation rhetoric for Afghan women. RAWA quickly became in-demand by the American media, pressured as it was to uncover and publicize dramatic evidence of the oppression of Afghan women. Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam accuses RAWA of distortion and

> wholeheartedly milking *rumors* about women under the Taliban, and *cashing in* on the naiveté of journalists and researchers content to be hoodwinked and manipulated[.] *RAWA fuels Orientalist notions of veiled Afghan women living in seraglios, jealously guarded by bearded Musulmans wielding scimitars*. RAWA has yet to prove that its *relentless self-promotion* has contributed in any significant way to the betterment of Afghan women. (2004, 101, italics added)

This passage presents an extreme picture rife with stereotypes to characterize Azarbaijani-Moghaddam's perception of RAWA's rhetorical strategy, condensing its representations of women's oppression as "rumors" used to "cash in" on the empathy of donors through the media. What she fails to acknowledge is the intensely magnifying effect of the American media on Afghan women's oppression as a result of Americans' sudden interest, nor RAWA's efforts to promote Afghan women's agency and arrest the trend in which two-thirds world women are spoken *for*. Her observations do, nevertheless, voice a legitimate concern about the shared cultural meaning held by most Americans about Afghan women and its reinforcement by RAWA in the textual and visual rhetoric on its Web site: that Afghan women are veiled and sequestered, and that Afghan men surround them with violence. RAWA does not use <oppressed woman> ideographically online to build onto Western perceptions of Afghan women as sequestered lovers, as Azarbaijani-Moghaddam may suggest; however, RAWA's rhetorical strategy does rely on the opposition of the <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor>.

RAWA's Long-term and Short-term Goals

RAWA's ambitions for Afghanistan can be categorized into long-term and short-term goals, which are served in part through the strategic representation of Afghan women on its Web site. RAWA's short-term goals for funding humanitarian initiatives provide for women's immediate and most basic needs and give them the energy and hope to progress from simply surviving, to learning and advancing in society. Fundraising is achieved through other short-term goals such as catching and maintaining global

attention, publicizing Afghan women's oppression and deprivation, increasing worldwide empathy for oppressed Afghan women, educating the world about Afghan women's needs, and informing the world of ways in which it can help. These short-term goals rely heavily on the perpetuation of textual and visual ideographs.

In the long-term, RAWA's mission is "to involve an increasing number of Afghan women in social and political activities aimed at acquiring women's human rights and contributing to the struggle for the establishment of a government based on democratic and secular values in Afghanistan" (*About RAWA* 2009). Some of RAWA's short-term goals overlap with its long-term goals. RAWA's lasting mission for Afghanistan is to educate the world about Afghan women's needs, inform the world of ways in which it can help, promote gender equity, seek secular democracy, empower women politically by increasing their participation, expose male oppressors, accurately document human rights violations, and increase women's equitable access to the workplace and civic institutions like education and healthcare. Women seek equity for themselves not only in civic arenas, but also for their right to shape and sustain a democracy alongside men to liberate Afghanistan. They organize groups

> in which the participated women and girls are being thought [*sic*] about the concepts of women's rights, the nature of the fundamentalists, objectives of our Association, conditions of the women under the fundamentalists, the need for struggle against the religious bigots and for human rights, ways and means for the speedy solution of the Afghan problem, and involvement in the social and political life of the country. (ibid.)

These goals are long-term commitments to foster networks of women interested in joining the male-dominated public sphere for the advancement of their country's governance and security. The ideographic expression of these goals is very text-driven. They can only be achieved by the Afghan women themselves, but they require gradual acceptance in the Afghan and greater Muslim communities as well to be truly successful.

RAWA's short-term humanitarian goals can also be understood as a foundation for its long-term goals. Access to healthcare, education, and paid work establish the stability in the domestic sphere that allows women to pursue their interests in the public sphere. The current situation in Afghanistan is, sadly, one in which many Afghan women are simply struggling for survival. Because income is commonly dependent on male providers, Afghan widows who cannot provide for themselves or their children sometimes turn to illegal and dangerous means of income. Many other Afghan women who live with spouses or other male relatives suffer domestic violence without recourse to legal protection or divorce; seeking either of these escapes is dangerous in itself for the social backlash it incurs. These stories of struggle only prove that the short-term humanitarian and long-term political agendas of RAWA are both independently important and intrinsically related. However, the global struggle for procuring humanitarian aid is extremely competitive.

To catch and maintain the attention of external providers, RAWA emphasizes women's oppression and deprivation to gain attention and elicit empathy and moral outrage from a mainly Western audience. RAWA intuited the success of the American political and media discourse in linking <freedom> with responsibility for human rights, and strategically stresses this connection through ideographic representations of

<oppressed woman>, which are apparent in the following sections as the dominant visual and textual feature of RAWA's Web site. However, the saturation of <oppressed woman> could potentially cause the audience to question Afghan women's capabilities and remain uninformed about Afghan-led advancements, therefore reinforcing negative Western stereotypes about Afghan women and confining them indefinitely in a dependent state where Afghanistan remains occupied by the United States.

In this chapter, I present a Web site content analysis that contrasts RAWA's core message of women's empowerment and gender equity with its ideographic representation of Afghan women as oppressed, defenseless females oppressed by violent Afghan males, as anonymous figures who do not have the agency to shape their own societies, and as submissive women who need a paternal savior to liberate them from oppression. Then, I compare these representations to the mission and goals expressed by RAWA online. In the textual and visual representations of <oppressed woman> that dominate the site, RAWA reinforces the American stereotype that all (and only) Afghan men are oppressors of women and that all Afghan women are oppressed by men, contributing to the <male oppressor> ideograph. These representations widen the gender divide in Afghanistan and ultimately reinforce that country's dependence on the United States, thus undermining true nation-building.

WEB SITE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Methodology

I used Christopher Weare and Wan-Ying Lin's framework for the content analysis of the World Wide Web (2000) as the basis for my content analysis of a sample unit of

RAWA's Web site. To simulate the speculated online experience of RAWA's likely audience as that audience might navigate the Web site, I chose to analyze the content in the directory structure, using the Web site's Navigational Bar as a guide. The sample unit that I studied is comprised of the first-level domain name consisting of RAWA's *Homepage* (http://www.rawa.org/index.php) and the second-level domain names of each English-language Web page listed in the site's Navigational Bar. This is the depth of viewing that I consider reasonable for the leisurely reader/viewer on his or her first visit to the RAWA Web site to consume in one sitting.[1]

This sample unit underwent a rhetorical analysis of its textual and visual media on the first-level *Homepage* as well as the second-level Web pages *About RAWA*, *On Our Martyred Leader*, *Social Activities*, and *How to Help Us?* in order to define RAWA's organizational mission and goals. RAWA's *Homepage*, *Publications*, *RAWA in Media*, *Photo Gallery*, *News Archive*, *On Afghan Women*, *RAWA Documents*, *RAWA Events*, *Patriotic Songs*, *Movie Clips*, *Poems*, and *TAKE ACTION* were also analyzed for textual and visual representations of Afghan women as either oppressed or liberated.[2]

My Web site content analysis uses the directory structure to guide my approach to the RAWA Web site because I believe it is an apt reflection of the Internet itself: its sheer volume of information and its chaotic structure present several challenges to the researcher and complicate attempts to develop a reliable and valid method of content analysis. Hyperlinks are exceedingly prolific on RAWA's Web site, and as such they

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[1] Third-level domain names are hyperlinks presented in second-level domain names (Web pages reached through the Navigation Bar) and were not investigated for the purposes of this project.

[2] The pages *RAWA Around the World*, *RAWA Awards*, *Links*, *Contact Us*, *Search*, *Subscribe to Mailing List*, and *Guest Book* were researched for content but were not included in this Web site content analysis due to lack of either textual or visual ideographic representations of women on these pages.

pages they lead to are not included in the data collection or Web site content analysis. It is not reasonable to expect that the leisurely reader/viewer on his or her first visit would follow each hyperlink to each of these new sources of information. The content of the first-level domain name (the RAWA *Homepage*) and second-level domain names (located in the Navigational Bar) covered in the sample unit offer a wealth of information and are sufficient to provide the leisurely reader/viewer on his or her first visit with an accurate sense of RAWA's overall representation of Afghan women.

After identifying the sample unit, I identified the recording units, or the text and visuals I examined for associations with Afghan women's oppression and empowerment. Next, I created a category scheme, grouping the recording units under the following categories: domestic sphere violence against women, public sphere violence against women, suppression of women's rights, women's self-abuse, and positive representations of women. I also demarcated sub-categories for a closer examination of the collected data. Each recording unit was evaluated in relation to the above category scheme and had the potential to fulfill the criterion for all or no categories created for the scheme, and it may also fulfill all or no criterion for the sub-category created for the category. By the same token, each recording unit may offer a vague representation of Afghan women, or it may conjure a very specific representation. Finally, I coded the data collected from the sample for analysis and interpretation. There is a possibility that the author's Western perspective influenced the coding; however, this viewpoint complements the author's interest in the perceptions of Afghan women in the mind of the American reader/viewer.

In the following section, I analyze ways in which RAWA ideographically represents <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> and code these accordingly. In

textual rhetoric, RAWA conjures <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> in news article titles hyperlinked to the full article, and the content of these news titles are included in the data collection. In my Web site content analysis, I also consider the grouping of these news articles according to their anticipated audience and their priority among surrounding material, which can be interpreted by the text's position on the page, its graphic treatment, and how often <oppressed woman> is repeated on the Web page.

THE REPRESENTATION OF AFGHAN WOMEN ON RAWA'S WEB SITE

<Oppressed Woman> and Gaining Western Sympathy

The dominant ideograph on the RAWA Web site, <oppressed woman>, and other prevalent ideographs such as <male oppressor> and <empowered woman> appear in both visual and textual media and are spread across the many Web pages linked to the main page on the Web site. RAWA's main page, the *Homepage*, and several of the Web pages linked in the Navigational Bar contain long lists of news article titles linked to full-text articles with photographs or illustrations depicting more ideographs. Even at a cursory glance, the dominant ideograph <oppressed woman> is made obvious in numerous news article titles and video clip captions, communicating a distinct first impression of the Afghan woman as the victim of physical and/or sexual violence and severe oppression. This impression fuels the sympathy Western reader/viewers feel for two-thirds world women, informed by culturally imbued feelings of moral authority and responsibility for human rights around the globe.

Coverage of sexual assault against women is also prevalent on the *Homepage*, especially the sexual assault of minors (aged seventeen or younger). Four of the seven

instances of the sexual assault of minors on the *Homepage* are accompanied by videotaped interviews with the victims and their families. Women and children of varying ages are portrayed under such titles as "Ear and nose of Nafisa was cut off by her husband" and "A 12-y-old [*sic*] girl victim of violence," pictured below in Figure 3.1. In News Box 2, the second of three large graphically separated boxes containing news articles on the *Homepage*, ten of the twelve videos that line the right-hand side feature the bloodied and bandaged female victims of sexual and physical violence. Of the seventy-two news article titles in News Box 2, <oppressed woman> is apparent in twenty-three, or nearly one-third, of them. RAWA also gives priority to <oppressed woman> by giving the stories of oppressed women video coverage and revealing their burnt, bandaged, and crying faces in the still shots of video clips with explanatory captions. In all three news boxes on the *Homepage*, there are only two positive representations of Afghan women.

Figure 3.1: A screenshot of News Box 2 on RAWA's *Homepage* (accessed 27 February 2009). Representations of <oppressed woman> appear textually in the news article titles and visually in the video clips lining the right side of the screen. In the background image, a veiled woman breaks the chains of her manacles high above her head.

The empowering image of a veiled woman breaking a chain that links her manacled wrists provides the graphic background for the *Homepage* (see Figure 3.1), but even this empowering image recalls perceptions of Afghan women as enslaved. The portrayal of expressive, independent women pays homage to the strength and resilience of Afghan women that is unfortunately not supported by the saturation of <oppressed woman> on the *Homepage* and other Web pages on RAWA's Web site.

The three News Boxes on RAWA's *Homepage* are graphically separated and each News Box presents a different side of RAWA. News Box 1 is largely political, but News Box 2 contains seventy-two articles, twenty-three of which employ <oppressed woman>. The article titles in News Box 2 further down on the page include more representations of Afghan women's suffering than News Box 1, but RAWA prioritizes it as secondary to the chiefly political material of News Box 1 as interpreted by its lower position on the screen. News Box 2 is only reachable by first scrolling through the chiefly political material highlighted in News Box 1.This may indicate that RAWA considers political news updates as more important to reader/viewers making their initial visit to the RAWA Web site. However, the political articles in News Box 1 do represent Afghan women's oppression and RAWA's involvement in speaking for Afghan women. Table 1 (below) catalogs the representations of women on the *Homepage*.

Homepage: Number of Representations of Afghan Women	
Content of Representation	Number
Domestic Sphere Violence Against Women	8
Physical violence/Murder	4
Forced marriage/Selling women and children	4
Rape/Sexual assault	
Public Sphere Violence Against Women	14
Rape/Sexual assault/Threats	9
Of adults	2
Of minors (under 18)	7
Beating/Threats/Murder	4
Of women accessing healthcare/education/profession	
Suppression of Women's Rights	7
Misogynistic laws	
Clothing (ie, burqa) and "veiled" verbiage	
Silencing/Intimidation	
Denying access to healthcare/education/profession	2
Women's Self-abuse	3
Suicide/Attempts/Contemplation	2
Self-immolation/Contemplation	1
Positive Representations of Women	2
Equity under the law	
RAWA rallies	
Women speaking out	2
Women accessing healthcare/education/profession	

Table 1: The number of times women and girls are mentioned in the text on RAWA's *Homepage* in text in News Box 1, News Box 2, and News Box 3 (accessed 8 February 2009).

