

Plugged in Praxis: Critical Reflections on U.S. Feminism, Internet Activism, and Solidarity with Women in Afghanistan¹

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Abstract

Cyber-space presents many contradictions to those seeking to use it for activist ends in a transnational world. This paper explores some of these contradictions by examining various uses of the internet in efforts to raise awareness about the situation for women in Afghanistan during the period the Taliban came to power and controlled a majority of the country. I explore differences in approaches, images, and tone within examples of internet activism, emphasizing the Web work of the Feminist Majority Foundation, set in comparison with that of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. Due to the prominence of the *chadari* in the images and campaigns of the Feminist Majority, a central part of the work is devoted to careful consideration of the image of veiling. As I note in the body of the paper, internet activism around the crisis for women living under the Taliban shows the potential for its usefulness as a tool in raising cross-global consciousness. At the same time this research reveals the need for caution, care and a critical eye when exploring and utilizing the internet and Web as a means of activist education and organization. In the end, I hope this critical reflection on these examples were feminists have utilized the tools of cyber-space will help in building, especially within the U.S., more careful and nuanced approaches as we seek international solidarity.

Key Words: Internet activism, International solidarity, women in Afghanistan

Introduction

In this paper I explore feminists' efforts to raise awareness about the situation for women in Afghanistan under the Taliban by utilizing the internet.² This paper adds to a growing body of research examining various aspects of the rise of the Taliban and their specific policies toward women, as well as looking at feminist international mobilization around these policies (for examples see Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Shahnaz Khan; 2001; Sonali Kolhatkar, 2002; Valentine Moghadam, 2002). My focus on the internet echoes Myfanwy Franks' call for approaches that start in "the metaphorical kitchen in which we might find ourselves, with the materials that are available," hence I am most interested in examples of feminist internet uses that were readily available to me as I sought out information on these topics from within the U.S. (2002, 9). I concentrate on internet sources that were prominent in feminist campaigns, referenced by writers and others both on and off the internet, offered in English, and located using readily available search engines or sent to me via e-mail from various sources.³ While a variety of examples of internet based information is explored, the heart of the paper focuses on a comparative reading of information found on the Web sites of the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA).

For all the publicity it has recently received, I believe many in the U.S. know little about Afghanistan or the history of the Taliban.⁴ I first learned about the Taliban in 1997 through a National Public Radio report on decrees imposed on Kabul after the Taliban takeover. As a feminist I was outraged by what I heard. However, I was skeptical of my immediate reactions to

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this story due to various aspects of my own positions in the world set in relation to this tragedy (for example that I was listening to a report from a major media outlet in the U.S.).⁵ Mindful of Edward Said's influential indictment of orientalism (1979), my historical understanding of the country and situation were newly gained, clearly limited, and also somewhat dangerous.⁶ Over time, my awareness of the situation for women under the Taliban grew, in part, thanks to the many powerful ways activists and organizations utilized the internet as a tool for intervening in this crisis. The growth in the internet has spawned a host of international and national activist projects worth more systematic theoretical consideration and exploration. In some sense analysis of the information and its impact contained in these "plugged-in" efforts raises issues similar to "un-plugged" efforts. But because of their global reach, and their almost instantaneous transmission, these sites also present unique challenges to understanding information and assessing activism. Computer driven activism can provide a means of isolating important moments for analyzing implicit and explicit visions within a particular campaign seeking global action and solidarity. Internet activism around the issue of women living under the Taliban shows the potential for such tools to be useful in raising cross-global consciousness. At the same time this research reveals the need for caution, care and a critical eye when exploring and utilizing the Web as a means of activist education and organization.

The history of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, and the expansion of U.S. military presence in so much of the world since 9/11, makes it especially urgent for U.S based feminists to reflect critically on our actions so we can improve solidarity among progressive, feminist, antiracist, and anti-imperialist communities.⁷ In introducing their text, *Race in Cyberspace*, the editors state,

...race matters in cyberspace precisely because all of us who spend time online are already shaped by the ways in which race matters offline, and we can't help but bring our own knowledge and experiences and values with us when we log on. (4-5)

Just as we inhabit racialized bodies offline that influence us online, we also inhabit bodies differentially positioned within the globe. It is vital that those in the U.S. reflect seriously on their activism within the light of concerns raised by a host of international, post-colonial, and women of color feminist writers regarding the dangers in dominant western feminist approaches in crossing racialized and global borders. Awareness of potential limits to these approaches should not, however, end in silence or inaction, but should help in developing frameworks that recognize the complexity and unstableness of positional categories (Shahzad Mojab, 1998; Hideh Moghissi, 1999; Chandra T. Mohanty, 2003).⁸ Discussing Sylvia Walby's (2000) assessment of her 1983 essay, Mohanty reminds us to "engage my notion of a common feminist political project, which critiques the effects of Western feminist scholarship on women in the Third world, but within a framework of solidarity and shared values" (2003, 502). While I do not necessarily focus on the effects on women in the Third world (an approach Mohanty goes on to suggest), I do explore limits in Western feminism's internet based activism and understandings that may impact and hinder efforts at solidarity with women around the globe.

I am interested in differences in approaches, images, and tone evident in these examples of internet activism. Due its prominence in the images and actions of the FMF, analysis of the images and uses of the *chadari* in internet efforts to raise awareness about women living under the Taliban emerges as a central consideration.⁹ This consideration is reflective of a larger struggle over emphasis and meaning that emerges between the U.S. and women both in Afghanistan as well as in other societies where veiling is practiced.¹⁰ My analysis adds another example and critique to that on-going discussion, further exposing Noelle-Karimi's observation that "In the West, the burqa has become a symbol of the deprivations and oppressions women in Afghanistan have had to bear" (2002, 1). This comparison explores some of the ways the veil was over-emphasized, revealing how problematic tropes can circulate even in some of the best feminist efforts to create cross-

cultural solidarity. Such problems undermine the work that is so necessary to mounting successful campaigns against the globalized onslaughts on women.

Much of my discussion involves information obtained previous to September 2001. I do not, however, ignore the world in the aftermath of the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent U.S. bombings within Afghanistan. I choose this historic focus in part because I started to seek out information on the topic well before this momentous date. Still, as Noelle-Karimi states, and this research reinforces, it is important to remember the need for contextual complexity in assessing the crisis in Afghanistan under the Taliban and today. She states that, "At every stage of the war, women have been raped, abducted and murdered. All parties involved are guilty of these transgressions, including the Northern Alliance, which has swept into power thanks to U.S. support....Most Afghans still find themselves in the grip of grinding poverty" (3).¹¹ Moghadam locates at least three causes for the deeply troubled status of women in Afghanistan including the "patriarchal social structure, the absence of a centralized and modernizing state, and the problematic stance of the international and feminist community..."(2002, 20). Recognizing the complexity of these past or present conditions, I hope my focus on the period of Taliban control, and the immediate aftermath of this period, can help feminists, particularly those in dominant organizations within the U.S., to consider more critically knowledge and approaches when viewing any global situation via the internet so as to be better allies to women in the region, and around the globe.

The focus on internet activism still feels a bit odd to someone who finds admirable qualities in the radical notions of the Luddites.¹² I, like them, believe viable communities and real people should come before the imperatives of either technology or profit. However, internet technology presents a complex reality for those interested in questions of liberation, especially for women. For example, these new telecommunications systems have incredible power to challenge the nation/state by defying its borders, a potential perhaps first noticed in the triumph and tragedy of Tiananmen Square. This power continues to be seen in a number of on-going struggles, from the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, to the mass mobilizations against the World Bank, to the never before seen global, massive, coordinated anti-war events built in response to the U.S. military invasion of Iraq. But this technology also brings with it new and incredibly powerful tools of gendered and racialized/patriarchal repression, economic deprivation, environmental degradation, commodification and homogenization. I think of the insights of the anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre are applicable to the current economies forged through these technologies. She wrote in 1909, "As to the essence of Commerce and Manufacture, it is this: to establish bonds between every corner of the earth's surface and every other corner, to multiply the needs of mankind, and the desire for material possessions and enjoyment" (36). (For example, I work on cyber-spaces that seem always to contribute to Bill Gates' capital accumulation.)

Like most capitalist commodity structures computer technologies bring specific contradictions to women's lives. Zillah Eisenstein, in her work *Global Obscenities, Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy*, eloquently states:

For women, transnational capital with its high-tech global telecommunications systems is contradictory--alienating and potentially liberatory. Capable of enormous levels of exploitation for the majority of women and girls, it also promises a new transnational but post patriarchal deliberative democracy built by women across the globe. (39)

As documented throughout Eisenstein's work, young girls and women predominantly in or from the third world, are the main manufacturers of the hardware of this technology, working primarily in sweatshop conditions, with highly toxic chemicals, for corporations outside their local control. The Web both allows us to learn of and communicate with women around the globe; at the same time it makes us complicit in the exploitation of women in the silicon valleys and sweatshops which

produce the material of a wired world. Only some women have access to the technologies produced predominately by other women. These contradictions cannot be forgotten even as the usefulness of the technologies may be lauded.

There are three sections to this work. In the first section, "Images of Women in Afghanistan," I overview the availability of feminist information on the Web regarding the Taliban, and then center my analysis of this information on some of the powerful images of women under the Taliban utilized on some of these sites. In the next section, "Forms of Activism," I consider the strengths and weaknesses of different specific examples of campaigns and actions promoted through the internet. In the final section, "Conclusion: On-Going Crisis," reviews the information with an eye toward current global events since September 11, 2001.

Images of Women in Afghanistan

The internet does offer opportunities to disseminate information unparalleled by other information resources. But, as Eisenstein reminds us, "...getting information is not the same things as acting on it, just like virtual reality is not the same thing as bodily reality. Thinking, knowing, and acting are distinct parts of a process that require different strategies..." (168). Information is obviously a necessary component of activism, and accurate information is made all the more important given the challenges of crossing language, cultural, religious, and national differences present in any attempt of cross-cultural solidarity.

