Frames and Cuts: Post-Millennial Representations of West Asian Female Identities

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis and the work contained herein was composed entirely by me and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. Any sections of the thesis which have been published (or are forthcoming) have been identified in my acknowledgements. Information derived from the published work of others is recognised in the written text, and references have been provided in the Works Cited.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates visual and written representations of West Asian female identities, and intersects with the fields of postcolonial feminist literary studies, cultural visual studies, and studies in affect theory. More specifically, I examine representations of Afghan and Iranian women in the post-millennial period, against a background of a continually shifting geo-political climate, especially following the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001. Given the ever-changing topography of media and information dissemination in the post-millennial period, this project is interdisciplinary and considers visual, written, and hybrid media.

My distinctive contribution to the aforementioned fields of study is the introduction of the conceptual model of *remediated witnessing*, which focuses both on the witnessed individual and on the acts of witnessing and recording as reiterative processes. This thesis uses the model of remediated witnessing in an examination of the various media that frames West Asian female identities. I critically examine how women are ascribed to the following categories: Subaltern, Spokesperson, Mother, and Martyr. In my examination of these categories, I explore the ways that West Asian women are represented: in the face of global marketing and publishing trends, especially following 11 September 2001 and US military intervention in Afghanistan (Chapters Two and Three); and in consideration of familial and societal structures and acts of protest in Iran and Afghanistan (Chapters Four and Five). Using the model of remediated witnessing as a deconstructive tool, I negotiate the relationship between subject(ed) and agential positions as it applies to represented West Asian female identities. I suggest that the combined acts of performance, witnessing, and recording are layered, framed, and reframed from different angles. I argue that by cutting through or intersecting with these frames, a space can be created from which represented female identities can occupy both subject(ed) and agential positions.

Acknowledgements

For you, Dad

Love, always

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Introduction

Frames and Cuts: Post-Millennial Representations of West Asian Female Identities

Negotiating visual and written representations of West Asian female identities, this thesis introduces ways of fixing and unfixing meaning through processes of remediation, refraction, and reiteration. This thesis intersects with the fields of postcolonial feminist literary studies, contemporary cultural visual and media studies, studies in affect theory, and studies in cultural memory. More specifically, I examine representations of Afghan and Iranian women in the post-millennial period, and navigate ways in which the continually shifting geo-political climate impacts upon these representations, especially following the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001. This project is an interdisciplinary endeavour that considers both visual and written media, as well as texts which use a combination of the two. This interdisciplinary approach proves valid when taking into account the ever-changing topography of media and information dissemination in the post-millennial period, spanning issues such as censorship, data leaks, the evolution and efficiency of social media in comparison to "official" news outlets, and the fallibility of both.

My intervention into the study of West Asian female identities is put forward through a theorisation of framing and witnessing. My distinctive contribution to the aforementioned fields of study, with which this thesis intersects, is my presentation of the conceptual model of *remediated witnessing*. In my consideration of represented identities, I principally examine the acts of performing and witnessing, often in conjunction with one another. No representation is absolute, but is perceived from a

multitude of different angles, recorded or mediated by different media, by different hands, and by different voices. I use remediated witnessing to negotiate the relationship between subject(ed) and agential positions as it applies to represented—performed and witnessed—West Asian female identities. I employ the model of remediated witnessing in an examination of the various media that is used to represent West Asian female identities, and the projected perceptions attached to these representations. These representations are often charged with pre-conceived stereotypes and neo-imperialist epistemologies within the context of "Western" political and media rhetoric and the production and reception of literary and creative works.[1] Remediated witnessing is a deconstructive tool. The combined acts of performance, witnessing, and recording are layered, framed, and reframed from different angles. I argue that acknowledging and cutting through these frames offers a space from which represented female identities can occupy both subject(ed) and agential positions.

Projected Female Identities: Resisting and Reformulating Tropes

This thesis uses remediated witnessing to negotiate and re-negotiate the layers of meaning assigned to West Asian women represented in a selection of visual and written

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[1] Edward W. Said posits imperialism as the "major, I would say determining, political horizon of modern Western culture" (*Culture and Imperialism* 70). Throughout this thesis I use the term "neo-imperialism" to refer to this "political horizon" as it is realised within the prejudicial sentiments and actions of the "West" in response to political, social, and economic concerns regarding "non-Western" countries in the twenty-first century. It is important to recognise that the "West" is a constructed space which Neil Lazarus identifies as "an ideological category masquerading as a geographic one" (44). Lazarus addresses the inherent problem of the "West" insofar as it "references neither a polity nor a state … but a 'civilization,' something altogether more amorphous and indeterminate" (44). I will hitherto leave this term unmarked, but make reference to the "West" self-consciously, aware of its limits and flaws, especially in connection to my discussion of "neo-imperialism." Referring to the "West," I recognise the US, Britain, and (to a lesser extent) countries belonging to continental Europe, but am self-aware of the geographical and continually shifting political and cultural distinctions amongst these various nations.

media, assessing works published in or translated into English. I demonstrate how the model of remediated witnessing can work to reformulate and redefine subject(ed) and agential identities, wherein an agential position is achieved through autonomous expression, while the subject position typically represents an individual upon which meaning is already inferred: they are subjected to an already prescribed role. In Chapter One I theorise the distinction and relationship between these subject(ed) and agential identities, drawing from the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Judith Butler. My central argument develops out of this theorisation, and I suggest that by pointing out, cutting through, or intersecting with the discursive frames which form stereotypes of female identity (through processes of remediated witnessing), women can occupy both subject(ed) and agential positions simultaneously.

West Asian women can be expected to act, or to perform, in certain ways; they are subjected to, or prescribed with, a particular stereotype of female identity. However, I argue that the process of remediated witnessing (in conjunction with acts of recording, testifying, and framing) refracts or reiterates the discursive frameworks that formulate the stereotypes under consideration in this thesis, subverting and destabilising them. The relationship between subject(ed) and agential identities, within the context of remediated witnessing, is explored in two key ways throughout the thesis. First, if an individual is subjected to a particular stereotype, they are expected to represent this stereotype. If we understand this representation as a mode of performance, then agency (as individualised, autonomous expression) is realisable. Thus, as I will elaborate on in Chapter One, agency operates within a framework of subjectivation, which is what Butler calls the "paradox of subjectivation" (*Bodies that Matter* 15). Second, the discursive representations of these stereotypes are both constructed and destabilised by witnesses. The position of witness is not a passive role. Rather, witnesses perceive,

interpret, record, and testify to what they see or hear. A witness can make an individual the subject of their recording or testimony, prescribing them with a particular identity trope. However, each time this representation is reiterated, and even reshaped, by new witnesses of the initial recording, or other recordings of the same individual, additional layers manifest. The folds of these composite layers represent the process of remediated witnessing within which agential expression can draw attention to the artifice of the performance, and thus the stereotyped, subjected identity can be construed.

Across five comprehensive chapters, this thesis explores West Asian female identities that are subjected to, or can be interpreted as belonging to, the following categories: Subaltern, Spokesperson, Mother, and Martyr. These tropes or stereotypes, assigned to denote a person's identity, represent a strategic selection of categories that are variously attached to women represented across visual and written media.[2] The above categories have been chosen because of their significance in relation to influential postcolonial discourses, foregrounded by Spivak (Subaltern); in response to global marketing, translation, and publishing trends, especially following 11 September 2001 and the US and British invasion of Afghanistan (Subaltern and Spokesperson); in consideration of familial and societal structures and expectations both in Iran and Afghanistan (Mother and Martyr); and in light of discourses of female resistance and protest (Mother and Martyr).

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[2] I make use of the terms "trope" and "discourse" throughout this thesis. Michel Foucault argues that we should not treat "discourses as a group of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (54). The object is categorised as a result of active relations across institutions. As representation, discourse in practice "do[es] not define its [the object's] internal constitution, but [is] what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority" (Foucault 50). As with the object of discourse, the trope (which is subjected upon the individual), exists as part of a discursive field, of dialectical practices and systems that assign meaning.

The exploration of these categorisations is not intended to reinforce them, but rather to consider ways in which these tropes are formulated, performed, reiterated, resisted, rewritten, and reframed. There is no single female identity. Identities are plural compositions, made up of personal experiences and identifications related to culture, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender, amongst others. In the case of the represented women studied here, plural identities are (re-)configured in visual and written media. The tropes explored throughout this thesis are not static, and often overlap with one another. I use the conceptual model of remediated witnessing to break down these tropes as they appear in various visual and written media, or to show how these texts, themselves, are already consciously working towards reframing female identities.

Multidirectional Trajectories in Postcolonial Feminism

My pre-eminent focus on West Asian women and my attempt to rework the relationship between subject(ed) and agential positions as it applies to represented female identities, entails a commitment to feminism. Given that my research is engaging with neo-imperial and transnational politics and media, negotiating the relationships between West Asia (mainly focusing on Afghanistan and Iran) and the West (predominantly the US and Britain) there must also be an open consideration of how feminist movements coincide with postcolonialism, and vice versa. Just as with female identities, feminism is not singular. In this section, I attempt to trace some of the significant trajectories of postcolonial feminism(s) which serve to inform and contextualise my own research.

The premise that "Sisterhood is Global" surfaced in conjunction with second wave feminism in the 1960s-80s. There are a number of limitations associated with this slogan, but Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj also highlight a positive outcome: "Global feminism brought First and Third World women together within a project of

feminism: it encouraged cultural exchange, shed light on some important Third World women's issues, and cleared a space for Third World women in the First World" (6-7).[3] Despite this apparently inclusive model, however, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty claim that global feminism remains "premised on a center/periphery model where women of color or Third World women constitute the periphery" (xviii). Literary texts written by Third World women were also often "viewed primarily as sociological treatises": a window through which to see a different cultural context (Amireh and Majaj 7). The dangers of this kind of reading practice (and the marketing associated with this practice) will be considered at length in Chapters Two and Three. Existing within a framework of "centre to periphery," literary and polemic texts written by Third World women are labelled as "global" insofar as they provide insight into "other" countries beyond the "West." Such "peripheral" texts are read through the dominant epistemological framework of the "centre."

In her famous 1984 essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," Mohanty discusses the impact of Western feminist discourses on Third World women as part of this framework of "centre to periphery":

> While radical and liberal feminist assumptions of women as a sex class might elucidate (however inadequately) the autonomy of particular women's struggles in the West, the application of the notion of women as a homogenous category to women in the third world colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political *agency*.

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[3] During the course of this thesis, I avoid the use of the term "Third World" (and "First World"), hereafter unmarked, unless in relation to its use by other critics.

Feminist activism is not something that can apply a "one size fits all" policy for all women across the world. Mohanty points towards the dangers of failing to acknowledge the heterogeneity of women's lives socially, culturally, politically, and individually, wherein the application of a Western feminist agenda might contradict or compromise an overlapping decolonising agenda. One woman's feminism is not every woman's feminism.

While it is necessary to ground feminist theoretical and practical approaches in an understanding of heterogeneity, particularly in light of postcolonial theory, it is equally important to acknowledge the global and transnational interactions that are at work. As Alexander and Mohanty put it: "Grounding analyses in particular, local feminist praxis is necessary, but we also need to understand the local in relation to larger, cross-national processes" (xix). It is valuable to consider both global and local feminist praxes, but we must also remain careful not to re-establish a binary model of "centre/periphery," or "global/local." Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan see the "global/local" binary to be at risk of "monolithic formation[s] [which] may also erase the existence of multiple expressions of 'local' identities and concerns and multiple globalities" (11). They, like Alexander and Mohanty, advocate for a series of what they call "[t]ransnational linkages," which cut across "global/local" spaces (Grewal and Kaplan 13). They propose that "[w]e need to articulate the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies," working comparatively across overlapping political, economic, social, and geographic structures (17).

Tracing the trajectories and/or genealogies of feminist praxes and female identities across locations which overlap and interact with one another is therefore tied to a consideration of movement not just between, but also amongst and across

community and geographical places. As Anna Ball puts it: "a distinctly post colonial feminist perspective entails a multidirectional act of 'writing back' to not one but many centres of power" (*Palestinian Literature and Film* 3). The most distinctive aspect of Ball's position is the definition of postcolonial feminism as "multidirectional": just as feminisms and female identities are plural entities, so too are the trajectories or genealogies along which we travel intellectually.

Situating my own intellectual endeavour more specifically within the expanse of postcolonial feminist theory, I now turn to consider feminist praxes that operate in relation to the representation of Muslim women. Here, I gesture to wider scholarly discussions regarding transnational interactions towards Muslim communities within the Arab world and/or the Middle East in the post-millennial period. I address locally specific contexts in the main body of my thesis. It is important to note that texts authored (or pictured) by female writers and artists do not necessarily deliberately project feminist agendas and discourses. This may be understood as a given when reading the vast amount of texts available by Western female authors but, especially when read through a sociological lens, it is often forgotten when reading texts authored by Arab, Middle Eastern, and/or Muslim women writers. As Anastasia Valassopoulos puts it: "Asserting that some kinds of Arab women are more feminist than others or engage with more feminist themes than others presumes that Arab women's writing somehow aspires towards incorporation into the feminist family" (12). Although focused on Arab women's writing, Valassopoulos' point remains relevant to my consideration of West Asian women writers. While my thesis considers the remediation, reframing, and reformulation of female identities, and I interpret some of the texts considered within this thesis as feminist, it should not be assumed that this is the main purpose of these texts. Texts by women writers should not be automatically assumed as purposefully

feminist, nor should male writers be excluded from projecting a feminist agenda in their works.

Given my focus on a predominantly Muslim region, it is also important to recognise "that women may identify as Muslim without practicing or even necessarily believing the precepts of religion, in the sense that Islam can also function as a general cultural and epistemological framework" (Moore, *Arab, Muslim, Woman* 8). Lindsey Moore stipulates that "[w]e should differentiate … between women who identify as Muslims and feminists, and feminists for whom Islam is the primary vehicle for redress of gender issues (Islamic feminists)" (8). In reference to the latter, miriam cooke distinguishes Islamic feminism to be a "double commitment: to the religious community and to themselves as strong women active on behalf of and with other women" (96). Bearing in mind Moore's stipulation for differentiation, the double commitment to community and to the female self can also be realised through the feminist practices of secular Muslims whose communities may still be strongly influenced by religious cultural traditions.

I examine the works of Muslim women, as well as works produced by non-Muslim women, and Muslim and non-Muslim men. As discussed above, this thesis is not an exploration of feminist writers, though that is not to say that some of the writers I focus on are not feminists. Rather, I explore various modes of female representation and performance, in conjunction with a feminist approach that both values heterogeneity and acknowledges the importance of "[t]ransnational linkages" which cut across "global/local" spaces (Grewal and Kaplan 13). I approach my work with a commitment towards justice and equality between genders; resistance against oppression; and the acute awareness that all women's experiences are unique across and within different cultures, religions, and political contexts.

However, although resistance against oppression is an important element of my feminist approach, I do not assume that women who do not access a particular kind of lifestyle are oppressed and in need of saving.[4] The desire to "rescue" Third World women from oppression is often neo-imperialistically charged. In a specific example, directly linked to the geographic region I am concerned with here, the US and British military intervention in Afghanistan, which followed the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, became associated with "a mission to rescue" Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women* 6-7).[5] Lila Abu-Lughod states that feminists that criticise this "rescue" narrative "are not ignoring the abuses the women suffer; to the contrary, they are suggesting that we ought to talk to them to find out what problems they face," rather than assuming these women "are not agentic individuals or cannot speak for themselves" (*Do Muslim Women* 9). Assuming Muslim women to be mute is a means of silencing in and of itself. Rather, Abu-Lughod argues that the experiences and stories of Muslim women "are worth telling in all their messiness and contradictions" and "must include not just education, unveiling, political rights, and domesticity but also reveiling and reinterpreting Islamic law" ("Introduction" 25). Feminist movements should demonstrate an awareness of how (Muslim) female identities and experiences are heterogeneous. As previously discussed, Muslim feminists are committed to both their female self-identity and their Muslim community and identity. The discussion of education, political rights, and domestic roles are generally important parts of a feminist

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[4] See: Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, Indiana UP, 1991, pp. 51-80.

[5] I expand on this in Chapter Two, where I examine how Afghan women were represented as oppressed in US and British political and media discourses as part of the rationale for invading Afghanistan in 2001.

woman's self-interest, but Muslim feminists will also negotiate these areas with consideration of their religious faith and teachings.

I have traced the trajectories of postcolonial feminism from discussions of "global" and "local" movements and the resistance towards consigning Third World women to the periphery; to a consideration of a transnational model of feminism that is multidirectional and rejects binaries; to a more specific examination of feminist politics located in the Arab and Middle Eastern region, tangential to West Asia. My thesis is situated alongside these various postcolonial feminist discourses. In a project that focuses on reframing, refiguring, and reformulating ways through which female identities are represented and received across visual and written media, I am invested in avoiding, and critically unravelling, reductive and monolithic categorisations of "woman." I employ a "genealogical method" which "simultaneously enquires into the political processes through which such categories [of identity] might be disrupted and resignified" (Pedwell, *Feminism, Culture and Embodied Practice* 53). Within this feminist approach, it is simultaneously necessary to situate female representation within its wider transnational context, and to address the singularity and individuality of each represented female identity in relation to their personal experiences and cultural, religious, and ethnic background.

In what aspires to be an intersectional feminist reading of the representational identities considered within this thesis, such tropes or stereotypes of female identity are opened outwards. As Carolyn Pedwell argues:

> Through treating the production of embodied subjectivities as ongoing
> and always unfinished, such [genealogical] frameworks acknowledge
> that no approach to theorising processes of social differentiation can be

complete or all-encompassing – there will always be excesses which

evade recognition or translation.

<div align="right">(*Feminism, Culture and Embodied Practice* 53)</div>

My conceptual model of remediated witnessing engenders a continual process of opening outward, identifying plurality and excess within representational politics. Within the context of this thesis, remediated witnessing is used to deconstruct tropes of female identity as they appear in various visual and written media, and to consider how female identities are being continually reiterated, reframing, and re-signified.

Geographic Parameters: West Asia and the "Troubled Triangle"

I have opted to use the term "West Asia" to describe the geographical region examined. Pakistan is the bordering nation between West Asia (the Af-Pak border) and South Asia (the Indo-Pak border). To the west of Pakistan is Afghanistan and Iran, and, extending further, the Gulf States (Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman), and the Levant (Syria, Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Jordan). Unmoored from the established groupings of South Asia, the Gulf, and the Levant, I focus predominantly on Afghanistan, Iran, and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan.

Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan have a tripartite structure, with each country bordering the other. This tripartite structure is partially captured in the filmography of esteemed Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf and his daughter, director Samira Makhmalbaf. Mohsen Makhmalbaf's acclaimed film *Kandahar* (2001) follows the journey of Nafas, a journalist and an Afghan immigrant living in Canada, who crosses the Iranian border as she travels towards Kandahar in search of her sister. Within the film, the description of the pending eclipse that "will cross Western Iran, Afghanistan and finish in the Indian subcontinent," captures the geography of this tripartite structure.

Following in her father's footsteps, Samira Makhmalbaf directed the film *At Five in the Afternoon* (2003), which chronicles the experiences of Nogreh, a Pakistani refugee who is living in Afghanistan, and trying to gain an education while there. The Makhmalbafs' filmography highlights an Iranian interest in the conditions of its neighbouring countries, which also manifests politically and economically.

The political and economic relationships amongst Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan are explored in the *Middle East Program*'s 2005 publication "A Troubled Triangle: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan in Strategic Perspective." The identification of this tripartite of countries as a "Troubled Triangle" is accompanied by the consideration of this grouping as "a geo-politically unstable 'critical core,' the security of which might have regional and extra-regional geo-strategic implications" (Siddiqa 8). Considering both the local and global implications of this "Troubled Triangle," the contributors of the 2005 *Middle East Program* trace some of the shifting relationships amongst the three countries and discuss the involvement of the Soviet Union and the US in the region in recent decades.

The connection between Afghanistan and Iran may be less apparent than the connections drawn up between Afghanistan and Pakistan. There has been an increased focus on the Af-Pak border following the use of Islamabad (the capital city of Pakistan) by the US to gain a foothold in the region. This was first in response to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and continued later as part of the "War on Terror" following the terrorist attacks carried out by al Qaeda on 11 September 2001.[6]

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[6] I refer to the "War on Terror" as a discourse which is used to justify and support the neo-imperial military and defence operations led by the US against its perceived enemies following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. The term was first used by US President George W. Bush (2001-09) in an address given to Congress on 20 September 2001: "Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them … Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated" ("Transcript of President Bush's address"). I discuss the term in more depth in Chapter One, "Post-9/11 Warfare and the Terror 'Network'," p. 33.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan and Iran have very different political histories and while both are predominantly Muslim countries, the majority of Afghanistan's Muslim community is Sunni, whereas Iran is predominantly Shia. However, Iran maintains an economic and political interest in the affairs of Afghanistan, especially following the US invasion of and continued involvement in Afghanistan. Post-invasion, Iran perceived the "long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan, a pro-American government in Kabul, and more generally a centrilized Afghan state as strategic threats," not least because of the existing negative relationship between Iran and the US (Nasr 13).

Valentine M. Moghadam also sets a precedent for the comparative analysis of gender politics in both Afghanistan and Iran, exploring the different revolutionary outcomes of the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1978 and the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.[7] She traces the effects that the different trajectories of Islamism in both countries had on women, within the context of the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution and the juridicio-clerical rule that followed, and in relation to the fighting and rule of the Mudjahideen and Taliban in the 1970s-80s.[8] Moghadam argues that: "Particularly where gender relations and the status of women are concerned, state policies, economic and demographic characteristics, and class structure appear to be at least co-equal determinants" (449). She finds a comparative analysis of the

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[7] See: Valentine M. Moghadam. "A Tale of Two Countries: State, Society, and Gender Politics in Iran and Afghanistan." *Muslim World*, vol. 94, no. 4, 2004, pp. 449-67.

[8] Anders Strindberg and Mats Wärn describe Islamism as "counter-hegemonic challenges articulated on the basis of, and expressed through Islam" (3). As the plural use of "challenges" indicates, Islamism is "multifaceted," emerging out of "a series of locally grounded, yet globally connected critical discourses" that challenge modern secularism (Strindberg and Wärn 2). Islamist movements, such as the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution; the fighting by the Mujahideen and Taliban in Afghanistan; and the attacks by al Qaeda on 11 September 2001; amongst others, are particular to their local contexts. Especially since the attacks on 11 September 2001, Lindsey Moore and Abir Hamdar state that "[i]t is important to emphasize, particularly given the typical incursion of other constructions such as 'jihadism' and/or 'terrorism' into discussions of Islamism, that Islamism and militancy are not synonymous" (2). Islamism can be expressed through political ideology, as the product of nationalism, and even violence, but can also arise from intellectual thought and discussion, and also socially, via public and individual practices.

"revolutionary state projects that were attempted in Iran and Afghanistan" to be constructive in demonstrating that social and cultural structures are as important in determining social change as political and state policy (449).

My own analysis considers the representation of women in Afghanistan and Iran in the post-millennial period. In the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001 and the "War on Terror," the West has seen both Afghanistan and Iran as examples of oppressive Muslim regimes. The military intervention in Afghanistan by US and Britain in 2001 was a response to the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. As will be discussed at length in Chapter Two, this military intervention was supported by a humanitarian rhetoric of "rescue," directed towards the women who were oppressed by Taliban rule. This often un-nuanced and neo-imperialistically charged "rescue" narrative recurs in several instances throughout this thesis. Meanwhile, during his State of the Union address, delivered on 29 January 2002, President George W. Bush included Iran in what he designated the "axis of evil," alongside Iraq and North Korea. As part of the discourse of the "War on Terror," Bush suggested that Iran "exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom" ("Full text: State of the Union address"). The description of an undemocratic, repressive Iranian government, albeit accurate, is utilised as part of US political rhetoric only insofar as it supports the neo-imperial discourse of the "War on Terror." The aforementioned gendered "rescue" narrative is also supported by literary representations of Iranian women. I address the ways in which West Asian women are represented in the West, but also, crucially, consider the ways in which these women deconstruct stereotypes and categorisations of identity as part of a dissident, often feminist, politics that responds to the politics of their own patriarchal and government institutions, as well as neo-imperialism.

Post-9/11 Orientalist Structures and Neo-Imperialism

While there is overlap between West Asia and the Middle East, I have elected not to use the latter term due to its prolific use in Western media and political discourses. Using the term West Asia allows for some level of critical distance while still being aware of neo-imperialist projects ongoing in this region. However, given the overlap between West Asia and the Middle East, I find Reza Aslan's introductory comments to the anthology *Tablet & Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East* (2011) useful, wherein he indicates that:

> The countries that stretch along the broad horizon of the modern Middle East – from Morocco to Iran, Turkey to Pakistan – speak different languages, practice different faiths, possess different cultures. Yet the literary landscape of this vast and eclectic region has been shaped by a common experience of Western imperialism and colonial domination.
>
> (xxi)

What I find especially helpful is Aslan's use of the term "broad horizon" where, within this breadth of geographical space, definitions of culture, religion, and language change across countries and even within them, with multiple ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups operating in any one single country. For example, both Pashtun and Dari are common languages in Afghanistan, whose population is divided into a multitude of ethnic, and sub-ethnic, groups. Thus, even within a single country, the discursive spaces constituted by linguistic, religious, and cultural praxes are varied and diverse.

And yet, as Aslan points out, these are often reduced into the singular as a result of opinions generated through Western neo-imperialism. To collapse so many specific spaces of culture, language, and religion into a single categorisation, such as the Middle East, or even West Asia, risks being an Orientalising gesture. In his seminal work,

Orientalism (1978), Edward W. Said argues that the discursive systems surrounding the Orient were formulated "through regulatory codes, classifications, specimen cases, periodical reviews, dictionaries, grammars, commentaries, editions, translations, all of which together formed a simulacrum of the Orient and reproduced it materially in the West, for the West" (166). The "Orient," and its counterpart the "Occident," represent constructs; "man-made" structures (Said, *Orientalism* 5). The division between the "West" and the "East"—the "Orient" and the "Occident"—remains today. These constructs grow out of historical colonialism and ongoing neo-imperialism, within continually changing ideological frameworks, reframed, for example, through current national security and government defence policies, linked to economic interests and prejudicial pre-conceptions of religious identities.

In the post-millennial period, the Orient is especially conflated with Islam. Neil Lazarus argues that "in the context of modern Orientalist discourse – 'Islam' is an ideological category masquerading as a religious one" (44). The category of "Muslim" comes to be perceived in a monolithic sense and, in a post-9/11 climate, is often, unfortunately, interchanged with "terrorist," something I will elaborate on in Chapter One. As Said puts it: "the images and process by which the media has delivered Islam for consideration to the Western consumer of news perpetrates hostility and ignorance" (*Covering Islam* xlviii).

In this thesis, I investigate the neo-imperialist relationship of the US and, to a lesser extent, Britain towards West Asia within the context of the "War on Terror" and the rise in Islamophobia that followed the events of 11 September 2001. Said characterises imperialism as "paternalistic arrogance," engendering a misled philanthropy borne out of the superiority complex of the previous colonial powers in the West (*Culture and Imperialism* xx). However, it is important to note the criticisms

of the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) towards Said's reading of imperialism. They argue that his reading of imperialism is "characteristically about domination rather than about exploitation or class struggle or the imposition of a mode of production. The tendential severing of imperialism from capitalism leads Said to neglect the structuring dynamics, agencies and vectors of modern historical development" (32). Neo-imperialism is motivated by potential political and economic benefits.

For instance, the philanthropic "rescue" narrative perpetrated by the US, which emphasised a humanitarian crisis regarding the treatment of women in Afghanistan during the US and British military intervention in 2001, was exploitive insofar as it supported US government spending on its military, defence, and security sectors. I therefore heed WReC's criticism of Said's presentation of imperialism "as a *political* dispension rather than a *process of accumulation on a world scale*, under the conditions of capitalist monopoly" (31; original emphasis). Within the context of aggressive shifts in US foreign policy following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, I refer to neo-imperialism not as a mode of enforcement or domination but as a mode of interference predicated on self-serving and exploitive economic and political agendas by prejudiced Western countries, often in the name of security or, usually misleadingly, humanitarianism.

Outline of the Thesis

Across five chapters, this thesis explores West Asian female identities that can be ascribed to the following categories: Subaltern, Spokesperson, Mother, and Martyr. Chapter One outlines my critical methodology, defining and demonstrating the process of remediated witnessing. I explore the conceptual foundations behind the arguments of my thesis—affect, wounding, and framing—through a consideration of political and

creative responses to the events of 11 September 2001, marking the opening of the new millennium. I conclude by expanding on my theoretical framework of the relationship between subject(ed) and agential identities, drawing from Spivak's work on subalterneity, and laying the groundwork for Chapter Two.

Chapter Two assesses how women are consigned to, and may subvert, the trope of "Subaltern." More specifically, I examine ways in which Afghan women are represented in visual media following the events of 11 September 2001, where women, especially those who are veiled, are often assumed to be mute figures in Western political and media discourses. Chapter Two examines how the oppression of women—silenced and veiled—was used as an alibi in the face of US military intervention in Afghanistan. I address the complex religious and cultural politics of the *hijab* before conceptually repurposing the way in which it is used by Western media, theorising the act of veiling as a form of framing. I analyse a selection of photographs of Afghan women, including the revisiting of Steve McCurry's *Afghan Girl* (1985) by *National Geographic* in 2002, and the 2010 *TIME* magazine cover of Aisha. I argue that the remediation, refraction, and reframing that occurs within these images prompts a potential disruption to the construction of their subject(ed) identities, structured by the camera lens of the neo-imperial photographer/voyeur.

Chapter Three investigates the trope of the "Spokesperson," the antithesis of "Subaltern." I analyse the content, form, production, and reception of memoir and testimonial writing, produced by West Asian women. The chapter explores different modes of expression in postcolonial women's autobiography, looking at Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003), Christina Lamb's *The Sewing Circles of Herat: My Afghan Years* (2002), and Zarghuna Kargar's *Dear Zari: Hidden Stories from Women in Afghanistan* (2012). In particular, I am interested in the didactic

voice of these authors whose pedagogic works contextualise the primary focus of the chapter: Malala Yousafzai. I examine Yousafzai's autobiography, documentary, and 2014 Nobel Lecture in relation to her role as a spokesperson in the post-millennial period, who focuses on issues of human rights, justice, and girls' education.

Chapter Four turns to the medium of the graphic novel. While reference is made to Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return* (2000-04), the central focus of this chapter is another Iranian graphic novel: Amir & Khalil's *Zahra's Paradise* (2011). I explore the figure of the mourning mother in the context of both state and dissident martyrdom in Iran, in light of both the 1978-79 Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), and, more recently, the dissident Green Movement (2009). I consider how the figure of "Mother" is framed within the format of the graphic novel and, in particular, assess ways in which the exhibition of public grief can be wielded as a political weapon, both for and against the state.

The final chapter of the thesis expands the trope of dissident martyrdom put forward in the previous chapter, connecting this to female identity. Chapter Five works as a coda of sorts, revisiting the tropes explored earlier in the thesis in conjunction with the categorisation of "Martyr." I return to the role of the mother in my analysis of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), looking not at the mother of the martyr, but at the mother as martyr. I then introduce the fictional testimonial of the unnamed, Afghan female protagonist of Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* (2008), exploring the stakes involved in speaking out. I end the chapter with the real death of Neda Agha Soltan, an Iranian student killed during the protests in Tehran in 2009. I explore the (re)mediation of her death, which was recorded and disseminated online. This culminating chapter, examines the processes of remediated witnessing—as

reiterative and disruptive—at its most extreme, underpinned by a debate on the ethical

implications of recording and bearing witness to death.

Chapter One

Critical Methodology

A Model of Remediated Witnessing: Theoretical and Affective Frameworks

A witnessed event can be recorded in a variety of different ways: in writing, in conversation, in photography, in film, and in illustration. This documentation, in whichever form it takes, represents a product of that witnessed event, a product which is then disseminated to an audience. This audience then witnesses the record of the event; *they witness the act of witnessing*. In both cases, the *act* of witnessing is subjective and reactive, and this series of moments represents an example of what I describe as remediated witnessing.

There are multiple moments of witnessing and multiple witnesses across the different stages of any recorded event. This thesis introduces the conceptual model of remediated witnessing and employs it in an investigation of represented identities in both visual and written media. I consider autobiographical writing, comics panels, fiction, mimetic performance, photography, and film in an interdisciplinary exploration of various media which, at times, converge with and/or overlay one another, representing different moments of witnessing. The role of the witness is vital to the documentation of written and oral testimony, and visual and auditory recording. This witness is, at least in part, anticipated, and both their perceived and actual position can significantly inform the ways in which the recorded event is marketed and understood.

What is particularly significant in the process of remediated witnessing is the consideration of the different ways a witnessed event is (re-)framed, and from which

point of view this frame might be conceived and perceived. I use the process of remediated witnessing to address different modes of reiteration and re-appropriation, and as a way of approaching both the fixing and unfixing of meaning. Depending on where frames are drawn, and by whom, I identify two potential modes of reframing. The first reaffirms an explicit frame in its fixed place, resulting in an additional impression or layer from which to infer new meaning. The second dismantles the frame, cutting through and deconstructing it. Often these two processes operate in tandem, either in competition with one another, undercutting one another; or sometimes complementing one another. There is never one single frame to any one record of an event.

In this chapter, I outline my critical methodology and discuss the theoretical and conceptual arguments that underpin my concept of remediated witnessing. Having defined my geographic parameters in my introduction, in this chapter I use remediated witnessing—and demonstrate how it works—to explore some of the key affective responses to the events of 11 September 2001 and the ways in which it is framed and reframed.[9] In examining this key symbolic event from the beginning of the post-millennial period I expand on the political and public conception of the relationship between the West and West Asia (and Islam) outlined in introduction of the thesis.

I also demonstrate how the model of remediated witnessing can work to reformulate and redefine agential and subject(ed) identities. I do this by expanding on the theoretical category of the subaltern. I consider how gendered subaltern identities

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[9] Clare Hemming posits that "[a]ffect broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions" (551). Throughout the course of this thesis I recognise numerous emotional responses (or feelings), namely pain, hatred, and grief, but as Sara Ahmed notes, "[e]motions are relational" and involve "affective forms of reorientation" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 8). Emotions arise out of affective economies which respond to—are reorientated towards or away from—people, events, and objects in an embodied, phenomenological way.

are prefigured within the hierarchical relationship between agential and subject(ed) positions, and negotiate ways in which this relationship can be reconfigured. Drawing from the theoretical works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Judith Butler, I posit the subaltern as a subject-agent. The configuration of the individual as conjoined subject-agent (not the separated hierarchal binary of the agent/subject) indicates the simultaneous occupation of both subject(ed) and agential identities within what Butler calls "[t]he paradox of subjectivation" whereby "the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms" (*Bodies that Matter* 15). Expressions of agency mediate, and are mediated by, the discursive spaces within which they are transmitted. I argue that by pointing out, cutting through, or intersecting with the discursive frames which form stereotypes of female identity women can occupy both subject(ed) and agential positions simultaneously.

Establishing Frames: Informative Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

My conceptual model of remediated witnessing pioneers an attempt to re-frame meaning through remediation and the dual, even paradoxical, motions of compounding and undercutting meaning. The model intersects with the field of contemporary cultural visual and media studies. The work of Mieke Bal, Ranjana Khanna, and Laura U. Marks proves particularly useful in complementing and elucidating the workings of the model of remediated witnessing. Additionally, Khanna's theorisation of processes of visual framing intersects with the field of postcolonial feminism and Marks' consideration of cinematography is focused on Arab texts. Although Bal, Khanna, and Marks are all predominantly concerned with the visual image (static, mimetic, and/or performed), I propose that their ideas are transposable onto an investigation of both visual and written

media, and texts which combine the two. After all, witnessing is not a wholly visual act, but one which is linked expressly to the act of testifying, of putting into words, either verbally or in writing.

In *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* (2008), Khanna focuses on the representation of women in Algeria during the period of French colonialism, the Algerian War of Independence, the Algerian Civil War (1991-2002), and its aftermath. Working within these contexts, examining the relationship between Algeria and France, and engaging with different forms of media and text, Khanna investigates the ways in which women cut across patriarchal frames in the pursuit of justice (*Algeria Cuts* xiii-xviii). Khanna's theorisation of the frame in *Algeria Cuts* intersects with the model of remediated witnessing as it is used in this thesis, especially given our shared emphasis on the representation of women in relation to colonial and neo-imperial contexts.

Khanna states that "[w]ithout a frame, context appears as empiricism without interpretation" (*Algeria Cuts* 37). The existence of a frame is necessary in identifying a represented context. In fact, the frame can infer as much meaning into what is being depicted, either pictorially or in writing, as its content. Khanna elaborates on this in her discussion on cutting across and between visual scenes:

> While the frame is … all about stasis, capturing a moment or holding a particular instance hostage, it also exceeds itself, through what happens 'off-frame,' through the sound or voice complicating an image, or through the *punctum*, an apparently insignificant signifier piercing or wounding the viewer.
>
> (*Algeria Cuts* 39)

Khanna constitutes the frame as something that ostensibly exerts a firm grip of, on, or around an image, but which is itself framed and interrupted by different (sensual) registers, disrupting its grip on the image.

The frame of the visual image ostensibly locks meaning into it, but Khanna uses Roland Barthes' terminology of the *punctum* which, in application to photography, results in a cut that exceeds or transgresses the frame.[10] What meaning would be inferred if we were to look at the negative space around the image? A sound emanating from off-camera interrupts the frame, informing the viewer that there is something beyond that they cannot visually access. An image that is printed within the page of a book may have a caption that appears beyond the pictorial frame, providing additional context through which to interpret the image. The frame may attempt to impose stasis, but it can be interrupted from both within and without, and can therefore be reframed and remediated; embedded and compounded. The act of framing or reframing, as Khanna conceives it, imparts meaning as much as the content being framed. The malleability of the frame is a significant component to consider within the framework of the model of remediated witnessing, which negotiates the framing and reframing of events, and the fixing and unfixing of meaning, enabled by exposing what cuts across and within material text, written testimony, and photographic images.

The model of remediated witnessing can be used to negotiate both textual and ideological frames. I am concerned with the role of the witness in capturing and/or constructing these frames. In considering the negative space surrounding a frame, the tool that constructs the frame and the witness that utilises this tool come into view: the

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[10] Barthes describes "[a] photograph's *punctum* [as] that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27). The *punctum* "punctuate[s]," leaving an impression and/or wound upon the image, which disturbs the image, and which therefore affects the viewer's reception of the image (Barthes 26-27).

camera and photographer, the pencil and the artist, the pen and the author. The viewer or reader also represents a witness who observes the frame, who may also have access to information that exists outside of the frame, and who may be affected by this *punctum* that exceeds or transgresses the frame. Bal's critical work on focalisation, which applies to both visual and written media, is particularly useful in foregrounding ways in which looking and perceiving information can be re-orientated.[11]

Bal defines focalisation as "the relation between the subject and object of perception" (*Travelling Concepts* 41). To put it another way, it is the direction of looking which determines the frame in the first place. Narratology forms the basis of Bal's work and she distinguishes the use of "focalization" from that of "perspective," finding that the latter term can sometimes come across as ambiguous as "it has come to indicate in the tradition of narrative theory both the narrator and the vision" (*Narratology* 143).[12] Given the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis, Bal's theorisation of focalisation as a transposable approach for both visual and written media proves especially useful. Demonstrating the synergy between visual and written modes of expression, Bal traces her trajectory of the conceptualisation of focalisation:

> After travelling, first from the visual domain to narratology, then to more specific analysis of visual images, focalization, having arrived at its new destination, visual analysis, has received a meaning that overlaps neither with the old visual one—focusing on the lens—nor with the new narratological one—the cluster of perception and interpretation that guides the attention through the narrative. It now indicates neither a

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[11] Gérard Genette introduces "focalization" in *Narrative Discourse* (1972), but only considers written literature. As such, Bal's lucid consideration of how focalisation is employed differently across written and visual works is more pertinent to my own interdisciplinary approach.

[12] Although the term "perspective" is used at particular points in this thesis, I remain materially specific to the visual and written media I examine, without conflating the two.

location of the gaze on the picture plane, nor a *subject* of it, such as either the figure or the viewer. Instead, what becomes visible is the *movement* of the look.

(*Travelling Concepts* 39; original emphasis)

In Bal's outline, focalisation first appropriates visual rhetoric for the exploration of (textual) narrative. She then moves on to explore the visual image, in and of itself, using a (narratological) rhetorical approach as the primary investigative tool, as opposed to an optical one (Bryson 8). Neither the visualiser (the "*location* of the gaze"), nor the visualised object (the "*subject*" of the image) is what construes the act of focalisation. Rather, focalisation arises from the relation—the *movement*—between, and around, the two points of contact. The frame is built through an act of focalisation that can, at least partially, be aligned with the act of witnessing.

The model of remediated witnessing negotiates the space of the frame, the spaces within and beyond these frames, and the polyvalent angles from which these frames can be constructed by witnesses. By evaluating the ways in which people, places, or events are represented using different angles with frames that complement and undercut one another, sometimes simultaneously, we may choose to consider these various mediations as layers or folds. The use of the term "folds" works particularly well when considering the model of remediated witnessing in alliance with the model of enfoldment developed by Marks. Marks expansively investigates Arab cinema and art in her examination of the different ways in which enfoldment and unfoldment manifest. Although her model is mainly focused on visuality, it remains valuable to an exploration of written text, especially in relation to the act of testifying, which is linked to the process of remediated witnessing.

The crucial component of Marks' enfoldment model is the proposition that "the past is not forgotten but *enfolded*" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 70; original emphasis). Marks describes the enfoldment model as follows:

> The past reaches us or becomes actual to us through selective unfolding, in a relationship between experience, information, and image. Each of these three levels is a plane of immanence – a membrane in which an infinity of stuff lies virtual, or enfolded. Now and then certain aspects of these virtual events are unfolded, pulling up into the next level.
>
> (*Hanan al-Cinema* 70)

Marks establishes that, as part of the enfoldment model, the image "triangulates between information and experience" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 72). Experience and information account for both past and present contexts, or epistemological frames, that inform the moment of recollection. The act of remembrance is unfolded by, or filtered through, these frames. Experience, when revisited, is mediated: it is represented by the image/text, and informed by contextual information, whether that information is historical or emotional, accurate or false. The memories of the witness are re-discovered (unfolded), but the process of en/unfoldment colours the recollected experience.

Not all memories are unfolded, nor are all memories, by extension, remediated or appropriated in art (either visual or written). The enfoldment model, which triangulates between image, experience, and information, is charged by both the "selection of what elements to unfold and conversely, for their way of willing certain elements to remain in a state of latency" (Marks, *Hanan al-Cinema* 72). Once again, it is the negative space, that which exists beyond the frame, which can tell us as much as the content of the visual or written text. That which is suppressed, the hidden layers that either exceed the frame, or exist beneath it, could represent a personal or communal

traumatic memory, or a governmental or cultural discourse that deliberately omits information.

However, the model of enfoldment, and the process of unfolding memories can be productive. Marks argues that "it is possible … to unfold some aspect, some seed, of what has been forgotten or repudiated or is too unbearable to behold. From these seeds it may be possible, not to revive the past, but to quicken new kinds of growth" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 8). The model of enfoldment can work, not so much to revive, but to re-envision or re-tell through a new lens, revisiting the past using a new frame. Aligned with Marks' conceptualisations, remediated witnessing looks towards the reshaping and remaking of events and meaning, in which the witnessed event is never revived completely or exactly, but partially recalled to bring forth new ideas and sentiments.

Crucially, especially given my focus on the representation of female identities, Marks argues that the model of enfoldment "shows that in our time, much art is concerned with the nature of en/unfolding rather than with producing images; these artworks (and other things) thus *are not so much representational as performative*" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 73; my emphasis). Female identities are represented across a variety of visual and written media, but the model of remediated witnessing works to negotiate the action of representation in and of itself. These visual and written accounts are not produced in a vacuum, but are formulated in conjunction with the represented subject/event and the witness; the tool with which the moment is recorded and the actions of the subject of the recording may influence the production of the work, as will the preconceptions, judgements, and perceptions of the witness. The action of putting into words or capturing an image is just that: an action. Remediated witnessing is not a static process, and neither are the female identities enfolded and unfolded in the various written and pictorial texts examined in this thesis.

Female identities are performed and perceived actively. Reiterated and remediated, represented identities are reshaped, compounded, and layered as the relationship between subject(ed) and agential identities is revisited and reformulated. The active relationship across subject(ed) and agential identities may be accentuated by Marks' interest in haptic (tactile) images, intersecting loosely with affect theory. The interdependence between subject(ed) and agential identities is relayed by Marks' assertion that "[h]aptic images rely on their recipients to activate them in their perceptual reception" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 277). Meaning is not passive, but must be received, remediated, and/or en/unfolded. This is multi-directional: the agent (or witness, or viewer, or reader) does not just unlock the subject(ed) individual; haptic images and affective media also "invite the viewer to respond to the images in an intimate, embodied way" (Marks, *The Skin of the Film* 2). Both the role of witness and performer are *active*, and the model of remediated witnessing not only reveals components of the subject(ed) identity depicted visually or in writing, but also the witness who accounts for the depiction, or who encounters the depiction.

Although the above has framed the model of remediated witnessing against critical works that deal primarily with visual media, the model can, and in fact, should also be used in consideration of written media, not least because witnessing is not, itself, a wholly visual act. The act of witnessing is tied to the act of testifying, which can be recorded visually, but is also just as likely to be recounted verbally or documented in writing. Both visual and written records are bound up within a model of remediated witnessing, hence, a range of written, visual, and hybrid texts are considered within this thesis. This interdisciplinary approach is particularly pertinent given the changing topography of media and information dissemination in the post-millennial period. This can be illustrated by the increased use and efficiency of social media in spreading news

on a global scale, which can be used to circumvent mainstream censorship, but can just as easily circulate misinformation. The advantages and limitations of social media referred to here are also reflected in the publication and translation politics of the world literary market, which will be explored in Chapter Three. In examining a range of visual and written media, and texts which combine the two, I am able to compare the different methods through which subject(ed) and agential identities are framed and reframed in the context of their material presentation and in terms of the conditions under which differing texts are disseminated to and received by public audiences.

Affective and Reiterative Responses to 11 September 2001

This section sets up and, crucially, breaks down some of the key contexts attached to the cultural and political responses to the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. In particular, I engage with aspects of affect theory and studies in cultural memory as they are linked to the individual and national practices of melancholy and mourning. Using Anida Yoeu Ali's *1700% Project* (2010), an iterative art project that verbally and visually responds to the increase in hate crime against Muslims in the US following the attacks on 11 September 2001, I will show how remediated witnessing can work to undercut preconceptions of minority ethnic and/or religious communities from within. As will be demonstrated in the latter part of this section, the *1700% Project* is not produced ex nihilo, but, to use Marks' phrasing, selectively enfolds and unfolds the words of others to form Yoeu Ali's own message from within another's.

Despite the different political, cultural, and religious practices that exist across the various countries situated within the West Asian region referenced during the course of this thesis, most are marked by recent engagements with the West: the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001; George W. Bush locating Iran and Iraq within the "axis of evil"

in his State of the Union Address in 2002; the subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003; and the killing of Osama bin Laden (in retribution for the attacks carried out on 11 September 2001) on Pakistani soil in 2011. All these events mark an US response to West Asia, often in alliance with Britain. I use the term *response* as many of these moments arguably manifest because of the events that transpired on 11 September 2001, either in an act of direct retribution, or as a result of a more general paranoia about the region of the Middle East. 11 September 2001 marks a significant point in time, at the beginning of the post-millennial period, which does not belie the previously existent (and systemic) neo-imperialist mind-set but rather exacerbates it. It was a violent, politicised moment which marked out a new discursive field for the post-millennial period, and which also influences the ways in which West Asian female identities are perceived, deployed, and mediated in the West.

Post-9/11 Warfare and the Terror "Network"

Giovanna Borradori states that "[t]he choice of a date, 9/11, as a name for the attacks, has the aim of attributing to them historical monumentality" (21). Writing some fifteen years after the events of 11 September 2001, I have the opportunity to be retrospective, but to refer to the date "9/11" in this colloquial form allows for no such distance at the rhetorical level as no year is included: the historical contexts are, for the most part, voided. Instead, the use of the term "9/11" serves as a signifier that continues to suggest that the events are *current*, even though a significant amount of time has passed since 11 September 2001. Today, debates about the war in Afghanistan focus more on the withdrawal of troops than on the logistics of invading. Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar call the coverage of Afghanistan since 2001 a "game of dehistoricization," one which does not necessarily acknowledge the previous involvement of the US in Afghanistan or, further still, the hand they had in the eventual formation of the Taliban

(777). To de-historicise is to de-contextualise. Or, put another way: to de-historicise is to ignore the frame(s) and material(s) in and out of which an image or piece of writing might be constructed.

However, "9/11," as a rhetorical device and a construct, is grounded in very real and material circumstances: the attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, and the declaration of war that followed. This declaration of war has manifested both physically and ideologically in response of the US towards these initial attacks, subsumed under the title of the "War on Terror." As with the term "9/11," the meaning inferred by the title, "War on Terror," is not without its problems. As Jacques Derrida puts it in his interview with Borradori in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Haberman and Jacques Derrida* (2003): "We have been speaking of a strange 'war' without war" (117). That is not to say that a conflict has not occurred, but it is a multi-faceted conflict, far more nuanced and complicated than a battle between two groups of people. Also in dialogue with Borradori, Jürgen Habermas is equally critical of the term "war" and argues that "pragmatically, one cannot lead a war against a 'network' if the term 'war' is to retain any definite meaning" (35). The terror "network" to which Habermas refers to, al Qaeda, has become almost exclusively equated with fanatical, radical Islamism.[13] However, as we will come to see, in the aftermath of the attacks on 11 September 2001 the threat from this terror network has also been identified with unnuanced, monolithic definitions of "Islam" and "Muslim." Thus, the term "network" is problematic both as an impractical target of war and because, in this context, it has been prescribed with a dangerously monolithic identification of Muslim.