RAWA's *Homepage* contains a high representation of violence against women and the suppression of women's rights in comparison to an extremely low representation of positive representations of women (see Table 1, above). The high representation of violence against women and girls and women's self-abuse as opposed to the suppression of women's rights suggests that RAWA relies more on physical and sexual violence than women's struggle for rights to highlight women's oppression. As Table 1 indicates, there are fourteen accounts of women suffering physical and sexual violence in the public

sphere on RAWA's *Homepage* as compared to eight in the domestic sphere. The majority of these acts were committed against minors. Two eye-catching examples of <oppressed woman> in News Box 2 are the news article titles "14-year-old Afghan girl butchered in the name of honour [*sic*]" and "Opium farmers sell daughters to cover debts to traffickers" (*Homepage* 2009). These titles use phrases such as "butchered in the name of honor" and "sell daughters" to communicate the perceived moral liability and low social worth of Afghan girls in extreme and violent language meant to shock American reader/viewers. In the text of News Box 2, the only two positive representations of Afghan women are titled: "Female foe of warlords faces them in Afghan assembly" and "The women of Afghanistan find a leader" (*Homepage* 2009). This reflects the enormous power attached to Afghan women finding a voice in the community, a prerequisite to political participation and nation-building.

The *RAWA in Media* Web page contains 299 English-language headlines out 428 and does not emphasize news stories of violence; however, it does communicate <oppressed woman> (2009). Table 2 (below) catalogs the representations of women in the 299 English-language headlines on RAWA's *RAWA in Media* Web page. It illustrates the high number of representations of women speaking out compared to oppressed women and the suppression of women's rights.[3]

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[3] Some of these examples communicate both RAWA speaking against the oppressors or for the oppressed and were categorized under women speaking out and the suppression of women's rights.

RAWA in Media: Number of Representations of Afghan Women	
Content of Representation	Number
Domestic Sphere Violence Against Women	1
Physical violence/Murder	
Forced marriage/Selling women and children	
Rape/Sexual assault	1
Public Sphere Violence Against Women	2
Rape/Sexual assault/Threats	1
Of adults	
Of minors (under 18)	
Beating/Threats/Murder	1
Of female students	1
Of women seeking healthcare/education/profession	
Suppression of Women's Rights	71
Misogynistic laws	3
Clothing (ie, burqa) and "veiled" verbiage	14
Silencing/Intimidation	3
Denying access to healthcare/education/profession	2
Women's Self-abuse	
Suicide/Attempts/Contemplation	
Self-immolation/Contemplation	
Positive Representations of Women	100
Equity under the law	1
RAWA rallies	22
Women speaking out	51
Women accessing healthcare/education/profession	3

Table 2: The number of times women and girls are mentioned in the text on the *RAWA in Media* Web page in English (accessed 8 February 2009).

RAWA in Media concentrated on the losses and gains in women's rights, not tales of violence, and focused on RAWA's publicized organizational activities, consistent with the Web page title "*RAWA in Media.*" In 299 English titles, positive representations of women are indicated in one hundred titles, and the suppression of women's rights is indicated in seventy-one (ibid.). As a page dedicated to the works of RAWA, the Web page's content centers overwhelmingly on positive representations of women to

emphasize the accomplishments of the organization; however, many positive representations are contextualized in the atmosphere of oppression from which these positive representations grow. Therefore, even though such representations of women are positive, they still invoke <oppressed woman>. A majority of these positive representations of women depict either RAWA rallies (fifty-one) or women in general speaking out against oppression (twenty-two) as opposed to article titles suggesting that women were intimidated into silence (three). A majority of the article titles, fourteen, insinuate the suppression of women's rights with verbiage that recalls the "veil," "cloak," or other word suggestive of the burqa, invoking a powerful symbol to the Western reader/viewer to relay <oppressed woman>. Almost none of the news articles seemed to concern the personal stories of victims of physical or sexual violence, a stark contrast to the type of representation of <oppressed woman> on other Web pages. The abundance of positivity—i.e., women asserting their voices in the public sphere to claim equitable treatment under the law and access to public institutions—on the *RAWA in Media* Web page by individual RAWA members and RAWA as a collective identity puts forth an image of RAWA as a successful positive influence in Afghan society and as supported by an international audience.

Some of the news article content was clearly either positive or negative, while others indicated a progression from suppression to agency, such as the article "A voice for the voiceless" (ibid.).[4] This news article title implies that a leaderless group could not speak for itself until one person gained the agency to speak on its behalf. Placed in the context of the news article titles around it where women's agency is suppressed, "A voice

[4] "A voice for the voiceless" communicates a sense of both women's oppression and liberation and was categorized under both suppression of women's rights and positive representations of women.

for the voiceless" can be interpreted as a reference to women's voices gaining agency in a rhetorical situation where women's voices are normally silenced.

RAWA in Media, which praises the efforts and successes of organized women, is a study in contrasts to the Web page *On Afghan Women*, which publicizes the physical and sexual violence against and oppression of individual, often named, female victims, who are also often pictured alongside their stories. *On Afghan Women* features hyperlinks to two documents—"An overview on the situation of Afghan Women" and "Some of the restrictions imposed by Taliban on women"—as well as a hyperlink to a photo gallery, "Self-immolation among Afghan Women (horrible photos)" (2009). This photo gallery of "horrible photos" underscores the marital and familial pressures that drive desperate women to set themselves on fire in suicide attempts.[5] This act is also often used by RAWA as a commentary on the prevalence and severity of male-on-female domestic violence and lack of legal or social options for escape. Five videos whose still shots depict bandaged and burned women are lined up beneath these hyperlinks. Beneath these are forty news stories, each with a headline, introductory text, and an image. Still lower on the page are 161 news titles without graphic treatment, mostly concerning Afghan women (*On Afghan Women* 2009). Table 3 (below) catalogs the high representation of women's oppression compared to the low positive representations of women in the 201 headlines on RAWA's *On Afghan Women* Web page.

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[5] These acts of hopelessness often fail and leave the victim in long-lasting physical and emotional pain and scarred for life. Images of these deformed and bandaged women are very common on RAWA's Web site as testaments to the desperation and miserable lives that women lead that drive them to commit self-immolation.

On Afghan Women: Number of Representations of Afghan Women	
Content of Representation	Number
Domestic Sphere Violence Against Women	15
Physical violence/Murder	7
Forced marriage/Selling women and children	9
Rape/Sexual assault	1
Public Sphere Violence Against Women	59
Rape/Sexual assault/Threats	24
Of adults	3
Of minors (under 18)	7
Beating/Threats/Murder	32
Of women accessing healthcare/education/profession	9
Suppression of Women's Rights	80
Misogynistic laws	16
Clothing (ie, burqa) and "veiled" verbiage	5
Silencing/Intimidation	9
Denying access to healthcare/education/profession	24
Women's Self-abuse	11
Suicide/Attempts/Contemplation	5
Self-immolation/Contemplation	6
Positive Representations of Women	9
RAWA rallies	
Women speaking out	6
Gains in law	1
Women accessing healthcare/education/profession	2

Table 3: The number of times women and girls are mentioned in the text on the *On Afghan Women* Web page (accessed 8 February 2009).

As a page dedicated entirely to the plight of Afghan women, *On Afghan Women* contains by far the most ideographic representation of <oppressed woman> in all of its forms, including violence in the domestic and public spheres, the suppression of women's rights, and women's self-abuse. On this Web page there are seventy-four news articles about violence against women in the domestic or public sphere, eighty articles concerning the suppression of women's rights, eleven stories of women's self-abuse, and only nine headlines that represent women positively. Six of the positive representations of women

depicted women speaking out in the poor conditions that suppress women's agency. Overall, the Web page *On Afghan Women* portrayed a wide variety of the types of suffering that affects women of all ages in the country, providing greater detail than the other Web pages on RAWA's Web site about the risks women face to get healthcare, an education, and maintain a profession. Compared to the twenty-four articles that show women denied these public institutions afforded to men, only two articles show women gaining these privileges. Nine articles even covered the beating, threat of violence, or murder visited on women who dared to pursue these privileges. This type of oppression is accompanied by strong visual images, consisting of either photographs or graphics, which capture the feeling of enslavement that RAWA expresses on behalf of Afghan women and are defined by the ideograph <oppressed woman>.

On the Web page *On Afghan Women*, textual and visual rhetoric are more closely interwoven than they appear to be used on the other pages analyzed in this sample unit. At the top of the Web page is a graphic of a woman made of chains (see Figure 3.2), metaphorically illustrating the "enslavement" of women to the patriarchal and fundamentalist ideology of Afghanistan. This visual rhetoric is often accompanied by textual references to slavery, chains, and bondage of Afghan women to invoke the perception of Afghan women as slaves or property, with no decision-making agency of their own. This rhetorical strategy is effective in emphasizing women's oppression in Afghanistan, but it also constructs an understanding of Afghan women as dependent and voiceless.

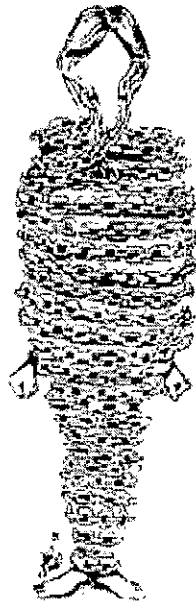

Figure 3.2: This graphic, a woman made of a coil of chains, is used at the top of RAWA's *On Afghan Women* Web page. Bondage imagery and verbiage are commonly used by RAWA to emphasize Afghan women's oppression.

Visual aids such as Figure 3.2 are highly prioritized on the *On Afghan Women* Web page. RAWA uses photography to show what it calls the reality of life for the people of Afghanistan, but some of its photography and even graphic elements appear to be strategically chosen to deliver the highest degree of moral offense to the reader/viewer to incite anger and protectiveness over the <oppressed woman>. For instance, where no photograph is apparently available to use in relation to a news article, a stock image is frequently used on the *On Afghan Women* Web page. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 are notable examples of this rhetorical strategy. These images serve as a ploy for attention and to induce feelings of horror to rouse action on the part of the reader/viewer.

Figure 3.3: This graphic illustrates the article "Two Afghan women are murdered by their husbands in Takhar and Kabul" (*On Afghan Women* 2009).

Figure 3.4: This graphic illustrates the article "Two Women and a Small Girl Chopped into Pieces in Northern Afghanistan" (*On Afghan Women* 2009).

Figure 3.3, an image of a bloody knife, appears beside the article "Two Afghan women are murdered by their husbands in Takhar and Kabul" (*On Afghan Women* 2009). Beside the article "Two Women and a Small Girl Chopped into Pieces in Northern Afghanistan," Figure 3.4 was chosen to represent the story, a graphic of a woman cowering in front of a blood-spattered wall with one hand at the base of her throat and the other hand extended in self-defense (ibid.). The circulation of images such as these negates the argument that RAWA is simply presenting "the reality of life" of oppressed Afghan women. These stock images were strategically chosen and are exemplary of the violence and fear that RAWA incites to communicate <oppressed woman>.

The <oppressed woman> ideograph is not simply present in the images on RAWA's Web site; it is written onto them through various techniques, in stock images as well as in photographs. In visual media, <oppressed woman> communicates shared

cultural meaning through symbolic items associated with women's oppression from a Western perspective, visual subordination, imaginary contact, point of view, and social distance. Certain photos that are judged to best represent <oppressed woman> can also be selected from a collection of the same subjects for desirable traits. The realization that photograph selection occurs before the images are made available to the audience is important to understanding the ways in which RAWA represents itself and those it speaks for. Dana Cloud claims that "photographic images are marked by metonymy, the reduction of complex situations into simpler visual abstractions" (2004, 289). This is, arguably, the case for any presentation of photographs, but is especially so in the representations of Afghan women by RAWA. Through the use of a single photograph, the organization seeks to fulfill both humanitarian and political goals, and so it attempts to choose photos that will accomplish both purposes. "The simple act of selection, choosing one view instead of another, cropping or editing, or choosing to include one image instead of many others" can belie to some extent the assertion that photographs are a slice of reality (Fahmy 2004, 95). At the end of the day, the moment frozen in time through photography is actually a reproduction of that moment, reconstructed and presented in consideration of an imagined viewer.

RAWA takes advantage of the vast amount of room cyberspace allows for media storage, linking to 112 photo galleries on the *Photo Gallery* Web page alone (2009). On the *Photo Gallery* Web page, a slideshow plays nineteen undated photographs at random. Double-clicking on any photograph transports the reader/viewer to a new photo gallery of photographs similar in content to the one featured on the slideshow. Of these nineteen

photographs, twelve depict Afghan women or girls in scenes of fear, poverty, and violence (*Photo Gallery* Slideshow 2009).[6] A warning scrolls beneath the screen:

> CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION. This page contains links to photos which some viewers may find disturbing. To viewers intolerant of gory scenes we advise caution in viewing them. Our apology for publishing such material is... THIS IS THE REALITY OF LIFE FOR THE PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN (ibid.).

This language primes the reader/viewer for unsettling, bloody scenes, eliciting from the reader/viewer an expectation to be disturbed and intolerant of the situation depicted in the photos. This warning also emphasizes in all capital letters the claim that these nineteen photos accurately represent "the reality of life for the people of Afghanistan" (ibid.).

To illustrate, Figure 3.5 advertises itself as "Life Under the Taliban" (*Photo Gallery* 2009). The photograph frames two women in burqas before a crowd: one woman whose face is covered and whose emotions are indiscernible, and another woman whose burqa is raised and who is grimacing in what appears to be sadness. The visibility of the woman's face allows the viewer to see her "emotions [which] play an important role in humanizing the subject" (Fahmy 2004, 94). By observing her anguish, "the viewer feels a relationship with her. When it is not known what emotion the woman is currently experiencing, no relationship will be established" (ibid.). Such is the case with the second woman in the picture. The burqa, completely shielding the second woman's face and body, "represents a visual element that in Western thought conveys subordination [and] have been promoted as icons of gender repression" (ibid.). This photograph offers human

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[6] The photographs are captioned by RAWA: Brutalities Against Afghan Women (1), Beggary in Kabul (2), Life Under the Taliban (3), Poverty and Destitution (4), RAWA Actions (6), Courtesy of the "Islamic Revolution" (7), Drawings by Afghan Children (13), RAWA Protests Fundamentalists (14), RAWA Event in Kabul (15), Self-Immolation Among Afghan Women (17), Women's Rights Catastrophe (18), and Public Execution of Zarmeena (19).

emotion through the filter of two-thirds world women's difference. It invites the reader/viewer to identify with the pain of Afghan women, but also view them as subordinate objects. Through this image, the reader/viewer is moved to empathy by the display of emotion yet also feels a paternalistic relationship with the woman under the burqa with whom no human contact is made.

