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BESIEGED BY BURQAS

ANALYZING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BURQA

LARA MAZURSKI

BESIEGED BY BURQAS: ANALYZING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BURQA

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom

ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties ingestelde

commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de *Agnietenkapel*

op woensdag 15 april 2015, te 12.00 uur

door Lara Elizabeth Mazurski

geboren te Thunder Bay, Canada

Promotor: prof. dr. M.D. Rosello.

Overige leden: prof. dr. Cees Hamelink
prof. dr. Yolande Jansen
prof. dr. Annelies Moors
dr. S.M. Dasgupta

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen

For Mom, Dad, and Johanna

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Mazurski, Lara. "Imagined Violence: Representations of Masculinity and a Culture of Peace." *Communication and Peace: Mapping an Emerging Field*. Ed. Hoffmann, Julia, and Virgil Hawkins. London: Routledge. 107-119. 2015. Print.

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A revised version of Chapter 5 appears in the forthcoming:

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Chapter 1 Introducing the Afghan Girl

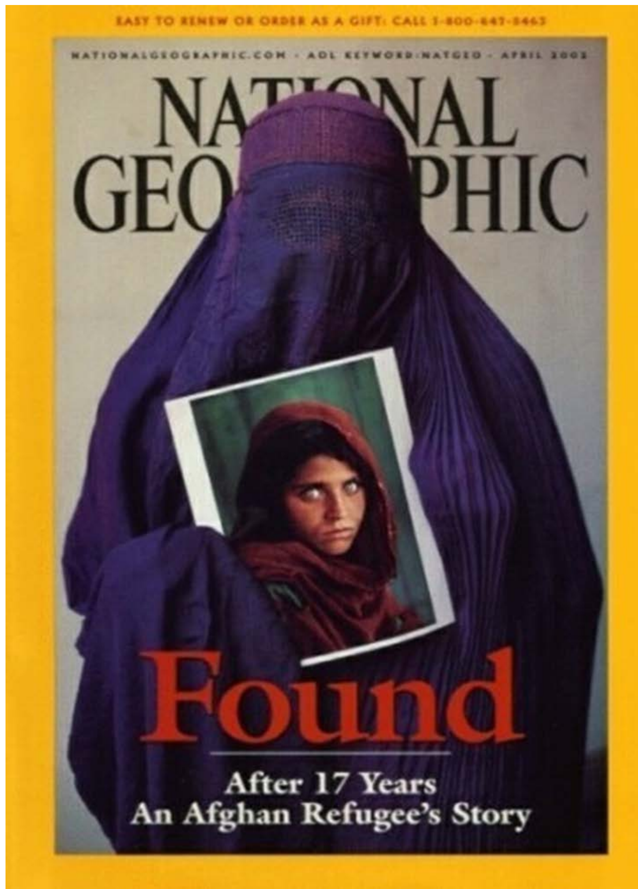

Fig. 1. Cover of *National Geographic* (2002).

In 2006, I stumbled upon a battered copy of the US-American magazine *National Geographic*. The burqa-clad figure holding a photograph of a young girl on its cover captured my attention. To create the cover image, photojournalist Steve McCurry went in search of the woman he had famously photographed 17 years earlier. Popularly recognized as *the* Afghan Girl, the woman on the 2002 cover holds to her draped chest that original 1984 image, a portrait of a young girl wearing a headscarf. With a somber expression she stares out towards the camera capturing the viewer's gaze with her sea green eyes (Hesford and Kozol 1). Since its publication, McCurry's portrait of the Afghan Girl has become one of *National*

Geographic's most celebrated and widely recognized images (1). The story inside the magazine documents the experiences of a crew from National Geographic Explorer, a spinoff documentary television series searching for the whereabouts of that girl whose gaze had captured international attention in 1985.[1] The documentary, *Search for the Afghan Girl*, details the long and arduous task of locating and validating the identity of the mysterious Afghan girl whose gaze grabbed international attention two decades earlier. When rediscovered by McCurry and his "team of experts" she is subjected to a barrage of biometric tests to verify her identity, including: iris scans and optometrist appointments that were supplemented by techniques of facial recognition conducted by the FBI (Szörényi 2). These processes highlight not only modalities of bio-power through which the Afghan Girl - Sharbat Gula's - identity is scrutinized but also more importantly it reveals a powerful paradox the public has about popular imaginings of refugees and veiled women. It makes visible a series of cultural assumptions the Western public holds about the lives of Afghan women and girls, particularly those who are represented in burqas and "collectivized" as "the other" in popular culture (2). What is significant in these assumptions is the crucial role the real and the imaginary plays in the creation of a supposedly universally legible Afghan woman.

This dissertation will analyze representations of Afghan women wearing a burqa and the specific ways in which such images are constructed. I will focus on specific representations that were originally created in the Netherlands, France, Sweden, and the United States. These representations range from media discourses to visual arts and political discourses but they constitute two sets of interventions. In the first part of the dissertation, I focus on representations of the burqa worn by women in Afghanistan (over there, where the

[1] McCurry took the anonymously titled portrait of Gula when she was a child in 1984, and *National Geographic* magazine originally published it in June of 1985 alongside Debra Denker's article "Along Afghanistan's War-Torn Frontier." The subsequent cover image that depicts Gula - the "Afghan girl" - as a woman, was published in the follow-up story "A Life Revealed" by Cathy Newman in April of 2002.

archetype sees them as oppressed by their culture), and in the second part of the dissertation, I turn to images that represent the burqa in our midst, within "our" Western world. And this time, the woman is represented as a threat as well as a victim.

Perhaps I should spell out exactly what I mean by the term "burqa" as I start this dissertation. By burqa, I mean the long and enveloping cloth that many Afghan women wear in public. It covers the whole body as well as the head and the face, which is hidden by an opaque screen. And since it is said that an image is worth one million words, I could say, I mean "this" (see fig. 2):

Fig. 2. A woman wearing a traditional burqa, Reuters (2009).

However, it is the aim of my dissertation to show that there are no innocent examples of "images" to which we can appeal in this manner. Images tempt us to think in terms of archetypes while this dissertation aims to demonstrate that no image is archetypal or even simply stereotypical. They all occur within a specific context and each of them teaches us or tries to teach us something different. I have chosen the cover of the *National Geographic* magazine (see fig. 1) as a representative of what I identify as a problem. Historically, we have come to recognize this silhouette of a woman under a burqa as immediately understandable. This is the mythical "Afghan woman." Instead, I propose that there is no such thing as a neutral representation, not even a definition can be a neutral representation of the burqa. As a consequence, I have constructed this thesis as a series of case studies that

refuse to believe that generalizations are possible. Of course we all generalize, but my goal is to suggest that each reader of a new image of the burqa can, all over again, choose to analyze the representation, its context, its political and rhetorical power, and its effectiveness.

My objects are taken from contemporary culture: conceptual art, sculpture, theatre, photography, literature, the mainstream mass media, and politics. Each reading of each object highlights the framing of these figures and critiques the message that *any* burqa is a dangerous and or threatening icon that endangers Western ideals. The implicit allusion to "the West" is already a sleight of hands as Gillian Whitlock and Seyla Benhabib remind us: they remind us that "the West" is a constant creation and re-creation of the imaginary boundaries between Euro-American societies that self-identify as "the West" (we) and construct Islam as "the East" the obverse (others) (Whitlock 7; Benhabib 2002, 8). When I use quotation marks around the concepts of "West" and "Western," I mean to remind my reader of Whitlock and Benhabib's words of caution.

Western representations however, should not be dismissed and left unchallenged: a number of accounts that address representations of women in burqas are framed within the all too familiar lens of Orientalism. There, women who wear a burqa are seen as "backwards" victims who need to be saved from the "non-West" by "the West." Others, however, are aware of the Orientalist bias of such representations and contribute activist and theoretical perspectives that work to disrupt or fight against the static figure of the woman under the burqa. If I want to move beyond the positionings that systematically stereotype Islam and Muslims as "backwards," "barbaric," and "uncivilized" I need to do more than acknowledge that such images are naturalized. This, I argue, can be achieved through an interdisciplinary analysis that hinges on a combination of intersectional and post-colonial theories. Interpreting representations of the burqa through visual and literary analysis forces us to at

the very least become aware of which discourses we wish to critique. This point will be unraveled progressively throughout this introductory chapter.

For now, I would like to return to the photograph of the Afghan Girl to see how this iconic image has been positioned within contemporary media theory. This will help explain and reinforce the link between the framing of the Afghan Girl as the exotic "other" and the prevalence of such images within mainstream Western mass media outlets. The dynamic that underlies this photograph highlights the intensity of the feelings associated with such an image among those who critically encounter it.

Rae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre for example, suggests that:

> [the] iconic portrait is marked by its continual representations and repositioning. In 1985 the Afghan Girl was situated in a complex set of discourses feeding on a Western desire to rescue a beautiful, veiled girl from a country failing to protect her from Soviet communism. The sequel, however, resignifies her image as it circulates in a distinct post-9/11 moment. (432)

Schwartz-DuPre highlights the importance of framing and the contextualization of images. While the original photograph was shot during the Soviet era, it has now travelled and been resignified for the present. Within the lens of a post 9/11 world, the image resonates with familiar tropes but they have been revitalized. The Afghan Girl still requires "saving" but this time from new enemies: civil war, the Taliban, Islamic fundamentalism, and the Muslim religious extremists who require her to be covered. Such resignifications have to be kept in mind because they explain how volatile the issue becomes when we turn to images that represent women wearing a burqa not in a faraway land but in "the West," in Europe for example.

Vera Mackie, who looks at media representations of Afghan girls and women in times of war, has also commented on McCurry's images. In his second generation photograph Mackie suggests that McCurry re-located the Afghan Girl re-enacting narratives of "Western" exploration in the "non-Western" world (121). In her reading of the photograph of

the Afghan Girl Mackie points to the metonymic relationship between woman, land and nation (121). She writes that McCurrys story makes visible:

> [the] deep structure of the unveiling stories. There is a desire to take part in what might almost be called a primal scene of unveiling. However, the desire can never be satisfied with any single enactment of the scene of unveiling, so that there is an obsessive return to, and repetition of, the scene of unveiling. On the cover of National Geographic…the structure of this desire is revealed in a photograph where the Afghan Girl appears simultaneously veiled and unveiled. (121)

Like Mackie, I argue that the issue of the burqa resurrects the typical debate around the "veiling" of colonized women. As Frantz Fanon remarked very early on in "Algeria Unveiled," the desire to "unveil" or "uncover" veiled women is more about colonial power than about feminism (1959, 184-185). Today, post-colonial and feminist critiques of Western representations of veiled women expose the persistence of a central element of Orientalist analysis. Mackie's analysis of McCurry's photo works to highlight what Homa Hoodfar refers to as the "entrenchment of the Western image of the oppressed Muslim woman" (1993, 6). The persistent narrative that is at work, ties the figure of the Muslim woman to the veil, with a long history that spans back to colonial practices and the discourses that emerged in response to these "unsubstantiated assumptions" (Hoodfar 1993, 6). A significant body of literature has been written on the emergence of this narrative addressing how the representation of the Muslim Orient by the Christian Occident coincides with the Ottoman empires diminished power and the rise of European domination (7).

Malek Alloula made the links between the Western vision of the Orient, as "the other," and the establishment of French colonial domination in the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) explicit. Alloula's reading of postcards of Algerian women that were produced and sent by the French in Algeria from the 1930s to the 1960s critiques the colonizer's obsession with veiled women's bodies. Paying homage to Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, he reads the images as a "wound" (Harlow xiii). The colonial postcards as

Barbara Harlow argues in her Introduction to Alloula's text represent a desire that characterizes "the West" as bent on revealing the phantasmatic sexuality of the harem as dreamland in Orientalistic accounts (xiii). Like him, Mary Ann Fay analyzes "the harem as a trope that permitted unfavorable comparisons between the Orient and the West and validated their belief in the superiority of Western civilization" (24). Reading the symbolic power of Orientalist discourses Fay addresses the ahistorical perceptions of female seclusion, gender segregation and veiling as detrimental to understanding women's socio and economic power (1). I treat both Alloula and Fay as classic critiques of Orientalism that are, surprisingly and sadly, still valid today. When I look at burqas, I realize that we cannot pretend that the issue of veiling is underexplored, but in spite of the enormous body of literature that critiques the West's tendency towards "unveiling," Orientalist narratives are deeply engrained in the social and discursive production of identities tied to what Hoodfar deems "the making of the veil in western minds" (1993, 6).