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[13] In the context of this thesis I generally refer to terrorist activity that has been attributed to al Qaeda in the early post-millennial period. However, it should be noted that terror networks have also been grounded in different countries, regions and religions (or in no religion at all).

I here propose to strategically repurpose the term "network" as it applies to the multitude of conflicts subsumed by the term "War on Terror." The war in Afghanistan directly responds to the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, but both these events are located within a network of previous historical actions and inactions which led to the presence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As Stabile and Kumar note, the US was involved with Afghan affairs well before they officially entered the country in October 2001. In particular, Stabile and Kumar disclose the fact that, "[w]ith the help of Pakistani intelligence, the US armed and trained mujahideen from Afghanistan and elsewhere in camps set up in Pakistan and Afghanistan," following the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 (767). The socio-economic position of the displaced refugees, the religious education taught in the camps, and military training offered by the US, were all major factors in the development of what would later become the Taliban and, in a more extreme vein, al Qaeda.[14] Thus, the terrorist group responsible for the attacks on 11 September 2001 developed out of a network of conditions and actions. This network of conditions resulted from the links between socio-political ideologies experienced in West Asian refugee camps and, internationally, the contexts of the Cold War. The physical conflicts that have developed as a result of these actions and interactions are therefore grounded in the relationship, or tension, between ideological networks. Thus, the "War on Terror" is constituted out of both ideological and physical conflicts; out of overlapping networks.

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[14] Both al Qaeda and the Taliban can be understood as practitioners of Islamism. These Islamist movements are not wholly alike: al Qaeda is a terrorist group and the Taliban is akin to a theocratic military police force that operates martial law. However, as previously noted, Islamism can be expressed in multifarious ways and while it can be expressed via militancy and terrorism, Islamism and militancy are not, in fact, synonymous, nor even always political (Moore and Hamdar 2).

This thesis is predominantly focused on the representation of West Asian women in relation to the conflicts outlined above, particularly in relation to Afghanistan, Iran, and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan. However, an exploration of the affective and ideological positions of the US following the events of 11 September 2001 are illuminating. 11 September 2001 is a significant moment against which to examine affective responses to the terrorist attacks, and to demonstrate the value of remediated witnessing in pointing out the framing of these responses. Foregrounding the affective responses of the US at the beginning of the post-millennial period serves to contextualise and situate later readings which focus on the representations of West Asian women as they pertain to potential affective and economic politics.

The following sub-sections examine two reiterative modes of affective response: pain and hatred. These are not the only affective responses resulting from the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, but are selected because of their significance to the model of remediated witnessing as it is used throughout the course of this thesis. The affective response of pain is tied emotionally to mourning and melancholy, and to the concept of the wound. The wound, as I will demonstrate shortly, is an impression that imparts meaning upon the marked surface. I link this, conceptually, to the frame which equally impresses and infers meaning, and is representative of the *punctum* that, mapped onto Barthes' terminology, "wounds" (27). My examination of the affective response of hatred is used as the basis for the analysis of Yoeu Ali's *1700% Project*, the iterative art project that responds to the increase in hate crime experienced by Muslims in the US following the attacks on 11 September 2001. The reiterative format of the *1700% Project* explicitly demonstrates how remediated witnessing works.

Critical Melancholia: Democratising Remembrance?

In this sub-section I introduce a critical framework of mourning and melancholia. I go on to situate these theoretical terms alongside an examination of the affective response of pain to the events of 11 September 2001. Sigmund Freud theorises the two terms in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), where he defines mourning as a reaction to loss and notes that circumstances of loss can also result in melancholia (243). Freud argues that it should be regarded "as an appropriate comparison … to call the mood of mourning a 'painful' one," which emphasises that the feeling of pain can be caused by an emotional wound as much as by a physical one ("Mourning and Melancholia" 244). Mourning works slowly and the individual gradually accepts the new reality in which the object/person that they have lost is no longer there. This is "carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged" in a painfully piecemeal process (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 244-45). Whereas mourning is a process through which the individual eventually lets go of their loss, Freud suggests that the melancholic displays "an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, and impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 246). In summary, mourning maps a drawn out, painful process wherein the subject can eventually reconcile the reality of the loss they have experienced with the habitual memories associated with the lost object or person. By contrast, Freud understands melancholia to represent a loss that cannot be reconciled for the subject, where the object of loss is eluded, or not wholly identifiable. Unable to mourn (however inefficiently), part of that loss then manifests as a loss of her or his own self/ego.[15]

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[15] Freud revisits his earlier reading of melancholia in "The Ego and the Id" (1923). He writes that since he first proposed his theory on melancholia he has come to understand that it "has a great share in determining the form taken on by the ego and that it contributes materially towards

Contesting Freud's early assessment of melancholia as a state of abasement, Khanna asserts that melancholia can afford "an ethico-political gesture towards the future" ("Post-Palliative"). Khanna argues that, within a postcolonial framework, "the melancholic's critical agency, and the peculiar temporality that drags it back and forth at the same time, acts towards the future" ("Post-Palliative"). In many ways this description aligns itself with Marks' model of enfoldment and unfoldment, which selectively unfolds memories, which are not produced anew, but can be re-oriented using past roots. More than the work of mourning, which "may relegate swallowing disposable bodies to the garbage can of modern nationalism" in a way to forget, or to memorialise on a national scale, Khanna suggests that critical melancholia is a democratic mode of remembrance enacted through and formulated by the "ghosts" and "melancholic specters" of not just the dead, but also of the potential ideals attached to these figures ("Post-Palliative"). Khanna's somewhat optimistic reading of melancholia as a future-thinking mode of postcolonial thought uses the past to offer a potential means to deconstruct and democratise the future.

Melancholia is a prominent investigative tool in the field of postcolonial studies. Examining Assia Djebar's *Algerian White* (2000), Lucy Brisley points out that "[i]t is not simply that trauma and melancholia are both pathological responses to loss, but also that they are, at times, strategically deployed across the humanities as ethical markers of remembrance" (97). In both Khanna's and Brisley's formulations of melancholia, in which they both write against the contextual backdrop of colonial and postcolonial

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building up what is called its 'character'" ("The Ego and the Id" 32-33). Judith Butler summarises Freud's theoretical shift on the subject: "he suggested that successful mourning meant being able to exchange one object for another; he later claimed that incorporation, originally associated with melancholia, was essential to the task of mourning" (*Precarious Life* 20-21). Butler also suggests that "mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation)" (*Precarious Life* 21; original emphasis).

Algeria, it is ethics that is at stake. Khanna perceives melancholia to be a democratic mode of remembrance, one which remembers not just the individual, but their ideals. Brisley adds to this in the summation that "a melancholic relationship with the dead other, in which he or she exists distinct from the self, is conceived as an ethical response to death, as it both precludes the forgetting of loss and respects the singularity of each (lost) individual" (99). Melancholia, both as a mental state and a narrative imperative, is engendered towards remembrance that works to make the loss matter. Thus, "[r]elatedly, melancholia is today also linked to testimony and witnessing" (Brisley 99). Melancholia proves a necessary critical concept within this thesis due to its links to the acts of witnessing and testifying as modes of remembrance.

Melancholia, linking to acts of witnessing and testifying, is also concomitant with or an express response to trauma. Cathy Caruth suggests that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology … it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4).[16] There exists an imperative to narrate or to testify in response to trauma, as part of a process of remediated witnessing; an imperative to remember. Similarly, the narrative tools used to mimic the "inassimilable and fragmentary" recollections of the trauma victim, mirroring symptoms of "suspension, repetitive looping, incorporation, and object-attachment … are, despite their ostensibly debilitating effects, valorised as ethical markers of remembrance" (Brisley 98-99). The ethical imperative is to remember. As Caroline Rooney suggests, "[b]earing witness … should be understood

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[16] The theorisation of trauma in the humanities is generally Eurocentric. Stef Craps argues that it is drawn predominantly from narratives relating to the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jews and others by Nazi Germany (1933-45) and, more recently, in relation to the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 (9). Craps re-orientates trauma theory, looking at it through a postcolonial lens in: Stef Craps. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

as a matter of keeping faith with humanity," an act of solidarity with those whose dignity has been stolen by trauma (106).

However, as Brisley warns, perhaps doing right by the dead (or the injured), is to do so at the expense of the self. Brisley uses Djebar's *Algerian White*, in which the author recalls the death of her friends and many others in the aftermath of the Algerian Civil War, to show some of the critical limitations of melancholia. In particular, Brisley draws attention to how, "[f]or all her insistence upon the ghosts' agency, however, it is, of course, Djebar herself who selects the memories that are to haunt the present … framing them according to her own desires within her own literary narrative" (105). Consequently, "[t]he possibility of a strategic form of melancholia or haunting associated with witnessing and testimony … gives way to Djebar's rationalisation that the dead do not really exist but are instead conjured at will" (Brisley 105).[17] As Marks points out in her discussion on the model of enfoldment, which unfolds memories in a similar fashion to melancholic remembrance, a consideration of the artist's or narrator's "selection of what elements to unfold and conversely, for their way of willing certain elements to remain in a state of latency" is useful in evaluating what information or experience is privileged and the potential reasons why (*Hanan al-Cinema* 72). Thus, as with most theoretical tools, melancholia is wielded subjectively. However, melancholia remains a useful critical lens in the field of postcolonial studies which I use in reference to both individual and national expressions of grief in the following section of this chapter, and which I revisit in later chapters.

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[17] Djebar is uneasy about her role as "conjurer." She is "particularly anxious not to become the *porte-parole* (spokesperson) of the dead" (Brisley 105).

11 September 2001: Pain

Freud compares melancholia to an "open wound" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 253). Freud's choice of language opens up the potential to speak of pain as something that manifests both physically and emotionally. This sub-section addresses the affective response of pain in the context of the events of 11 September 2001. Despite, or rather, because of, its ahistorical signifier, "9/11" remains omnipresent within the political thoughts and actions of the US. 11 September 2001 is a moment that is continually revisited and remembered. Thus, is can be presented as an example of remediated witnessing, framed in a variety of different ways, from multiple perspectives.

In fact, "9/11" represents an example of remediated witnessing par excellence insofar as its images, its linguistic signifier, and accounts of what occurred continue to be disseminated, even today. Each piece of memorialising documentation represents a return to the event, a remediation of the event that continues to be witnessed. This was especially prevalent in the press coverage immediately following the attacks, where "we encountered in the media graphic pictures of those who died, along with their name, their stories, the reactions of their families. Public grieving was dedicated to making these images iconic for the nation" (Butler, *Frames of War* 38). This proliferation of overt publicity is a source of remembrance and of remediated witnessing.

The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 are remembered through the reiteration and publicity of iconic images and, paradoxically, through negative space. Elaine Scarry posits that "the very content of pain is itself negation" (52). Within this affective framework, qualified by negation, no memorial is more exacting than Ground Zero, a non-structure, a no-place that serves to remediate and reiterate the space of

tragedy and grief.[18] In her consideration of the affective response of melancholia, Khanna proposes that when it comes to memorialising, "[t]he monument performs the work of mourning, and hence the assimilation of the dead object into the national body" ("Post-Palliative"). She goes on to state that "[t]he work of mourning materialized in the monument forms a simulation of the past in the service of political myths serving the state" ("Post-Palliative"). The monument, or, in the case of the former site of the World Trade Centre, the non-monument, is a space towards which mourning can be (re-)directed.

By having a structure (or non-structure) in place, affective mourning is projected upon that construct (or lack thereof), and also drawn from it, a cyclical process that is very similar to the act of remediation. The affective response to an event is, in fact, an affective response to an act of witnessing, and this response is continually revisited and reshaped with each renewed viewing or reception of the event, or with each reminder of the event. This reminder, or monument, does not necessarily have to be (literally) concrete material, but can, and is, represented in a variety of different textual media and communicative systems. For example, the ahistorical "9/11," that has, arguably, generated an entire mythos of discourses, is a linguistic monument, one that is continually remediated and reconsidered from a multitude of different perspectives. The events that occurred on 11 September 2001 lasted a day, but the signifier "9/11" is revisited continually in a cycle of remediated witnessing.

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[18] The non-structure of Ground Zero is rendered on the front cover of Art Spiegelman's board book, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), which places two gloss black silhouettes against the already black background of the cover. The remnant (or shadow) of the towers remain but, in reality, there is only the single coloured background left. For an account of the actual memorial and museum based at Ground Zero, see: Marita Sturken. "The 9/11 Memorial Museum and the Remaking of Ground Zero." *American Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2015, pp. 271-90.

The act of mourning can manifest both individually and nationally in response to feelings of grief, loss, and pain. In regards to pain, Sara Ahmed suggests that "[t]he wound functions as a trace of where the surface of another entity (however imaginary) has impressed upon the body, an impression that is felt and seen as the violence of negation" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 27). The monument (or lack thereof, in the case of Ground Zero) is an example of one such impression. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), Ahmed discusses ways in which the wound is impressed upon the skin of the body, and, in the case of the monument, following Khanna's directive, this impression can also leave its mark on the national body. The impression of pain, represented by the wound, leaves a mark, whether this is corporeal or not. In regards to the events of 11 September 2001, the impression left behind by the attacks left a mark on Western ideology, made visible by the West's resultant homogenous perceptions of, and actions in, the region of West Asia.

The *impression* left behind by an event or incident that instigates pain, whether it is emotional or physical, also marks out the *frame* of the material, national, or even ideological body. Here, I map discourses surrounding the physical wound onto a discussion of how impressions mark and, as *punctum*, therefore frame and/or disrupt textual and material bodies. Ahmed writes that:

> It is through the intensification of pain sensations, that bodies and worlds materialise and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, surface and fixity is produced. To say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what 'makes' those borders also unmakes them. This paradox is clear if we think of the skin surface itself, as that which appears to contain us, but as where others *impress* upon us.
>
> (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 24-25; original emphasis)

In a sense, pain consolidates an individual or national body insofar as the impression left behind, as negation, points to where the body begins and ends. If "pain sensations demand that I *attend* to my embodied experience," they impress upon and therefore mark out the surface (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 27; original emphasis). Ahmed's account of surface and embodiment is useful when considering the variety of different textual products that result from the witnessing of an event: written texts, photographs, and monuments all contain surfaces that have resulted from an impression or mediation. These textual surfaces embody that impression, which materialises emotional, affective, ideological and other non-corporeal influential experiences.

Ahmed's theorisation of pain is helpful in illuminating the inner workings of the model of remediated witnessing. In rapport with Ahmed's work, Scarry writes that "[w]hile pain is in part a profound sensory rendering of 'against,' it is also a rendering of 'something' that is against, a something at once internal and external" (52). Essentially, that which is without can impress upon that which is within via close proximity at the border (in Ahmed's usage the skin; in mine, the frame or surface material of the text). The wound that is inflicted upon the border—of flesh, or the graphical, or ideological frame—both adds to and removes something: it imposes upon and cuts away a part of the original, thus composing a visceral layering of multiple frames, remediated and palimpsestic. By drawing attention to the border we allude to those aspects which layer and cut (or wound) the frame, which make and unmake—fix and unfix—meaning.

11 September 2001: Hatred

The conflict implicated under the title "War on Terror" does not simply exist on an international scale, but also nationally: following 11 September 2001, hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in the US rose exponentially. This sub-section examines

elements of Yoeu Ali's *1700% Project*, which responds to this rise, to demonstrate the ways in which remediated witnessing can be used. Additionally, it draws attention to the ideological and (violent) physical response to the terror attack in the domestic US. This violent ideological response within the US primarily presented itself as an assumption that "Muslim" meant "Terrorist." This example of conflated meaning across lexis is facilitated by what Ahmed refers to as "sticky" words or signs where "[t]he work done by metonymy means that it can remake links – it can stick works like 'terrorist' and 'Islam' together – even when arguments are made that seem to unmake those links" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 76). It is the continual circulation and reiteration of linguistic, visual, and performative signs that makes these terms "stick" to one another, in guiding the perception of a group identity. Metonymic impressions are left upon or stick to an individual body, textual body, or ethnic body.

Impressions on the body are left both verbally and physically. With regards to hate crime, Ahmed argues that "[v]iolence against others may be one way in which the other's identity is fixed or sealed; the other is *forced* to embody a particular identity by and for the perpetrator of the crime, and that force involves harm or injury" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 55; original emphasis). The moment of impression—or materialisation (such as through writing or photographing)—results in the fixing of a border or frame. In the case of hate crime, the barrier of the skin is forced to embody (becomes fixed) with an identity, such as the ethnicity of the individual living in that skin, and it is done at a cost: the impression also represents an injury, in which the barrier of the skin is broken (unfixed). The target of the hate crime experiences both these results for the very reason that they are targeted.

An affective response, as an embodiment of feeling, therefore results in the simultaneous cutting and layering of the barrier (of skin) which, in being damaged, is

also marked out. Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead describe affect as "a material intensity that emerges via the 'in-between' space of embodied encounters, circulating power not primarily as a mode of discursive regulations but rather as the potential to 'become otherwise' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994)" (116). Their definition of affect as an "in-between" state captures the seemingly paradoxical combination of cutting and layering in this particular instance: an embodied encounter is both inflicted (by another) and responsive (to the other). Significantly, Pedwell and Whitehead identify the potential of this "in-between" space as a space for reorientation. This opportunity to re-orientate the impressions inflicted by another (such as in the case of a hate crime) can manifest through reiteration.

This process is evidenced in Yoeu Ali's poem "1700%," which is part of a larger project that explicitly responds to the rise in Islamophobic hate crimes following 11 September 2001. The *1700% Project* demonstrates how the "War on Terror" has also translated to an attack against Muslims, or those perceived to be Muslim, or even "other." The *1700% Project* is an iterative project where the poem, "1700%," has since manifested as "video, audio recording and performance/installation" where "[e]ach iteration of the text becomes its own work of art with a unique site of engagement" ("Home," *The 1700% Project*). My particular focus is on the Yoeu Ali's video, entitled "1700% Project: Mistaken for Muslim." This video is an iterated text both from within and without. From without, the poem that is performed in the video appears in the other art forms outlined above. From within, the poem iterates, repeats, and, most significantly, re-orientates and reclaims its content.

As a particular example of this, Yoeu Ali offers two separate accounts of different events. The first reads:

Awoke to find 300

march on a mosque in Bridgeview, IL 300

American flags shout 'USA! USA!'

Then, later in the poem, we are told of how: "Two women at a bagel store, attacked / for wearing a Quranic charm." Both of these accounts are then collapsed upon one another, becoming: "300 march on two women at a bagel store." The patriotic American identity that Yoeu Ali constructs in this poem is symbolised by both the flags that are waved and the repeated shout: "'USA! USA!'." This version of US identity is built out of the ideological and physical responses to the events of 11 September 2001. Yoeu Ali's use of compounded, or reconstructive, iteration, outlined above, both demonstrates how the targeting of "Muslim" escalates and, at the same time, serves to personalise Muslim identity. Originally, 300 march on a building that symbolises a religion, but in the compounded, reconstructed iteration, 300 march on two people in a bagel store. In the compounded iteration there is no identifier of faith, as there was in the first rendition, which cites a Quranic charm as the motive for the hate crime. Thus, the threat grows as the huge number of people march against two women in an ordinary public place, with there being no reason cited for this aggressive action. The threat of those marching has personal ramifications as people, not a religious building, become the target.

"1700%" characterises an US ideology that, post-9/11, targets not just Muslims, but the "other." Through reconstructive iteration and the recounting of specific and personalised hate crimes, Yoeu Ali re-contextualises the attack against "Muslims" by recognising the ordinary individuals who are personally affected by these attacks. In the video, the prevalence of the ways in which such ideological and physical targeting affects individual people is demonstrated (and reiterated) by both the words of the poem

and through the presentation of those credited as "portrait participants".[19] These portrait participants intersperse the performance, which presents Yoeu Ali being carried by pallbearers while speaking her poem aloud. The portraits are snapshots, mimetic but lasting only a second or two each. These snapshots offer a diverse representation of the "other." For example: a black man in a hoodie with an unsmiling face; a close up of a half-smiling woman; a mother in a head scarf with four children who are all grinning at the camera. In these three examples alone, we are presented with a diverse set of faces and expressions. They might be assumed to be "Muslim," "Arab," or even "Terrorist," but these portraits offer a visual representation of separate personalities with different identities and emotions.

In outlining a critical background for the model of remediated witnessing, I previously cited Khanna, who argues that the frame of a captured image can be interrupted with the use of the *punctum*, resulting from overlapping sensual registers emerging either from within the scene or, in particular, from off-screen. The event is captured, and held "hostage," but the *punctum* serves to reach out and "pierc[e]" the viewer" (Khanna *Algeria Cuts* 39). In her account of this process, Khanna uses violent rhetoric throughout and, in equating the frame and the visual form with terms such as "hostage," "piercing," and "wounding," she, to some extent, politicises the visual process in and of itself (*Algeria Cuts* 39).

Similarly, Yoeu Ali further politicises her poem in the video by being accredited as "Poet/Prisoner." As "prisoner," Yoeu Ali's role can be equated with the position of "hostage" to which Khanna makes reference. The frames that constitute the "hostage" are exemplified by both the orange clothed prisoner captured by the camera lens and

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[19] The role of the portrait as it applies to representing, and represented, identity is explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.

also, in the opening of the performance, by the grave site which the "Poet/Prisoner" occupies (see figure 1). However, this dual framing of the "prisoner" by the outline of her grave and by the edges of the visual frame itself, is then interrupted, and exceeded by the spoken poem which audibly *cuts* across these images, while, in a different vein, the images of the "portrait participants" serve to *cut* across the auditory landscape; their diversity interrupting the condemning words and acts that target them as "TERRORISTS" (Yoeu Ali "1700%").

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 1: "Prisoner's Grave." Screenshot from "1700% Project: Mistaken for Muslim," by Anida Yoeu Ali.

Thus, the use of iteration and the interruptions across both auditory and visual fields in the performance of "1700%" serve to destabilise the frame drawn by an ideology that conceives Muslim identity as terrorist identity. In one instance during the poem Yoeu Ali recounts an event in which an "Attacker lunges and yells, 'Look / what you people have done to my people'." In this instance the attacker is an American attacking "you people" (the other; the Muslim). Later, however, these words are reiterated and re-appropriated by Yoeu Ali. As the video comes to a close, the frequency of "portrait participants" increases and the visual frame is cut across by the verbalised poem where the use of compounded and restructured iterations increases, culminating in Yoeu Ali standing before the camera and demanding: "LOOK! what you people have done!" She re-appropriates and redirects the phrase two-fold, both towards those who have perpetrated these examples of hate crime, and also towards the viewer. Her explicit response to these hate crimes and the command to "LOOK!" forces her audience to turn

their gaze inwards and to be self-reflective of their potential complicity. The reiterated and redirected phrasing targets, pierces, and wounds the viewer.

The World Trade Centre was the target of terrorists. As a result, Muslims became targets of hostility and blame and, on an international scale, Afghanistan became a target of a retaliatory attack and manhunt by the US military. Creative works such as Yoeu Ali's *1700% Project*—visual, written, performed, spoken—cuts across this network of connections which have manifested both physically and ideologically. The *1700% Project* targets the perpetrators of hostility while at the same time deconstructing that which their hostility is directed toward: a monolithic (and reductive) Muslim or Arab (or even terrorist) identity. Thus, we see an example of remediated witnessing in the taking of an event (the hate crime), the recording of this event and, the *re*-construction—the layering and cutting— of the event.

Yoeu Ali's *1700% Project*, as an iterative project, provides a clear demonstration of how the model of remediated witnessing might be consciously mobilised as it directly engages with and responds to the socio-political climate in the US following the events of 11 September 2001. The act of remediated witnessing simultaneously layers and cuts in order to re-negotiate meanings, and the model offers a space for communication or argument between the persons in the following positions: subject, agent, and witness. Often the individuals involved can take on more than one of these roles, if not all three. In the example of the *1700% Project* we see the marginalised "other" re-appropriate the textual space. They reformulate the message of the hegemonic narrative of discriminatory hate: the subject(ed) individual enacts agency. The reconfiguration of the relationship between subject(ed) and agential identities, as demonstrated in my analysis of the *1700% Project*, is central to my

overarching focus on the reformulation of West Asian female identities, using the model of remediated witnessing.

Subalterneity and Configurations of Agential and Subject(ed) Identities

My thesis starts with and, thus, pivots around the category of the "Subaltern." The problem of subalterneity is pervasive in postcolonial discourse. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills preface Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as "the exceptionally cited female voice," weighing the more common awareness of "male greats" such as Frantz Fanon and Edward W. Said over "the contributions of women scholars and activists" such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks (1). In spite of, or perhaps more accurately, because of her "exceptionally cited-ness," I find Spivak's exploration of the subaltern a necessary starting point in a thesis concerned with the representation and reception of postcolonial female identities. In the final part of this chapter, I therefore expand on the subaltern as a theoretical category, and negotiate how gendered subaltern identities are prefigured into and can reconfigure the hierarchical relationship between agential and subject(ed) identities.

A subaltern is a subordinated individual who finds themselves marginalised as a result of their "class, caste, gender, race, language, and[/or] culture" and is "used to signify the centrality of dominant/dominated relationships" (Prakash 1477). My work engages, in particular, with the gendered subaltern, whom Spivak identifies as being "consistently exiled from episteme" ("Practical Politics" 102-03). The gendered subaltern in West Asia is marginalised as a result of dominating discourses that operate both intra- and inter-nationally. Within specific nations, women can find themselves marginalised by male dominated political or policing groups. In Afghanistan, for example, this body might be represented by the Taliban; in Iran, the Morality Police,

and so forth. Internationally, West Asian women find their experiences lacking, or exiled, from the episteme that might be constructed by the news media, or even by feminist discourse, as discussed in the introduction of the thesis. Hegemonic models of a supposed "global feminism" are often the kind that is perpetrated when the media, or feminists, make claims that West Asian women are oppressed. That is not to say that these women have not been subjected to oppressing forces, but rather that Western feminists and West Asian women might have very different opinions of what it is that constitutes this oppression, and what might count as "liberation." This is something that will be explored in detail in future chapters, especially in Chapter Two. Here, I approach the possibilities of deconstructing such hegemonic episteme by asking where the voice of the gendered subaltern can be located in these multifaceted relationships.

Spivak grapples with her eponymous question in her significant and controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985). Spivak explores the modes of epistemic violence (and the exile of the marginalised and the disenfranchised from episteme) that become apparent via processes of neo-imperialism, and also in First World intellectual and theoretical writing. She identifies the "benevolent *Western* intellectual" and argues that "the [marginalised] 'subject' has a history and that the task of the first-world subject of knowledge in our historical moment is to resist and critique 'recognition' of the Third World through 'assimilation[]'" (263; original emphasis). Essentially, Spivak argues that the Third World individual should be understood as part of a heterogeneous, not hegemonic, episteme: Western thought, and Western *theory* should not be applied unquestioningly to cultures that operate in different epistemes.[20]

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[20] Spivak does problematise this position in "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World" (1987): "Resisting 'elite' methodology for 'subaltern' material involves an epistemological/ ontological confusion. The confusion is held in an unacknowledged analogy: just as the subaltern *is* not elite (ontology), so must the historian not

Spivak then goes on to examine the responses towards the practice of *sati*, or *suttee*: a Hindu widow self-immolation ritual. In particular she sets up the ramifications for the legal appropriation and judgement passed by the British colonial elite; the significance and meaning of the act (*sati*) shifts in the eyes of the law (and therefore in the official episteme):

> In the case of widow self-immolation, ritual is not being redefined as superstition but as *crime*. The gravity of *sati* was that it was ideologically cathected as 'reward,' just as the gravity of imperialism was that it was ideologically cathected as 'social mission.'
>
> ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 274; original emphasis)

When Spivak concludes her essay, answering her eponymous question with the claim that "[t]he subaltern cannot speak," it is filtered through these examples of epistemic violence, performed on a theoretical, intellectual, and legal level (283). The central understanding of *sati* is reframed by the neo-imperialist perspective. Through her disclosure on the ritual of *sati*, Spivak reveals the life and death ramifications for the subaltern individual. As Spivak states in an interview with Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean: "'the subaltern cannot speak,' means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard" ("Subaltern Talk" 292).

As a means of approaching Spivak's claim that "the subaltern cannot speak," particularly in light of the hegemonic episteme outlined above, I consider the ways through which individuated (and thus, heterogeneous) expressions of agency might unfold within a subaltern identity, generating a useful position from which to approach the categories of female identities considered throughout my thesis. Gyan Prakash

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know through elite method (epistemology)" (349; original emphasis). Thus, the academic arguably finds themselves in an impossible position.

argues that, despite the "effort[s] to retrieve the autonomy of the subaltern subject" by those who work in the field of Subaltern Studies:

> [T]he subalternist search for a humanist subject-agent frequently ended with the discovery of the failure of subaltern agency: the moment of rebellion always contained within it the moment of failure. The desire to recover the subaltern's autonomy was repeatedly frustrated because subalternity, by definition, signified the impossibility of autonomy: subaltern rebellions only offered fleeting moments of defiance, 'a night-time of love,' not 'a life-time of love.'

(1480)

Here, Prakash essentially argues that the subaltern cannot sustain her own agency, and goes on to align "agency" with "autonomy." Prakash stipulates in his argument that autonomy is a condition and/or consequence of a rebellious or defiant act: an act which seeks to usurp the power constructs of the "dominant/dominated" binary that he initially laid out. Thus, if aligned with rebellion insofar as it seeks to disrupt hierarchical power structures, the speech act that Spivak alludes to in her essay cannot be sustained.

However, I disagree with Prakash, who seems to suggest that the only means through which agency can be precipitated is through a (fleeting) rebellious act. To put my case simply: agency is not predicated by acts of defiance. Judith Butler locates agency within "[t]he paradox of subjectivation" whereby "the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms" (*Bodies that Matter* 15). Butler therefore "locate[s] agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (*Bodies that Matter* 15). To put it another way, to recall the reiterative qualities of Yoeu Ali's *1700% Project*, when Yoeu Ali issues forth a challenge against hate crime, her speech act is

demonstrative of performing agency, but is also, quite literally, formulated out of the words and actions produced within the same power structure she seeks to dismantle. Yoeu Ali's words imitate and reiterate and are therefore immanent to the power structures she challenges; engaging in a subversive conflict, rather than setting up an antagonistic opposition. Agency can be conceived through acts of disruption, but is, itself, tied to the personal actions of the individual and can be used or practiced neutrally, internally, aggressively, or, as in the case of the *1700% Project*, subversively.

Agency, as a concept, is implicated within existing power structures, and not limited to disruptive acts. Thus, if we take Spivak's words, "[t]he subaltern cannot speak" to mean that the speech act is unsustainable, this is not to imply that the subaltern has no agency, as Prakash suggests, but rather that the subaltern, *as* subject-agent, is embroiled within a schema of discourses ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 283). The configuration of the individual as conjoined subject-agent indicates the simultaneous occupation of both subject(ed) and agential identities. Agency is a condition of "signification" as a continual, ongoing process of performative repetitions (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 198). Thus, the agency of the subaltern, while perhaps only conceivable within dominating, hegemonic discourse, does exist. The subaltern is a subject-agent. However, her *autonomy* and ability to act independently of these signified power structures tends to be frustrated and at best fleeting. The subaltern subject-agent, while not dependent on the success of a rebellious act, is, with the failure of this act, non-autonomous. Thus, the subaltern-as-agent works within the system of a "paradox of subjectivation" whereby the speech act, or the failure of the speech act, actually serves not just as a consequence of the power structures that the subaltern-as-agent occupies, but as its condition: speech is "enabled," "produced," and *producing* (Butler, *Bodies*

that Matter 15). Thus the speech act mediates, and is mediated by, the discursive spaces in which it is transmitted.

Even when "agency" is opened up to the transformative potential that is availed through "the possibility of a variation on … repetition," it does so within certain parameters (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 198). For example, in her discussion on drag, Butler argues that the "performative dimension of gender is not precisely *an example* of subversion" but rather challenges what we understand "reality" to be (in her example, heteronormative gender appearances), by presenting an alternative that is deemed artificial, and yet is constructed out of the same materials—of discourse, of episteme (*Gender Trouble* xxiii; original emphasis). Thus, acts of reality (of heteronormativity or otherwise) are revealed for what they are: a construct and a performance (*Gender Trouble* xxiii). Any transformative potential that is availed to agency is therefore located within the already existing dominating episteme: "it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible" (*Gender Trouble* 198-99; original emphasis). Recalling the reiterative qualities of the *1700% Project*, repetition and the reconstruction of image and/or performance (as in the case of drag) subverts, in an indirect way, the dominant episteme by drawing attention to its status as a construct.

I apply this theorisation of subversive agency to visual and written media produced and published in the post-millennial period. However, it is helpful, briefly, to recall Iranian artist Shirin Neshat's *Women of Allah* (1997) photographic series. Neshat's controversial series simultaneously evokes and de-sediments binaries in the representation of specifically Muslim women, anticipating some of the key analyses of post-millennial representational politics in this thesis. Many of Neshat's images repeat similar iconography: an out-turned woman's face, a black *chador*, Persian script

overlaying the subject, and a gun. The combination of Persian script alongside the closed or obscured mouth of the female subject unsettles the notion of the silent—subaltern—woman. The combined appearance of the *chador* and the gun "blur[s] the line between the complementary gendered tropes of 'warrior brother' and 'veiled sister'" whose titles are affiliated with post-revolution Iran (Moore, "Frayed Connections" 7-8). In addition to representing these (de-)constructed binaries, the reiteration of these iconographic and, thus, *signifying* details, across various images in the *Women of Allah* series, unsettles the neo-imperial and/or patriarchal hegemonic meanings previously associated with these representational features.

These iconographic features arise from this dominant, neo-imperial and/or patriarchal epistemology, but are re-orientated within the frame of the silent female Muslim subject. For instance, in the image "Rebellious Silence," a woman wearing a *chador* faces the voyeur with Persian script transposed onto her face and the straight line of a rifle's barrel, held vertical, cutting through the centre of the image. Her mouth is closed and barred by the gun she holds, but she *speaks* without speaking. Her confrontational return gaze, the writing etched across the image of her face, and the gun she holds can be interpreted as agential expressions. The potential for agential expression within these iconographic features, combined in this single image, is compounded in their reiteration across the photographic series.

Anthropologist Saba Mahmood draws from Butler, cited above, to elucidate her discussion of Muslim women's agency in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005), which gives an "ethnographic account of an urban women's mosque movement that is part of the larger Islamic Revival in Cairo, Egypt," emerging

in the 1970s-80s (2-3).[21] Mahmood's work clearly accentuates how modes of agency and subject(ed) identity are often interlocked, wherein the transformative potential of agency is located within the already existing dominating episteme:

> [O]ne may argue that the set of capacities inhering in a subject—that is, the abilities that may define her modes of agency—are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations. Such an understanding of power and subject formation encourages us to conceptualize agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable.
>
> (17-18; original emphasis)

Modes of resistance are not generated anew, but are formed using the models of what is already there. Following Mahmood's reading, based on a specific Muslim context, agency is located within the subject, or subjected, identity. This account of subalterneity, which oscillates between subject(ed) and agential identities, allows me to reconceive the identity of the subaltern, which is more frequently associated with disenfranchisement. Agency resides in the capacity to reiterate and reformulate subordinating or dominating epistemologies, and the model of remediated witnessing offers one way of doing this, textually and materially.

Applying the model of remediated witnessing, reiterative performances and projections of identities and events are continually reframed: working to cut through the layers of representation, or to add to them. In either case, we are drawing attention to

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[21] Adair Rounthwaite draws from Mahmood's work on non-liberatory agency in order to show how "Neshat's art offers a way of thinking about Islamic women's agency which is not reducible to the binary opposition of liberal freedom vs religious oppression" (166). I return to Mahmood in Chapter Two to account for this same issue in my analysis of the representation of Muslim women in the post-millennial period.

the frame and to the construct, at once fixing and unfixing the meaning of the contents that is framed, and of the frame itself. That which is represented, whether visually or verbally, is a construct that is labelled according to the prescriptive perception of the witness. A representation of an event or individual, as a remediation of something that has been witnessed, is a construction which often involves prescribed or non-prescribed performances of the subjected individual. By identifying this performance on the part of the represented individual, we can conceive of this individual as subject-agent. The act of remediation allows room for agential expression, located in the remediated perceptions of the witness, in the construct, or frame, of both written and visual material media, and in terms of ideological constructs and epistemologies.

Situating Myself as Writer and the Process of Writing as Remediation

At the conclusion of my critical methodology section it seems pertinent to briefly contemplate how my own writing of this thesis represents a form of remediation. The process of writing—of researching, drafting, re-drafting—is a process of remediating. The texts and events that form the basis of my analysis have been revisited numerous times: writing that began elsewhere (such as conference papers) has been revised and re-contextualised. Moreover, whether explicitly or implicitly, in focusing on the post-millennial period, my thesis has been responsive to and influenced by politics, events, and critical and theoretical ideas that have emerged since the start of this project.

Ideologies and epistemologies are not static constructs. This is made clear in Spivak's work, where she offers a direct response of her own to her initial claim that "[t]he subaltern cannot speak" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 283). This is identified in her own reworking (and thus remediation) of her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). Here, Spivak states that: "I was so unnerved

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by this failure of communication that, in the first version of this text, I wrote, in the accents of passionate lament: the subaltern cannot speak! It was an inadvisable remark" (308). Even within its most recognised theoretical context, the concept of the subaltern (and agency) has a complex and shifting genealogy.

The speech act that Spivak alludes to in her title is not constitutive of a verbal expulsion of words in the corporeal sense, but rather about the way in which the spoken word is, or rather, is *not*, received: "The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read," nor re(-)presented by the intellectual without some "complicity in the muting," for example, by an academic (*Critique* 308-09). It is the appropriation, or rather, the misappropriation of West Asian female identity within intellectual and journalistic discourses that ascribes subaltern identity. It is this which I strive to assess critically in my thesis, while attempting not to perpetrate the very same "rescue" narrative that I am criticising. As a white British woman my own perspective is limited: my own research and arguments represent one *frame* of reference. I position myself here as a dissenter from neo-imperial politics and Islamophobia. I am not a rescuer, but, rather, an ally of women of colour and, in the specific context of this thesis, Muslim women. I strive to practice intersectional feminism in my life and in my academic writing. I aim to combat epistemic violence, wary of Spivak's warning against the assimilation of a subaltern identity (subaltern-as-agent) into hegemonic and intellectual discourses.

Through her own remediation, Spivak demonstrates how theoretical and conceptual thought in the academic world is also layered, and thus fragmented: undercutting and re-adjusting. The intellectual is as much embroiled in the act of remediated witnessing as the writers, artists, characters, and subjects of the works that they examine. This is, in many ways, an asset: to conclude a critical analysis with the assertion of a resolutely fixed meaning closes down a text, and it closes down the

representations contained therein. We must remember that academically charged theoretical and conceptual critical tools are subject to change or re-evaluation. This itself can demonstrate the intellectual's awareness of how their work is situated within a world whose politics, environment, and means of information dissemination is continually shifting.

Chapter Two

Subaltern

Imaging Female Identities, Framing Afghan Women

In 1999, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) were unsuccessful in persuading international media networks to air the secretly filmed public execution of Zameena, an Afghan woman, in Kabul. The film was rejected as it was deemed "shocking for western viewers" (Rawa Afghanistan). However, the organisation discloses in the summary of their video, uploaded to YouTube in 2011, that "after [the] 9/11 tragedy, every network was approaching us to get a copy and it was aired thousands of times all over the world" (Rawa Afghanistan). Why the sudden change in stance? Corinne Fowler cites this same incident as an example in which "feminist discourses of liberation were appropriated for the purpose of marketing western liberal secular democracy through military intervention" (191). The suffering of Afghan women was misappropriated as part of a humanitarian discourse which was partially used to justify military action in Afghanistan.

In the context of the "War on Terror," the figure of the "oppressed woman" became a signifier, an *alibi*, in support of US and British military intervention. The term "alibi" is borrowed from Rae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre, who uses the term the "Afghan Alibi" to describe "the excuse US officials provided for military occupation of Afghanistan" ("Portraying the Political" 337). This chapter exposes the ways in which this "alibi" is perpetrated, particularly in visual media. I expand on my discussion in Chapter One on the subaltern-as-agent, an individual whose expressions of agency mediate, and are mediated by, the discursive spaces within which they are transmitted,

as part of what Judith Butler calls "[t]he paradox of subjectivation" (*Bodies that Matter* 15). As theorised in Chapter One, within a framework of subjectivation and signification, it is possible for the individual to simultaneously occupy both subject(ed) and agential roles. This chapter expands on this position within the specific context of imaged Afghan women. I extend my earlier arguments, challenging the notion of subalternieity as a strictly subject(ed) identity, before focusing on other tropes of identity—Spokesperson, Mother, Martyr—which are more readily, though still limitedly, associated with expressions of agency. Examining the perception and misappropriation of Afghan women, and to a wider extent, Muslim women, in Western media following 11 September 2001, I argue that there is potential for agency to unfold within subaltern identities.

By disrupting the various frames used to construct the visual image, it is possible to subvert and challenge the discursive structures behind the images of Afghan women produced within the context of the "War on Terror." Considering the imaging of Afghan women, in this chapter I focus on the structure of material borders; the use of the *hijab* (or *burqa*) as a mode of framing; and the role of the voyeur's gaze and the return gaze. I expand on my earlier critical methodology to theorise how modes of reiteration (and refraction), as part of a process of remediated witnessing, can deconstruct the various frames which structure discursive, visualised spaces. To do this, I examine several images of Afghan women produced within the post-millennial period, with a particular focus on Steve McCurry's *Afghan Girl* (Sharbat Gula) (1985), revisited by the *National Geographic* in 2002, and the cover image of Aisha for *Time* magazine in 2010. I argue that modes of reiteration and refraction structure and destructure the frames of the images examined in this chapter, deconstructing the artifices that have composed women's represented identity and creating a space for this identity to be reformulated.

Re-orientating Significations: Framing Women during the War in Afghanistan

The "Afghan Alibi" exemplifies the ways in which the female body can be reduced to nothing more than a signifier within political and media discourses. Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar argue that Afghan women were "rhetorically useful" in justifying US and British military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 (771). Within this context, the female body might be best understood as monopolised: reduced to a monolithic status that becomes a commodity of sorts. Images of women dubbed by US President George W. Bush as "women of cover" were utilised "to sell the war to the US public" (Stabile and Kumar 765-66). This notion of selling the war is literally realised in that the female body, when disclosed as part of the "Afghan Alibi," becomes fiscally tied to the spending of the (US and British) defence budgets on overseas fighting in Afghanistan, and to the income of those media outlets that write about or show them as oppressed (or liberated). As such, the female body becomes both signifier and commodity: a fetishised object, at once both immaterial and material.

However, I argue that these frames which signify and commoditise female images and identities can be broken down. I conceptualise the frame as something that is both reiterative—tied to remediated witnessing—and a fissure, or cut. In the previous chapter, I identified how agency is a condition of "signification" as a continual, ongoing process of performative repetitions (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 198). I posited the subaltern as a subject-agent wherein agency is opened up by the transformative potential of "the possibility of a variation on … repetition," but only within certain parameters (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 198). Within these parameters the varied action is constructed out of the existing hegemonic episteme: "it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible" (*Gender Trouble* 198-99; original

emphasis). Consequently, the rebellious or subversive identity of the subaltern-as-agent is realised by cutting through frames from within, in order to draw attention to these frames as constructs. In this chapter, I use this critical approach in my examination of imaged Afghan women represented within the context of US and British defence initiatives following the events of 11 September 2001.

In Chapter One, the famous question "Can the subaltern speak?" was explored at length through my theorisation of the relationship between agential and subject(ed) identities wherein an agential position is achieved through autonomous expression, while the subject position typically represents an individual upon which meaning is already inferred: they are subjected to an already prescribed role. I have argued that the subaltern can enact agency (can "speak") through subversive reiterative acts. However, John Beverley argues: "if the subaltern could speak in a way that really mattered to us [the dominant hegemon], that we would feel compelled to listen to and act upon, then it would not be subaltern" (xvi). Beverley views this as a complication through which the subaltern identity can never be successfully represented by the subaltern individual, whereby the subaltern identity ceases to exist altogether should the individual successfully speak and be heard.

This is a viewpoint that I contest. Responding to Beverley's assertion, I argue that a subaltern identity cannot simply cease to exist, purely because an individual might successfully articulate themselves and be heard by someone. A speech act might indicate a transition on behalf of the individual from silent subaltern to speaking subject, but the subaltern identity is not simply left behind. Rather, a defiant act, whether it is fleeting or permanent, is charged with a subaltern consciousness, even if the act itself transforms that identity. Through a process of both reiterative and transformative performativity, expressions of agency are enacted accumulatively, but remain rooted in

the initial discursive framework of subjectification. Accumulatively, these speech acts have the potential to deconstruct or subvert hegemonic frameworks, even exceeding the frame that has been imposed from without.

Although the above foregrounds the spoken word, the argument can be repurposed in order to explore the visualisation of subaltern identities and the consequent potential for subverting and deconstructing these. Modes of signification can be reoriented, especially when remediated and viewed from different angles and perspectives. In this chapter I examine visual representations of Afghan women who are subjects of—and subject(ed) to—the voyeur's gaze. By exploring the ways that frames are constructed, overlapped, reiterated, and cut from both within and without these images, I identify ways in which agency almost inevitably emerges.

The *burqa* is a major aspect to the visualisation of Afghan women in "coalition rhetoric of political and social liberation" in political and media discourses surrounding the war in Afghanistan (Fowler 191). The *burqa* is a politically loaded signifier, used as a "metonym for oppression" (Fowler 189). While the projection of the *burqa* as a symbol of oppression distracts from the identities and personalities of the women who wear it, the meaning of the *burqa*, or the *hijab*, is also de-contextualised. This de-contextualised rhetoric belongs to a larger misrepresentation of the so-called "veil." Fadwa El Guindi attributes the term "veil" as a Western one which fails to encapsulate the nuances and complexities of veiling culture, in which "[t]he absence of a single, monolithic term in the language(s) of the people who at present most visibly practice 'veiling' suggests a significance to this diversity that cannot be captured in one term" (7). Both in earlier colonial discourses and within the context of the "War on Terror," the "veil" is therefore almost entirely a conceptual and political marker of identity, but one that often ignores cultural, religious, and non-Western political contexts. When

speaking about direct examples I use the proper name for the apparel of cover being referred to (such as the *burqa*), or use the term *hijab* as opposed to the particularly loaded term of the "veil." Before discussing the specific contexts in which the *burqa* has been imaged in the visual representations of Afghan women following 11 September 2001, and its use as a signifier in political and commercial media as a fetishised object, I briefly contextualise and historicise some key aspects of the *hijab* within the religious, cultural, and political contexts of Islam.

The Hijab *in Islam: Sanctity, Privacy, and Politics*

Although I mainly look at the *hijab* through a feminist lens, to consider the *hijab* through the subject of gender alone offers only a limited perspective. Other socio-political frameworks should therefore be taken into account. El Guindi argues this same point with regards to the female-orientated space of the harem: "Looking at the phenomenon of the harem from the perspective of gender alone and through the ideological lens of feminism strips it from its cultural contexts and from society at large" (26). As such, this sub-section briefly historicises and contextualises the cultural and political background of the *hijab* as it relates to the practice of veiling in Islam.[22]

I use the term *hijab* throughout this thesis. As El Guindi explains: "'Veil' has no single Arabic linguistic referent, whereas *Hijab* has cultural and linguistic roots that are integral to Islamic (and Arab) culture as a whole" (xi). Describing the origins of the *hijab*, which means "curtain," in Muslim scripture, Fatima Mernissi states that the *hijab* "'descended,' not to put a barrier between a man and a woman, but between two men" (85). She cites 33:53 of the Qur'an, in which the "descent of the *hijab*" is narrated,

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[22] It is also pertinent to note that despite the strong association between the *hijab* and religious teachings and practice in Islam, historically speaking, "Islam did not invent or introduce the custom of veiling" (El Guindi 149). The custom of veiling is thought to have initially developed as a result of, or in conjunction with, pre-existing cultural practices in the region, such as "Hellenic, Judaic, Byzantine, and Balkan cultures" (El Guindi 149).

where a fabric curtain shielded the newly wedded couple of the Prophet Muhammad and Zaynab from the sight of the messenger, constituting a private space into which he is forbidden to look (85). In contextualising this famous verse, which is often used to support women's veiling practices, Mernissi reorientates the representation of the *hijab* in this religious-historical narrative from the subject of gender to the subject of privacy.

El Guindi draws links between the focus on both gender and privacy as it relates to the *hijab*, establishing a link between *harem* and *hijab*. She traces the etymological link across the "pilgrimage centre (*haram*)" and "women's quarters (*harim*)" from the root "*h-r-m*" (96). El Guindi attributes these spaces and the *hijab* as being linked to concepts of sanctuary, sanctity, and privacy, where "[d]ress in general, particularly veiling, is privacy's visual metaphor" (96). This manifests in a material, practical sense, insofar as El Guindi argues that "veiling is mobile, carrying women's privacy to public spaces" (95). In drawing a link across these cultural-religious locations and dress, El Guindi motions towards the different ways through which sacred and private space is performed both within and beyond a gender-orientated lens.