Figure 3.5: "Life Under the Taliban," a photograph on RAWA's *Photo Gallery* Web page. The emotions of the unveiled woman put a human face on Afghan women's despair and elicits an empathetic response from the viewer.

A similar treatment has been used in Figure 3.6, entitled "Poverty and Destitution," a photograph of a woman who appears to be begging in the dusty street of a crumbling Afghan town (*Photo Gallery* 2009). Her burqa denotes visual subordination, but her bare hand is extended, hinting at the real person underneath. "When subjects are depicted as begging or asking for help, the viewer will perceive them as submissive, passive and with very little power over their lives," yet this photograph also establishes imaginary human contact, pulling the viewer into a relationship with the subject (Fahmy 2004, 94). The

desperate hand evokes an emotional quality in the photograph's subject for the reader/viewer, but in a connection that reinforces the position of power occupied by the reader/viewer. The nearly deserted street in the background suggests that the reader/viewer is the subject's only hope for liberation.

Figure 3.6: "Poverty and Destitution," also a photograph on the *Photo Gallery* Web page. The woman wears a burqa and extends her hand as if begging. The extended hand invites the viewer to assist the woman.

The subject in Figure 3.7, captioned "Self-Immolation Among Afghan Women," was photographed at eye level, and the top of the woman's head is cropped out of the top of the photo, indicating that her wounds are the main subject of the photograph (*Photo Gallery* 2009). Photos of self-immolation on the RAWA Web site typically focus on the self-inflicted wounds of women driven to this desperate attempt at suicide by the oppression and oftentimes violence they suffer at home. In Figure 3.7, the woman's face is visible, but is turned slightly away, avoiding eye contact with the viewer. Her attitude suggests a reaction of embarrassment and hopelessness that invites the viewer's

sympathy. In addition, the view from "eye level [...] gives the viewer a form of symbolic equality," and the close-up suggests "an intimate, personal relationship with the subject," further appealing to the viewer's pathos (Fahmy 2004, 96). However, the sideline view of the woman's face, nearly a "profile shot, [...] leads us to hold the Afghan woman in a marginal point of view" (ibid.), invoking a paternalistic reaction to "save" the victim.

Figure 3.7: "Self-Immolation Among Afghan Women," also a photograph on the *Photo Gallery* Web page. This photograph emphasizes the woman's wounds rather than the woman bearing them.

These three photographs are representative of the theme of <oppressed woman> in the *Photo Gallery* Slideshow and also the theme throughout RAWA's Web site. In Figures 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 specifically, the subjects are oppressed Afghan women who are at once rhetorically humanized and subjugated. RAWA uses these images to stimulate the reader/viewer's empathy and inclination to help while marginalizing the women by emphasizing two-thirds world women's difference. Billed as reproductions of "the reality of life" for Afghan women, these visual representations of <oppressed woman> are effective at inducing Western horror and sympathy and encourage the viewer to assist

with RAWA's humanitarian initiatives for these oppressed Afghan women. Unfortunately, the images also reinforce negative Western stereotypes of Afghan women and Afghan family life and are not effective at gaining Western confidence in Afghan women's ability to serve a role in nation-building.

<Empowered Woman> and Gaining Western Confidence

While representations of women on RAWA's Web site overwhelmingly consist of the <oppressed woman> ideograph, I discovered a surprising number of progressive representations of Afghan women that also exist on the Web site that I have identified as an ideograph: <empowered woman>. These ideographs are mainly grouped on the *RAWA in Media* Web page, which includes announcements and pictures of several RAWA rallies and demonstrations. Ideographic representations of <empowered woman> are surprisingly common but often segregated on RAWA's Web site, and frequently cover women's political rallies that RAWA either pictures or proclaims in news article titles. In <empowered woman>, Afghan women speak out against women's oppression through their voices (sometimes with a megaphone), the force of large numbers, physical acts like raising their fists in defiance, and name specific human rights violators (always male). Representations of <empowered woman> generally show women who do not wear the burqa, and the women's clothes are a blaze of color when compared to drab pictures of women wearing the burqa. These strategic visual tactics increase Western favorability of Afghan women but do not unravel the persuasive work done by <oppressed woman> for Western viewers because both images reinforce the perception that the <male oppressor> exists and should be defeated. The progressive act of congregating to speak out against an

oppressor invites Western confidence in Afghan women's ability to participate in the public sphere and also emulates a perceived "Western" method of social change that is easily recognizable to Western cultures.

One notable representation of <empowered woman> is embedded in one of the organization's most recognizable visual aids—its logo—confirming the ideograph's importance to RAWA's rhetorical strategy. The image of Afghan women speaking out is so inspirational that it is reflected in RAWA's logo (see Figure 3.8). The logo is framed by the national boundaries of Afghanistan and depicts a crowd of women protesters holding a banner and raising their fists in the air. Some women wear the veil, and some do not, the leader among them. The banner on the logo reads, in ascending order, "Freedom," "Democracy," and "Women's Rights" (*Homepage* 2009).

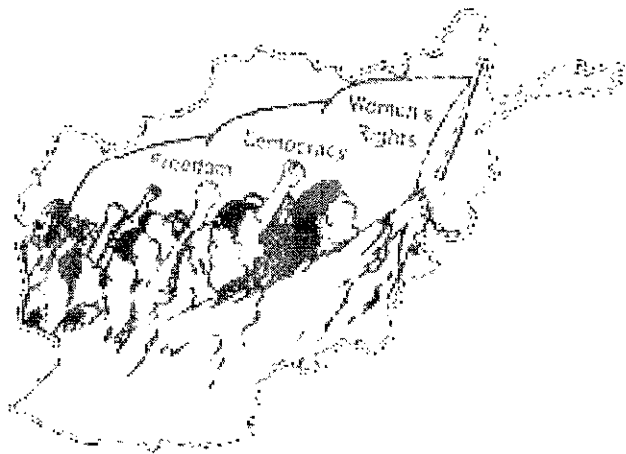

Figure 3.8: RAWA's logo. The image of the women's rally is prevalent on RAWA's Web site as one of the chief grassroots activities undertaken by the organization besides their humanitarian efforts.

"Freedom," "democracy," and "women's rights" are culturally loaded words most Americans strongly associate with "uniquely American" values. The ability for women

like the fictional demonstrators in Figure 3.8 to congregate and speak out against oppression accomplishes the two goals which the Bush Administration and RAWA championed: <empowered woman> proves that Afghan women are indeed oppressed, and that the audience can assist the rhetor towards improving the condition of Afghan women.

The Afghan women in Figure 3.9 (below) are real RAWA members demonstrating in a group that represents <empowered woman> and shows evidence of women's oppression and also RAWA's capability for improving the condition of Afghan women, as well as attesting to all Afghan women's potential to become full participants in the public sphere. In the ideograph, the women wear bright colors pleasing to the eye and wear little to no head cover; the burqa is not in sight in this photograph. Together with the megaphone and the closed fists and the signs targeting specific, male enemies of RAWA, the subjects of this photograph are aggressive in their tactics, pledging their commitment to progress and reassuring the Western reader/viewer that by supporting RAWA, women's condition will improve. This progressive rhetoric also invokes the <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor> binary in that all of the demonstrators are women fighting oppression, and all of the crossed-out figures are males and presumably are the women's oppressors.

Figure 3.9: "RAWA Actions," also a photograph on the *Photo Gallery* Web page. This depiction of Afghan women, <empowered woman>, represents women's progress and commitment to the Western audience, gaining the confidence of the West in Afghan women's capabilities.

Positive representations of Afghan women such as those involved in motivating social change are set apart as a lesser priority, while the Web site and Web pages are largely dominated by the highly visible <oppressed woman>, whose ideographs are primarily placed in premium viewing locations. Tables 1, 2, and 3, each covering a Web page that is driven by a different topic, indicate that <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> function strategically to communicate different representations of Afghan women through various combinations of the ideographs. On the *Homepage* and other Web pages reachable through the Navigational Bar, such as *RAWA in Media* and *On Afghan Women*, positive representations of women were mixed in with representations of violence against women and the suppression of women's rights at varying levels (2009). The *Homepage* and *On Afghan Women* have high representations of violence against women whereas *RAWA in Media* depicts a fair mix of women's oppression and positive representations of women, indicating a need to showcase

RAWA's positive influence on women's condition and its potential to spark and sustain social change with funding. On the *Photo Gallery* Web page, however, a separate section entirely is reserved for "Photos of RAWA's Activities" of which there are sixty news article titles proclaiming RAWA's participation in demonstrations, protests, and humanitarian efforts (*Photo Gallery* 2009). The <empowered woman> is clearly segregated from the privileged ideograph <oppressed woman> entirely and is located past the sections of <oppressed woman> which the audience must view first to reach <empowered woman>. This physical separation demonstrates the importance of <oppressed woman> to RAWA's humanitarian goals and its effectiveness toward achieving those goals.

The prolific use of the <oppressed woman> ideograph encountered in the news article titles, photo galleries, and video clips on RAWA's Web site was not unexpected; however, I was surprised by the large number of positive representations of Afghan women that I did find, and summarily disappointed to observe that the positive representations of <empowered woman> were clustered together and segregated from the privileged dominant ideograph. It is interesting that the most important and dangerous work of the organization is placed secondary to representations of Afghan women as oppressed, helpless victims in need of rescue. In light of the rhetorical strategy commonly utilized by humanitarian organizations worldwide, which places an emphasis on oppression and deprivation to gain international attention and humanitarian aid, this separation can be understood to better serve RAWA's short-term goals, more directly benefiting the Afghan women who are not the imagined audience of the Web site.

Unfortunately, by relegating Afghan activist women to the background, RAWA is undermining its long-term goals for increasing women's political participation.

My Web content analysis of RAWA's Web site has revealed what strategic media practices RAWA participates in as part of its role in the women's rights social movement in Afghanistan and considers its intentions in the use of its online ideographs, but it does not address *why* RAWA chose the rhetorical constructions that it has. RAWA draws its rhetorical strategies from a long history of humanitarian and political rhetoric in development discourse and social movements around the world, in addition to its own stake in feminist ideology. In the following sections, I will contextualize RAWA's location as a collective identity of women organizing for social change and the unique challenges it faces as a neglected and oppressed community whose unique perspective and contributions are necessary for successful nation-building. RAWA's rhetorical choices can be better understood by examining them in the context of the rhetorical choices, sacrifices, and gains made by other marginalized communities in their dialog with hegemonic powers.

STRATEGIC MEDIA PRACTICES IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Two-thirds world women, as compared to two-thirds world men, suffer disproportionately from poverty, illiteracy, domestic violence, and impeded access to healthcare (Wilkins 1999, 46), and yet "women dominate the focus of attention in development discourse on health, population, and nutrition projects, in their capacity to nourish children, men, and even the economic well-being of their communities" (ibid.,

62). Women traditionally shoulder the most foundational tasks of the community—domestic and reproductive responsibilities—but their needs are not being met despite the international focus trained on their well-being. Karin Gwinn Wilkins attributes this imbalance to the early humanitarian shift away from informing strategies toward a concentration on women as social contributors "through their economic production and human reproduction" (199, 49), the main premise of "women in development" thinking, or WID, which expanded globally when the U.N. declared the "Decade for Women" from 1975 to 1985. However, the strategy of WID was thought to be too narrow (Steeves 2003; Wilkins 1999), and a more nuanced perspective, "gender in development," emerged (ibid.). Preferred by feminists, gender in development, or GAD, imagines a collective identity for two-thirds world women in contrast to privileging individuals pioneering for social change (Wilkins 1999, 50). The emphasis on the collective is a key tenet of RAWA's imagined identity, and members deflect personal recognition in favor of crediting "RAWA" (Brodsky 2003, 14). The development framework of GAD "recognizes the importance of considering the gendered context of every situation" (Steeves 2003, 228) while "stressing the need to recognize power dimensions within women's domestic, professional, and social contexts" (Wilkins 1999, 63). This new development framework is not implemented nearly enough, according to Wilkins. Although "GAD proponents would advocate interventions designed to change structures or norms, [...] few projects attempt to promote social change as a gradual, macrolevel process" (ibid.). This kind of bottom-up social change that RAWA supports in its long-term endeavors can only be successfully accomplished by encouraging collective over individual action, considering the gendered context of the rhetorical situation, and

approaching social change as a gradual and all-encompassing process. These criteria must be implemented with the involvement of indigenous knowledges to enact change on that level.

New development frameworks, realizing the shortcomings of top-down development, have stressed the importance of indigenous knowledges in development based on the inclusion of local voices and priorities (Briggs and Sharp 2004, 661). Rather than struggling to impose foreign frameworks on a diverse and largely unwilling society, bottom-up approaches "take greater account of the specificities of local conditions, draw on the knowledge of a population who have lived experience of the environments in question, and provide peoples with ownership of the development process" (ibid.). The heretofore neglected and even endangered advocates of Afghan feminism and nationalism, ignored and terrorized by their own government, may seek American empathizers online as a way to reach above the heads of its antagonists and enlist a hegemonic power to its cause. However, in order to do this, rhetors such as RAWA seeking to link with the West must be willing to meet them halfway. Accusations from some feminists that "the West is only interested in hearing its own voice" bear out in RAWA's reflection of <oppressed woman> to an engaged American audience intent on the "discovery" of women's oppression, but the price of the West's attention seems to be that "the experiences of the marginalized are used in the West, but without opening up the *process* to their knowledges, theories, and explanations" (ibid., 664, italics original). I argue that RAWA, hoping to meet Americans halfway with the richness of Afghan women's experience, uses the ideographic representation of Afghan women as <oppressed woman> to invoke a paternalistic role for Americans to fulfill, then advocates

for gender equity and national liberation from the margins to the hegemonic powers, hoping that the West in turn will meet it halfway to its indigenous knowledges, theories, and explanations. The next section contains some examples of this strategic media practice.