When I study the burqa, I see old Orientalist tales and immediate historical events collide and fuse as one story. In her study of Afghan women Dana L. Cloud shows that Orientalist imagery cannot be dissociated from the US global war on terrorism. She argues that widely circulated images of Afghan women and men have been used to establish a series of binary oppositions between white, Western, modern subjects and abject foreign objects of surveillance and military action (286). The reductionist marking of cultural "differences" through binary oppositions is key to unraveling the way in which meaning is made within both language and representation. For Cloud it is the positioning of the viewer as a paternalistic savior of Afghan women through the lens of oppositions such as "self" and "other," "backward" and "pre-modern," in need of "rescue" and "saving" that is tied to matters of representation that are crucial to the framing of these images:

> [these] images construct the viewer as a paternalistic savior of women and posit images of modern civilization against depictions of Afghanistan as backward and pre-modern. Through the construction of binary oppositions of self and Other, the evocation of a paternalistic stance toward the women of Afghanistan, and the figuration of modernity as liberation, these images participate in justifications for the war that belie the actual motives for the war. This contradiction has a number of implications for democratic deliberation and public life during wartime. (Cloud 286-287)

Orientalist tropes no longer serve to justify the intervention of colonial authorities. Unveiling will be achieved through a war that is justified to liberate women from a "backward" society and religion. But women are also somehow responsible for their fate to the extent that they are "both a cause and effect of the decline of Islamic civilization" (Fay 3). Like Cloud, Fay highlights the powerful sentiment that works with the photograph of the Afghan Girl.

The new image has been refigured from its original context (during the Soviet invasion from December 1979 to February 1989) and again tied to discourses of rescue that serve as justificatory narratives for the war in Afghanistan (Cloud 288). For Schwartz-DuPre and Cloud, the cover image memorializes not only the Afghan Girl but also Afghan women bearing witness to the "patriarchal politics of Afghanistan" (Schwartz-DuPre 436). Returning to Schwartz-Du Pre, we are reminded that the all-encompassing burqa the Afghan Girl wears might easily be read as a signifier of "Third World women's inferiority" (436).[2]

Orientalist tropes dating back to imperial and colonial projects (such as the British in Afghanistan or the French in Algeria but not limited too them), link the situating and "othering" of veiled women's bodies, as the exotic and erotic but also use them in the service of normalizing subjects away from these bodies; in other words, they signal and enforce

[2] Inderpal Grewal and Schwartz-DuPre argue for instance, that such images confirm beliefs that all veiled women are inferior. Grewal explains these kinds of imaginings also reflect the practices associated with a desire to unveil (the veiled woman or) the woman under the burqa becoming "a technology of colonial power exercised both to 'save' and to destroy at the same time. Furthermore, saving the veiled woman became a project of reform, undertaken by anti-colonial nationalists as well as by colonial authorities" (537). This accusation of course reinforces feminist and Orientalist critiques that theorize reductive statements situating the woman under the veil/burqa as a subordinated subject (Donnell 489).

mandatory terms of the self (Yeğenoğlu 47). In this double movement, representations of "covered women" are not simply indicative of "the other" but they also serve as a marker of discernible "difference," functioning as a disciplinary apparatus.

This is a useful point to begin a critical discussion of how messages of cultural inferiority and dysfunction have been so widely disseminated in Western Europe and North America (Canada and the United States) that when we encounter representations of veiled women or women in burqas, viewers often presume that the woman represented is a victim of a patriarchal culture or religion (Schwartz-DuPre 436; Razack 1998, 7; Hoodfar 1993, 6). This account offers an explanatory narrative for how the image of the Afghan Girl has been represented and repositioned within contemporary narratives. Significantly, discourses of rescue, those that framed the original photograph from 1985 and the specific time frame in which it was taken during the Soviet offensives in Afghanistan. As a result, large numbers of displaced persons were fleeing the war to Pakistan (1979-1989). In the current day these framings of the Afghan Girl still exist but they have shifted in the post 9/11 period, recirculating and reconfigured to present a particular geo-politics that associates Islam with extremism and Muslims with terror. This point has been well established, resonating with a vast legacy of literature that addresses images of Arabs and Islam in Western mainstream mass media outlets and their framing as being overwhelmingly negative[3] (Damon and Michalak 83; Stabile and Kumar 773; Hammer 106; Fahmy 92; Kumar 255; Stockton 121; Amos and Parmar 3-19; Macdonald 2006, 8).

My reading does not simply fall in line with those that dominate the leftist political spectrum informed by and propelled forth by liberal human rights discourses. Rather, I use it as a departure point for thinking about what such extremes mean when Western viewers

[3] Importantly, Robert Stockton in "Ethnic Archetypes and the Arab Image" discusses the negative stereotypes associated with Arabs who are identified along Orientalist lines as backward, aggressive, cunning, barbaric, veiled and tribal. In addition he also addresses the power of counter representations where bravery, intelligence, and religion are situated as positive elements associated with Arab stereotypes as a strategy of re-reading Orientalist imagery.

encounter representations of the burqa (through visual and literary narratives). I would like to think of it as a way of re-ordering approaches for studying representations of veiled women, especially images of women in burqas. In order to do so I begin with a critical analysis of second wave feminism, and those who are concerned with subjects that are "free," white, and unveiled in *The Vagina Monologues.* I offer a reading that counters the instrumentalization of veiled women's bodies building on the important work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and her theorization of "Third World feminism" and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to address Orientalist and neo-Orientalist suppositions and the corresponding subjects that emerge from such assumptions. Static and essentialized figures of burqa-clad woman still exist and they are still configured through Orientalist discourses. At the same time, however, they are repositioned within the current sociopolitical order. The critique of early Orientalist tropes has also opened new cans of theoretical worms that I would like to analyze: for example, a second wave of feminist discourses has unwillingly reproduced some of the tropes that emerged out of Orientalist and post-colonialist critiques.

Inspired by Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* I work with dual approaches to inquire into what it would mean to think about the burqa and intersectionality. This thesis tracks the amalgamation effects that occur when the burqa is interpreted as an already familiar figure. For example, in second wave feminism and affective theory the burqa-clad woman is envisioned as an outcast, positioned outside the values that are situated as representative of the values of Western (secular) liberal nation states. I would like to challenge this perspective by looking to the works of "Third World feminists" to look at how feminism, agency, and sovereignty are evaluated. This perspective moves across different actors, as an analytical tool it allows us to ask to what extent current representations of the burqa-clad woman invite us to say "yes" or "no" to the dominant framing of the burqa in the political and public debates that marked the first decade of 2000 and the present.

So for example, let us return to the portrait of the Afghan Girl this discussion opened with and how oppositional thinking emerges as a key element that simultaneously is produced and reproduced in the framing of Gula, *the* Afghan Girl (see fig.1). The portrait is not exempt, as it stages a before and after representation, underscoring a message of change, provoking readers into thinking that what has changed for the worse is that, in the intervening years, the girl has become anonymous and ghostlike. Structuring this train of thought is an understanding that things have deteriorated dramatically for the woman, and that encountering the picture functions as a form of "witness" to specific moments in history.

Indeed this is a legitimate point that is visible in the series of images of the Afghan Girl from the "A Life Revealed" story in *National Geographic* that illustrates the rhetoric that is tied up with the colonial project of authorities seeking to save veiled woman as a reform project (see fig. 3). Featuring another photograph taken by McCurry, these juxtaposed portraits stage a "before" and "after" reinforcing accusations of post-colonial theorists with critiques that levy claims about the Western desire to unveil veiled woman. Despite decades of post-colonial and feminist theorizing on the question of the symbolic power of the veil within artistic and literary productions, these criticisms make visible the tensions and anxieties that are recounted in these kinds of images. Works written by critical theorists such as Talal Asad, Myra Macdonald, Saba Mahmood, Bobby Sayyid and Meyda Yeğenoğlu offer a number of different ways of engaging the conceptual meaning of Islamic iconography (burqa) as it moves from "the West" to the "non West" (Buck-Morss 43). Importantly, these scholars do not share a common voice, as each comes with a different perspective, expressing different traditions moving from Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology to Foucault's analysis of truth and power, Derrida on deconstruction, the radical democracy of Laclau and Mouffe, the postcolonialism of Spivak and Bhabha, as well as the critical theories of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin (43). Susan Buck-Morss in *Thinking Past Terror* explains that

what they do share is a desire to discover how Western phenomena such as modernization, secularization, and nationalism change their material referent when the move from the "West" to "non-West" and with it their political value (43). Moving between different theoretical frameworks the conviction that each theorist shares is their desire to address different elements associated with Islamism as a political discourse breaking it free from associations of terrorism and violence for Western audiences (49).

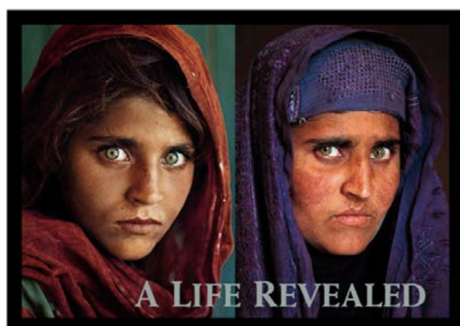

Fig. 3. A Life Revealed from *National Geographic* (2002).

Take the widely-cited scholar Akbar S. Ahmed, whose book *Islam Under Siege*, explores the depiction of Islam following 9/11 as being more than a monolith but still serving as a short hand for terrorism or extremism. Ahmed, a prominent anthropologist and Islamic scholar works through many of the historic and ideological frames that have been used to situate Muslim normative behavior that he rightly claims is used to "single Islam out" (2003, 8). Through a reflexive anthropological method he seeks to work through "misunderstandings" of Islam that have pervaded "the West" since 9/11 with its explicit ties to xenophobia. Concerned with "fundamentalist," "terrorist," and "extremist" categories tied to depictions of Muslims and Islam he responds to these positionings with a reading that favors cultural notions of "honor" and "dignity" (18). Such "misunderstandings" as Ahmed kindly refers to them bring to the fore the power of a unique series of converging geopolitical factors such as the economic, political, historical, demographic, and cultural that reflect social

transformations (7). These historical "misunderstandings" can be used to justify the global war on terror, American imperialism, and xenophobia (13).

With these points in mind, the second portrait of Gula called "A Life Revealed" (see fig. 3) mixes up tropes of liberation and unveiling (Grewal 537). The desire to "save" and "reveal" Gula as a representative figure of Afghan women, constructs her as a victim and celebrates her unveiling as a source of "liberation" without addressing her actual conditions of life. This account works in line with Stabile and Kumars analysis of stories that were prevalent in US news media outlets: celebrating women's unveiling said absolutely nothing about the women and their actual conditions of life (765).[4]

Eugenia Siapera suggests the figure of the woman in a burqa emerges as a conglomeration of what Alloula refers to as the "best and worst" of Orientalism - those broad all-purpose renderings of subordination that are associated with covered women (3). The Afghan Girl featured in fig. 1 and fig. 3 also works with the pictorial imagery associated with Orientalism, the bright colors of exoticism, the all-concealing veil that is worn because "tradition demands a rigid separation between the sexes," but also an important element that is often ignored: the fact that she is being photographed by a man who is determined to unveil her (Harlow x). Alloula powerfully reminds us of these very concerns that are at work in colonial postcards in *The Colonial Harem:*

> [the] Orient is no longer the dreamland. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, it has inched closer. Colonialism makes a grab for it, appropriates it by dint of war, binds it hand and foot with myriad bonds of exploitation and hands it over to the devouring appetite of the great mother countries, ever hungry for raw materials. (3)

The convergences that come out of the meeting of Orientalism and the practices of colonialism in the Afghan context (from the Soviet era to the present day) create more than

[4] News stories that circulated at this time, in the wake of 9/11 such as "Now I See the Sunlight" (November 26, 2001) published in *Newsweek* and "Damned Anyway" in *TIME* magazine (October 29, 2001) also situate Afghan women as forced into "darkness" by Islamic fundamentalists while positioning "the West" as a necessary liberating figure.

an imaginary figure of who that Afghan woman is. She has become more than a category that has been shaped by literary convention and narrative processes within Western cultural traditions. The subject that *the* Afghan Girl, has come to represent, has been addressed by feminists and post-colonial theorists alike through a number of different avenues including intersectional theory.

Intersectional theory also known as "intersectionality" was spearheaded by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw who in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" explored the merging of markers of difference such as race, gender, nationality, religion, age and others within liberal discourses (1242). Crenshaw argued that identities are experienced together they cannot be thought of as separate categories and transcended, rather they need to be thought of together (1241). Addressing what she refers to as the "multidimensionality" of "marginalized subjects" lived experiences offers an inclusive approach to the analysis of minority groups. From the onset, intersectionality appears to be commonsensical in its problematizing of specific intersections, such as race and gender. Yet, the real strength of her argument is found in the time it was produced. It served as a form of intervention that highlighted the power of essentialist arguments of "womanhood," "color-blindness," "neutrality," and "objectivity" and strove to break free from them (1244). Ignoring racial/gender binaries, and the differences of these markers within groups creates tensions among individuals and minority groups affecting efforts to politicize violence against women, for example. A powerful concept that has been championed in feminist scholarship, intersectionality was theorized to address the struggles of women of color who "fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse" (Davis 68). Intersectionality allows for multiple dimensions of lived experiences to be theorized together by different disciplines (humanities, social sciences, and law), theoretical perspectives (deconstruction, sociology, phenomenology), and political persuasions

(feminism, anti-racism, queer studies, and multiculturalism) that deploy it as a tool to elaborate on the political possibilities of identities (68).