Feminist Web sites dealing with Afghanistan were easy to locate and figured prominently among information on the internet regarding the Taliban well before 9/11. Both RAWA and the "Stop Gender Apartheid" page of the FMF were among the top three or five sites listed when the term "women" was added to searches on the Taliban or Afghanistan in various searches I conducted.¹³ There is certainly even more information on the topics in the period after September 11th. Even with the increased traffic after 9/11, RAWA still came up in my searches as the third Web match and the FMF was listed as the seventeenth Web match in a more recent search for information on "Afghanistan." No doubt due to publicity it gained through discussion on *Oprah* and the resulting volume of users trying to access the site, in the late 1990's RAWA started forwarding messages to a secondary, "Mirror" site. The FMF and RAWA were, and in many ways continue to be, Web based and real world leaders in the struggle for human rights and self-determination for women in Afghanistan. Other organizations working for women's rights in the region do not appear with the same ease as these two organizations. For example, neither the Afghan Women's Mission (AWM) or the Afghan Women's Association International (AWAI) appeared among the first organizations to appear in any of my Web searches.¹⁴

The amount of information on the Web always leads to questions about who was the intended audience.¹⁵ As Eisenstein states

one may have the *freedom* to receive electronic information, but one must have *equality* to do so: a computer, the software, the training, and a telephone line. One may have the freedom to electronically communicate with anyone across the globe, but one must first secure an e-mail address. (94)

The internet is a world that has mainly been accessible to males, and disproportionately to wealthier males, due to expendable incomes, uses in particular workplaces, and available time, as well as the technological support structure needed to utilize its recourses. It is also a primarily male space because: "More than two-thirds of the world's illiterate are women" (Eisenstein, 163, see also 93-100). According to RAWA's "Main Social Activities" page, literacy rates in Afghanistan were and are among the worst in the world, "estimated by UNICEF at between three and four percent for females and twenty-eight percent for males" (2001, 5). In a nation torn by war, where basic

education was denied to women, in a nation with limited access to food and shelter, let alone phones and data lines--who will gain access to the information on the internet? Eisenstein again was helpful to consider here when she observes that, "The "real" demands that we look at the problem of inequality. But the net is concerned, instead with freedom. And freedom gets defined as unfettered speech."(95). When considering who has access to this powerful information resource, the "problem of inequality" presents an ugly side of the internet as the regime's policies forced silence through illiteracy, intimidation, and sheer lack of access on the women within the society. The world of those with computer access is the internet's audience; the primary audience for these stories was not the majority of women within the society.

Due to the official silencing of most women (as well as others) within Afghanistan by the Taliban, simply placing information from within the Taliban controlled areas on the Web became a necessary and radical form of political action. Heroic attempts were made to cross the border to document and record women's (as well as men's) stories. On the RAWA and AWM sites one could, and still can, see many of these images, read these stories and learn of the struggles to get the stories out of Afghanistan. Those attempting to gather information on conditions of Afghan women and men inside Taliban controlled Afghanistan risked beatings, jailing, and death. The threats faced by women working to document lives within Afghanistan under the Taliban included a series of edicts placing severe limits on women's movements. At least one woman has been reported to have been shot attempting to leave the country in the company of a non-related male (RAWA, 2001).¹⁶

For organizations working for democracy, peace and women's rights in Afghanistan, the internet provides a means of reaching out to the globe to motivate through education and then channel action both on and off the internet. RAWA's site is a prime example of such an activist intent. The site is produced in a number of languages, and it is linked to a variety of international pages. It encourages activism in a variety of forms and uses the support it gathers to help pressure various governmental and U.N. bodies, as well as raise finances for its schools, hospitals, job training, and general relief programs. The FMF's "Stop Gender Apartheid" pages, and the AWM page, were and are among other important examples of such activist sites meant to motivate and channel action within the United States.

On both the RAWA and the FMF sites there is a wide variety of current news, resources, links, and, most important, action based information. Many of the images utilized on these sites brought to the globe evidence of relief efforts as well as living conditions both of the refugees and people within Afghanistan (see in particular AWM's site). Interestingly, only a small proportion of the FMF and RAWA Web space was devoted to pictorial representations. But because of their symbolic power, I turn my attention in the remaining parts of this section to the images located on the opening pages of the FMF's "Stop Gender Apartheid" site and compare this images to those available through RAWA's Web site.¹⁷

In 1998, if one accessed the FMF's "Stop Gender Apartheid" page, the first image that would greet you would be of a single, unidentified, woman in a chadari. This was the only image on the opening page, and was originally one of the few images of women found throughout this section of the site. This solitary woman was centered on the page, claiming about a third of the page's total space. Below the image was a bulleted list of Taliban decrees regarding women. The remaining space was devoted to hot buttons linked to information covering various parts of the FMF campaign. With her limited view on the world, seen in her need to hold the garment below her chin, apparently to hold the garments mesh area in place over the face, her solitariness, and her anonymity, the image is striking and disturbing, especially when reinforced by the details of the decrees.

Is having the central image of this site focused on a woman in a chadari necessarily a problem? Consider, by analogy, the example of an unusual 2001 *MS Magazine* "No Comment." Located on the back inside cover, this section usually features three or four clearly misogynist

advertisements sent to the magazine by the readership. This particular month the full back cover was devoted to a single Reebok advertisement depicting a veiled woman in running shoes. Rather than the usual tradition of letting the ads speak for themselves, this month the editors also included commentary at the bottom of the page. Headed by the caption "Captive or Captivating?" the editors' commentary summarized a number of staff responses to the image, and asked readers to write in with their thoughts. Let me leave aside the troubling corporate expropriation in this example (some of the potential implications embedded in the ad include that it would be unusual to find veiled women in such running shoes, or that the veil really covers a yearning to dawn athletic gear.) The *MS.* piece highlights that feminists, even within the U.S., do not always agree on the symbolic meaning of representations, including depictions of veiling. The summarized staff comments in the text under the image show this diversity of opinion. Some saw this representation of the veil as a reclamation of culture and traditions, some saw in it a depiction of the realities of daily life when veiling, and others saw in it a subversive use that raised the contradictions found in the linking of gender and culture. These are all certainly artistically and socially important readings of this ad, and reflect the nuance and complexity required in reading representations of many culturally inscribed female fashion trends.¹⁸ While in a similar way the depiction of women in *chadari* within feminist based efforts at solidarity with women in Afghanistan could certainly also be visually important, indeed necessary, something in the original, and subsequent, depictions of women in *chadari* on the FMF site made me pause, especially when coupled with the FMF's larger campaigns.¹⁹ I wondered, was this solitary woman in *chadari* the best way symbolically to draw attention to the situation for women in Afghanistan? The deployment of images of *chadari* as the dominant symbol of women within Taliban controlled Afghanistan on the FMF's site seemed to me powerful, contradictory, and troubling.

The image does reflect an important aspect of the "real world" where the *chadari* was a very serious part of the imposition of drastic restrictions that specifically targeted and oppressed women under the Taliban. The Taliban's edicts imposed veiling on a heterogeneous, mostly, though not entirely, Islamic population, which traditionally had a number of different cultural approaches to the practice of veiling. Women were in fact brutally beaten and harassed for various infractions of the newly state imposed dress codes, treatment which has been most well documented within the formerly Taliban resistant Kabul (for example, see RAWA, 1999 and 2001; Ellis 2002; Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), 1998 and 2001). Further, the garment itself drastically reduces vision. The *chadari* was, and undoubtedly still is, a very dangerous form of clothing for negotiating walking in Afghanistan which was, and is, among the most heavily land-mined regions in the world, and where debris made walking difficult. According to some accounts women have been hit by cars, stepped on landmines, and faced other injuries due to the restriction of vision notorious in the clothing (again see RAWA, 1999; Ellis 2002; PHR, 1998 and 2001). In one sense, then, the image on the FMF page was effective at imparting the lack of independence and autonomy for women under the Taliban. As these examples highlight, under the Taliban the veil moved "from a socially approved custom" Noelle-Karimi informs us, to "a political statement imposed from above" coming to "symbolize Taliban control over society, especially in the towns" (2). Without a doubt women in Afghanistan should be liberated from fear of violence imposed by state sanction (or other means), including being free of the forced or coerced imposition of clothing, as should women anywhere.

This particular image, however, was used by the FMF not just to reflect the "real" women in Afghanistan. Sonia Shah notes "Feminist campaigns raised public awareness in many cases by making the burqa--and American repulsion to it--the emotional center of their projects" (2001, 2). She goes on to quote the FMF's Norma Gattsek as stating that this garment was a "symbol of the total oppression of women" (2). Even with the reality of the brutal Taliban imposition of this garment, when contextualized within a site generated by and targeted to feminists in the U.S. the emphasis on the image of the *chadari* as symbol for the situation for women in Afghanistan seems

troubling.²⁰ Borrowing from Michelle Sharif's analysis of NOW's activities around Saudi women's driving campaigns at the time of the U.S.' first military intervention in Iraq, I worry that this use of the veil leads to a disturbing motivation for action based on the view that "these 'passive' women must be 'saved' by enlightened and liberated U.S. women" (155). Khan's observations, which build on the work of Trinh Minh-ha (1989), are helpful in clarifying concerns that emerge in this particular use of the veil when she states,

accounts of the third world women's pain and oppression have made them inmates in a private zoo. Within such a zoo, the archetypal image of the veiled woman, even when accompanied by a speaking subject remains limited to the immediate sensory experience of what it is like to be confined. The political context and social systems are eliminated (1).

No text accompanied the FMF image of the photograph's production or the identity of this woman in this *chadari* and the woman, covered as she was, has little individuality.²¹ The FMF image, especially in this earliest campaign, decontextualized the veil from its social and political history within the culture.