FEMINISM ON THE MARGINS: SPEAKING TO THE HEGEMONIC POWERS

RAWA is not the first to represent its indigenous community to a larger, transnational audience through the rhetorical strategy of reflecting the hegemonic culture's ideographic perception of the community on its margins. In order to make an effective humanitarian appeal for external aid, RAWA addresses its audience by narrowing its focus to the American reader/viewer on the World Wide Web and echoing Western-held stereotypes about RAWA's "world" by invoking textual and visual ideographs with roots in Western ideology. Harald Prins and Avi Santo, who analyze the online rhetoric of the Native American (2002) and Inuit communities (2008), respectively, also provide examples of indigenous organizations within marginalized communities that also take advantage of the Internet to echo Western stereotypes about their cultures. These organizations employ this rhetorical strategy in order to capture the attention of the hegemonic power system, raise social consciousness, and/or supplicate for humanitarian aid outside of their communities.

Even when indigenous communities gain the agency to express themselves globally, they tend to echo oversimplified, Westernized reconstructions of their ethnic identities. Prins and Santo found that this rhetorical strategy approaches a Western audience with its preconceived notions about marginalized communities and speaks to

the West in a verbal and visual language that they understand by using the shared cultural meaning Westerners attribute to these indigenous communities through accumulated knowledge. Invoking Prins's analysis of romanticized ideographs used by Native Americans to communicate their indigenous culture to a Western audience, Santo states that "while images and ideas circulating about the noble savage might reduce indigenous peoples to stereotypes, they have also provided them with a model of self-representation that can be exploited for particular political and economic ends" (2008, 333). Thus, the Inuit and Native American communities use their agency in the global forum of cyberspace to encourage Western empathy without doing the work of reeducating their audience about their indigenous lifestyles and ideologies, and use this to their short-term advantage even at the risk of potentially negative long-term effects.

While reflecting ideographs is a reactionary rhetorical strategy that speaks directly to imperialist Western (and often negative or romanticized) perceptions of indigenous peoples, the decision to pursue these ideographic self-representations is a choice made independently by these marginalized groups; they are speaking for themselves, albeit in a borrowed language. Framing self-representation as a response to negative stereotypes from hegemonic communities is often present in discourse about a minority group's agency and autonomy. Santo adds that

> marginalized groups often forge their identities in response to negative cultural representations about them and, as such, combat internal incorporations of these devalued identities by *producing alternative imagery intended for both local consumption and external validation.* (2008, 331, italics added)

As a progressive, feminist group, RAWA is doubly marginalized in Afghanistan's deeply-rooted patriarchy, which is still mired in fundamentalist ideology. Although RAWA's ideographic messages are designed to appeal to an American audience, the number of Internet users in Afghanistan and its surrounding developing nations is quickly rising. This changing reality is reflected in RAWA's attention to social restrictions on women's appearance and behavior, which also shape its message. RAWA's textual and visual rhetoric is increasingly impacted by the influence of its Afghan audience and non-Afghan Muslim audience; therefore, women's representation on the site must be carefully monitored for its implications on local consumption.

In addition to navigating the appeal and constraints which shape its message, as a marginal organization speaking to the hegemony, RAWA must also specifically frame its rhetoric *in response* to Western stereotypes about Afghan women. Afghan women are widely perceived as exotic, mysterious, and oppressed, inviting a paternalistic reaction in the reader/viewer and claiming needs based on Afghan women's difference. Similar to the online Inuit marketing strategy, which effectively appropriated many of the same discursive strategies used in Western stereotypes "in order to purposefully appeal to a global audience fascinated by questions of Aboriginal authenticity, difference, and universal humanism" (Santo 2008, 333), RAWA focuses on exposing the stark, hopeless side of Afghan society where Afghan women truly lack security and basic human rights to appeal to American interest in RAWA's authenticity, difference, and universal humanism as an association made up of oppressed Afghan women. By rhetorically constructing cultural authenticity, the "backwardness" of Afghan culture is contrasted against American modernity and creates a "clash of civilizations." A sense of American

exceptionalism is herein reinforced and Western perceptions of modernity are presented as the only viable answer.

The decision to employ specific ideographs on the Internet to affect a certain audience is not a forced choice; or a frivolous one. “Aboriginal media producers” speaking to the hegemonic powers “are not naïve participants, but rather active players, willing to both confirm and challenge global assumptions about native authenticity, difference, and universality in order to achieve local objectives” (Santo 2008, 338), and RAWA pursues these same objectives in its online humanitarian rhetoric. It chooses to address Western demands for authenticity, difference, and universal humanism by sensationalizing cultural symbols like the burqa. However, after affirming the assumptions of its audience, RAWA proceeds to challenge those assumptions on the World Wide Web in its demands for national freedom, secular democracy, and gender equity.

THE INTERNET AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN AFGHANISTAN

Commenting specifically on RAWA’s Web site, Gregory Stock, director of the University of California at Los Angeles science, technology, and society program, said: “Geographic boundaries really begin to disappear with the Internet. They can open a dialogue, at very low cost. It changes the game” (O’Connor 2000). These insights acknowledge that for two-thirds world countries, the Internet is chiefly used for transnational communication rather than as an effective means for grassroots communication within that country’s borders. Internet access for two-thirds world people is often sharply limited due to “geopolitical, economic, cultural, ethnic, linguistic,

educational, and ideological factors" (Queen 2008, 473). For these reasons, two-thirds world countries that have gained access are using it to reach out to highly developed populations with broad access to and knowledge of the Internet.

The Internet has long been considered an inherently democratic medium of communication because it "enhance[s] the quality of political discussion and the viability, meaningfulness, and diversity of the public sphere by lowering the access barrier to meaningful public speech" and allows a dialog to take place between the rhetor and the audience, or among the audience members themselves (DiMaggio et al. 2001, 321). This kind of response, however, requires the medium to be widely accessible across social divisions on a local level. On the other hand, the Internet can be inexpensive compared to other methods of communication, providing access and equipment are publicly available, and also allows the audience to engage in a dialog with other participants from all over the world.

The population of Afghanistan has been estimated at 33,609,937 people for July 2009, with approximately a quarter of these residing in urban areas where the Internet is more likely to be available (CIA World Factbook 2009). As of 2008, thirty-one Internet providers were supplying Internet access in Afghanistan (ibid.). Around 580,000 people had access to the Internet in that country in 2007[7] compared to the 223 million with access in the United States in 2008 (ibid.). The CIA World Factbook noted in 2005 that "Internet access is growing through Internet cafes as well as public 'telekiosks' in Kabul" (ibid.), the capital of Afghanistan, despite the apprehensive outlook for Internet café-type establishments when the first one was established in Kabul in the summer of 2002

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[7] This number "may include users who access the Internet at least several times a week to those who access it only once within a period of several months" (CIA World Factbook 2009).

(Sheeres 2002). An article on the opening of the first Internet café described public Internet access as prohibitively expensive, heavily censored, and used mostly by tourists and the wealthy (ibid.). The fact that Internet use has blossomed to 580,000 users in 2007 since the Taliban's defeat lifted the Internet ban in 2001 is remarkable, and more current statistics can be expected to reflect even higher numbers. If this trend continues in Afghanistan and is reflected in the concurrent pace of its surrounding regions, then RAWA's Web site may undergo more scrutiny by RAWA members as its content becomes viewable to more Afghan and non-Afghan Muslims in surrounding countries.

Afghanistan's technological barriers also have cultural origins. Afghanistan contends with a "digital divide," characterized by "inequality in Internet access [that] limit[s] people's opportunities to find jobs, obtain education, access government information, participate in political dialog, and built networks of social support" (DiMaggio et al. 2001, 310). The further divide between those with *formal access* to the Internet, or the opportunity to physically use it, and those with *effective access*, or the affordability and knowledge people need to benefit from its use (Bitzer 1966, 12), exacerbate the digital divide in Afghanistan. The capacity for dialog in online communication is "not only a way to gain factual information, but also a means to demand [...] citizenship rights" (Bajraktari and Parajon 2008, 6). A year after the first Internet kiosk opened in Kabul, practical issues arose as women and schoolgirls sought Internet access. To accommodate them, "there are always two computer assistants on hand—a man and a woman—to monitor the terminals [...] because it would go against social norms for a woman to work with a man" (Batista 2003). Ensuring the continuation of equal access to Internet technology and computer education is essential, but in order

for women to take advantage of this new technology, education deficiencies that mired the country in a literacy rate of 12.6 percent at the height of Taliban rule without seeing much improvement since must first be overcome (CIA World Factbook 2009). Also, expanding Internet access into isolated rural areas could provide more political and humanitarian organizations like RAWA with the capability to tap the indigenous knowledges of the common people and motivate and support grassroots social change.

Until the technological and cultural barriers of Internet use are taken down and Internet is made reasonably accessible to all Afghan women, Afghan Web sites like RAWA's can expect the majority of their reader/viewers to be foreign and mostly English-speaking. Spokeswomen for RAWA have repeatedly confirmed their intention for the Web site to be a vehicle for communication with the outside world (Danish, qtd. in Queen 2008; BBC News 2001; Tom 2001; O'Connor 2000). A RAWA lobbyist asserted that the Web site is "the only tool that enabled us to be in contact with other people in other countries and we think it is the only tool that can tell people around the world about the suffering of our people, of our women and children, and the way that they can help us" (O'Connor 2001). Another RAWA spokeswoman reported that early on in 2001, RAWA "had not been able to provide their supporters inside Afghanistan with Internet facilities, because of the 'watchful eye' of the Taleban [*sic*]. 'Our chief purpose, therefore, is to awaken the world to the plight of women in Afghanistan'" (BBC News 2001). The overall impression from RAWA is that currently, the Internet is still primarily used as a method of transnational communication for supplicating humanitarian assistance. In light of current (in 2009) statistics about Internet access in Afghanistan, this focus could soon change.

The Internet has enormous potential for RAWA and other women-led organizations within Afghanistan through its capacity for various forms of communication and context, if only accessibility to this medium could improve. There is danger in entering the public sphere, especially for Afghan women traveling alone in public without a male relative, so rallying grassroots support on the Internet *could* be an effective means for creating social and political connections while avoiding unnecessary and risky transportation. However, without significant technological progress in Afghanistan, especially for women and rural communities, RAWA and other humanitarian groups are limited to the more traditional forms of print and local media to communicate with Afghans and the Internet will remain an outlet for contact mainly with the outside world. Despite this disadvantage, access to the Internet has the most potential to enlighten foreign audiences about Afghan women's struggle because of its ability to integrate "different modalities of communication (reciprocal interaction, broadcasting, individual reference-searching, group discussion, person/machine interaction) and different kinds of context (text, video, visual images, audio) in a single medium" (DiMaggio et al. 2001, 308). RAWA's extensive use of hypermedia and varied modalities and context on its Web site increases its opportunity to inspire an effective and informed social movement for women's equity in Afghanistan if access to the Internet improves.

As the Internet becomes more accessible in two-thirds world countries, in particular the Muslim countries neighboring Afghanistan, RAWA will consequently redirect part of its focus towards this growing segment of its online audience. Because the textual and visual ideographs used on RAWA's Web site are designed to appeal to

Western audiences, these rhetorical strategies will not only fail to connect with Muslim audience members, but may also deter them and agitate them against the organization. The introduction of an alternative ideograph, one capable of forwarding RAWA's long-term goals among Muslims, is needed to address the varied desires of its increasingly diverse and influential audience.

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Although RAWA repudiates American involvement in building the governmental and defense structures of Afghanistan, it perpetuates and reinforces negative Western stereotypes of Afghan women as voiceless, defenseless creatures not up to the rigorous task of nation-building; a stereotype negated by the existence of RAWA's own powerful female activists. RAWA faces a paradox—to uplift Afghan women, RAWA must at once educate and supplicate its occupier for aid through the representation of Afghan women as <oppressed woman> and also provide evidence of its success through the limited positive representations of Afghan women as <empowered woman> who are motivated to demonstrate through the funded efforts of RAWA. Successfully offering both representations of Afghan women can bridge its short-term and long-term goals, nurturing women in need so that they can graduate from simple survival to literacy and activism. Unfortunately, to achieve its short-term goals, RAWA compromises its long-term goals of gender equity, greater political participation for women, and national independence by perpetuating harmful Western stereotypes of Afghan women and limiting positive representations of Afghan women. RAWA's supplication for financial support follows a key rhetorical strategy established and proven effective in many other humanitarian organizations: publicizing oppression and deprivation. This strategy

counteracts RAWA's core message: that its greatest resource is its own people's resolve to right itself. The organization states that

> whenever fundamentalists exist as a military and political force in our injured land, the problem of Afghanistan will not be solved. Today RAWA's mission for women's rights is far from over and we have to work hard for establishment of an independent, free, democratic and secular Afghanistan. (*About RAWA* 2009)

Publicizing oppression and deprivation through <oppressed woman> appeases most Americans' sense of exceptionalism because "militant and vocal Afghan women who are well organized are not as easy to 'liberate' as those who are voiceless and faceless and can be portrayed as dependent on the benevolence of foreigners" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 184). To build this ideograph, RAWA perpetuates <oppressed woman> online to invoke a role for the reader/viewer to fulfill as a paternalistic savior.

In my Web site content analysis, I find that RAWA overwhelmingly depicts <oppressed woman> in its textual media by using the rhetoric of oppression, fear, veiling, and violence. In visual media, <oppressed woman> not only contains symbolic items associated with women's oppression from a Western perspective such as the burqa, but also makes use of visual subordination, imaginary contact, point of view, and social distance. During the course of my research, I also find that ideographic representations of <empowered woman> are grouped together by RAWA in categories of their own, and are typically segregated from representations of <oppressed woman> in locations on the Web page which require the reader/viewer to view <oppressed woman> first in order to reach <empowered woman>. Both of these ideographs fulfill different rhetorical goals for the organization through their content and placement: <oppressed women> by gaining

Western sympathy, and <empowered woman> by gaining Western confidence. In these ways, RAWA not only anticipates and reacts to the American reader/viewer's perceived interest, but also invokes an audience by providing cues to which the reader/viewer is invited to respond.