Intersectionality or "intersections" (Higginbotham 252; King 71; Moore 79-80) remain a core part of theoretical discussions in feminism, regarded by some as a concept, heuristic device, or as a strategy for doing feminist analysis. In this thesis I employ intersectionality as a strategy for theorizing essential elements of identity linked to feminist scholarship, and as a way of acknowledging differences among women (Davis 70). It serves as a destabilizing method that works to break free of theories presenting identity as a totalizing category and instead enables what Jennifer Nash refers to as more "robust analyses of cultural sites (or spectacles) that implicate both race and gender" (2).

Intersectional feminists such as Zinn et al. have pointed out that white, middle-class feminists have held "gatekeeping positions" in feminism and popular feminist theory for too long (295). Categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality are significant elements that need to be theorized beyond what is deemed "the norm," moving past exclusionary practices that are linked to privileged groups (299). I use these assumptions to address the differences among women that have become a key part of feminist critiques in recent years, moving away from essentialist imaginings of women and focusing on those who are excluded.

It is important to explain that intersectionality is more than Phoenix and Pattynama's claim, i.e. a "handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positionings that constitute everyday life and the power relations that are central to it" (187). Rather "intersections" serve as a productive way of thinking through issues of "difference" (understanding the role race, class, and gender play in relation to women's experiences and struggles) (Davis 71). Fátima Fernandes suggests that intersectionality allows for a focus to be placed on conflict, contention, debate, discord, and disagreement by focusing on the full meaning of the word "difference." I am also interested in how intersectionality works with

postcolonial and poststructuralist theorists such as Mohanty, Spivak, and Butler who offer alternatives to static and essentialized conceptions of identity (Davis 71).

Key to intersectionality is the theorization of cultural difference, as a category that has specific meaning for Fernandes. However for Puar it has been "simultaneously emptied of specific meaning on the one hand and overdetermined in its deployment on the other" (2013, 374). Puar's point serves as a challenge to rethink cultural difference as it can be articulated as an oppositional force and as more than a vague term that addresses cultural reception. Difference, also known as cultural difference (which I use interchangeably) is a concept that is often wielded within sociological analysis that allows for other categories to be articulated or rethought in relation to its moments, tensions, and historic specificity as a greater part of context (key to the developing of non-essentialist theories of ethnicity and race such as those that emerge from cultural critics Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy). Difference, is considered to be "slippery" for the British cultural theorist Stuart Hall. A "contested concept," difference highlights how racial and ethnic differences are foregrounded in representation (1997, 226-227). Difference engages with our "feelings, attitudes, and emotions" associated with viewers and processes of looking, mobilizing our collective fears and anxieties (Hall 1997, 226). Paul Sharrad explains:

> [t]he politics of difference have usefully shown that there are more than two sides to a social problem, according to the number of interested parties, and that not all parties speak/understand the issue with enough terms in common to admit straightforward compromise or reasoned consent to a course of action not everyone completely assents to. (55)

Sharrad's conceptualization of difference frames concerns of reason and exclusion within the positioning of minority groups, highlighting social and cultural practices as areas that need to be looked at, especially as they are tied to minority groups and it is often called into use when thinking through the postcolonial. Difference is used to invoke claims of "shared goals of

equality and liberation" to foster communication including language between minority groups and their oppressors (55).

Often employed in cultural studies, difference is one way of addressing otherness - adding sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, and color as essential elements to practices of stereotyping (Hall 1997, 231). Within the legacy of cultural studies, difference has been mobilized as a productive way of reading race and representations of "blackness" for example as inescapable points of discrimination by Fanon (1952, 109-140), Gilroy, and Hall (1997, 231). Difference is an integral category when addressing signifying practices and the politics of representation (Dasgupta 33-34). An essential element of visual analysis in contemporary popular culture understanding cultural differences, othering, and themes such as ethnicity and gender within visual and literary representations are significant (33-34). Later I will elaborate on the political applicability of otherness, and representational modes such as photography, those that linger within the "collective memory" through the image of *the* Afghan Girl, using it as a rubric for theorizing cultural difference.

Understanding Images

British media scholar John Ellis explains that photographic images made public have informational use especially when perceived as evidence and thus serve as an objective record of something that has happened, in this case the war in Afghanistan (2011, 22). The doubled image of Gula moves beyond journalism as a form of visual documentation and serves as a carrier of the collective memory. The image offers the viewer a simplified glimpse of the past in the service of the present; as Barbie Zelizer writes:

> [images] of collective memories are schematic, lacking the detail of personal memory's images. Few of us remember the name of the South Vietnamese village where children ran screaming from their napalmed homes into a photographer's field of vision. Nor do many of us remember the date or circumstances under which the photograph was taken.

> But its resonance as an image of war atrocity – and invocation by U.S. antiwar groups during the sixties and seventies – stabilized its meaning precisely along its more schematic dimensions. Collectively held images thus act as signposts, directing people who remember to preferred meaning by the fastest route. (1998, 7)

Echoing a similar sentiment, one may not know the Afghan girl's name but her image resonates with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the movement of countless refugees across its neighbors' borders. Images such as McCurry's portrait of Gula act as signposts for the collective memory directing viewers to a simplified view of the past in service of the present (Zelizer 1998, 5). In agreement Wendy Hesford explains that the image (of the Afghan Girl) is framed as having objective value, as producing a set of visual facts or documents "a representation that rests on the narrative configuration of the girl refugee as a deserving victim in need of rescue, and on the familiar dualism of tradition and modernity- intended to champion human rights within the framework of Western liberalism" (2011, 2). Returning to Zelizer she explains how images, particularly news images, are of critical importance to the public's understanding and attitudes towards unsettled public events such as civil war and the mass movement of Afghan refugees, generalized by the media and illustrating the problems associated with simplified visual framing. She writes in her powerfully titled book *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public*:

> [because] many images reflect unsettled public events - the difficult and often contested planned violence, torture, terrorism, natural disaster, war, famine, crime, epidemic, and political assassinations at the core of today's geopolitical environment - their consideration can help clarify how the public forms sentiments about the larger world. It can also elucidate under which conditions images promote broader political agendas and what happens to a healthy body politic when images reduce complex issues and circumstances to memorable but simplistic visual frames. (Zelizer 2010, 1)

Zelizer also offers a number of vivid examples of how larger photographic essays on Afghanistan have been used by the American popular media to re-define the conflict and re-frame Afghan girls and women through an affective lens that is used to justify military intervention in Afghanistan. She describes how even though Afghanistan had rarely been

discussed in the US-American mainstream mass media pre-invasion (2001), a mere two months after 9/11, it had become "the most reported-from country on earth" (Zelizer 2010, 269). Promptly following the invasion and subsequent occupation, photographs of smiling children on the street began to circulate, villagers who were enjoying previously prohibited activities, women who were happily throwing off their burqas with all of these images shot amidst the backdrop of a pulverized landscape (Fahmy 91; Zelizer 2010, 270). It is in these moments that the prewar image of the Afghan Girl began to recirculate and the search of her whereabouts began.

> In this context, images such as the one on the cover of *National Geographic* magazine were used in a way that showed less of the war and more about the assumptions held by the forces responsible for its prosecution. United States journalism was thus complicit, if not consciously so, in using images in ways that upheld larger strategic aims of the administration. (Zelizer 2010, 269)

Images such as the one of *the* Afghan Girl became a tool for interpreting events and gaining the public's consent in support of the broader geopolitical climate. With this in mind McCurry's iconic photograph serves as a potent reminder of the paradoxes associated with the media's deployment of images of the burqa, affective viewing, otherness, and what these photographs might teach us about the power of media witnessing (Hirschmann 345).

In agreement, in *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*, Ellis dubbed the 20th century "the century of witness" (1999, 9). For Ellis, the 20th century was unique because audio-visual technologies, such as photography, film, television, recording, and new media, were able to introduce new modalities of perception into the world. Photography has been described as a powerful medium that offers viewers access to feelings that are presented as facts, serving as more than a document, photographs also confirm or give testimony to others of what has been seen; and it involves a complex to-and-fro between seeing, believing, and feeling among viewers (Ellis 2011, 130; Hamilton 84-85; Peters 709; Zelizer 2010, 15-16).

Susan Sontag in *On Photography* explored how photographic images have traditionally played a special role in the witnessing of crisis because of their perceived nature as an interpretation of the real, as a trace of something that has happened that is likened to a footprint. She explains that photographs are generally lauded for their standards of resemblance, remembrance, and reminiscence as a means of communication and a means of sharing experience. Similarly, Judith Butler in *Frames of War*, *Torture and the Ethics of Photography*, and *Precarious Life* has argued that through photography, film, and television contemporary audiences have been provided with visual evidence of worldwide events (such as war and catastrophe) that are mediated through particular forms of technology.

In *Frames of War*, Butler demonstrates that notions of personhood are constructed through histories of life and histories of death in relation to some available frame (Mazurski 115). This is not to say that one cannot live or die outside of frames, but rather, that our apprehension of the precariousness of life is governed by them (115). More specifically, that one cannot apprehend a life as livable or grievable if it were not first apprehended as living is both the crux of her argument and the function of framing, and it is supplied by the interrogation of being and recognizability (115). Butler suggests that what underlies this apprehension is that which guides interpretation and recognition and it is here that the "frame" is questioned through analysis of war photographs as those which "break out" of the frame "or break from" the frame, like the case of the digital images from Abu Ghraib circulated across the Internet. Framing in this chapter is presented as both reflexive and visual; it is not simply a concept, but also a process that is integral to the recognition of personhood.

In earlier works, such as "Torture and the Ethics of Photography" concerns of representability are tied to the frames which allocate for the recognizability of certain figures as human that are tied to broader norms that determine humanization and dehumanization,

and how they can be used to articulate a political analysis over an established field of perceptible reality (Butler 2007, 951). What Butler does, I believe, is enable a way of conceptualizing vulnerability and personhood within the broader framing of photography. In this case, they are critical to an understanding of the political and historical discourses surrounding the global war on terror.

Ellis and Sontag both suggest that the visual representations impart to the viewer knowledge about the world; carrying over a sense of complicity (an intimacy) with what they see. Such intimacy, mediated visual images offer viewers a sense of "closeness" and "proximity" while at the same time bringing a sense of "powerlessness" and "anxiety" with them. Photographs and other forms of recordings Ellis explains "are born in intimate moments but quickly grow up and take on a life of their own. Anxieties haunt photography and recording, anxieties about the moment of making recordings and the subsequent use to which they can be put" (2011, 4).

Roger Silverstone, in his article "Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life," claims that when viewers are defined as active and reflexive a moral stance is assumed (they are morally culpable); he refers to Abercrombie and Longhurst writing, "If audiences refuse to take that responsibility, then they are morally culpable. And we are all audiences now" (1998, 18). What Ellis, Silverstone, Sontag, and Butler argue is that a shift has taken place in the way humans perceive the world beyond immediate reach. Viewers are witnesses to something that is taking place somewhere else, implying a sense of responsibility that falls upon them.[5] Following this conceptualization of contemporary

[5] In his essay "Ethics For Media Users" Cees Hamelink offers a thorough and insightful discussion of "responsibility" and the consumption of media products. Interrogating the concepts "accountability" and "responsibility" through the lens of "media freedom" he offers a detailed examination of Mort Rosenblum's notion of "shared responsibility" (between producers and consumers). Ultimately, Hamelink concludes by suggesting that not only do media consumers have a "shared duty" with media producers (and client communities) but that they also must be accountable for their choices (2000, 400). Morality, codes of conduct, and media performance merge and serve as a springboard for thinking about the role agency and accountability plays. In short, this discussion offers a productive way of conceptualizing the link between consumers and producers that can be helpful when thinking about mediated experiences.

media, witnessing the audience's engagement with visual images as a mediated experience is conveyed through the kind of image deployed on the cover of *National Geographic* magazine, as the image and its framing works to depict an image of the past in relation to the present. As viewers, we are reconnected with a past life now lost.

Throughout this thesis, which is an analysis of the way in which images of the burqa turn us into a specific kind of audience, I will keep the issue of imaging, witnessing, and responsibility in mind, asking what kind of viewers we have become or can be. On the cover of the magazine, the past and the present collide, inviting us to reflect upon the presence/absence of the highly symbolic burqa. By focusing on the burqa, what the photographer renders invisible is the possibility of thinking that, in spite of the spectacular change, little, in fact, has changed for the girl: for decades she was displaced (living in a Afghan refugee camp Nasir Bagh, in northwestern Pakistan near Peshawar). The recent photograph does not show her past refugee status. Instead, it prompts us to sympathize with what appears to be her new predicament. The photograph does not tell us how she feels about wearing a burqa but invites us to assume that insult has been added to injury. After all, she may or may not find it a dramatic alteration in her condition of life that she now wears a burqa (this we do not know), but what we may find dramatic in her life-story is that for 20 years she was a refugee. Does the fact that she was once a beautiful girl redeem it?