Mernissi offers another critical meaning associated with the *hijab* within Muslim religious tradition, as it relates to the practice of faith. She notes that for some, predominantly in the Muslim Sufi tradition, the *hijab* represents a "negative phenomenon" that disturbs and "blocks knowledge of the divine" (95). Mernissi adds that "it is the constant seeking of God that allows one to go beyond the *hijab* that imprisons our consciousness" (95). Here the *hijab* signifies a barrier of a very different type: it is not a blockade between two men, or between men and women (as it is generally understood to be), but between the individual and God. Within this context, Mernissi expresses her puzzlement that "[t]he very sign of the person who is damned, excluded from the privileges and spiritual grace to which the Muslim has access, is

claimed in our day as a symbol of Muslim identity" (97). Thus, drawing from the second, negative meaning that Mernissi has associated with the *hijab*—perhaps controversially—we see how religious and socio-political discourses on the *hijab* do and do not intersect in the representation of the *hijab* as a barrier to the divine versus its representation as a symbol of the upholding of faith.

Mernissi offers some important analysis of how the *hijab* is represented in relation to historical-religious narratives. Today, veiling continues to be a significant and visible practice in Islam. Much debate surrounding the *hijab* is entrenched in political discourses and, while many have explored the different reasons for veiling, Saba Mahmood states that "it is surprising that … authors have paid so little attention to Islamic virtues of female modesty or piety, especially given that many of the women who have taken up the veil frame their decision precisely in these terms" (16). In her anthropological study of the Egyptian Mosque Movement, which arose as part of the larger "Islamic Revival" across the Arab world, beginning in the 1970s, Mahmood frames a debate around the *hijab* as it relates to religious, cultural, and traditional modes of influence.[23] She argues that "bodily acts—like wearing the veil or conducting oneself modestly in interactions with people (especially men)—do not serve as manipulable masks in a game of public presentation, detachable from an essential interiorized self" (158). Rather, these bodily acts, in which the wearing of the *hijab* is included, serve as "the *critical markers* of piety as well as the *ineluctable means* by which one trains oneself to be pious" (Mahmood 158; original emphasis). Thus, the *hijab* is part of a structure made up of bodily acts. This structure constitutes an internalised practice of

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[23] Related to Islamism, Mahmood describes the "Islamic Revival" as "a term that refers not only to the activities of state-orientated political groups but more broadly to a religious ethos or sensibility that has developed within contemporary Muslim societies" (3).

piety, as opposed to overt political action, the latter of which seems to dominate much discussion on the subject of the *hijab*.[24]

Drawing from the work of both Butler and Michel Foucault, Mahmood refers to the "paradox of *subjectivation*" discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, whereby "the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent" (Mahmood 17). Mahmood argues that, consequent to this paradigm, or paradox, "[t]he kind of agency I am exploring here does not belong to the women themselves, but is a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which they are located" (32). As I argued in my critical methodology, expressions of agency mediate, and are mediated by, the discursive spaces within which they are transmitted. An exhibition of agency that is reflective of piety is likewise situated within performativity: "Virtuous actions … enact that which they name: a virtuous self" (Mahmood 163). If identity is derived from the actions of the individual and, in this case, the internalisation of a physical action, then the act of wearing the *hijab* is a reflection of pious character. Therefore, the *hijab* reflects both outwards and inwards: it is a visible performance of piety that constructs the individual.

In spite of the importance of the historical-religious contexts from which women choose to wear the *hijab*, in the specific context of US and British military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, media coverage and political rhetoric was almost wholly focused on the apparent oppression signified by the *burqa*. However, oppressive action is not encapsulated in the fabric of the *hijab* (or, in this case, *burqa*) but by forcing the fabric to be worn. The oppressive action of removing women's choice (agency) over

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[24] Mahmood does not state that these two factors cannot co-exist. In fact, she acknowledges that they often do, as in the case of the women's Mosque Movement in Egypt.

whether they wear the *hijab* or not means not just the enforcement of the *hijab*, but also its forced removal.

The focus on the *hijab* as a cultural battleground between the colonial or neo-imperial interests of Western countries and the nations they have become involved with is not new. For instance, in response to attempts by French occupiers to unveil women during the Algerian War (1954-1962), wearing the *hijab* (or *haïk*) was consciously framed as a political act symbolising the wearer's (nationalist) resistance to occupation, similar to the aforementioned women's Mosque Movement in Egypt in the 1970s-80s. Franz Fanon outlines how the occupying French forces saw the *hijab* as a space through which to enact their cultural battle: women, "with bare faces and free bodies, henceforth circulated like sound currency in the European society of Algeria" (42). This colonial narrative echoes in Western political discourses regarding the war in Afghanistan whereby liberating women from the *burqa* symbolises the attainment of a Western standard of "freedom."

Discussing the unveiling of Algerian women, Fanon's writing is charged with violent rhetoric where he reads the process of unveiling as an indication that Algerian society, via its women, has been "breached" and "rape[d]" (42). This violent imagery—that simultaneously victimises and feminises the colonised space—prevails further where Fanon asserts that, unveiled, the Algerian woman "has an impression of her body being cut up into bits" (59). By tying the *hijab* to the body insofar that its removal requires cutting not into fabric, but into flesh, the *hijab* also becomes tied with identity; an identity that is formed within socio-political and national ideological praxes. By conflating the female body with both her *hijab* and her nation-state, Fanon pre-figures the importance of the female population—and the *hijab* (or lack thereof)—as a means of identifying the politicised identity of the nation.

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As part of the Algerian resistance, wearing the *hijab* represented a political act, asserting the wearer's national identity. The occupier's violent attempts—both metaphorical and real—to unveil Algerian women contributed to the use of the *hijab* (or lack thereof) by the National Liberation Front and their supporters. First, the apparent transparency afforded by the stripping away of the *hijab* was used by the resistance movement in which unveiled women used their "European" appearance to transport weapons and information for the Algerian resistance, paradoxically disguised by their visibility. This tactic is famously depicted in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) where three unveiled women are allowed through French checkpoints while carrying explosives and execute bombing attacks. When the French became aware of tactics such as these, militant resources were instead hidden beneath the folds of the *hijab*, or *haïk*. In the context of the Algerian War, the *hijab*—and the decision to wear or not wear it— represented a symbolic position of resistance and nationalism, and, of particular significance, also served as a material, practical resource for resistance activity.

The *hijab* has also been used politically as a symbol of resistance in Iran during the Iranian Revolution in 1978-79. I return to the historical contexts behind the Iranian Revolution in Chapter Four, but it is worth noting here that in "the late 1970s, for many women hijab represented what the Pahlavis had rejected; from a symbol of oppression and a badge of backwardness it was transformed into a marker of protest and of a new Islamic identity" (Mir-Hosseini 4). Previously, Reza Shah Pahlavi had embarked on a policy of unveiling (*kashf-e hijab*) as part of a promotion of secularisation and modernity, banning the *hijab* (or *chador*) in 1936 (Mir-Hosseini 3). Ziba Mir-Hosseini points out how the decree to appear in public unveiled actually "brought [about] the confinement of many women and girls from religious and traditional families, since for girls to go to school or women to leave the house without chador meant – for them –

the transgression of a religious mandate" (4). This practice points to the importance of privacy to the Muslim religious understanding of the *hijab*, as explored above. The *hijab* can be therefore understood as a facilitator of women's mobility where they can maintain their privacy outside of the home.[25]

For many women during the Iranian Revolution, wearing the *hijab* was a political statement. Within the context of the revolution, *choosing* to wear the *hijab* was seen as a "re-claiming of their identity and faith" and a demonstration of these women's "rejection of the Shah's regime" (Mir-Hosseini 6). However, following its use as part of the Revolution, the *hijab* was enforced in 1979 when the Islamic Republic of Iran legislated for the opposite extreme of the *kashf-e hijab*. The enforcement of the *hijab* divided women, as had the earlier enforcement to unveil: some women strongly protested the compulsory *hijab*, leading to demonstrations and protests in 1979, but others who had struggled under the *hijab* ban, were now able to comfortably return to the public domain, with a sense of having the "moral high-ground" (Mir-Hosseini 7).

It is clear, both within the contexts of Algeria and Iran, that the *hijab* has a complex political history across different regions. The politics of veiling and unveiling is particularly fraught when women are given no choice as to whether they do, or do not, wear the *hijab*. The enforcement or banning of the *hijab* negates the agency of Muslim women who choose to either wear or not wear it, whether for reasons of piety, privacy, practicality, familial or cultural preference, or political statement.

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[25] The *hijab* was also linked to social mobility during this period in Iran. Even when it was no longer mandatory for women to unveil, following the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, under Pahlavi rule, wearing the *hijab* remained "a real hindrance to climbing the social ladder, a badge of backwardness and a marker of class" (Mir-Hosseini 4).

Marketing the **Hijab** *and Subalterneity in the Post-Millennial Period*

Within the specific context of Afghanistan, women may choose to wear the specific garment of the *burqa* for both religious reasons (as outlined above) and as part of the traditions of their tribal or ethnic communities. The *burqa* is most commonly associated with the Pashtun community, especially after its enforcement by the hands of the Taliban in 1996, whose "highly unorthodox interpretations of *Sharia* law … profoundly resembles Pashtun codes of Pashtunwali" (Fowler 74).[26] However, when featured in US and British political and media discourses addressing the reasons for military intervention in Afghanistan, the cultural, traditional, and religious contexts of the *burqa* were often ignored. The representation of the oppression of Afghan women, symbolised by the *burqa*, and not the choice, or lack thereof, of the women wearing it, is complicit in what Fowler identifies as "a clear correlation between the assumptions of Afghan women's subordination and the exclusion, or muting, of their voices" (201). In this context, Afghan women are consigned to the subaltern insofar as they are denied an opportunity to speak, their voices literally "excluded" from the conversation.

We can think about this consignment to subalterneity in relation to (institutional) structures of patriarchy and neo-imperialism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued, with particular reference to communal power structures, that perhaps it is not the task of the Subaltern Studies group to attempt the "making-visible of the figure of woman," but perhaps to "raise the question of woman as a structural rather than a marginal issue" ("Deconstructing Historiography" 301). She then goes on to suggest:

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[26] It is worth noting, that although the *burqa* is popularly attributed to Pashtun communities, the garment "has been discarded in several Pashtun communities" and, outside of Taliban control, it is now more usual for Pashtun women to wear "the *Chadar*, the length of which varies across communities" (Saigol 205).

> [T]he figure of the woman, moving from clan to clan, and family to
>
> family as daughter/sister and wife/mother, syntaxes patriarchal continuity
>
> even as she is herself drained of proper identity. In this particular area,
>
> the continuity of community or history … is produced on … the repeated
>
> emptying of her meaning as instrument.
>
> (302)

Here, Spivak proposes that a female subaltern identity often results from the categorisation of female identity that both produces and is produced by a dominant patriarchal structure insofar as designations such as "daughter/sister and wife/mother" are relational to men. The individual's personal identity is "drained" in favour of their performed role within a patriarchal institution (family, clan, society).

Likewise, in the case of the "Afghan Alibi," Afghan women are "drained of proper identity," serving as an "instrument" for media and political institutions perpetrating dominant Western (neo-imperial) discourses arising within the context of the "War on Terror." Adopting the approach proposed by Spivak's assertion—that "the question of woman" should be assessed "as a structural rather than a marginal issue"—in what follows I analyse the ways in which Afghan women were appropriated, mediated, and muted in the context of the "War on Terror" ("Deconstructing Historiography" 301). In particular I assess this structuring of subalterneity in discourses surrounding Afghan women by addressing the concept of the frame (and reframing) as a structuring device, drawing on the model of remediated witnessing.

The *hijab* is used frequently in neo-imperial discourses, especially in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. The *hijab* represents one of many defining characteristics of female Muslim identity, and yet West Asian women are often reduced to their apparel alone. As an explicit example of this, the Season Four promotional

poster of US television series *Homeland* (see figure 2) presents an image of a multitude of figures in black *burqas* all facing away from the gaze of the camera lens. These figures, "drained" of their identity, are presented as nothing but a structural frame: they represent the backward, the exotic, and the "other." Meanwhile the central subject in the poster, Carrie Matheson (Claire Danes), the white US Central Intelligence Agency officer, is dressed in a red headscarf with her face turned to look out of the frame. Her face—and her return gaze—is accessible to the audience. The splash of colour at the centre of a sea of black draws attention to her as the dominant neo-imperial power. The coding of the *red* headscarf recalls the semantic of threat and danger associated with the figure of Red Riding Hood. If "[a] frame both determines and supplements meaning," the role of both the red headscarf and black *burqa* in the framing of this scene serves to identify the political contexts of the programme (Khanna, *Algeria Cuts* 33). Season Four of *Homeland* is based on the interaction between the US and Pakistan. Even though the *burqa* is not the most common covering garment in Pakistan, its use as a framing device in the promotional poster draws from the common usage of the *burqa* in media rhetoric in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, in order to familiarise, and politicise, the narrative of the programme. Its usage empties the *hijab* of its religious, cultural, and local meanings and, instead, builds on the assumptions and expectations that have previously been set up by US media discourse, especially those surrounding the *burqa* in Afghanistan. The *burqa* (not the subjects beneath, it is important to note) provides a frame of socio-political assumptions with one particular purpose in mind: to sell the show.

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 2: "Homeland Season 4 Promotional Poster."

Here, the use of the *hijab* in media exemplifies the commodification and marketability of reductive assumptions about Muslim women, both in West Asia, and further afield, in the Arab world and the Muslim diaspora. The *hijab* sells when used in the media. Whether it sells socio-political ideas, or makes an actual financial and commercial gain, the *hijab* is an investment. We see this in the case of the *Homeland* promotional poster and on the cover of what Gillian Whitlock refers to as the "veiled best-seller" (*Soft Weapons* 88).[27] Speaking about the cover image of Jordanian author Fadia Faqir's novel *Nisanit* (1987), of a "veiled, faceless Arab woman," Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj point out that "[t]he cover illustration of the 1987 American King Penguin edition reflects none of the political themes of the novel … but taps instead into audience assumptions about Arab women" (5). The "veiled best-seller" taps into what Fowler identifies as the "enduring currency of the veil as a metonym for oppression," following the events of 11 September 2001 (189). In referring to the *hijab* as "currency" Fowler equates the *hijab* to a commercial commodity, one which makes use of its "metonym for oppression" as a key socio-political motivation for justifying US and British military intervention in Afghanistan (as part of the "Afghan Alibi"). The trend identified by Whitlock and Amireh and Majaj, which uses images of veiled women as a means of advertisement, positions the *hijab* as a commercial investment. As such, the *hijab* comes to represent a commodity.

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[27] I revisit the "veiled best-seller" in Chapter Three, "The Postcolonial Literary Marketplace," p. 118.

The **Hijab** *as Fetishised Fabric and Wounding the Voyeur*

Beyond the political metonymy associated with the *hijab* following the events of 11 September 2001, Amireh and Majaj identify another reason for the *hijab*'s marketability and (de-contextualised) commercial success:

> Within the space of this book cover [Faqir's *Nisanit*], assumptions about the 'oppression' suffered by Third World women come together with interest in the 'exotic veiled Third World woman' to create an eye-catching image, one designed not to reflect the actual content if the book but rather to attract readers and generate sales.
>
> (5-6)

Amireh and Majaj ascertain that the use of the *hijab* as a marketing device works insofar as it attracts the "benevolent first-world" Western reader within the context of the "rescue" narrative of the "Afghan Alibi" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 259). They also identify how the *hijab* attracts readers/voyeurs because it is associated not just with oppression in the context of the "War on Terror," but is also associated with the sensual, the exotic, and the spectacle that is drawn from the context of a far-reaching colonial history.

The "veiled" women who are tied to a narrative of "rescue" and the exotic can be understood as a fetish: "The fetish is stable, an object, an artefact. It avoids the restless probing of curiosity to see what lies behind a mystery" (Mulvey, "Introduction" xi). Often sensualised and sexualised, (veiled) women become a fetishised spectacle, "objects of display, to be looked at and gazed at and stared at by men. Yet in a real sense, women are not there at all. The parade has nothing to do with women, everything to do with man" (Mulvey, "Fears, Fantasies" 13). Laura Mulvey's assessment of the fetishised female subject is translatable to the conditions that produce the "Afghan

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Alibi." Women wearing the *hijab* who are represented in visual media and/or promotional material (such as book covers), are objectified and commoditised for the purposes of marketing the "War on Terror." Women's oppression is marketed as an argument in favour of US and British military intervention in Afghanistan, but perceptions of these women's oppression and/or liberation has no real depth. To borrow Mulvey's phrasing: the parade has nothing to do with social justice for Afghan women, everything to do with the political agenda of Western governments pitching the "War on Terror."

Misconceptions of the *hijab* are partly what codifies the assumption that covered Afghan women are oppressed. As such, we might argue that the fetish object in these visual representations is, in fact, the *hijab* itself. The lack of recognition in Western media and political discourse regarding the contextual background of the *hijab* is one factor that demonstrates the status of the *hijab* as a fetish object, in "which someone invests a meaning and a value beyond or beside its actual meaning and value" (Mulvey, "*The Carapace That Failed*" 520).

In the context of the "Afghan Alibi," the veiled subject—and the *hijab* or *burqa*—is fetishised and sensationalised by the neo-imperial gaze. Meyda Yeğenoğlu describes the *hijab* as a historical trope "through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient … are fantasmatically achieved" (39). The *hijab* is a fetishised object which, in turn, defines the fetishised subject and the way in which she is perceived: the *hijab* encapsulates a barrier which the neo-imperial voyeur, to borrow Yeğenoğlu violent and suggestive language, wishes to "penetrate".[28] Yeğenoğlu goes on to argue that:

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[28] This penetrative force, tied to the discourses and significations of the *hijab*, is reminiscent of—and rhetorically tied to—Fanon's assertion that "the rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil" (45).

An obsession with a 'hidden' and 'concealed' Oriental life and with the woman behind the veil and in the harem has led to an overrepresentation of Oriental women in an effort to evade the lack posed by a closed 'inner' space.

(73)

Yeğenoğlu argues that the barring of the neo-imperial gaze results in an exaggeration of the subject. When this is visually rendered, the Oriental female subject is often, quite literally, over-exposed as a consequence of the desire to breach, or penetrate, this private, restricted space (of the *hijab* and/or harem).

This overrepresentation, or exposure, of the subject results in the construction of artifice: a "simulacrum" (Alloula 64). The camera lens constructs an artificial surface in place of the hidden—and interior—subject: the gaze is not refocused towards the interior, but redirected towards a reconstructed, artificially produced exterior. Thinking of the framing of the subject and the relationship between subject and voyeur, the *hijab* can be analogised with the camera lens, as they both perform similar functions. Both negotiate a dialectic of visibility and invisibility. A camera lens facilitates and frames the (neo-imperial) gaze of the voyeur, and the frame of a photograph only permits a restricted view. The *hijab* frames the body of wearer/subject and therefore frames (or entirely blocks) the voyeur's gaze. The *hijab*, which is conceptually constitutive of the frame, perhaps serves as a source of protection. However, as a sensationalised fetish object, the *hijab* itself is also framed by the ideological structures operating in society, which render the *hijab* through a gaze—or lens—that commoditises, sensualises, and eroticises.

Despite the continual reframing of the *hijab* within neo-imperial discursive spaces, Mulvey reminds us that "[t]he message of fetishism concerns not woman, but

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the narcissistic wound she represents for man" ("Fears, Fantasies" 13). Applying the rhetoric of the wound specifically to the fetishising of the *hijab*, Anne-Emmanuelle Berger argues, in light of arguments posed by Luce Irigaray, that:

> Because the deemed 'invisibility' of the girl's genitals, an effect of castration threat, renders the possibility of castration visible to the boy's eyes, he will strive to cover up this 'invisibility,' to make invisible the invisible, in order to conjure away the threat. Such an attempt can take different guises, whether it leads to fetishistic behaviour (denial of man's potential castration) or to the prescribed covering of woman (denial of the castrated woman).
>
> (96)

In this reading, the *hijab* comes to represent a means through which men deny the potentiality of the narcissistic wound, or castration, to be inflicted upon his body. We are reminded that the voyeuristic (fetish) gaze towards the *hijab* is not only a neo-imperial gaze but also, significantly, a patriarchal one.

If the *hijab* constitutes a frame—one which obscures the female subject and enables the projection of male, neo-imperial fantasies—then disrupting the frame has the potential to upset the dominating, violent gaze. In her discussion of photography and cinematography, Ranjana Khanna argues that an interruption that occurs "off-frame" may result in the "piercing or wounding of the viewer" (*Algeria Cuts* 39). As Khanna shares her rhetoric of wounding with its psychoanalytical use by both Mulvey and Berger, we can infer that there is the potential for the (male) voyeur to be "wounded" if the *hijab* (as frame) is disrupted. This can occur when the simulacrum and/or fantasy is undermined by the contextualisation of the meaning if the *hijab* for the individual who wears it and through the actual appearance of the woman wearing it.

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This reframing is achieved, partly, through historicising and contextualising the religious, political, and personal meanings of the *hijab*, as covered earlier in this chapter, which challenges the use of the *hijab* as an emptied signifier within a neo-imperial discourse that supports the "War on Terror." We can also reframe and dissect the imaging of veiled subjects, analysing the construction of subject(ed) women in portrait photographs used as part of the discourse of the "Afghan Alibi." The remainder of this chapter considers the relationship between the subject(ed) and agential positioning of imaged Afghan women in photographs circulated or revisited within the context of US and British military intervention in Afghanistan in the post-millennial period.

"Rupturing" the Imaged Subject and the Subaltern as Subject-Agent

Mary Ann Doane posits the "veil" as a barrier that enters into "a curious dialectic of depth and surface," between the interior non-corporeal self and the physical body (Doane 56).[29] Much like the camera lens, the *hijab* represents a frame that is constituted and focalised from multiple directions. Just as the frame of an image marks out a conceptual point of access (or denial), so too does the *hijab*. Using the model of remediated witnessing to identify the intersections across frames, I consider what occurs off-frame. Through analysis of the dual dialectics of depth and surface, we can identify ways in which the imaged (and veiled) female subject might respond from within those very same structures that objectify her.

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[29] Although Doane's work on the "veil" is useful for my theorisation of the *hijab*, it should be noted that she speaks rather positively about the "veil" in the context of its appearance in cinematography in the 1990s, and not in relation to Muslim, neo-imperial, and/or Oriental discourses. She argues that the "veil" is "characterized by its opacity, it ability to fully block the gaze," and by blocking the spectator's gaze towards the spectacle, "[i]t is not … [the] … interiority, or psychology of the woman which is inaccessible but her sexualised, eroticized, and perfected surface" (48, 56). Doane suggests that the "veil" serves as a mode of protection (and privacy), introducing an ironic dialectic where its mode of covering obscures the eroticised flesh in favour of the interior personality of the subject: invisibility of the exterior results in the visibility of the interior.

It is through an investigation of the mediation of images that are framed and reframed that we might elicit agency from the photographed subject. Doane poses the question of "how can we imagine, conceive her look back?" before going on to suggest that such a "look back" might cut across frames, so that "[e]verything would become woven, narrativized, dissimulation" (75). By cutting across the frame, the returned or refracted gaze can re-orientate the voyeur's gaze to recognise the (material and ideological) structure within which the subject is imaged. The discursive, simulated space of the (photographed) image is built out of cuts across frames, not just from without, but also from within.

Doane's question helpfully opens up an enquiry into the return gaze of the female subject, but the "her" that she refers to is homogenous. I examine some specific examples of photographed Afghan (and veiled) women in the context of neo-imperial post-9/11 discourse, in which I consider the return gaze of the imaged women. First, however, I wish to outline the process through which an analysis of depth and surface in photography of (veiled) female subjects can reframe and address the existing frames that construct such images.

As an example of the way in which a hegemonic understanding of "her" can be rendered visually, especially in the context of neo-imperial discourse, I refer the reader back to the promotional poster for *Homeland* (see figure 2). The image perpetrates a trope which I call the "*Burqa*-Sea" in which an outward facing individual is framed by a "sea" of veiled, *burqa*-clad figures, each one indistinguishable from the other. In this image, and others like it, the interweaving of the veiling material is indicative of a merging or sewing together of identity, rendering the same woman over and over again,

constructing a refracted imaged figure: a mirror and a reflection.[30] The voyeur is attracted to the surface of the image: the *burqas*, each indistinguishable from the next, represent a sign that populates the image and which signifies a hegemonic "other" who is sensationalised and, by extension, commoditised.

This "other," and I use the singular as opposed to the plural exactly because the image homogenises the figure of the veiled woman, facilitates the "rescue" narrative that prescribes Afghan women as being speechless and oppressed in the context of the war in Afghanistan. The so-called "stakes" of the "rescue" narrative are emphasised in both the *Homeland* promotional poster, and in another example of the "*Burqa*-Sea" trope: a photograph taken by photojournalist Yannis Behrakis in 2001 (see figure 3) which pictures a young Afghan woman whose face is visible amongst a crowd of *burqa*-clad women. In both images, the out-turned face at the centre of the picture returns the gaze of the voyeur. In the *Homeland* promotional poster the central subject, whose face is visible to the viewer, is a white American female: her freedom as a Western woman is juxtaposed with the inaccessible, indistinctive, and oppressed "other" which frames her. Behrakis' photograph portrays a different dichotomy, where the central, outward-facing subject is Afghan. Her "unveiling" (her face is visible, but she still wears a *hijab*) metaphorically represents her liberation within the marked out space (or frame) of her *burqa*-clad, and thus, "oppressed" companions. Both images perpetrate a "rescue" narrative in which "unveiling" becomes tantamount to liberating.

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[30] This construction of homogenous identity is like that of the white-veiled women photographed in Algeria in the early twentieth century, which is one topic of Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (1987). Alloula discusses the production of the colonial postcard in Algeria between the 1900s-30s and suggests that, from these images, "nothing emerges except some vague contours, anonymous in their repeated resemblance. Nothing distinguishes one veiled woman from another" (7).

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF

ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 3: "A young Afghan woman shows her face in public for the first time after 5 years of Taliban Sharia law as she waits at a food distribution centre in central Kabul, November 14, 2001." Photograph by Yannis Behrakis.

The "unveiled" central figures in these images (especially in the photograph taken by Behrakis) might be used to facilitate the neo-imperial "rescue" narrative that featured in Western news media and political discourse in the context of the "War on Terror." However, the act of "unveiling" serves to dissolve, or unstitch, the fabric that has constituted the hegemonic "*Burqa*-Sea," revealing an individuated, heterogeneous subject, whose return gaze might cut across the frames of the image, and whose unveiling has the potential to destabilise the monolithic constitution of the "other" that seems imperative to the "rescue" narrative. The imaged Afghan woman in Behrakis' photograph, with her unique identity on show, continues to be portrayed within the same discursive, and politicised, fields that serve the "Afghan Alibi," framed by the "*Burqa*-Sea." However, her direct return gaze provides an opportunity for her to appear as subaltern-as-signified-agent. The defiant act of the direct return gaze is produced and transmitted within those same discursive spaces that have originally designated her as subaltern. Within the framework of the paradox of subjectivation, her return gaze challenges the gaze of the neo-imperial voyeur.

She points to the constructed nature of her imaging, drawing attention to the tool (the photographic lens) that has captured the image. In a sense, she "breaks the fourth wall" and, in doing so, as subject-agent, she cuts across the discursive frames of the image. This image, and others discussed in this chapter are, for the most part, portraits of female subjects. On the subject of portraiture, Kamilla Elliott writes:

The image always differs from what it images; it is never identical with

it. Identity as inherent imaging, then, articulates an affiliative relationship

that positions the image as both the link to and the point of rupture from

other identities.

<div align="right">(30)</div>

Portraiture simultaneously points towards, and serves to fragment, the identity that it is

representative of. The "rupture" that Elliott indicates in her conception of portraiture,

and the imaged subject, recollects the "piercing or wounding" of the voyeur that Khanna

references as resulting from the cut, or *punctum*, in visual multi-media (*Algeria Cuts*

39). In Elliott's usage of this violent rhetoric she refers less to the media or the projected

audience, but to the identity of the envisaged subject of the portrait. Her use of the term

"rupture" also recalls Jacques Derrida's similar hypothesis that "what is supplementary

is in reality *differance*, the operation of differing which at one and the same time both

fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and

delay" (88). The "supplement" is the image, and it operates as part of a process of

differance as a trace that defers/differs from "presence," which, for Elliott, is

represented by the distance between the body and the image, and the concepts of identity

regarding the subject that has been imaged. This itself can be traced back to Roland

Barthes' definition of the *punctum* as a supplement, an "addition" which "I add to the

photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*" (Barthes 55; original emphasis). In

the imaging of a subject who returns the gaze of the voyeur there is both a simultaneous

linking to (deferring) and rupturing of (differing) the represented identity captured in

the photograph.

The imaged female subject returns the gaze of the voyeur from within a

discursive and material frame, in which her identity is represented, simulated,

<div align="center">86</div>

constructed, and mediated. The image discussed in this section, and the ones that follow, feature Afghan women whose portraits are received by a (gendered) neo-imperial gaze in support of the discourse of the "Afghan Alibi." However, the return gaze of the female subject in these images gives rise to a potential upheaval of this discursive space. The return gaze draws our attention to the tools through which the gaze of the voyeur is also mediated: the camera lens. This represents a remediation of gazes, of focalisers, and of focalised points of reference. By acknowledging that the image is a construct, the image (and its contexts) can, in turn, be deconstructed. Consequently, the transformative potential of the subaltern(-as-agent), or imaged subject, can be found in the "rupture" (the "piercing," the "wounding," the "fissure," the "cut") that has been embedded within—and without—the composed image.

Cover Girls: The Portraits of Sharbat Gula and Aisha

In light of the contextual and theoretical praxes introduced within this chapter, I now go on to analyse two distinct examples of photographed Afghan women, whose portraits are entrenched within the discourse of the "Afghan Alibi." The first photographed subject under consideration is Sharbat Gula (most famously known as the Afghan Girl). She was initially photographed by Steve McCurry in 1985, and was later photographed as an adult in 2002, both times for *National Geographic*. The second photographed subject is Aisha, who was photographed and featured on the cover of *TIME* magazine in August 2010. I situate the imaging of these two women against the discourse of the "Afghan Alibi," following the events of 11 September 2001 and the ensuing war in Afghanistan. I examine the ways in which agency can be conferred from within these subject(ed) representations via the remediation, refraction, and reframing that occurs in the photographs under consideration.

Reiterating the* Afghan Girl *during the "War on Terror"

The representation of Afghan female identities is tied into a paradox of subjectivation within the neo-imperial "rescue" narrative perpetrated by the US to legitimate the war in Afghanistan. The performance of agency by Afghan women is conceivable from within the same discursive spaces which they attempt to challenge. In the case of Anida Yoeu Ali's reiterative performed poem, as part of *The 1700% Project*, discussed in the previous chapter, the (re-)cycling of words and images serves to subvert the discursive space to which they belong, by drawing attention to it as a construct. Yoeu Ali's poem is a model example for this reiterative process. The transformative potential of the (ethnically) marginalised speaker/poet from subject(ed) identity to agential expression is brought about due to the intentions of the artist to critically respond to post-9/11 ideological constructs in the US. In my examination of the figure of the Afghan Girl, I demonstrate how agency can also be conceived from the subject of an image produced by another.

The *Afghan Girl* was photographed by Steve McCurry in 1984 and later appeared on the cover of the *National Geographic* in June 1985. At the time, her name (Sharbat Gula) was not known and so she came to be called by the title of her photographed portrait. I typically refer to her as the Afghan Girl, as this is the signifying moniker under consideration. The iconic image of the young Afghan girl in a red *hijab* and with searing sea-green eyes resurfaced following the events of 11 September 2001, when McCurry and a crew from *National Geographic* went in search for her, to discover who she was. The documentary *Search for the Afghan Girl* (2002) and the resulting articles and photographs published with the *National Geographic* are examined here.

As theorised earlier, the process of reiteration and remediation provides room to deconstruct, re-structure, and/or subvert neo-imperial discourses. However, reiteration

can also be used to emphasise the fetishising neo-imperialist gaze. As Alloula envisions in his discussion of the colonial Algerian postcard:

> Photography nourishes the voyeurism of the photographer but never satiates it because this voyeurism, as the structure of desire, has neither beginning nor end … It is therefore an infinite plethora of images that tirelessly repeat the same subjects: one photographer copying another and so on.
>
> (67)

The voyeuristic (and/or neo-imperial) gaze of the photographer seeks to repeat that same subject within their images, simultaneously constituting and constituted by fetishised desire. In the case of the *Afghan Girl*, this repeating fascination and voyeurism in the beginning of the new millennium is embedded in the high stakes of both neo-imperialist economic and political discourses.

The image of the *Afghan Girl* is utilised as part of the "Afghan Alibi," both as an economic and political construct. Schwartz-DuPre applies the "Afghan Alibi" to the 1985 production of the *Afghan Girl* on the cover of the *National Geographic* and proposes that this image represents a discourse "that is produced by, produces, and reproduces colonial narratives of rescue" ("Portraying the Political" 337). Schwartz-DuPre discusses the "Afghan Alibi" in light of the involvement of the Reagan administration in Afghanistan. However, the term continues to encapsulate the continued relationship between the US and Afghanistan, especially in light of post-9/11 discourses of "rescue" and in relation to the revisiting of the image in 2002.

The "search" for the Afghan Girl in 2002, documented by the *National Geographic*, reiterated the iconic 1985 image in the new, but connected, context of the "War on Terror." Schwartz-DuPre argues that the use of biometric technologies to

locate the "missing" Afghan Girl, as detailed in the documentary, seeks to justify the use of these tools within the post-9/11 period ("Rhetorically Representing Public Policy" 447). There is something quite sinister about US security resources being used to locate an Afghan woman photographed some 25 years before. These security resources are typically used to identify criminals, security threats, and victims. The documentary demonstrates how these security measures can be used to track down a victim: the "missing" Afghan Girl. The use of these tools to "help" the "victim" (to "find" the "missing" girl) justifies the use of these tools in the name of security to "protect" those in danger. If these tools can successfully track down a missing girl, they can also track down "threats" to US national security, which, in this context, is "stuck" with a Muslim identity, as discussed in Chapter One. The humanitarian, anthropological project to locate the Afghan Girl promotes the use of increasingly invasive security measures in response to the events of 11 September 2001 by perpetrating the "rescue" narrative that homogenously perceives Muslim men in Afghanistan as a threat.

While the documentary frames its contents as being "one of the most challenging missing persons cases of our time," she is not actually missing. Schwartz-DuPre suggests that the use of biometric security technologies in the search for the Afghan Girl "assigns identity to truth – you either *are* or *are not* whom you claim to be. Identity *is*, or *is not*, authentic" ("Rhetorically Representing Public Policy" 443; original emphasis). The search for her "authentic" identity could be read as an endeavour to restore the subject of McCurry's initial photographed portrait with a semblance of individuated identity and agency. However, this reading is premised on the notion that the Afghan Girl needs to be "found." She is presented as "missing," but to whom is she "missing"? The *claim* of her identity, as the Afghan Girl, is not hers, but belongs to McCurry and *National Geographic*, who published the *Afghan Girl*. Meanwhile,

Sharbat Gula has lived her live with no knowledge of her famous portrait and the neo-imperial discourses that surround it.

I propose that this search for an authentic identity for the Afghan Girl was due to a need to revisit the cover girl for the "Afghan Alibi" in the new context of the "War on Terror," and to make a spectacle of the search and, by extension, the female subject. The search also represents a response to the recent investment in the "authenticity" represented in Third World literature that is received, even "welcomed," in Western feminist circles (Amireh and Majaj 9). "Authenticity," used in these contexts, and especially in relation to the search for the Afghan Girl, is a conceptually loaded term, where "authentic" narratives typically serve to authenticate the neo-imperial narrative.[31] The hunt for the "authentic" identity of the Afghan Girl in 2002 serves to support the "Afghan Alibi" that she first represented in 1985.

The neo-imperial basis to the claim of the Afghan Girl's "authentic" identity is demonstrated in the *National Geographic*'s report on finding her, written by journalist Cathy Newman:

> Names have power, so let us speak of hers. Her name is Sharbat Gula,
> and she is Pashtun, that most warlike of Afghan tribes. It is said of the
> Pashtun that they are only at peace when they are at war, and her eyes—
> then and now—burn with ferocity. She is 28, perhaps 29, or even 30. No
> one, not even she, knows for sure. Stories shift like sand in a place where
> no records exist.

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[31] Spivak challenges the notion of authenticity, proposing that "what I find useful is the sustained and developed work on the *mechanics* of the Other; we can use it to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the Other" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 265; original emphasis).

Newman is correct in her assertion that names have power. However, in the case of this narrative, the power does not belong to Sharbat, but rather to the neo-imperial agenda being perpetrated here. For example, Newman's declaration "let us speak of hers" very clearly designates the speaking voice—the revelatory voice—as being that of "us" (the reporter, the photographer, the neo-imperial rescuer and voyeur), not "her" (Sharbat).

Newman's article is lyrical in tone, in line with the aesthetic of the magazine for which it is written.[32] In fact, Newman ignores facts altogether, concluding her extrapolation of Sharbat Gula's background with the comment that "[s]tories shift like sand in a place where no records exist." This comment, while perhaps based in some element of truth, sets up Sharbat's life as a story which lies in some mythical plateau in the supposed sand-lands of Afghanistan, pandering to Orientalist assumptions of the "East." Newman is almost setting up Sharbat as a Scheherazade figure, except she is provided with little chance to tell any stories of her own. Newman uses the setting of *A Thousand and One Nights* (a sand-coated Oriental space filled with stories) as a trope, but fails to extend this allegory to allowing Sharbat to have control over her own voice and story. Set against this neo-imperial, paternalist approach towards the supposedly "powerful" revelation of her name, Sharbat is still very much the "Afghan Girl," not just as portrait, but as discourse. How can Sharbat subvert her designated identities (as refugee, female, war orphan, other, and subaltern) when the "Afghan Girl" is not only constituted by neo-imperialist discourses, but has come to represent that very same discourse?

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[32] Discussing key contexts surrounding the *National Geographic*, Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins posit that the photographs included in the publication are intended to be informative and to "have an aesthetic dimension that communicates feelings and emotions" (58). It is a magazine that "consistently beautifies and dignifies (at the same time that it exoticizes and objectifies)" (Lutz and Collins 274).

The answer can be potentially found within the revisited and reiterated images themselves. However, it is not just the neo-imperialist discourse and rhetoric of her iconic image that hinders Sharbat Gula's individuated identity, but also the photographer's gaze. Mulvey has linked fetishism to the same modes through which capitalist society functions, outlining the following dichotomies: "woman as consumed and woman as consumer of commodities, women exchanged in image and women transforming themselves into image" ("Introduction" xii). Thus, women literally buy into those same discursive spaces that commoditise them. From this we can specifically link fetishism to economic praxis, which is exemplified in the documentary when McCurry comes across a reproduction of the *Afghan Girl*. He asks for a special price for the reproduction because, he states, "I'm the one who photographed her." The shopkeeper offers him a discount of 20 (Pakistani) rupees. Not only does McCurry make a financial gain, via his profession, for the initial photograph that he took of Sharbat. He also exploits those whom the Afghan Girl is meant to represent. The commercial exchange in the documentary is particularly problematic when set against the scenes that follow: McCurry, having visited and photographed a woman named Alam Bibi, who, at the time he believes might be the Afghan Girl from the 1985 image, comments on the fact that "she can't afford the 25 cents it would cost to send her children to school." What is disturbing here is that the discount of 20 rupees that McCurry gained from this image of the Afghan Girl (who at this time he believes to be this woman) would actually constitute 19 cents of that 25 cents. McCurry makes a profit while she makes none. The unequal relationship between photographer and subject is abundantly clear here, as McCurry financially exploits the Afghan Girl, which, as discourse, can be ascribed to the identity of not just Sharbat but also Alam Bibi.

The power dynamics at work in the constitution of a constructed female identity, in the case of the Afghan Girl, are further realised through McCurry's declaration that "I'm the one who photographed her." The photographer is central to the whole commercial exchange, both locally, in the shop, and internationally, in regards to the sales of the 1985 image of the *Afghan Girl* on the cover of the *National Geographic*. Where is Sharbat Gula in this equation? The imaged subject is not the centre of this discourse, but is projected into the discursive space by others: "let *us* speak"; "*I'm* the one." These declarative statements in Newman's article and McCurry's dialogue defer Sharbat and privilege the paternal, possessive, and neo-imperialist (photo)journalists. This declarative frame of power is emphasised as McCurry continues: "I'm the photographer. You see the name here?" Pointing onscreen to his written name below the image, which he then also speaks aloud, doubly emphasises in both written and oral form McCurry's presence in this image. Given both his commercial success and the positioning of his name, branded, so to speak, onto the image, while hers remains absent (and at this point unknown), McCurry comes, in a sense, to *possess* her.

Therefore, in order to access Sharbat Gula's individuated identity, it is not only necessary to subvert the discursive rhetoric, or (visual) vernacular, that constitutes the Afghan Girl, but also the gaze of the photographer (McCurry). What space is there for Sharbat, as subaltern, to transform her own agency? Here, I take a closer look at the images produced from the 2002 re-visitation of the Afghan Girl. To begin, I analyse the title card of the documentary (see figure 4). Foregrounded by the documentary title, the older and newer images of the Afghan Girl are spliced together. Both images are framed: the 1985 image is framed by the yellow borders of the *National Geographic* magazine, while the more recent image is framed by the view-finder of a digital camera. The emphasis in both images is Sharbat's sea-green eyes, famous for having "captivated

the world since she appeared on our cover in 1985" (Newman). The splicing, or inter-cutting, of these two images draws our attention to her gaze, while, in both instances, the mouth has been obscured and is not visible. Her eyes represent, and to some extent, embody her iconic status, while her voice has been side-lined, symbolised by the erasure of her mouth from the spliced images, signifying subalterneity. Immediately following this title slide are scenes from the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, thrusting these images of the Afghan Girl into the discursive frame of the post-9/11 geo-political, neo-imperial landscape and the discourse of the "Afghan Alibi" in conjunction with the "War on Terror."

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF

ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 4: "Search for 'The Afghan Girl'." Screenshot from *Search for the Afghan Girl*, dir. Lawrence Cumbo Jr.

However, the effect of splicing these two images in such a way that both frames (the magazine border and the camera viewfinder) are visible results in a cut which "pierces both, indeed damages both frames, because it demonstrates its own liminality and therefore the representational structure of the frame itself" (Khanna, *Algeria Cuts* 5). While the title card foregrounds the discursive (socio-political) space in which these images operate, it can also be deconstructed through the splicing that occurs within the image—the clear depictions of the framing devices—and the reiterated gaze of Sharbat Gula onscreen. The cuts across the images in the title card create a fissure which deconstructs the material topography of the reporting and recording technologies that have visually captured Sharbat. Sharbat's reiterated gaze is also remediated two-fold within the frame of the title card: the two different frames within the title card prompt the voyeur to see Sharbat (the Afghan Girl) from two different angles and/or

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perspectives, diluting the gaze of the voyeur while Sharbat's is compounded. The two gazes from the same woman demand the voyeur to split their attention and acknowledge the frame(s)—material or otherwise—that construct the image of the Afghan Girl. By drawing attention to these works as constructed pieces, and by remediating them, it is possible to begin to destructure the possessive hold of the photographer's and neo-imperialist's gaze.

Following the discovery of Sharbat Gula—the *re*discovery of the Afghan Girl—McCurry captures another image: a sitting portrait in which Sharbat holds the 1985 *National Geographic* magazine, with her younger face on the cover (see figure 5). Once again, we witness a reiterated face and gaze, one that is framed by the purple *burqa*/red *hijab*: two faces, two pairs of eyes, but the same Afghan Girl. The reiterated image locates Sharbat, in 2002, within the same discourse of the Afghan Girl, which she simultaneously produces, and is produced by.

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 5: "Afghan Girl." Photograph by Steve McCurry.

Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins infer that the return gaze can be "confrontational," but that "this look, while acknowledging the viewer … implies a more open voyeurism," in much the same vein that the removal of the *burqa* affords access to the face (197). However, expanding on my point regarding the reiterated gaze in the title card of the documentary, the reiterated gaze in this photographed portrait serves to disrupt the voyeuristic gaze of the photographer, resulting in a schism rooted in the discursive identity of the Afghan Girl. Lutz and Collins describe what they call the "Refracted Gaze" in which a camera or mirror, held in the hands of the subject, serve

as "tools of self-reflection and surveillance," resulting in the creation of "a double that can also be alienated from the self, taken away, as a photograph can be, to another place" (207). The materiality of the tool or reflective surface (the camera, mirror, or, in this case, the earlier cover image) disrupts the imaged space.

There is a fissure between Sharbat Gula's identity, or imaging, as discourse and as individual. Embedded within the 2002 photograph, the 1985 *National Geographic* cover image is remediated— refracted—transported to and framed by this new context in 2002, and witnessed in this context. In one sense, the 1985 image is transported into the post-9/11 "rescue" narrative in which the search for the Afghan Girl is entrenched. However, the immediacy of the adult Sharbat within the image overshadows the material, aged copy of the original visual rendition of the Afghan Girl and the discourses attached to her iconic image. She holds the image; she is not the image. Through the splicing, compounding, and embedding of frames and gazes which engender a process of remediated witnessing, there is potential to fracture the iconised and discursive space constituting and constituted by the "Afghan Girl" as discourse. Sharbat's position as an agential figure can therefore be formed from the subject of the original *Afghan Girl* image through the same reiteration that was intended to substantiate the "Afghan Alibi."

Aisha and "Women of Afghanistan Under Taliban Threat": Wounding, Spectacle, and Portrait Participants

Whereas the revisiting of the Afghan Girl by the *National Geographic* took place at the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, the cover(age) of "Women of Afghanistan Under Taliban Threat" (2010) by *TIME* magazine responds to the decision made by the US to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in 2010. The photo gallery, "Women of Afghanistan Under Threat," features photographs taken by Jodi Bieber, and is featured

on the website of *TIME* magazine.[33] Amongst these images is a photograph of Aisha, which also appears on the cover of the August 2010 print issue of *TIME* and is accompanied by a written article (see figure 6). The cover image shows Aisha, her face loosely framed by a purple *hijab*, looking directly out of the image. Her face is scarred and disfigured; her nose is missing.

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF

ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 6: "Aisha." Photographed by Jodi Bieber.

The scar that features at the centre of the cover image can be read as abject. It is important to note that my application of the term "abject" is directed towards the *imaged* subject, as she is used as the cover feature of *TIME* magazine, and is *not* aimed at Aisha herself. Julie Kristeva defines the abject as "that of being opposed to *I*" (1). This definition inflects neo-imperial discourses which distinctly constitute the "other" as that which is opposite to the "I," where the "I" stands in for the neo-imperial powers who direct an Orientalising gaze. Accompanied with the heading "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan," Aisha's portrait comes to represent the threat of the "other"—in this specific context, the Taliban—whereby "[t]he abject confronts us … with those fragile states where man strays on the territories if *animal*" and of "*primal repression*" (Kristeva 12; original emphasis). The lack of a question mark in the heading "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan" implies that this is therefore a declarative statement which, appearing next to Aisha's scarred face, implies that what happened to Aisha *is* what will happen if "we" leave Afghanistan.

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[33] See: Jodi Bieber. "Women of Afghanistan Under Taliban Threat." *TIME*, 2010. content.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2007161_2170305,00.html.

Aisha's injuries were inflicted by men in her family as punishment for her fleeing her husband's home. In the cover image, her scar represents a "*symptom*" of abjection (Kristeva 11; original emphasis). More specifically, the scar signifies the brutal—primal—act that has been enacted upon her and the potential risk posed by letting her assailants remain free. Although the Taliban might not have been directly involved in her attack, the heading of the accompanying article to the image, entitled "Afghan Women and the Return of the Taliban," implies otherwise. The image of an abjectly scarred subject, in conjunction with the heading on the cover and the accompanying article, garners the fear of the voyeur by situating the "otherness" of the portrait as "both repellent and repelled" (Kristeva 6). The abject scar repels the reader, directing them towards a discourse of fear of the primal "other" (or Taliban), while at the same time, the repellent image alienates Aisha from the voyeur: she is decidedly *not* me, but she *could* be me.

These twisted relationships construct the abject frame of the "other" in different ways: the Taliban represent the force of abjection, the primal "other," while Aisha's scar represents the abject—the symptom of abjection—resulting from the Taliban's wounding of, or impression upon, her body. However, Aisha is victimised by processes of abjection on two fronts. The first sees Aisha wounded and scarred as a victim of abuse at the hands of her in-laws (and the Taliban). The second draws from Kristeva's understanding of abjection as not just "animal," but as a "sinister" personality, as "a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it" (4). Far from the "inflamed," sexualised, erotised images of the Oriental "other," Aisha, imaged onto the front cover of a major cultural magazine, is "bartered" and sensationalised. The imaging of Aisha's scar on the front cover might be construed as constituting "a terror that dissembles" as a means of instilling fear into the US reader,

and a "hatred that smiles" insofar as *TIME* magazine present a victim of a brutal crime who is emotionally accessible, pulling the reader in. *TIME* magazine's image constitutes a spectacle (a "smile") that simultaneously fascinates and frightens its readers, perhaps encouraging the support of a violent, retaliatory agenda towards the aptly named "terror" that resides overseas.