By criticizing the contradiction between RAWA's core message of women's empowerment and its prolific use of <oppressed woman>, I do not intend to suggest that <oppressed woman> does not have its place in either humanitarian or political rhetoric on RAWA's Web site. The ideographs RAWA uses serve complex rhetorical functions. Fully integrating positive representations of Afghan women activists with <oppressed woman> on RAWA's Web site, diverting from RAWA's current practice of segregating such images, could potentially serve as a first step toward recognizing the diversity of Afghan women's experience, but the placement as well as the content serves a special purpose for RAWA. By privileging <oppressed woman> over other representations of Afghan women, RAWA appeals to Western sympathies to procure donations for its humanitarian initiatives. The <empowered woman> ideograph serves to reinforce the perception that all (and only) Afghan women are oppressed by all (and only) Afghan men, it reassures Westerns that their donations are making a difference in Afghanistan, and it also enacts a Western ideal of feminism and democracy that invites the confidence of the Western reader/viewer in the capability of Afghan women to participate in their governance.

However, these tactics work insofar as the Western reader/viewer is privileged in RAWA's online humanitarian rhetoric, focusing on the West's capacity to fund the organization's short-term goals at the expense of its long-term goals. The long-term goals

can only be accomplished through the equal involvement of men and women as well as with the support of the Islamic culture in and around Afghanistan, necessitating a future approach to the Web site that is not wholly reliant on ideographs which can be understood to have a "Western taint" owing to their existence as a Western appeal. An alternative ideograph, one which bears no undesirable associations with the West and instills confidence in Afghan women to enter the public sphere, can only be cultivated in its acceptance in the wider culture of Afghanistan and Islam.

In the following chapter, I clearly define gender equity and explain my case for gender equity as a more feasible solution for Afghanistan over gender equality. The difference is crucial to exploring Afghan women's role in nation-building, a key imperative for RAWA's long-term work in its political rhetoric. Next, I consider the ways in which <oppressed woman> is reinforced by textual and visual representations of male violence on the RAWA Web site. I argue that the polarization of the <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor> widens the gender gap that prevents successful nation-building efforts by Afghans and reinforces Afghanistan's reliance on the United States for humanitarian aid and its continued supervision of infrastructural development. Lastly, just as Lloyd Bitzer suggests that the rhetorical situation calls for a fitting response, I propose the introduction of an ideograph, the <compatriot woman>, as a fitting response to women's oppression and as an alternative to the current representation of Afghan women on RAWA's Web site toward women's gradual acceptance in the public sphere.

CHAPTER IV

IDEOGRAPHS AND THEIR IMPACT ON GENDER (IN)EQUITY AND NATION-BUILDING

> If we don't pay attention to the rights of women and work and struggle to guarantee them rights, we will have forgotten half of society. It will be like working with one hand, and like this our society and work can't be completed.
>
> Mahmood,[1] male supporter of RAWA
> Interview with Anne Brodsky
> *With all Their Strength: The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan*

The rhetorical situation surrounding Afghan women's oppression is not solely a product of the present moment, but of the convergence of that context with shared cultural meaning that communities learn, sustain, and contribute to over time. Ideographs, once established, can take on different meanings through the associations attributed to them by rhetors with their own agendas. Through the association of <freedom> with the responsibility for human rights in the rhetoric of then President George W. Bush, First Lady Laura Bush, and subsequently the mainstream American media, it is apparent that shared meaning can be invoked and cultivated for specific purposes wherein a humanitarian approach may, for instance, be used to disguise imperialistic aims.

A case in point is the repetition of the ideograph <oppressed woman> in American political speeches and journalistic media, which assisted the Bush

[1] Anne Brodsky changed the names of the interviewees to protect their identities (2003, 11).

Administration's ability to act as a protective father figure and moral authority in the world and which continues to construct a paternalistic role for most Americans that appeals to a general American sense of moral authority. In early humanitarianism, "the humanitarian impulse [was] part of the imperial dual mandate to 'civilize' and control subaltern peoples," and it was used not only to disseminate Western value systems and systems of education, but to exert power over "underdeveloped" nations and advance Western moral authority and political influence in the region (Gott 2002, 19). The Bush Administration followed in that vein and couched its imperialistic motives in today's politically correct human rights rhetoric to achieve the same goals. By perceiving themselves as responsible for the liberation of Afghan women and the preservation of freedom worldwide, the use of force is rhetorically justified. As the foot in the door for military intervention, "humanitarian discourse did more than provide cover for the raw power ambitions of the imperial states" by using liberation rhetoric to appear benevolent; rather, "the imperial and the humanitarian formed a kind of partially arrested dialectic, whereby the transnational humanitarian identity became an important articulation point of imperialism" (ibid., 30). This partially arrested dialectic was successful in generating enough support for the war on moral grounds that these humanitarian motivations overcame the criticism of the Bush Administration's imperialistic goals.

With the advent of the Internet, the marginalized feminist voices of the Afghan humanitarian organization RAWA took advantage of American sensitivity to ideographic representations of Afghan women to serve its own needs. Two main depictions of Afghan women are repeatedly represented on RAWA's Web site: the dominant ideograph <oppressed woman> and the <empowered woman>. As different as these two ideographs

are, they have two key similarities: they both indicate the existence of the <male oppressor> and both are directed toward the same general audience. The emphasis on these representations of Afghan women is beneficial to RAWA's short-term humanitarian goals as Western appeals. The <oppressed woman> and the <empowered woman> on RAWA's Web site are both directed toward the Western reader/viewer to persuade the reader/viewer that Afghan women are indeed oppressed and that by supporting RAWA, the reader/viewer can have a positive influence on oppressed Afghan women. The <oppressed woman> elicits this reaction because she invokes the role of paternalistic savior in the Western audience. For the <empowered woman>, her image is used as strong evidence for the Western audience of women's progress and proof of Afghan women's commitment to social change and nation-building.

Nation-building and social change are some of RAWA's main long-term goals, but ironically, RAWA's rhetorical use of oppressed and rebelling Afghan women can actually undermine its long-term goals. RAWA's core mission for Afghanistan is to achieve gender equity, liberate the country from foreign occupiers and install a secular democracy, and increase women's participation in politics. Its externally-focused goal is to educate the world about Afghan women's oppression and seek global solidarity and support in this enterprise. Shorter-term goals include obtaining funds for RAWA's woman-centric humanitarian initiatives as well as seeking opportunities to gain global attention to its cause. Despite RAWA's dedication to its long-term ideals, the visual and textual ideographs displayed in images and news article titles are geared toward the achievement of its short-term goals at the expense of its long-term mission.

The function of the <oppressed woman> and the <empowered woman> as appeals for Western aid makes them unsuitable for moving toward RAWA's long-term goals of national independence and gender equity and more suited for encouraging Western empathy and fundraising. These Western associations make <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> unusable for local consumption and external validation in the Muslim world and endangers RAWA's local credibility. Afghans view progressive women in general as being very Western-minded and therefore un-Islamic and use this powerfully negative association to strategically destroy the credibility of progressive social movements in Afghanistan such as the women's rights movement. The anti-West sentiment of conservative and fundamentalist ideologues in Afghanistan is widespread and runs deep, and progressive organizations and social movements are particularly susceptible to accusations of being "too Western" or "anti-Islam," effectively breaking down the popularity and credibility of the organization or movement. RAWA itself, a leading organizer of rallies in which women are the main participants fighting for gender equity, is a primary target of fundamentalists and conservatives who wish to discredit the organization by questioning the allegiance and morals of its female participants. Because both <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> are so overwhelmingly used on RAWA's Web site to appeal to Western donors, the fitting response to Afghan women's oppression and RAWA's long-term goals for gender equity could possibly be a new portrayal of women *not* associated with Western appeals. If RAWA's long-term goals of gender equity and nation-building are to become realities in majority-Muslim Afghanistan, a new ideograph of a socially acceptable woman in public and working

towards these initiatives is needed if RAWA hopes to appeal to Muslims in the general population who are needed to support them in the long term.

Such an alternative ideograph could be characterized as the <compatriot woman>, a representation of Afghan women that appeals to Afghan and Muslim people and that supports the participation of Afghan women in the public sphere toward the long-term goal of rebuilding the nation alongside men. The <compatriot woman>, which is not known to exist as an ideograph presently, may give Afghan women the opportunity to forge their own identity *apart* from appeals to the West, therefore disassociating themselves with the negative Western stereotypes written onto marginalized women's representations. By "producing alternative imagery intended for both local consumption and external validation" (Santo 2008, 331), the introduction of the <compatriot woman> ideograph can combat the devaluation of Afghan women's identities locally while providing a strong representation of everyday Afghan women to an external audience.

An ideograph cannot successfully originate from and thrive in an organization—by definition, an ideograph takes root in the shared meaning of a culture as a whole. Its meaning must find acceptance and support within the wider community to be defined as an ideograph. Although the <compatriot woman> could reconcile RAWA's short-term and long-term goals on its Web site, the ideograph must first be rooted, constructed, and accepted in Afghan and Islamic culture before it can be effectively used by RAWA. If the <compatriot woman> emerges and is culturally accepted in Afghanistan, Afghan women will have the opportunity to claim their place in their own governance, working alongside Afghan men toward the goals of national liberation, gender equity, and increasing women's political participation in a secular government. The <compatriot woman> could

not only provide balance to representations of women heretofore portrayed as either suffering under the <male oppressor> or rebelling against him, it could also present Afghan women with a simple model of full female participation in society unassociated with male oppression or the Western appeals that are perpetuated on RAWA's Web site.

My own location as a Western feminist has shaped my perception of Afghan women's rhetorical situation, and it is a constant challenge to avoid making prescriptive suggestions for alleviating Afghan women's oppression. The difficulty of recognizing prescriptive solutions for what they are—Western solutions for two-thirds world issues—is recorded in this and other research, but with each rhetorical deconstruction emerges new and informed perspectives on a global feminism. These new understandings reach across borders; not to impose foreign social structures, but to improve women's quality of life and their ability to identify the needs of their own communities and to contribute toward those needs in their own ways.

In this chapter, I consider the need for and benefits of perpetuating a positive ideograph such as <compatriot woman> meant for institutionalizing and mainstreaming women's roles in Afghanistan, and identify the possible obstacles facing its acceptance. After I examine how equality between men and women appears differently to Western and Muslim audiences, I focus on RAWA's polarization of <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor> and acknowledge the presence of the sequestered male supporters of gender equity. Then, I investigate the intricate cultural sensitivities at work in Afghan discourse about the West and Islam before returning to the potential for <compatriot woman> as an Afghan woman-centric model of gender equity and nation-building and the cultural obstacles that complicate the emergence of such an ideograph.

GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN NATION-BUILDING

Before detailing how representations of Afghan women might suggest possibilities for the composition of the <compatriot woman>, it is important to recognize that gender equity in Afghanistan will take a different but no less viable form than that typically recognized in the West. The difference between gender *equity* and gender *equality* is critical for the purposes of my argument. Gender *equality* means that

> both men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices [and that] the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. [...] Gender *equity* means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs [which are] different but which [are] considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. (International Labour Office, qtd. in UNESCO 2000, 5)

In much the same way that women's rights must be viewed through a different lens in the theory and practice of Western feminism than in Afghan feminism, so must culture have a bearing on changes in the social structure of men and women and the rate at which such change develops—not at a rate imposed upon it by an external force with different cultural standards.

Gender equity is not only necessary for a country's progression; it prevents the country from experiencing *re*gression. Once misogynist, fundamentalist movements gain traction in a country already experiencing gender inequity, "violent rebellion-oriented movements" like the Taliban's are difficult to derail, especially in Afghanistan, where

women are already extremely oppressed (Benard et al. 2008, 19). Instead, "a long-standing inequity from gender-separated roles creates the norms of violence that prompt forward momentum and encouragement of violence" and anchors an imbalance of status and power (ibid.), leading to a regression made easier by the exclusion of women in political and social life. Regression for a country can have deleterious consequences for its people, such as the post-Soviet generation of Afghans, who have been imbued with fundamentalist values throughout their formative years. After the fall of the Taliban and the liberation of women, there has been "a great deal of confusion and disorientation for both women and men since, on the one hand, women are promised independence, and yet, on the other, they are still subject to the dictates of patriarchy," a tension that still persists eight years after the fall of the Taliban (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 2004, 102). This is an indicative result of the long-standing fundamentalism that took hold in a country weakened in part by pre-existing gender inequity.

Taking into account the complex assumptions about gender roles and social stigma embedded in Afghan culture, as well as their constantly evolving nature, the endeavor for gender equity for Afghan women through an indigenously pioneered <compatriot woman> ideology provides a way for women to claim respect and rights while accepting that an equitable gendered social structure may not be perceived as equal to Western eyes. The women of Afghanistan are ready to reclaim their role in nation-building that has been repeatedly interrupted by violence and regime change, but find themselves with no indigenous model for success to aspire to, such as <compatriot woman> may provide. Women without a model that they can relate to may be uninformed about their role in and potential impact on nation-building. I argue that the

introduction of the ideograph <compatriot woman> may prompt a cultural shift toward gender equity for the women of Afghanistan, promoting women's long-term goals of attaining rights, justice, and the benefits of equitable membership in Afghan society, necessary to become a partner in nation-building.

It is important for Afghan women to have access to indigenous constructions of <compatriot woman> as opposed to models constructed by Westerners according to Western culture and values and without input by Afghans. Research by the RAND Corporation, in their research in-country on women in Afghanistan, describe women's role in nation-building:

> Women's equality is a cornerstone of the contemporary democratic state, and it is generally thought to be a requisite of any post-conflict government established under the auspices of the international community. Women's participation is often also an economic necessity, so that granting women education and training, followed by opportunities commensurate with their talents and skill sets, is the only sensible approach in terms of human capital. (Benard et al. 2008, 60)

This passage rhetorically fixes Afghanistan "under the auspices of the international community"; more forthrightly, the United States is implied as driving the international presence in Afghanistan by referring to the establishment of a post-conflict government, largely headed by the United States, and is configured as the authority on Afghan women's equality and participation. Women are framed as an economic commodity in this top-down approach wherein women are first "granted" with education, training, and opportunities that match their "talents and skill sets," privileging women's economic value over increased women's political representation and involvement in the public

sphere. Afghan women who wish to claim a role in rebuilding their country are routinely confronted with such foreign expectations of women and economic structures, further inhibiting women's ability to excel in nation-building. For this reason, the <compatriot woman> ideograph should be produced by indigenous rhetors in order to perpetuate a socially acceptable model of Afghan women's participation that can achieve widely shared cultural meaning in Afghanistan.