In what follows I analyze the politics that surrounds specific representations of the burqa in the West, North America and Europe. Specifically, I am interested in the way in which various discourses produce knowledge about the burqa. I analyze objects that depict women wearing burqas in contemporary Western cultures (the United States and Western Europe). A close reading of these objects sheds light on the sociopolitical conditions that make these images meaningful. They reveal that Orientalist constructions of Islam and Muslims have been reimagined after 9/11 and the subsequent global war on terror. To counter

the naturalization of stereotypical images, it is necessary to look slowly, closely, and patiently at that which appears to be obvious, simple, and self evident. One of the most effective ways of doing so is to look at tropes that reduce Afghan women and women in burqas to static and essentialized categories. The following section will do so, by situating these forms of representation within the larger theoretical framework of Edward Said's academic work with a specific focus placed on *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, that serve as an axis by which such discourses can be critically evaluated.

Thinking with Said: Orientalism

When looking at representations of Islam, and specifically at images of women in burqas in the mainstream media, the work of Said (*Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*) is still extremely helpful. In *Orientalism*, Said reminds us that the word Orient emerges as a "semi-mythical construct" that is used to generalize "innumerable histories and a dizzying variety of peoples, languages, experiences, and cultures, all these are swept aside or ignored" (1978, xviii). Said's concept of the Orient problematizes the generalization of a wide variety of peoples; relevant to my analysis is how he works to establish a discursive formation in which hegemonic representations of Islam in "the West" prefigured the Orient and Islam as "backwards" and "uncivilized" in photography, literature, and so forth; that is, how they worked to create a discourse: Orientalism.[6]

A contemporary branch of analysis that emerges from Said's work is concerned with the colonial project of domination and extraction. To paraphrase Arjun Appadurai in

[6] It is important to note that Michel Foucault's concept of discourse was significant within Said's formulation of Orientalism. Knowledge and power play a central role in Said's analysis. By employing the notion of discourse, Said was able to look at the system of ideas that allowed European culture to "manage and produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively" (Said 1978, 2). It is this kind of institutionalism that gives the myths that develop in relation to Islam "the authority of a nation" and ensure the West's hegemony (Poole 29).

Modernity at Large, Orientalism breaks up exoticism, strangeness, and difference into "manageable parts" (115). These "manageable parts" are the foundation on which this project rests. I am concerned with the narrative that prefigures the Orient and Islam as "antidemocratic," "backwards" and "barbaric." I read Muslim women, and Afghan women in particular, as often narratively represented in visual and literary texts as either "victims" who are in need of "saving" and even more insidiously as willing accomplices in their own victimization.

In the present day, these narratives are all still active and do cultural work to enlist the burqa in "the West" as an emblem of the Islamic "other." My approach re-invokes Said's analysis of Orientalism with Afghan women, and especially in regards to images of women in burqas, in an attempt to intervene within the power of such rhetoric. Through this lens the burqa has emerged as an icon where the economic, political, social, and legal conditions experienced by Afghan women during the Taliban regime (1996-2001) were fought. Yet these discursive entanglements are loaded with highly emotive language and they were the first hurdles to overcome.

In *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the World* Said focuses his attention on Islam as a source of news that converged on the American media's coverage of the embassy seizure in Iran in 1981, "the Iran Story" (1981, 81). For Said, this was a significant moment in the history of the US-American media, as it solidified Orientalist discourses through which knowledge about Islam had become known and dramatically increased it. He points out that the Iranian Revolution was a signifier of the resurgence of the West's interest in Islam and it was striking because it came to "[represent] American relations with the Muslim world" (83). Subsequently, the Iranian crisis became associated with the threat of violence, militancy, and anti-Western sentiment that was perpetuated by the media (83-84).

Following this train of thought Said argues that through racial hatred, cultural hostility, and ignorance, Islam is not allowed to be "known" and is "covered up" (xxii). Playing an essential role in the "covering up" of Islam mainstream Western mass media outlets disseminated powerful interpretations. C. Wright Mills referred to them as the "cultural apparatus" through which "the West," Europe and the United States derive knowledge of Islam (47). The images media outlets disseminate are informed by official definitions of Islam, those that work to serve interests of government and private business. The success of these images then is dependent not upon their accuracy but rather on the power of the people who produce them (Western-based global media). As Said observes:

> For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is news of a particularly unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategists, and - although they are marginal to the culture at large - the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is a threat to Western civilization. Now this is by no means the same as saying that only derogatory or racist caricatures of Islam are to be found in the West. I do not say that, nor would I agree with anyone who did. What I am saying is that negative images of Islam continue to be very much more prevalent than any others, and that such images correspond not to what Islam is […] but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be. Those sectors have the power and the will to propagate *that* particular image of Islam, and this image therefore becomes more prevalent, more present, than all the others. As I said […], this is done through the workings of a consensus, which sets limits and applies pressures. (1981, 144)

Stephen Morton explains that the image to which Said is referring describes certain visual and verbal stereotypes that are reproduced by the Western media and foreign policy to stand in for the Muslim world (2003, 166). These stereotypes offer violent representations of Islamic societies and are exasperated by the tragic stereotype of the veiled Muslim woman who is a victim of a repressive patriarchy (166).

An Awkward Relationship with Orientalism: Women Speak Back

Memorably, Marilyn Strathern has remarked that gender and women's studies have an awkward relationship with Orientalism. In agreement Lila Abu-Lughod writes "*Orientalism* was not meant to be a work of feminist scholarship or theory. Yet it has engendered feminist scholarship and debate in Middle East studies as well as far beyond the field" (2001, 101). Resonating with those who are concerned with gender relations, the recovery of feminism in the Middle East, and the constraining stereotypes of Muslim women, Islamic feminists for example work to complement methodologies that are still evolving such as Orientalism. As a result, while Orientalism founds this research, I confront Said's project by looking to others, such as Moghadam, Abu-Lughod, Göle, Moghissi, Cooke, Kahf, and Zine who here advance more complex and more focused ways of challenging hegemonic discourses about Afghan woman. They help me critique what I call the myth of the Afghan woman, the naturalized narrative that conflates any knowledge about the position of women in Islam with Orientalist tropes and images of the burqa.

In the West, a distinct narrative is used to represent Muslim women, particularly women in burqas. According to the Egyptian American writer on Islam and Islamic feminism Leila Ahmed, the core tenets of this account are "that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies" (1992, 151-152). As both Ahmed and Mohja Kahf remind us, this narrative can be broken down and reduced to the statement: the burqa represents the victimization of women. Jasmin Zine expands on the burqas iconic power and its association with oppression when she suggests that: "Muslim women are particularly marked, as media images of burkah-clad women have become the trademark of Islam's repression" (2002, 2). A prominent

variation on this narrative suggests Muslim women, particularly Afghan women, are willing accomplices in their own victimization. A parallel version situates women in burqas as desperately trying to escape their victimization (this is explicitly tied to the burqa). These narratives serve as the basis for hegemonic representations of the burqa in the Western world today; they have become so powerful that they operate on multiple levels in society, pervading all aspects of culture, from high to low.

Mohja Kahf who takes her cue from Said explains that these narratives go unchallenged because they are so pervasive they no longer require substantiation. She explains that "this narrative has formed a central part of Western discourse on Islam ever since the eighteenth century" (Kahf 3). In the past decade, such images of women in burqas have been deployed to justify the latest invasion of Afghanistan and to rationalize missionary discourses that accompanied it. If such narratives are challenged, representations of the burqa are often ignored in favor of focusing on the realities of Afghan women or apologist explanations for Islamists; correspondingly, others look to a genealogy of the narrative (3). They neither look at representations of the burqa nor at the greater grand narrative that situates Afghan women, or the women under the burqa as passive victims or vocal opponents (3). As a result of the power/knowledge that has emerged from such discourses a number of laws has been passed, implemented, or debated in the public arena (in countries such as Italy, France, Belgium, Canada, and the Netherlands, for example). They either ban the burqa, or pursue women with fines and/or jail time for wearing such garments in public spaces (Gal-Or 317).

Taking the fear and anxieties that the burqa has come to represent to the extreme, the French government under President Nicolas Sarkozy went so far as to use the burqa as a

justification for the denial of citizenship (Gal-Or 318).[7] In this example, the burqa became a boundary that was used to define that which is not French as a symbolic representation of a desire to be anti-secular and anti-individualist.

After 9/11, a similar discourse was deployed which situated women in burqas as victims and threats in the greater grand narratives in the global war on terror. Abu-Lughod's writings on cultural relativism and Muslim women as "others" in her provocatively titled article "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" offers an analysis into how projects of "saving women" are dependent upon a patronizing rhetoric (2002, 783). In this provocatively titled article, she seeks to discover whether the justifications made for the US-American intervention in Afghanistan those that claim to "liberate," "emancipate," or "save" Afghan women (and women in Muslim countries) - have become cemented within Western culture. Abu-Lughod maintains that the images of burqa-clad Afghan women plastered all over the mass media were deployed as powerful cultural icons in lieu of engaging in messy discussions of historical and political dynamics (785). In agreement, Krista Hunt explains that in the post 9/11 climate what we see in the media are two distinct yet complementary images of Afghan women, those who are portrayed as passive victims of the Taliban (images of women in burqas) and the others are empowered opponents of the regime (RAWA members) (117). In both cases women's rights discourses are co-opted and used to not only express indignation about the treatment of women by the regime but also to justify US response to the global war on terrorism and to moralize the plan to force them from power (117). In both articles the focus on the co-option of women's rights and human rights in the "American campaign against Afghanistan (and Islamic fundamentalism)…by the media

[7]Alexandra Sandel's article for the *Los Angeles Times* (February 05, 2010) "France Denies Citizenship to Moroccan Man Over Burqa" explains how a Moroccan immigrant was denied citizenship because his wife wears a burqa. When read in conjunction with Lizzy Davies' earlier "France denies citizenship to Moroccan man who forces wife to wear full veil" (February 02, 2010) or Katrin Bennhold's "A Veil closed France's door to citizenship" (July 19, 2008) it makes clear the symbolic power of the burqa and how it is represented as clashing with French values.

[reveals how women's rights are used as a justification]…in this 'war against terrorism'" (119).

Central to Abu-Lughod's argument is the use of missionary discourses on Afghan women by then-First Lady of the United States Laura Bush in her radio address to the nation November 17, 2001. She points out that the speech conflates concerns to create a slippage between the Taliban and the terrorists, or what she refers to as "a kind of hyphenated monster identity: the Taliban-and-the-terrorists" (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784). Separate causes, such as ill health, malnourishment, and poverty, revealingly became intertwined with the exclusion of women from education and decrees that mandated the burqa in the public sphere (784).

In Bush's radio speech, the global war on terrorism became explicitly linked to the position of Afghan women; the message's utility is revealed through the heroic liberationist outcome of the intervention in Afghanistan. She claims: "Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment" (Bush 2001). However the lines between these issues blur: "Yet the terrorists who helped rule that country now plot and plan in many countries. And they must be stopped. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Bush 2001). These words Abu-Lughod reminds us resonate deeply for those who have a knowledge of British colonial history (2002, 784). What is exposed is how women's rights and human rights discourses have been wielded in the American campaign against Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan (Hunt 119). Bush's words evoke images that echo the displacement of female subjects (subaltern women from colonial India) from Hindu religious codes via the British constitution discussed by Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" As Bush's address demonstrates, women (who were forced into) wearing burqas at the beginning of the last decade were inseparable from interventions in the violence of war, the "rights and dignity of women," and liberating others (Bush 2001). The

burqa debate evokes the same logic where Afghan women's bodies are politicized in the service of "the West."