In other cultural settings, Mojab, among others, has noted that in general "The veil has had multiple and changing meanings throughout history" (1998, 21). This is true within Afghanistan where the issue of veiling has a long history of use within the struggles over state development and has been used as a powerful target of state development by both fundamentalist and modernist movements (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Moghadam, 2002). Earlier modernist movements had targeted the veil as a sign of "backwardness" and sought to encourage the ending of the practice. More recently, state imposition of the veil in Afghanistan was first enforced by the Mujahadeen controlled Afghanistan in 1992, with more restrictive decrees issued in 1993 (Ellis, 42). The Taliban do go on to impose the most brutal of dress decrees (Ellis, 42). Indeed there is some evidence that within Afghanistan many women did not see the imposition of the veil as their primary concern (PHR 2001).²² The veil remains a contested issue within the current day politics of Afghanistan.²³

While the history of the practice may simply reveal that women's oppression did not begin with the Taliban, this history also means that concerns regarding the Taliban's amplification of women's oppression cannot be reduced to the issue of veiling.²⁴ It was not the *chadari* alone that led to such formidable repression in Afghan women's lives; the imposition of *chadari* was not just about a garment. The imposition of the *chadari* as national policy regardless of previous cultural practice occurred in concert with a variety of other laws restricting women's lives, enforced by a brutal and unchecked religious police that enforced an extreme form of what the FMF called "gender apartheid" within this society.²⁵ To raise this concern another way, would the violation of rights of women have been any less appalling if women were not forced to wear the *chadari*, but were still told they could not be seen in the windows of their houses, could not be seen in the streets without a male relative, and indeed as Mawalawi Raflulla Moazin, general president of the religious police, warned the women of Kabul they "should not step outside their residence" (Christine Aziz, 6)? In this larger context of an entire continuum of restrictions, it is possible to imagine that the solitary women in the *chadari* in the FMF page might in fact be an image of a women veiling her resistance; perhaps she is using the cover provided by the *chadari* to hide school books, the camera she used to record Taliban abuses, her use of lipstick, or her identity as she flees persecution.²⁶

Further, I wonder how well this woman in *chadari*, as a symbol of women's lives under the Taliban might have fit the day-to-day "look" of women within Afghanistan. For example, many women may not have been seen daily in *chadari* simply because the garment itself was relatively expensive in a poverty stricken society where women were banned from almost all work outside the home. Households and neighbors were said to sometimes share one garment, limiting, I would imagine, the number of women who at any one time were seen at all outside their homes in

Afghanistan. The restrictions on women that did not allow them outside their homes without a male relative further limited who had access to public spaces where the chadari had to be worn. The enforcement of the chadari rules though brutal, were also varied, particularly between places that resisted the Taliban, such as Kabul, and those that did not, as well as between urban and rural areas (Shah 2002; PHR 2001).²⁷ Thus images that depict women's lives might have looked different in a variety of settings.

The FMF had updated its page by May of 2001. Unlike the earlier picture on the FMF page, the new image no longer dominated the space on the page. The majority of the page's space was now taken by text, with bullets linking the reader to further information. Rather than a solitary figure, the new image contained a group of chadari-clad women surrounding a single woman who looks out from the middle around the shoulders of the others toward her right. The chadari in the picture were in a variety of colors, perhaps a gesture to autonomy. There might even have been recognition of a variety of styles to the veiling as the woman, whose face we see, still had her head covered. The women in chadari appeared to band together in their efforts to surround this woman, which at first I thought might be a gesture of solidarity, though a colleague observed when she saw the image that they could just as easily be turning the unveiled woman in to authorities. While perhaps less problematic than the first image, this image still presented many of the troubling aspects of the original image. It still centered the chadari as the first and primary visual representation of the problems for the women in Afghanistan, it still drew on the chadari in powerfully symbolic ways, and the women remained devoid of context.

Interestingly, and by way of contrast, during the same time period the above FMF images appeared, the RAWA page opened with very different images that were certainly as powerful in visual and symbolic intent, yet avoided the problems of the FMF page. The first page on the site contained, and still does contain, a photograph of the founder of RAWA, described as its "Martyred leader Meena." Meena Keshwar Kamal was assassinated in 1987 after years of work both against the Soviet invasion and the fundamentalists in Afghanistan and in Pakistani refugee camps. There is much to consider in this image, including the use of the concept of martyrdom. However, for this analysis what is particularly interesting in the use of this image is its powerful symbolic meaning that, unlike the images on the FMF site, served to quickly contextualize the realities for women living under the Taliban within a larger political struggle and history. Kamal's life and death, after all, speak to RAWA's long-standing work for democracy. For those of us who accessed this site from the U.S., our government's imperialistic involvement in the region is immediately implicated through this image. Kamal reminds all that there were democratic, feminist, and secular groups organized and able to serve as alternatives to the misogynist and fundamentalist military organizations so heavily funded and backed by the U.S. government in their proxy war against the Soviets.

Those who looked beyond the opening pages found that RAWA's site is also rich in images compared to the FMF site. Rarely was a lone woman in *chadari* shown without specific captions as to the circumstances depicted or without other images also present. Women were shown living and working in a variety of conditions within Afghanistan and within the Pakistani refugee camps. Often where the chadari image appears it was rendered fully symbolic, as in a cartoon image of a woman's outline done in chains or as wallpaper behind other photographic and textual images. The AWM sight also provided contrasts to the early images on the FMF page. Here a drawing depicting a veiled woman holding a child with faces showing is presented as the organizations logo. The page included a variety of pictures of women in a variety of styles of veiling throughout Afghanistan and in the refugee camps in Pakistan. Captions clearly contextualize the images. Further, the primary focus within these images on AWM's site were the RAWA run schools and hospitals the organization supports. AWAI's primary image on its opening page was its logo, a drawing of a veiled woman, again face showing, on top of a map of Afghanistan. Within AWAI's

site there were few other images, but where pictures are presented they are snapshots of events in which members had participated. These examples are important because they further counter the passive and decontextualized symbolic images within FMF's site, highlighting alternative but equally powerful means of representing the crisis for women living under the Taliban.

The FMF had drastically restructured their page in the period after the Taliban's fall. In the page accessed on 12/18/2002, visual images continue to be presented, but are smaller in size. One gets to the information on Afghanistan from a hot link on the FMF main page entitled "Help Afghan Women." The word "Gender Apartheid" has been removed from links, though not from the information within the site. The new opening page includes two small photos. The first image was of a group of young women, smiling and in various forms of veil with a caption that reads "Afghan girls are finally allowed back to school. However, they still face an uncertain future without adequate security or funding for their health and education." The second picture was of a woman, again in veil but not chadari, with a caption "Chair, Independent Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan." By March 29, 2003 the woman in the picture, Dr. Sima Samar, was named in the caption. The rest of the page links readers to an array of information, including materials assessing the U.S.' on-going involvement in the region. A woman in chadari remains on the FMF site but was located by clicking a link labeled "background" once in the "Help Afghan Women" page. This image showed a woman standing against a brick wall holding one child, with two other children standing in front of her. The image appeared next to a section of text entitled "Gender Apartheid -- The Elimination of Women's Rights" which highlights the history of the Taliban's decrees against women. Above this image, linked to a different topic, was the cover for Rashid's text. Below the image and its accompanying text on gender apartheid is a final photograph. These women are in various forms of veil, but not chadari, laughing and smiling, walking the streets of Kabul. The caption for this picture reads "Women university students in Kabul in 1995 before the Taliban takeover."

These changes on the FMF site, particularly those on its new opening page, are important steps in the direction of meeting Khan's call for a "methodology that historicizes narratives of experience by identifying how geopolitics...helped determine the current social formation in Afghanistan" (1). For example, the cite now opens with graph from CARE international that gives the statistic on international aid to Afghanistan since October, 2001. While the Feminist Majority's new page is much improved, we must still raise questions about the deeper meaning conveyed in its layout.²⁸ Removal of images of women in chadari from the front page seems to imply that concerns about the chadari are now a matter of history. This is clearly not the case. For example, a Human Rights Watch report on conditions in western Afghanistan in November, 2002, noted that while women and girls have made strides in gaining access to education, the administration of Ismail Khan, the military leader of the area, "has announced an increasing number of restrictions and prohibitions on everyday conduct" including that "Both men and women are instructed by the government to wear non-western, Islamic dress: women must wear the burqa or closed chadori; men have been forbidden from wearing neckties" (5). The FMF images continue to underemphasize the history of conflicts over veiling previous to the Taliban's regime, but this history continues to be vital to understanding the veil's reassertion in the current period.

Feminists around the globe need room to critique any practice, cultural or political, which oppresses women and hinders their liberation. We need space to analyze and consider the veil, imposed or not, just as we do push-up bras or cosmetic surgery. It is useful here to consider Mojab's critique of the relativism present within some postmodern theory. Mojab reminds us that women in the "West" need not sit still in the face of oppression abroad, nor do women in Islamic countries need to silence themselves regarding either racism or sexism within or outside their own cultures (26). She states, "it would be appropriate to criticize the veil even if all Muslim women voluntarily used it. There is nothing sacred about veiling, Islamic or non-Islamic. Indeed, feminists

in the West have not outdone Iranian women and men who have denounced the hijab and chador throughout this century" (25-26). Mojab's discussion is reinforced in Moghissi's observation that "The best way to express solidarity with Muslim diaspora is not to keep silent about oppressive features of one's own cultural tradition or the inhumane practices of fundamentalist regimes"(4). But when we seek to work in cross-global solidarity it is necessary that we consider carefully the images we draw on to do our work. It is vital that we do not repeat or recreate troubling forms of oversimplification that remove our efforts from the larger forces in which they are shaped (Mojab, Khan, Noelle-Karimi). In a 2000 interview in *MS*, Sima Wali emphasized this point as it relates specifically to the images of veiling within the U.S., noting

As an Afghan woman and a development worker, my frustration intensifies whenever I read about the Taliban's gender apartheid policies. There is now more than sufficient evidence of its treatment of Afghan women. But addressing only the symptoms of its rule, such as the burqa...lacks vision... Until Afghanistan gets sustainable development help and genuine political attention, U.S. foreign-policy games will continue to draw out Afghan women's misery. This is what is eluding many feminists in the U.S. It's not the *burqa* but the politics behind our problems that has kept Afghan women isolated and dehumanized. (27)

Arline Lederman continues and expands on the observations of Wali into the post-9/11 period, considering the way this view limits our understanding of Afghan women. She begins her 2002 essay by stating

The drama of the Chadari, the cruelty of the Taliban and limited knowledge of Afghan history have led us to oversimplify both the difficult struggles and enormous strengths of the *zan* (the word means "women" in Farsi) of Afghanistan. Reality is richer and more complex than our headlines reveal. (46).