The emphasis on two-thirds world women's oppression is based on and advances false "assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives" (Mohanty 2003, 41). The West has merely reached a point in its culture's own ongoing development, just as two-thirds world cultures must develop at their own pace and lead their own social movements; Afghanistan should neither reject Western advancements because they are Western nor accept them because they are Western. Because emphasis on Afghan women's oppression promotes the false assumption that Western women are fully equal to men, American men and women viewing <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> on RAWA's Web site are reinforcing their exaggerated beliefs about American women's liberties. This belief stirs a feeling of moral authority that leads neatly into the role of paternalistic savior created through RAWA's construction of <oppressed woman> as defenseless and voiceless. On RAWA's Web site, American reader/viewers are also consuming ideographs that widen the Afghan gender division through the polarization of <male oppressor> and <oppressed woman>, oversimplified representations designed to emphasize the barbarity of Afghan culture and advance a perception that Western gender relations can be used as the model for Afghan gender relations.

The harmful impact of <male oppressor> and <oppressed woman> on gender equity is not simply the assertion of men's power over women and women's powerlessness under men; its negative effects are felt by both sexes. Only the members of a community can alter or remove the exigency that invites certain ideographs into the rhetorical situation while excluding others. For example, both Afghan men and women must be committed to gender equity in Afghanistan if <oppressed woman>, the <empowered woman>, and their divisive connotations are to be overcome. Afghan men's acceptance of women's participation in politics was higher than expected in 2008 (Benard et al. 2008, 10), yet the attitudes of Afghan men do not show signs of changing with adjustments to the law, which is therefore not a sufficient protector and enforcer of Afghan women's rights. A cultural shift must attend advancements in law, and such a shift takes much time and meets a great deal of resistance.

Textual and visual rhetoric emphasizing the opposition of men against women is a common recurrence in American media and is reflected on RAWA's Web site. Although the tensions exposed between the men and women on the RAWA Web site are real, Afghan men are rhetorically situated on the Web site as the oppressor, the silencer, and the common enemy of both women and American forces. RAWA's scapegoating of Afghan men online strengthens American feelings of responsibility for Afghan women's liberation, serving RAWA's short-term fundraising goal but working against RAWA's long-term goal of Afghan independence and self-rule by inviting and maintaining the need for an American military presence in that country. The repetitious display of <male oppressor> also disregards the existence and invaluable contributions of RAWA's thousands of male supporters. The following section examines the function of <male

oppressor> on RAWA's Web site and considers the positive hidden force of the male supporter in the Afghan women's rights movement.

AFGHAN MEN AS MALE SUPPORTER AND <MALE OPPRESSOR>

RAWA's Web site ignores male contributions to the organization and male opposition to fundamentalism or patriarchy in general, although there is significant evidence in Anne Brodsky's work (2003) of Afghan men's ardent support for and involvement with RAWA; it also fails to recognize the existence of oppressed Afghan men and Afghan women oppressors. Americans' false assumption that Afghan gender relations consist solely of <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor> motivate the reader/viewer to fulfill the role of the paternalistic savior that is invoked by the ideograph. This role invites the reader/viewer to intervene to rescue the <oppressed woman> from her <male oppressor> as part of their perceived moral responsibility for human rights and commitment to <freedom>. In this way, the ideographic representation of the <male oppressor> benefits RAWA's rhetorical strategy to target potential Western donors and provides for a reliable source of external humanitarian aid.

Afghan men are scapegoated in RAWA's online humanitarian rhetoric as either the explicit or implied cause of women's oppression. Most visual representations of the <male oppressor> on RAWA's Web site depict men acting out violently against women, holding guns or operating other artillery, or as corpses as a result of violence. Dana Cloud states that repeatedly presenting "an Afghan man with weapons," such as RAWA's *Photo Gallery* photograph does in Figure 4.1 (below), is a powerful rhetorical strategy that "reduces the man to the image of the terrorist when he, his life, and his reasons for taking

up arms are probably more complex than the snapshot" (2004, 290). In Figure 4.1, an Afghan man raises a weapon from behind an embankment of sandbags on a public, populated street, contrasting the everyday scene with the image of male-perpetrated violence. The man's face is not visible to the reader/viewer, dehumanizing him and simplifying the reader/viewer's interpretation of the armed man as a symbol of all Afghan men.

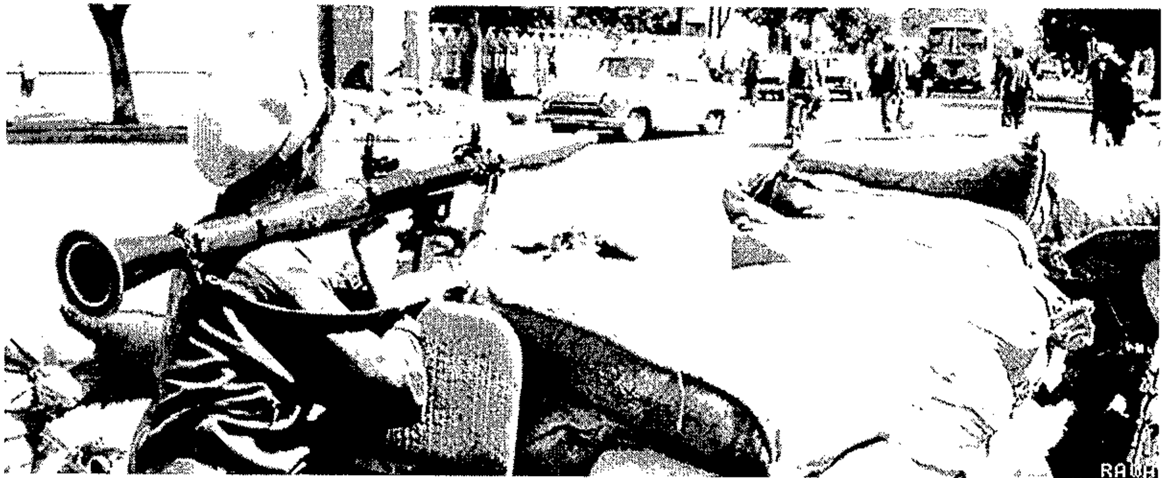

Figure 4.1: "Brutalities Under the Taliban," a photograph on RAWA's *Photo Gallery* Web page, is an example of <male oppressor>. It invites the reader/viewer to intervene to rescue the <oppressed woman> as part of the West's perceived moral responsibility for global human rights and commitment to freedom.

Additionally, textual representations of <male oppressor> on the Web site depict men as beating, raping, mutilating, or killing women and girls, selling women and girls or forcing them into marriage to mediate disputes, as well as oppressing women and girls in other ways. Because Afghanistan is a highly patriarchal society which currently adheres to a strictly fundamentalist ideology, most American reader/viewers of <oppressed woman> who are also reading and viewing <male oppressor> are likely to assign general

responsibility for her oppression and suffering to Afghan men in general rather than to fundamentalists or terrorist groups. Presenting images of violence out of context and over-representing reports of male-on-female violence invites the emotional reactions of anger and fear against men and empathy for and an urge to protect women. This is a common stereotype exploited in appeals to the Western viewer: the "the idea of 'saving the brown women from the brown men,'" a rhetorical strategy often resorted to in humanitarian discourse for the uplift of women (Cloud 2004, 289). "Although an enemy nation's men often represent the 'enemy,'" Cloud continues, "the women (and children) of that same nation often are represented as victims needing rescue from the men in their society" (ibid.). This is true of the representations of Afghan men on the RAWA Web site, who serve as the scapegoat for women's oppression and are rhetorically labeled as the "enemy" in order to cast a persuasive appeal for external funding and assistance; chiefly for women, and at the expense of men.

According to RAWA's Web site, part of its political goal for the long term is to expose the perpetrators of human rights atrocities in Afghanistan's government. While the documentation of atrocities is extremely important to preserving accurate accounts in the face of biased reporting as well as to uncover major criminals and corrupt politicians for local and global knowledge, the singular focus on male alleged criminals contributes to negative Western stereotypes about Afghan men. In the global trend toward concentrating humanitarian efforts on the uplift of women and children, men are increasingly either ignored or defined as the problem by their absence in humanitarian rhetoric. For example, on RAWA's Web site, the *X*s drawn over the faces of male human rights violators in the signs held by women at women's rights rallies only add to the

perception of the <male oppressor>. Ideographic representations of the <empowered woman>, who rebels against oppression by males, and <oppressed woman>, who suffers under the oppression of males, promote this understanding of the <male oppressor>.

While some men depicted in the ideograph <male oppressor> are either labeled as Taliban or warlords, others are simply called "fundamentalists," an increasingly vague moniker as more and more Afghan men subscribe to the dominant ideology perpetuated by fundamentalists like the Taliban or the currently governing Northern Alliance. Other text in RAWA's mission statements, news article titles, or photograph captions do not specify the man's affiliations at all and simply denote the oppressor as "man," "husband," or "father." This act of naming politicians and criminals as oppressors as well as members of one's family effectively characterizes the <male oppressor> as an inescapable part of an Afghan woman's life; therefore, experiencing oppression and violence are framed as a certainty for women. While it is true that the nature of patriarchy privileges males over females and heightens the potential for male violence against women while giving women less resources to protect themselves, not all (and only) Afghan males are oppressors of women. The resulting negative stereotype and abiding fear make it difficult for the reader/viewer of the ideograph to imagine Afghan women as violent or Afghan men as supportive of women.

While Anne Brodsky acknowledges that "Afghan society, traditional interpretations of Islam, and recent waves of fundamentalist control of the country have negatively shaped many men's attitudes and behavior towards women" she rejects the impulse to "paint all Afghan men with that same brush," testifying to the thousands of male supporters she discovered through personal interviews with Afghan men connected

to RAWA (2003, 192). Brodsky estimated that in 2003, RAWA had about 2,000 male supporters, nearly equal to its number of female active members[2] (ibid., 194). Through her interviews with Afghan men connected to RAWA, Brodsky reports that "almost every male supporter I met also spoke with deep appreciation about RAWA's efforts to bring world attention to the plight of all Afghans" (ibid., 199-200). In one interview, male RAWA supporter Ishaq expresses a common view expressed in many of Brodsky's interviews with Afghan men: that many men generally perceive women's rights as human rights and women's participation as vital to rebuilding Afghanistan (ibid., 202).

The advancement of women in the public sphere has been held up as a necessary precursor to a country's cultural progress, and the representation of progressive Afghan men committed to human rights and women's rights in indigenous and externally-directed media could possibly be an effective encouragement for such progress in complement to RAWA's long-term goals; however, RAWA's short-term humanitarian needs in some ways benefit from the continued dichotomy of <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor>. The victimization of Afghan women and the scapegoating of Afghan men construct a space for the reader/viewer to fulfill as paternalistic savior: a moral authority responsible for the liberation and protection of Afghan women. This dependence on external forces is not true to RAWA's mission and values and prevents the advancement of Afghanistan toward successful nation-building, where there are roles for both men and women. However, the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people must be met. Addressing their legitimately different needs as men and women should not be perceived as a barrier to gender equity and nation-building, but as its catalyst, for without

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[2] Membership in RAWA is only available to women; men are prohibited from joining as members (Brodsky 2003, 194).

the inclusion of women in the public sphere, the humanitarian emergency will persist and continue to prevent the nation's attempts to rebuild.

THE WESTERN/ISLAMIC BINARY

I have stated that RAWA represents Afghan women on its Web site as either women who are profoundly oppressed or as women rebelling against their oppression, each functioning as a poignant appeal to its Western audience. In this section, I further my argument by examining more closely the Western/Islamic binary that deeply affects gender relations in Afghanistan and forms the crux of Afghanistan's outlook for its future relations with the rest of the world. Mohja Kahf summarizes the ideology of what I have identified as the <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> with the following:

> The dominant narrative of the Muslim woman in Western discourse from about the eighteenth century to the present basically states [...] that the Muslim woman is *innately oppressed*; it produces Muslim women who affirm this statement by being either submissive nonentities or rebellious renegades—*rebellious against their own Islamic world, that is, and conforming to Western gender roles*. (1999, 177, italics added)

The two-thirds world adaptation of Afghan women to what are understood to be "Western gender roles" reaffirms perceptions of American moral authority in the world and encourages Western paternalistic views of "innately oppressed" Afghan women. When these ideographs are used by RAWA as Western appeals, the people of Afghanistan form strong associations between <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> and the West. The construction of these ideographs as Western appeals is "often

figured as sexual oppression, and the corresponding submission or rebellion figured as sexual submission or rebellion," earning disapproval from Islamic culture when they are "produced in ways [...] that rationalize and justify Western interests in the material domination of the Islamic world" (ibid.). Trends toward modernization are often condemned as a loss of Islamic culture to the appropriation of Western ideology and culture. Similarly, the growing women's movement and its ideographic function as an appeal to the West is condemned by Islamic culture as the encroachment of Western imperialism and the foreboding of "material domination."

Islam, as the religion of 99 percent of Afghans (CIA Factbook 2009), has a profound impact on nearly every aspect Afghanistan's culture. In Afghanistan, Islam guides policymaking as an intrinsic part of law and social order. From this viewpoint, many Western feminists are apt to lay the responsibility for women's oppression at the feet of Islam. H. Leslie Steeves claims that little attention is paid to religion or spirituality except as an "obstacle to change under the dominant paradigm of modernization" (2003, 227). She posits that "the structures and processes of [development] communication may be conceptualized as serving at least three, overlapping practical goals: marketing, collective resistance, and spiritual awakening" (ibid., 239). The influence of religious fundamentalists and conservative followers of strict interpretations of Islam in Afghanistan is too powerful for a rebellion to not be rooted in a spiritual movement. The strength of religion has often been a basis for social change in cultures around the world. Cultural barriers between Western and Islamic cultures based on stereotypes and misjudgment share little to no common ground on which to cultivate a social revolution like gender equity because "Western feminists have tended to assume [that] religion is

fundamentally sexist," and Steeves also calls religion "often a greater force of oppression than empowerment" (ibid., 237). Nevertheless, "spiritual awakening" has been defined as one of the three practical goals of development communication for its potential as a "positive role and power of religious communication in transforming individuals and communities" (ibid., 239). To change Afghanistan's treatment of women which is dictated by fundamentalist religious law, the change must occur not only on the level of the law but also on religious grounds.