The accompanying article, "Afghan Women and the Return of the Taliban" (2010), written by Aryn Baker, uses the image of Aisha and her story to frame *TIME* magazine's political point. The article opens by narrating the story of how Aisha had her nose and ears sliced off, making a dramatic and emotive entrance into the written segment. We are then offered a brief interlude where Aisha's own voice is quoted. However, her opportunity to "speak back" to the reader/voyeur is overshadowed by Baker's commentary. As a result, Aisha's expression of her own voice is cut up when Baker focuses on her wound: "'They are the people that did this to me,' she says, touching the jagged bridge of scarred flesh and bone that frames the gaping hole in an otherwise beautiful face. 'How can we reconcile with them?'" By drawing attention to the wound, Baker embeds the scar within Aisha's speech act, where it functions as a part of her message. In the first instance, the affiliation between Aisha's wound and words serves to emphasise, even strengthen, Aisha's stance: her question of how it is that the Afghan government might actually accommodate and reconcile with the Taliban is marked by the physical "jagged" and "gaping" scars that have been inflicted upon her by the Taliban. Aisha's words are personalised ("me" and "we") and her action of reaching towards her scar—flagged by Baker—affiliates her words with this reminder of the violent acts of the Taliban against her person, and to others in Afghanistan.

However, Baker's explicit reference to Aisha's action also goes on to serve another agenda, targeted towards Western viewers. Richard Stengel, the Managing Editor for *TIME* magazine, in explaining his rationale for the inclusion of the image on the magazine's cover, claimed:

> We do not run this story or show this image either in support of the U.S. war effort or in opposition to it. We do it to illuminate what is actually happening on the ground … our job is to provide context and perspective on one of the most difficult foreign policy issues of our time. What you see in these pictures and our story is something that you cannot find in those 91,000 documents [released by WikiLeaks]: a combination of emotional truth and insight into the way life is lived in that difficult land and the consequences of the important decisions that lie ahead.
>
> ("The Plight of Afghan Women: A Disturbing Picture")

Yet, this claim that the article and image do not serve to lobby in either support of or opposition to the US war effort in Afghanistan is suspect given the heading of the cover image: "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan." The message is clear: if US forces leave Afghanistan, more violent and brutal acts will be perpetrated against Afghan women. It is true that the image and its accompanying article might offer "a combination of emotional truth and insight" into these women's lives, but this itself is an emotive ploy, and the article continues to be framed by a political agenda. For example, the blurb that follows the heading to Baker's article begins: "As the U.S. searches for a way out of Afghanistan, some policymakers suggest negotiating with the Taliban." While the article does go on to offer the different perspectives offered by some women in Afghanistan, including Aisha, the article continually returns to, and is framed and structured by, the context of US policies and decisions about Afghanistan.

The article is framed in a similar way to which "the jagged bridge of scarred flesh and bone … frames the gaping hole in an otherwise beautiful face" (Baker). That is, the geo-political, neo-imperial digression of *TIME* magazine impresses upon the presence of Afghan women and their voices in the article. Sara Ahmed argues that the wound represents a trace and impression upon the body, and that the resultant "pain sensations demand that I *attend* to my embodied existence" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 27; original emphasis). The knife leaves an impression and scar upon Aisha's body, just as a camera shutter captures an image, making an impression of the subject's presence. Wounding materialises the body: the *presence* of the body is insinuated by the very fact that it has been marked out, or wounded, as a result of an interaction. The wounded individual's identity is therefore embodied by its relationship to the other surfaces that it reacts to: a knife, a camera, an interviewer. Aisha's wound is fetishised and sensationalised as part of a sustained, neo-imperial "rescue" narrative.

Although Aisha's wound serves as a significant narrative and emotive frame to *TIME* magazine's coverage, while the wound manifests—both physically and figuratively—as the result of an impression of one force upon the other, this contact also leaves a trace on that which has enacted, fetishised, and sensationalised the wound. Acknowledging the discursive frames that construct Aisha's cover image and her narrative, however, represents only a limited success. The choice by *TIME* magazine to use Aisha on the cover and not, for example, Fawzia Koofi, the former Deputy Speaker of Afghanistan's parliament; Robina Muqimyar Jalalai, one of Afghanistan's first two women Olympic athletes; or Mozhdah Jamalzadah, a popular talk show host, all of whom are featured in the "Women of Afghanistan Under Taliban Threat" photo gallery, suggests that the aim is to produce a spectacle that shocks and sensationalises. Sharbat Gula's success in breaking the voyeuristic neo-imperial gaze, and accessing, or

possessing a space in which to perform as an individuated, as opposed to discursively prescribed agent, is similarly restricted. Both Aisha and Sharbat are located as icons that perform both commercial and political statements in cover photos to high-profile magazines and as representatives of the "Afghan Alibi." The transformative potential towards agency is restricted by the (neo-imperial, patriarchal) intentions of the Western photographer and the magazine. Thus, in these two examples, and in others featured in this thesis, the individual, through processes of remediated witnessing, occupies both agential *and* subject(ed) identities, the result of overlapping, refracting, and reiterated frames.

I have focused on how reiteration and remediation of a singular image can break down hegemonic frames and infer agency in the represented subject. In the cases of Sharbat Gula and (to a lesser extent) Aisha, it is a singular icon that is reiterated. However, there is another potential approach to destructuring hegemonic constructs, where we can look at not just multiple representations of a single person, but also representations of multiple persons. Multiple women are represented both in the body of the accompanying article to Aisha's cover image and in the photo gallery, "Women of Afghanistan Under Taliban Threat." These women are also framed by a socio-political discursive field. The choice to use an emotively charged image (of Aisha's scarred face) as the cover, despite the numerous other Afghan woman who are quoted and photographed, ultimately encourages support for the continued presence of the US in Afghanistan. However, unlike the singular focus on Sharbat as the iconic "Afghan Girl," the gallery does offer a multiplicity of individual portraits. Meanwhile, in the written article, the inclusion of multiple Afghan women's (agential) speech acts works to balance out the neo-imperial political undertones of the article insofar as those who

will be directly affected do offer different personal, political, and professional insights into the potential consequences tied to the withdrawal of the US.

The multiplicity of subjects photographed by Bieber for the photo gallery represent a multitude of (albeit imposed) identities. The gallery includes images of women in domestic spaces; women with children; a woman sitting in her talk-show studio; a woman standing on a running track; a young girl standing alone in a pink princess dress; a women in a *burqa*; and a woman in a hospital, her legs horribly burned. These women can be assigned a variety of categories of identity, some of which are organising categories in this thesis: wife, mother, spokeswoman, athlete, child, and victim.

In some instances, their categorised identities are explicitly laid out for us. For example, rather than using the names of the subjects of the image, as is the case in most of the images, the ninth image of the gallery is entitled "Prisoners." The title of this image prescribes these women with an assigned role. The commentary attached to the photo "Prisoners" sets out the discrepancies of law and order in Afghanistan, asserting that "[e]ven under the new government, Afghan society still imprisons women for crimes that are never ascribed to men." This context represents the gender inequality present in Afghanistan at a socio-political and legislative level.

Likewise, Aisha's portrait and body "comes into being not only through the mark of gender but also through the visualization of gendered violence" (Heck and Schlag 904). Another image shows Sabrina Saqib, Afghanistan's youngest parliamentarian. As a politician, Sabrina is neither a subaltern nor a victim, but still occupies a discursive space that is indicative of gender inequality. This is marked by the background to Sabrina's image, which is composed out of the framed portraits of, presumably, male parliamentarians. In occupying this masculine dominated space she

has the opportunity to disrupt this patriarchal space. Her positioning on the staircase metaphorically suggests that she is "climbing the ladder," so to speak. There are still stairs yet to climb; progress to be made. All three of these images—Prisoners, Aisha, Sabrina—represent examples of gender inequality in Afghanistan, but each image provides a different way in which this inequality manifests for different women in different situations, therefore offering a heterogeneous narrative.

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 7: Mahbooba Seraj. Photograph by Jodi Bieber.

In my earlier discussion on the trope of the "*Burqa*-Sea," an outward-facing female subject was framed by an indistinguishable crowd with no individuated female figures or identities, merely a refracted, monolithic, hegemonic conception of identity. Bieber's photograph of Mahbooba Seraj (see figure 7) offers an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with this discursive space. Mahbooba stands amongst a crowd of women at a training conference for parliamentarians. This crowd does not appear as a swarm of blue *burqas* which are indistinguishable from one other and Mahbooba's is not the only outward turning face. The crowd that frames Mahbooba, who stands at the centre of the image, is represented as a group of individuals: they wear different coloured clothes and *hijabs* and, facing ahead, each face is captured by the camera lens. Here we see an example of multiplicity that goes beyond the production of a photo gallery of women, within which this image appears. In this photograph, multiplicity is represented in a single image. Rather than constituting multiple female figures and female identities out of a series of frames—portraits that recall or allude to one another—this single frame serves to encapsulate a diverse representation of subjects. Perhaps the potential for

breaking down those frames which are constructed by the voyeur's/photographer's gaze lies not just in identifying the fact that they *are* a construct (via reiteration and remediation), but also by capturing images that locate multiple subjects within the same frame. All of these women in this image, with out-turned faces, participate within the image, there sheer number unbalancing the power dynamic between photographer/subject.

We can take this notion of multiplicity as a means of representing heterogeneity one step further. To do so, I briefly revisit Yoeu Ali's *The 1700% Project*, discussed in the previous chapter. In particular, I address the mimetic "Portrait Participants" used throughout the audio-visual performance "1700% Project: Mistaken for Muslim." These "Portrait Participants" number a total of 52 names in the credits. Here, as with the image of Mahbooba, we are offered a multiplicity of faces from a diverse group of people: different genders; hailing from different ethnic and religious backgrounds; some wearing a *hijab* or turban, others not; some presenting themselves in groups, as families or as friends; others appearing alone; old and young; some smiling; some grinning; some glaring; some stern. These are not icons. These are not cover images. These are, as their accredited role suggests, *participants*. They are participants in the video, in the narrative of the poem, and in US society. As participants, they are not possessed, or captured, but are active agents.

This active role is emphasised by the active mimetic video shots, each lasting only a few seconds: they are not quite still photographs as Aisha's and Sharbat's photographs are, but they are also not quite a video in the same sense as the "Mistaken for Muslim" video is as a whole. These extensively varied "portraits" exist in a moving frame, located somewhere between photo and video. In this in-between zone that transcends the photographic still, these participants inhabit a liminal space. The few

seconds of additional movement within the frame act as a *punctum*, a supplement that emphasises that the subject of the visual recording also exists beyond a single frame.

Open Wounds: Opacity and Transparency

The liminal space—the cut, the fissure, the schism, the *wound*—is the edge or frame through which discourse is constructed.[34] Acknowledging this fissure can simultaneously serve to strengthen these structures, or can destabilise and deconstruct them. The West Asian female body—her face, her eyes, her *hijab*—is mediated and monopolised by Western media, which mostly fails to show the multiplicity of the different experiences that lie at the heart of each individuated female identity. As I have argued, the individual that is designated with a subaltern identity is not without agency. Rather, because agency is a performed act, the individual finds her performance to be one that is subjected to mediating and signifying discourses. In this chapter, this discourse has been that of the "Afghan Alibi," which frames the imaged subject in light of neo-imperialist post-9/11 geo-politics.

The space in which the subaltern might perform agency lies in the fissures that structure and destructure the discursive space within which they are framed. The frame—or wound—implicates the image or narrative as not just a construct, but material: something that can be commoditised, but which also represents artifice. Discourse as artifice, or a *material* photo (as in the case of the Afghan Girl), can be identified and deconstructed through reiteration. Instead of obscuring or shielding the voyeuristic gaze, the process of reiteration results in a subversive confrontation. The

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[34] The reference to the "open wound," while used by a number of critics referenced in this chapter, lends itself first and foremost to Sigmund Freud ("Mourning and Melancholia" 253). It is also, significantly, cited by Irigaray who delineates that the girl, wounded—*castrated*—"functions as a *hole*," as "an outsider, herself (a) subject to their norms" (70-71).

self-conscious utilisation of those same discourses that have designated West Asian women as "other" and "subaltern," through reiteration, results in the deconstruction of the visualised, discursive space. A reiterative form (re-)directs attention to the discursive space as a construct: it equates to rubbing salt in the wound, to split this liminal space wider so that the frame, and not the subject, becomes the focus of the viewer's gaze. Here lies the space, this schism, within which the self-defining "she" can speak and look back at the imposer. The reiterative form forces the gaze of the voyeur elsewhere: it deconstructs the artifices that have constructed her identity as *they* see it and allows her to then re-build her own. She is not shielded by the opaque *hijab*, but is transparent about the discursive spaces that she occupies (either by her own choosing or without). Thus, she is essentially hiding in plain sight while the viewer is distracted by the overt frame, nursing their wounds.

<center>Chapter Three</center>

<center>**Spokesperson**</center>

<center>**Testifying Female Identities: West Asian Women Speaking/Writing
Personally and Polemically**</center>

This chapter turns to look at the trope of the Spokesperson, the arguable antithesis of the silent subject of the Subaltern. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey propose "an optimistic reading, that bearing witness in order to testify, or bearing witness to the other's testimony, means opening oneself to hearing a different kind of truth" (6). The reiterative folds that formulate the process of remediated witnessing are highlighted here: an event is witnessed; it is then articulated as a recollection via testimony; and this testimony is also witnessed, providing indirect access to the original event via its remediation. Witnessing has been widely linked to experiences of trauma and in giving expression to these traumatic experiences.[35] While this chapter does, inevitably, engage with testimonial works that give voice to traumatic experiences, I, following the prerogative of Ahmed and Stacey, attempt to offer an optimistic reading. I argue that personal narratives offered by female writers and spokespersons can serve to disrupt and deconstruct the epistemological, political, and economic frameworks that drive publishing markets, offering an opportunity to access alternative kinds of truth. I propose that these personal narratives have the potential to galvanise the political message these women are delivering.

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[35] The link between witnessing and experiences of trauma is expanded upon in my discussion on martyrdom in later chapters. See: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The John Hopkins UP, 1996; Stef Craps. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Abigail Ward, editor. *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

The act of giving testimony, either vocally or in writing, may be tied to experiences of trauma, but there are more affective responses at stake than (physical and emotional) pain. These range from more negatively associated emotions—anger and pride—to more positively orientated emotions—empathy, compassion, and hope. Gillian Whitlock states:

> Testimony is a political act that works on the emotions, and as a carrier
>
> of affect; it shapes how emotions move and shift relationally; it produces
>
> and conducts what moves us and makes us feel; it travels on ripples of
>
> emotion

(*Soft Weapons* 87)

In my examination of West Asian (auto)biographies both in terms of their content and marketing, I address the various affective resonances and responses that are conducted via the multi-folds of remediated witnessing. This chapter critically analyses the content, form, production, and reception of testimonial texts, and explores the personal and political agendas that are at stake in the works examined.

I initially concentrate on a small range of (auto)biographies that focus on women's experiences in the West Asian region. I mainly consider these through a pedagogic lens, which proves to be a useful frame when later considering the central focus of the chapter: Malala Yousafzai's iconicity and activism in support of girls' rights to education. I cover some already well-trodden scholarly ground in my consideration of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003) and examine the pedagogical scaffold of her text. An exploration of Christina Lamb's journalistic travel writing, *The Sewing Circles of Herat: My Afghan Years* (2002), proves pertinent given her role as co-author of *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013). I also look at testimonial writing

(and *testimono*) through an examination of Zarghuna Kargar's *Dear Zari: Hidden Stories from Women in Afghanistan* (2011). By looking at this connected form of (auto)biographical writing I highlight the way in which women's voices can represent the speaking individual and, at the same time, speak for a group in a nuanced and non-reductive way. An exploration of the tone and style of these various (auto)biographical texts provides a solid grounding and a critical framework from which to look at Malala Yousafzai's (auto)biography, the documentary *He Named Me Malala* (2015), and her 2014 Nobel Lecture.

Postcolonial Women's (Auto)biographies

In this section, I explore the ways in which (auto)biographical genres are adopted and adapted by female and postcolonial writers, and examine how these texts are disseminated and marketed. There is a level of uncertainty, or instability, in terms of the genre's parameters and forms of the genre in scholarly discourse surrounding Western (auto)biography. Bart Moore-Gilbert queries: "without a stable set of definitions of autobiography as practised in the West, how can its postcolonial analogues be distinguished generically?" (xiv). He adds:

> The task is further complicated by the heterogeneity of contexts and
> cultures from which postcolonial life-writing has emerged, not to mention
> the range of sub-forms it operates within – from autobiography as
> conventionally understood, through memoir, to *testimonio*, diary, email
> and blogging. (This poses the further danger of flattening such sub-
> generic diversity to fit a single totalising model.)
>
> <div align="right">(xiv)</div>

(Auto)biographical texts are anything but homogenous: their forms, genres, and sub-genres are various and shift across cultures and borders, in terms of their production, media, and reception.[36] While some work specifies its own generic context (the acclaimed *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) is unambiguously marketed as *testimonio*), other works are more difficult to categorise. For example, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return* (2000-04), which folds comics form into its narrative expression, is described in a variety of different ways. The 2008 Vintage Books edition markets the text as both an autobiography and a graphic book, and Lisa Hoashi reviews *Persepolis* under the heading of "graphic memoir" (162-65). Meanwhile, Whitlock coins the term "autographics" in reference to Satrapi's work ("Autographics" 966).[37] Given this heterogeneity, it is important to avoid, as Moore-Gilbert argues, the "flattening" of "sub-generic diversity," especially in light of the rise of inter-media and digital forms of expression (xiv).

The etymological roots of the word "autobiography" are, in Greek, *autos* (self), *bios* (life), and *graphe* (writing). James Olney views the autobiography as "more than a history of the past" but "also, intentionally or not, a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition" (35). The self (*autos*) is caught between and defined by lived experience (*bios*) and the experience of writing (*graphe*), both of which represent a process through which the self is continually developed and shaped. These components can interact with one another in different ways and can be emphasised to different degrees in any given text. Acknowledging the fluidity of the relationship between acts of self-expression, the type

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[36] There has been an influx of digital sub-genres within (auto)biography, wherein "[n]ew technologies have altered the fabric of autobiographical expression" and "shape[d] new routes for autobiographical acts" (Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* 4, 8).

[37] I will expand upon Whitlock's definition and usage of "autographics" in Chapter Four, when looking expressly at Satrapi's *Persepolis*.

of self posited, and the mode of representation used, allows us to engage with the heterogeneous forms that the "autobiographical" genre comprises.

Different (auto)biographical modes of self-expression and self-representation emerge out of, and operate within, different cultural contexts. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state that "[f]or the colonial subject, the process of coming to writing is an articulation *through* interrogation, a charting of the conditions that have historically placed her identity under erasure" (xx). In Smith and Watson's intentional gendering of the colonial subject, we see a conflation of the postcolonial and female autobiographer. They configure postcolonial women's (auto)biography as an expression—an "articulation"—of "a" non-western woman's identity that has previously been pushed to the margins, silenced, and erased by colonial histories and neo-imperialism. However, this reading implies an essentialist centre/periphery model that assumes non-western women's placement at the margins despite the various local and global contexts that might influence these women's works in terms of content, genre, and dissemination. It is important to recognise that while non-western women—in the plural—may speak from marginalised or peripheral positions, their locations are defined in complex social, economic, and political ways and intersect globally with what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call "scattered hegemonies" (17).[38]

As part of a centre/periphery model, the individual—whether colonised, female, or both of these things—is disenfranchised and/or marginalised in relation to dominating discourses. This marginalised individual may occupy the position of a subaltern. However, this is a position from which one can still write or speak, as I explored in my previous two chapters, mapping a model of the "subaltern-as-agent." At

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[38] For an extended account of the nuances and limitations of the centre/periphery and global/local models, please see: Introduction, "Multidirectional Trajectories in Postcolonial Feminism," p.5.

the beginning of my last chapter I quoted John Beverley, who argues that "if the subaltern could speak in a way that really mattered to us [presumptively, the Western audience], that we would feel compelled to listen to and act upon, then it would not be subaltern" (xvi). This suggests that a subaltern identity can never be successfully represented by a subaltern individual, as the subaltern identity ceases to exist altogether should the individual successfully speak and be heard. However, as I have argued previously, a subaltern identity cannot cease to exist, simply because an individual might successfully articulate themselves and be heard by someone. The speech act might indicate a transition on the behalf of the individual from silent subaltern to speaking subject, but the subaltern identity is not simply left behind. The act of speaking, in a way that matters to us, to borrow Beverley's phrasing, is charged with a subaltern consciousness, even if the act itself transforms that identity. If the act of articulation on the part of the speaker is intended to challenge the erasure of their person within the dominant discourse, the denial or deletion of the subaltern element of that speaker's identity seems counter-productive.

Moore-Gilbert highlights some of the keys ways in which marginal speakers are presented, or present themselves, in (auto)biographical writing and challenge dominant discourses. He argues that "feminist critics provide templates for defining what is *sui generis* about its [(auto)biography's] postcolonial equivalents," and identifies three characteristics that regularly feature in women's (auto)biographies, tying these to habits of postcolonial life-writing (xvii-xx). The equivalence between (auto)biographical texts produced by women and postcolonial writers, which Moore-Gilbert maps out, is a useful starting point, but it is equally important to recognise that although both women and postcolonial writers write from relatively marginal positions, these categories are

intersectional, and their work stems from a range of locales and reaches out to multiple audiences.

The first two characteristics that Moore-Gilbert outlines is the manner in which women's (auto)biography generally "promotes models of dispersed and decentred subjectivity," as opposed to the sovereign self of Western male autobiography, and the way in which these female autobiographies offer "a more dialogical conception of Selfhood as something which is essentially social and relational" (xviii). This initial outline by Moore-Gilbert suggests that female and/or postcolonial (auto)biographers aspire, whether consciously or unconsciously, towards a plural and collective self as opposed to an individuated self. In fact, Nawar Al-Hassan Golley argues that a model of (auto)biographical writing that aspires towards the sovereign self is wholly inadequate for Arab women writers: "Writing, for women, becomes a way to provide spaces within which women can talk about complexities and pluralities of their selves. The individualistic model provided by male writers, especially in the west, becomes inadequate to the lives women lead" (69-70). Golley's specific focus on Arab women's writing lends credence to the argument that female and/or postcolonial autobiographical work is predicated on the constitution of a plural and dispersed model of self-representation, which forms dialogues socially and locally.

The formation of a dialogical or relational self in autobiographical writing is not simply an act of engaging in conversation, but can also be seen as beginning a conversation, or even intervening within a pre-existing one. Golley states: "When a woman writes about herself, she is immediately engaged in a double process of writing and rewriting the stories already written about her as a woman, as passive or hidden" (61). Within this configuration, the female (and postcolonial) autobiographer participates within a social and political field and responds to, and perhaps even argues

with, the dominant discourses that have located these individuals within the margins. Speaking specifically about black female subjectivity, Mae G. Henderson proposes that black women writers traverse "simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous social and discursive domains out of which black women write and construct themselves … that enables these women writers authoritatively to speak to and engage both hegemonic and ambiguously (non)hegemonic discourse" (62). By extension, postcolonial women autobiographers speak within two discursive spaces: the space they write about and the space they are writing to; their subject and their market. They "speak in dialogically racial and gendered voices to the other(s) both within and without" (Henderson 61). In this sense, their narrative is relational in multiple directions, speaking to their own communities and also to those with backgrounds different from their own.

Postcolonial and/or women's autobiographical writing can be conceived as fundamentally relational. However, in her analysis of the Egyptian Mosque Movement and the political and/or pious implications behind women choosing to perform/practice their religion, Saba Mahmood warns that "it is incumbent upon us to analyse not only hierarchal structures of social relations, but also the architecture of the self, the interrelationship between the constituent elements of the self" (152). Thus, while the individualistic model might appear inadequate to postcolonial women's (auto)biography, postcolonial women are still more than capable of individual thought and self-reflection. As Golley suggests, the act of "[w]riting for women [also] becomes a double act of self-discovering and self-making" (61).

This leads us to the third characteristic that Moore-Gilbert outlines in reference to the equivalence between female and postcolonial (auto)biography: the inclusion of "a (reconceptualised) discourse of embodiment to women's subjectivity" (xviii). Women writers tend to engage dialogically with elements of their personal, social,

cultural, and political environment in their writing, often in overt and self-conscious ways. Thus, "the colonial subject inhabits a politicized rather than privatized space of narrative. Political realities cannot be evaded in the constitution of identity" (Smith and Watson xxi). Golley casts this shift from private to public, or the publicising of the private, in positive terms when she argues that "[w]hen a woman writes her own story down on paper or tells it to others, she is asserting her autonomy by ordering her life into a composition and to that extent moving toward feminist consciousness" (81). The act of writing or speaking about oneself explicitly builds relational ties with the surrounding world, responding to social and cultural circumstances, alongside the writers' own set of politics. In Golley's configuration of the (auto)biographical act, (auto)biography is not merely a form through which the female and/or postcolonial writer situates themselves within a localised or global space. It is also a way of reformulating the way one embodies the space they are writing from or to; or of composing a relational experience out of her own choice of words. Within this relational experience, the personal becomes emphatically tied with the political. In this chapter, I argue that the personal narratives of postcolonial female writers and spokespersons can serve to deconstruct hegemonic political agendas, and suggest that personalised narratives can empower, or draw attention to, an intersectional political or polemical message.

The Postcolonial Literary Marketplace

The publicising and the politicising of the private in (auto)biographical texts is not only reflected in the content of the work, but also in terms of the publication and dissemination of the text within commercial and public spheres. The first thing to note is that these works are not produced exclusively by an author. Literary texts are

mediated by editors, translators, publishers, and distributors, whose actions are "made with economic as well as literary factors in mind" (Amireh and Majaj 4). The mediatory figures listed by Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj have an impact on the content, cover, paratexts, and advertising of a text as it goes to market, and affect the market itself through the selection of what is and is not published and commercialised. Editors and translators, to different extents, make decisions about what material to leave in and take out; what to change and how to change it. In turn, publishers and distributors tend to select texts that they believe have commercial value. The shortcomings of the Western market for postcolonial literature are outlined in a 2015 report published for *Literature Across Frontiers*, which identifies that the number of translated texts being published in Britain is approximately three percent of all texts published and distributed in English (Büchler and Trentacosti 5). This statistic suggests that translated texts have little commercial value and serves as a useful marker of the potential restrictions for writers of postcolonial texts in languages other than English.

The reader, as consumer, also plays a significant role when it comes to the marketing and publicising of the text. Postcolonial texts are often understood to represent a window into the local, political, and/or social situations of the author. Such texts are often approached with pre-existing assumptions that influence potential readings of the text. As discussed in my introduction, Amireh and Majaj identify a trend in the reading of women's postcolonial texts whereby "instead of being received and read as literature, and assessed on literary grounds, Third World women's literary texts have been viewed primarily as sociological treatises granting Western readers a glimpse into the 'oppression' of Third World women" (7). Here, Amireh and Majaj argue that the reader/consumer does not assume postcolonial women's writing to be solely literary.

In *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (2007) Whitlock expands on this issue in the post-9/11 context, addressing, in particular, the reception of Afghan (auto)biographical texts in the West. She writes:

> The notion of 'soft weapons' captures the double-edged nature of these forms of life narrative. They can be harnessed by forces of commercialization and consumerism in terms of the exotic appeal of cultural difference. They can also be used to buttress aggressive Western intervention in so-called primitive or dysfunctional national communities. And yet they can also be used to describe experiences of unbearable oppression and violence across a cultural divide.
>
> (55)

Looking specifically at female postcolonial (auto)biography, Whitlock identifies three different ways in which a text might be received. The first involves a commoditised fetishism of the exotic in the marketing of the text, which has political and aesthetic ramifications in terms of the "decontextualisation" and de-historicising of the text's cultural focus (Huggan 20). The second involves a justification or propagation of Western political ideas and actions, where Whitlock argues that the (auto)biographical text "is a 'soft' weapon because it is easily co-opted into propaganda" (*Soft Weapons* 3). Finally, and corroborating Amireh and Majaj's argument, (auto)biographical texts might be read ethnographically or, in related fashion, in ways that enable the metropolitan reader to display "cosmopolitan tastes, openness, sympathy, political commitment, and benevolent interest in cultural difference" (*Soft Weapons* 55).

Taking note of these paradigms in which postcolonial female (auto)biographical texts are read as a means of propagating "soft" neo-imperial ideals, I wish to draw attention to what Whitlock terms "the 'veiled best-seller' – popular and romantic

biographies of Muslim women" (*Soft Weapons* 88). As discussed in the previous chapter, the agenda of the "veiled best-seller" is comparative to, and an instrument of, the "Afghan Alibi," whereby the representation of Afghan women as oppressed generated sympathy and facilitated support for US and British military intervention in Afghanistan. The increase in the publishing of texts by West Asian writers in the West in the post-millennial period is highlighted by Whitlock's account of the production of exiled Iranian writer, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*:

> Random House scheduled a first print run of 12,000 copies for Nafisi's memoir when it purchased the option in 1999. Following the events of 9/11 this first print run became 50,000 copies. In the build up to the war in Iraq Azar Nafisi became a popular commentator in the West, and the book sold 95,000 copies in hardcover. It made its paperback debut on the *New York Times* best-seller list in January 2004 and has sold 484,000 copies.
>
> (*Soft Weapons* 21)

This serves as but one example. In the last eighteen years, especially since the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, there has been an increased production and sale of fiction and autobiography written by or about West Asian women. Texts such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* are part of a literary market that appeals to and promotes cosmopolitan benevolence, sympathy, and support for US and British (military) intervention in West Asia. In using the *hijab* as a marketing device, given that the *hijab* has become metonymically associated with discourses of female oppression, texts published with an image of a veiled woman (or women) on its cover endorse a paradigm that readers might then use to interpret the written content of the book. This represents

an overt example of how readers might approach texts with a particular interpretative predisposition.

Addressing the way in which a reader/consumer might be predisposed to read a postcolonial text, Graham Huggan suggests that cultural difference is produced in the political sense. Unequal power relations are highlighted across various representations and in terms of aesthetic value, commoditised and generally "measured explicitly or implicitly in terms of the *exotic*" (Huggan 13). Huggan argues that metropolitan marketing attempts to assimilate representations of cultural difference. However, even "[i]f exoticism has *arrived* in the 'centre', it still *derives* from the cultural margins or, perhaps more accurately, from a commodified discourse of cultural marginality" (Huggan 20; original emphasis). In this reading of cultural difference, expressed through exotic representations, postcolonial texts reside in the margins of a centre/periphery model, mediated and exploited through a commoditised discourse that aesthetically values the exotic as something that can be monetised.

However, Sarah Brouillette suggests that there are alternative ways to approach a postcolonial text. She does this, primarily, through her introduction of *strategic* exoticism, which she understands to be "comprised of a set of literary strategies that operate through the assumption shared between the author and the reader, as both producer and consumer work to negotiate with, if not absolve themselves of, postcoloniality's touristic guilt" (7). She goes on to suggest that this operative strategic exoticism "indicates a set of textual strategies that communicates at all because the author and the *actual* reader likely share assumptions about the way culture operates, and concur in their desire to exempt themselves from certain undesirable practices" (43; original emphasis). In this reading, Brouillette suggests an alternative reading model to that of the touristic reader/consumer who, literally, invests in the fetishised exoticism

and propaganda that is sold to them. The shift away from touristic complicity is not instigated by the text itself but, rather, is dependent on the reader already having some form of awareness of the cultural practices they wish to discard. Strategic exoticism acts as a contract between the postcolonial author and (Western) reader, offering a way to produce and encounter a text as something other than an ethnographic or touristic window into a different world.

The shift in reading strategy that Brouillette outlines is best demonstrated with an example. The reader who has read little or no literature about Afghanistan prior to Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), a bestselling book in Western markets, can be posited as an ethnographic, touristic reader, who is drawn in by political and/or aesthetic exoticism and is offered a window into Afghan culture through their reading of the text.[39] By contrast, the reader who has read a variety of Afghan literature, beyond Hosseini's repertoire, and/or who is, perhaps, a student of postcolonial literature (and therefore attempting to read in a way that does more than assuage her/his cosmopolitan tastes), will ideally read the text with a pre-existing awareness of the exotic paradigms operating within the text. As such, this reader may attempt to read beyond the images and endorsements advertised on the book cover that comprise its marketing paratext. Authors might also construct a text that attempts to navigate pre-existing paradigms of ethnography and exoticism. In the following sections of this chapter, I examine ways in which writers and speakers negotiate the pre-existing exotic, ethnographic, and political imperatives that shape the global literary marketplace.

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[39] The blurb for the 2004 Bloomsbury paperback of *The Kite Runner* announces that the setting of the novel is "1970s Afghanistan" before any plot or character details are given. The narrative, and therefore the novel itself, is distinguished by the place in which it is set. Further paratextual information also encourages a perception of exotic aestheticism. The review included on the back cover, given by the *Daily Express*, reads: "It's remarkable. It's like a condensed history of Afghanistan, mixed with a Shakespearean tale of friendship and love." The review marks the text out as an easily digestible, and romanticised, slice of culture.

Modes of Expression: Frameworks of Speaking and Reading in West Asian (Auto)biography

In this section I explore a few key (auto)biographical texts arising from the West Asian region in order to build a critical platform for the main focus of this chapter: the writing and public profile of Malala Yousafzai. First, I explore Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, which has featured prominently in scholarly discussion since it was first published in 2003. Given how strongly girls' education features as a part of Yousafzai's personal narrative and polemical platform it feels pertinent to examine some of the previous ground covered on the subject of pedagogy in a postcolonial and feminist context. Second, I consider Christina Lamb's journalistic travel writing, *The Sewing Circles of Herat: My Afghan Years* (2002), which works to historicise some of the events leading up to 11 September 2001. Finally, I explore testimonial writing (and *testimono*) through an examination of Zarghuna Kargar's *Dear Zari: Hidden Stories from Women in Afghanistan* (2011), considering the ways in which women's voices can represent the speaking individual and, at the same time, speak for a group in a nuanced and non-reductive way, which anticipates my analysis of Yousafzai's 2014 Nobel Lecture.

Although pedagogy is linked to institutions of learning and teaching in both *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *I am Malala*, pedagogy can also manifest through means of "knowledge production" that is "discursively constituted, debated, claimed, and consumed through a variety of literary, academic, and visual forms of representation," beyond the confines of the classroom (Taylor and Zine 2). Literary texts can therefore be seen as pedagogical in and of themselves, serving as tools that communicate knowledge to their reader. Jasmin Zine argues that, in the context of Muslim feminist literary production, some "didactic texts … [can]… teach us 'truths' about imperilled

lives of Muslim women in faraway lands" (185). She argues that "these kinds of texts construct a 'pedagogy of peril' as the central lens through which Muslim women and girls are viewed," at risk of religious and patriarchal oppressions (185). To homogenise a Muslim identity in this way is to form a narrative that "become[s] pedagogical in that … [it]… purport[s] to teach us something about the lives of Other women through the imperilled difference they represent" (Zine 186).

All four texts considered throughout the remainder of this chapter are, arguably, authored by a "didactic" individual: a teacher (Nafisi), a Western journalist (Lamb), a migrant journalist and interlocutor (Kargar), and an activist and student (Yousafzai). These texts propose to teach their reader something of the women featured within their pages. Lisa K. Taylor and Jasmin Zine caution that "[t]exts such as Nafisi's must be read against the imperial politics that galvanize their popularity as 'authorizing texts' of Muslim women's imperial lives" (11). However, I argue that the interplay between personal narrative and political subject matter, both on and off the page, offers room within these (auto)biographies to challenge homogenising forms of knowledge. The act of writing back, as a form of remediated witnessing, can be interpreted as a form of border crossing. This can be linked to Henry A. Giroux's definition of border pedagogy as something that is "both transformative and emancipatory" (29). This is established, as with remediated witnessing, by shifting perspectives in place, time, or media: "Border pedagogy decenters as it remaps. The terrain of learning becomes inextricably linked to the shifting parameters of place, identity, history, and power" (Giroux 30). I suggest that, while such texts are potentially appropriated by neo-imperial economic markets and political propaganda, narrating women's stories nevertheless provides opportunities to decentre and remap Western neo-imperialist imaginaries.

Memoir and Pedagogy: Azar Nafisi's Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books

Azar Nafisi, through the publication of her memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003), is one of the best-known woman spokespersons from the West Asian region. She is also one of the most controversial. Hamid Dabashi abrasively argues that Nafisi is a "native informer and colonial agent" for a post-9/11 US ("Native informers"). Meanwhile, Anne Donadey and Huma Ahmed-Ghosh contend that "[u]nwittingly or not, Nafisi's book provides an ideological rationale to help Americans of various political persuasions stand behind a conservative political agenda" (643). In both these indictments, and there are others, the main criticism directed at Nafisi's memoir is the way in which it is used to justify post-9/11 US ideologies and military activity.[40]

Reading Lolita in Tehran has been covered fairly comprehensively in the scholarly field of women's and transnational autobiography since it was first published in 2003. I therefore discuss it relatively briefly and selectively, in order to categorise the genre of the pedagogical memoir ahead of reading Yousafzai's (auto)biographical text. I examine how *Reading Lolita in Tehran* can be positioned as a pedagogical project both in terms of Nafisi's professional reflections as a teacher/lecturer and the arguments she makes within her text. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* has been used as part of a neo-imperial feminist political project, in support of Western military intervention following the events of 11 September 2001. However, it is my suggestion that because her profession of teacher is both public facing and an instrumental part of her personal

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[40] Roksana Bahramitash argues along similar lines, suggesting that "Nafisi's selective and partial view of Iran is not innocent but seems to have a particular agenda, namely to contribute to the Islamophobia that already exists in North America" (233). In response to such criticisms Coleen Lutz Clemens argues in defence of Nafisi that "[i]t is not her job … to be a watchdog over each interpretation of her book; how western readers choose to use her text is beyond her control" (585).

identity, her pedagogy is therefore both politically and personally motivated. This is especially notable in the small private reading group that Nafisi convenes within the domestic space of her own home, outside the public institution of the university. Nafisi presents these two spaces, the public and the private, as "two worlds" and establishes her reading group as an attempt "to try to imaginatively articulate these two worlds and, through this process, give shape to our vision and identity" (Nafisi 26). Personal identity is as much at stake as political awareness in this description. Although her published book may be interpreted as a neo-imperial feminist project, it is worth remembering that in the small study space of Nafisi's Tehran apartment, she is teaching literature to Iranian women within an Iranian context.

Both Azar Nafisi and Christina Lamb, whose work will be examined later in this section, profess their works to be memoirs in their subtitles "A *Memoir* in Books" and "A *Memoir* of Afghanistan," respectively.[41] Unlike autobiography, as it is understood in the Western tradition, the memoir focuses less on an individual life and more on the time and context of a particular life experience. In this sense, "[m]emoirs personalize history and historicize the personal," wherein the narrative of the memoirist is explicitly tied to the political, social, and/or cultural moment of the recounted life-experiences (Buss). Norbert Bugeja considers memoir as remediation of the past:

> By narrating a representational space, the memoir forges the encounter between the claims of unrequited pasts and the present narrative as it interpellates the surviving traces of those pasts for the world literary stage, hence perpetrating new forms of witness and testimony to their oppression.

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[41] In the 2004 edition of *The Sewing Circles of Herat* published by Harper Perennial, the subtitle "A Memoir of Afghanistan" is used on the front cover, while the subtitle "My Afghan Years" appears in its stead on the inner title page.

Bugeja suggests that past events are mapped out, whether self-consciously or unconsciously, within a contemporary and worldly setting that engenders a potential shift in the reader's perceptions of these events. In memoir, the remediation of past events is inextricably tied to personal perceptions of these events, whereby testimony is built from the memories of the subjective witness. Although a memoir may be founded within a historical moment, the memoir is also "a reflection on the self in process and in history" (Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* 133). The literary genre is as much invested in the memoirist as it is in the events recounted. The subjective process behind the narrator's act of giving testimony may be presented both implicitly and explicitly, their narrative shaped by both implicit character traits and explicit commentary. For example, in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, recent Iranian history is filtered through, and framed by, Nafisi's personal experiences and her professional role as an academic. This professional aspect of her narrative is implicit within her often didactic tone and explicit given how much her role as a teacher is discussed alongside her account of Iranian politics.

The memoirist, who is "grounded in an experience at once lived and situated in history," arguably occupies a position of authority regarding their societal and/or historical context (Bugeja 25). In conjunction with this, Whitlock suggests that "[t]he memoir is a genre for those who are authorized and who have acquired cultural legitimacy and influence" (*Soft Weapons* 20). Nafisi embodies this position of authority as an Iranian woman who writes about her experience of living in Iran during the 1970s-90s, a position that affords her work cultural legitimacy. Nafisi's national identity is then coupled with another authoritative position, that of the academic, which also influences the way that events are remediated. This occurs structurally, in that the events

she recounts are not ordered chronologically, but, rather, organised around the particular moments in which she was teaching specific books. Many of Nafisi's political engagements, and therefore much of her narrative also occur at sites where she teaches. This includes the university, a hub for student and lecturer political action. However, for much of the time that Nafisi writes about, she does not work at the university but, instead, runs a private reading group with a small group of previous students. Here, they still speak about the political but often in more personal and intimate ways. Her professional identity as an academic also bears upon the tone of the memoir. At one point she writes that "I am too much of an academic: I have written too many papers and articles to be able to turn my experiences and ideas into narratives without pontificating" (266). As Nafisi recognises in this example of ironic self-reflection, her writing is often didactic. Her use of pedagogy as a narrative framing device often serves to further exaggerate this teacherly tone.

Focusing on its didactic and pedagogical framework, Theresa A. Kulbaga argues that "[a]s a 'memoir *in* books,' *Reading Lolita in Tehran* advances a particular ideology, rhetoric, and pedagogy of reading, despite Nafisi's repeated claim that reading is existential rather than ideological or political" (508; original emphasis). If *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is defined as a "memoir *in* books," and if the genre of memoir is a mode of writing that serves to "personalize history and historicize the personal" then Nafisi's self-reflective, even self-evaluative, writing is situated not just in history, but also in pedagogy (Buss). The pedagogical overtones of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* have the potential to undermine Nafisi's understanding of reading as *just* an existential and sensual experience that exercises the imagination. This belief comes across in her lecture to her students, in which she states:

A novel is not an allegory … It is the sensual experience of another world. If you don't enter that world, hold your breath with the characters and become involved in their destiny, you won't be able to empathize, and empathy is at the heart of the novel. This how you read a novel: you inhale the experience.

(111)

This romanticised version of how one reads emphasises the importance that Nafisi places on the imaginary in the experience of reading. However, her lecture, which is presented to her students and also directed towards the reader, is still predicated by a didactic tone: "This is how you read a novel." Her writing is instructive, and it is hard to decouple her personal experiences from her professional, academic experience. In addition, the instructive passage on how to read a text is discussing F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and she later suggests "in these days of public prosecutions, that we put *Gatsby* on trial" (120). Although not strictly allegorical, one might argue that to situate the text, and the act of reading that text, within the political format of a trial is to perpetrate a politicised, symbolic reading, especially if it is set up as a "case of the Islamic Republic of Iran versus *The Great Gatsby*" (Nafisi 24).

Both of the approaches that Nafisi outlines for *The Great Gatsby* are tied to pedagogy, but present contradictory notions regarding the act of reading. This represents the difficulty that Nafisi has in separating the competing public and private worlds in which she teaches: the political agenda in Tehran and the public institution of the university against that of her personal teaching practice at the university and her explicitly private study group. The fraught relationship between these political, public institutions and personal, professional pedagogy is illustrated in Nafisi's assertion that "what 'they' [the university under theocratic control] wanted [was] impossible: good

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academics who would preach their ideals and conform to their demands" (183). The incongruity between Nafisi's argument that a novel is not an allegory and the concurrent mapping of contemporary political contexts onto the novel, can be read in light of Fredric Jameson's controversial notion of national allegory. Jameson argues that all Third World texts are read as national allegories wherein:

> Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*
>
> (69; original emphasis)

Here, Jameson suggests that private, personal narratives facilitate a political reading, an assertion denounced by some as a vastly generalised statement.

Anna Bernard defends Jameson's argument, stating that "Jameson's 'national allegory' is in fact a theory of metropolitan reading, albeit negatively framed" (23). Bernard argues that Jameson's position is directed towards the First World, metropolitan reader, asking them to confront "our habits of perceptions and interpretation" (23).[42] This links, at the very least, to the preconceptions tied to the "veiled best-seller" by First World readers, and to Nafisi's own descriptions and instructions on reading. In her argument that "[a] novel is not an allegory," Nafisi advocates that reading should be a sensual, imaginative, empathetic act (111). However,

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[42] Further to this, in defence of Jameson's apparent dividing of first- and third-world literature, Bernard also states that "[i]t is not that 'third-world literature' needs an entirely different theory to 'first-world literature'; it is rather that we need a theory of literature that can dialectically account for the world literary system as a whole, and for our own place in it" (25). This chapter investigates West Asian women's writing and its reception in the West, but these literary texts belong to the wider sphere of "third-world" literature and, also, the world literary system at large. Thus, my reading of these texts are related to wider theoretical debates and/on other literary criticism.

an emotional reading can still be a political one. Sara Ahmed argues that "emotions 'matter' for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 12). A sensual, private reading is still a political reading. In light of Jameson's argument of the national allegory of the Third World text, the Third World novel "speaks to its context" politically and culturally (Szeman 808). The public and private, and the acts of reading politically and personally, cannot be wholly separated. Nafisi's mock trial of "the Islamic Republic of Iran versus *The Great Gatsby*" demonstrates that novels can explicitly speak to their own context (1920s New York) and to the political contexts of these particular readers (1970s Iran) (124).

Nafisi positions the reading of a novel as an imaginative experience, and as a political one, when she argues that "[a] great novel heightens your senses and sensitivity to the complexities of life and of individuals, and prevents you from the self-righteousness that sees morality in fixed formulas about good and evil" (133). In this sense, she implies that the act of reading, as an imaginary, empathetic experience, will then provide the tools to encounter the political world. In many ways, this appears to be the purpose of her private and specially selected reading group. Nafisi describes the protagonists of some of the books she used in this reading group and in her classes. Discussing Henry James' *Daisy Miller* and *Washington Square*, Nafisi suggests that:

> Daisy [Miller] and Catherine [Sloper] have little in common, yet both
> defy the conventions of their time; both refuse to be dictated to. They
> come from a long line of defiant heroines, including Elizabeth Bennet,
> Catherine Earnshaw and Jane Eyre. These women create the main
> complications of the plot, through their refusal to comply
>
> (194-95)

Reading these texts and focusing on the "defiant heroines" who refuse to comply with the status quo of their society offers Nafisi's "girls" an opportunity to reformulate their opinions of their own societal context. The text provides models for these "girls" to ask questions of it, sometimes explicitly so, as when one of her students, Manna, rewrites Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*'s famous line as a contextually-specific question: "is it a truth universally acknowledged … that a Muslim man must be in want not just of one but of many wives?" (257). The reading group is a space that operates a process of "border pedagogy" as something that is "both transformative and emancipatory" (Giroux 29). It is a space where Nafisi's female students can speak freely and personally about a politics that is grounded in censorship; where they can speak satirically, as Manna does above; and where they can establish and develop their own personal and political identities. In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, pedagogy is used as part of a quiet, private revolution, happening within the study space in Nafisi's domestic home.

However, amongst the criticism regarding Nafisi's relationship with the West, Kulbaga criticises how Nafisi "does not seem to find problematic the idea that her girls find their authentic selves only in Western literature" (512-13). Although, at its core, the narrative of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* integrates a didactic and instructive mode of address that encourages the self-empowerment of Iranian women, this is achieved through the sharing of Western literature, and therefore a transmission of Western ideology. Although it is problematic that Nafisi's choice of texts is comprised from Western canon, I feel that this is an issue that is larger than Nafisi's teaching practices: the institutionalisation of the Western canon persists within education in non-Western countries. This is especially evident within the context of colonial history and neo-imperialism. Debates regarding the teaching of Western canon and the English language can be located within a diverse selection of sources. One notable example includes

Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Education" (1835), which speaks of the institutionalisation of the English language in education in the Indian empire. Another example is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), which argues against the use of the European language over that of the many indigenous languages of his continent.

Even today, debates surrounding "global" education are rarely completely independent from earlier imperial educational policy from the period of colonisation. Discussing the geo-political response to the shooting of Malala Yousafzai in 2012 and the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls in Nigeria in 2014, Shenila Khoja-Moolji identifies "the emancipatory promise of education" for girls ("Suturing Together Girls and Education" 88). However, importantly, she also reminds us "that when advocates for girls' education calls for universal access to schooling, they are referring to a particular Western model of schooling with its attendant promise of progress" ("Suturing Together Girls and Education" 98-99). This biased, though well-meaning, perspective of what represents "progressive" or "good" education fails to recognise the importance of other's cultural histories and also, potentially, erases negative (colonial) narratives about the West. This neo-imperial, humanitarian, perspective about what represents "good" education is recognisable in both *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and, later, the public narrative surrounding Malala Yousafzai.