For Abu-Lughod, Spivak, and Hunt the social and political agency of subaltern women reappears, but this time with a slightly different context, echoing familiar discourses surrounding the 19th century practice of sati (suttee).[8] Spivak points out that our expectations are: "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (1988, 286). This statement addresses the subjects who fell under the control of colonial powers but it also sheds light on the socio-historical conditions associated with the oppression of women more generally. In her discussion, cultural erasure and political domination go hand-in-hand, and they work to silence the subaltern subject by overlooking the agency and voice of Hindu women. Rather than defending women's agency, the colonial administration formally banned the practice of sati in 1829, making the body of the widow a battleground for colonial power. As a result, subaltern women's subjectivities and gender become tools used to constitute a voice for hegemonic agency (where subaltern women cannot speak but are instead ventriloquized) (Birla 94). Saving brown women for the British colonial administration became the justification for a civilizing mission in South Asia and a subsequent war (84). Through these discourses English men, the colonizers, were represented as "protectors," as the saviors of Indian women who required rescue from a patriarchal society. Importantly, Spivak offers a powerful counterpoint when she argues that "the women actually wanted to die" (qtd. in Birla 93). When rephrased and re-oriented to the more universally applicable argument "brown women do not need saving" the polemical positions offered in her argument emerge, as a conceptual way of working through the constitutive constructions of "brown women" in need of saving as a trope tied to operations of British colonialism in India. It offers insight into

[8] Sati is a practice where a widow immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Self-immolation became one way through which the British colonial administration justified not only intervention but also rule in India. In her discussion of British colonial representation, Spivak offers examples of how colonial subjects were oppressed under colonial rule.

how political and epistemic imperial projects mobilized women and their bodies as a rationale for organizing missions that relied on rescue narratives (Bracke 241; Pratt 1821; Abu-Lughod 2002, 784).

In the article "Saving Brown Women," Miriam Cooke gives a persuasive argument for how the burqa debate recalls sati (suttee) and the four-stage gendered logic of empire in South Asia. She writes:

> (1) women have inalienable rights within universal civilization, (2) civilized men recognize and respect these rights, (3) uncivilized men systematically abrogate these rights, and (4) such men (the Taliban) thus belong to an alien (Islamic) system. (Cooke 2002, 469)

Within the formulation of these kinds of protectionist scenarios, gender is used to separate subjects: for example men are "the other" and women are "civilizable" (Cooke 2002, 469; Jiwani 184). In order to "save" or "liberate" (Afghan) women, they must first be "freed" and (Afghan) men must be "attacked." Such a logic does not claim that (Afghan) women need to be saved because they are more like "ours" than "theirs" but rather that they will become more "ours" through the rescuing mission (Cooke 2002, 469; Jiwani 184). She continues: "[t]he rhetoric of empire conceals race, ethnicity, and class so that gender becomes these Afghans' major defining characteristic. Politics in the era of American Empire disappears behind the veil of women's victimization" (Cooke 2002, 469). Women's victimization becomes the veil behind which politics in the era of the US's empire disappeared.

Cooke continues:

> Citizens of the civilized world have universally acknowledged a duty to save Afghan women. In the Islamic context, the negative stereotyping of the religion as inherently misogynist provides ammunition for the attack on the uncivilized brown men. Yet any thinking person knows that it is not possible for an entire population of women to be passive victims. (2002, 469)

The negative stereotyping of Islam, women who are situated as passive and without agency, and men who are characterized as inherently misogynistic all serve as ammunition for the

attack on the "uncivilized brown men" (469). This argument makes visible the problematics of situating an entire population group (Afghans) as "passive" and "uncivilized." She articulates her critique of US imperial logic through the deployment of the burqa that serves as an icon reflecting protectionist scenarios of "Third-World women" via discursive colonization. Cooke not only makes an explicit link to Spivak's powerful argument that exposes the heart of missionary rhetoric ("White men saving Brown women from Brown men") but she uses it to expose Eurocentric operations of power and false universalizations: "to defend our universal civilization we must rescue these women" (2002, 469).

A particular risk stems from this kind of discourse as Mohanty warns in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*. The production of a monolithic subject: the notion of "Third-World women." For Mohanty, the textual construction of a particular kind of cultural discourse about the Third-World is problematic because it implies a violent suppression of heterogeneous subjects (51). While terms such as First World and Third World are questionable in their oversimplification of differences and the internalization of these differences, they speak to the codification of others as non-Western, and, hence, the utterers as implicitly Western (52). They are also problematic in their suggestion of over-simplified similarities between those countries deemed First and Third-World working to reinforce existing economic, cultural, and ideological hierarchies that come into play when using such terminology. The consequences of these oversimplified similarities work to place Third-World women in a distinct category that exists apart from Western feminism, constituted outside of social relations and not through them (51-52).

Ethnocentric universality comes into play, and the legal, economic, religious, and familial structures marked as developing or underdeveloped produce an image of the "average Third World woman," which implicitly transforms her into a category which emerges through difference (56). It is this particular element of Mohanty's approach that is

productive when looking at representations of the burqa, for within her argument the discourses that are used to situate representations of burqa-clad women are structured by "Third World difference" (the paternalistic attitude that is projected towards Third-World women from the First World). The power relations that configure such differences automatically define women in burqas as religious (read: archaic), family-oriented (read: traditional), and domestic (read: backward). The repetition of such characterizations produces Third World difference that exists in "ahistorical splendour, setting in motion a colonialist discourse which exercises a very specific power in defining, coding and maintaining existing first/third world connections" (73).

When most representations of burqa-clad women imagine them as victims, threats, and/or invaders, those who do not share this viewpoint are alienated and minoritized. And this minoritization affects subjects who are not necessarily far away, in Afghanistan. As the second set of examples will show, women who wear the burqa in Europe are directly confronted with the consequences of archetypal representations. Further insight into the effects of such discourses can be found in the following section which addresses the exclusion of burqa-clad subjects in Europe.

The Burqa Ban: Two Sides of the Same Coin (Victimization and Saving)

After the events surrounding the 9/11 attacks in the United States the visibility of the burqa increased significantly in Western popular culture. Much of this coverage advocated protectionist scenarios for Afghan women in the global war on terror. With this came a series of major shifts in the political field, where mainstream politicians came to consider Islam or particular forms of it such as Islamic fundamentalism as incompatible with Western values, which were defined in terms of secularism, Judeo-Christian heritage, or both (Moors 2009,

395). At the same time populist anti-Muslim parties that considered secularism as "the way of life" rapidly propagated in Europe and North America (395). Muslim communities became the target of the increasing hostility across many countries in Europe and North America (González et al. 667).

Part of the wider cultural shift that emerged in public discourse at this time framed Islam as a threat to both secularism and national homogeneity. Easily identifiable symbols, such as the face-veil, the burqa, and the turban all materialized as privileged examples, if not the embodiment of Islam's threat to national security and the public order. Intensifying these very concerns were a series of heated debates that were especially prolific in contemporary public discourses but also in academic debates on Islam and the integration of Muslim immigrants.

With religion playing a key role in public debates, the focus on the relations between secularism and integration became significant in the deployment of culture as a way of understanding identities, nations, and the public sphere (Jansen 2013, 31). As Yolande Jansen explains, "[i]n this regard, a discourse has arisen in which secularism is often seen as a more or less defining characteristic of Western societies with a deeply rooted history in Europe" (2013, 39). Many debates concentrated on the question of when exactly do religious practices such as face-veiling transgress the boundaries of secularism (39). Political conflicts have been rebranded, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 and secularism is now invoked as a precondition to defend the rights of children, women, and sexual minorities (16). In agreement, Asad's earlier work offers a similar perspective when he discusses what is distinctive about secularism as a political doctrine. To the way that secularism is imagined, especially in relation to religious movements, that the secular is re-reinterpreted presupposing new ways of understanding concepts such as religion, ethics, and politics (2003, 1-2).

When secular and religious imagery is invoked to stir the political imagination between parties who are in conflict, (take for example those debates concerned with the wearing of headscarves or even the burqa in public spaces) concerns of cultural diversity in the public sphere are reinvigorated. The burqa debate, asks us to take a position. We cannot opt out of it as we are all produced as subjects through politics and language.

For example, in June of 2009, Sarkozy denounced the burqa in his address to both houses of the French Parliament (*Congrès*) stating that it is "a sign of subjugation [and] of debasement" that is "not welcome on French territory" (qtd. in Joppke and Torpey 21). A day later a parliamentary commission was formed, led by André Gerin of the Communist Party to "review the practice of wearing the burqa and the niqab by certain Muslim women…on the national territory," with the goal to "better understand the problem and to find ways to fight against this affront to individual liberties" (21). Colloquially known as the "Burqa Commission" the commission would not recommend a "general and absolute prohibition of the integral veil in public space," overruling decisions made by the National Assembly (2010) and France's highest administrative court that advises the executive on legal matters, the *Conseil d'Etat* (July 2010) (Balibar 353). They echoed a strain of earlier sentiment that permeated legislation from 1989 that banned the headscarf (the "*foulard* affair") and later "ostentatious religious symbols" (*signes religieux ostensibles*) from French public schools in 2004[9] (Joppke and Torpey 23). The law does not make explicit references to the headscarf, it instead refers to clothing which "conspicuously manifest(s) a religious affiliation" but this has been largely perceived as a law that targets the headscarf (qtd. in Westerfield 640). The "burqa ban" would follow a few years later and it was the culmination of a heated debate that

[9] The committee chaired by Bernard Stasi, Mediator of the Republic advised the French government to ban "conspicuous religion symbols" from French public schools in 2003 (Ruitenberg 17-18; Terray 121). The French Code of Education would quickly be amended and a prohibition against "signs or dress that obviously manifest religious belonging" in public schools came into effect in September of 2004 (Ruitenberg 17-18). An overview of these bans can be found in Terray 2004; Scott 2005, 2007; Bowen 2006; Akan 2008; Ruitenberg 2002; Jansen 2011; Joppke and Torpey 2013).

raged through the country, dominating the media for months supported by louder cries to protect the principles of French secularism (*laïcité*) (640).[10]

The battle cry to protect secularism quickly captured the attention of France's citizens, politicians, and law-makers (Scott 2007, 40; Bowen 243). Anti-burqa fervor would soon pick up speed in neighboring countries, for example in Belgium and the Netherlands proposing laws that would also ban the burqa. They are some of the most restrictive legislations against Islam in "the West." A brief survey of headlines taken from international newspapers such as *The Guardian, The Telegraph,* and *TIME* magazine illustrate the way in which they reported on these events. In "Challenge to Burqa Ban as First Women Prosecuted in Belgium" *The Guardian* reported that in both Belgium and France women were being fined for wearing niqabs (which cover most of the face while leaving the area around the eyes exposed) or burqas while in public spaces. Bruno Waterfield in his article for *The Telegraph* "Netherlands to Ban the Burqa," reported that women who were caught in burqas while in public spaces, including on public transport, in government buildings, in schools, and hospitals would be fined. Similarly, Italy followed suit and proposed a law banning women from covering their face in public, specifying the burqa which was outlined by Stephan Faris for *TIME* "In the Burqa Ban, Italy's Left and Right Find Something to Agree On." Each of these headlines highlights the illegality of the burqa within the public sphere, resignifying the garment, moving from religion to politics. The political discourses that work to destabilize the burqa as a religious garment bring to the fore problems for immigrants. Indeed many

[10] The French concept of *laïcité*, or secularism, has been widely discussed especially in relation to the headscarf debate with a focus on the "definition of limits: limits to acceptable ideological conflict, based on a certain institution or consensus or of "civil peace," and limits to the translation of religious beliefs into political positions, based on a certain institution of "truth" (Balibar 356). The principle of *laïcité* has played a role in the Burqa Commission. The National Assembly (Assemblée Nationale) in 2009 presented the garment as a threat to national unity "If laïcité is threatened, French society is threatened in its unity and in its capacity to offer a common destiny" (qtd. in Joppke and Torpey 29). This alarming battle call to protect *laïcité* has been used to not only restrict visible signs of cultural and religious difference from the public sphere but it also politicized these symbols. The burqa for example moved from being a religious symbol into a political one, that was not solely limited to Islam (29). Here, the enveloping cloth became a symbol of what the French state sought to fight against.

religious symbols also found themselves tied to these heated debates about protecting secularism or the values of the host nation which are under attack by foreigners. One of the most divisive examples of this, in terms of the scapegoating of religious and ethnic minorities, can be found in Switzerland which supported a ban on the construction of minarets on November 29 2009 in the electorate vote (referendum). Organized by the Swiss People's Party and the Federal Democratic Union. 57.5% of Swiss voters supported a ban that targeted European Muslims and their symbols of faith (Ramadan 2009; Lentin and Titley 123). At the time of the referendum, four minarets existed in the country and environmental legislation banned them from broadcasting a call to prayer. The YES vote was a surprise to many, damaging Switzerland's image as a peaceful, multicultural country whose principle of direct democracy was in conflict with its obligations under international law (Lentin and Titley 123).

Nilüfer Gõle in her article "Mute symbols of Islam" noted that "the debate on the minarets in particular and the visibility of Islam in general, generate transnational dynamics and assemblage of disparate elements" (qtd. in Lentin and Titley 123). This point is illustrated in a SVP poster that was present throughout the country, banned in Basel and Lausanne (see fig. 4) that portrayed a woman in a burqa foregrounded against a Swiss flag that was surrounded by minarets that resembled missiles (123). With highly stylized eye-catching graphics, bold colors, and powerful text the poster campaign drew much attention from not only the Swiss electorate but also much of the world. Returning to Gõle's excerpt, the idea of transnational assemblages (with symbols of Islam such as burqas and minarets) find themselves weaving in and out of public debates with reference to narratives of crisis (124). For Lentin and Titley the minaret debate serves as a heuristic device for the "mediation of multicultural crisis" as a way of making fast connections between media realities and "a crisis politics organized and narrated through symbolic events" (124).