This diversity of experience and history, struggle and strength, must be kept as central components in our attempts to understand both our own government's role in the region, and our own desires to act in solidarity. This constant foregrounding of historical, social, and experiential context are particularly necessary parts of the lenses we must use when viewing, as well as posting, images and information obtained on the internet.

Forms of Activism

As noted above, most political organizations that utilize cyberspace to provide information do so to inspire action. Eisenstein is once again useful when she observes,

Net feminisms are a different kind of politics, an additional form of interaction and dialogue. They are not meant to stand in for collective expressions of real "bodied" women, but rather to enhance these connections when onsite action and deliberation are impossible...email and listserves become alternative sources of information upon which to build counter politics. (164-165)

Computer technologies have proven very useful in the transmission of organizing information that can circumvent corporate and governmental controls. Meeting times, locations, tactics, strategies, immediate on site reports, and requests for assistance can all be transmitted to a wide-ranging audience. Among recent evidence of the very powerful use of new computer technology as an organizing tool were the international anti-globalization movement actions against the World Bank and IMF in Seattle, Prague, Genoa, and Cancun. Likewise, the organizations involved in the struggle in Afghanistan also utilized the Web to motivate action. RAWA requested, indeed

continues to request, a number of types of aide and action through its site, including: support for letter writing campaigns and other actions; translators for its Web work; donations of computers, copiers, films and books, for its educational and outreach work; as well as money for its school, health, relief and operating costs. During the Taliban's rule, they also sought contributions of video cameras, cassette duplicators, sound and film mixing equipment for use in its work documenting atrocities. The FMF's site encouraged readers to, among actions discussed below, write letters, sign petitions, form "Action Teams," fund schools, and buy Afghan crafts. The AWM and AWAI sought aid for their programs, help in fund raising, and volunteers as well as announcing upcoming events. Here I briefly discuss two prominent examples of such activist uses of computer technology; one a broad based FMF educational campaign with both on-line and off-line activist dimensions, the second a widely circulated petition that circulated most frequently through e-mail.

The campaigns organized by FMF against the Taliban have been credited with some vital successes. For example, Khan, after relating the history of the oil pipeline proposed by UNOCAL to link Turkmenistan to Pakistan by way of Afghanistan, notes

That this project has now been cancelled is one example of contradictory strategies that work towards women's empowerment. Much of Feminist Majority literature suggests a missionary zeal that seeks to save Afghan women from Afghan men....Yet it was their lobbying and the resulting political pressure that helped increase an awareness of the situation in Afghanistan. So much so that UNOCAL cited pressure from the Feminist Majority and other feminist organizations protesting the state of women's rights in Afghanistan in their decision to suspend the project in 1998. (13)²⁹

However a part of the FMF's campaigns reinforced the contradictory and troubling use of veiling seen within the images used within their sites.

The FMF's campaigns, as revealed through promotion on their Web site, relied heavily on the image of the *chadari* as the symbol of oppression of women. Among the FMF requests that people write letters and sign petitions, on their pre 9/11 Web site was a hot button linking readers to their "back to school" campaign. In this campaign, participants were encouraged to engage in a series of learning events that included obtaining a *chadari* and having those present at events try it out. Another part of the FMF campaigns involved purchasing pieces of mesh symbolic of the *chadari* as a "symbol of remembrance" to be worn until the rights of Afghan women are restored. The FMF campaigns were given further publicity through the power of their coordinator, Mavis Leno, who headed the FMF efforts against the Taliban by the late 1990s, and were further popularized by Oprah Winfrey.³⁰ Parts of the FMF campaign were taken up by other organizations. For example, AWA, in a report on a local fundraiser in 2001, noted that organizers had made these "symbols" available to the audience.

The FMF educational activism seems to also imply that their audience was one that did not include people who would already be familiar with the *chadari* from their own families and cultural experiences. It seems this audience would also not be motivated to action by the sheer brutality, or magnitude, of restrictions on women's lives under the Taliban without fully immersing themselves in the experience of the *chadari*. Pointing out the limitations of the campaign to have women try out the *chadari* to capture the life of women under the Taliban Shah stated, that "A more accurate rendition of women's Taliban-induced problems would probably entail an enforced fast and/or being stoned by classmates" (2). In taking this campaign to schools, I wonder about its impact on the child whose relatives might choose, for religious reasons, to veil within the U.S. What was their experience when exposed to classmates donning this dress to understand "oppression" elsewhere in the world? The limits of these uses of the *chadari* for motivating action were seen at the time of the fall of the Taliban, when images of unveiling became symbolic of the liberation brought to

women by U.S. troops to the region. Yet, as noted above, many women report a desire to veil, women in many regions face attack where practicing the new freedom to not veil, and in at least one region there are reports of its renewed imposition. The reductionism within the campaign also detracts attention from education the history from which the Taliban emerge, including about the complicit role of the U.S. In the conclusion to her discussion of the FMF and other uses of the veil, Shah states:

The work of the Feminist Majority and other women's rights groups--drumming up humanitarian aid, funneling funds to women's clinics and home-schools, petitioning the administration to pressure Pakistan and other countries to stanch the flow of arms to Afghanistan--is exemplary. But the tactic of capitalizing on American horror of the Muslim veil, while it may work well in drawing attention to the heartbreaking plight of women in Afghanistan, has now been undeniably uprooted from reality. Let's drop it.

On the 2002 FMF site the campaign to have site reader's wear the chadari has been dropped. The campaign to raise awareness and money through the wearing the pieces of mesh was still available at the time of this paper's completion.

It should be noted that a RAWA representatives participated in the Oprah event, and RAWA and FMF have often worked together over the years (Thrupkaew, 2002). While it is certainly worth considering and analyzing further RAWA's own approaches, and indeed contextualizing their own work in the history of the region, as represented on their Web site the group's approaches still provides an interesting comparative contrast to the FMF's campaigns.³¹ Digging into RAWA's Web site we find that the organization developed and publicized a complex position on the imposition of the veil that should give all U.S. feminists further cause to reconsider our own approaches to these questions. Located on page four of their listing of their 1999 published "Standpoints" RAWA wrote:

Besides being mentioned in the Holy Quran, veil is also a part of our culture as it is indeed in Russia and other non-Muslim countries of this region. However, it is the inability of the fundamentalists to understand and improve the economic conditions of the masses which make them engage themselves in a shameless, cruel and inhuman drive to impose hejab. This is an attempt on the part of the fundamentalists to suppress our women and deprive them of their basic rights. We hold that nobody has the right to instruct Afghan men to grow beard or force the Afghan women to wear hejab.

Here the organization contextualized the practice of the veil in ways both the FMF's images and campaign activism failed to do. The religious and other cultural basis of the practice was recognized, and the existence of the practice in non-Islamic and "Northern" cultures was emphasized. Further, the restrictions on women were placed in tandem with restrictions on men, resisting the impulse to make the veil the only cultural symbol of the regime's disregard for human rights. This statement also forced readers to acknowledge that the gendering in the Taliban's decrees included consequences for men, a subtlety that disrupts any inclination to see the situation as simply one of Afghan men against Afghan women. The organization also emphasized their view that the root issues facing Afghanistan were political and economic and contextualizes veiling in this reality. In concluding the above standpoint, RAWA included a recommendation for member action, asserting "As a token of defiance, and without assigning any priority to it, we will resist wearing veil in the manner the fanatics want us to." Here RAWA indicates that the action of solidarity would not be over-emphasized compared to their other concerns. The action is also promoted in a way that gives women individual autonomy, allowing women to define for themselves the manner in

which they will resist. In thinking about this more complex approach, Mojab again provides a useful reminder that, in our solidarity campaigns,

we can, instead, adopt a dialectical approach which recognizes the individuality and particularity of each woman and each feminist movement, each within its specific historical context, but at the same time acknowledges that, even in their uniqueness, they share common struggles against capitalist and precapitalist patriarchy. We can respect the voluntary choice of any woman to wear the veil, and we can oppose forcible unveiling..., yet we can at the same time criticize veiling or any segregation of human beings along sex lines. (27)

Mutuality, agency, context, history, and complexity are vital ingredients useful to judging the activism we find promoted on the internet, and necessary for more effective solidarity.

Beyond the particularly unique example of the FMF campaign, the internet is well suited to promoting low risk forms of activism, especially the use of petitions. The internet makes it very easy to disseminate and gather petitions as these can be read and signed onto from the privacy of your own home requiring little time or effort. Considered spam by many, OMB Watch reports that petitions are not particularly effective at influencing politicians in Congress (Fryer and Chaudhry, 1999). However, petitions can be useful to organizations in disseminating information, motivating people to take that first step toward committing to more substantive means of financial and volunteer support, and generating potential contact lists for supporters for later organizational use (Fryer and Chaudhry, 1999; Pincus, 2001).

Petitions were prominent in efforts to gain women's human rights within Afghanistan under the Taliban. One petition in particular was widely circulated on the internet in the 1990's. The petition often arrived with the subject line of "The Taliban's War on Women" and includes an opening line "The government of Afghanistan is waging a war upon women." Joy Pincus of Women's E-news service reported in 2001 that petition signers were requested to copy and send the petition to others, with every fiftieth signatory asked to forward the petition to sarabande at Brandeis University. In less than two weeks, Pincus reports the appeal brought down the Brandeis University computer system (where it apparently originated) as thousands of completed petitions poured-in. The university cancelled the e-mail address and at least as early as January 10, 1999, Brandeis issued requests to stop forwarding this email.³² Interestingly, the Unet announcement from Brandeis University in 1999 directed those who wanted to help with the situation in Afghanistan to the FMF site for more information. Despite the closing of the address, as Pincus, reports the petition "refuses to die" and was still circulating two years after the account's closure (2).³³

This petition was a fascinating example of the critical issues the contradictions within internet activism. While it irritated many when they received it for the tenth or twentieth time, it should also be remembered that this petition did educate thousands, if not millions, of readers around the globe to the crisis in Afghanistan under the Taliban, as RAWA itself recognized on its site in the 1990s. Further, the speed with which the Brandeis system was overloaded by responses showed that people clearly respond to this simple form of activism. However, the petition also points to the way in which petitions can create havoc on e-mail systems and wariness in recipients when they do not originate from reliable sources. Although Khan does not specify that she is discussing the sarabande petition, she does discuss a strikingly similar sounding e-mail that she and many others recently received with details of "horrors perpetrated on the Women in Afghanistan" (9). Noting the problems with this petition, Khan states

Scholars and activists, myself included, are outraged by the conditions of women's lives [in Afghanistan]. It is not my intention to argue for a political petition to come with detailed contextualization....However, given the generalizations that normally accompany popular accounts about Muslims and in this case Afghanistan, an attachment might have helped many...become more familiar with what they were petitioning for. Many people cannot bring themselves to add their name to the protest list—perhaps because within this communication, the Afghan woman as subject has no context and no history. (9)

Regardless of whether Khan's comments had the sarabande petition in mind or not, her comments are still instructive. As Khan notes of her petition, the sarabande petition was relatively accurate in most of the information provided on the conditions within Afghanistan, but its tone and what it left unsaid were equally vital. Missing was any sense of the history or larger geopolitical world in which the Taliban and the crisis for women arise. Further the petition, reduced a complex crisis to one of Afghan men against Afghan women. The petition did not acknowledge the diversity of women's experience within Afghanistan, nor did it point to resistance within Afghanistan to the Taliban's rule. Finally it does not provide the reader with anyplace else to go for information.