Reporting Experience: Christina Lamb's The Sewing Circles of Herat: My Afghan Years

This section addresses how journalism, another typically instructive profession, is modelled in Christina Lamb's memoir, *The Sewing Circles of Herat: My Afghan Years* (2002). Lamb is a renowned foreign correspondent, and, as the time of writing, is Foreign Affairs Correspondent for the *Sunday Times*. She has published a number of

books, including another remediation of her encounters with Afghanistan, *Farewell Kabul: From Afghanistan to a More Dangerous World* (2015). She also co-authored *I am Malala* with Yousafzai. As a product of journalistic travel writing, produced in light of her return to Afghanistan following the events of 11 September 2001, *The Sewing Circles of Herat* is an instructive and pedagogical text that works to inform its predominantly Western audience about Afghanistan (and Afghan women) in a nuanced fashion. First published in 2002, one year before *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Lamb's memoir is similarly received by a contemporary imagination fuelled by the geo-political context of the "War on Terror" following the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001. The neo-imperial context in which Lamb's memoir is received should be acknowledged. However, Lamb's trip to Afghanistan is a *return*. As she recounts her earlier experiences of Afghanistan (before 11 September 2001), she *re*maps the Afghan terrain as it has come to be understood within the discourse of the "War on Terror." By offering a historicising perspective, describing significant events that occurred in Afghanistan prior to the events of 11 September 2001, *The Sewing Circles of Herat* constructs a border pedagogy that "decenters as it remaps" the discursive territory of post-9/11 Afghanistan. Lamb reminds her readers that the map of Afghanistan was, in fact, drawn before 11 September 2001, before "the map came up on the [television] screen to show viewers the whereabouts of this forgotten country squashed between Iran, Pakistan, the –stans of central Asia and one thin arm just touching China" (6).

Numerous journalists have written (auto)biographical accounts of their experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq during the US military intervention of both countries. A notable example is American journalist Evan Wright, writing for *Rolling Stone*, who was one of the embedded journalists during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and who published *Generation Kill* (2004). Another example is Åsne Seierstad, a

Norwegian freelance journalist who published *The Bookseller of Kabul* (2002), based on her experiences of living with an Afghan family in the months following the events of 11 September 2001. Seierstad's (auto)biography received increased public attention when she was sued by Suraia Rais, the second wife of the bookseller, Shah Muhammad Rais, although the ruling was later overturned by an appeal court in Norway.[43] These and Lamb's (auto)biographies are distinct in subject, tone, and approach. Wright's ethnographic subjects were US soldiers rather than Iraqi civilians, and Seierstad's work is dramatised and written as if it were a novel. Meanwhile, Lamb's memoir travels more widely to look beyond a particular, enclosed experience (the Iraqi invasion; an Afghan family home) both in terms of the geography and timeline that it (re)visits. Despite their differences, however, there remains a consistent presence of an ethnographer in each of these texts (rendered in paratexts in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*): the journalist her/himself.[44]

Journalistic travel writing can often be self-serving. As Whitlock notes: "When journalists write memoirs they draw on and enhance their established place and professional reputation in metropolitan networks of print and online and broadcast media" (133). However, there is more at stake than merely an economical and professional reward for writing. As memoir, these texts explore not just events, but also the journalists' own position in relation to these events, reflecting on "the self in process and in history" (Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* 133). For Lamb, whose text is proclaimed to be "A *Memoir* of Afghanistan" (my emphasis), on the front cover of its 2004 Harper Perennial edition, *The Sewing Circles of Herat* is as much about *her* journey, as it is

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[43] See: Conor Foley. "Bookseller of Kabul author can't plead cultural immunity." *Guardian*, 30 Jul. 2010; and Alexandra Topping. "The Bookseller of Kabul author cleared of invading Afghan family's privacy." *Guardian*, 13 Dec. 2011.

[44] In the context of journalist memoir and travel writing, these examples of ethnography fall within Corinne Fowler's rubric of "pseudo-ethnographic" (*Chasing Tales* 12).

about Afghanistan. Whitlock points to how "journalists use memoir as an opportunity to reflect on their craft" (*Soft Weapons* 133). In Lamb's memoir there are multiple gestures to the tools of her trade—her notebook and pen—but her "craft" is also considered in other ways.

At one point in the text, Lamb recounts her attempts to get to the front of the action during the fighting in Jalalabad in 1989 at the beginning of the Afghan Civil War (1989-92). Surrounded by refugees and injured civilians, she, as a Western woman, is presumed to be a doctor. She recounts how she asked about one of the injured women called Lela: "'What happened?' I asked, pen poised, not looking too closely " (71). The woman who accompanies the wounded Lela, expects that Lamb can help Lela and tells Lamb her story of what happened. Lamb recalls that "I made notes then started to walk away. I had to get where the action was. I wasn't getting the point that it was all around us" (71). In this example of self-reflection, Lamb's reprimands herself for her past actions, pointing to her past naivety. She also (re-)evaluates her journalistic craft in terms of her approach and understanding of the profession, especially in light of her role as a foreign correspondent. This is demonstrated when she corrects her earlier mistake: the war ("the action") is "about the people, the Naems and Lelas," those who she had earlier dismissed (73). Implicit within Lamb's self-reflective discourse is the narrative of the Bildungsroman. In *The Sewing Circles of Herat*, she traces her personal growth and the evolution of her profession as a journalist and foreign correspondent, reflecting on what and how she reported. Her memoir is as much about her journalistic craft as it is about Afghanistan.

While the genre of memoir is about writing back (to an earlier self), "immediacy" and the present is the journalist's purview, something that has commercial value and impacts upon professional reputations (Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* 133). The

journalists' memoir must find some way to integrate these two agendas of retrospection and the immediate present. In *The Sewing Circles of Herat*, this is achieved due to the events of 11 September 2001. Twelve years after she last visited Afghanistan, Lamb recounts how she watched the news footage of the planes crashing into the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001, featuring conversation of "Osama bin Laden" and "Afghanistan." She describes this moment: "*Afghanistan*. It was as if a ghost had walked across my grave" (6; original emphasis). For Lamb, present events ignite a memory of the past. She reads her return to Afghanistan against these past experiences, which inform her, and haunt her. She writes that "a week after the attack on the World Trade Center, war in Afghanistan was once again imminent, but it was reawakening long-buried ghosts from the past that worried me, not the future" (79). As a product of journalism, *The Sewing Circles of Herat* confronts an immediate concern: the "imminent" war with Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks that occurred on 11 September 2001. The immediacy of this war with, what was for many, an unknown country, propels Lamb's work onto a "relevant" platform, "enlisted in the scramble for knowledge about Afghanistan" (Fowler 79). However, this text is also a memoir, in which the present events "reawaken" Lamb's past experiences, and the memoir genre, propelled by present events, becomes a platform for Lamb to confront these "ghosts."

The Sewing Circles of Herat is built out of a process of remediated witnessing, whereby earlier events in Lamb's journalist career are remediated, inflected with nostalgia, experience, and a post-9/11 political imagination. Written for a post-millennial audience, the memoir is instructive both about Afghanistan's recent historical and political context and, importantly, about how perceptions can shift, developing from personal and professional growth. Later, Lamb continues to experience shifts in her professional outlook when asked to co-author Yousafzai's (auto)biography.

She has spent many years as a foreign correspondent covering Pakistan and Afghanistan but in her account of writing the book, she writes: "In 25 years of travelling the world I have interviewed warlords, dictators, royals and Taliban, yet I find myself nervous waiting for a teenage girl" ("My Year with Malala"). Yousafzai's narrative is uncharted territory. Her story is one that perpetrates both a personal and political activism, but it is a story that rises not from an esteemed professor, a journalist, or a politician, but from a teenage student. Giroux argues that "[c]entral to the development of a critical pedagogy is the need to explore how pedagogy functions as a cultural practice to *produce* rather than merely *transmit* knowledge within the asymmetrical relations of power that structure teacher-student relations" (98; original emphasis). Yousafzai's narrative, even with Lamb's involvement in co-writing it, is one that deconstructs the teacher/student hierarchal binary, in which the student charts a pedagogical approach from a new direction. Lamb and readers of *I am Malala* become Yousafzai's students.

Testimony/Testimonio, *Mediation, and Collective Voices*

In the previous examples of women spokespersons offered, the focus has been on one author. Here, I wish to briefly explore the (auto)biographical genre of *testimonio* as a mode of expression that is explicitly connected to the act of giving testimony, and which is generally rendered via a mediated and/or collective voice. Whereas (auto)biography in the tradition of Western male writing aspires towards an individualised self, Doris Sommer stipulates that, "as a device, the orality [of the speech act] helps to account for testimonials' construction of a collective self. For unlike the private and even lonely moment of autobiographical writing, testimonies are public events" (118). Sommer identifies how testimony is often orientated towards a collective self, which I later examine in relation to Yousafzai's 2014 Nobel Lecture, in which she is presented as a figurehead for the educational rights for girls. The orientation of *testimonio* toward the

collective intersects with the way in which postcolonial and/or female (auto)biography generally works towards a "dispersed" or "scattered" heterogeneous self as opposed to the sovereign self that, critics have argued, is emulated in classic, generally male-authored (auto)biographies.

In this examination of some of the key aspects of testimony, I place considerable emphasis on the genre of *testimonio* due to its significance as a testimonial form within the postcolonial field.[45] I use Zarghuna Kargar's *Dear Zari: Hidden Stories from Women in Afghanistan* (2011) to address this focus. *Dear Zari* is a compilation of testimonials collected by Kargar during her time as a reporter working on the BBC's radio show, *Afghan Women's Hour*. In *Dear Zari*, Kargar speaks about her own experiences as an Afghan woman and her experiences as a reporter, alongside the testimonies of twelve other Afghan women. Both Kargar's ethnic and migrant identity (she lives in Britain), and her inclusion of many other women's narratives within her text, distinguishes her work from Lamb's (auto)biographical, journalistic reporting.

Given the infusion of orality predicated on *Dear Zari*'s origins as a radio broadcast, I propose that the testimonies included in the text share an affinity with the genre of *testimonio*. The genre of *testimonio* is typically part of an ethnographic or anthropological project in which a subaltern figure gives voice to their own experiences. The examination of the *testimonio* in this thesis proves pertinent given the consonance of the genre with the subaltern figure. The genre is also "highly mediated" via "not just the usual array of translators, editors, and publishers but also by anthropologists or others who record and shape the oral testimony" (Amireh and Majaj 10-11). The various layers of material mediation within this genre represent an explicit example of remediated witnessing.

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[45] *Testimonio* is most commonly associated with Latin America.

The genre of *testimonio* is pre-eminently tied to the subaltern figure. Beverley, quoted earlier, suggests that when the subaltern is able to speak in such a way that it matters to those that reside in and manufacture the dominant discourse, then that figure cannot possibly be a subaltern anymore (xvi). My overarching response to this assertion is that the subaltern identity is not simply left behind during the course of the speech act: the act of speaking is charged with a subaltern consciousness. Beverley does go on to suggest that "testimonio might be understood as part of the agency of the subaltern" (xvi). However, he interprets agency as something that becomes strategically linked to a collective consciousness as opposed to an individualised subject, in which the subaltern is refigured as a tool. For instance, in his reading of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, which is perhaps the most well-known Latin American *testimonio*, he argues that "the testimonial narrator, like Rigoberta Menchú, is not the subaltern as such either, rather something more like an 'organic intellectual' of the subaltern who speaks to the hegemony by means of a metonymy of self in the name and in the place of it" (Beverley 52). Beverley maintains that this speaking subject, whose voice is heard by the hegemon, is not a subaltern figure, but essentially stands in for the subaltern. This evokes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of the "two senses of representation" which she identifies as "representation as 'speaking for', as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation', as in art or philosophy" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 242). She argues that these two senses of representation "are related but irreducibly discontinuous" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 242). Beverley reads *testimonio* as a mode of "representation" insofar as the narrator speaks for others: the narrator is an "ideologically subject consciousness" in their own right (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 243).

Therefore, we might understand Beverley's earlier statement that *testimonio* constitutes "part of the agency of the subaltern" only insofar as the metonymy of the subaltern is infused with agency because the narrator is labelled and marketed as such (xvi). Beverley's reading contrasts with my own argument, posed in Chapter Two, that the agency of the subaltern individual is organic. Agency may be attached to the metonymy of the subaltern by the actions of a single spokesperson. However, a subaltern individual almost inevitably produces and projects agency through their own accumulative words and actions. These words and actions develop out of subalterneity, from within the same discursive framework which has silenced them. I therefore propose that the expression of agency by the subaltern is a "re-presentation" of personal consciousness as opposed to a politically strategic "representation."

However, *testimonio* does remain a genre that seems adverse to an individualised consciousness. The collective consciousness of the *testimonio* genre is accomplished through two key methods upon which I will now briefly expand using *Dear Zari*. In the first instance, *testimonio* is a collaborative work insofar as it is generally a mediated text, and there is often an intermediary figure positioned between the spokesperson and her audience. In *Dear Zari*, Kargar embodies this role of interlocutor or mediator for the various women who are providing their testimonies by recording, transcribing, translating, and editing their words. She is a rather intrusive interlocutor, adopting not just an editorial, but also an authorial position wherein she presents a narrative of her own that features alongside and sometimes even interrupts the testimony of the other voices in the text. For example, Kargar often interrupts throughout "Nasreen's Story":

> *Have you ever wondered about those women who are married to a man*
>
> *whom they never loved and were never suited to?*

When she asked this question I hesitated. I wanted to shout out, 'Of course I know!' I knew just how it felt to pretend to be asleep when my husband came to bed so as to avoid having to talk to him.

My husband is sixty years old and I haven't seen my parents for a long time ...

(54; original emphasis)

In this example, Kargar interrupts the flow of the narrative (albeit to answer a question) to express her own experiences. Kargar's interruption demonstrates how women's narratives can appear dialogic and relational. However, the interruption also disrupts the speaker's narrative, especially when done frequently as it is in "Nasreen's Story." These interruptions have the potential to undercut the words of the women narrating their stories, where the mediator takes control of the context in which the speaker's words are read.

The patchwork fabric of the narratives included in *Dear Zari* is marked by shifts in narrative mode and perspective throughout the course of the text; some testimonials are heavily mediated and presented in third person, whereas others appear to have been directly transcribed. For example, in "Nasreen's Story," Nasreen's first person narrative is italicised to distinguish it from Kargar's interjections, and her narrative concludes when Kargar states: "At this point I stopped recording" (63). Kargar's intrusion, both in this example, and in the body of text, can be refigured positively as it does imply the collaborative nature of both testimony and mediation in *Dear Zari*, which features multiple testimonials, various reporters besides Kargar, and several different ways of receiving these women's stories. Kargar's self-evident presence within the text can be disruptive and diverts the reader's attention away from the other voices featured in the text. Nevertheless, the fact that *Dear Zari* offers more than one narrative voice to some

extent belies an individuated spokesperson and points the inclination of *testimonio* towards a collective consciousness.

Besides the use of italics, examples of relatively direct transcriptions in *Dear Zari* are also indicated through the use of "I" by the protagonists of the narrative and includes declarative statements such as: "*My name is Ilaha and I want to tell you my life story*" (101; original emphasis). This opening statement in particular shares a resonance with *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, which begins: "My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony" (1). These declarative statements assert the identity marker of the multiple individuals narrating their stories and mark out the nature of their words as their "life story" or their "testimony." Having said this, while *testimonio* "is frequently narrated in first person," a "singular experience [often] alludes to a broader collective experience" (Alemán 492).

This indicates the second route through which a collective consciousness is emulated in *testimonio*. In *Dear Zari*, the sense of a collective consciousness is accentuated by its ensemble of narrative voices, giving a sense of a collective of authorial "I." However, this quasi-authorial "I," even when taken separately from the other narratives, is still not an essentialist sovereign self. Sommer argues that, in *testimonio*, the narrator's "singularity achieves its identity as an extension of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole" (108). Sommer positions the testimonial narrator as speaking, not for, but *from within* a collective group.

The act of speaking, or of giving testimony, implies that there is some form of dialogue occurring, not just between the testimonial narrator and their mediator, or interlocutor, but also with a projected audience. As previously mentioned, *Dear Zari*

originates as a radio broadcast which was aired in Afghanistan. As radio boardcasts, these oral testimonials were initially intended for other Afghan women. Kathryn Blackmer Reyes and Julia E. Curry Rodríguez argue that "*testimonio*[s] must include the intention of affirmation and empowerment" via the voicing of the speaker's experiences (527). This intention of affirmation serves both the (subaltern) individual and the (subaltern) collective. This aspiration for communal empowerment is represented in the testimonies and Kargar's commentary in *Dear Zari*. The testimonies voiced during *Afghan Woman's Hour* not only offered assurances to listeners and provided a chance for them to learn or take strength from the voicing of these experiences, but also encouraged others to speak. For instance, after hearing Ilaha speak, a woman, under the pseudonym of Gulalai, sought out Kargar and shared her similar experiences as when "she'd heard Ilaha's story she had felt a kind of relief" (Kargar 108). The testimonials featured as part of *Afghan Woman's Hour* and in *Dear Zari* do not simply speak for, but speak *to* their own community:

> I knew the voice wasn't just speaking to me but to the thousands of women it would touch with its story of pain, courage and hope. This is what these stories do. It doesn't matter if you are Zarghuna in London or Gulalai listening in Kabul, they have the power to change lives for the better.
>
> (Kargar 261)

If testimony is aligned with a collective consciousness, it is more political and empowering if it is in dialogue with both the community it speaks to, and, especially, the community it speaks from.

Malala Yousafzai: A Post-Millennial Icon

Whenever I am asked to explain the subject of my thesis, the example I have always returned to is Steve McCurry's photograph of the Afghan Girl. Even when speaking with people who have no expertise within my research area, they almost always recognise the image that I am referring to and, often, they make a comment which, to paraphrase the many times it has been said to me, asks: "the girl with the green eyes?". Her eyes is what people seem to remember most clearly about her image, not least because she had no name with which to be identified with until 2002. The Afghan Girl, who I explored at length in the previous chapter, is an almost instantly recognisable figure, an icon who represents the Afghan region in the context of US and British military and supposed humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s-90s and the 2000s.

In this section, I argue that, following the publication of her biography, *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013), co-written with British journalist, Christina Lamb, Malala Yousafzai is a preeminent icon and spokesperson for West Asia in the post-millennial period.[46] In what follows, I focus on Yousafzai's writing, the documentary *He Named Me Malala* (2015), her 2014 Nobel Lecture, and her public image (as icon). I also examine the recounting of her shooting at the hands of the Taliban as an event that has become inextricably caught up within a process of remediated witnessing, transmitted across various media and tied to the affective response of compassion. In my consideration of Yousafzai as spokesperson, I,

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[46] Although the main focus of this thesis is on Afghanistan and Iran, it is pertinent to include the case of the Pakistani Malala Yousafzai here. Pakistan falls under the umbrella of "West Asia" (see: Introduction, "Geographic Parameters: West Asia and the 'Troubled Triangle'," p.12). Yousafzai is Pashtun, an ethnic community that overlaps the Pakistani and Afghan border insofar as "[t]he Durand Line, which divides Pakistani Pashtuns from Afghan Pashtuns, had always been viewed as entirely artificial by the Pashtuns themselves" (Shamsie 69-70). Both regions have also been subject to a Taliban presence.

like Whitlock, follow Gérard Genette in examining both text and paratext. As Whitlock summarises:

> Paratexts are the liminal features that surround and cover the text and, following Gerard Genette, I distinguish two elements. The first, 'peritext,' includes everything between and on the covers … The second, 'epitext,' are the elements outside of the bound volume: interviews, correspondence, reviews, commentaries, and so on.
>
> (*Soft Weapons* 14)[47]

Beyond the published material of the biography and documentary, I therefore also contemplate the peritexts attached to these texts, and the epitexts that surround them, such as news and media coverage of her. I also consider how, in the case of Yousafzai, sometimes peritexts and epitexts are embedded within one another, and remediated across different media.

Initially, the publication of Yousafzai's narrative was anonymous. Before the shooting, Yousafzai's words were published on BBC Urdu in the form of a diary. Her words were also translated into English and published on BBC UK. Her identity was kept anonymous for her own safety, and she used the pseudonym "Gul Makai." She recounts her experience of producing this diary in *I am Malala*, in which she includes excerpts from her previous writings as they appeared on the BBC's webpages:

> My first diary entry appeared on 3 January 2009 under the heading I AM
>
> AFRAID: 'I had a terrible dream last night filled with military helicopters

---

[47] Genette argues that a published text is "rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations" (*Paratexts* 1). He argues that "the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers" (*Paratexts* 1). He locates peritexts as being from within or part of the volume, while epitexts are "located outside the book" (*Paratexts* 4-5).

and Taliban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military

operation in Swat.'

(130)

Here, Yousafzai's words are remediated, spoken in a new context, and directly ascribed to her. The epitext of the diary, written four years prior, becomes embedded within what is now the primary—marketable—autobiographical text.

I am Malala, as (auto)biography, recalls and remediates events, words, and images. I find Laura U. Marks' considerations of archived materials and archival research in *Hanan al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image* (2015) to be particularly useful in reading these different modes of life narrative. She argues that archival material "is not an image that is found. It's not memory itself. It's a flash from the past that changes the present—a fossil, a combustion" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 172). The discovery of an archival object is unsettling: Marks' description of the process as an "exorcism" does not produce images of comfort and reassurance (*Hanan al-Cinema* 173). These "volatile" objects, Marks argues, are still "in process, and able to yield new things with every encounter" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 172). The process of discovering these "new things" operates in line with her enfoldment model, whereby an archive is "a textual surface, a collection of peaks and folds, some of which the researcher chooses to tug out and actualize while leaving others enfolded" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 183).[48]

Here, the "researcher" is the writer Yousafzai (and Lamb), who unravels archival materials documenting her life. The online diary represents a peak in the surface of Yousafzai's life experiences, one which is already embedded in the textual surface of a blog written and posted four years prior, and which is tugged free and

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[48] For more on the enfoldment model see: Chapter One, "Establishing Frames: Informative Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks," p.24.

unfolded within the content of *I am Malala*. The diary represents an example of remediated witnessing: words outlining Yousafzai's experiences are posted online, these words are then revisited and repeated by Yousafzai in her biography, which is accompanied by her recollection of the circumstances under which these words were initially formulated, adding additional layers to the earlier recounting. Marks, while speaking about the archive, states:

> Remediation shows material history, as images are made to migrate from one format to another. This process diminishes the image quality, but at the same time it allows you to reconstruct a sense of the generations of viewers who make do with migrated media.
>
> (*Hanan al-Cinema* 206)

Through each remediation, the source—both the scene that was witnessed and recounted, and also the first textual surface constructed out of this recounting—becomes increasingly faded. Marks is speaking pre-eminently about visual images, accounting for how a camera film might become obscured, blurry, or damaged with each remediation across form, and by different hands. It also tells us something about those different hands that have processed and re-processed these images. But this remains relevant for non-visual texts as well. The online diary represents a material text, albeit digitised, from which elements are revisited and rewritten across different media. Reading only selective extracts from Yousafzai's diary, in her autobiography, paints a different picture for the reader than reading the comprehensive collection of her diary entries would.[49]

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[49] Her diary entries are located in the BBC archive: "Diary of a Pakistani schoolgirl." *BBC News*, 19 Jan. 2009. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7834402.stm.

Remediation is often migratory, and we see the migration across forms in the example of Yousafzai's diary entries. The migration of media—migrating archival texts—is expedited by both analogue and digital technologies. In *I am Malala*, Yousafzai recalls the process through which her diary was published online:

> So Hai Kakar would call me in the evening on my mother's mobile …
> We would speak for half an hour or forty-five minutes in Urdu, even
> though we are both Pashtun, as the blog was to appear in Urdu and he
> wanted the voice to be as authentic as possible. Then he wrote up my
> words and once a week they would appear on the BBC Urdu website.

(129)

Yousafzai's diary entries, in which she recounts her experiences as a Pakistani schoolgirl in 2009, are remediated across a variety of different textual surfaces: she speaks aloud her diary entry, which is then transcribed by the BBC correspondent Hai Kakar, before being published online. Initial steps were taken to retain Yousafzai's narrative authenticity by having her speak Urdu to avoid the need to translate her words when they were published as part of BBC Urdu. However, this choice is ambivalent, as it pushed Yousafzai to speak in a language other than her mother tongue. Additionally, her diary entries have still been translated into English and published by BBC UK and, in another remediation, extracts of these translated words have since migrated to the written manuscript of her printed biography.

Just as the various textual surfaces through which Yousafzai is presented, or through which she presents herself, function as "a collection of peaks and folds" of her experiences, so too is her image remediated and migratory (Marks 183). Yousafzai may represent a post-millennial icon, but her image appears in a variety of forms, wherein "Malala emerges as an assemblage of position and affects" (Khoja-Moolji, "Reading

Malala" 552). In particular, there are two modes of imaging and representation through which I wish to approach Yousafzai as icon: the first, Yousafzai as a wounded victim of a shooting; and the second, Yousafzai as she has since appeared both at public events and on the cover of her biography: wearing bright and colourful clothing, including a *hijab* (see figure 8). Both of these images are remediated, supported, or re-envisioned by portrayals in news media and by Yousafzai's own words (spoken or written).

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 8: "Malala." Cover photo by Antonio Olmos.

Yousafzai's diary, written in anonymity, is remediated not just by Yousafzai, as discussed above, but also by the media. On 10 October 2012, one day after Yousafzai was shot by the Taliban, *BBC News* published a story entitled "Malala Yousafzai: Portrait of the girl blogger." Alongside reports on the events of the shooting, and quotes from people responding to these events, this news story includes excerpts from Yousafzai's diary. Significantly, this profile of Yousafzai, which uses visual language in its title, indicating that what is to follow is a "portrait," is composed of not just images, but also words, and, importantly, many of these are her own words. These words are no longer anonymous, and in the lead paragraph her name, her diary, the shooting, and her cause are all tied together:

> Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai first came to public attention in 2009 when she wrote a BBC diary about life under the Taliban. Now recovering from surgery after being shot by the militants, the campaigner for girls' rights is in the spotlight again.

What is particularly notable about this opening paragraph is that, although Yousafzai is explicitly linked to her actions as writer and campaigner, as supported by the written profile, it is the shooting that has propelled her into the limelight so proficiently.

While her identity as a writer, a campaigner, and a spokesperson are evident both prior to her shooting, and since, the immediate aftermath of the shooting ties her to another prominent image: the wounded victim. I explored the wounded figure in Chapter Two when addressing the image of Aisha as she appears on the 2010 cover of *TIME* magazine. Earlier, I pointed out that there were a range of photographed women's portraits to choose from, in Jodi Bieber's collection "Women of Afghanistan Under Taliban Threat," and so why choose the horrifically scarred face of a subaltern Afghan woman, as opposed to the face of the former Deputy Speaker of parliament or a female Olympic runner? The decision made by *TIME* magazine to use the image of the explicitly wounded woman, perpetrating an abject and fetishised spectacle, sees the wound serve as a significant narrative and emotive frame to *TIME* magazine's coverage, which relates to the involvement of the US in Afghanistan. We also see the marrying of emotional investment and international political agenda in the image of the *Afghan Girl*, whose body "is a site at which the principles of security and humanitarianism meet, and war and humanitarian aid are closely connected" (Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* 71). The wounded image, or the lost/refugee child, which is usually recognised as a subaltern figure, provides a space through which a Western audience can sympathise with an unfamiliar culture and become more readily invested in the overseas engagement of their country, as is the case with the "Afghan Alibi."

The impact of images of wounded and/or child subjects has been more recently demonstrated in the figures of Aylan Kurdi, a three year old Syrian refugee who drowned at sea and was discovered and photographed on the Turkish coast on 2

September 2015, and Omran Daqneesh, a five year old boy who was pictured wounded in the back of an ambulance after an airstrike in Aleppo, Syria, on 17 August 2016.[50] Ahmed argues that "[t]he face of the suffering child places the British subject in a position of charitable compassion" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 192).[51] Ahmed goes on to clarify that this is because:

> The child represents the face of innocence; through the child, the threat
>
> of difference is transformed into the promise or hope of likeness. That
>
> child *could be* mine; his pain is universalised through the imagined loss
>
> of *any* child as a loss that could be my loss.
>
> (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 192; original emphasis)

The suffering of the child is more accessible to a distant audience: a strong stance against letting migrants in, or the use of airstrikes in other countries, feels an unfairly disproportionate response when the cost is reflected in the life of a child.

Given the aftermath of the shooting and its news coverage, Yousafzai is also subject to these conditions, which elicit sympathetic charity. As with Aylan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh, victims of the Syrian Civil War (2011-Present), "her pain signals excess. It takes place outside the context of 'legitimate' drone strikes, and its bodily dimension is visible as it is captured in public archives such as newspaper photographs" (Khoja-Moolji, "Reading Malala" 544). Khoja-Moolji's comment also highlights how the eliciting of public sympathies is often expedited by news and social media coverage.

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[50] See: Adam Withnall. "Aylan Kurdi's story: How a small Syrian child came to be washed up on a beach in Turkey." *Independent*, 3 Sep. 2015. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/aylan-kurdi-s-story-how-a-small-syrian-child-came-to-be-washed-up-on-a-beach-in-turkey-10484588.html; and Raf Sanchez. "New photos emerge of Omran Daqneesh, the boy who became a symbol of Aleppo's suffering." *Telegraph*, 5 Jun. 2017. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/05/new-photos-emerge-omran-daqneesh-boy-became-symbol-aleppos-suffering/.
[51] In her article, "Reading Malala: (De)(Re)Territorialization of Muslim Collectives" (2015), Shenila Khoja-Moolji also links Malala to Ahmed's notion of "charitable compassion" (540).

Following her shooting on the 9 October 2012, Yousafzai's name and face (which often includes images of her being treated in the aftermath of the shooting) was shared in Britain and globally in a deluge of news stories which included headlines such as: "Malala Yousafzai: Pakistan activist, 14, shot in Swat" (*BBC News*, 9 Oct. 2012); "Malala Yousafzai: The Latest Victim in the War on Children in Pakistan" (*TIME*, 9 Oct. 2012); "Pakistan Taliban claim responsibility for shooting of 14-year-old girl" (*Telegraph*, 9 Oct. 2012). In all of these headlines, which are reflective of the majority published on 9 October 2012, Malala is identified not just as a victim of a shooting, but also as a child. As a fourteen-year-old (although this is misreported; Malala was 15 years old at the times of the shooting), she is accessible to a receptive audience.

However, as the BBC headline, "Pakistani activist, 14, shot in Swat," aptly addresses, Yousafzai is not just a victim, but also an activist. Thus, anger and compassion may find its outlet through interest in and donations towards her cause of activism. Yousafzai is not a subaltern figure in the same way that Aisha and the Afghan Girl, or Aylan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh, might be considered so. Yousafzai does not singularly embody the identity of a victim in media coverage.

It could be argued that her other identifiers, ones which are tied to explicit acts of agency—writer, campaigner, and spokesperson—have since diminished in the face of the image of Yousafzai as victim, in which the shooting is continually revisited, even in Yousafzai's own works. Even though "[s]he does not remember being shot. The last thing she recalls is getting on the bus," in both her biography and the documentary *He Named Me Malala* we see her shooting revisited and, thus, remediated (Lamb, "My Year with Malala").[52] However, I argue, here, that the recounting of the shooting,

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[52] In the prologue of her biography, Yousafzai recounts that "I remember that the bus turned right off the main road at the army checkpoint as always and rounded the corner past the deserted cricket ground. I don't remember any more" (5).

articulated in writing and in speech on the part of Yousafzai, and visually via images and onscreen reconstruction in the documentary, as a remediated event, unfolds a space for Yousafzai to establish her own position of agency.

The opening of the prologue to *I am Malala* reads: "I come from a country which was created at midnight. When I almost died it was just after midday" (1). The mirroring of coming/leaving and midnight/midday in these two lines aspire towards a lyrical or poetic expression, but the intrusion of "just after" discombobulates what would have been an easy symmetry in the depiction of these two instances, alluding to the disruptive reality of the shooting. The following line, that "[o]ne year ago I left my home for school and never returned" is similarly poetic and nostalgic in its expression, ringing as if the first line in a fictional story (1). However, again, the fatalistic certainty of the words, that the speaker will "never return" undercuts the illusion that this story is made for children (1). In the prologue of her biography, Yousafzai recounts the shooting in uncensored, graphic detail:

> My friends say he fired three shots, one after another. The first went through my left eye socket and out under my left shoulder. I slumped forward onto Moniba, blood coming from my left ear, so the other two bullets hit the girls next to me. One bullet went into Shazia's left hand. The third went through her left shoulder and into the upper right arm of Kainat Riaz.
>
> (6)

Here there is no poetic expression, just matter-of-fact sentences that clinically set out the order of events of when the shooting occurred. There may be fanciful turns of phrase used periodically throughout the text, but at its core, the event of the shooting is told

plainly. Lyrical language is not needed at this point to convince the reader to feel horror or disgust at the events addressed.

Yousafzai's biography covers an expansive period of her family's life, spanning discussion of her father's activities before she was born and during her youth; her own experiences as a schoolgirl in Pakistan and her rising involvement in the political scene; and the shooting, her recovery, and her early experiences of living in Britain. Yousafzai's shooting is not revisited again until much later in the book, but as we read of her experiences as a child growing up and going to school in Swat valley, we read it with the same fatalistic certainty of her opening sentence that one day she will leave home for school and never return. The prologue serves as a graphic reminder of this, as does the titular sub-heading of her biography that casts Yousafzai as "The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban." While the order of the statement suggests that she is an education advocate first and foremost, and that the shooting is secondary, the event of the shooting remains embedded in Yousafzai's story: we cannot read her story without it having some kind of impact on our reading of her.

In fact, her biography can be read as a direct response to the shooting, and to the shooter, who asked, before choosing his target, "Who is Malala?" (6). Her declarative title, "I am Malala," is an answer to this question. This declarative statement is further reiterated at both the opening and close of her biography, through which Yousafzai emphasises her own position of agency.[53] The framework of Yousafzai's biography as a *response* serves to positively refigure her position as a victim of the Taliban. She is also, unlike the Afghan Girl, a named icon, and her first name is clearly reinforced in both the title of her biography, and in the title of the documentary *He Named Me*

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[53] Yousafzai ends her prologue with the following statement: "Who is Malala? I am Malala and this is my story" (6). The end of the epilogue reads: "I am Malala. My world has changed but I have not" (265).

Malala.[54] In the early scenes of the documentary, Yousafzai narrates her experience of waking up in hospital for the first time: "I realised that this is not my country. And I thought, no one knows what's my name." Once more there remains a concern with her name; her identity. The documentary, in both its content and its title, works to tell us what her name is, and what it has come to represent.

The documentary covers a range of material, encompassing stories of her family life before and after the shooting and scenes of her various public engagements. The documentary repeats elements that appear in her biography in what becomes another example of remediated witnessing, whereby events and experiences that were recounted in her biography are remediated once more, both narrated *and* visualised. The documentary uses an aesthetic and affective conceit in which moments of Yousafzai's narrated past are depicted in animated graphic episodes, often with emotively charged music (composed by Thomas Newman) playing for additional affect. The opening scene depicts the narrative of Yousafzai's namesake, Malalai, which Yousafzai tells in the form of a voiceover.[55] The figure of Malalai is dressed in a *hijab* and loose pink clothing, resembling, not accidently, the iconic image that Yousafzai has come to be seen as today (see figure 9). Amongst her are the men who are fighting to defend Afghanistan against the British. As Malalai's words encourage the Afghan men to fight to defend their lands, Yousafzai narrates that: "She led the army to a great victory. But she was shot … Her name was Malalai." As this voiceover is heard, the music, which has been building up to a crescendo, quietens, and we see a close-up of the flag Malalai had been carrying fall from her hand.

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[54] It is noteworthy that Yousafzai is recognised in these instances by only her first name, perhaps due to her status as a child at the time of the shooting.

[55] Malalai was an Afghan girl who encouraged the Afghan army to fight and ultimately defeat the British in 1880 during the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80). She was killed by enemy fire.

Figure 9: "Malalai." Screenshot from *He Named Me Malala*, dir. Davis
Guggenheim.

The moment that the narration, music, and action onscreen anticipates has occurred, and in the instant of Malalai's death there is only quiet. This is immediately interjected with live-action footage of Yousafzai being carried on a stretcher following her own shooting, her treatment by the doctors, and the vigils being held for her, with archived news reporters presenting news of her shooting. The shift from animated narrative to live-action footage of Yousafzai in the immediate aftermath of the shooting has a jarring effect on the viewer. Ohad Landesman and Roy Bender, writing about the concluding scenes of Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), which also effectively moves from animated to live-action footage, consider the effect as "an unexpected dénouement, a final chord providing the spectator with an eye-opening, rude awakening. Any layer of shielding distanciation that that may have persisted due to the animated form's beauty … is peeled off to disclose the naked, visible evidence" (366). The shift in cinematographic mode in *He Named Me Malala*, however, results in a rude awakening for the audience at the advent, not the conclusion of the documentary. The viewer is barely settled when they are confronted with the shocking real-life footage of the shooting. The documentary is interwoven with these moments of animation which recount many of the experiences of Yousafzai's family in Pakistan before the shooting, by way of reconstruction, in an affectively accessible form of remediated witnessing, presented visually. However, this first interruption, depicting the aftermath of the shooting using stock live-action footage, serves as a persistent reminder that this violent act is at the core of this narrative.

As with the biography, which begins with a prologue that recounts the shooting before revisting it later in the main body of the text, the documentary also returns to the events of the shooting some time after its initial recording of it. In this later remediation, the documentary again employs both animated and real-life footage. The animation begins with a remediation of the documentary prologue, showing Yousafzai's namesake Malalai encouraging the men on the battlefield and providing the voiceover that "[w]hen every man was losing courage on the battlefield, a woman raised her voice." We are then shown an animation of Yousafzai walking to and attending school, which is spliced with live-action footage of Yousafzai publically speaking in Pakistan, and with audio clips of Radio Mullah. There are also reconstructed scenes which depict fragments of the moments that immediately led up to the shooting, and which can be recognised from her written account in *I am Malala*: boots walking alongside a bus, a shadow of a gun being raised, two girls holding hands, and a hand held up against a gun being raised, shadowed against the glare of the sunlight. The screen blanks white, the music that has been rising in a crescendo fades abruptly, and then there is silence as the animation returns, showing Malalai's flag from the opening prologue falling to the ground.

There are several layers of remediation here: the instant of the shooting is fragmentally reconstructed in live-action cinematography, and draws from elements of her written narrative in her biography. In particular, Yousafzai writes of a moment in which "Moniba tells me I squeezed her hand," which is visually rendered onscreen in the documentary reconstruction (6). Both the events of the shooting and the death of Yousafzai's namesake Malalai are remediated from when they were recounted in the opening of the documentary. In this later segment, they are remediated alongside one another. The inclusion of the animation with the flag falling to the ground embeds the

two stories into one another: both are women who were shot for raising their voice. The gunshot is signified, paradoxically by silence. The moment in which the shot occurs is not signified by the sound of a gun firing, but by complete silence as the music abruptly fades and the flag falls. We neither see nor hear the shooting. We see (and hear via the music) the anticipation, a flurry of movement and noise and voices, and then we hear silence, and see still photographs of the aftermath (of the school bus with blood on the seats) which appear onscreen. Given how much the shooting defines Yousafzai's public image—onscreen, in writing, and in the news—perhaps the most effective remediation of the event is the one that renders it through absence, omitting it in the form of silence and blank screens. This, perhaps, is a visualisation of the wound: a trace or impression, realised through violent negation (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 27). The event of the shooting, which is usually so hyper-present, becomes almost invisible. The audience expects to see the event of the shooting; the onscreen narrative anticipates it. Instead this is negated; there is only silence and still photographs of the aftermath of the shooting. And in this audio silence and visual stillness, Yousafzai's voiceover, spoken loud and clear over the top of the reconstruction is what echoes: "I will get my education if it is at home, school, or anyplace. They cannot stop me." In this statement she reminds us that she is both shooting victim and education advocate.

It was posed earlier that Yousafzai's image as a wounded victim might serve to diminish her role as an active agent as writer, campaigner, and spokesperson. While continually reiterating the events of the shooting could expedite such an effect, in Yousafzai's own accounts, events are often refigured in ways that allow her to return to her position of advocacy for education. In her biography, in her second recounting of the events of the shooting, Yousafzai states: "I didn't get a chance to answer their question, 'Who is Malala?' or I would have explained to them why they should let us

girls go to school as well as their own sisters and daughters" (203). Yousafzai reframes the events according to her polemical message. Here, the answer to the question "Who is Malala?" is not an affirmation of her name ("I am Malala") as appears in the title and bookends of her memoir, but an explanation as to why girls should be allowed to go to school. Her writing, as border pedagogy, "decenters as it remaps" wherein the retrospective genre of the memoir affords Yousafzai the opportunity to refigure—decentre—the homogenising image of victimhood in this moment (Giroux 30). By remediating the events of the shooting, Yousafzai ties her experiences to her campaign for girls' rights to education, in the same way that the sub-heading of the biography interlinks the two, leading to the conjoining of the two identities of wounded victim and public spokesperson. The strength behind the delivery of Yousafzai's polemical message is the interdependence of these two identities.

This combination of identities, of shooting victim and spokesperson, is also emphasised in Yousafzai's Nobel Lecture in 2014, which is partially embedded, and thus remediated, in the closing credits of the documentary.[56] During the course of this speech act, Yousafzai identifies herself in numerous ways. She identifies her position as both victim and advocate: "Some people call me the girl who was shot by the Taliban. And some, the girl who fought for her rights." But there are more identities at stake, even in this single twenty-seven minute speech. She states early on in her speech that she is "the first Pashtun, the first Pakistani, and the youngest person to receive this [Nobel Peace] award," identifying herself with not just her national, but also her ethnic identity, something which she refers to often during the course of her biography. She also calls attention to her age, which is apt given her advocacy for children's

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[56] See: "Malala Yousafzai Nobel Peace Prize Speech." *Malala Fund*. YouTube, 11 Dec. 2014. www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOqIotJrFVM.

(educational) rights. She recalls and explains that "I was named after the inspirational Malalai of Maiwand who is the Pashtun Joan of Arc." The story of her namesake and its meaning is something that is repeated from the documentary, her biography, and even her anonymous diaries (in which she explains that her real name means "grief stricken"). With these identifiers: Pashtun, Pakistani, child, shooting victim, children's education advocate, and namesake of Malalai, which are all repeated at various points of Yousafzai's (self-)representation in writing, onscreen, and in public speeches, we are able to build a familiar picture of who Yousafzai is. She is not just a name, unlike the Afghan Girl whose identity is consigned to her title and iconic face. In continually reiterating and remediating multiple aspects of her own identity, Yousafzai builds an image, or platform, from which to deliver her politics.

In her biographical writing, Malala represents herself as an exemplary individual, but in her Nobel Lecture, her voice is, self-consciously, not intended to be hers alone. She states that:

> I tell my story, not because it is unique, but because it is not. It is the story of many girls. Today, I tell their stories too. I have brought with me some of my sisters from Pakistan, from Nigeria and from Syria, who share this story … Though I appear as one girl, though I appear as one girl, one person … I am not a lone voice, I am not a lone voice, I am many. I am Malala. But I am also Shazia. I am Kainat. I am Kainat Soomro. I am Mezon. I am Amina. I am those 66 million girls who are deprived of education. And today I am not raising my voice, it is the voice of those 66 million girls.

What is striking about her choice of expression in this section of the Nobel Lecture is that she does not project a voice that is speaking for others, but a voice that is speaking

with others; a voice that is speaking amongst 66 million others.[57] Admittedly, Yousafzai's voice is the only one that we are able to explicitly hear, projected from the stage, but her voice tells a story that is shared by others. As Sommer puts it in her examination of *testimonio*, discussed earlier, the individual's "singularity achieves its identity as an extension of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole" (108). As Yousafzai notes, her story is not unique, and we may use this explicit example to respond to Beverley's assertion that should a subaltern be able to speak in such a way that "we would feel compelled to listen to and act upon, then it would not be subaltern" (xvi). Yousafzai, who has been educated, fought to keep that education, and spoken out for her right, and the right of others, to be educated, does not appear the silent subaltern figure. However, her Nobel Lecture is still infused with a subaltern consciousness through the act of aligning herself with 66 million others, where she identifies her speech act as not just hers, but also theirs: "I am not raising my voice, it is the voice of those 66 million girls."

This alignment, or alliance, that Yousafzai forms with these other girls in the course of her speech act is one of sisterhood: she explicitly calls these girls her "sisters." In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined the limitations of the slogan and notion that "Sisterhood is Global," which surfaced in feminist discourses in the 1960s-80s, wherein global feminism generally utilised a "center/periphery model" which delegated coloured or Third World women to the periphery, while Western women and Western models of feminism remained at the centre (Alexander and Mohanty xviii). To respond to this model, and drawing from Grewal and Kaplan's proposal that we "articulate the

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[57] For statistics regarding children's access to education see: *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.

relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies," working comparatively across both local and global contexts of political, economic, and social structures, I suggested that the tracing of feminist praxes is based not on a consideration of place but, rather, on travel, which moves in multiple directions (17).

The podium from which Yousafzai speaks is provided by a European institution, and the very act of speaking at such a prominent and publically available event (via mainstream media) represents a central, as opposed to a peripheral, space. However, as Yousafzai puts it, her story is "the story of many girls." Yousafzai is speaking from a privileged position in terms of the space she is currently inhabiting, but her own life experiences are not wholly separate from the girls she calls sisters, which includes Shazia and Kainat, who were also victims of the same shooting event that injured her. Yousafzai's alliance of sisterhood is one of solidarity, shared by other girls who have also experienced the same limitations as she to their right for education.

Moreover, within this projection of shared experiences, Yousafzai also provides specific local examples in her speech, such as her "sixteen year old courageous sister, Mezon from Syria, who now lives in Jordan as refugee and goes from tent to tent encouraging girls and boys to learn." Mezon's exact situation is different from Yousafzai's own experiences under Taliban control in Swat valley, but the two life experiences still intersect, sharing a desire to learn, and to teach others. Yousafzai does not speak for her sisterhood, but from within a sisterhood. She is "an extension of the collective" (Sommer 108). Yousafzai, despite her role as a public icon, is not, at least in her own words, exceptional: "I am not a lone voice, I am many." Her experiences are shared experiences, and her advocacy for her own right to education is therefore intended to support the rights of others.

Political Speaking and Ethical Listening

This chapter has considered the role of the West Asian spokeswoman in light of different modes of (auto)biographical expression. I have argued that personal narratives have the potential to galvanise political messages delivered by woman spokespersons. Drawing from personal and professional experience in their self-reflective memoirs, literature professor Nafisi and foreign correspondent Lamb provide a lens through which to explore their respective political climates. Testimonial writing, although reflecting on an individual's experiences, is often aligned with a collective consciousness, and the personal narrative can be empowering to those who speak and listen as it is in dialogue with both the community it speaks to and the community it speaks from. Yousafzai's dual identities of shooting victim and education rights activist, coupled with the remediated events of the shooting, tie her experiences to her continued campaign, and strengthen and substantiate her polemical message. In these examples, the personal materialises in self-conscious and self-reflective writing, and is politicised not just by the content of spoken/written words, but also in the intentions of the spokeswomen to reach the ears of others, to empower others.

Testimony is not simply the retelling of a witnessed event, but is also witnessed itself, and Whitlock argues that "the recognition of testimony is a political and ethical act" (*Soft Weapons* 74). This chapter has been preoccupied with the interrelationship between the political and the personal, but Whitlock's argument implies that ethics is also rooted within testimonial acts. There is an ethical imperative to recognise and engage with testimony and, by recognising testimony, the spokesperson is also acknowledged. Ahmed ponders "the intimacy of the political and the ethical" and reads this into the act of meeting an "other" where "*'this other' brings with her other others*. In getting together, and speaking to each other, we are also opening up a space in which

other others can be encountered, even if they are not yet faced" ("This other" 569-70; original emphasis). Testimony is exposure, and there is an ethical obligation to not discard the identities and words expressed by "others." The last two chapters of this thesis grapple with the values attributed to an individual's (or group's) life, and the ethical imperative to recognise liminal and marginal figures. Recognition is an ethical act, one which opens up a space to encounter others, and to encounter their stories.

Chapter Four

Mother

Mothers and Absent Children: Brokenness in the Iranian Graphic Novel

While previous chapters have tended to focus on images and written text as separate phenomena, in this chapter I focus on the comics form as a genre that marries visual images with written text to construct a narrative structure. I introduce some of the key narrative techniques of the comics form, which frame, reframe, and cut up the content of the narrative in the graphic novel, offering new ways for this thesis to explore representational politics. I consider the representational politics of state and dissident martyrdom within post-revolutionary Iran and examine the depiction of the mourning mother as part of this. This chapter analyses two Iranian graphic novels, Marjane Satrapi's renowned *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*, which was initially published sequentially (in four parts) between 2000-04, and Amir and Khalil's *Zahra's Paradise* (2011). I continue to address the trope of spokeswoman which was the focus of the previous chapter, as it is practiced by the maternal figure. In Chapter Three I concluded by suggesting that a personalised narrative strengthens and substantiates the polemical message of the texts under consideration. In exploring the figure of the mourning mother, I explore how the personal, individual expression of grief can either be used to facilitate or challenge the national political discourse of martyrology in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Within the context of Post-Revolution Iran and the 2009 Green Movement, this chapter focuses on the figure of the mother and considers how she is constructed and reconfigured politically. Addressing how death and grievability are configured within

Iranian political discourses, I examine the figure of the mother whose child has been martyred. I explore how the grief of the mother is felt and expressed both individually and nationally, and the potential tensions between the individual politics of the mother and national political discourse. In particular, I draw on Sara Ruddick's seminal work *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1989), which "accords maternal feeling the status of thought" (Guzmán Bouvard 133). I look at how images of mourning mothers are deployed by Iran's political regime and explore how mothers challenge the political status quo in distinctive ways, predicated on their maternal status, wherein "empowered mothers seek to fashion a mode of mothering that affords and affirms maternal agency, authority, autonomy, and authenticity and which confers and confirms power to and for mothers" (O'Reilly, "Introduction" 47). I argue that the representation of the feminist maternal figure within the graphic novel form, with all its "brokenness," allows for the interrelated messiness of politics and personal lives to be revealed, orchestrating distinctive counter-narratives in response to authoritative political discourses.