Afghan gender relations chiefly operate by two main principles in regards to women: "they are subordinate to men in society [and] they are responsible for the honor of the family" (Benard et al. 2008, 73). The fixation of fundamentalists on the vice and virtue of women is evident in the establishment of a Department for the Preservation of Virtue and Vice, led by the Taliban, who

> publicly beat and flogged Afghan women and girls for displaying any part of their face or ankles, [...] traveling without a male family member, being involved in education as a teacher or student, or seeking employment. This was done in the name of protecting women's security and [the fundamentalists' version of] Islam. (ibid., 19)

However brutal women's experiences have been at the hands of religious extremists, I believe it is part of Western feminists' duty to appreciate the cultivation of positive roles of faith and religion by indigenous communities, especially in societies where religion is central to the running of the state. Faith has historically centered social movements around the common interests of Afghan people and guides policymaking, a movement only an indigenous community seeking change can lead to success. In this respect, the

powerful influence Islam has in Afghanistan and its outlying regions can be interpreted as a positive opportunity for changing women's role in Afghan society and other countries by appealing to Muslims' core values and drawing away from the brutal aspects of fundamentalism.

Although fundamentalist rule has worsened the oppression of Afghan women, Western feminists should respect the gender-based divisions of purdah that Islam sanctions as a way to sustain respect and privacy between men and women and that is commonly misunderstood by well-intentioned Western feminists. During Soviet rule and the establishment of communism, having a career and leaving the home was normalized for many urban Afghan women, "but the policy of encouraging unrelated men and women to socialize in the work place remained anathema to many families. They perceived it as an attempt to weaken strong family ties" (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 2004, 98). Because of this stigma, some Afghan conservatives perceive RAWA as an organization with an agenda as a result of its members' interactions with non-relative male supporters. Therefore, RAWA must be extremely careful to respect traditional social conventions in its representations of Afghan men and women on its Web site. Afghanistan is "a society that closely scrutinizes every interaction between men and women for signs of disgrace and dishonor to the woman"; this may account for the reason men are not depicted in RAWA photographs as supporters of women's right to public life, or why RAWA's male supporters are not given attention in the media (Brodsky 2003, 206). "A woman can lose all of her credibility and standing in a community if there is even the hint that she has been in a situation where there was the *potential* for

inappropriate behavior" (ibid.), and this stigma extends to progressive groups of women, such as the members of RAWA.

Underlying the conservatives' determination to enforce purdah and suppress the rights of women is their intense aversion to Western influence which forestalls any attempt at modernization or social change. The tension between Afghans' desire to modernize and the perceived associations between modernity and Westernization strengthen the country's grip on ultra-conservative moral codes and gender roles. This adds to the

> forces and influences that agitate against any elevation of women's status. These range from the sincerely held belief that tradition and religion demand the subordination of women [...] to a more prosaic desire by men to hold on to perceived advantages and the intertwining of the women's issue with an ideology or value system associated with the enemy. (Benard et al. 2008, 60)

Both Islamic and anti-Western sentiments are at the heart of arguments against Afghan women's rights. RAWA, because of its progressive campaigns to elevate women's status and make civil institutions more accessible to women, has been accused of being "too Western," and "even among liberal Americans, outspoken Afghan women are dismissed as being too revolutionary or influenced by Western notions" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006, 192).

Fundamentalist and conservative Afghans who oppose RAWA often use shame tactics to discredit them. In areas in and around Afghanistan, including "in Persian, Central Asian, and South Asian contexts, RAWA is also called an organization of lesbians or prostitutes" as a way to disarm RAWA's influence on potential supporters

(Brodsky 2003, 58). RAWA's participation in rallies and protests has drawn local conservative anger, as evidenced by male RAWA supporter Jawid's interview with Brodsky, in which he attests that "the fundamentalists say that these women want to go outside and demonstrate only because they want to touch men's bodies" (ibid., 206). On April 15, 2009, a group of 300 women gathered to protest a proposed law targeting Afghanistan's small Shia population that would legalize the marital rape of women, among other stipulations, but the group of women was overcome by 1,000 male and female counter-protesters who shouted, "Death to the slaves of the Christians," giving voice to the Western/Islamic binary that equates Westerners to "Christians" and the West's perceived anti-Islam sentiments (CBC News 2009). The shaming of women who risk physical danger and public repudiation to demand their rights and revisions to the laws which affect them create enormous barriers to gender equity. Even conservative women who desire conservative changes to the law cannot speak out or they chance the stigma that comes with women's political activism or simply participation in the public sphere. The perceived deviation from strictly conservative social norms intrinsic in shaming labels such as "lesbian" or "prostitute" in Afghan culture leads RAWA to concentrate much of its energy on avoiding social stigma in order to maintain its credibility and supporters in Afghanistan. These social constraints may prevent RAWA from fighting for women's rights in more progressive ways and may contribute to the gender gap through the <oppressed woman> and <male oppressor> binary used on RAWA's Web site.

It is important for Afghan women to have a woman-centric ideograph like <compatriot woman> that does not promote the <male oppressor> and that both

progressive and conservative women can unify around and aspire to. Not all Afghan women are liberal; conservative women certainly exist in force in Afghanistan and find social benefit in being conservative. The introduction of an alternate ideograph, one which conservative *and* progressive women could both identify with, is a good basic rhetorical construction for building self-confidence in Afghan women. RAWA's current rhetorical representations of <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> support RAWA's short-term humanitarian initiatives for Afghan women, but they make it extremely difficult for Afghan women to behave in equitable ways that would not be perceived as Western or associated with Western behavior or ideology. The addition of a new ideograph—one whose origins do not lie in making humanitarian appeals to a Western audience—could potentially help to disassociate women in the public sphere with the West and build national unity while working to gradually mainstream and institutionalize women's public roles, thereby creating an atmosphere in which RAWA can safely and effectively integrate this rhetoric to uphold its long-term goals.

In the next section, I consider the potential value and the consequences of introducing the <compatriot woman> to Afghans and the complexities facing the successful initiation of this ideograph in a culture where social change is not only suspect, but oftentimes criminal. As a rhetorical construction, <compatriot woman> will be discussed not as the framing of a photograph or turning of a phrase, but as a strategic media practice joining the development discourse of Afghanistan beyond the rhetorical choices of RAWA and even beyond the national borders of Afghanistan, as a representation of Afghan women that has repercussions for the entire Muslim community.

<COMPATRIOT WOMAN>: A FITTING RESPONSE

Lloyd Bitzer, in his exposition on the rhetorical situation, calls one feature of the rhetorical situation the invitation of a "fitting response" and contends that the "situation must somehow prescribe the response that fits" (1966, 10); thus, I suggest that the introduction of the <compatriot woman> ideograph is timely for Afghanistan and is a fitting response to the present rhetorical situation. After decades of war and infighting, an entire generation of women and men has suffered a massive loss: the security and innocence of childhood, sound nutrition and access to water, basic education, vocational training, healthcare, housing, security, and just governance. Yet, although the losses affect both Afghan men and women, women's role in nation-building has long been denied. Such a model is essential if long-term nation-building in Afghanistan is ever to be successful, because women's ability to contribute alongside their male compatriots is necessary to bring the crumbling nation to its feet. In fact, as the post-September 11, 2001 generation comes of age, an argument that women may be *better* equipped for nation-building than men has been proposed:

> [W]omen have gotten training, but the men from the same age group were deprived of an education when they went off to fight. They cannot enter into meaningful, productive activities, and they are not intellectually or emotionally capable of functioning in 'normal' society. The traditional male role has been eroded as a direct result of the war, and women have replaced them. (Dupree, qtd. in Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 2004, 111)

This evaluation of a post-September 11th Afghan culture portrays a scenario in which the "traditional male role" is not the only thing that has changed about Afghan patriarchy; the

men themselves are intellectually and emotionally incapacitated, and women must take their "training" and rise to this new test of survival. This extreme summation of current Afghan gender roles only reaffirms that the post-September 11th world is a vastly different world than the one in which Meena was assassinated for her work on behalf of the advancement of Afghan women. The work of gender equity in Afghanistan's deeply-rooted patriarchy—protected by decades of fundamentalist rule—is a change that will take time and the dedication of both men and women, but Dupree's observations suggest that Afghan women are likely more ready for responsibility than current public sentiment would indicate.

The <compatriot woman> must originate within Afghanistan and the larger Muslim world and in a socially acceptable way in order to appeal to a wide internal audience, as a potential model for Afghan and non-Afghan Muslim women for participation in political and social efforts. Alternate imagery, imagery intended for both local consumption and external validation, would be more successful and have a greater opportunity to reach the status as an Afghan ideograph if its shared meaning is cultivated in Afghan development discourse directed inward, toward Afghan people. The emergence of the <compatriot woman> as a new, participatory public female originating in Afghanistan, created by Afghans, and representative of both progressive and conservative Afghan women would have a greater potential to gradually modify the exigence of women's oppression in Afghanistan than if such an ideograph were to come from outside the country. It could allow Afghan women to reclaim their agency in humanitarian and political arenas, combat the internalized devaluation of their identities that comes under the scruntiny of hegemonic powers, and reclaim Afghanistan's

independence and the movement for Afghan women's liberation. It also may encourage everyday, conservative Afghan women to join the movement by serving as a model for women's right to participate as a co-shaper of her community at varying levels of participation, the only limitation being the individual woman's ambition.

The <compatriot woman>, the co-shaper of her community, is not present on RAWA's Web site and is not represented in Afghan media targeted toward Afghan people, to this author's knowledge. There are several complications that make the introduction of <compatriot woman> on RAWA's Web site unadvisable. Because the representations of Afghan women as <oppressed woman> and <empowered woman> that are on the RAWA Web site were created as Western appeals, it is important that the <compatriot woman> does not share or appear to share an agenda with those ideographs as a Western appeal, or else it risks alienating the Afghan audience; the same audience that must be depended on to participate in long-term nation-building. While <empowered woman> functions as an external validation of Afghan women by a Western audience hoping to see signs of "progress" in Afghanistan, it is not an ideograph crafted expressly for local consumption. Scenes of rebellious women without male chaperones speaking out against male oppressors are too liberal for and may offend a majority of the conservative Muslims who are presumably the ones who must be involved in nation-building. As a liberal feminist organization facing constant attempts from conservative and moderate groups to discredit its efforts, RAWA is not the ideal vehicle for the emergence of an ideograph like <conservative woman> which should gain acceptance among a diverse audience of Afghan women and men.

The name that I assigned to the ideograph <compatriot woman> is derived from Meena's poem "I Will Never Return" as an example of a woman who has joined with men as their equal partner in the liberation of their shared homeland. Meena's commitment to opening the public sphere to women and her ability to inspire a fiercely dedicated following would seem to make her a model for <compatriot woman>, but the Western associations that taint progressive women and Meena's associations with RAWA, which has its own history with the West, challenge Meena's fitness as a model for what <compatriot woman> might look like. The deep undercurrent of collective identity and anonymous accomplishment that resides in RAWA's dedicated members is propelled by the hope Meena represents, but according to the data collected on RAWA's *Homepage* and second-level Web pages, RAWA has only two divergent fates for the progressive Afghan woman: that of the oppressed woman or the embattled social activist. Despite the intense reverence of Meena, or perhaps because of it, RAWA's Web site lacks any single other female figure, individual or representative of all Afghan women, to serve as a model for the success RAWA has accomplished for women throughout its existence. Indeed, even if such an ideograph were to be developed on RAWA's Web site, RAWA's history of using Afghan women's representations to make appeals to the West and the cultural paranoia that singles out progressive Afghan women as "too Western" precludes the suggestion that <compatriot woman> could originate on the RAWA Web site and successfully take hold in Afghan culture.

Speculation on the appearance, type of media, and the mode of distribution of <compatriot woman> are beyond the scope of this paper and are better left to indigenous communities to devise. Attempts for Western feminists to configure the <compatriot

woman> would lead to contentious questions concerning how conservative or how radical such an ideograph would be, such as: Would the <compatriot woman> wear the burqa, the hijab, or no head covering at all? Would the <compatriot woman> only be effective in the public sphere, or could she inspire from the home? If men should be placed in the <compatriot woman> ideograph at all, would the <compatriot woman> challenge him or be submissive to him? Such questions, with their limitless possible answers, invoke the reality that Western feminists—and the general Western audience—are likely to respond to the <compatriot woman> as a regressive or conservative figure. However, what may appear to be regressive or conservative in the West may be interpreted as radical in the Islamic culture of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the <compatriot woman> would appeal to a larger, more diverse audience in Afghanistan by rooting itself in conservative values. As an ideograph directed toward an Afghan audience, the textual and visual incarnations of <compatriot woman> are likely to find more success on the indigenous community's wheel, shaped by indigenous knowledges.

LIMITATIONS

The question "Who may speak for whom?" is an ongoing internal debate in indigenous communities struggling for agency and is also part of a transnational dispute among Western scholars in regards to how best to examine the societies they choose to speak for. As a Western feminist, I can relate to the "fear of appropriating the voice of others [that] has led some researchers to question their abilities to say anything about the communities of which they are not a member" (Briggs and Sharp 2004, 671). It was enlightening to realize more acutely the same phenomenon occurring within Afghanistan

between progressive and conservative forces, both of which represent legitimate concerns for Afghanistan's future and the preservation of its culture in the face of perceived Western appropriation. RAWA's advantage is that it presents itself as an organization *of* Afghan women, *by* Afghan women, *for* Afghan women; it gains credibility and interest from its global audience as an authentic voice telling the true story of Afghan women's oppression and by assuring donors that their aid is distributed in a bottom-up fashion that sincerely helps poor Afghan women and their families.