We must view the information presented in petitions, particularly those circulated without verifiable agency, with a degree of skepticism. But this does not mean that all non-internet circulated petitions are a problem, but it should be clear where the petition comes from, how it will be collated and how and when it will be forwarded to appropriate targeted bodies. It should be noted that many organizations used the internet based petitions very effectively. Here FMF and RAWA both are good examples. For example, FMF's petitions required your signature, sent signatures back to the organization for tabulation and to avoid duplication, and informed you which specific governmental representatives and policy-making bodies were targeted. Further, to participate in either organization's petitions you had to access their sites. This exposed readers to even more information and puts them in contact with further ways to act on the issues. While they are often good first steps, internet petitions are only first steps in activism. Even as they bring awareness, petitions can also be dangerously unreflective and hence conservative forms of activism, encouraging thousands, to sign-on but avoid the necessary, more time consuming, and perhaps personally challenging, political work required in systemic change. In the case of the sarabande petition, signing on was a particularly vacuous form of activism, which has the dangerous potential of confusing and desensitizing people to calls for help from organizers in the future (Pincus, 2001). The forms of activism encouraged of the internet require a degree of savvy both on the part of readers and activists.

Conclusion: On-Going Crisis

In many ways, the world I originally sought to understand when seeking out information via the internet has drastically altered; in others I fear it tragically continues (Human Rights Watch, 2002). The bombing and U.S. military presence in Afghanistan did push the Taliban from governmental control, but a tentative interim government has only a marginal hold in the society. Factional infighting has threatened this coalition government. The U.S. continues to be involved in the region militarily and monetarily, overtly and covertly. Gender is a major battleground in these conflicts. Women and children continue to be among the major victims of the on-going crisis. Women have worked hard to have voice and presence in the government against great odds. They have met with support as well as threats and great resistance from many inside Afghanistan as well as cynical manipulation by U.S. leaders (Mehta, 2002; Kolhatkar 2002). As I write, media attention in the U.S. has once again left the crisis of Afghanistan for a new front in Bush's on-going "War on Terror," carried this time to Iraq. The anonymous woman in the FMF picture comes back to haunt me. Who is she? What would she say to Americans today? Will her image be transferred to

symbolize the oppression of women living in other places in the havoc left in the wake of U.S. operations?

My interest in this topic was originally grounded in both my concern with previous U.S. involvement in the region of Afghanistan as well as with the rising influence of Christian fundamentalism within the U.S. Bush's easy slippage in a number of moments in the first days after the attacks of 9/11 into the language of "crusades" and frameworks of "good" versus "evil," along with the pronouncements of Jerry Falwell who located the cause of the events in the nation's ungodliness, blaming feminists among others for god's wrath, has done little to alleviate these concerns (Moore, 2001).³⁴ Since 9/11 various members of the current and former national security establishment--including participants of the (no-longer-so) secret government that brought us Iran/Contra--are given air time as experts on terrorism and military policy (News Service, 2002). In this new age marked by the U.S.' increasingly aggressive stances worldwide, where so much information is circulating on the internet, it is more vital than ever that we know the history of the voices we hear and inquire at all levels about the voices we are not hearing.

As the feminist, human rights, and peace communities, along with many others, struggle over tactics and strategies to reframe the debate in the many rapidly changing crises in the post-September 11th world, the discussion of the widely circulated petition outlined above should help us consider seriously the efficacy of the activism we promote through the internet. For example, petitions have the potential to draw people out of their shock and motivate mobilization to oppose the rapidly increasing crisis for civil liberties at home and indiscriminate bombing abroad. But they also have the potential to create burnout. Efforts to impact change in U.S. policy must involve much more than surfing the Web or e-mailing petitions. People must locate real bodies, and join with them, taking those bodies to the halls of power. Further, while the outcomes of the act are still being debated, in the wake of the *Patriot Act* organizations using the internet must now contend with more severe surveillance of their activities, including their organizational mailing lists (Cohen, 2002; Mathieson, 2002). The internet itself must be placed in context and does not exist totally free of the geopolitical societies in which it is used.

While the FMF has removed the initial images analyzed in section three, and no longer promotes the campaign to raise awareness through donning the chadari, the problems surrounding the symbolic use of veiled women in the U.S. have in many ways intensified in the period after September 11th. The power and importance of understanding the complex history of and reliance on the veil as central images to informational and organizational campaigns is clear. Magazines, books, films and television in the U.S. all utilized the powerful image of the chadari in coverage of Afghanistan, and celebrated the veil's lifting as the U.S. bombs fell. This use is particularly striking in a host of recently published books. For example, Marion Wink's review of three recent texts on women in Afghanistan notes that each of these texts featured women or a woman in chadari (1).³⁵ There are, of course, other images of women in Afghanistan circulating within the culture, but the dominance of the chadari image continues to highlight the need for careful consideration of context.

In the midst of various world crisis since 9/11 we see how the issues of women quickly become tools to be utilized within the halls of power. Use of the veil as a tool of the state is not limited to those players from within Afghanistan. Moghissi, in her discussion of other contexts and places, provides a useful reminder as we consider gender's use in the current crisis in Afghanistan, when she states "...the constructed oppression of 'Muslim women' was central to...the Orientalization of the Middle East" (32).³⁶ The "occident" saw itself as a savior to women in the "orient," despite much evidence of the contradictions in this illusionary framing.³⁷ As I watched this new stage in the crisis for the people in Afghanistan unfold after 9/11 I grew increasingly concerned about the possibility that women in the region would again be used as a symbol of the "righteousness" of the U.S. cause. A basis for my concerns were substantiated when Laura Bush, spoke about the oppression of Afghan women under the Taliban as the first First Lady to address

the nation on the president's weekly radio address (given on November 17, 2001). But this use of women's status had not lead to women's liberation. As Noelle-Karimi notes, the symbolic use of the chadari has "unfortunately, lent itself to the political justification of Western military involvement in Afghanistan. Since the takeover of the Northern Alliance in Kabul it has become evident that the removal of the Taliban has done little to change the lot of women"(1). While it might be arguable how much life has altered for women in post- Taliban Afghanistan, the use of gender by the U.S. state for its own political aims was one of the very real places where U.S. feminists' solidarity with women in the region was tested.

A number of questions regarding solidarity and the internet are raised but not addressed in this analysis. One important issue not addressed includes the one way nature of this dialogue between the U.S. and other cultures, particularly those in the Third World. Are our attempts to act in solidarity with others establishing relationships of equality? Do we speak for and to, or are we in dialogue? Are we only giving aid on these internet sites, or do we offer space for women in Afghanistan to give aid to us? What insights could we gain if we saw women in other parts of the globe as consultants and models for our work in resisting and surviving in the wake of decreasing civil liberties so evident in the "brave new world" of post-September 11 official U.S. policy? How might the women in RAWA help U.S feminists gain better understandings of means to effectively build and sustain alternative health care for our communities, maintain access to education, and resist imposed closures as state alternatives and resources diminish?

This paper, in the end, serves as a reminder of the wisdom of Eisenstein's analysis: the internet is indeed a complex and contradictory tool for feminists seeking solidarity. With all its contradictions, including its potential uses by state and local powers antithetical to feminist concerns, the internet can certainly be a powerful tool in confronting oppressive regimes and reactionary policies. It provides a means to publicize stories that counter the hegemonic line. It offers ways to channel resources. It connects diasporic communities. Despite the limits in uses of the internet to promote activism discussed here, as noted throughout this paper, the work of groups like FMF, RAWA and others has been vital in putting pressure on NGOs, governments, and corporations to address women's concerns. They have helped many women in the U.S. begin to question the policies that lead up to the catastrophe for women under the Taliban. They have provided vital organizational tools to channel necessary money into the region were such resources literally mean the difference between life and death. U.S. mainstream feminist organizations were central to putting people in touch with RAWA and other organizations in the region working on Women's Rights. And the internet has been a critical, and for some the only, source of alternative information to the mass media framing. A great deal of organizing is happening through the internet throughout the globe. The e-mail petitions floating around in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 events began, for many, to create a sense of community opposed to the war in the face of a media onslaught designed to create the illusion of unity. This sense of community has enabled many to take action and organize away from their computers.