Writing Graphically: Brokenness and Writing in the Margins

Published at the outset of the post-millennial period, Satrapi's *Persepolis* garnered international critical acclaim, signalling, and potentially expediting a burgeoning market for and increased recognition of the postcolonial graphic novel in both popular and academic circles. Sam Knowles, James Peacock, and Harriet Earle make a case for the particular value of the comics medium within postcolonial and transcultural writing. Knowles et al. argue:

> The movement from each panel to the next is a border crossing that
> weaves the narrative in each step. At every turn readers must consider

their next moves and bridge the gap between the panels. The transitional

movement used here is about reconciling violence and reconstructing

brokenness; postcolonial narrative art seeks to redefine and recreate

identity out of a violent and often obliterated past. Thus, in their very

make up, the comics form mimics the thematic concerns of

postcolonialism.

(381-82)

Knowles et al. configure the process of reading a comics narrative as a mode of border

crossing in which the frame of the panel is a part of the narrative and must be negotiated

in order to construct the "bigger picture." For these critics, the reading process of the

comics form is one that is primarily reconciliatory in the face of a mode of

writing/imaging that draws attention to the brokenness and fragmentation inherent

within postcolonial narratives, particularly those characterised by censorship, trauma,

and mistranslation.

The gesturing by Knowles et al. towards the comics form as reconciliatory

shares meaning with the notion of "closure." The narrative structure of the comics form

is composed of panels and gutters: panels are the boxes on the page that display images

and/or text while gutters are the spaces between these panels. In relation to this

configuration of the comics form, Scott McCloud explains closure:

Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato

rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these

moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality. If visual

iconography is the vocabulary of comics, closure is its grammar.

(66-67)

McCloud describes the relationship between panels and gutters as fragmented. Closure can be used to (re-)connect a fractured narrative, or, to borrow the phrasing of Knowles et al., to "reconstruct brokenness," implicating the reader as an active agent in the making of the narrative that they are reading.

The notion of reconciliation, reconstruction, and closure may appear at odds with the concept of remediated witnessing which opens out through reiteration. However, while remediated witnessing unsettles the metonymy associated with the technical term "closure," the "re-" of reconciliation and reconstruction represents a reiteration; an approach from a different angle. I read the comics form as innately broken, with its gutters and distinctly framed panels cutting up that which is visualised on the page. The innate brokenness of the comics form allows for multi-directional (re)constructions of the narrative which are the subjective choice of each reader. In this way, the fractures between panels—the gutters—are instrumental in the composition of the comics form. The narrative is written from the gutters, from the literal margins of the work.

The brokenness of the comics form remediates, reconstructs, and reconstitutes the representational politics of its visualised and/or invisible subjects: those who are framed and cut out of the frame. This is especially significant in my analysis of *Zahra's Paradise*, which recounts the search of an Iranian mother (Zahra) for her son (Mehdi), who goes missing following the demonstrations during the 2009 Green Movement. In my consideration of *Zahra's Paradise* I examine the visibility and/or lack thereof of those classified as dissident martyrs—those who did not act in the interests of the juridicio-clerical government—whose lives are considered ungrievable in the eyes of the state. Athena Athanasiou, in conversation with Judith Butler, comments:

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But if there can be no realm of appearance possible apart from social normativity and thus from imposed invisibleness, the challenge is to mobilize 'appearance' without taking for granted its naturalised epistemological premises—visibility, transparency—that have been abundantly used to reify political subjectivity.

(*Dispossession* 194-95)

Reconciliation is a form of recognition and realisation; something that the unique bridging of writing and images in comics can tenuously (re)construct. However, if we take Athanasiou's warning seriously, while comics can challenge the inherent violence of imposed invisibility, we might also argue that complete transparency, as a state of over-exposure, can be equally limiting. Instead, an opportunity for not just redefining and recreating, but also revisiting should ideally present itself. The brokenness of the comics form offers opportunities for reiteration and, as with remediated witnessing, allows subjects to be rendered visible in different ways and from different perspectives, opening up alternate interpretive avenues.

In particular, the multi-directional representational technologies of the comics form lends itself to how we read "autographics" differently from more conventional written (auto)biographies (as explored in the previous chapter). Both *Persepolis* and *Zahra's Paradise* operate as forms of graphic memoirs, although *Zahra's Paradise* follows a fictional character arc intended to be representative of various experiences during the protests against the re-election of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-13) during the 2009 Green Movement. Gillian Whitlock coins the terms "autographics" in reference to the graphic memoir in an investigation of "the specific conjunctions of visual and verbal text in this genre of autobiography" and "the subject positions that narrators negotiate in and through comics" ("Autographics" 966). It is

these factors that are under investigation in this chapter, which examines how narrative and testimony is remediated through the various framing devices made accessible via the comics form and considers what these may add to the narrative. Of particular importance, linking to the way in which gutters operate within the comics form, Whitlock points to how the "labor of reading and looking for closure is at the heart of the opening that autographics might make in shaping affective engagements and recognition across cultures now" ("Autographics" 978). By implicating the reader as an active agent in the construction of the written-visual narrative, as opposed to a passive voyeur, the comics form engenders a more immediate and visceral narrated world.

This intimate reading process is particularly valuable when encountering transcultural and postcolonial narratives, as Knowles et al. argue:

> Comics forces the reader to engage with the narrative, to cross boundaries and to create links between panels and hyper-panels. We as readers participate in violence, perpetrating it with every movement of our eye across the page. For this reason alone, comics is a form that can handle the stresses and tensions of a postcolonial narrative perfectly.
>
> (182)

Pointing to the stresses, tensions, and violence which they see as common characteristics of postcolonial narratives, Knowles et al. suggest that the comics form is adept at literally illustrating these shattered spaces and forcing the reader to participate in violence and piece together the fragments of the narrative.[58] Implicating the reader in this violence engenders an affective response insofar as "we are affected

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[58] Susan Sontag poses an ethical dilemma to the notion of witnessing violence through a mediated source such as a photograph (or comics panel): "there is shame as well as shock in looking at the close-up of a real horror. Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could alleviate it … The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be" (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 37-38).

by 'what' we come into contact with" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 2). In the case of the comics form, affective contact is intimate and participatory.

In other words, the graphic novel can do a specific type of work which intimately integrates the reader into the composition of the narrative. Marianne Hirsch identifies this potential, arguing that the comics form of panels, gutters, and closure highlights "the compulsion to transcend the frame in the act of seeing" and "startlingly reveal[s] the limited, obstructed vision that characterizes a historical moment ruled by trauma and censorship" (1213). The grammar of comics draws the eye away from the centre of the image to take note of where the frames are drawn, where frames intersect, and where gutters interrupt and, therefore, fragment the action(s) being represented. Hirsch argues that these conceits can be used to illuminate moments of trauma and censorship; personal and political scars and erasures that would normally cut up and obstruct a narrative. The brokenness of the comics form facilitates—and challenges—similarly tenuous postcolonial, and often traumatic narratives. In the two Iranian graphic novels examined in this chapter, the comics form confronts the trauma of the Iran-Iraq War, political arrests and protests, and the censorship of the theocratic government.

The comics form lends itself to autographics, building a metanarrative in which the author who writes and illustrates their memoir draws attention to the potential gaps in their recollections through the use of gutters, frames, and blank spaces within the text. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious strategy on the part of the (auto)biographer, comics form lends itself to rendering (literally blank) absences in the narrative. In this sense, graphic memoirs are written not just from the margins (canonically, politically, culturally), but *in* the literal margins of the text; in the broken gaps.

Cuts and Conceits of Comics in Marjane Satrapi's **Persepolis**

In this section, I draw selectively from Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return* (2000-04) in order to highlight some of the key technologies of the comics form which can be used to formulate a contrapuntal narrative in the face of both a theocratic post-revolutionary Iranian government *and* a neo-imperialist Western perspective of Iran, which falls under the rubric of the "axis of evil." First, I explore how Muslim women are depicted through visually representational media. I then discuss how the process of remediated witnessing can occur within the manipulative construction of comics panels, drawing attention to framing.

Whitlock writes about how, for Satrapi (and for Azar Nafisi, discussed in the previous chapter), writing about her experiences in Iran in the 1970s-90s, "the censorship of the mullahs is figured (and experienced) most potently through and on the bodies of women" ("Autographics" 974). As discussed in Chapter Two, female bodies and clothing are used to express politics and counter-politics. Women's bodies represent a stake in the theocratic political discourse of Iran, which Satrapi "writes back" to using the tools of the (auto)biographical genre. Whitlock suggests that the veiled child avatar that features at the opening of *Persepolis* is "highly iconic" and that "by drawing the figure of the veiled child in cartoons, with emphasis on the face, Satrapi is using an icon that is particularly powerful in triggering a humanizing frame of reference" (*Soft Weapons* 191). The visual aspect of Satrapi's autographic medium can be used to facilitate her role as a spokeswoman by providing not only a voice, but also a face—an icon—that is at once instantly symbolically recognisable (framed by the *hijab*) and yet unique (in terms of the girl's facial features and expressions). The combination of word and image reshapes the mode of "writing back," wherein the

images instil iconicity, recognisability, and accessibility through which to stage her words.

The images, drawn in distinctive blocks of black and white colouring, produce individualised women's faces that are nevertheless also framed by the black *hijab* (or *chador*). Expanding on my earlier discussion in Chapter Two of the *hijab* as conceptually constitutive of the frame, here I briefly consider how the *hijab*, and by extension, women's bodies, are framed and reframed through Satrapi's use of the comics form. In Chapter Two I examined the *hijab* as it is typically represented in photography, as a sensationalised fetish object, often framed by the ideological structures operating in society, which render the *hijab* through a gaze, or lens, that commoditises and eroticises. However, the *hijab* also constitutes a multi-faceted barrier that presents "a curious dialectic of depth and surface"; it mediates between an interior non-corporeal self and a physical body (Doane 56). I argued earlier that, much like the camera lens, the different frames through which the *hijab* is constituted and perceived, as a conceptual point of access (or denial) of women's bodies, offers the potential to identify the simulacra at work.

What happens off-frame, or in the in-between folds of the dual dialectics of the depth and surface of the *hijab*, has the potential to respond from *within* those very same structures that might objectify that which is captured by the frame. The discursive, simulated space is built out of cuts across frames, not just from "off-frame"—from without—but also from within the form of the text. The illustrated nature of comics allows for more flexibility in what and how scenes and bodies are rendered. For example, in a panel towards the end of the graphic memoir, Satrapi draws a line-up of women below a commentary: "With practice, even though they were covered from head to foot, you got to the point where you could guess their shape, the way they wore their

hair and even their political opinions" (296). Here, there are three women, drawn in profile, and drawn twice over. This deconstructs the duality of the surface and depth of the *hijab*: one drawing shows the women in their black *hijab* (or *chador*), the second drawing shows the outline of the *hijab* but leaves the clothing, hair, and body shape beneath visible. Satrapi corporealises the body hidden beneath the fabric of the *hijab* and shows how the body shapes and contours the fabric that is intended to conceal: the shape of the *hijab*, as frame, is imposed from within, by the body it envelopes.

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 10: "This is me." *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi.

The use of panels and gutters in comics introduces additional paradigms for the construction and deconstruction of frames. This is evident in the evocative opening panels of *Persepolis*, entitled "The Veil" (see figure 10). The opening pages discuss the imposition of the *hijab* following the Iranian Revolution, which Whitlock points out is registered "in the child's view and the child's irreverent sense of proportion and significance" of the religious-political manoeuvre (*Soft Weapons* 189-90). The first panel shows a solitary image of Marji (Satrapi's avatar): "This is me, when I was 10 years old. This was in 1980" (3). This is followed by a panel with a line of veiled girls: "And this is a class photo. I'm sitting on the far left so you don't see me. From left to right: Golnaz, Mahsid, Narine, Minna" (3). It is important to note that in these panels, and throughout the course of the graphic memoir, Satrapi draws distinctive facial features and expressions upon each face framed by a *hijab*, so each is distinguishable from the other.

In the second panel there is a rendering of a "class photo" in which the illustrated comics form reconstructs the class photo using and featuring different frames. The class photo is a replication—a remediation—but it is also cut: "I'm sitting on the far left so you don't see me" (Satrapi 3). Along the left side of the panel, the edge of Marji's *hijab* is visible, but nothing else. She is cut out of the frame, her face is obscured or hidden from view by the borders of the panel and the focalisation in the image. This is a technique also used by Amir and Khalil in *Zahra's Paradise* in which Mehdi, the missing son in the narrative, is never fully visualised: his face is always obscured or shaded. It is unclear if the panel in the opening of *Persepolis* is a direct replica of the class photo but the position of the frame and the gutter between this panel and the one that precedes it highlights the ways in which the comics form can be used to draw specific attention to what is both included and excluded within a panel. In the case of the class photo, Marji is mostly excluded from the image, but she is marginally present, and her presence is indicated by the fabric of the *hijab*, just visible at the edge of the panel.

However, the preceding panel shows Marji in her entirety, as she should have appeared as part of the class photo, separated by the gutter, and yet slightly overlaying the class photo. This dissonance between the two panels generates the effect of a *punctum*: a supplement that "*is nonetheless already there*" (Barthes 55; original emphasis). The gutter represents a *punctum*, a cut, which "pierces both, indeed damages both frames, because it demonstrates its own liminality and therefore the representational structure of the frame itself" (Khanna, *Algeria Cuts* 5). Comics, in their innately broken form, which literally cut through scenes using gutters, can be used to frame the scene or subject in dissonant, liminal ways. This draws attention to how scenes are constructed and people are represented. Marji appears as both a central figure

in the first panel, alongside the declarative statement "This is me," and as a liminal figure in the second panel, where "you don't see me" (3). These images could be overlaid, but the frame of the panels and the gutter between them draws exacting attention to how frames are constructed around people, to both include them in an image, or to exclude them. The brokenness of the comics form can point to representational politics because its visual grammar can literally illustrate the question of who is represented and who is not within its visual plane.

The comics form featured in autographics highlights how some events are rendered and/or articulated as imperfect (re-)iterations, which can elucidate, subtract from, or even entirely change the way in which a moment is witnessed and/or experienced. The graphical medium of comics can draw direct parallels and remediations across the gutters—the cuts—between panels. In *Persepolis*, we see an example of an iterated partial-mirror image in the final panels of the two parts of the text: *The Story of a Childhood* and *The Story of a Return* (153, 343). In each of the final panels, Marji stands in the airport and watches her parents leave. The setting of the windows of the airport building are identical in both panels; Marji stands behind the glass with a suitcase by her side, while her parents occupy the foreground of the image; even the silhouettes in the background are identical. Marji's avatar is dressed identically in both images, in a black dress and *hijab*, but here the iteration across images differs as she is considerably older in age in the second image. The second image recalls—and remediates—the earlier experience from her childhood. It prompts the reader to identify that between the moments of these two departures an entire narrative of "return" has occurred, as proclaimed by the heading of *The Story of a Return*. To depart again, from the same place, implies a return.

The other distinct difference across the two panels is the way in which Satrapi has drawn her parents. In the first panel, as she departs Tehran as a child, Marji turns to see her mother collapsed in her father's arms. In the panel at the conclusion of *The Story of a Return* Marji's parents smile as they wave farewell, and are accompanied by her grandmother. The text box states: "The goodbyes were much less painful than ten years before when I embarked for Austria" (343). The two iterative panels tell different narratives in a different tone, but they are still intricately linked to one another: by sharing the visual template of the airport we are invited to compare the moments of departure, just as the written text in the final panel explicitly does itself.

There is another example of iteration in the final panel of *The Story of a Return* that shows how autographics can use a combination of word and image to form different meanings, demonstrating the memoirist's subjective framing of the events that they recount. Written text frames both the top and bottom of the panel. The top text box concludes by stating that "my grandma was there, happily…" (343). The implication of this statement is that Marji's grandma was happy as she left Marji at the airport. However, this is immediately undermined by the illustration in the panel which shows her grandma crying with down-turned lips. A momentary confusion is alleviated by the text at the bottom of the panel that reads: "… happily, because since the night of September 9, 1994, I only saw her again once, during the Iranian New Year in March 1995. She died January 4, 1996… Freedom had a price…" (343). The repetition of the word "happily" at the end and beginning of each clause, can serve to either conclude or begin separate sentences, or can overlap to form a single clause. The two truncated clauses, separated by the image of Marji's departure, undermines the comparably positive image with the news of the death of her grandma. The iteration of the word "happily" is a conceit that highlights the ways in which experiences are never entirely

closed off to change, wherein Satrapi reflects upon this scene "happily" due to her hindsight that this is one of the last times she sees her Grandma. Autographics, using the grammar of comics, offers a tool through which to achieve such a conceit.

These various conceits, realised through the intertwining of image and written text on the page, serve to unsettle narratives and the perceptions of the reader. This chapter now zooms in on the figure of the martyr in Iranian and Islamic tradition and looks, in particular, at the figure of the mother of martyrs. It does so by examining how the cuts and conceits produced as part of the comics form can be used to formulate contrapuntal narratives in response to the theocratic discourses of the Iranian government regarding martyrdom and mourning. The figure of the mother in West Asia obviously extends beyond the scope of "mothers of martyrs." However, I focus on this particular context of motherhood as a means to explore how the role can be refigured within the political sphere. I explore how mothers are used by the Islamic Republic of Iran as part of their political discourse on martyrdom in the context of the Iran-Iraq War, before examining the ways in which these Iranian mothers of martyrs can pave the way for their own maternal-orientated counter-politics. In many ways, this latter point is the examination of "[a] counter narrative of empowered mothering [which] is concerned with imagining and implementing a view of mothering that is *empowering* to women as opposed to oppressive as it is with the patriarchal institution of motherhood" (O'Reilly, "Introduction" 45; original emphasis).[59] I also look at mothers of martyrs because martyrdom is affectively charged and is intricately linked to witnessing. It is therefore conceptually tied to remediated witnessing, something which will be examined further in the final chapter of this thesis.

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[59] Andrea O'Reilly gestures to motherhood as a patriarchal institution, drawing from Adrienne Rich's seminal text *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1977).

Martyrdom and Mourning in Islam Traditions

The Arabic etymological root *sh-ḥ-d* can be traced to both "martyr" and "witness." *Shaḥid*, with a long first vowel and short second vowel (*shāhid*) means "witness." With a short first vowel and a long second vowel (*shahīd*) it can mean both "martyr" and "witness." The shared root of *sh-ḥ-d* for "martyr" and "witness" can be linked to my conceptual model of remediated witnessing. Within a religious context, which is not exclusive to Islam, martyrdom is tied to witnessing insofar as the religious martyr is believed to die in the eye of God.[60] Martyrdom is also often an important element of nationalist rhetoric and symbology, tied to periods of conflict, and is enfolded into some national discourses of trauma and mourning. Although martyrdom and the public expression of mourning are often framed positively as part of nationalist rhetoric, martyrdom is underpinned by a feeling of loss or pain by those who personally knew the martyr. This personal loss is representative of a wound and, therefore, of a "negation" (Scarry 52). The wound, or negation, frames what can be a personally traumatic event, formulating a disruption or gap between what, or who, has been lost and how they and the act of martyrdom are remembered. This notion is expanded on as the chapter goes on to explore the ways in which the personal and national configuration of the martyr (and their mothers) is often disjunctive. This is achieved through the consideration of remediated witnessing in the context of both the comics form in the texts examined here and the national conception of martyrdom in Iran.

David Cook defines an ideal martyr as an individual who enters into a violent situation, is killed, and whose actions "expressed courage and defiance of the enemy,

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[60] It should be noted that while martyrdom is a prominent aspect of Muslim tradition, it is also significant to (the typically Westernised) Judaism and Christianity, perhaps most markedly exemplified by the crucifixion of Christ.

loyalty towards Islam and the pure intention to please God" (30). In Iran and other predominantly Muslim states, especially those with larger Shia communities, such as Lebanon, the conception of martyrdom originates from Muslim historical narratives. Sunnis have been the majority sect in Islam for most of its history and, therefore, while they do venerate martyrs from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, they have rarely done so as a consequence of their oppression, as compared to Shia communities (Cook 47). As such, martyrs are revered and have more political and spiritual relevance in Shia communities. In Shia narratives, Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third Imam, challenged the rule of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid, who was chosen to succeed Muawiyah as the ruler of the Muslim community. He and his family were killed in the Battle of Karbala in C.E. 680 (61 A.H.) when their caravan was intercepted by Yazid's forces. Ingvild Flaskerud summarises that "Imam Hoseyn is seen to have defended what the Shiite recognizes as 'True Islam' against the unjust ruler of the Muslim community, Caliph Yazid. Dying for a just cause, Hoseyn became a martyr" (24). In fact, in the Twelver Shia worldview, Husayn is the "martyr *par excellence*" and the Karbala narrative, as will be explored here, remains a prominent feature of political discourse in Shia Iran today (Flaskerud 23).

Martyrdom is often framed not just through a religious lens, but also politically. Martyrdom has featured as part of nationalist discourses and conflicts in a number of Arab and West Asian countries, amongst others. Specifically focusing on how martyrdom is integrated into Palestinian nationalist movements, Laleh Khalili posits that "[a]ffinities between self-sacrifice and a political cause have always been present within the nationalist, liberationist, or Islamist movements in general" (114). Khalili examines the role of the mother of the martyr in Palestine in the late twentieth century: "The courageous self-sacrificing mother thus becomes the emblem of the nation. This

trope is not only reproduced by political factions, but is in fact propagated by mothers of martyrs where such performative bravery is called for and expected" (128). Khalili's work points to how the politics of martyrdom and the representation of the mothers of martyrs in contemporary Muslim and nationalist discourses is not exclusive to a particular country—such as Iran—but is expressed in various forms in different nations and across Sunni and Shia communities. Khalili's recognition of mothers of martyrs as emblematic, political, and performative is something that I explore in this chapter. I examine this trope of motherhood in the particular cultural, political, and national context of post-revolution Iran.

Leading up to my consideration of the figure of the mourning mother, the next sections outline how martyrdom is formulated and conceived visually in the predominantly Shia Iran, as it features as a significant part of religious-political discourses surrounding the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution, the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, and, more recently, within the context of the post-millennial, post-ideological Green Movement.[61] Whereas the state-endorsed martyrs of the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War are commemorated on a national scale, dissident martyrs, who challenge the juridicio-clerical Iranian government, are all but invisible. Shahla Talebi notes "the stark contrast between the hyper-visibility of the 'state martyrs' *vis-à-vis* the discriminatory invisibility and lack of recognition of the 'dissident martyrs.'" ("From the Light" 122; original emphasis). The acts of state martyrs are retold and their portraits are dispersed throughout the city in an act of remediated witnessing that politicises and utilises the affective response of grief for political ends. Thus, mourning, and

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[61] A reverence for martyrs does pre-date the post-revolutionary period in Iran in which Ashura, the annual commemoration of Imam Husayn's martyrdom, represents one of the most important spiritual events of the year for Shia Muslims. Ashura is a public ritual mourning that in some cases calls for the physical suffering of participants' bodies, such as through self-flagellation.

specifically the figure of the mourning mother, is turned into a political tool. However, in the context of the Green Movement, and by examining the utilisation of the "broken" comics form in *Zahra's Paradise*, I contend that this politicising of the mourning mother can, and has, been re-appropriated to render visible both their dissident martyred children and their own maternal, dissident protest.

Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran

In this section I contextualise some of the key moments of revolution and conflict in recent Iranian history which feature a political discourse of martyrdom. The 1978-79 Iranian Revolution was the result of protests against the perceived Westernisation (or "Westoxication") of the country and the increasingly tyrannical rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Feelings of discontent towards the Westernisation of Iran were utilised by both secular and Islamic opposition and "was expressed essentially in ethical, moral, normative, and spiritual terms. But ultimately the language of the revolt … was theological" (Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* 5). In the build-up of the Revolution and, in particular, following the deaths of anti-Shah protestors, "The Battle of Karbala and the death of the Imam Hosayn were emerging, at this time, as a new paradigm for politics. In this paradigm, martyrdom constituted the ultimate political act" (Yarbakhsh 79). Hamid Dabashi expands on the political viewpoints that were engendered within this paradigm of martyrdom, in which martyred protestors "became the supreme symbolics of the legitimacy and morality of the revolutionary movement and, simultaneously, of the illegitimacy and immorality of the king and his monarchy" (*Theology of Discontent* 507). A politicised Islamic ideology became an established discourse and, with the successful overthrow of the Shah, the Islamic Republic was established under the rule of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been one of the key figureheads of the revolutionary movement.

In post-revolutionary Iran, "the rule of law be[came] subservient to the rule of God and the hegemonic leadership of a juridico-clerical Islam" (Moallem 101).[62] The prominently clerical government integrated matters of religion within its political manoeuvrings. The Revolution had ignited a Shia political consciousness or, as Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh puts it: "reawaken[ed] a Karbala consciousness" (79). The religious energies that had been channelled into the Revolution remained in effect, but needed an outlet. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) presented a platform for the clerical government to consolidate its position as both a religious and authoritarian force. Yarbakhsh argues that:

> The invasion of Iran by Saddam Hussein in September 1980 allowed the revolutionary potential of the Karbala paradigm to be turned outwards against an external enemy. Throughout the period of the war, the Islamic Republic was able to gain a monopoly over martyrdom and so acted to institutionalize the martyr as a governmental category.
>
> (79)

The conflict of the Iran-Iraq War was fuelled by disputes over territory and resources, and by the political and symbolic value of the contested land (Khosronejad 3-4). However, Pedram Khosronejad identifies a gradual "develop[ment] within the Iranian fronts to completely shift the war's identity and ideology from territorialism into the idea of defense—of course, not a simple defense but the Sacred Defense" (4). The Karbala paradigm was an ideological consciousness that was nurtured within the

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[62] The government that has presided over the Islamic Republic of Iran since the revolution is guided, first and foremost, by the religious authority of the head of state, the Supreme Leader. Khomeini held the position of Supreme Leader from 1979 until his death in 1989. He was succeeded by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who remains in the role at the time of writing. The president (the head of government) is elected by public vote, but must still answer to the Supreme Leader.

context of the Revolution in which martyrdom came to represent a political act embedded in religious discourses. The paradigm heralded a huge number of (volunteer) soldiers that sought out the frontlines of war. Many of these soldiers (approximately 200,000) were killed as part of the conflict, and most were celebrated as martyrs.

The persistence of the theme of martyrdom in relation to the Iran-Iraq War is, in part, demonstrated by its presence in various scenes within Satrapi's *Persepolis*. Although not the central aspect of Satrapi's narrative, the recurrence of conversations regarding martyrdom indicates its overt presence within the social sphere of 1980s Iran. In the chapter entitled "The Key" the family's maid is upset by an incident in which her son is given a plastic key in school and is told that if he dies on the battlefield then the key will let him into heaven (99-100). The chapter also features a resonant, full-page panel of the schoolgirls beating their chests to the beat of the funeral marches (95). The uniformity to the girls' action implies the ritualistic and organised nature of mourning and points to the sort of public commemorative practices encouraged by the Iranian government. During the Iran-Iraq War, public mourning was used as part of the political discourse that called for the "Sacred Defence" of the Iranian nation. As part of this, martyrdom proliferated epistemological and visual frames, through rituals, murals, museums, and other manifestations of commemorative and cathartic propaganda in public spaces.

I will explore the figure of the mother as part of the visual propaganda that surrounded the Iran-Iraq War, considering examples from *Persepolis* and Tavakolian's photographic series *Mothers of Martyrs*. I then compare this to the representation of the mourning mother in *Zahra's Paradise*, within the contemporary events of the Green Movement. In June 2009, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in a landslide victory. Many perceived the victory to be fraudulent, and the incident sparked

multiple protests in the following weeks, touting the slogan "Where is my vote?" Some of these protests were led by former presidential candidates, such as Mehdi Karroubi and Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the prominent green colour originating from Mousavi's campaign. Dabashi urges against reading the protests as a "reinventing" of the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution (*The Green Movement in Iran* 56). Instead, he argues that these protests were a post-ideological, even cosmopolitan response from the younger generations who make up 60 percent of the electorate, signifying that "[t]he rising demographic tide is against the old revolutionaries" (*The Green Movement in Iran* 56). These protests were built out of a different context, in a post-millennial context, attended by people who had not even been born at the time of the Iranian Revolution.

Dabashi prefers to identify the Green Movement as "a *civil rights movement* and not as a *revolution*" (*The Green Movement in Iran* vii; original emphasis). This is perhaps a useful way to view the Green Movement in comparison to the 1978-79 Revolution: not as a resistance movement intent on power, but as a righteous movement which is seeking to make the government accountable (although it is worth noting that dissatisfaction with the Shah contributed towards the Revolution). This notion of accountability is emphasised by the new technologies available in the post-millennial period, with people taking to social media to record and publicise the protests and the acts of retaliation by the government. Also referred to as the "Twitter Revolution," the Green Movement had a strong media and online presence. Social media sites and YouTube were used as a resource to publicise arrests and injustices over the duration of the protests. Perhaps the most recognisable, recorded moment of the Green Movement was the death of Neda Agha Soltan, a student whose death on the 20 June 2009 was caught on camera, uploaded online, and became viral. My final chapter will examine the circumstances surrounding the various representations and (re)mediations of Neda's

death. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider the ways in which the representation of the martyrs—those killed during the protests—of the Green Movement differs from pre-millennial governmental uses of martyrology, focusing, in particular, on how the role of the mother is configured and refigured as part of these state and dissident narratives.

Grievable Lives and National Commemoration in Iran

Although it might be simplistic to perceive the Green Movement as a revisiting of the earlier Iranian Revolution, as Dabashi argues, both protests *do* draw from "Shia symbols and mythology" (Yarbakhsh 81). Dabashi, somewhat offhandedly, criticises the notion that the Green Movement "reiterate[es] an archetypal martyrdom" (*The Green Movement in Iran* 53). Dabashi discredits the notion that the configuration of the martyr from the 1978-79 Revolution is identical the figure of the martyr in the Green Movement. However, the Karbala paradigm was not absent in the martyrology surrounding those killed while protesting as part of the Green Movement.

The Green Movement charts a new path through which martyrology is conceived within this post-millennial, post-ideological context. Yarbakhsh conceives of this as an inversion, whereby "[t]he claim to martyr status, made on behalf of those killed by the state, acts, in the first place, to deny the Iranian government its monopoly over martyrdom" insofar as "[t]he sacrifice of Green Movement martyrs ultimately condemns the state in accordance with the terms of its own Shia-derived juridico-moral codes" (84-85). Shia martyrology is often influenced by the perception of a minority (and possibly subjugated) position in comparison to the majority Sunni sect. Indeed, "[m]ost martyrs that are venerated by Shi'ites were in fact killed by other Muslims, usually Sunnis" (Cook 59). The martyrology constructed for those killed when participating within the Green Movement, who may be classified as dissident martyrs,

disrupts and unsettles the Iranian government's politico-religious discourse on martyrdom.

Talebi recounts a tension between "state martyrs" and (political) "dissident martyrs" following the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution. Speaking in the context of the years succeeding the Iranian Revolution, Talebi points of "the hyper-visibility of the 'state martyrs'" in contrast to "the discriminatory invisibility and lack of recognition of the 'dissident martyrs.'" ("From the Light" 122). The hyper-visibility of state martyrs is realised through the production of murals and other commemorative memorabilia available within public spaces. In contrast, dissident martyrs, who conflict with the ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran remain invisible within the public eye. The category of "dissident martyr" can be assigned to those who lost their lives during the protests in 2009, whose deaths are not made public by the state, and who, in many cases, are given clandestine burials. As part of what follows, I identify instances in which the notionally ungrievable lives of these dissident martyrs in the eyes of the state are contested, principally regarding *Zahra's Paradise*.

This portion of the thesis uses Judith Butler's conceptualisation of grievable and ungrievable lives as a framework to compare how "state martyrs" and "dissident martyrs" are treated within the political discourse of the Iranian government. Murals and other visual commemorative paraphernalia endorse the grievability of the martyr's life and death and demonstrates their value within Iranian sovereign discourses in the context of the Iran-Iraq War. Meanwhile, the lives of those demonstrators who were incarcerated and/or allegedly executed without trial following the protests in 2009 can be perceived to be, as Giorgio Agamben defines it, *homo sacer* in the eyes of the state: to be someone "*who may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (8; original emphasis). In line with this theoretical notion of the *homo sacer*, Butler argues that grievability "is a

presupposition for the life that matters" (*Frames of War* 14). As the inverse, ungrievable lives are subaltern: they do not "matter" within political and social discourse. As part of this theorisation, the dissident martyrs of the 2009 Green Movement are not part of Iranian juridico-clerical rhetoric; they do not "matter."

The martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War, by contrast, denote hyper-visible, grievable lives. Butler suggests that "[o]pen grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice," which "has enormous political potential" for a controlling sovereign power (*Frames of War* 39). As I have suggested, during the Iran-Iraq War, public mourning in Iran evolved as part of a politicised rhetoric that propagated the "Sacred Defence" of the nation. Khosronejad indicates that "[n]ational bereavement and the commemoration of martyrs were common due to state policy and social demands during and immediately after the Iran-Iraq War" (1-3). Significantly, Khosronejad goes on to suggest that this commemorative trend is a "business arrangement" that maintains political influence over Iran's citizens (9). Martyrs were propagated and rendered politically profitable by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and are still publically recognised in a number of ways. For example, streets are named after martyrs; cemeteries designate spaces solely for martyrs; diplomas exalting martyrdom are rewarded by the state to the families of the deceased; and museums are dedicated to martyrs (Fromanger 54, 50, 65-6). Portraiture also accompanies tombstones for, and murals of, martyrs (and mourning mothers).

The proliferation of these murals throughout Iran's major cities during and after the Iran-Iraq War is one means through which martyrdom has been "institutionalized" within the Iranian state (Varzi 54). Roxanne Varzi identifies how Shia martyrology was appropriated and visualised for the purposes of establishing the strength of the governing regime in the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic: "If power is bound by its

visibility, then the power of Iran's clergy was made visible by the Islamic surface they so quickly created" (108). The visibility of state martyrs served to consolidate the political rhetoric and discourses of the governing powers of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The use of murals and other sites of memorialisation serve as instruments of the state to facilitate an affective response of mourning in the Iranian public. The various commemorative forms also perpetrate a system of remediated witnessing: a revisiting and a testimony (visual or otherwise) of the lives and deaths of martyrs. The act of remediation offers ways for grief to be felt and revisited and shared.

In contrast to the hyper-visibility of state martyrs, dissident martyrs are rendered invisible. Butler argues that "[i]f certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense" (*Frames of War* 1).[63] Lives—as social entities— are framed by epistemologies, or discourses, which constitute the value, the lack of value, or even the lack of recognition of different human lives. Those lives that are ignored come to constitute not even a lived entity, which Agamben regards as *bare life*. Butler identifies the indefinite detention of Guantanamo inmates as an example of bare life (and cites Agamben), qualifying indefinite detainment as a suspension of the law, where there is "no definitive prospect for a re-entry into the political fabric of life, even as one's situation is highly, if not fatally, politicized" (*Precarious Life* 68). Similarly, those protesters detained in Evin prison in Tehran in 2009 are removed from the political field, and yet this act of negation is politicised in that it secures the regime's position of power.

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[63] Butler's work on grievability and mourning mainly responds to the aftermath of 11 September 2001 and the value that was attached to US lives as compared to the fatalities of those with other nationalities. In spite of this, Butler's arguments are still relevant to the Iranian contexts being explored in this chapter.

In *Zahra's Paradise*, the mother, Zahra, searches for her missing son, Mehdi, following the demonstrations in 2009. Mehdi is imprisoned at Evin, and later executed. Mehdi can be interpreted as *homo sacer* within the context of state discourses, in which his life (and death) is "set outside human jurisdiction without it being brought into the realm of divine law" (Agamben 82). The conflation of human jurisdiction with divine law in the Iranian juridico-clerical government constitutes a legislative system in which the category *homo sacer* is realisable. The absent son (Mehdi) in *Zahra's Paradise* is devalued in the epistemological frame of state discourse in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The regime's failure to acknowledge Mehdi's presence (and death)—as he does not die in willing service to the state—conceives of a position wherein "[a]n ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all," an epitome of bare life (*Frames of War* 38).

However, while Mehdi's life is not grievable for the state, the personal loss experienced by his mother persists as an inconvenient truth, disrupting the hegemonic presentation of the Karbala paradigm by the theocratic state. This personal loss can be understood, conceptually, as a wound which, itself, represents a "negation" (Scarry 52). This negative space of the wound is also realised through the invisibility of dissident martyrs within Iran's hegemonic theocratic discourse of grievability. However, a wound is not simply a void, for the wound requires edges, a frame where that which is negated might still be perceived. This framework of the wound is conceptually linked to the brokenness of the comics form where the gutter both fractures and frames panels through the use of negative space.

Earlier in this chapter I proposed that the gutter in comics has the potential to (re)form a narrative from the (literal) margins of the work. I explore this potential in my consideration of *Zahra's Paradise*, and argue that the brokenness of the comics form

manipulates this invisibility and marginality, writing back to state discourses on grievability. The brokenness of the comics form facilitates the maternal strategies and emotional interruption exercised by the grieving eponymous mother of *Zahra's Paradise* as she challenges hegemonic juridicio-clerical discourses of grievability. In the context of this graphic novel, the figure of the mourning mother, which is also used by the state, disputes the idea that the missing demonstrators of the Green Movement are non-grievable, producing "martyrs [that] have been made without the sanction of the state" (Yarbakhsh 85). The relationship between mother and son introduces an emotive counter-narrative that makes the dissident martyr visible. In what remains of this chapter, I examine in more detail the figure of the mourning mother and maternal political strategies in Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Newsha Tavakolian's *Mothers of Martyrs* (2006) photographic series and, finally *Zahra's Paradise*.

Mourning Mothers in Iran

Motherhood is not a fixed or stable entity; it is subject to individual experience "as it is lived and represented: fundamentally and inherently as an intellectual and social site, one that is simultaneously personal and relational, subjective and cultural" (O'Reilly and Bizzini 11-12). Mothering and maternal thinking is personal, political, and cultural. Ruddick argues that mothering is a type of work: "To be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one's working life" (17). It is a duty that requires conscientiousness and which can work both for or against the politics and expectations of local, intellectual, and ideological communities. As Andrea O'Reilly and Silvia Caporale Bizzini put it: "mothering is a self-reflexive practice and … motherhood is a political and social institution" (27). Mothers are engaged in a personal relationship with their child, but

the role of "mother" is perceived and synthesised through varied political and social lenses. The role of "mother" can also be used for political ends, both by the mothers themselves (perpetrating a form of "maternal thinking"), and by governments and regimes in positions of power.

This chapter is concerned with how the bereaved mother is conceived within the political and social institutions of post-revolutionary Iran, both in the context of the Iran-Iraq War and, more recently, in relation to the 2009 Green Movement. In the context of the Iran-Iraq War, I explore how the grief of the mourning mother is conceived within Iranian government propaganda as part of its discourse on martyrdom. I then look more closely at how mourning mothers, whose children went missing or died during the protests during the Green Movement, continue their "work" as mothers and manifest a form of "maternal thinking" that voices dissent towards the silence of the government about these "dissident martyrs."

Ruddick conceives of maternal thinking as an approach that strives for peace, or non-violence. Discussing this using a specific feminist lens, she writes:

> A feminist maternal politics of peace: peacemakers create a communal suspicion of violence, a climate in which peace is desired, a way of living in which it is possible to learn and to practice nonviolent resistance and strategies of reconciliation. This description of peacemaking is a description of mothering. Mothers take their work seriously and create a women's politics of resistance. Feminists sustain that politics, devising strategies, celebrating strength, resisting violence and contempt.
>
> (244)

Maternal thinking engenders a reconciliatory politics, but one that is prescribed through acts of non-violent resistance that are constructive in that they are peaceful. As

Marguerite Guzmán Bouvard puts it, in relation to maternal approaches to resistance: "anger is highly constructive and sparks imaginative acts when it is not linked with hatred and destructive goals" (136). These maternal strategies are evident in *Zahra's Paradise*, following the mother's, Zahra's, search for her missing son. Her movements within the text are focused, meaningful, peaceful, but emotionally fraught, as she works to find her son, and render his life and his death visible in the face of his erasure by the juridico-clerical regime.

Zahra encounters and serves as a representative of *The Mourning Mothers of Laleh Park* who assemble at this eponymous site in Tehran and protest the disappearance and/or death of their children following the arrests that took place during the post-election demonstrations. This is similar to a movement that exists in Argentina (*Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*) where mothers began assembling following the "disappearing" of their children during the "Dirty War" (1976-83). Discussing the *Madres*, Ruddick suggests that "[t]hey speak a 'women's language' of loyalty, love, and outrage; but they speak with a public anger in a public place in ways they were never meant to do" (229).

This public outrage, strengthened by the caring, protective work of the mother, aligns itself to Butler's conviction that "[o]pen grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice" (*Frames of War* 39). Butler proposes that the visualisation of open grieving and outrage "has enormous political potential" for the controlling sovereign power, engendering a discourse of grievability (*Frames of War* 39). While this is evidently the case in relation to the mourning mothers featured in the propaganda used by the Islamic Republic of Iran during and after the Iran-Iraq War, the opposite can be said in the case of *The Mourning Mothers of Laleh Park* whose outrage is directed towards the sovereign power: theirs is a resistant, communal politics,

outraged but non-violent and reconciliatory. The remainder of this chapter explores these two strands of state-endorsed and dissident public expressions of grief, both expressed by the mother.

The Iran-Iraq War: Visualising and Framing Martyrs and Mourning Mothers

As I have explained, one of the chief forms of commemorative media during and after the Iran-Iraq War was the murals of martyrs that populated Iran. These murals propagated a state-endorsed discourse of grievability that typically valued the martyr for the "Sacred Defence" of his religion and nation, in which "Shiite sacred history played a significant role in motivating the population to defend Iran, as well as the state's attempts to sustain the Islamic Republic" (Flaskerud 26). Such murals fall under the remit of the Karbala paradigm, in which martyrdom represents a political act that is facilitated by and utilised by the Iranian regime. Talebi points to how commemorative tools such as the mural indicate that what is central to martyrdom "is a particular way of living and dying in relation to the community and its continuity, for which collective memory is crucial" ("Martyr's Dilemma" 182). The grievability of the martyr is coded by Shia traditional narratives that serve to support the political-religious sovereign discourses of the regime of the Islamic Republic, and works to establish continuity, strength, and catharsis within the national community.

These murals would frequently include the image of the mother of the martyr in a state of mourning. The publically visualised display of grieving by the mourning mother served to maintain the overt presence of the losses felt by the nation, instilling this into national collective memory. The visualisation and presence of the mourning mothers serves to constitute and emphasise the grievability of their martyred children. The prominence of the commemorative visualisation of martyrdom and the figure of the mourning mother as part of this is evident through its depiction in Satrapi's

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Persepolis. Although *Persepolis* is not primarily engaging with this aspect of Iranian culture, the image of the martyred son and the mourning mother is rendered twice in the text.

The first example of this occurs as part of a series of panels that depict Marji travelling through Tehran in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War. She takes note of "all the images: the sixty-five-foot-high murals presenting martyrs" accompanied with "slogans like 'The martyr is the heart of history'" (Satrapi 252). Alireza Korangy notes that murals such as these "concentrate[d] on the spiritual, religious, and romantic-epic characteristics of martyrdom" (542). The murals propagate an epic religious-historical narrative ("the heart of history") in support of the religious-political state of Iran, as part of the Karbala paradigm. One of the panels in this sequence situates Marji in the bottom corner of the image while a mural towers above her, depicting a woman holding a dead martyr in her lap. (542). This figure, who dominates the space in the panel, can be perceived as a mourning mother (although she might also represent a war widow). Her act of making eye-contact with Marji and her elevated position structurally within the panel is intimidating and unsettling. Her eye-contact also communicates her grief in a directed message in which state narratives of grievability serve to shape the propagation of martyrdom.

The mural in the panel recalls and remediates the tradition of the Pietà, originating in the Christian tradition: an iconographic image that visually depicts the Madonna holding the dead body of her son, Jesus. This is made more explicit in the other visualisation of the figure of the mourning mother, where Satrapi reproduces her drawing qualification for her application to join the college of art. She writes that "I practiced [for her exam] by copying a photo of Michaelangelo's 'La Pietà' … I reproduced it by putting a black chador on Mary's head, [and] an army uniform on

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Jesus" (283). In this example, as with its use in the murals that populated Iranian city centres, the Pietà is transposed from its initial Christian context into a Muslim-centric, politicised one. The reproduction also represents a version of remediated witnessing insofar as the Pietà is repeated from different perspectives and contexts. In *Persepolis*, Statrapi recalls symbology that she has witnessed on public murals such as the one featured earlier in the graphic novel, but she also makes explicit reference to how she draws from the original Christian contexts of the iconographic image. The Pietà may be seen to "portray the Virgin's personal loss if it is interpreted as a sign of her charity. Her sadness then becomes an expression of the pain that mother and son had to endure in order to rescue mankind" (Eriksson 275). In the context of the Karbala paradigm, relating to the Iran-Iraq War, the depiction of the mourning mother alongside her martyred son, affiliated with the iconographic Pietà, places emphasis on the sacrifice that both mother and son have made for the "Sacred Defence" of Shia Iran. However, the remediation and translatability of the mother-son image across contexts gestures to how mothering has universal connotations.

Iranian photographer Newsha Tavakolian's series *Mothers of Martyrs* (2006) recalls the murals that populated Iran throughout the Iran-Iraq War. Varzi argues that, in light of the Iran-Iraq War, two things were needed to establish the space of death: "a martyr and a photograph. Martyrdom is meaningless without memorialization, and memorialization is not possible without a photograph" (62). Developing from this, I propose that there are four things of importance in the *Mothers of Martyrs* series that constitute the space of death in Iran; the martyr, the photograph, the frame, and the mother. In each image in her series, Tavakolian has photographed a mother standing alone, each holding the framed image of their martyred son, killed during the Iran-Iraq War. The frame constructs a barrier which divides the two portraits of mother and son.

As previously cited, Ranjana Khanna argues that "[w]hile the frame is therefore all about stasis, capturing a moment or holding a particular instance hostage, it also exceeds itself, through what happens 'off-frame,' … or through the *punctum*, an apparently insignificant signifier piercing or wounding the viewer" (*Algeria Cuts* 39). Although Khanna is writing predominantly about the cinematic frame, the conceptual premise is useful to my analysis of the still image, and harks back to my earlier consideration of how the comics form, which splices scenes with frames and gutters, can point to the narrative dissonances. The physical frame held by the mother in the photograph represents a moment of stasis. Khanna argues that "[p]hotographs in particular capture something irretrievably lost" and that their contents constitute a "spectral presence" (*Algeria Cuts* 39). This is certainly the case for these photographed martyrs who are captured, or held "hostage"—eternally young, eternally dead. The martyr is memorialised in this image, but this imaging is but a spectre or simulacrum. As with the martyrs propagated in murals disseminated throughout Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, his visualisation comes to represent the very fact that he is absent.

The frame constructed around the martyred son not only renders stasis, but also "exceeds itself" (Khanna, *Algeria Cuts* 39). In *Mothers of Martyrs*, that which occurs "off-frame" interrupts the framed image: the placement of the mothers' hands literally disrupts the physical frame that surrounds her son, and her physical (and visual) presence in Tavakolian's photographs constitutes an additional frame in itself. The martyr is framed by the presence of his grieving mother. In fact, the central subjects of Tavakolian's photographs are not the martyrs, the sons who appear as a photo within the photo, but the mothers. As the title of the series suggests, these are images of the *mothers* of martyrs. The mourning mothers are the central foci of the image, even if they are not literally at the centre of Tavakolian's frame.

The interruption of the image of the martyrs, qualified by the *grief* of the mothers, can be seen to represent a *punctum*. The emotional interruption can be seen to result in the "piercing" or "wounding" of the viewer insofar as the action of mourning by the mother elicits an emotional, rather than passive response from the viewer (Khanna, *Algeria Cuts* 39). Using similar terminology to Khanna (associated with the rhetoric of wounding), Sara Ahmed asserts that pain is "bound up with how we inhabit the world, how we live in relationship to the surfaces, bodies and objects that make up our dwelling places" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 27). The mourning mother not only signifies pain through her presence and interruption of the photographed martyr, but performs it, evidenced by the grief showing in her facial expression. The visualised, and thus "open," grief of the mother constitutes the "affective" response utilised by state narratives of grievability when relational images of mourning mothers and martyred sons were depicted in murals. The propagation of both the publically grieving mother and her martyred son commemorates and legitimises his sacrifice within the context of the "Sacred Defence."

The dual-framed images of Tavakolian's photographs are illustrative of this state narrative—an epistemological frame—that qualifies *these* lives as grievable. However, taken nearly twenty years after the events of the Iran-Iraq War, Tavakolian's preeminent focus on the mourning mother introduces a narrative that is led first and foremost by the personal grief of the mother, as opposed to the political ramifications of the son's status as a martyr. Tavakolian's series represents a form of remediated witnessing insofar as her photographs revisit the configuration of mother and son that was visualised on the state-endorsed public murals and emulates the iconography of the Pietà. The visualisation of mourning mother and martyred son is reoriented and,

materially, reframed, partially detached from its initial politicised context and engendering a more private reconfiguration.