While I agree with many arguments made in *The Crises of Multiculturalism*, this particular point is not one of them, as I do not believe the burqa debate reflects the failings of multiculturalism. Rather, it illustrates the desire of governments to pass off assimilationist policies as emblems of integration, under the auspices of liberalism. Vast differences exist in the inner workings of assimilationist and integrationist programs and policies within governmental levels. Yet, when returning to fig. 4 (the SVP Poster for the 2009 referendum) my interest is driven by the positioning of burqa-clad figures used to divisively mobilize public sentiment against Muslim citizens and migrants in the "West." As an exclusionary symbol, the burqa (and other full-face veils) have been wielded as indicative of what many countries in Western Europe, Canada, and the United States want to fight against (Joppke and Torpey 21-22). The burqa functions as a symbolic boundary that highlights the limits of secular liberal states, that have deployed it as the icon they have chosen to fight against.

Fig. 4. SVP Poster for the 2009 Referendum.

Through the fine-tunings of this politicized and abject subject, we as citizens or subjects, are interpellated and a response is demanded from us - to say "yes" or "no." The prescribed limits are outlined in the power and affect of interpretations of the burqa that have been driven by a legacy of Orientalist works that sadly still resonate in the present day.

In *Legal Integration of Islam* Joppke and Torpey offer a valuable contribution to the discussion of these very elements specifically of the legal system in the post-nation state and the conflicts surrounding religious claims by Muslim ethnic and immigrant groups (2013, 1-2). In this text, they explore institutional responses to Islam in major Western countries and the foregrounding function liberalism plays in this process (1). Islam and Muslims play a key part in the debates on secularism, liberalism. The authors, re-read "state neutrality" as playing a role in Western states moves against their Muslim citizens. Of specific interest to this thesis is their discussion of the French Burqa Ban (2010) where they deconstruct the argument about the institutionalization of Islam in France, the ban itself, and the flawed legal bases for the ban.[11]

Reading the Burqa: From the Imagined to the Symbolic

Moving from a discussion of the laws that work to restrict the burqa back to reading the symbolic we can now return to concerns of political mobilization that lie in the midst of the burqa ban. There are many explanations for the political mobilization against the burqa that reveal entanglements that are focused on religious and cultural customs as opposed to issues of global interconnectedness steeped in socio-political/socio-historical concerns (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784).

A reading complicit with these artificial distinctions reinforces simple binary forms of identification, such as West-East, secular-religious, modern-traditional, or citizen-foreigner. In light of these characterizations and the polarizing debates that exist in many different places in the public sphere, the burqa has emerged as a generic signifier that not only singles out Islamic fundamentalism but also the Muslim woman as other, framing Islam as morally

[11] Note: on July 1, 2014 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) controversially upheld the French governments ban on full-face coverings and the burqa.

inferior, irrational, backwards, and barbaric (Moallem 8). Competing visions of women within this framing brings familiar heroics with new heroes. Abu-Lughod points out, for example, that First Lady Mrs. Bush was idealized as strong and with a voice, while Afghan women were portrayed as victimized and voiceless (2002, 784). Annelies Moors expands on Abu-Lughod's point when she explains that the term burqa "evokes an imaginary of the Taliban regime, which has not only come to be seen as the most repressive for women ever, but […] has also become the visual symbol of women's oppression par excellence" (2009, 402). These familiar tropes have been recycled time and again in popular culture and what they reveal is how these kinds of representations have shifted from being "objective problems to subjectively experienced feelings of fear, anxiety and discomfort. The fact that face-veiling produces such feelings is again linked to Islam, as the repeated references to radical and violent Islam indicate" (Moors 2009, 407). The politics of discomfort that emerges in representations of women in burqas becomes clearer when these tropes are contextualized and deconstructed.

To explain the problems associated with the burqa I critically evaluate essentialist and static visions of the woman under the garment, cultural difference, and the politics of immigrant integration while also highlighting the links between them. I further use my case studies, unraveled over 4 separate chapters to illustrate the problematics that emerge from such a reading, because these positions as alternative formulations to multiculturalism not only penalize the immigrant groups they are used to speak for but also because they lead to nationalist and Eurocentric conceptions of citizenship. Finally, I address the contours of these debates, working through a series of examples that illustrate these complex concepts and the problems associated with them.

In this thesis, I redeploy the shards of these discursive engagements as entry points for an analysis of representations of the burqa. I scrutinize contemporary discourses on these

concepts, but I have also made use of a variety of sources and methods including critical discourse analysis and semiotics. I have close read a number of objects such as news articles, political talks, conceptual art, theatre, politics, television, sculpture, photography, and literature to shed light on these complex dynamics. To a certain degree, what motivates this research project is the excess of meaning that works to characterize the burqa linguistically, visually, socio-culturally, and also politically. My aim is to find out, what these examples tell us about the burqa as a cultural object, cultural artifact, and what this reveals about the garment's potential to produce anxieties and fears in Western viewers.

Theoretical Framework: Looking at Burqas

This section maps out the broader theoretical framework that I have used to analyze representations of women wearing a burqa. A close reading of these case studies sheds light on the sociopolitical conditions that make these images/texts meaningful. Even if we are aware that we often encounter stereotypical representations that depict Islam as "barbaric" and "backwards," we sometimes forget in which ways they are not self-evident. For example, we think we all know that the burqa signifies discrimination and some sort of suffering. Yet we disagree about who is doing what to whom, who is suffering and why. This thesis proposes to examine what exactly happens when various types of representations of the burqa *smuggle* a message about our way to think about the burqa. As the following chapters show, this message is either overt or explicit, either self-reflexive or ironically self-contradictory.

What are the objects that constitute my canon and which I propose to close read? In this thesis, I examine newspaper articles, political talks, theatre, satire, photography, sculpture, and film where the burqa is framed in a specific way. I especially investigate those representations that are pervasive in "Western" contemporary cultures so that they can be

"interrogated." In order to do so, I begin by probing what has been said about burqas in visual and literary representations. I then look at such discourses and how they produce supposedly common knowledge about the burqa.

In the preceding sections, I sketched the relevance of post-colonial theory and intersectionality, that were sutured together by one overarching interdisciplinary method: cultural analysis. I propose to analyze very specific objects that show how discourses on Islam, women, and the burqa manifest themselves. I have relied on theorists whose voices have contributed to a better understanding of the historical production of knowledge about the Islamic "other" and the "problem" of the burqa. For example, I read two intertexutal or palimpsestic images of the "Afghan Girl" (see fig. 1 and fig. 3) and highlight the staging of a "before" and "after" that allows me work at the intersection between various disciplines (visual studies, cultural studies, media studies and post-colonial theory) in my analysis of the discourses on Afghan women and the burqa. A close reading of these objects is important as I wanted to perform my critique of generalizations and stereotypes by stressing the vastly different contexts of meaningfulness in which one may encounter the burqa. My investigation of such images enables me to implicitly celebrate what, in certain images, critique such generalizations and stereotypes.

In *Reporting Islam: Media Representations and British Muslims*, Elizabeth Poole suggests that mass media has become "the primary focus of attention" and are perceived as superseding other institutions within the cultural production of knowledge about the burqa (and, by proxy, about Islam) (41). Inspired by Poole's concerns and the representational challenges associated with Western representations of the burqa, I look at discourses that work to reinforce familiar scapegoatings of Islam and Muslims as "barbaric," "backward," and "oppressed." In this thesis I seek to discover what specific forms this phenomena takes today. I ask *how exactly* do Muslim women's bodies find themselves positioned within the

geopolitical stage? The objects I chose confirm the persistence of stereotypical views but they also critique such assignations and let us imagine other representations. In each of the chapters I look at objects that force us to reconsider our visions and stories about the burqa. I have selected objects that show when and how some representations of the burqa reinforce, resist, or critique such stereotypes.

Research Questions

How can we recognize, denounce and resist the way in which the burqa is traditionally represented in "the West" (Canada, The United States, and Western Europe)? Each of the chapters tackles one specific aspect of this general question that is reformulated around specific case studies.

1. How has it become possible to reduce the burqa to Afghan women during the Taliban regime, Afghan women to the burqa, and these women as abject? And can we do so while still speaking from a feminist perspective that aims at liberating all women for the possible contamination of the burqa? (Chapter two)
2. To what extent can we recognize the burqa as that which signifies the ambivalence of the victim/perpetrator dyad when it comes to discourses on female oppression? (Chapter three)
3. What happens when the burqa and the Western nation meet, or more accurately, when an artist tries to represent an encounter between national flags and burqas, two icons that hegemonic discourses normally treat as incompatible and mutually exclusive? (Chapter four)
4. How has the burqa been wielded as an icon indicative of that which Western societies must fight against? (Chapter five)

Methodology

To answer these questions, this thesis analyzes the way in which various discourses produce knowledge about the burqa. I am interested in analyzing objects that depict women in burqas within contemporary "Western" cultures (Western Europe, the United States, and Canada). A reading of these case studies (objects gleaned from contemporary culture such as newspaper articles, political talks, theatre, satire, photography, sculpture, film, etc.) sheds light on the sociopolitical conditions that make these representations meaningful. In order to unravel such meanings from a variety of cultural objects this thesis relies upon a combination of intersectional theory and post-colonial theory. It also employs a combination of methods taken from cultural analysis and cultural studies to work through the "signifying practices" that are related to the production of knowledge about the burqa in "the West," and the constitution of the subject (Culler 42). Within this project, I seek to understand how the burqa functions as a cultural object and as a discursive practice within contemporary culture. In principle, this project then combines the methods of discourse analysis (the way in which visual and literary narratives are analyzed) and the political project of cultural studies. Key to this is my use of the discursive approach when analyzing representations of the burqa.

Here I take my cue from what Foucault has famously called the power/knowledge nexus, the ways in which power affects what counts as knowledge. In everyday practices, hegemonic or dissident discourses make the burqa visible or invisible, familiar or foreign. I do not understand "discourse" as referring only to writing or speech. In the *Archaeology of* Foucault explains that discourses are "as groups of signs but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1969, 49). Grounded in language, disseminated via language, they also encompass a wide range of social practices. Precious here is Foucault's notion that discourses exist through exclusion, ideas of what are "sayable," "knowable," and "thinkable" about a particular topic in a particular period of time (*episteme*). Discourse

produces forms of knowledge through objects, languages, subjects and practices of knowledge but also through social practices; as a way of defining and producing the objects of our knowledge (Hall 1997, 44).

And to the extent that "discourse" organizes what even counts as representable or not, I have had to rely on the resources offered by narratology, which enables me to look at the ways stories try to circumvent or reinforce existing tenets and stereotypes. Bal explains "[n]arratology is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural artifacts that 'tell a story.' Such a theory helps us to understand, analyse, and evaluate narratives" (1985, 3). As a productive model of analysis for understanding the poetics of narrative, narrative structure, different kinds of narrators, or how narrative techniques are useful for understanding how descriptive texts such as Eve Ensler's "Under the Burqa" from *The Vagina Monologues* (Chapter two) function. Narratology is thus an instrument that can be used to address how communicative figures such as narrators and focalizers can be assumed in relation to receivers or spectators in how they interpret, narrative texts (Bal 1985, 4). As tools, they are helpful in formulating interpretive descriptions in ways that are accessible to others such as readers by breaking down abstract narrative systems.