The internet can allow us, if we listen carefully, to reach out beyond national and cultural boundaries, to hear the voices of those most directly involved and thus act in ways determined by them to be most useful to their needs. The radical potential for the internet can only be harnessed in a world sensitive to issues of access, aware of potential biases, and versed in more and less effective political strategies. Eisenstein tells us that to tap this radical potential, ultimately requires that:

The globe must be deprivatized and the locales in which we live re-civilized. Coalition must be built to make the globe a habitable home. Cyber technologies can subversively assist this process by allowing new modes of communication across (168) the indecent racial/patriarchal divides. As women demand access to cyberspace--both to move beyond the confines of the body's geography AND to enhance the freedom of bodies-- a different

world is imagined. Such IMAGINATION is subversively hopeful because it indicts the REAL. (169)

he potential of the internet for radical change will only be realized if it inspires us to unplug from the cyberfantasy and move into the streets to affect change not only in the cyber-imaginary, but in the real world lives of women and men. The anti-globalization movement, the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, the rapid circulation of information not presented in the mainstream press in the wake of the World Trade Center tragedy, has shown us this radical potential. The struggle to link feminists in Afghanistan and in the U.S. in many ways continues this growing possibility. I started this project in part to explore possibilities of transnational solidarity. It became an exploration of the use of the internet as a first step to gathering information and moving to action in solidarity with women across the globe. In the process it raised particular concerns about how to move to solidarity without relying on, repeating, and recreating biases that haunt western thinking and actions in the regions. In the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, in the wake of the on-going U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, these topics seem most urgent. The need for feminists in the U.S. and Europe to link in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan, and other parts of the globe currently experiencing the terror of U.S. foreign policy, has become ever more imperative. I hope this analysis helps move feminists, particularly those in the US, toward more careful and nuanced views as we work in solidarity with woman seeking liberation across the globe.

Notes

¹ I am grateful for a number of institutional grants from California State University, Fresno, which helped provide time to complete this project. Parts of the paper were presented at various conferences, including the June 2001 *National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference* in Minneapolis, MN. I am grateful to various reviewers for their feedback, and especially for the critical readings of earlier drafts provided by my colleagues Berenice Carroll, Lynn Jacobsson, Priya Kurian, Janet Slagter, Kathryn Forbes, Mary Coomes and Theresia Rogerson. Thanks also to my student assistant Kristina Garcia.

² Spelling of the Taliban varies with some authors preferring Taleban. I try to be true to authors' preferences within quotes, but utilize Taliban as the most frequent spelling I have encountered. See "Reviewers Note" in M. Jamil Hanifi (2002) for a detailed look at the term.

³ Simple searches using the basic "Yahoo" search engine revealed the daunting task of sorting through information when utilizing the WEB. On June 7 and 8, 2001, using this engine to search for the word "Afghanistan" yielded 12 "new sites," 75 "site matches" and 127,000 "Web pages." Searching for "Taliban" will also yielded a great number of hits, including 1 "category match," 5 "site matches," and 127,000 "Web page matches." When I specified the "Taliban and Women" I found "400 Web matches," a little more manageable but still daunting to wade through.

Since the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Towers, the inundation of information has only become worse. On September 18, 2002, using this engine to search for the word "Afghanistan" yielded 18 "category matches," 3 "sponsor matches," and 269 "Web site matches," and 4,080,000 "Web page matches." Searching for "Taliban" also yielded a great number of hits, including 1 "category match", 2 "sponsor matches," 5 "site matches", 47 "Web site matches, and 1,090,000 "Web page matches." When I specified the "Taliban and Women" I found 3 "Web site matches," and 208,000 "Web page matches."

Among the many limits to reading these numbers, these hits include multiple references to the same Web site. Further, engines use different means to seek words presented in the search. Conceding this is a very crude, unsophisticated survey, I still think it is instructive on a number of levels, including highlighting the daunting amount and variety of information available on the topic through the internet.

⁴ Sima Wali devotes a part of her introduction in Sunita Mehata's edited volume to outlining the "truth and mythology" around the topic of Afghanistan. This includes a nine bullet basic guide to "The True Nature of the Afghan People." Among the items on this list are facts such as:

Afghans are not Arabs, nor are they of Middle Eastern or Persian origin. Afghans speak Dari, not Arabic or Persian...

The Afghans were aligned with the United States...to bring down communism;
While most Afghans are Muslim, this does not mean that they are militant Islamic fundamentalists...;
...the majority of those defined as terrorist, including those who committed the heinous acts of September 11,
are not of Afghan descent. (2002, 8-9)

⁵ Other examples of items that impact my position and "hearing" might include that I was raised in a Roman-Catholic family, in a small town in Indiana, or that I heard this report while living in a small rural college town in Illinois with little, though some, cultural diversity.

⁶ In these considerations I reflect on Edward Said's insight:

For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. And to be a European or an American in such a situation is by no means an inert fact. It meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer. [Italics in the original (11)].

Said defines Orientalism stating:

Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient...it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, event to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world...Indeed my real argument is that Orientalism is--and does not simply represent--a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world. [Italics in the original (12)].

⁷ A number of works examine U.S. current and past involvement in the region. Along with a number of works cited elsewhere in this paper, see Birsard and Dasquié, 2002; Maley, 1998; Rashid, 2000; and Roy, 2001)

⁸ I recognize the problem of the terms "Western" and "the West"(Mohanty, 505-508). It always begs the question, west to whom? Further, as Mojab points out, there are several objections to "constructing a universal "west" with its own unique women and feminism" and she lists among these the observations that "Western feminist criticism of the veil and the sexual apartheid policies of the Islamic regime cannot be equated with the positions of Western states and mainstream media (25-26)." I try to use this term sparingly in the paper as a short hand for European and Euro-American hegemonic constructions of culture, ideas, and politics.

⁹ What to call the particular kind of full body style covering conceived as the only proper form of veiling by the Taliban, now prominently depicted in the U.S. media's coverage, raises its own issues. Arlene Lederman (2002), in the note to her first use of the term chadari, clarifies that chadari is "The Afghan term for the head-to-toe pleated covering, usually called the burqa (an Arabic word) in the West. Sometimes spelled Chadri. (n1, 57)." Given that I am discussing Afghanistan, I have used the term chadari here, though I have left burqa wherever it was used in quoted text. Where speaking more generally of a wider more generic practice encompassing a variety of styles of coverings, or broader cross-cultural discussion of the use of such coverings, I utilize "veil" or "veiling."

¹⁰ Among many examples, for general discussions of veiling, see Fatima Mernissi's classic discussions (1987, 1991). Both Khan (2001) and Noelle-Karimi (2002) include analysis of the veil and how it is viewed by Westerners in the context of the Taliban as part of their larger discussions.

¹¹ A number of other authors also point out that the human rights and women's rights records of those who presented the main military opposition to the Taliban was also appalling (Deborah Ellis, 2000; Lucian Kim, 2000; James Ingalls, 2000). Indeed, recent news updates distributed by RAWA via their Web site include a number of reports of on-going attacks on women in post-Taliban Afghanistan, again by a number of parties affiliated both with and against the Taliban.

¹² For a provocative history of the Luddites, see Kirkpatrick Sale's 1995 work, *Rebels Against the Future*.

¹³ See note 2 above.

¹⁴ AWM was a US based organization founded in January of 2000 and organizes fundraising and information campaigns to channel support from the U.S. to RAWA's relief efforts. If you seek to give aide via RAWA's site from within the U.S., this is the first address provided to send donations. AWAI was an organization formed in 1992 to aid in protecting and promoting basic human rights for Afghan women.

¹⁵ I am particularly concerned that information on the Web, if not viewed with a critical eye, has the potential to endow a certain kind of legitimacy for institutions directly antithetical to feminist and democratic struggle. For example, among the sites I bumped into in seeking information on the Taliban and Afghanistan was a page hosted by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In an encyclopedic way it is quite useful. Unsurprisingly, the CIA barely acknowledges its own history in the region within its "World Factbooks", nor did it mention gender apartheid as among

what it calls the “transitional issues” raised by the Taliban. Regardless of the debates surrounding the level and directness of CIA involvement in Afghanistan, my point here is simply that the agency’s site is neatly sanitized from the geopolitical history it presents of the region, and that this sanitation performs the dubious function of further legitimizing the agency as an impartial information source. In searches for information on Afghanistan and the Taliban previous to September 11th, 2001, the Web provided a chance for intelligence agencies in the U.S. to sell themselves as trustworthy geopolitical “experts”. The use of the Web as a place to legitimize political organizations is further exposed in the fact that the Taliban controlled government and a number of Mujahadeen factions, also have utilized the Web to transmit information. Like the CIA’s information, these sites were appear very professional and informative to the unobservant eye. If the Web allows cross-global dialogue among feminists, its freedom also allows cross-global conversations by anti-feminists of all sorts. In my research, explicitly CIA, Taliban and Mujahadeen supported Web sites are far outnumbered by sites working for human rights. Since this paper examines feminist internet activities I did not discuss this in the paper’s body, but feel it an important point for feminists to remember as we consider the usefulness and limits of this resource.

¹⁶ We should remember that in parts of the country under the control of the Northern Alliance women also surmounted daunting challenges to access and disseminate information (Kim 2002, 2).

¹⁷ This is a very small sample and I do not want to overstate the prevalence of the issues I am about to discuss. I also do not wish to leave the impression that U.S. based sites always contain limitations or that RAWA is somehow more “authentic” in its cultural production. The situation is not that simple. For example, RAWA has been supported by the FMF in the past, and took part in some of the FMF campaigns I discuss in this paper. Further, as a recent article in the American prospect and response letter shows, RAWA’s own actions in the region and links to western feminists have also generated some discussion and scrutiny (Noy Thrupkaew, 2002; Hibaaq Osman, 2002). In thinking through the problem of creating monolithic entities out of either “Western” feminism” or “Muslim Women” I think Mojab’s 1998 discussion is particularly interesting and worth consideration. Coming from a somewhat different understanding of the issue, Khan’s “Between Here and There: Feminist Solidarity and Afghan Women” is also worth examination, as she allows us to consider the often conflated boundaries between “here” and “there” in representations of Afghan women.

¹⁸ I recall the popularity of *Dr. Martin* boots with fluffy skirts of varying lengths in the late 1980s and early 90s in some punk and riot grll circles.

¹⁹ This pictorial use of the chadari as a symbol of the oppression of women under the Taliban was reinforced by the FMF in other aspects of their educational campaigns (discussed in more detail in the next section).

²⁰ It seems particularly troubling given the critiques of such over emphasis on veiling presented in the literature. See not eight above.