In my consideration of *Zahra's Paradise*, I explore this personal, private expression of grief, formed outside of the juridicio-clerical discourses that predicate which lives are grievable and, therefore, visible. Although a more personal narrative is predicated in the series *Mothers of Martyrs*, the son remains fully visible. By contrast, in *Zahra's Paradise*, Mehdi, the missing son, is never fully rendered. I now explore the ways in which this invisibility is framed and politicised using techniques of the comics form, challenging the institutionalised invisibility of the "dissident martyr."

Maternal Resistance and Unburiable/Ungrievable Lives in Zahra's Paradise

An amateur video recorded and uploaded to YouTube on 13 July 2009 shows a distraught mother crying and screaming at the funeral of her son Sohrab Aerabi. He was a 19-year-old student who disappeared on 15 June 2009, during the protests which followed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's landslide victory in the Iranian presidential election held that year. His body was returned to his family after weeks of searching. In the recording, according to the subtitles, Sohrab Aerabi's mother, Parvin Fahimi, shouts that "[t]hey told me he was in Evin [prison]. … But they killed him." Her anger is directed towards the juridicio-clerical regime in Iran, whom she calls "cowards," and she declares that "I need to tell my story. No-one can stop me" (hydrademian).

This video served as the inspiration for Amir and Khalil's (writer and artist respectively) graphic novel *Zahra's Paradise* (2011), a fictional narrative based on factual events. The graphic novel depicts elements of Parvin Fahimi's narrative, with the text culminating in an angry and bitter tirade by the eponymous mother, Zahra, who

attacks the same "they" that Parvin Fahimi accuses.[64] Parvin Fahimi is a mourning mother to a lost—or martyred—son who stands for pro-democracy, as is the avatar Zahra.[65] Both the real and fictional mother are responsible for carrying on the politics of their children. Maternal protest also manifests in the case of *The Mourning Mothers of Laleh Park*, a gathering, or movement, of mothers that represents a form of public commemoration and remembrance which exists outside of and contests state discourse.

Working outside of the epistemological frame of the Islamic Republic, in *Zahra's Paradise*, Amir and Khalil utilise the role of the mourning mother in their counter-narrative to state discourses, which qualifies her son's life (and death) as grievable in the eyes of his mother. I suggested earlier in this chapter that those incarcerated following the protests in 2009 inhabited a state of bare life. The violence (and alleged executions) enacted upon them is "classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide" and belongs to "neither the sphere of sacrum facere nor that of profane action" (Agamben 82-83). The incarcerated, as bare life, are neglected in Iranian juridicio-clerical discourses, omitted from the Karbala paradigm. This correlates with Butler's suggestion that if violence is enacted upon (bare) life that is considered non-grievable then "it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated" (*Precarious Life* 33). While Tavakolian's series posits an emotional narrative that is precipitated on the visuality—and therefore, grievability—of the dead son, in *Zahra's Paradise*, Mehdi's presence in the narrative is emphasised by his absence. His life (and death) are negated within state discourses, treated with the "discriminatory

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[64] The title of Amir and Khalil's text is also indicative of the cemetery *Behesht-e Zahra* in Tehran, alternatively called Zahra's Paradise.

[65] Although the texts and examples that I have focused on in this chapter have predominantly covered the loss of sons, daughters have also lost their lives. Neda Agha Soltan, whose death and "martyrdom" has been received globally will be considered more fully in the following chapter of this thesis.

invisibility" of dissident martyrs (Talebi, "From the Light" 122). In Tavakolian's *Mothers of Martyrs*, the sons are visually rendered and centrally framed. In *Zahra's Paradise* we never see Mehdi's face.

The graphic novel emphasises the extent to which Mehdi's life (and death) has been negated by his literal invisibility—and thus negation—within the text. The first chapter of *Zahra's Paradise* emphasises that this is the mother's narrative. The narrative begins with Zahra searching for her son, in the immediate aftermath of the protests. At the end of the chapter, Hassan (the narrator and Mehdi's brother) dreams of Mehdi's return, but we see him only at the margins of the frame; his face always obscured (31-32). In this visualisation of Hassan's dream, where Mehdi "walks back into our lives," the mother fills almost the whole of the panel, her arms extended outwards towards her lost son who resides at the very edge of the frame, with almost the entirety of his profile in shadow, as is continually the case throughout the narrative (31). As a profile that is depicted either in outline, or filled in shadow, Mehdi's paradoxical (and spectral) presence throughout the graphic novel is engendered by his continual absence. Unlike Satrapi's schematic style that utilises densely filled black and white spaces, the style of *Zahra's Paradise* is more cluttered—shaded and detailed—emphasising the comparative lack of visualisation of Mehdi. Amir and Khalil's depiction of, and emphasis on, the *mother* and maternal loss further mark Mehdi's absence.

Zahra's Paradise visually depicts the invisibility of Mehdi whose "life … enter[s] into an intimate symbiosis with death without, nevertheless, belonging to the world of the deceased" insofar as his death is unacknowledged (Agamben 99-100). In the cemetery, death is lifted from both the organic and the spiritual plane, and into a digital one. Taghi, one of the assistants at the cemetery who assists Hassan in his search for his brother, proclaims "[w]elcome to the garden of the dead," gesturing to what is

plainly visible in the panel: a series of computer terminals (161). The "computerized" cemetery represents "the most efficient bureaucracy in all of Iran" (161). The subversive comment regarding the "efficiency" of death aligns the regime with violence. Taghi's dialogue also dehumanises death: in this representation, death and burial is not about spirituality or biology, but is now digital; it is "scien[tific]" (160). The compartmentalisation of human life and death into the digital world also offers the capacity to essentially "delete" human life, removing the record of the physical human body. Lot 309, where Mehdi, and other protestors, is buried, is a preeminent example of this. Taghi states, with an expression of fear, that Lot 309 "does not exist: it has no name and no record" (163). However, the lack of presence of Lot 309 in the digital, bureaucratic landscape is undermined by its physical presence and, in the graphic medium of *Zahra's Paradise*, its visual presence. In a panel where Hassan takes a photograph of Lot 309, both the physical and visual are compounded (163). The act of photo-taking captures—holds "hostage"—the physicality of Lot 309. By capturing an image of the Lot, facilitated by the visuality of the comics form, Hassan lends visibility to it, the adverse of negation.

The unnamed grave used by the regime signifies not just the disavowal of Mehdi's death, but also a disavowal of the family's right to grieve: "if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life ... It is already the unburied, if not the unburiable" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34). The emphasis placed on the (il)legitimacy of the gravesite by Amir and Khalil accentuates the grief of those left behind, and contests their right to grieve. If the dead body cannot be buried, it could be argued that grief cannot find release. Designated as bare life and unburiable dead within state rhetoric, Mehdi is non-grievable, and his absence throughout the narrative puts a strain on his mother's ability to grieve. The narrative is driven by Zahra's need to find her absent son, in order to

allow her to bury him and legitimise her grief. Mehdi's absence (and absent presence) fuels the mother's narrative.

As part of a religious-political discourse on martyrdom, "the state seeks and devours the sacrifices of its citizens" (Talebi "Martyr's Dilemma" 184). Within state discourses, Mehdi is, first, sacrificed as a dissident in order to "protect" the state. The government then later attempt to dissolve his dissidence by enfolding him into a discourse of state-endorsed sacrifice and martyrdom. The state attempts to devour Mehdi and make his true actions invisible. As a dissident martyr, Mehdi (as with other protestors, such as Neda Agha Soltan and Sohrab Aerabi) represents a counter-narrative to state discourses of martyrdom. The persistent absence of Mehdi in *Zahra's Paradise* is representative of how he and his cause of martyrdom exists outside the epistemological frame of martyrdom and grievability employed in support of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, when Hassan locates previously hidden evidence that Mehdi is deceased, the state change their stance and make moves to legitimise Mehdi's death, enfolding it into their own rhetoric. Here, we can recall Laura U. Marks' model of enfoldment, regarding the recollection and remediation of memory, which sees the "selection of what elements to unfold and conversely, for their way of willing certain elements to remain in a state of latency" (*Hanan al-Cinema* 72). This selection is a political one, choosing which lives, bodies, and deaths should be visible and grievable for the purposes of dominant juridicio-clerical discourse, serving the Karbala paradigm.

After Hassan's discovery, government officials visit Zahra and posit her son as a state martyr, killed by "a *non*-Iranian bullet" (210; original emphasis). They attempt to persuade her to sign documents attesting to his martyrdom, bribing her with "*top of the line* benefits! Better than we ever gave mothers of martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war!"

(210; original emphasis). A signature is needed in order for Mehdi to enter from the margins and into their epistemological frame; once again death is entwined with bureaucratic discourses. Their offer would make Mehdi's death grievable in the eyes of the state, but it would do so on their terms, terms which Zahra refuses to accept. Her refusal to make her son into a state martyr rejects the state ratified discourses of sacrifice which would award Mehdi public visibility and would recognise, even value, Zahra's maternal loss. Zahra proclaims that "I did not raise my son to be the sacrificial lamb on the altar of the Islamic Republic" (211). Her loss is driven by her personal and maternal attachment towards her son. She personalises him ("my son"), disengaging him from the bureaucratic rhetoric of martyrdom used by the government officials. Further still, by refusing to sign the documentation, Zahra refutes the attempts of the regime to dissolve (to devour) Mehdi's political dissidence which would turn him into *their* sacrifice.

State discourses had posited Mehdi as bare life—unburiable, ungrievable—and his absence is continually reflected by his shadowy presence in the text, facilitated by the devices of dissonant panels, visual style, and gutters within its "broken" comics medium. However, in the climactic conclusion to *Zahra's Paradise*, Zahra, the mourning mother, expels her rage and grief in an intensely visible and verbal series of panels which compose a powerful counter-narrative, drawing attention to Mehdi as a dissident martyr and calling for the grievability of her son. Here we can recognise the similarities between Amir and Khalil's fictional depiction of events and the video of the vocal and grieving mother Parvin Fahimi, which is loosely remediated. Zahra occupies the majority of the panels in this final chapter, sometimes appearing multiple times in a single frame. Zahra's overt presence is particularly noticeable in the panels on pages 216-18, appearing in every one. The power of the medium of the graphic novel is

particularly pronounced here, especially given the emphasis that has been placed on invisibility within the text. The visual form bombards us with the repeated figure of the mourning mother, shrouded in black: her black clothing, her body, her face, and her speech are empowered by their repeated visibility in these panels. The figure of the mourning mother and her message is compounded and emphasised by her reiterated visualisation: fractured, broken, and dissonant.

[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]

Figure 11: "Burn, my son." *Zahra's Paradise*, by Amir and Khalil.

Zahra's words draw the eye of the reader as much as her image through their powerful repetition and the enlarged, often bold type-face: "Did you not run in this dirt? Did you not play in this dirt? Did you not … Did you not …" and so it goes on (217). Similarly, in a tirade written upon the visual depiction of Zahra's tongue, she repeats, "*Burn*, my son, Burn with my rage, Burn through this shroud of lies, Burn, Burn …" (218; original emphasis). The use of repetition presents an emphatic, dramatic narrative which reads almost poetically: it is a dirge and a chant, a pledge and a prayer.

Zahra's appeal to "burn" away the lies is accompanied by the re-visualisation of Mehdi as part of the pictorial frame for her words: his face is clearly visible, a swaddled baby in the arms of his mother (see figure 11). Mehdi is re-visioned through the eyes of his mother who sees him forever as her *child*. This image also recalls an earlier panel in *Zahra's Paradise*, which depicts a mural of the Madonna holding her infant child Jesus inside a Christian church (Amir and Khalil 140). This panel, which mirrors the visualisation of the Muslim Zahra and Mehdi in this later section, and which recalls

elements of the Pietà, symbolises that while maternal loss might be politicised, motherhood and maternal love are conditions that bear universal significance.

In the funeral sequence, grief and, more notably, a discourse—a counter-narrative—of grievability, is preeminent. It occupies and overpowers the space, dominating both written text and visual art. Where the lost and absent son is unable to establish his own presence, the mourning mother re-introduces visibility and value into the life of her son and others like him. Although Mehdi has been invisible throughout, the narrative remains driven by the mother's search for her son and his presence has been inferred (reconciled) within the negative—broken—spaces of the comics form. In the funeral scene, Zahra uses her position as a mother (as the giver of maternal love and nurturement, and the labour this involves) both to authorise her grief and to qualify the terms of that grief. She formulates her own terms of grievability, which are separate from state discourses and, significantly, openly target them.

As part of her monologue, Zahra beseeches her son to "[s]peak that the world may know that *all* of Iran's sons have died, and lie dead in you!" (215; original emphasis). The comics form, here, offers both visibility and vocalisation. The graphic novel represents a fictional rendition of factual events, drawing from the personal experiences of citizens in Iran (for example, Parvin Fahimi's grief). Those who are missing, incarcerated, and executed are "*all* Mehdi," they are "*all* of Iran's sons" (188, 215). What is particularly significant here is not just the emphasis placed on Mehdi as a representation of "*all*" those who are lost, but also that those lost are identified as "sons." Those who are missing or dead are categorised by their relationship to another; by their relational status as children to mothers (and fathers). The experience of parental loss is represented, even validated, through Amir and Khalil visualisation of Zahra in *Zahra's Paradise*. Butler conflates "[o]pen grieving" with "outrage in the face of

injustice" (*Frames of War* 39). In *Zahra's Paradise* a counter-narrative of grievability is vocalised by Zahra's open grief, which responds to the injustices dealt to a multitude of citizens—of sons and daughters—in Iran. The mother is left behind. Her grief may open up a politicised discourse, but, crucially, this grief is emotively charged, introducing a different valuation to the politicised counter-narrative, driven by the familial relationship which has been endangered.

A Monument of Grief: The Mourning Mothers of Laleh Park

The emotive counter-narrative of *Zahra's Paradise* is intended to make a political statement and was designed to be far-reaching. Although now in print, the graphic novel was originally produced as a web-comic to be disseminated to a global reading public. Continuing to use the forum of the web, Amir and Khalil orchestrated a campaign, "Vote4Zahra," which puts Zahra forward as a "virtual candidate" in the 2013 Iranian election (Amir and Khalil, "Chapter Two" 3).[66] As part of a distinctive political act, the avatar Zahra campaigned on a platform that advocated human rights and democracy. The campaign was accompanied by a series of short comic-strips.

Mehdi represents the sons and daughters who have been lost. However, what becomes clear, both in *Zahra's Paradise* and this online campaign, is that Zahra represents all those mothers left behind. Responding to the idea of campaigning, Zahra asks "Who will vote for me?" (Amir and Khalil, "Chapter One" 5). The response: "Every mourning mother," wherein "Your [Zahra's] grief is Iran's grief" ("Chapter One" 5). In this online campaign, Zahra's grief and loss is legitimised through a politicised narrative that is predicated on her role as mother.

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[66] This web-comic was originally accessible via the site vote4zahra.org. At the time of revising this writing in 2017. This website is now redirected to an error page, and although numerous blogs and articles discuss the 2013 web-comic, the web-comic itself does not appear available.

Significantly, consolidating the importance of the role of mothering in relation to her politics, Zahra reads her "Declaration of Candidacy" at Laleh Park. The "Mourning Mothers of Laleh Park" have been gathering there since the protests in 2009. However, the group also consists of mothers whose children had gone missing, been imprisoned, or been abused prior to this time, going back to the 1980s. The political movement in Laleh Park resembles, in part, the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. Alongside the expression of maternal identity, Ruddick argues that the particularity of the personal loss experienced by the *madres* serves as "the emotional root and source of their protest … extended mothering to include sustaining and protecting any people whose lives are blighted by violence" (232). Maternal practice, maternal work, maternal labour—to protect, to nurture—continues in these spaces of the Plaza de Mayo and Laleh Park. With an underlying grief, maternal work calls out the injustices and violence that has threatened or taken their children and others.

By presenting Zahra's speech in Laleh Park, Amir and Khalil deliberately politicise this space of communal grief. Amir's and Khalil's campaign, with Zahra as its figurehead, appropriates the mourning mother for polemical and political purposes. However, Zahra's "Declaration of Candidacy" serves to deconstruct the deployment of the mourning mother figure as it used as part of the rhetoric of the juridicio-clerical state, such as in connection with the Iran-Iraq War. Zahra's candidacy speech and the larger movement at Laleh Park come to embody both a personal and politicised counter-narrative of grievability. The speech banner that flows out from her microphone signifies a clear indication of her speech act. This remediates her "Burn" speech, cited earlier, in which her words are rendered upon a visualisation of her tongue. This banner is bordered—off-frame—on one side by a crowd of mothers, holding aloft posters of their children, and, on the other side, a mass of gravestones, pointing to the prominent

value of the gravesites of state martyrs. Both the faces of the mothers, and of the gravestones, are bare. This can be read in such a way that Zahra is giving voice to the faceless, voiceless, and, of course, the dead.

Just as, in *Zahra's Paradise*, the missing are "*all* Mehdi," the avatar Zahra and her narrative stands in for all mourning mothers who have lost their children (188). The Islamic Republic validates grievability based on its utility to (politicised) state discourses. For example, in *Zahra's Paradise*, government officials were only willing to publically validate Zahra's grief if it could be used to support their cause (209-11). By contrast, Zahra uses polemical rhetoric in order to draw attention to the personal and emotive experiences of maternal (and familial) loss. Amir's and Khalil's work engages with politics in order to validate personal emotions and relationships, while state discourses in Iran appear to utilise emotive and affective narratives to facilitate their political discourses.

In her speech for her "Declaration of Candidacy" Zahra cites her connection to the park, reminiscing about taking Mehdi there in his youth. She reflects that now "this park is a monument and a mirror in which time is a measure of grief, a reflection of our children's absence" (Amir and Khalil, "Chapter Two" 1). This statement aligns the park with the discourses of commemoration and memorialisation preeminent in Iranian culture. Laleh Park represents the "absence" of their children, invisible and faceless. Importantly, their absence is emphasised by the presence of their mothers. Writing about the *Madres*, and therefore useful to my consideration of *Laleh Park*, Ruddick states: "The distinctive structuring of the relation between self and other, symbolized in birth and enacted in mothering, is now politicized. The children, the absent ones, are *not* their mothers, who have decidedly *not* disappeared but are bodily present" (228; original emphasis). The bodily presence of the mothers—their visibility—undermines

the discourse of invisible, and thus, ungrievable lives that the juridicio-clerical state has perpetrated against dissident martyrs.

The presence and visibility of the collective mourning mothers also serves a commemorative function and turns the park into a living and breathing "monument" (Amir and Khalil, "Chapter Two" 1). Speaking within the context of the fight for Algerian independence, Khanna argues that "[t]he work of mourning materialized in the [official] monument forms a simulation of the past in the service of political myths serving the state" in which "[t]he monument performs the work of mourning" ("Post-Palliative"). However, in the case of the "Mourning Mothers of Laleh Park," it is the work of mourning, itself, that constructs the "monument." In Laleh Park, mourning is still *performed*, if we are to use Khanna's rhetoric, but it is not (as)simulated by sovereign discourses. Rather, it is grounded in the raw emotive collective of the citizens, the relatives, and, above all, the mothers in Iran.

Maternal Work: Nurturing a Narrative of Protest

This chapter has worked through the contexts in which martyrdom has been conceived within Iran, tracing, in particular, its contemporary usage in relation to the Karbala paradigm, which draws from Shia historical-religious narratives. In the post-revolutionary period, while religious-political discourses in Iran posit state martyrdom through overt visibility, (politically) dissident martyrs are all but invisible, existing in a delimited space: ungrievable and unburiable. I have considered these negotiations between visibility and invisibility in relation to those killed and publically commemorated during the Iran-Iraq War, and those incarcerated and/or allegedly killed during the 2009 protests. The martyr has been a significant figure within this chapter

and is the central focus of the following chapter, which turns to look at acts of self-sacrifice performed by women, and female martyrdom.

I have argued that the martyr is connected, conceptually, to the wound—and mourning—an impression that imparts meaning upon the marked surface. In turn, the marked surface is linked conceptually to the frame which equally impresses and infers meaning, representative of the *punctum*; a cut that disrupts. This conceptual paradigm will be explored further in the following chapter. Here I have focused on the fracturing techniques used as part of the comics form in graphic novels, as well as in the other visual images. The innate brokenness of the comics form—with its gutters and separate panels—remediates, reconstructs, and reconstitutes the representational politics of the various people and places visualised on the page. These cuts have disrupted the politics of visibility and invisibility at stake in relation to grievability, and have done so, predominantly, through the figure of the mother. In *Zahra's Paradise*, in Laleh Park, and in the video of Parvin Fahimi, the spectacle of the mourning mothers' outrage and grief constitutes a counter-narrative to state discourses. Her maternal labour endorses a narrative of grievability, and thus visibility, for those children and relatives who are incarcerated, missing, and/or killed. The "cut" or "splice" between frames, or between panels, is a liminal space, "the edge that belongs to neither one frame nor to the other" (Khanna, *Algeria Cuts* 5). In *Zahra's Paradise*, Mehdi exists in the very margins of the panel frames and, in the concluding chapter, his mother, fuelled by her grief, breaks down these barriers. Her grief becomes both spectre and spectacle as her shrouded figure repeats visually—and verbally—across frames, and within them. Here, the mourning mother cuts through, and remakes, the epistemological frames of grievability constructed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It may appear that throughout this chapter the mother has been the secondary focus and that the martyr has been the central figure of exploration. However, the mother's role is always relational: her work, her labour, is always meant for another. In the case of the mourning mother, her maternal work is expressed always *in relation* to her martyred child. Ruddick argues that "[w]hat [mothers] share is not virtuous characteristics but rather an identification and a discourse about the strengths required by their ongoing commitments to protect, nurture, and train" (25). Maternal work is a discipline and a discourse in and of itself.

Ruddick advocates a maternal discourse of peace and nonviolence. However, a movement for "peace" is not just about acting peacefully, but also about ascertaining a "peaceful" environment, one that does not precipitate injustices and violence. The images of martyrs killed during the Iran-Iraq War offered an outlet for open grieving, both commemorative and cathartic. These martyrs were killed in the violence of war, but there is equal violence in "cutting" other people's—other children's—lives and deaths out of the picture. Silence and invisibility comes with its own kind of violence, against which mothers nurture a narrative of protest, of love, and grief, and outrage that, facilitated by the medium of the graphic novel, makes their child, and the injustice done to them, visible.

Chapter Five

Martyr

Over My Dead Body: Fatal Agency and Dying Women

**[REMOVED IMAGE; COPYRIGHT – SEE 'LIST OF
ILLUSTRATIONS' TO LOCATE SOURCE]**

Figure 12: "Over My Dead Body." Installation by Mona Hatoum. 1988-2002.

Mona Hatoum is a Lebanese-born Palestinian artist whose installations typically offer a haptic, embodied viewing experience wherein "defiance cannot be easily separated from vulnerability" (Brett 34).[67] All bodies are vulnerable. In Hatoum's work, acts of resistance surface in spite of this vulnerability, in response to this vulnerability, and in defence of this vulnerability. In this opening to my final chapter, I engage with one of Hatoum's works as the source of my chapter's title: a black and white billboard emblazoned with bold font which reads: "OVER MY DEAD BODY" (see figure 12). In the image, Hatoum stares down a toy soldier, whose gun is pointed at her forehead. The "toy" gun transfers increased power to Hatoum's (or her avatar's) returning stare as she defiantly faces the weapon aimed at her. However, although the toy soldier is, in effect, harmless, the threat that he represents (for example, the militarised, or oppressive, state) is not. The familiar statement of "over my dead body," usually used idiomatically to suggest that the speaker will do everything in their power to prevent something from happening, is resistant and defiant. However, the soldier's presence,

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[67] Regarding the haptic qualities of Hatoum's art, see: Anna Ball, "Impossible Intimacies: Towards a Visual Politics of 'Touch' at the Israeli-Palestinian Border." *Journal of Cultural Research*, vol. 16, no. 2-3, 2012, pp. 175-95.

though diminished, remains the focal point of the image: he is both at the centre of the image and, within the image itself, he is the focalised subject of Hatoum's gaze. His presence symbolises the persistent threat posed by the militarised state and reminds us of the vulnerability associated with such an act of defiance: resistance may result in a dead body. It is this relationship between resistance and vulnerability that Hatoum explores in her work more widely.[68] Elena Tzelepis argues that "Hatoum's feminist aesthetics bring forth a bodily representation of vulnerability, alerting us to both the disembodiment induced by mass political violence and the embodied potential for resistance and self-determination" (146).

As I have argued in the initial stages of this thesis the relationships between states of subject(ed) and agential identities are not straightforward. Nor is the relationship between vulnerability and defiance. These are co-existing states or terms on a continuum which oscillates between states of collusion and collision. "Over my dead body" may indicate a defiant or resistant act, but the phrase can also take on a more sinister meaning in that the militarised state may also, literally, step over the dead body, whether by moving over or concealing this body. The dying women in the visual and written media discussed in this chapter can be seen as dead bodies over which hegemonic, militarised, and oppressive states and/or soldiers have duly stepped. They are subaltern: still and speechless. And yet, expressions of agency and defiance can be found in different ways during the event of death. Although a dead body might be conceived of as silent and subaltern, an agential act might precede the moment of death,

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[68] The relationship between resistance and vulnerability is evident across a range of her work. Her performance *The Negotiation Table* (1983) particularly emphasises the vulnerability of the human body where the artist was bound, covered in bandages and blood, wrapped in a clear bag, and displayed on a table for three hours, moving, living, but barely breathing. However, Elena Tzelepis identifies the "revolutionary potential" in this creative performance, arising from "its transformative capacity to endure, inscribe in, and actively mobilize collective struggles contesting domination, displacement, and occupation" (152).

such as in the woman's decision to place the body there; to stand in front of the soldier with the gun and say: "OVER MY DEAD BODY." Her living body, prior to the moment of death, and the presence of her dead body, that is stepped over, both represent obstructions, insofar as they are "in the way."

This thesis has deconstructed selected tropes of female identity—Subaltern, Spokesperson, and Mother. I have argued that by pointing out, cutting through, or intersecting with the discursive frames which form these identities, through processes of remediated witnessing, women can come to occupy both subject(ed) and agential positions simultaneously. This last chapter is concerned with dying women, and the trope of Martyr. I revisit the categorisations that have previously been focused on, remediating my earlier interventions into these tropes within the context of death as the most extreme manifestation of a categorised, subaltern subject. While we tend to assume that death represents a lack of volition in the extreme, this is not necessarily the case, especially within the context of martyrdom which views death as self-sacrifice. As such, when in the process of dying, and with whom, can agency possibly be located? This chapter explores this question in an analysis of two Afghan novels, focusing on the death of the female protagonists in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* (2008). I also analyse the recordings of the death of Iranian student Neda Agha Soltan, who was killed in the protests during the 2009 Green Movement.

However, before continuing, it is important to note that, whether death is by the hand of another, a consequence of intentional self-sacrifice, or both, and whether the death is considered heroic or noble, this does not negate the often horrific means through which a person may be killed. Death is not to be taken lightly, and when approaching the subject of death conceptually and theoretically, it is key to remember that there are

often real people's lives and deaths at stake. The death of Neda Agha Soltan in 2009 is real, as is the execution of Zameena in Afghanistan, which was recorded by RAWA in 1999, referred to in Chapter Two. To write about the recordings of these deaths, I have had to watch them: I have watched a life being taken. In comparison with a fictional onscreen death, to which we emotionally respond, but can later set aside and rationalise as something separate from our own reality, there is something more at stake in the witnessing of these real-life moments: the emotional response cannot easily be appeased in that what has been witnessed *happened*. So why watch? Why write about it?

Donna McCormack states that "[b]earing witness to trauma is an embodied event," wherein "we sense and sometimes cognitively register how the 'I' is implicated in, dependent upon, entangled with and enthralled by others" (27, 34). McCormack ties embodied witnessing to the multisensory body, citing Laura U. Marks, and argues that "[m]ultisensory witnessing is the desire to hear when words cannot be spoken": it is a mode of witnessing that goes beyond conventional forms of oral or written narration, in the cases of trauma and death that cannot be narrated, or which cannot be fully realised—or embodied—through narration (McCormack 34). For Marks, sense perceptions—audio-visual and haptic—are linked to our own memories and experiences, where "[p]erception takes place not simply in a phenomenological present but in an engagement with individual and cultural memory," enabling us to better empathise with what we witness (*The Skin of the Film* 147). McCormack thus designates an "ethics of witnessing" as an "embodied engagement through which the responsibility for the story is assumed" (40). McCormack asserts that we are ethically obliged not just to watch, but also to *engage* with the recording, testimony, or narration of another's trauma; of their account of suffering, and, indeed, the account of their death. Witnessing death, when the event is mediated via a visual, oral, or written record,

is an ethical imperative that demands empathy and compassion. In particular, empathy, which Suzanne Keen describes as a "spontaneous sharing of affect," allows for an embodied mode of witnessing wherein feelings are, to an extent, experienced from the perspective of the sufferer's subjectivity (4).[69] To witness death—to listen to or to watch its reiteration—and to do so in an embodied, engaging, and affective way, is, in some small sense, to give body back to the seemingly disembodied dead.

I use the term *fatal agency* to encapsulate the different modes through which agency might be ascertainable in the event of death, investigating with whom and at which moment agency may be located. Fatal agency oscillates between subject(ed) and agential roles, occupying a continuum between the two positions. In Chapter One, I opened up a discussion as to how an individuated agency might unfold within a subaltern identity. The subaltern, usually construed as a silent, liminal figure, is recognised at its most extreme in the silent, dead body: the endpoint or limit. In Chapter One, drawing from the theoretical works of Judith Butler, I argued that agency occupies a "paradox of subjectivation" whereby "the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms," thus locating agency as a "reiterative or rearticulatory practice" from within (*Bodies that Matter* 15). The subaltern is a subject-agent who, within a "paradox of subjectivation," is simultaneously produced by hegemonic discourses (as subject) as well as producing (through reiteration) potentially deconstructive, disruptive acts (as agent).[70] Agency resides in the capacity to reiterate and reformulate subordinating or dominating epistemologies from within, engendering

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[69] As Carolyn Pedwell writes: "empathy is associated … with other allegedly humanising emotions such as compassion and sympathy in denoting an orientation of care towards others, yet is distinguished from these feelings on the basis of the stronger element of identification or perspective-taking it entails" (*Affective Relations* 94).
[70] As I outline in Chapter One, the configuration of the individual as conjoined subject-agent indicates the simultaneous occupation of both subject(ed) and agential identities, as opposed to a hierarchal binary of agent/subject.

an act of resistance. Fatal agency represents a similarly disruptive act, often perpetrated through remediation or remediated witnessing.

The temporality of death is at stake in the remediation of the event of dying. This remediation is two-fold, and opens up the opportunity to find answers as to when, or with whom, in the process of dying, agency can be located. In the first instance, the dying woman occupies the ambiguous position of subaltern as subject-agent: her death is orchestrated by a hegemonic individual or institution (to which she is subjected), but she might find the opportunity to subvert the circumstances of her death (she becomes an agent). If she chooses to die for another, or for a political cause, either by her own hands, or another's, her agency forms from a point before death: from the moment she chooses to die, she begins the process of "dying." Alternatively, she may die an involuntary, violent death at the hands of another. However, if this death is recorded—digitally, visually, orally—then the moment of death is reiterated: the dead subject, as with the subaltern images explored in Chapter Two, challenges the culprits of her murder from within the hegemonic discursive space in which she resides.

The dead woman might therefore attain agency even if she does not seem to explicitly perform an agential act in the moment of death itself. This chapter examines two different temporal points from which agency can be exercised in the event of death. The first occurs before death, in a woman's *choice* to die, instigating the process of dying. This is evident in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*. In these two texts, the female protagonists die at the hand of another, because they choose to let themselves be killed: their agency is located in their decision to remain passive. Put another way, these women become aligned with the "resistant dead," wherein someone lives as though they are already dead and, "[b]y affirming death, by saying 'enough', the resistant is no longer hostage to the useless death in life

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and assumes the dignity of a resistant life without fear of death" (Caygill 126).[71] Such a resistant subjectivity does not presume that freedom will be forthcoming, but assumes the last resort of resistance… to go down fighting. The other temporal point at which agency can sometimes be conferred is located after the event of death, as is the case for Iranian dissident martyr Neda Agha Soltan, whose act of dying is remediated and reiterated in videos and screenshots circulated online via social media. In this latter case, agency is invoked by another through narrative, visual, and digital haunting, in the afterlife of the event of death.

The afterlife of death can provoke a process of haunting, which, itself, is a process of remediation. The agency of the dead subject may be conceived from recordings of the event and/or its aftermath. However, this recording, as a mode of haunting, must be mediated through another. As such, agency is located in the mediator and/or mourner who then confers agency upon the dead woman. In Chapter One, I cited Lucy Brisley, who makes reference to Assia Djebar's *Algerian White* in order to point to a potential flaw in the theorisation of critical melancholia. Brisley argues that despite the insistence of Djebar regarding the agency of the ghosts that speak in her writing, she, herself, "selects the memories that are to haunt the present" and, consequently, "the dead do not really exist but are instead conjured at will" (105). I agree that the interlocutor, or mediator, remains a problematic figure, but to conceive of the (dead) gendered subaltern as subject-agent is to foreground her by her subversive potential. Fatal agency originates from the process of reiteration—of remediated witnessing— which is facilitated by the figure of a mediator. As a democratic mode of remembrance, remediated by others (and with the introduction of advancing social media technologies

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[71] The concept of the "resistant dead" is drawn from its use by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (1994 – present), a militant group based in Chiapas in Mexico which opposes the Mexican government.

this can occur on a global scale), critical melancholia—a mode of grieving and of being haunted—formulates "ghosts" and "melancholic specters" of not just the dead, but of the potential ideals attached to these figures (Khanna "Post-Palliative").

In spite of the potential problems posed by the selective recollections and recordings of mediators and interlocutors, the theoretical model of critical melancholia remains dependent on those who witness and testify to the lives and deaths of those who have been killed, in order to engage with the process of haunting. Speaking in the context of the Siege of Beirut (1982), Caroline Rooney argues that "the so-called 'remnant' concerns the being of that which *persists* or is steadfast" and that "[t]rauma, as the wounding of connective life-lines testifies to this oneness precisely through its painful moment of rupture" (114; original emphasis). By assigning the otherwise straggling signifier of "remnant" to the act of persistence, Rooney conveys the somewhat paradoxical insistent impression left by the "rupture," wound, or negation. The remnant, as spectre, is structurally interstitial and liminal. It traverses out from the fleshy frame of bodies to affectively "touch" or "wound" the witness and/or the mourner. As Sara Ahmed describes it: "The wound functions as a trace of where the surface of another entity (however imaginary) has impressed upon the body, an impression that is felt and seen as the violence of negation" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 27). Haunting, and emotional responses of grief, anger, or outrage on behalf of the dead function as a wound in its oscillation between intensification and negation in the formation of fatal agency. Critical melancholia, as a democratising force, is driven by those that witness and testify to death, working to acknowledge the impression left by those you have died, wherein "[w]itnessing … is an act of faith in a togetherness that cannot be surpassed" (Rooney 114). Haunting, which impresses upon, or mediates

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events to, those left behind, exposes an agency in death, facilitated by and/or located within those who record and/or testify about the event of death.

Female Martyrdom and Suicide Bombing

The event of death being considered in this chapter is that which is aligned to acts of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. While Neda Agha Soltan has been popularly granted the status of (dissident) martyr, the two fictional characters also addressed in this chapter—Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and the unnamed speaker in *The Patience Stone*—are not labelled as such in their respective texts. However, both these fictional characters die as the result of an act of self-sacrifice, which Meir Hatina aligns with martyrdom: "The heroism of martyrdom is closely associated with the notion of altruism. Self-sacrifice is an altruistic act that runs counter to the human instinct for survival" (4). In this chapter, I understand the female martyr as an individual who chooses to let herself be killed, performing an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of others (usually other women). She is altruistic and thus heroic in her actions.

I see the dead or dying women considered within this chapter as dissident martyrs. In Chapter Four, dissident martyrdom was explored in the figure of Mehdi in *Zahra's Paradise*, a student whose politics contradicted the theocratic discourses of the Iranian government. Dissident martyrdom is counter-hegemonic to the national, political, and/or religious contexts within which it occurs. The dissident martyrs examined in this chapter challenge or subvert hegemonic cultural and religious politics. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the death of Neda Agha Soltan during the 2009 Green Movement, as she is situated in the same struggle between state and dissident martyrdom that was explored in the fictional avatar of Mehdi in the previous chapter. However, due to their female gender, both Neda and the fictional Afghan

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protagonists in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Patience Stone* further destabilise the hegemonic discourse of martyrdom.

In her discussion on female suicide bombing, Frances S. Hasso argues that acts of violent self-sacrifice by women serve to "corporeally and discursively destabliz[e] dominant notions of moral order and duty with respect to gender," challenging occupying/neo-imperial and patriarchal institutions (44). Female martyrdom undermines not just neo-imperial institutions but also subverts the political and/or religious systems in which they themselves are embedded, thus challenging hegemonic discourses on multiple fronts.[72] This can be demonstrated in the case of Afghanistan, where those identified as female martyrs can immediately be considered dissident insofar as female martyrs are absent from the hegemonic national discourse. Exploring the absence of female martyrs in Afghanistan, Matthew P. Dearing argues that "[s]tructural and cultural factors have limited the ability and inclination of insurgent groups to temporarily adjust women's role in society, thus providing them agency to participate in *jihad*" (1084). Although the religious-political authorities that comprise Taliban rule in Afghanistan do not call upon or recognise female martyrs, Mariam and the unnamed speaker in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Patience Stone*, respectively, still perform acts of self-sacrifice. Their acts of martyrdom prove counter-hegemonic, each occupying the role of dissident martyr through her individual, gendered, subversive act of agency, challenging the patriarchal structures which refuse to officially acknowledge female martyrs within Afghan communities.

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[72] Although I emphasise the destabilising aspects drawn from the gender of the female suicide bomber and martyr, it is important to remember the importance of the anti-colonial project of such individuals. This can often be minimised or diminished by a distracting focus on the differences between the motives of men and women. As Anat Berko and Edna Erez put it, in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict: "By becoming a suicide bomber, Palestinian women are as likely to make a statement about the colonization of their land … as they are about the colonization of their female body by Palestinian patriarchal hegemony" (160).

The status of martyr can be conferred upon soldiers who have died in battle; civilians (or militants) who have died protesting or defending their national and religious beliefs; and civilians who have been killed by enemy crossfire. In spite of this, most scholarly work addressing *female* martyrdom focuses exclusively on the figure of the female suicide bomber. There is a scholarly gap in the consideration of female self-sacrifice in the contemporary political field that is not the result of the egregious violence of suicide-bombing. This chapter responds to this scholarly gap. The dead women focused on in this chapter are not suicide bombers: in their acts of self-sacrifice no innocent bystanders are physically caught in the crossfire. The motive in each case is to protect others and/or to deliver a political (and feminist) message. In this way, as protectors and/or as spokeswomen, these dead women who choose to die represent an extreme realisation of the tropes of Mother and Spokesperson, which have been the focus of previous chapters.

In this section I expand on the figure of the female suicide bomber, as part of my process of thinking about the relationship between women and martyrdom. The suicide bomber is the most violently excessive manifestation of martyrdom, dependent upon human collateral. As such, this violent action may initially appear to exceed the signifying value of the other tropes (Subaltern, Spokesperson, Mother) that have preoccupied this thesis. And yet, the female suicide bomber remains tied to such categories. Recognising the hazards of stereotyping, Herjeet Marway attacks a dichotomisation that sees the female martyr "either as agentless victims ('subwomen') or [as] wholly agentic ('superwomen')" (222). In this dichotomy, female martyrs can only be subaltern or exceptional. This produces unnuanced projections as to how their expression of agency is influenced by both personal and political motivations. Gendered stereotypes "stick" to female martyrs, often unfavourably, undermining the subversive

potential of a female martyr towards patriarchal institutions.[73] For instance, a woman is thought to undertake a suicide attack because she has been widowed, or is in a failing marriage, or because she's "mad" or "insane" (Marway 225). Or, as Palestinian female suicide bombers tend to be portrayed by Arab media: she is a social heroine, recognised for her purity and piety (Schweitzer 132). Whereas male martyrs are usually assigned a political motive, politics is often removed from the potential decisions of why women have become suicide bombers in the post-mortem analysis of reporting media: "while men are attributed political and personal agency, women are limited to the personal, and that only to the extent that they are compelled to act" (Marway 130). Readings of female suicide bombing, and martyrdom more generally, are therefore often unnuanced and deny women political agency, despite the importance of ideology in marrying the motivations of the individual and organisation involved in performing and propagating the act of terror.[74]

Here, I turn briefly to Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack* (2005).[75] This fictional narrative follows the suicide bombing of Sihem (as part of the Palestine-Israel conflict) and her husband's attempts to understand the reason behind her attack.[76] In *The Attack*, Sihem is seemingly without a voice. She is first seen in the aftermath of the suicide

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[73] The use of "stick" is drawn from Sara Ahmed's terminology in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. See: Chapter One, "11 September 2001: Hatred," p. 44.

[74] Suicide bombing is generally perceived by its perpetrators as a noble act where "[a]s a terrorism tactic, human bombing requires an ideology of martyrdom to sustain it and this ideology … is the glue that marries the individual motivations of the 'would be' human bomber to the social political factors and groups that promote its use" (Speckhard 997).

[75] Yasmina Khadra is the pen name for Algerian writer Mohammed Moulessehoul.

[76] Both *The Attack* and most of the articles cited throughout this section are predominantly focused on the context of female martyrdom and suicide bombing in the Palestine-Israel conflict. However, it should be noted that there are other nations and regions which have seen a rise in female suicide bombing, especially in recent years, including organisations such as the Lebanese group, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party; the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam operating in Sri Lanka and India; the Kurdistan Workers Party against Turkish targets; Chechen rebel groups; Al Qaeda-related terror in Iraq; and in Somalia; though not in Afghanistan, as noted earlier (Speckhard 996-97).

bombing, a dead body in the morgue. The novel is also told through the first person narrative of her husband Dr Amin Jaafie, who is bewildered by her role of suicide bomber and seeks motivations for how and why she came to carry out the attack. The only point at which we directly hear Sihem's voice is through the letter which Amin receives from her after her death. It reads:

> *What use is happiness when it's not shared, Amin, my love? My joys faded away every time yours didn't follow. You wanted children. I wanted to deserve them. No child is completely safe if it has no country. Don't hate me.*
>
> *Sihem.*

(Khadra 69)

This suggests two lines of inquiry which I want to draw out here. The first relates to the role that motherhood plays in the figuring of the suicide bomber. The second pertains to the relationship between the categorisations of Subaltern and Spokesperson in connection with the act of suicide bombing.

The letter written by Sihem in *The Attack* is mainly preoccupied with the subject of children, with half of the six short sentences dedicated to the topic. Sihem's motivations are therefore tied to a maternal perspective, to enacting maternal work, of "preservative love, [and] nurturance," in order to "deserve" children (Ruddick 17). The line "*No child is completely safe if it has no country*" suggests that while Sihem will have no children of her own, she performs maternal work insofar as she sacrifices herself in order to build or restore a country in which other children might flourish. This ties together the personal and the political in an intricate fashion, as one motivation driving Sihem's ideology and terrorist act.

However, although the positively framed maternal thinking can be traced through the fictional Sihem's motivations, it is important to point to Sara Ruddick's argument that, often, the patriarchal institution of "mother*hood* [that] is oppressive to women. It defines maternal work as a consuming identity requiring sacrifices of health, pleasure, and ambitions unnecessary for the well-being of children" (29; original emphasis). While maternal thinking is defined by women and focuses on the self-empowerment and productivity of reproductive and nurturing actions, motherhood is an oppressive, "male-defined" epistemological framework (O'Reilly, "Introduction" 11). This patriarchal institution of motherhood is often the form that maternity takes in the propaganda and discourses which surround female suicide bombers, perpetrated by resistance groups. This is noted by Cindy D. Ness in her consideration of the messages propagated on behalf of childless Palestinian female suicide bombers:

> The framing of female suicide missions as a form of sacrifice has been a successful rhetorical strategy to define the act in terms consonant with accepted gender expectations and as such to make the act more palatable to society. Rather than being perceived as a display of female inhumanity, which Palestinian society would be hard pressed to accept, a female who offers her life in this context is seen as engaging in the most profound form of selflessness. Giving life to a Palestinian state is privileged even over motherhood.

> (367)

Even as suicide bombers—engaged in a violent act of life-taking of both the self and others—women are continually associated with motherhood, often extinguishing other motivations of female suicide bombers.

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Although Sihem's motivations for the suicide attack she carries out can be partially tied to a form of maternal thinking, embroiled in a somewhat contradictory act of extreme violence, both her personal and political agenda is more complex. With the exception of the letter cited above, Sihem appears to offer no other explanation for her terrorist act. Yet, she resists the category of subaltern. Throughout the novel, Amin attempts to blame others, relegating Sihem to the position of "subwoman," undermining his wife's agency and purporting that his wife was "coerced into the act" (Marway 229). However, Amin's desperate opinion is disputed by his nephew Adel: "The fact of being a woman didn't disqualify or exempt a resistant fighter. Men invented war; women invented resistance. Sihem was the daughter of a people noted for resistance. She was in a very good position to know exactly what she was doing" (Khadra 227-28). The suggestion of Sihem's informed agency is clearly emphasised in the assertion that she knew "exactly what she was doing." This agency is also tied to the political and the militant through her affiliation with resistance. Despite her apparent silence throughout the novel, Sihem's motivations seem to be multi-faceted, and although she speaks no words, her act of blowing herself up speaks the loudest.

In the previous chapter I tied the act of martyrdom to the act of witnessing, which implies an act of giving testimony. Martyrdom, as an act of self-sacrifice, is an act of *testifying*, the conditions of which I will explore further in my examination of the female speaker in *The Patience Stone*. For McCormack, the suicide bomber represents an example of how "bodies communicate when words are unavailable, absent or unnecessary" (183). The suicide bomber communicates in an embodied way, in that, "[r]ather than working through institutionalized political channels or processes of verbal recognition, suicide bombers use the flesh both to destroy self and other and to render visible and audible a politics that is failing to be seen or heard" (McCormack 1). Suicide

bombing is without words, but it prompts a visceral, haptic form of witnessing. Suicide bombing is an atrocity which normally results in the loss of innocent life: a shock and awe tactic that is emotively charged due to its merciless and excessive violence. However, while suicide bombing is evidently made audible through its key factors of shock and excess, McCormack's invocation of an alternative, embodied mode of communication reminds us that even violent bodies—in the process of dying and in the process of haunting and remediating—can make an impression, even if they cannot speak. To be impressed upon, to empathise, to be affected, is to listen or to witness, to not take the propagated narrative for granted, and to discover the subversive potential in female martyrdom.

Female Martyrdom in Afghan Fiction: Revisiting the Figures of Mother and Spokeswoman

The fictional women in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* are not suicide bombers. However, in examining the decisions made by Mariam and the unnamed speaker in *The Patience Stone* which lead to their respective deaths, I conceive of each woman as a martyr. Her act of self-sacrifice, and her motive and decision to let herself be killed is described by the author, and witnessed by the reader. Although less explicit and violently provocative than blowing herself up, the death of each of the Afghan women featured in these two texts comes to resemble an embodied means of testifying to their previous silencing by patriarchal institutions in their family and culture.

Mother: Maternal Protection and Self-Sacrifice in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns

This section briefly explores the role of the mother, not as a mother of a martyr but, rather, mother *as* martyr. In Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2008), Mariam is a mother, a murderer, and a martyr. This section considers these three interlinking identities and the different kinds of agency that are enacted in Mariam's act of killing and act of dying. Mariam is maternal but is not, biologically, a mother. Mariam, who is barren, becomes a mother to Laila, the significantly younger, second wife to their husband Rasheed, and to Aziza and Zalmai, Laila's children. Ruddick argues that, although there are distinctions between birthgivers and adoptive mothers in terms of the anatomical process of labour, "all mothers are 'adoptive.' To adopt is to commit oneself to protecting, nurturing, and training particular children" (51). Mariam "adopts" Laila and her children insofar as she performs maternal work in protecting, nurturing, and training them.

A Thousand Splendid Suns, which focuses predominantly on the lives of Mariam and Laila, can be considered a feminist text. However, the novel, itself, is not without its problems and I acknowledge from the outset that Hosseini's fiction panders to a Western audience. His work feeds into the humanitarian, ethical, and neo-imperial discourses formed during the US and British invasion of Afghanistan following the events of 11 September 2001, as discussed in Chapter Two. As David Jefferess puts it in his discussion of Hosseini's first novel:

> *The Kite Runner* [2003], as much as it provides a window into Afghan culture, also projects back to the western reader the simple moral absolutes that inform the War on Terror as paradoxically both a 'war', based on the fulfilment of vengeance or justice, and a humanitarian project of 'sharing' western values, such as democracy and liberalism.

Coeli Fitzpatrick is more scathing in her assessment of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a "New Orientalist" text, a discourse that she posits sustains the tenets of earlier Orientalism, but which are now facilitated by "native or semi-native narrators," such as Azar Nafisi (discussed in Chapter Three) and Khaled Hosseini (245). I do not attempt to defend *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from all of Fitzpatrick's accusations, but I do contend that her reading of gender representation in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is, in itself, oversimplified.