Chapter 2 Heroic Victims: Analyzing Eve Ensler's "Under the Burqa"

"Under the Burqa" *The Vagina Monologues*

In 2000, Eve Ensler traveled to Afghanistan. There, she witnessed firsthand what misogyny would look like if it were to totally fulfill itself. Under the Taliban, women were essentially living the lives of walking corpses. This monologue is for the brave, tender, fierce women of Afghanistan, who not only survived, but kept their country alive. The piece is not about the Burqa per se. Wearing one is obviously a matter of culture and choice. It is about a time and place when women had no choice.

imagine a huge dark piece of cloth
hung over your entire body
like you were a shameful statue
imagine there's only a drop of light
enough to know there is still daylight for others
imagine it's hot, very hot
imagine you are being encased in cloth,
drowning in fabric, in darkness.
imagine you are begging in this bedspread
reaching out your hand inside the cloth
which must remained covered, unpolished,
unseen
or they might smash it or cut it off
imagine no one is putting rupees in your
invisible hand
because no one can see your face
so you do not exist
imagine you cannot find your children
because they came for your husband
the only man you ever loved
even though it was an arranged marriage
because they came and shot him with the gun of
his they could not find
and you tried to defend him and they trampled
you
four men on your back
in front of your screaming children
imagine you went mad
but you did not know you were mad
because you were living under a bedspread
and you hadn't seen the sun in years
and you lost your way
and you remembered your two daughters vaguely
like a dream the way you remembered sky.

imagine muttering as a way of talking
because words did not form in the darkness
and you did not cry because it got too
hot and wet in there.
imagine bearded men that you could only
decipher by their smell
checking your socks and beating you
because they were white
imagine being flogged
beaten in the streets
in front of people you could not see
imagine being humiliated so deeply
that there was no face attached to it
and no air. It got darker there
imagine no peripheral vision
so like a wounded animal
you could not defend yourself
or even duck from the sideward blows
imagine that laughter was banned
throughout your country and music
and the only sounds you heard
were the muffled sounds of the azun
or the cries of other women flogged
inside their cloth, inside their dark.

imagine you could no longer distinguish between
living and dying
so you stopped trying to kill yourself
because it would be redundant
imagine you had no place to live
your roof was the cloth
as you wandered the streets
and this tomb
was getting small and smellier every day
you were beginning to walk into things
imagine suffocating while you were still
breathing
imagine muttering and screaming
inside a cage and no one is hearing.

imagine me inside the inside
of the darkness in you
i am caught there
i am lost there
inside the cloth
which is your head
inside the dark we share
imagine you can see me
i was beautiful once
big dark eyes
you would know me. (Ensler 135-136)

Introduction

In 1997, the Obie Award[12] winning American playwright Eve Ensler skyrocketed to fame with the production of her critically acclaimed off-Broadway one-woman show *The Vagina Monologues*. *The Vagina Monologues* (*TVM*)[13] is a series of first-person narratives in which women reminisce about their bodies, sexuality, and relationships. The monologues are marked by intimate stories of vulnerability and sexual self-discovery (Cooper 727; Nguyen 371).[14] *TVM* is framed as a recounting of women's most private experiences turned into poetry that offers an emancipatory political and feminist ethos "we must hear each other's stories to understand each other, that understanding thus fueling anger, compassion, and a sense of shared mission to foster change for the better in our lives and the world" (Cooper 728). This mission, to promote change in the world highlights the political imperatives of *TVM* foregrounding global feminism, sexual politics, and activism as driving elements of the play (728).

The genesis of *TVM* have been well publicized, in a conversation with a friend who was going through menopause, Ensler recalls that her friend had "made remarks full of contempt about her own vagina. Shocked and intrigued at such a strong response, Ensler began asking other women she knew how they viewed their own vaginas" (qtd. in Scott 405). The monologues are vignettes; or, as Ensler puts it, "Some of the monologues are close to verbatim interviews, some are composite interviews, and with some I just began with the

[12] The New York newspaper *The Village Voice* annually celebrates distinguished performances by actors and ensemble casts (honoring achievement) in Off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway productions with the Obie Awards.
[13] In 1998 *The Vagina Monologues* were published as a book.
[14] Ensler not only wrote but also began performing *The Vagina Monologues* in 1996 in New York City's "Here" theatre in Soho to popular acclaim. The show itself was a simple production, directed by the Tony nominated Joe Mantello. The performance consisted of Ensler, barefoot in a simple black gown, seated on a stool, with note cards in hand, speaking into a microphone, and adopting different character voices for the monologues (Scott 405). Since its initial performances in this tiny theatre in downtown New York, the monologues have been produced in over 140 countries and translated into multiple languages (Aitkenhead).

seed of an interview and had a goodtime" (8). Audiences encounter a wide range of voices in *TVM* distinguished by race, class, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and religion reflecting the hundreds of interviews she conducted with women prior to writing her one-woman show. While the tenor of *TVM* echoes the "consciousness-raising" practices, the sharing and analyzing of group experiences - a way of understanding the women's condition that is typical of - second-wave feminists, it is still relevant today as it addresses concerns of social justice (Cooper 727-728).

Empowerment through the body is unequivocally second-wave, where sexuality is wielded as an indicator of autonomy and it is Ensler's mobilization of the body that locates the *TVM* within this era (Lewis 2001, 39). The political agenda that grew out of 1970s feminism moves away from considerations of social transformation - economic and antiracial - towards what Ellen Willis in "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism" dubbed the "cult of the individual liberated woman" (93). With individuality and liberalism emerging as driving forces in early 1970s feminism, the oppression of women became privileged above all else, the focus was on changing lived experiences, employing strategies of what Willis has dubbed "individual and collective self-improvement" (108). The strategic positioning of the individual within the confines of this specific strain of Western feminist liberalism proved to be exclusionary and plagued a great many who were invested in gender politics (Cooper 734; Willis 1984, 108). With the body emerging as a site of politics, where power is claimed and tied to personhood, concerns of the social and the political became transformed and subsequently the body was deployed as a site of "revolutionary activities" (Fuss 101).

Diana Fuss in her book *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* highlights the importance of social and political transformation where the body emerges as a revolutionary activity in its own right (101-102). A similar tactic is at work in *TVM* where the body (vaginas) are privileged over everything else. Scott explains that it is Ensler's concern

with the vagina and her desire to disrupt the taboos that surround women's bodies (menstruation, masturbation, sexual abuse, and the display on stage of naked bodies) that situates her play within the reformist legacy of second-wave feminism (2003, 418). Consequently many may hail *TVM* as a feminist battle cry for purging negative attitudes women have about their bodies, sexuality, and of the violence that surrounds them.

The frankness, humor, controversy, and anger - that is, the many voices - that constitute *TVM* offer the millions who have seen it a sense of empowerment. The play has been an intensely popular theatrical performance and has also played a key role within feminist discourses, perhaps, as Christine Cooper in her article "Worrying about Vaginas: Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues" of the same year observes, because it arrived "at a juncture in the history of feminism" threatened by "the so-called postfeminism of younger generations of women" (730-31). Critics such as Cheng, Cooper, Chasin, Friedenfels, Scott, and Hall have all criticized Ensler's one woman performance and its collaboration with V-Day[15] activities for being too easy a vision, one which is a "media spectacle of gender politics fit to answer… a liberal, humanist feminism fashionably dressed, easy on the eyes and mind, and one that ruffles just enough but not too many feathers" (Cooper 731).

Cooper's critique echoes that of her counterpart Alexandra Chasin whose analysis of *TVM* is aimed at "ideas - the ones I think harmful - and the practices that militate towards their institutionalization" (qtd. in Cooper 731). These critiques inform my consideration of

[15] In 1997 Ensler met with a collective of activist women, and together they formed the V-Day collective. On February 14, 1998, on Valentines Day the first V-Day performance was born with celebrities such as Whoopi Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey, Lily Tomlin, Margaret Cho, Gloria Steinem, Susan Sarandon, Glenn Close and others performing the monologues, raising over $100,000 to launch the V-Day movement. In the years since, V-Day performances have run well into the tens of thousands and have raised millions of dollars for local groups working to stop violence against women. The V-Day Fund not only supports American grassroots organizations but also others worldwide. Relevant to this Chapter is the link V-Day had with RAWA, Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, a group that actively works to support women and fight against oppression. Well known in the West for leaking videos that documented human rights abuses by the Taliban against the local population, RAWA actively works to promote equality, education, and health care in Afghanistan. RAWA's high profile authority is due to a close connection with the Feminist Majority Foundation, who concentrates most of its attention on US specific issues but is becoming involved in global outreach projects (McLaughlin 202; Hunt 116-117).

how some bodies (burqas) are materialized in one particular monologue taken from Ensler's V-Day performance of her play ("Under the Burqa"). Through the production of knowledge and meaning in discourse about the burqa, the *TVM* delivers not only an artistic message but also a political one to educate the audience (Nguyen 371). As a form of theatrical spectacle (activities such as drama, performance art, dance, and mime) that place bodies in action before an audience, through which the theatre emerges as a tool for social change, the monologues are situated between the realms of art and politics (Rancière 3).

In *The Emancipated Spectator* the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, reconsiders the political implications of theatrical spectacle. For him, the theatre as a form of the aesthetic constitution - the sensible constitution of the community - is situated between the paradigms of art and politics (6). Spectators are offered a medium through which they can reflect upon modes of representation and politics; the stage works to transform dialogue (the monologues) to art (theatre) but it does something else: it also emphasizes the grand narratives[16] that bring them together (3-4). Theatrical narratives bring actors and spectators together through the creative process, at times reflecting upon political and historical events under an artistic pretext. If the theatre serves as a conveyor of aesthetic practices as well as ideological information then discourses can be inscribed onto both subjects and objects (101). It is within this context that Eve Ensler in *TVM* brings not only entertainment to her audience but also an emancipatory political message.

The theory of conveyance I take from Rancière (how meaning is conveyed in theatre, as well as the social impact of the meanings that are conveyed) resonates with a monologue

[16] The term grand narrative refers to those discourses that offer an explanatory framework such as Marxism or the Enlightenment to provide a teleological explanation for everything as a form of story-telling within a legitimizing philosophy (Bennett and Royle 282). For example such narratives often move towards equality and justice: after injustice, unreason etc (282). Notable writers on grand narratives are Jean-Francois Lyotard who introduced the terms grand narrative and master narrative in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

taken from the V-Day performance of *TVM*, "Under the Burqa."[17] In this chapter I maintain that in "Under the Burqa," the emancipatory feminist ethos that ostensibly lies at the heart of the monologues is jeopardized through a blatant "othering" of Afghan women. In the performance, Ensler tells a story about the lives of Afghan women during the Taliban regime. Throughout the monologue, she invokes notions of death, misery, and great personal tragedy, which are all symbolized by the burqa.

In order to answer these questions this chapter looks at the imagery used by Ensler and consequently that which is replicated by the spectator through the theory of narratology. Narratology, the theory and study (practice) of textual analysis (narrative and narrative structure) is helpful because it allows for an investigation into the use of voice, mood, and language (Bal 1985, 4). It also offers an elaboration on how texts and their references function, serving as a methodological framework where the cultural and political significance of representation (symbolism) and its meeting with politics on a linguistic level - point to how texts can be critically engaged (4). The production of knowledge and the symbolism that emerges from "Under the Burqa" exemplifies critiques made by "Third-World women" about the pervasiveness of common identities and collective histories that characterize feminist commentaries of the subaltern (Mohanty 1991, 51; Cooke 2000, 91; Scott 2003, 404; Puar 2007, 6). When referring to the process of "othering" "Third-World women" I am interested in the feminized passivity of women who are constructed as helpless victims. This very point is reinforced by what Tomlinson refers to as "a whole history of global dominance - of imperialism and colonialism" ignoring Third World feminisms as well as the social,

[17] "Under the Burqa" is part of the 2002 V-Day Spotlight on Afghan Women that was launched to draw attention to the experiences of women under the Taliban at that time. The Spotlight campaign, "Afghanistan Is Everywhere" focused on Afghan women and sought to unite women worldwide by highlighting the similarities between their experiences and women and girls in other spots in the world (V-Day). In excess of $250,000 was raised to open schools and orphanages in Afghanistan and to provide education and healthcare (V-Day). Part of this transnational campaign was tied to the Feminist Majority selling burqa swatches in 2001, with the tag line "Wear it in remembrance – so that we do not forget the women and girls of Afghanistan until their right to work, freedom of movement, education, and healthcare are restored and they are freed again" (qtd. in McLaughlin 204).

economic, and historical contexts in which these feminisms have developed (28). Afghan women are recognizable within this discourse as variations of what Mohanty calls the "average third world woman" who "leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender" (read: constrained) and her being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, tradition-bound, victimized, family oriented etc.) (qtd. in Tomlinson 56).

The tensions found within *TVM* highlight the staging and restaging of authoritative discourses, which surround Afghan women and the imagery associated with the burqa as a cultural object (Kattwinkel 254; Puar 2007, 6). In "Under the Burqa" Ensler creates forms of alterity that embody the women she speaks for, reinforcing what Mohanty terms "Third World difference" (53). In agreement, Amos and Parmar explain that the kind of feminism invoked in the monologue:

> [focuses] exclusively on the gender-based oppression of third world women and does so without acknowledging the role of racism, colonialism, and economic exploitation; it claims solidarity with Third World women and women of color, but in actuality contributes to the stereotyping of Third World cultures as "barbaric" and "uncivilized," which then justifies imperialist intervention. (qtd. in Russo 558)

In this excerpt, Amos and Parmar raise several significant points that are relevant in a critical examination of Ensler's monologue and her use of tropes that work to participate in what Caren Kaplan deems the reobjectificaiton of the "gendered subaltern subject" (143). Simply stated, such tropes work to not only reinforce the concept of "Third World difference" but also as Kaplan notes, the "apparently progressive gender politics articulated through liberal discourses of equality and self-empowerment may participate in the reobjectification of the gendered subaltern subject" (qtd. in Nguyen 372). As Tomlinson, Mohanty and Kaplan suggest rhetoric of moral superiority and imperialism is brought to life in the construction of "Third World women." In this context they serve as a counter model of white American and/or European women that are proposed as models of liberated womanhood contrasted

against “Third World women” (Russo 575; Nguyen 372; Butler 2004, 143; Mahmood 2005, 22).