²¹ Given the lack of information on the production of the FMF image, it is sobering to consider that the women depicted may not be “from” Afghanistan, or live under the Taliban at all. For example, she might be one of the thousands of U.S. woman or girls who have put on chadaris distributed by FMF to help them come to empathy with the women living under the Taliban. This campaign will be discussed below. She could also simply be a women hired by the photographer for FMF to produce the image. As this paper focuses on what was readily available to anyone accessing this Web site, I did not follow up with FMF to find out more information on the images production.

²² Shah begins her discussion by reporting on the lack of publicity around the PHR 2001 report. Reporting on PHR’s 2001 findings, Shah notes

Most striking in the face of U.S. feminist campaigns against the veil is the finding that over 80% of women in non-Talebans controlled areas say they wear a Chadari all the time and over 90% say that their dress rarely affects their daily lives. Over 80% of all respondents consider persecution for dress codes infractions as an unimportant issue (2).

While this information is important to remember, opinion polls can only take us so far in our assessment of oppression. For example, I think of various U.S. dress reform movements that were not always supported by a majority of women. There lack of prioritizing the issue does not mean it was an unimportant issue to address. Similarly, while the chadari may not be the issue women in Afghanistan feel needs to be addressed immediately, this alone does not mean it is unimportant for feminists either in the region or abroad to consider its theoretical implications.

²³ See RAWA’s Web site for a number of reports on conflicts around veiling. Also see Human Rights Watch report on conditions in western Afghanistan in November 2002.

²⁴ Regarding access to health care, for example, PHR 2001 report notes:

Women exposed to Taliban policies reported restrictions (60-69%) in receiving medical care largely because of financial limitations (45-55%). In the non-Taliban controlled area, financial limitations (13%) and lack of a *Chadari* (10%) were the most common reasons listed as restrictions. In the non-Taliban area, limited access to health care because of the lack of a *Chadari* suggests that cultural practices with regard to women had an effect on women’s access to health care in this are. Among women exposed to Taliban policies, lack of female

medical facilities (25-27%) and not having a *mahram* (male family escort) (14-19%) were listed as the other most common response limiting health care access. (7)

²⁵ I wonder if there is a parallel in clothing issues within the U.S that can help us think about this even further. For example, it is not the high-heeled shoes and skirts imposed both explicitly and implicitly in the dress codes of some companies that many women would regard as the only, or, for some, even the primary site of their oppression as corporate workers. Many U.S. workers would perhaps talk instead of problems of balancing career and family, sexual harassment, pay equity, and glass ceiling issues as the most immediate priorities of their lives. The Lady Luck exotic dancers union drive also comes to mind as a place where dress codes are not raised as central concerns while grievances about working conditions are. I do not mean to negate the possibility that U.S. women in these examples miss an important component of their oppression by not noticing cultural clothing restrictions, nor do I want to under-emphasize the repression of the imposed veil. I simply raise these examples as food for further thought. Examples of clothing politics, from the imposition of the veil to U.S. corporate dress codes, remind me of the importance of Marilyn Frye's work which so powerfully revealed that a whole "birdcage" goes into any single act of oppression, and when we reduce our view to a single wire we risk missing the structural boundaries that keep the bird in place (Frye, 1983).

²⁶ In September of 2001, while driving I listened to a radio interview on a KPFA regarding conditions for women in Afghanistan that revealed this reason the state sponsored veil might not be among the first reforms sought by women in the region without guarantees of the other decrees being lifted. According to the guest the chadari has been used to smuggle books, notebooks, pens and pencils into a chain of underground schools in the country.

²⁷ Shah notes that a

Physicians for Human Rights' 2001 study corrects for some biases in its hugely influential 1998 report, *The Taliban's War on Women*. "We made a huge deal in the last report about the clothing edicts," says PhD's Susannah Sirkin, sparking nationwide feminist outrage with the Taliban regime. But that report "was not a randomized sample," says PHR's Dr. Lynn L. Amowitz, continuing "It was a discussion of what was happening to educated Kabulese women who had abandoned traditional practices" (1).

²⁸ Beyond images, I also wonder about an issue within the text on the FMF site. What we are to make of the organization's new placement and de-emphasis of the concept "Gender Apartheid". If in its original use of apartheid FMF referred to practices where gender is enforced by powerful official bodies in a way that creates secondary status leading to segregation for those in the "suspect" gendered group, then why de-emphasize the concept given that there are certainly plenty of practices that would still fit this discussion around the globe? What does this concept's use only as a sub-heading to the FMF history on the Taliban's decrees mean when considering current realities for women's lives in Afghanistan or elsewhere?

²⁹ This victory is in many ways time bound. The issue of the pipeline remains one that can be easily resurrected in the newly emerging Afghanistan.

³⁰ Mavis Leno's information is provided by the National Women's History Project. An example of Oprah Winfrey's role in the popularizing the FMF campaign is provided by Shah (2).

³¹ See note 17 above.

³² Urban Legends and Folklore also reports on this incident and the closing of the e-mail account.

³³ I received this petition a number of times before and after the time I first became aware of the Brandies request to stop its circulation. It was resurrected for a brief period in the week's just after 9/11.

³⁴ In her November 2001 story, Ann Waveney Moore reports

Speaking on Robertson's television program, the 700 Club, shortly after the September tragedy, Falwell said the attacks reflected God's wrath at the American Civil Liberties Union, abortion providers, gay rights supporters and federal judges who banned school prayer. (6)

³⁵ Additionally, Cheryl Benard's *Veiled Courage* also features a group of women in blue chadari.

³⁶ Moghissi, applying Said's definition of orientalism to discussions of gender, states "Orientalism seized upon such divisions [cultural practices and social mores....histories, traditions, society, even races (32)], historically and actually...This gave the West legitimate authority not only to represent the Orient but to change its reality. It conferred upon the West a 'civilizing mission' in the Orient. (33)"

³⁷ In a useful comparison Moghissi argues that the post-Iranian revolution ushered in a new age of "Islamophobia." In this age "Self-congratulatory discussions from a Western hegemonic position about women's rights 'here' as opposed to their deprivations 'there' worked to fuel everyday racism, somehow softening the shame of the West as a violent, clumsy, bully" (37)."

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I am grateful for a number of institutional grants from California Sate University, Fresno, which helped provide time to complete this project. Parts of the paper were presented at various conferences, including the June 2001 *National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference* in Minneapolis, MN. I am grateful to various reviewers for their feedback, and especially for the critical readings of earlier drafts provided by my colleagues Berenice Carroll, Lynn Jacobsson, Priya Kurian, Janet Slagter, Kathryn Forbes, Mary Coomes and Theresia Rogerson. Thanks also to my student assistant Kristina Garcia.

³⁷ Spelling of the Taliban varies with some authors preferring Taleban. I try to be true to authors' preferences within quotes, but utilize Taliban as the most frequent spelling I have encountered. See "Reviewers Note" in M. Jamil Hanifi (2002) for a detailed look at the term.

³⁷ Simple searches using the basic "Yahoo" search engine revealed the daunting task of sorting through information when utilizing the WEB. On June 7 and 8, 2001, using this engine to search for the word "Afghanistan" yielded 12 "new sites," 75 "site matches" and 127,000 "Web pages." Searching for "Taliban" will also yielded a great number of hits, including 1 "category match," 5 "site matches," and 127,000 "Web page matches." When I specified the "Taliban and Women" I found "400 Web matches," a little more manageable but still daunting to wade through.

Since the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Towers, the inundation of information has only become worse. On September 18, 2002, using this engine to search for the word "Afghanistan" yielded 18 "category matches," 3 "sponsor matches," and 269 "Web site matches," and 4,080,000 "Web page matches." Searching for "Taliban" also yielded a great number of hits, including 1 "category match", 2 "sponsor matches," 5 "site matches", 47 "Web site matches, and 1,090,000 "Web page matches." When I specified the "Taliban and Women" I found 3 "Web site matches," and 208,000 "Web page matches."

Among the many limits to reading these numbers, these hits include multiple references to the same Web site. Further, engines use different means to seek words presented in the search. Conceding this is a very crude, unsophisticated survey, I still think it is instructive on a number of levels, including highlighting the daunting amount and variety of information available on the topic through the internet.

³⁷ Sima Wali devotes a part of her introduction in Sunita Mehata's edited volume to outlining the "truth and mythology" around the topic of Afghanistan. This includes a nine bullet basic guide to "The True Nature of the Afghan People." Among the items on this list are facts such as:

Afghans are not Arabs, nor are they of Middle Eastern or Persian origin. Afghans speak Dari, not Arabic or Persian...

The Afghans were aligned with the United States...to bring down communism;

While most Afghans are Muslim, this does not mean that they are militant Islamic fundamentalists...;

...the majority of those defined as terrorist, including those who committed the heinous acts of September 11, are not of Afghan descent. (2002, 8-9)

³⁷ Other examples of items that impact my position and "hearing" might include that I was raised in a Roman-Catholic family, in a small town in Indiana, or that I heard this report while living in a small rural college town in Illinois with little, though some, cultural diversity.

³⁷ In these considerations I reflect on Edward Said's insight:

For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. And to be a European or an American in such a situation is by no means an inert fact. It meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer. [Italics in the original (11)].

Said defines Orientalism stating:

Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient...it *is*, rather than expresses, a

certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, event to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world....Indeed my real argument is that Orientalism is--and does not simply represent--a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world. [Italics in the original (12)].

³⁷ A number of works examine U.S. current and past involvement in the region. Along with a number of works sited elsewhere in this paper, see Birsard and Dasquié, 2002; Maley, 1998; Rashid, 2000; and Roy, 2001)

³⁷ I recognize the problem of the terms "Western" and "the West"(Mohanty, 505-508). It always begs the question, west to whom? Further, as Mojab points out, there are several objections to "constructing a universal "west" with its own unique women and feminism" and she lists among these the observations that "Western feminist criticism of the veil and the sexual apartheid policies of the Islamic regime cannot be equated with the positions of Western states and mainstream media (25-26)." I try to use this term sparingly in the paper as a short hand for European and Euro-American hegemonic constructions of culture, ideas, and politics.