Fitzpatrick suggests that "[t]he book's simple portrayal of male power is not an attempt to think through the power structures of gender, but rather seems designed to portray misogyny simply as an innate characteristic of most Afghan men" (249). To be sure, Rasheed is an un-nuanced caricature of misogynist cruelty. His representation in the novel does support Fitzpatrick's connection of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to "New Orientalism" and reinforces the "rescue" narrative of "the oppressed Afghan woman" in connection to the US's invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. However, the display of male authority in the novel does not totally negate Hosseini's critical negotiation of gender relations, as Fitzpatrick suggests. For all its problematic representational politics, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is centred on a relationship between women and, I argue, even though the novel encourages Western humanitarian and neo-imperial discourses, it also posits that the strength garnered from such relationships can result in the subverting of patriarchal powers.

Although their relationship has a rocky start when Laila joins the household as Rasheed's second wife, the relationship between Mariam and Laila ultimately becomes

one of mother and daughter.[77] In the final scenes between Laila and Mariam, after Rasheed has been killed, Mariam's maternal identity is explicitly conveyed in the lexical choices made by Hosseini. She runs her hand through a distraught Laila's hair, a maternal gesture, and speaks in what Hosseini describes as a "soft maternal voice" (345-46). Mariam also explicitly identifies herself as a mother when convincing Laila to let her turn herself in to the Taliban in order to protect Laila from living life as a fugitive: "Think like a mother, Laila Jo. Think like a mother. I am" (Hosseini 349). Her repetition and the declarative tone of her final words, "I am," indicates that she thinks and identifies as a mother: I am thinking as a mother, therefore I am a mother. More importantly, Mariam's statement aligns her choice to sacrifice herself with her role as mother—as protector. Mariam's decision to murder another and to sacrifice herself for her "children" afterwards represents two poles of extreme protective maternal work.

Mariam—as murderer and martyr—subverts the patriarchal institution represented by both her husband and the Taliban. Patriarchy is a slippery term, but is encapsulated by Adrienne Rich as follows:

> Patriarchy is the power of the father: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the

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[77] There are numerous theoretical discussions surrounding the specific relationship between mother and daughter. These are not strictly relevant to the reading made in this chapter, but follow two broad avenues. The first is a patriarchal narrative of the mother-daughter relationship wherein the daughter finds fault in her mother's compliance to the patriarchal "institution of motherhood" (linking to matrophobia, the fear of becoming one's mother). The second regards an empowering narrative where, through listening to the mother, strategies can be developed to resist the patriarchal narrative, learning through experience gained across generations. A useful overview of these two key approaches to the mother-daughter relationship can be found in: Andrea O'Reilly. "Across the Divide: Contemporary Anglo-American Feminist Theory on the Mother-Daughter Relationship." *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering*, Demeter Press, 2006, pp. 89-105.

division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and

in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

(57)

Rich connects patriarchy to both familial and social structures. In Afghanistan, the connection between familial and social structures of patriarchy is inflated by the use of familial terminology (mother, father, daughter, son) to address each other in social situations.[78] Motherhood, as a patriarchal institution, "is male defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women" (O'Reilly, "Introduction" 11). It is an institution that Rich argues "has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities" (13). By contrast, mothering, or "maternal thinking," is defined by women—by mothers—and focuses on the potential for empowerment in women's relationship to their reproductive and nurturing actions. Mariam, who is abused because she cannot bear children of her own in a society that expects her to perform the role of motherhood, adopts her children, forming the role of mother through her actions—through maternal thinking—as she confronts her husband and the patriarchal institution of the Taliban.

Mariam's expression of agency is tied to her identity as mother, motivated by maternal thinking, through which she subverts the patriarchal institution (both her husband and the Taliban) who shunned her for being unable to anatomically produce children as was expected of her. However, Mariam's most explicit act of agency— performed in extremis—is located in her murder of her and Laila's husband, Rasheed. In a scene where Rasheed strangles Laila, Mariam hits him over the head with a shovel in order to protect her. The first blow stuns him and she debates her next move. Hosseini narrates that "[h]ad Mariam been certain that he would be satisfied with shooting only

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[78] For discussion on this mode of address see: Jon W. Anderson. "Social Structure and the Veil: Comportment and the Composition of Interaction in Afghanistan." *Anthropos*, vol. 77, no. 3-4, 1982, pp. 397-420 (p.404).

her, that there was a chance he would spare Laila, she might have dropped the shovel. But in Rasheed's eyes she saw murder for them both" (340). Mariam murders her husband not out of revenge or self-defence, but in order to protect Laila, her "adopted" daughter. Thus, she enacts the maternal quality of preservative love/protection that Ruddick identifies as a key tenet of maternal thinking. In her act of killing "[s]he turned it [the spade] so the sharp edge was vertical, and, as she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time that *she* was deciding the course of her own life" (Hosseini 341; original emphasis). Her decision is motivated out of maternal, preservative love. It is through embracing her maternal identity—by engaging with maternal thinking—that she explicitly performs her own agency: she *decides*, she *kills*.

Mariam's act of murder is an extreme demonstration of enacting agency, which finds its counterpoint in her decision to then sacrifice herself so that Laila and her children (Mariam's "grandchildren") can begin a new life without the threat of being hunted. As with her decision to kill, her decision to die (to face the death penalty for murdering her husband) is motivated by maternal thinking: "Think like a mother. I am" (Hosseini 349). Mariam's decision to martyr herself is prompted by her desire to protect her daughter, with a view that Laila will continue to grow, as a mother herself, and as a woman. Whereas Mariam's act of killing her husband subverts the patriarchal structure of the family home by very literally cutting the man out of the picture, the subverting of the patriarchal institution of the Taliban is less obvious. In this latter instance, the subversion of the clerical institution that sentences Mariam to death is located in Mariam's decision to let it happen: she decides to murder her husband, then she decides to turn herself in and face the death penalty. Both decisions are motivated out of maternal, preservative love. As she awaits execution and is told to kneel, we are told how, "[o]ne last time, Mariam did as she was told" (Hosseini 361). This would appear

to see Mariam subjugated—following the instructions of her male executioner—but her agency resides in this moment: it resides in her choice to die; her decision to remain passive in this last moment before death.

Her decision does not make any grand changes; it does not undermine the entirety of Taliban rule. However, her decision *does* protect the lives of her adopted daughter and grandchildren, from both Rasheed and Taliban rule. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is tragic and sentimental—a perfectly accessible tale for a Western audience—but it is a tale that shows the strength of the figure of the mother in challenging institutional patriarchy. Mariam, condemned for her inability to bear children, to conform to the conventions of motherhood as set out by the patriarchal rulers in her life, enacts agency by engaging with maternal thinking. She kills and she dies. In her decision to carry out both actions, which are inverses of each other, Mariam undertakes two different modes of agency in death, being explicitly decisive (in killing) and *deciding* to be passive (in dying).

Spokeswoman: Staging Verbal and Corporeal Testimony in Atiq Rahimi's The Patience Stone

I have argued that agency can be located before the point of death, at the moment at which a person chooses to die, thus instigating the process of dying. The unnamed female protagonist in Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* (2008) is a mother, but her decision to speak is not motivated by her maternal identity. The unnamed speaker is relatively abstract: she is a woman, she is Muslim, she is Afghan, she is a mother and a wife, but neither she nor any other character has a name, and we have little background context about her other than what she chooses to narrate. The action of the novella takes place as if performed on stage. The novella opens with what resembles detailed stage directions:

> The room is small. Rectangular. Stifling, despite the paleness of the turquoise walls, and the two curtains patterned with migrating birds frozen mid-flight against a yellow and blue sky. Holes in the curtains allow the rays of the sun to reach the faded stripes of a kilim. At the far end of the room there is another curtain. Green. Unpatterned. Concealing a disused door. Or an alcove.
>
> (Rahimi 1)

The uncertainty over whether the curtain hides a door or an alcove gestures to how the information that is available to the reader will only be offered by the characters that move around the room. The curtain is later revealed to cover an alcove, but, just as if this were being watched on stage or onscreen, this is only revealed upon the woman's action of drawing back the curtain later on in the text. The reader is also never given a glimpse outside the room: actions and conversations that happen outside of the room can be heard, but as though they are occurring "off stage," or else are related to us retrospectively by the female speaker.

By containing the events of the text and the woman's narrative within this enclosed space, Rahimi achieves a sense of immediacy. The "staging" of the narrative comes across as a performed monologue by the female speaker, directed at both her comatose husband and the reader. It is my argument that the woman's *choice* to narrate her thoughts and confess past actions to her silent husband, who she calls her *sang-e sabur* (patience stone), marks a simultaneous choice to die and to kill. This is implicated in the tale of the *sang-e sabur*, which the speaker narrates: "You talk to it, and talk to it. And the stone listens, absorbing all your words, all your secrets, until one fine day it explodes … And on that day you are set free from all your pain, all your suffering" (71). She gives her testimony, her confession, to her husband with the expectancy that he will

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"explode." The violent imagery that is attached to this word—which is realised in the final moments of the novella—implies that the release (to be set free) that she will feel will be a physical one: to get caught in the explosion and to be released from this world. Her words unlock the explosion intended to kill her, and so, with the woman's intent to speak, she verbally signs her own death sentence.

Although the author of the novella is male, *The Patience Stone* is, I argue, a feminist text as the woman testifies to experiences and feelings that are directly linked to her female identity, while her husband remains silent in his comatose state. Several of the topics covered by the woman focus on undermining and criticising male power and privilege, such as a monologue that angrily points to the hypocrisy of men who will rape a virgin, ruining her honour, but will not rape a whore, because there is no honour or, arguably, dominance, found in that (82). A particularly poignant confession occurs early in the novella, before she has become truly emboldened in her narrative. She recounts how, on the night they consummated their marriage, she was menstruating and "[p]ass[ed] … impure blood as virginal blood" (29). Her confession indicates how she has previously subverted the patriarchal system of honour traditionally practiced in Afghanistan, which condemns menstrual blood as impure while virginal blood is expected upon the consummation of marriage in order to prove the virginity of the new wife.

In her narrative regarding "impure" blood, the woman also carries out a more immediate, physical confrontation with her husband. She "[r]ams her fingers into herself, roughly, as if driving in a blade" (Rahimi 30). Pulling them free, "They are wet. Wet with blood. Red with blood" (30). Besides illustrating the poetic tone of Polly McLean's English translation of the novella, these three monosyllabic sentences, each three syllables short, emphasise the physical presence of the blood within the narrative,

layering "wet," "blood," and finally, the distinctive "red" colour. She smears the blood over her husband's face, its physical presence in the narrative cementing her words (Rahimi 31). Her physical touch with blood-coated fingers sees the realisation of her words "reaching" her husband. Further to this, the metaphoric stabbing of herself ("as if driving a blade") is a destructive act and injurious to herself. Her act of self-harm can be linked to what Gillian Whitlock calls "testimony incarnate" (*Soft Weapons* 84). This terminology is derived from Joseph Pugliese's work on refugees living or incarcerated in Australia, where he argues that self-harm is an act of testimony wherein "[f]or the traumatised refugees, their bodies incarnate their testimony" (*Soft Weapons* 33). Although the woman in *The Patience Stone* is not a refugee, her physical act of self-harm does suggest that her testimony is not just verbal, but also "incarnate." Her act of self-harm is captured through her act of stabbing her fingers into herself, and through her expectation that her narrative will conclude with the violent "explosion" of her husband. These are examples of "corporeal speech acts" (Pugliese 28). Her testimony is embodied by her physical presence and injury in the text, and the emotional response of the witness (the husband; the reader) is not only prompted but, significantly, "intensified" through her act of self-harm (Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* 85). The wounding of the self, as a form of martyring of the body, impresses upon the witness, and intensifies the verbal message of the text.

In a debate about physical and verbal communication, it is important to identify the politics of language implicated within the production of *The Patience Stone* in both its novella and film format. Previous to writing *The Patience Stone*, Rahimi had written two other novellas, *Earth and Ashes* (1999) and *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* (2006), which were originally written in Dari. In contrast, *The Patience Stone* was written by Rahimi in French. Rahimi has stated that he has experienced "a kind of

involuntary self-censorship" when writing in Persian, further stating that: "My acquired language, the one I have chosen, gives me a kind of freedom to express myself, away from this self-censorship and an unconscious shame that dwells in us from childhood" (Rahimi qtd. in Gerner). Thus, in writing his third novella in French, he finds that the change in language—with its ties to nation, culture, and their associated rules—allows him to more easily discuss taboo subjects. The language through which one communicates is important, as is the role of translation in allowing testimony to be heard, whether by freeing up a censored tongue, or by expanding the market of potential readers or listeners.

However, when Rahimi translated his novella to film in 2013 (he is the director and co-screenwriter), the actors speak Dari. This is when the importance of physicality and corporeality to testimony is made evident: as words fail, actions speak. In an interview with Tobias Grey, Rahimi states that:

> When it was in novel form I started to translate *The Patience Stone* from
> French into Dari, but I just couldn't do it … Cinema was a way for me to
> translate my novel, not only into images but also into my mother tongue
> … By using images I found myself able to sidestep my reserve regarding
> the language and what it can express … I used images to say things that
> I couldn't say with dialogue.

The aforementioned scene and dialogue in the book, where the woman smears blood onto her husband's face does not appear in the film, but she does recount, towards the end of the film, as in the book, how she slept with another man in order to become pregnant. The power behind the words the woman speaks in this penultimate scene is consolidated by visual cues. This includes a flashback of the scene she narrates, which adds emphasis to her words. However, a subtler visual cue indicates her increased

confidence, emboldened by her narrative: in the scene that precedes this narrative dialogue she changes into a brighter coloured dress and applies red lipstick. Her change in appearance tells the audience without words her growing conviction in testifying to her experiences.

Both novel and film use verbal and corporeal communication to express the woman's testimony. Although the narrative is fictional, the content of the monologue deals with real themes that are in common with some—though, certainly, not all— women with Afghan or, more broadly, Muslim backgrounds. The woman's narrative in *The Patience Stone* challenges the patriarchal system put in place during Taliban rule and in the domestic setting of her husband's home. She speaks of experiences that are specific to her, and yet Rahimi posits her as an "everywoman" figure, both in the fact that she (and all characters) are unnamed, and in that the novella opens with the epigraph "Somewhere in Afghanistan or elsewhere." The woman's narrative is intended to tell other women's stories to us, the reader, and, crucially, to her husband. She states that "I hope you are able to think, to hear, to see … to see me, and hear me … You never listened to me, never heard me!" (52). This narrative is directed at the husband who cannot, for once, speak back; it is intended to shift the power balance between the wife and her husband, to give women a voice. In a sense, the novella is a (fictionalised) *testimonio*, where the single speaker speaks from within a larger whole (Sommer 108).[79] The fictionalised, unnamed speaker, situated in the abstract location of "somewhere" or "elsewhere," testifies to common experiences of other women, collated in this short novella for the purposes of getting the message out. Speaking for others who may not be able to speak up or be heard, this fictional spokeswoman takes on the risks associated with speaking out, perhaps even highlighting to a Western audience (a French audience,

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[79] See: Chapter Three, "Testimony/*Testimonio*, Mediation, and Collective Voices," p. 139.

in the first instance) the real dangers involved in trying to speak back, speak out, and speak up.

The fictionalised character sacrifices herself for others, but perhaps the biggest subversive factor of this text is that the act of martyrdom has no real collateral beyond the fictional narrative. The woman speaks real words, taboo words, dangerous words, but no one outside of this fictional realm gets hurt. Still, to look at the final scene within its fictional context, the woman's exercising of agency—in speaking—does lead to her husband "exploding." She chooses to speak with the expectation that it will result in a release, causing both his and her deaths. When she begins to speak, she chooses to die. But explosions are messy, and so I read her narrative as a form of suicide bombing. She acts out, she speak out, and, when she dies, she takes her enemy with her. The final page reads as follows:

> **[REMOVED FULL QUOTATION; SEE FINAL PAGE OF *THE**
> ***PATIENCE STONE* FOR FULL DESCRIPTION; KEY EXCERPTS**
> **REMAIN BELOW]**
>
> She screams and drives [the khanjar] into the man's heart. There is not a
> drop of blood. The man, still stiff and cold, grabs the woman by the hair…
> [and] brusquely, wrings her neck … The man – with the khanjar deep in
> his heart – lies down on his mattress … The woman is scarlet. Scarlet
> with her own blood … The woman slowly opens her eyes. The breeze
> rises, sending the migrating birds into flight over her body.
>
> (135-36)

Although the film ends with the appearance that the woman survives this "explosion" (perhaps a desire to end the film released nearly five years after the book with a sense of cautious optimism), the ending of the novella is far more ambiguous. I have always

read this scene as resulting in death for both the woman and her husband. Besides the rather obvious statement that the woman is "scarlet with her own blood" (an image which is not in the film), the novella ends by referring to migrating birds (a symbol of her release) flying over the "body," which connotes an inanimate state and/or death. There is a frightful energy and ecstasy to this final scene, which is further enhanced by the stillness that has previously dictated the tone and speed of the narrative up to this point. As with Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the woman in this narrative murders her husband, stabbing him with the khanjar, but his murder is collateral; it is not calculated in the same way that Rasheed's is. In *The Patience Stone* the woman sacrifices herself for her testimony, her confession, and takes her husband with her, in an explosion of ecstasy and release.

The death of both characters represents a final, corporeally realised conversation: the only bit of true dialogue that occurs in the narrative in that both the woman and the husband are active participants. It is a form of "testimony incarnate"; an embodied conversation. It signifies the woman's agency insofar as she chooses to talk, to confess, and she chooses to take her husband with her. Pugliese identifies self-harm as a "corporeal poetics," and the violence in this final scene certainly captures this physical language (33). He argues that "[t]he resulting scar, a speech act that cannot be effaced, will continue to bear witness to the original trauma" (33). The traumatic scene of a husband violently attacking and killing his wife leaves a scar: in this instance, the bloodied bodies of the woman and her husband.

Although bodies can be removed, they represent a physical, heavy presence. Recalling Hatoum's billboard image from the opening of this chapter, the dead body is "in the way," a reminder to the (Western) reader of the potential cost involved in speaking out. It is corporeal and present in a way that words are often not, and the

bodies—caught in the explosion of the *sang-e sabur*—communicate: they leave an impression. As McCormack puts it: "suicide bombers use the flesh both to destroy self and other and to render visible and audible a politics that is failing to be seen or heard" (1). The woman in *The Patience Stone* chooses to speak and her words spell a death sentence. The impact of these words on her husband, and on the reader, is intensified by the corporeal language of her own and her husband's deaths in the "explosion" of the *sang-e sabur*.

Feminist Dissidence, Dissident Martyrdom, and Revisiting the Subaltern

The two fictional female protagonists of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Patience Stone* are dissident martyrs. Their dissidence is partially predicated on the lack of recognition of female martyrdom in Afghanistan. In this sense, their gender is therefore implicitly connected to their dissidence. However, their dissidence is also explicitly tied to the feminist politics practiced by both protagonists. In the case of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam's apparent passive acceptance of her execution is fuelled by maternal preservative love. As was concluded in Chapter Four, mothers nurture a narrative of protest. In the case of Zahra, a mother of a martyred child, her protest, fuelled by love, grief, and outrage makes her child, and the injustice done to him, visible. Mariam, as a mother as martyr, nurtures a narrative of protest by guaranteeing the survival of her daughter who then returns to Afghanistan as a teacher, enacting feminist pedagogical practice, challenging the Taliban threat. In *The Patience Stone*, the unnamed protagonist confesses to her silenced husband her dissenting acts and vocalises her discontent over the dominant patriarchal behaviour practiced by her husband and other male figures in her life. She dies for her role as a spokeswoman, articulating a feminist agenda, speaking from within a group of other (Afghan and/or Muslim) women with shared experiences. She is martyred for a dissenting, feminist cause.

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The preceding sections have revisited the categories of Mother and Spokeswoman in extremis, considering the performances of these identity tropes within the context of death. In the final section of this chapter, drawing towards a conclusion for the overall thesis, I revisit the trope of Subaltern, analysed in my first and second chapters. I move away from the fictional examples used so far in this chapter to consider the death of a real woman: Neda Agha Soltan. Whereas the previous sections have considered examples of dissident martyrdom in Afghanistan—and expanded on the representational politics of Afghan women beyond the muted, veiled images discussed in Chapter Two—I conclude by looking at Neda's positioning as a dissident martyr in light of the Green Movement in Iran. In particular, I investigate how agency can be conceived in the aftermath of Neda's death, through its remediation via visual recordings and witness testimony. The following section therefore expands on my previous analysis in Chapter Two, of remediated witnessing as a means for subverting imaged and framed female subjects, and does so by considering the most extreme realisation of a subaltern identity: death.

Subaltern: Accountable Visuality and the Recorded Death of Neda Agha Soltan

> Recording I (41 seconds): The video begins just after Neda Agha Soltan has been shot. Two men are lowering her to the ground as the shaky, grainy camera phone is carried closer to the scene in question. One of the men noticeably applies pressure to her wound as the cameraman circles around the group of three people so that Neda's face can be seen. The camera is shaky and at times unfocused. The camera lingers on Neda's face, and her eyes appear to shift and look directly into the camera lens. More people enter the scene, obscuring the cameraman's view. People are shouting. Through the throngs of legs, the camera catches a glimpse of Neda's face, which now has bright red blood pouring from her nose and mouth, creating streams of blood across her face. Cries of despair get louder. A woman screams somewhere off-camera. The camera moves back around to focus on Neda's face. Multiple hands are now pressed against her upper chest area. A man in a white shirt who has been crying in despair kneels over her and lays his hands on her face, clearly distraught. The sound cuts out

as the camera hovers over the man kneeling over Neda's head. The screen goes blank.[80]

Recording II (34 seconds): The camera starts recording after Neda is already lying on the ground. The opening image has a full view of Neda's face, just as the blood spills out from her nose and mouth. People crying and screaming can be heard. As the camera pulls away (as the camera man steps back) you can see another man leaning in with what looks to be a camera phone (perhaps the recorder or the first video). The camera then pulls out properly and moves around to the foot of Neda's body, which becomes wholly obscured by the people kneeling and crouching over her. The camera lingers here for a moment. More screams can be heard. The camera pans around capturing a brief view of the street. The sound cuts out, and then the screen goes blank.[81]

A Thousand Splendid Suns and *The Patience Stone* are both fictional texts, and I have considered how agency can be construed in the *choices* of their respective female protagonists prior to death. This last section of the chapter investigates how agency can be inferred *after* the event of death. The agency of the dead subject can be formed through the remediation—the afterlife, the haunting—of the event (and its aftermath) through visual, written, and oral recordings. In addition to this, recordings of another's death usually entail an interlocutor. As such, agency is also located in the figure of the mediator and/or mourner: the agency of the dead can be conferred upon them through the actions of those who remain to speak on their behalf (as in the case of Zahra's speech at the conclusion of *Zahra's Paradise*). Compared to the earlier sections of this chapter, the stakes are different here: it is not a fictional life that is discussed, but a real one. I examine the death of Neda Agha Soltan, an Iranian student who was shot in the chest at the age of 26 during the protests in Iran on the 20 June 2009. Although my work is largely theoretical, I approach the discussion of the death of Neda Agha Soltan with

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[80] Recording I: Iran Briefing. "Neda Agha Soltan Getting Shot." *YouTube*, 26 Sep. 2010. www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zFslcGmZnM.

[81] Recording II: 1367Persia. "New Video of Neda Agha Soltan's Death!" *YouTube*, 11 Jun. 2010. www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQjGud7wGUM.

humility. I hope that by engaging with remediations of Neda's death not just as an academic but as a feeling individual, I am an ethical witness to this scene, taking responsibility for and engaging compassionately with the visual and written recordings of her death.

At the centre of this discussion regarding Neda's death, and the reason that news of her death gained global momentum in 2009, are the amateur recordings which bear witness to her dying moments. Two separate cameras recorded Neda's death. I have provided a synopsis of each of these in the opening of this section. I originally wrote out synopses of these two recordings so that I could limit the amount of times I had to watch their content. I found it both upsetting and unsettling to watch the death of a real person. While I think it is important to discuss the real as well as the fictional, especially in discussing the subject of death, the emotional consequences for the person that intimately engages with the subject should not be left unspoken. I consequently included the synopses at the opening of this section so that readers of this thesis would be able to understand the analysis below without having to watch the videos themselves. The inclusion of the written summary also means that screenshots from the video do not need to be included, as I feel it would be inappropriate to feature actual images of Neda's dying moments within this analysis. The written synopses presented a way to "safeguard the dignity and pride of the victims … while honestly reflecting the extent of the violence" (Rooney and Sakr 2).

The two videos, described above, circulated on both social media and mainstream news media, either shown in their entirety, edited, or through the use of screenshots. The circulation of these recordings across multiple platforms to global audiences is a practical demonstration of remediated witnessing: a scene shot simultaneously by two different cameras, instantly offering two different audio-visual

perspectives of the same moment, is then shown across different web pages and news reports, spliced, screenshotted, with commentary added, and is then witnessed in these remediated forms by global audiences. Before discussing the presentation of Neda herself—the subject of these recordings—I first wish to focus on the role of the mediator who plays a necessary part in exposing Neda's death to the world.

In the cycle of remediated witnessing, there is both the individual(s) who directly witness(es) and records and/or testifies to the event in question, and the individual(s) who witness(es) the remediation of the event in its recorded form. Considering the video recordings of Neda's death, it is relevant to think about the location of the witness who records the event insofar as they are on the peripheries of the action. As Susan Sontag argues: "The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene" (*On Photography* 12). In the circumstance that an individual observes an instance of suffering (or dying), are they ethically and morally obliged to act; to aid the individual in question? Is the act of recording the instance of suffering or dying also an ethical imperative? This is a debate that has been attached to Kevin Carter's notorious photograph of the starving Sudanese girl being stalked by a vulture (1993). Arthur and Joan Kleinman summarise the moral quandary: "Inasmuch as Kevin Carter chose to take the time, minutes that may have been critical at this point when she is near death, to compose an effective picture rather than to save the child, is he complicit?" (4-5). I do not claim to have answers to this particular moral debate, but do wish to point out that, often, the separation between the act of witnessing and the act of recording is not as clear cut as photographer/journalist/filmmaker and suffering subject. Moreover, McCormack's argument that there is an ethical imperative to witness—to take on responsibility and to engaged in an embodied way—another's

suffering, is underpinned by the necessity for there to be a record of the events we are ethically obliged to witness (40).

The collapse of the division between the role of testifier/mediator and the role of the suffering subject is also evident in the many cases where individuals provide testimony of their own experiences, in what represents an embodied mode of witnessing where one occupies both subject(ed) and agential positions. Examples of this can be seen in "conventional" narrative forms such as autobiography and *testimonio*, which were explored in Chapter Three. In the particular case of the recorded death of Neda, the photographer/journalist/filmmaker is directly part of the event that is being recorded. While the photojournalist Kevin Carter and travel writing journalist Christina Lamb (see Chapter Three) might be classed as ethnographers, recording from the outside looking in, the amateur cameramen who record Neda's death do so from inside the event as it happens. This is very literally demonstrated when we see who is most likely the cameraman of the first recording in the recording of the second video: his actions are embedded within the witnessed—and recorded—scene.

The breakdown of the separation between "recorded subject" and "recording witness" comes to a head in the post-millennial period, with the surge in the availability and use of portable recording devices, social media and, with these, citizen (photo)journalism. Embedded within the scene that is being recorded, "[w]hen witnesses create and disseminate pictures themselves, witnessing no longer appears to be two-sided. There hardly appears to be a passive act of observing prior to the active, mediated act of bearing witness" (Mortensen 9). The product of citizen (photo)journalism represents an embodied recording which encourages an engaged, affected response by the witness of the recording, wherein "[c]itizen camera-witnessing … has proven to facilitate connectivity with an action on distant suffering precisely by

its distinct claim to truth in the name of afflicted civilians who are recording their own repression" (Andén-Papadopoulos 755). Whereas the passive photojournalist may be struck by moral quandary—to act or to record—"the ethical claim of the citizen witness lies in his or her *mortal* engagement with the event accounted for" (Andén-Papadopoulos 766; my emphasis). The citizen (photo)journalist's claim to truth is recognised in the very real, physical, and often life-threatening risk that the individual has taken to record and disseminate information that illuminates suffering or injustice.

In considering the role of citizen (photo)journalist, the focus shifts from being accountable for what you record to holding others accountable by recording their actions (or the consequences of these actions). The dissemination of camera footage of Neda's death to a global public audience works to hold accountable the Basij militiaman thought to be responsible for shooting Neda, and, more broadly, the government of President Ahmadinejad, whose election victory was the focus of the protests in which Neda was involved. This is not an isolated case; other examples are emerging of amateur camera footage being publically disseminated on social and news media, working to hold accountable the actions of police officers and/or governmental bodies. Recently there have been numerous examples of amateur footage showing unduly violent arrests of individuals from minority communities in the US, the most notorious perhaps being the recording of Eric Garner being choked and killed by police officers while being arrested in 2014. Despite the different political and societal contexts of Iran and the US, the similar cases of the public dissemination of the recordings of the deaths of Neda Agha Soltan and Eric Garner demonstrate how this mode of remediated witnessing works to hold responsible the perpetrators of these murders on a transnational level, even if justice in the legal system is not realised in either case.

In the case of Neda, we do not need to speculate as to the motivations behind the publication of the video recording (Recording I). Arash Hejazi, an Iranian medical doctor and publisher, has published *The Gaze of the Gazelle: The Story of a Generation* (2011), an autobiography which includes details of his involvement in the scene of Neda's death, as one of the men who applied pressure to Neda's wound. Similarly to Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Hejazi's account is written in English, and so is written for a predominantly Western audience. This is perhaps intended as an extension of the global reach of the video recordings, seeking a response of aid or support from without. In *The Gaze of the Gazelle*, the scene of Neda dying is remediated in Hejazi's written narrative. He also recounts the moments that occurred after the shooting, when he returned to his offices with Emad, who filmed the scene:

> 'I did nothing to help her!' Emad said, ignoring my request, 'I just stood there and filmed…'
>
> I grabbed his arm, 'Listen, Emad. There's nothing you could have done. But you recorded it. Now it's our responsibility to let the world know!'
>
> He looked at me in horror.
>
> 'But your face is clear. We have to blur it first.'
>
> 'There's no time, Emad. The Internet is shutting down exactly for this reason. They don't want the world to see what's going on. It's our responsibility …
>
> (348-49)

In this description, Hejazi reveals Emad's guilt over having done "nothing": of having recorded the trauma as opposed to trying to "help." This recalls Sontag's assertion that "the person who is recording cannot intervene" (*On Photography* 12).

However, despite Emad's individual guilt over his actions during the scene of Neda's death, Hejazi is quick to point out to Emad (and the reader) that he has played an important part in the scene by recording it. He asserts that now it is their "responsibility" to share the video, for "the world to see what's going on." This discourse of responsibility—to testify to what has happened and to hold someone accountable—is what spurs the publishing of the video on social media and Hejazi (now living in exile in Britain) to write his account of what happened. Hejazi's role as participant in the scene of Neda's death as well as witness, offers an overt demonstration of how witnessing can involve an element of risk. The cost of testifying to—of sharing the recording of—the circumstances of Neda's death is that Hejazi must leave Iran for his own safety. John Durham Peters argues that the notion "[t]hat simply seeing can mark your bodily fate is a suggestive way of getting beyond the idea of mere spectatorship" (714). Witnessing is rarely passive, and the interlocutor—the agent who remediates the scene or event—affectively and/or physically serves as an embodied witness.

As in *testimonio*, the interlocutor is often of a privileged agential position. In the account offered above, it is notable that it is men who are responsible for recording the scene of Neda's death and disseminating both the video and written narrative. Although it offers insight into some of the circumstances surrounding Neda's death, *The Gaze of the Gazelle* perpetrates familiar patriarchal hegemonic practices insofar as the text is ultimately Hejazi's autobiography: witnessing Neda's death prompts him to look back on his own life and narrate his experiences in Iran, from childhood to the present. This is an inherent practice of patriarchal privilege where Hejazi uses Neda (and her death) to market his text through both his title and prologue, while relegating Neda to the margins of the narrative.

However, this is but one iteration of the scene and recording of Neda's death. I posit that remediating witnessing serves as a democratising model. When a witnessed scene is circulated and remediated through different media platforms and (as in this case) on a global scale, the role of interlocutor is spread like an echo, with each remediation, cut, and edit, that occurs. The exchanges and linkages integral to the process of remediated witnessing form a network. Marks argues that "[n]etworks, the media of grassroots political organization, dissolve subjectivity at the same time that they reinforce connectivity" (*Enfoldment and Infinity* 145). The dispersal and democratisation of interlocutors—the agents who remediate the scene—shifts the power onto the product that is being disseminated. In every "cut" of the remediated recordings, Neda's position as the focal subject is emphasised.

Thus, I now, partially, turn away from the role of mediator to address the reiterated figure of Neda and her classification as a dissident martyr. The previous chapter outlined the conditions of dissident martyrdom in the context of the Green Movement, with particular reference to the fictional character of Mehdi, a student who disappears after the protests challenging the re-election of President Ahmadinejad. There, I put forward that the Green Movement charts a new form of martyrology that is conceived of within a post-millennial, post-ideological context; that is, within the cosmopolitan outlook of the younger generations in Iran, who do not remember the 1978-79 Revolution. Amongst the cosmopolitan protestors within the Green Movement, the discourse of martyrdom—the Karbala paradigm that celebrates the (Shia) minorities that stand up to unjust and larger powers—is re-orientated from the religious to the secular. As Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh argues: "today it is the 'secular' opposition which holds aloft the imagery of Karbala, using it to claim both politics and morality against the monopoly over the interpretation of Islam that has been claimed by

the Islamic state" (85). In Chapter Four I argued that protestors who were killed or went missing during the protests in 2009 were "dissident martyrs": their classification as martyr is contrary to the political message of the juridicio-clerical state.

In the case of Neda, "a whole martyrological narrative was developed around her death (and life)" (Yarbakhsh 83). The status of martyr is formed out of a narrative: dying acquires political (or religious) meaning through the way in which the event is witnessed and testified to; through the way that the news of death is disseminated. Neda's death, and her designation of martyr, was narrated by her family (her mother and fiancé were particularly vocal); by witnesses to the event (such as Hejazi); by the protestors within the Green Movement; and by global news outlets. Neda is, however, a dissident martyr: her title of martyr is built within the secular, political arena of the Green Movement, and her mother, Hajar Rostami Motlagh, disavowed the attempts by the government to claim Neda as a martyr of the state (Yarbakhsh 84). There is clear symmetry between Hajar's refusal to let the Iranian government control the martyrology of her daughter and the scene near the conclusion of *Zahra's Paradise* where Zahra rejects the government's same offer for her son. In both real and fictional cases, if the mothers were to admit their children into the government's discourse on martyrdom, the state would therefore be "claiming moral legitimacy, over and against the claims being made by the opposition" (Yarbakhsh 84). As a dissident martyr, Neda threatens the image of the juridicio-clerical state within the context of the Green Movement. She becomes a symbol for the movement, her martyrology is prominently secular, but is no less political than the celebration of state martyrs in the aftermath of the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution.

On the local level, within Iran, Neda's death and accreditation of dissident martyrdom represents the opposition of a growing secular, cosmopolitan Iranian youth

towards the traditional juridicio-clerical government that has held power since the Iranian Revolution. On a global level, particularly in Western media reaction, Neda's death is also politically symbolic, but her representation is embedded within some all too familiar neo-imperial and gendered discourses. In fact, the reiteration of Neda's image on a global scale can be viewed as turning Neda into a glorified, or fetishised, figure. As Nima Naghibi argues: "The endless looping of the video of Neda's death on social networking sites and on news media has made a spectacle of her death, invoking representatives of the idealized and romanticized gendered corpse" (61-62). She is— much like the Afghan Girl and Malala Yousafzai—an *icon*: with her death, Neda "became the *face* of the Green Movement" both in Iran and in global media (Yarbakhsh 83; original emphasis). However, unlike the Afghan Girl and Malala Yousafzai (although Malala is still victimised after a brutal shooting), Neda's iconic status and, in fact, her iconic image, is derived from her status of being dead. Symbolising the extreme, Neda is not merely a romantised, fetishised female victim, but a female "corpse," or, slightly less bluntly, but still with overarching gendered connotations of death and the afterlife, an "angel".[82]

Although I make a case for how the concept of remediated witnessing (and the reiteration of Neda's image in social and news media) can open up a space for Neda to convey a sense of agency in death, it is important to point out that some reiterations of Neda's death are framed within particular ideological or gendered frameworks, hinted at by Naghibi, quoted above. Warning that insofar as citizen (photo)journalism is incorporated into the wider ideological narrative of mainstream media, Mehdi Semati and Robert Alan Brookey argue that "Neda's image and its circulation can be

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[82] Neda was frequently referred to as an "Angel of Freedom" in news and social media after her death.

understood in relation to an ongoing narrative that produces Muslim women as victims of their own culture and religion, who need to be rescued by Western powers" (139). Semati and Brookey contextualise this "rescue" narrative against post-9/11 discourses surrounding military intervention in Afghanistan (the "Afghan Alibi," explored in Chapter Two) and the demonisation of Iran within the so-called "axis of evil" by the US (140). Remediation is an imperfect iteration of an event, image, and/or recording: orientated within new frames or narratives. This can be an illuminating process, but can also appropriate or reposition the depiction of the individual or events within an opposing epistemological framework, such as the neo-imperialist "rescue" narrative considered at various points throughout this thesis.

I conclude this chapter with an examination of how agency might be located in Neda in her moment of death. Neda represents a dissident martyr in response to the state discourses of Iran. She also subverts Western media's neo-imperial narrative of her dead body. A common conceit is used by those reporting news of Neda's death where, rhetorically, Neda is given a "voice." In a report for US news corporation CNN, correspondent Octavia Nasr uses such rhetoric on at least two occasions, stating that, in dying, Neda "turned into the *voice* of an entire opposition movement," and concluding her report thus: "one woman's gripping story *speaking* volumes" (CNN; my emphasis). Neda is posthumously attributed with a voice, conflating "dying" with "speaking."

Equating the act of dying with the act of verbally speaking is an emotive rhetorical device, but the "speech act" is not a conventional one. Instead, Neda's death—and her posthumous "voice"—develops a "corporeal poetics" (Pugliese 33). Pugliese argues:

> Where the simple word or cry would go unheeded and evaporate without
>
> a trace, self-harm, as corporeal poetics, leaves an indelible mark of the

suffering that the subject has endured. The resulting scar, a speech act that cannot be effaced, will continue to bear witness to the original trauma.

(33)

The recordings of Neda's death—the graphic and disturbing images of blood pooling from her mouth and nose—represent an "indelible mark"; they are a representation or *impression* of a horrifying moment in which Neda dies. Neda cannot speak, but the recording of her death and its remediation represents a testimony insofar as we bear witness to it. The graphic and distressing nature of what is recorded impresses upon and (affectively) wounds the witness, prompting an intensified emotional response of grief and outrage on behalf of Neda.

Oscillating between subject(ed) and agential roles, Neda exhibits what I defined earlier as fatal agency. She is not a spokeswoman. She is not given the opportunity to speak and express a choice to die before she is killed (unlike the fictional Mariam and unnamed protagonist in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Patience Stone*), nor can she speak out after the shooting (unlike Malala Yousafzai, who survives her bullet wound). In this sense, Neda is a subaltern figure through the most extreme manifestation of silence: death. However, whereas subalterneity is conventionally linked to liminality, Neda is not relegated to the periphery: her death is, as quoted in *TIME*, "probably the most widely witnessed death in human history" (Mahr). This is a manifestation of the subaltern as simultaneously subject(ed) and agential. As (silent and dead) subject, Neda's narrative is controlled by others: the protestors within the Green Movement, the Iranian government, the Western media, the male neo-imperial voyeur. However, these various narratives over-write and continually (re)produce each other; they are palimpsestic and reiterative, facilitated by recordings, images, and interviews which are

shared, edited, and commentated on globally. It is the mass remediation and witnessing of Neda's death, each time from slightly different perspectives, that resists a dominating epistemology over what Neda's death *means*. It is the process of reiteration (a form of spectral *haunting*) that propels Neda into the centre of *many* narrative and discursive frameworks. As such, a fatal agency can be located within the scene of Neda's death.

Authorial Power: Remediated Witnessing as a Democratising Process and the Murderous Male Author

If death represents a lack of agency in the extreme, this final chapter has worked to identify where, with whom, and when, in the process of dying, agency can be located. Dying is a process, not a static temporal moment. Agency can be conferred before the moment of death on the part of the person being killed, in the decision to (let themselves) die; it can be located in the moment of death itself, as a form of embodied, corporeal expression (and impression); and agency can also be found in the aftermath of death, in the testimonies and recordings of those who remediate and bear witness to the event. To testify, record, and to bear witness to death holds accountable those responsible. In the post-millennial period, the process and purpose of remediated witnessing is facilitated by social media platforms which allow visual records and written testimony to be shared on an international scale across multiple webpages and forums, forming a network of reiteration and/as conversation. Networks draw people in, connect people, and often construct non-hierarchical organisations and groups (Marks, *Hanan al-Cinema* 291-92). Networks, incorporated into the process of remediated witnessing, are democratising and counter-hegemonic. The action of reiteration allows for new and subversive meanings to be formed out of the same material. This facilitates an oscillating representation of subject(ed) and agential

identities which breaks down the categorising of women as Subaltern, Spokesperson, Mother, and, at the most extreme, Martyr.

An important final comment to make in the conclusion of this chapter is that the deaths of the various fictional female characters explored in this chapter occur in texts which are penned by male authors. By reading the potential for subversive female agency in the deaths of these characters, I am not aiming to legitimise a common trend of male authors killing women in their work to get their message across instead of letting women simply speak in them. The fictional texts in this chapter were chosen because they can be categorised as feminist texts while still featuring female characters who die. However, they also recall a patriarchal hegemony that monopolises the subject of female death. I did look for fictional texts written by contemporary West Asian female authors which included significant deaths of female protagonists, but at the time of writing and researching this thesis was unable to identify any. Perhaps this serves as an indication of how female authors do not need to kill their female characters to get their message across. I would suggest that, in female authored texts, feminine power does not necessarily need to be subversive, as it appears in the male-authored texts in this chapter. After all, Hatoum's installation "OVER MY DEAD BODY" manages to show the vulnerability of her living, obviously agential avatar in her open and blatant dare to the (toy) soldier to kill her.

Conclusion

Developing a Concept of Remediated Witnessing, 2015 to the Present

This thesis has theorised the concept of *remediated witnessing* and tested it against visual and written media representations of West Asian women. I have put forward the notion of remediated witnessing as a process where a witnessed event is remediated from different angles and is layered and reiterated in its retelling and re-visioning. I have considered the ways in which West Asian women represent themselves and are represented by others in writing, in imaging, and in forms of media that combine these two modes of expression. By negotiating the frames and cuts that structure and destructure the written and visual renderings of these women, I have argued that the conceptual process of remediated witnessing can both fix and productively unfix the representational tools that confer meaning. By extension, West Asian women can simultaneously occupy subject(ed) and agential positions, expressing agency from within the spaces of, and beyond, the frames which are used to construct a represented female identity. I have demonstrated this by identifying cuts (as impressions), reiterative folds, and remediations which draw attention to and, consequently, destructure the material, ideological, and epistemological frames that formulate the representational politics of the West Asian female subject in visual and written media.

I have focused on the tropes of Subaltern, Spokesperson, Mother, and Martyr as they are applied to West Asian women represented in visual and written media. Identifying a process of remediated witnessing in the representation of West Asian women provides an opportunity to unsettle and de-sediment the tropes through which they might typically be conceived. These tropes are not rigid and can intersect with each

other and with other categorisations which have not been the primary focus of my analysis; as I have argued throughout this thesis, representations of West Asian women are complex, multi-directional, and layered. By examining instances where frames are cut and/or layered, via remediation, reiteration, and refraction, the perception of the witness and the performance of the gendered witnessed subject can be expanded and/or re-orientated.

The processes of cutting, screenshotting, and editing are integral to and often clearly recognisable in visual media, which is also more widely accessible, as it is easily circulated online, and does not typically require translation. Even in recordings in foreign languages, whether subtitled or not, visual imagery, diegetic sound, and the tone of voice informs the viewer. Remediated witnessing can also be traced in written text, through narrative voice and perspective, especially when the writing recounts the testimony of a witness, fictional or otherwise. Further to this, although most of the primary material discussed in this thesis is written in English, an additional layer of remediation can present itself in the form of translation from one language to another and/or in the adaptation from written text to film, as discussed in the case of Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*. The process of remediated witnessing can be derived from analysing the material structures of the text—whether visual or written—and the means through which the text has been produced.

Emerging in the post-millennial period, the body of work considered here reflects particular contexts and discourses, arising from responses to the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. I have emphasised what I see as the neo-imperial, military intervention in Afghanistan by US and British forces; the increased stereotyping of Muslims in the West, especially in conjunction with rising Islamophobia; and, as part of this, a Western political discourse that demonises Iran, amongst other nations, as part

of an "axis of evil." These specific historicising events are integral to the content and contexts of the texts and media discussed in this thesis.

However, the political landscape has shifted in extensive and visible ways during the course of my writing in Britain, in continental Europe, and in the US. I would particularly flag up such instances as the generally antagonistic response in continental Europe and Britain towards the influx of refugees from Syria and surrounding regions in what was labelled the European Migrant Crisis in 2015. Othering language used by politicians and news media (British Prime Minister David Cameron (2010-16) notoriously referred to these refugees as a "swarm") contributed to a rise in hard-line anti-immigration rhetoric in Britain.[83] This, as with increased Islamophobia, underpinned the xenophobic-leaning "Leave" campaign for the EU Referendum held on the 23 June 2016. The "Brexit" vote that resulted from the referendum has led to an increase in hate crime towards people who appear Muslim (mirroring responses in the US following the 11 September 2001 attacks, discussed in Chapter One) and Eastern Europeans.[84] Meanwhile, there has been an increase in Islamophobia in France, following a series of terrorist attacks (the Charlie Hebdo shooting on 7 January 2015; the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015; and the Nice attack on 14 July 2016).[85] In the US, following the election of President Donald Trump in November 2016, prejudicial rhetoric towards Muslims has increased and is exemplified by Trump's so-called, albeit unsuccessfully deployed, "Muslim Ban".[86] These examples unfortunately chart an

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[83] See: "PM blames Calais crisis on 'swarm' of migrants." *ITV News*, 30 Jul. 2015. www.itv.com/news/update/2015-07-30/pm-a-swarm-of-migrants-want-to-come-to-britain/.

[84] See: Matthew Weaver. "'Horrible spike' in hate crime linked to Brexit vote, Met police say." *The Guardian*, 28 Sep. 2016. www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/28/hate-crime-horrible-spike-brexit-vote-metropolitan-police.

[85] See: Lizzie Porter. "How does it feel to be a Muslim in France today?" *News Statement*, 11 Apr. 2016. www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2016/04/how-does-it-feel-be-muslim-france-today.

[86] The "Muslim Ban" is the name applied to the executive order of President Trump which banned the incoming travel of people from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

acceleration of the negative ways in which Muslims and immigrants (as refugees, migrants, *others*) are perceived in the West.

These contexts, while not explicitly connected to the works under consideration in this thesis, have greatly influenced my thinking as I have formed the key arguments of this work and developed my theorisation of the concept of remediated witnessing. They do not represent a global shift from one type of political and social thinking to another, but, rather, a *continuation* of a neo-imperial politics that presents the perceived "other" as a threat. Although this is a disappointing development, I argue that remediated witnessing can help combat, undermine, or at the very least, point out the dangerous projection of the monolithic stereotyping of the other in far right politics and news media. As I argued in my final chapter, we have an ethical obligation to bear witness to the discrimination, tragedy, and oppression that is occurring on a global scale. I have argued for remediated witnessing, facilitated by social media, translation, news media, and print presses, as a democratising process through which events and individuals can be framed and reframed in new lights.

There were particular moments during the writing of this thesis that precipitated the development of the model of remediated witnessing and which also indicate how the concept can be opened out into new directions, across different political and social contexts. While analysing the imaging of the Afghan Girl and the potential of reiteration as a process for projecting agency from within the dominant social and/or ideological discourse in which the individual is presented, the European Migrant Crisis was gaining attention in the news and social media. The generally negative anti-immigrant (anti-*other*) sentiment expressed in politics and the press came to a temporary halt with the image of 3 year old Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee who drowned attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, and was found on a Turkish shore on the 2 September 2015. The

shocking images of his dead body circulated in the press and on online social media; as a dead *child*, he humanised the refugee/migrant debate. This was only a brief pause, with no real impact on a policy level. Moreover, the ethics of circulating an uncensored image of a dead child on social media are as fraught as the circulation of the video which captured Neda's dying moments. However, the event demonstrated the increased power of both visual language (which requires no translation) and social media as globally accessible, democratising tools for framing and reframing representational politics. This event, in conjunction with the deconstructive intent already at work in my writing, informed my theorisation of remediated witnessing.

This thesis has therefore been a process through which I have engaged with the feminist project of deconstructing the representative politics of West Asian women, whilst simultaneously developing my concept of remediated witnessing. Remediated witnessing is a process that can be applied to various visual and written texts prior to the post-millennial period. However, it gains traction with the increase in the use of surveillance, amateur recording, social media, online news media, and citizen (photo)journalism. Remediated witnessing evokes a quickly evolving landscape of visual and written media production and reception in the twenty-first century and represents the urgency of democratising access to material that is now directly informing changes in political and ideological discourse.

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