Mary Queen protests that Western feminists have appropriated two-third world women's oppression to "claim agency and self-representation for ourselves while denying this same capacity to them" (2008, 472), but what does this declaration mean for Western feminists? There are definitive limits to the Western understanding of Afghan women's lived experiences, but the right to speak for Afghan women does not necessarily default to Afghan women such as the members of RAWA; RAWA members, in this way, would be privileged by dint of their nationality to speak for *all* women of Afghanistan, when the reality presented in this essay is that Afghan women come from all walks of economic, religious, and political life. Transnational feminism is enriched by the diversity of perspectives that are brought to it. The varying limits on the understanding of Western feminists for two-thirds world women's perspectives should not prevent Western feminists from advocating for marginalized communities of women who seek gender equity in far more dangerous parts of the world where social activism makes women targets on their own doorsteps. Speculating on gender relations foreign to one's own experience should also not prohibit "those concerned with understanding the workings of patriarchal power [from facing] challenges in coming to terms with indigenous

knowledge," such as can be found in Afghanistan through women's organizations (Briggs and Sharp 2004, 672). The apprehension "of being insensitive to locally constructed gender relations" has caused some hesitation on the part of Western feminists to take on foreign manifestations of patriarchy (ibid.). This healthy respect for the traditions of countries in different stages of development is laudable; however, Western feminists would be wise to rein in perceptions of Western culture as fully developed before entering into speculation about another woman's culture. I believe that Western engagement with the Islamic community in 2009 has illuminated Western privilege and opened a new self-awareness in transnational feminism.

There is intense pressure on RAWA to feed, shelter, and clothe Afghan women living on the edge of survival, which detracts from the organization's capacity to attend to its longer-term political goals.[3] This is evidenced by the organization's disproportionate concentration on the humanitarian aspects of its Web site and the rhetorical audience implicated in its textual and visual ideographs. For this reason, the expression of Western feminist's agency on behalf of Afghan women could allow woman-centric organizations such as RAWA to meet more of its humanitarian goals and free up more of its resources and redirect more commitment to fighting for women's rights and Afghanistan's independence.

***

Although RAWA's short-term humanitarian interests are privileged on its Web site, as evidenced by the strategic representation of <oppressed woman> and

[3] RAWA states that without assistance from the government, it is barely able to meet its ever-increasing financial needs, and that "other activities of RAWA, such as holding seminars and conferences, staging demonstrations and undertaking lobbying for our rights have been severely hampered. We feel that the intensity and impact of Afghan women's activism for the cause of democracy, and against fundamentalism, would have been much wider and more tangible if we were not in financial dire straits" ("Financial Sources of RAWA," *Social Activities*, 2009).

<empowered woman>, its short-term interests cannot be fully divorced from its long-term ambitions for the spirited country of Afghanistan and for Afghan women dedicated to change. RAWA's commitment to gender equity, national independence, and a secular democracy attract its Western audience as much as scenes of oppression and deprivation seem to do, and this attention and the assistance it brings instills hope in progressive Afghan men and women. Unfortunately, despite RAWA's message that nation-building is an indigenous effort, the saturation of the Web site with Western appeals communicated by the prevalent <oppressed woman> and segregated representations of <empowered woman> emphasizes women's state of oppression as static and absents the everyday roles brave Afghan women play in making incremental gains in mainstream acceptance and breaking social barriers in the public sphere. The emphasis on women's oppression also absents a large underground population of male supporters of RAWA and reinforces negative Western stereotypes of the <male oppressor>. Scapegoating Afghan men constructs a space for the American reader/viewer to fill as a paternalistic savior, which in turn allows for a continued American military presence in that country.

The prevalence of <oppressed woman> in addition to the ideographic representation of women protesters on RAWA's Web site as <empowered woman> compromises RAWA's long-term mission of nation-building by concentrating too one-sidedly on the courtship of its Western audience. RAWA's reliance on textual and visual representations of <empowered woman> to appeal to the West may also extend conservative Afghans' perceptions of RAWA activists as Western to all Afghan women, RAWA members and conservative non-members alike, to whom demonstration could otherwise be a peaceful and effective way to participate in their governance.

RAWA's rhetorical choices show that it values its Western audience over its local audience through the medium of the Internet, but statistics also show that RAWA's local Internet audience is growing fast. The Internet no longer caters to a strictly hegemonic audience; Internet kiosks are cropping up in Afghanistan and in neighboring Muslim countries, adding new constraints and opportunities. Sustaining its current rhetorical strategy of exporting representations Afghan women as victims of oppression designed to attract external humanitarian aid to Afghanistan fails to address RAWA's long-term goals and foster positive models of successful public women.

I have argued that the introduction of the alternative ideograph <compatriot woman> would provide a model for Afghan women's involvement in the public sphere that would more effectively advance RAWA's long-term goals of secular democracy and gender equity and increase women's political participation; yet, such an ideograph cannot originate on RAWA's Web site and gain traction in diverse Afghan culture. The tenuous leadership that RAWA holds in the women's rights movement in Afghanistan is too deeply entrenched in perceptions of Western ideology for <compatriot woman> to be anything more than a poster girl for liberal women if it is introduced by RAWA. The <compatriot woman> can only gain status as an ideograph, an ideological and rhetorical culmination of shared cultural meaning, if the idea originates with and gradually finds acceptance among Afghan people across gender and power divisions, religion, political ideology, and economic status.

Ideographs unify a diverse audience around shared cultural meaning, and in time, an optimistic prediction for the effect of the <compatriot woman> on Afghan society would be a more secure and welcoming environment for women as co-shapers of their

communities. With this accomplishment, organizations like RAWA might be able to speak more freely and participate fully in Afghan democracy without fearing for their lives. Introducing an alternative and easily relatable ideograph for diverse Afghan women, one that enables Afghan men and women to envision gender equity and women's contributions to nation-building, presents a pragmatic and emotional opportunity to inspire and unify a nation with a rich and diverse culture around shared goals and values.

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APPENDIX A: PHOTO PERMISSIONS FROM RAWA

Re: URGENT - Request for Photo Permissions
RAWA <rawa@rawa.org>
Wednesday, June 17, 2009 3:48:49 AM
To: Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>

Oh sorry for misunderstanding. It is clear now.
Yes, sure you can reproduce it.

On Wed, Jun 17, 2009 at 6:27 AM, Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hello Friba,

I apologize for not being clear in my request. Thank you for pointing out the poster, but I was actually asking for your required permission to reproduce the entire screenshot. I wanted to impart a view of what the audience would see when looking at the Homepage, so that includes not only the background image but also the text, videos, etc. That particular screenshot was taken February 8th, 2009. I have attached it again for you to view. It will print exactly as I have sent it to you, if I receive your permission.

Am I able to reproduce the screenshot in my thesis?

Thank you,
Heather Floyd

From: RAWA <rawa@rawa.org>
To: Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, June 1, 2009 4:09:37 PM

Subject: Re: URGENT - Request for Photo Permissions

Dear Heather,

Are asking for the background image of our web site which is taken from the following poster?
http://www.rawa.org/poster-chain.htm

If so, yes please feel free to use it.

But if you ask for something else, please let us know to make sure RAWA is the copyright holder.

Regards,
Friba

===
To subscribe to our mailing list visit http://www.rawa.org/ml.htm.
===

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)
E-mail: rawa@rawa.org
Home Page: http://www.rawa.org
Mirror site: http://www.rawa.us

Re: URGENT - Request for Photo Permissions
Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>
Monday, June 1, 2009 3:58:30 PM
To: RAWA <rawa@rawa.org>

Good afternoon Friba,

Thank you for your earlier permission to reproduce photos, and the additional links you sent. I overlooked one more RAWA image that I request your permission to use. It is not a photograph, but rather a screenshot, or a still frame of how part of your Web site looked when I took the screenshot on Feb. 8, 2009.

Attached is the exact image as seen on your Web site that I hope to use in my thesis to complete my degree. If you would be so kind as to give me the permission to reproduce this image, please do so by June 5, 2009.

Thank you!
Heather Floyd

Re: URGENT - Request for Photo Permissions
RAWA <rawa@rawa.org>
Thursday, May 21, 2009 9:17:12 PM
To: Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>

http://www.nowpublic.com/world/blood-stains

Second one is mix of 2 photos, one is here, but sorry that can't find the link to the second one:
http://sabotazusa.com/images/newsletter/blood.jpg

On Thu, May 21, 2009 at 9:22 PM, Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hello Friba,

Thank you very much for the permission to reproduce the RAWA photos. I would be more than happy to share my thesis with the organization when it has been published.

Do you have any information about where RAWA obtained the two images in question?

Thank you,
Heather Floyd

From: RAWA <rawa@rawa.org>
To: Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2009 5:51:09 PM
Subject: Re: URGENT - Request for Photo Permissions

Dear Heather Floyd,

Thanks you very much for email and interest in RAWA.

Please feel free to include RAWA images in your thesis, but just please note that we are not copyright holder of the following images:

bloody_knife_s.jpg
women_bloody.jpg

The rest of them are RAWA photos and you can publish them in your thesis.

We will be glad to have a copy of your thesis paper when printed.

Kindest wishes,
Friba

==
To subscribe to our mailing list visit http://www.rawa.org/ml.htm.
==
Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)
E-mail: rawa@rawa.org
Home Page: http://www.rawa.org
Mirror site: http://www.rawa.us

URGENT - Request for Photo Permissions
Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>
Wednesday, May 20, 2009 5:29:29 PM
To: rawa@rawa.org

Hello members of RAWA,

I am Heather Floyd, a student at Old Dominion University in Virginia in the United States. I am writing to request your permission to reproduce ten images from your Web site, www.rawa.org, in my thesis.

The thesis is titled "<Oppressed>, <Empowered>, <Compatriot> Women: RAWA's Online Construction of Gendered Ideographs." It is scheduled to be published August 2009.

Attached are the exact images published on your Web site that I hope to use in my thesis to complete my degree. If you would be so kind as to give me the permission to reproduce these images, please do so by June 5, 2009. If you need more information, I would be happy to answer your questions.

In gratitude,

Heather Floyd

APPENDIX B: IMAGE PERMISSIONS FROM SABOTAZ USA

Re: Request - Permission to Reproduce Image
Logan Hicks <info@sabotazusa.com>
Monday, June 1, 2009 2:36:49 PM
To: Heather Floyd hl_floyd@yahoo.com

Heather, sorry, but I do not know who created the image you are asking about. Sorry.

Sent via BlackBerry from T-Mobile

From: Heather Floyd
Date: Mon, 1 Jun 2009 08:04:54 -0700 (PDT)
To: <info@sabotazusa.com>
Subject: Request - Permission to Reproduce Image

Hello,

I am Heather Floyd, a student at Old Dominion University in Virginia in the United States. I am writing to request your permission to reproduce one image from your Web site, http://www.sabotazusa.com/store/, to include in my thesis.

The specific image is the bloodspatter image, attached. It was used on the website www.rawa.org, owned by the Revolutionary Association for the Women of Afghanistan. On the website, it is paired it with a graphic of a woman, also attached. Is this combination also made by Sabotaz USA? If not, do you know who might have created it?

The thesis is titled "<Oppressed>, <Empowered>, <Compatriot> Women: RAWA's Online Construction of Gendered Ideographs." It is scheduled to be published August 2009.

If you would be so kind as to give me the permission to reproduce this image, please do so by June 5, 2009. If you do not have the authority to grant permission for this photo, and do not know who does have that authority, please send a reply so that I can immediately find other options.

Thank you,
Heather Floyd

APPENDIX C: PHOTO PERMISSIONS FROM MAKHMALBAF

Fw: URGENT - Request for Photo Permission
Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>
Sunday, May 31, 2009 2:31:12 PM
To: info@makhmalbaf.com

Hello,

I am Heather Floyd, a student at Old Dominion University in Virginia in the United States. This is my second request for your permission to reproduce the photo attached.

As stated in my previous e-mail to you on Thursday, May 21, I am writing to request your permission to reproduce one image from your Web site, that of the actress Nelofer Pazira in the movie Kandahar, to include in my thesis.

The thesis is titled "<Oppressed>, <Empowered>, <Compatriot> Women: RAWA's Online Construction of Gendered Ideographs." It is scheduled to be published August 2009.

Attached is the exact image published on your Web site that I hope to use in my thesis to complete my degree. If you would be so kind as to give me the permission to reproduce this image, please do so by June 5, 2009. If you need more information, I would be happy to answer your questions.

In gratitude,

Heather Floyd

----- Forwarded Message ----
From: Heather Floyd <hl_floyd@yahoo.com>
To: info@makhmalbaf.com
Sent: Thursday, May 21, 2009 12:39:59 PM
Subject: URGENT - Request for Photo Permission

Hello,

I am Heather Floyd, a student at Old Dominion University in Virginia in the United States. I am writing to request your permission to reproduce one image from your Web site, that of the actress Nelofer Pazira in the movie Kandahar, to include in my thesis.

The thesis is titled "<Oppressed>, <Empowered>, <Compatriot> Women: RAWA's Online Construction of Gendered Ideographs." It is scheduled to be published August 2009.

Attached is the exact image published on your Web site that I hope to use in my thesis to complete my degree. If you would be so kind as to give me the permission to reproduce these images, please do so by June 5, 2009. If you need more information, I would be happy to answer your questions.

In gratitude,

Heather Floyd

VITA

Heather L. Floyd
English Department
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 23509

In 2005, Heather Lynn Floyd graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English from Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia, and returned to her hometown of Virginia Beach, Virginia, to enter the publishing industry. She enrolled at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, in 2006 for her Master of Arts in English.

After hearing a speaker from The Women of Hope Project discuss Afghan women's oppression and empowerment in 2007, Floyd developed a deep interest in gender relations in Afghanistan. She gave a presentation on *Afghan Humanitarian Rhetoric and the Use of Ideographs Online* at the seventh annual Global Perspectives on International Studies Conference in February 2009 and developed that knowledge into her master's thesis.

Floyd's research interests include editor-author communication and interpersonal communication in the family, particularly regarding women's roles. She presented her essay, *"Would you like to join us?": Ostensible speech acts and women's role in the biological and intermarital family and their influence on perceived marital success* to the Southern States Communication Association Conference in April 2009, earning the Top Student Paper Award in the Interpersonal Communications Division.

Currently, Floyd is employed as an editor with The Donning Company Publishers of Virginia Beach, Virginia.