³⁷ What to call the particular kind of full body style covering conceived as the only proper form of veiling by the Taliban, now prominently depicted in the U.S. media's coverage, raises its own issues. Arlene Lederman (2002), in the note to her first use of the term chadari, clarifies that chadari is "The Afghan term for the head-to-toe pleated covering, usually called the burqa (an Arabic word) in the West. Sometimes spelled Chadri. (n1, 57)." Given that I am discussing Afghanistan, I have used the term chadari here, though I have left burqa wherever it was used in quoted text. Where speaking more generally of a wider more generic practice encompassing a variety of styles of coverings, or broader cross-cultural discussion of the use of such coverings, I utilize "veil" or "veiling."

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³⁷ For a provocative history of the Luddites, see Kirkpatrick Sale's 1995 work, *Rebels Against the Future*.

³⁷ See note 2 above.

³⁷ AWM was a US based organization founded in January of 2000 and organizes fundraising and information campaigns to channel support from the U.S. to RAWA's relief efforts. If you seek to give aide via RAWA's site from within the U.S., this is the first address provided to send donations. AWAI was an organization formed in 1992 to aid in protecting and promoting basic human rights for Afghan women.

³⁷ I am particularly concerned that information on the Web, if not viewed with a critical eye, has the potential to endow a certain kind of legitimacy for institutions directly antithetical to feminist and democratic struggle. For example, among the sites I bumped into in seeking information on the Taliban and Afghanistan was a page hosted by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In an encyclopedic way it is quite useful. Unsurprisingly, the CIA barely acknowledges its own history in the region within its "World Factbooks", nor did it mention gender apartheid as among what it calls the "transitional issues" raised by the Taliban. Regardless of the debates surrounding the level and directness of CIA involvement in Afghanistan, my point here is simply that the agency's site is neatly sanitized from the geopolitical history it presents of the region, and that this sanitation performs the dubious function of further legitimizing the agency as an impartial information source. In searches for information on Afghanistan and the Taliban previous to September 11th, 2001, the Web provided a chance for intelligence agencies in the U.S. to sell themselves as trustworthy geopolitical "experts". The use of the Web as a place to legitimize political organizations is further exposed in the fact that the Taliban controlled government and a number of Mujahadeen factions, also have utilized the Web to transmit information. Like the CIA's information, these sites were appear very professional and informative to the unobservant eye. If the Web allows cross-global dialogue among feminists, its freedom also allows cross-global conversations by anti-feminists of all sorts. In my research, explicitly CIA, Taliban and Mujahadeen supported Web sites are far outnumbered by sites working for human rights. Since this paper examines feminist internet activities I did not discuss this in the paper's body, but feel it an important point for feminists to remember as we consider the usefulness and limits of this resource.

³⁷ We should remember that in parts of the country under the control of the Northern Alliance women also surmounted daunting challenges to access and disseminate information (Kim 2002, 2).

³⁷ This is a very small sample and I do not want to overstate the prevalence of the issues I am about to discuss. I also do not wish to leave the impression that U.S. based sites always contain limitations or that RAWA is somehow more "authentic" in its cultural production. The situation is not that simple. For example, RAWA has been supported by the FMF in the past, and took part in some of the FMF campaigns I discuss in this paper. Further, as a recent article in the

American prospect and response letter shows, RAWA's own actions in the region and links to western feminists have also generated some discussion and scrutiny (Noy Thrupkaew, 2002; Hibaaq Osman, 2002). In thinking through the problem of creating monolithic entities out of either "Western" feminism" or "Muslim Women" I think Mojab's 1998 discussion is particularly interesting and worth consideration. Coming from a somewhat different understanding of the issue, Khan's "Between Here and There: Feminist Solidarity and Afghan Women" is also worth examination, as she allows us to consider the often conflated boundaries between "here" and "there" in representations of Afghan women.

³⁷ I recall the popularity of *Dr. Martin* boots with fluffy skirts of varying lengths in the late 1980s and early 90s in some punk and riot grrl circles.

³⁷ This pictorial use of the chadari as a symbol of the oppression of women under the Taliban was reinforced by the FMF in other aspects of their educational campaigns (discussed in more detail in the next section).

³⁷ It seems particularly troubling given the critiques of such over emphasis on veiling presented in the literature. See not eight above.

³⁷ Given the lack of information on the production of the FMF image, it is sobering to consider that the women depicted may not be "from" Afghanistan, or live under the Taliban at all. For example, she might be one of the thousands of U.S. woman or girls who have put on chadaris distributed by FMF to help them come to empathy with the women living under the Taliban. This campaign will be discussed below. She could also simply be a woman hired by the photographer for FMF to produce the image. As this paper focuses on what was readily available to anyone accessing this Web site, I did not follow up with FMF to find out more information on the images production.

³⁷ Shah begins her discussion by reporting on the lack of publicity around the PHR 2001 report. Reporting on PHR's 2001 findings, Shah notes

Most striking in the face of U.S. feminist campaigns against the veil is the finding that over 80% of women in non-Taleban controlled areas say they wear a Chadari all the time and over 90% say that their dress rarely affects their daily lives. Over 80% of all respondents consider persecution for dress codes infractions as an unimportant issue (2).

While this information is important to remember, opinion polls can only take us so far in our assessment of oppression. For example, I think of various U.S. dress reform movements that were not always supported by a majority of women. There lack of prioritizing the issue does not mean it was an unimportant issue to address. Similarly, while the chadari may not be the issue women in Afghanistan feel needs to be addressed immediately, this alone does not mean it is unimportant for feminists either in the region or abroad to consider its theoretical implications.

³⁷ See RAWA's Web site for a number of reports on conflicts around veiling. Also see Human Rights Watch report on conditions in western Afghanistan in November 2002.

³⁷ Regarding access to health care, for example, PHR 2001 report notes:

Women exposed to Taliban policies reported restrictions (60-69%) in receiving medical care largely because of financial limitations (45-55%). In the non-Taliban controlled area, financial limitations (13%) and lack of a *Chadari* (10%) were the most common reasons listed as restrictions. In the non-Taliban area, limited access to health care because of the lack of a *Chadari* suggests that cultural practices with regard to women had an effect on women's access to health care in this are. Among women exposed to Taliban policies, lack of female medical facilities (25-27%) and not having a *mahram* (male family escort) (14-19%) were listed as the other most common response limiting health care access. (7)

³⁷ I wonder if there is a parallel in clothing issues within the U.S that can help us think about this even further. For example, it is not the high-heeled shoes and skirts imposed both explicitly and implicitly in the dress codes of some companies that many women would regard as the only, or, for some, even the primary site of their oppression as corporate workers. Many U.S. workers would perhaps talk instead of problems of balancing career and family, sexual harassment, pay equity, and glass ceiling issues as the most immediate priorities of their lives. The Lady Luck exotic dancers union drive also comes to mind as a place where dress codes are not raised as central concerns while grievances about working conditions are. I do not mean to negate the possibility that U.S. women in these examples miss an important component of their oppression by not noticing cultural clothing restrictions, nor do I want to under-emphasize the repression of the imposed veil. I simply raise these examples as food for further thought. Examples of clothing politics, from the imposition of the veil to U.S. corporate dress codes, remind me of the importance of Marilyn Frye's work which so powerful revealed that a whole "birdcage" goes into any single act of oppression, and when we reduce our view to a single wire we risk missing the structural boundaries that keep the bird in place (Frye, 1983).

³⁷ In September of 2001, while driving I listened to a radio interview on a KPFA regarding conditions for women in Afghanistan that revealed this reason the state sponsored veil might not be among the first reforms sought by women in the region without guarantees of the other decrees being lifted. According to the guest the chadari has been used to smuggle books, notebooks, pens and pencils into a chain of underground schools in the country.

³⁷ Shah notes that a

Physicians for Human Rights' 2001 study corrects for some biases in its hugely influential 1998 report, *The Taliban's War on Women*. "We made a huge deal in the last report about the clothing edicts," says PhD's Susannah Sirkin, sparking nationwide feminist outrage with the Taliban regime. But that report "was not a randomized sample," says PHR's Dr. Lynn L. Amowitz, continuing "It was a discussion of what was happening to educated Kabulese women who had abandoned traditional practices" (1).

³⁷ Beyond images, I also wonder about an issue within the text on the FMF site. What we are to make of the organizations new placement and de-emphasis of the concept "Gender Apartheid". If in its original use of apartheid FMF referred to practices where gender is enforced by powerful official bodies in a way that creates secondary status leading to segregation for those in the "suspect" gendered group, then why de-emphasize the concept given that there are certainly plenty of practices that would still fit this discussion around the globe? What does this concept's use only as a sub-heading to the FMF history on the Taliban's decrees mean when considering current realities for women's lives in Afghanistan or elsewhere?

³⁷ This victory is in many ways time bound. The issue of the pipeline remains one that can be easily resurrected in the newly emerging Afghanistan.

³⁷ Mavis Leno's information is provided by the National Women's History Project. An example of Oprah Winfrey's role in the popularizing the FMF campaign is provided by Shah (2).

³⁷ See note 17 above.

³⁷ *Urban Legends and Folklore* also reports on this incident and the closing of the e-mail account.

³⁷ I received this petition a number of times before and after the time I first became aware of the Brandeis request to stop its circulation. It was resurrected for a brief period in the week's just after 9/11.

³⁷ In her November 2001 story, Ann Waveney Moore reports

Speaking on Robertson's television program, the 700 Club, shortly after the September tragedy, Falwell said the attacks reflected God's wrath at the American Civil liberties Union, abortion providers, gay rights supporters and federal judges who banned school prayer. (6)

³⁷ Additionally, Cheryl Benard's *Veiled Courage* also features a group of women in blue chadari.

³⁷ Moghissi, applying Said's definition of orientalism to discussions of gender, states "Orientalism seized upon such divisions [cultural practices and social mores...histories, traditions, society, even races (32)], historically and actually...This gave the West legitimate authority not only to represent the Orient but to change its reality. It conferred upon the West a 'civilizing mission' in the Orient. (33)"

³⁷ In a useful comparison Moghissi argues that the post-Iranian revolution ushered in a new age of "Islamophobia." In this age "Self-congratulatory discussions from a Western hegemonic position about women's rights 'here' as opposed to their deprivations 'there' worked to fuel everyday racism, somehow softening the shame of the West as a violent, clumsy, bully" (37)."

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