Taking my cue from Cooper, I seek to discover how the paradoxical nature of the performed monologue and the vision Ensler, as the playwright, creates for her spectator breaks with the grand narratives that support not only the feminist ethos but also the emancipatory vision that lies at the heart of her project. In this chapter I wonder how has it become possible to reduce the burqa to Afghan women during the Taliban regime, Afghan women to the burqa, and these women as abject. And can we do so while still speaking from a feminist perspective that aims at liberating all women for the possible contamination of the burqa?

Under the Frames: Title and Prelude

The problematic representation of Afghan women in *TVM* begins with the title: “Under the Burqa.” The title not only foreshadow's the monologue’s framing, allowing the spectator to imagine what it must be like to be under the cloth but it also introduces the figure/concept of the burqa to the audience. The title does many things, it indicates an exposing, uncovering and unveiling gesture, one that invites both emancipatory struggles as well as stark pedagogic conclusions. When we look at the title, it becomes evident where the story will go: to the world of oppressed Afghan woman. A short prelude further frames the start of the monologue:

> In 2000, Eve Ensler traveled to Afghanistan. There, she witnessed firsthand what misogyny would look like if it were to totally fulfill itself. Under the Taliban, women were essentially living the lives of walking corpses. This monologue is for the brave, tender, fierce women of Afghanistan, who not only survived, but kept their country alive. The piece is not about the Burqa per se. Wearing one is obviously a matter of culture and choice. It is about a time and place when women had no choice. (Ensler 135)

The prelude to "Under the Burqa" presents the monologue as a factual, ethnographic account that will materialize itself in the forthcoming text. The prelude is framed in a way that forces the spectator to accept this narrative as truth. Further, it depicts an exoticized, phallocratic vision of what life was like for Afghan women during this time offering a descriptive narrative of the ills of Islamic fundamentalism and the miseries of civil war symbolized by the burqa per se (Jiwani 180-181).

Paraphrasing Bal, narratology is a theory which accounts for the functions and positioning of texts in different backgrounds, genres, and historical periods (1985, 4). From a narratological perspective, what Ensler has done by locating the text in a certain time and place is to emphasize context. The prelude locates the monologue both temporally and spatially offering a glimpse into the life of women of Afghanistan who lived in "a time and place when women had no choice" (Ensler 135).

The foregrounding of the monologue that follows as a journalistic (factual) artifact, or (ethnographic) account of life in Afghanistan during the height of the Taliban (1996-2001) provides Ensler with a way of transforming the spectator's perspective, and of authoritatively speaking on behalf of Afghan women (Jiwani 181).

What is silent in these opening lines is any awareness of the greater political, religious, and economic climate to which Ensler refers. Specifically, an awareness of the five years of civil war that ravaged Afghanistan as well as the rise of an oppressive, armed Islamic fundamentalist militia is necessary in order to understand the greater frames of reference that work to locate the monologue. In addition, it is important to note that the government in question, the Taliban regime, had been out of power for more than two years at the time of monologue's first production in 2003.

The prelude also works to illustrate the way in which the forthcoming address will be delivered, highlighting the sequence of events that will unfold, and the way in which these

events will be presented - they all serve as frames of reference for spectators. The authority invested in the prelude works to establish a series of rules for the spectator, Ensler's speaking voice structuring the text and building upon her power as a narrator. Textual elements work to assign meaning and without an understanding of the greater cultural/political frames of reference that are evoked; the spectator cannot interpret the significations embedded within such representations.

Meaning may not be permanently fixed to an object such as the burqa, but it may conceptually shift. Returning to the prelude, the burqa becomes a signifier for the "…brave, tender, fierce women of Afghanistan, who not only survived, but kept their country alive" (Ensler 135). Notably, the final line delivers further information to the spectator where they learn about the characters (women), country (Afghanistan), and relationship of this to the forthcoming text. Through the prelude, the narrator is established as the authoritative voice of the text, delivering and contextualizing the monologue even further. By establishing her speaking voice and her power over the spectator Ensler establishes ground rules for the monologue and sets up the ways in which her knowledge of Afghanistan will be delivered. How Ensler delivers her knowledge about Afghan women and burqas in the monologue is essential to those whose representations are created and how they unfold. Accordingly, the following section will analyze the monologue in depth to see how Afghan women are represented as "the other" and will demonstrate how essentializing, reductionist, binary practices are caught up in hegemonic plays of power.

Text Body: "Under the Burqa"

After the short prelude, the monologue "Under the Burqa" begins in a reflective mode, and the first line addresses the spectator where they are called to "imagine." The first passage reads:

imagine a huge dark piece of cloth
hung over your entire body
like you were a shameful statue
imagine there's only a drop of light
enough to know there is still daylight for others
imagine it's hot, very hot
imagine you are being encased in cloth,
drowning in fabric, in darkness.
imagine you are begging in this bedspread
reaching out your hand inside the cloth
which must remain covered, unpolished, unseen
or they might smash it or cut it off
imagine no one is putting rupees in your invisible hand
because no one can see your face
so you do not exist. (Ensler 135)

By instructing the spectator to "imagine," the spectator encounters a foundational problem in the monologue itself: what I call the paradox of the imagination. The paradox of the imagination can be defined by two elements. First, by asking the spectator to "imagine," Ensler is commanding the spectator to engage in a voluntary process of imagination. Yet, the point of one "imagining" implies that the process is both experienced by the individual and also that they "imagine" in their own time. By commanding the spectator to "imagine" the act is redundant, as she is demanding that the spectator envisions the imagery that comprises her text. Second, through Ensler's prelude the spectator is given the impression that she is empathizing with the women of Afghanistan. But by demanding that the spectator "imagines" upon command in combination with the imagery that is used in the text any form of empathy is removed. The imagination is then demoted to a far off place where the spectator cannot remain neutral; instead they are to envision the narrative as the focalizer demands and not through their own volition. "Imagine" then serves as a sign that they, the spectators, are to envision both the text and themselves through the eyes of the narrator.

A return to the following lines of the monologue further illustrates her vision of Afghan women who are characterized as lifeless, deprived, and invisible. The alienation of the spectator becomes immediately visible:

> imagine a huge dark piece of cloth
> hung over your entire body
> like you were a shameful statue. (Ensler 135)

These opening lines demand that the spectator imagines that a large piece of dark cloth is encasing their body like a shameful statue. We, as spectators become aware of the codes offered to us; for example, the third line tells us that we need the word "statue" and this is used in order to perform "lifelessness." If spectators interpret the text as instructed, they are to see from the narrator's point of view that the cloth is hung over their entire body. The cloth then serves to transform the spectator from being a focalizer of the text (the subject of focalization, or the holder of the point of view) to being the object of the text, a statue. The all-encompassing cloth then serves to transform the spectator by removing all forms of life and positive action. Through such a narrative technique, the spectator then sees him- or herself through his or her own eyes, and through the eyes of the narrator as a character recounting her text as real. As spectators we are positioned within the story, turning into the nameless woman under the burqa.

The monologue continues by conveying sensory and tactile information, relaying how the audience ought to situate themselves within and towards the burqa in question. The next lines of the monologue tell the spectator that all that they can see under this cloth is "only a drop of light." This "drop of light" is to remind the woman who is covered by the burqa that there are others who are not living in darkness:

> imagine there's only a drop of light
> enough to know there is still daylight for others (Ensler 135)

Darkness serves to transform the body engulfed by the fabric; light represents the freedom of those who are not oppressed. The next line commands the spectator to again "imagine" the woman under the burqa: "drowning in fabric, in darkness" (Ensler 135).

Ensler's text takes the spectator to a place where all forms of identity are erased by textiles. The cloth that encases the body deprives the wearer of her humanity (she becomes statuesque and lifeless). Light and darkness become metaphors of life and death when the cloth engulfs the life of the wearer. The monologue's theme and central object - the burqa - condenses corresponding sub-themes of the greater subject: lifelessness, loss of identity, and death. Next, the spectator is commanded again to "imagine" what it is like to reach out of the darkness with an immediate threat of direct violence:

> imagine you are begging in this bedspread
> reaching out your hand inside the cloth
> which must remained covered, unpolished, unseen
> or they might smash it or cut it off. (Ensler 135)

A change of tone becomes audible, and the mood that surrounds the narrative rapidly becomes increasingly dire. The repetition of "you" works to include the spectator in an emotional story and invites an experience of victimhood through that mode of address. Spectators find themselves positioned under the despised burqa forced to lose any distance or critical approach previously held. The monologue becomes more descriptive: the narrator begins to bombard the spectator with even more coded information and also creates a symbolic image. Audience members learn already from these opening lines that violence, sadness, poverty, insecurity, death, and muteness constitute a woman who is under a burqa.

Poverty in particular is signified a number of times within the text, for example: "imagine you are begging in this bedspread" and such sentiments continue in the following lines, and a little further in the monologue, that reads: "imagine no one is putting rupees in your invisible hand" (Ensler 135). On a narrative level we see a figure that is thematically and descriptively surrounded by violence and poverty. The use of such language serves to signify the relationship between such conditions and the burqa as an object even further. Through such techniques, the spectator becomes aware not of only the physical restraints of the burqa through the narrator's eyes but also of the religious, economic, and political

conditions that have at one time served to frame the view of it. Afghan womanhood is framed as something that conforms to the patriarchal limits and rules imposed on them, such as sex segregation (Vintges 293). With its emphasis on suffering, the monologue has taken the spectator on a journey of misery.

Given the politics woven into the text's presentation, so much violence and suffering have been attributed to the burqa that it is hard to envision the garment without such dire associations. Ensler's burqa is that which traps women and robs them of their individuality, emotions, family and livelihood.

The repetitive nature of this monologue is structured in such a way that the spectator becomes aware of the exceptionally dismal conditions that have become attached to the cloth. There is no neutrality; the only comment where such associations could be found are in the few short lines in the preface of the text - which is as paradoxical as the text itself - as it produces the complete opposite outcome of her stated intention. This is where the spectator finds the story that is embedded within the grand narrative.

Moments linking the burqa with death and poverty appear in both Ensler's work and the popular press: a 2007 Associated Press photograph by Farzana Wahidy typifies these associations (see fig. 5). The photograph's caption in the *Washington Post*'s online Day in Photos reads, "A woman begs as she lets her son sleep with his head covered to attract attention in Kabul, Afghanistan." People expect to see this kind of image when they hear about Afghanistan, for it narrates the vulnerability, poverty, and shame that ostensibly come wrapped with the burqa in the then present 2007. As a particularly powerful image that contains narratives that have elements of both "truth" and "fiction," we can use this image to juxtapose our thinking about the burqa. In this image what we are asked to "imagine" is what is framed as photgraphable - that we are asked to isolate, adapt between media that which mirror each other.

Fig. 5. Untitled Image from Farzana Wahidy (2007).

Returning to the monologue, we find a significant turn in the nature of the text at the point where the narration reflects Ensler's construction of life in Afghanistan at the time. These moments of interpretation are confirmed through the loss of the central figures (children, husband and autonomy), and represented in the reference to the arranged marriage for example. Coherence is found in the narrative structure where such sentiments are echoed repeatedly serving as a tool that signifies misery for the spectator. When spectators identify with the narrator as the nameless character trapped under the burqa, they become focalized as an invisible narrator and the woman under the burqa becomes realer:

> imagine no one is putting rupees in your invisible hand
> because no one can see your face
> so you do not exist
> imagine you cannot find your children
> because they came for your husband
> the only man you ever loved
> even though it was an arranged marriage
> because they came and shot him with the gun
> of his they could not find (sic)
> and you tried to defend him and they trampled you
> four men on your back
> in front of your screaming children. (Ensler 135)

In the sixth line of the excerpt the use of "loved" as a verb indicates a change in the focalization of the monologue. Feelings appear, for it is the spectator who is imagining him - or herself trapped under the burqa and experiencing great personal loss:

> imagine you went mad
> but you did not know you were mad
> because you were living under a bedspread
> and you hadn't seen the sun in years
> and you lost your way
> and you remembered your two daughters vaguely
> like a dream the way you remembered sky.
>
> imagine muttering as a way of talking
> because words did not form anymore in the darkness
> and you did not cry because it got too
> hot and wet in there. (Ensler 135)

At this stage in the text, the burqa signifies the political, the actions of an armed militia and the tremendous amount of violence targeted at a civilian population. Specifically, the disappearances and shootings of thousands of men as well as the persecution of thousands of others appear referenced within these lines, alluded to for the spectator. Yet, the overt dramatization of such horrific events minimizes the reality of them by overlooking historical elements in order to create a monolithic subject (the marker of ideology). When using the term "ideology" I look at Spivak's "The Politics of Interpretations." Spivak's concept of *ideology in action* is helpful when analyzing the link between cultural and social domination. *Ideology in action* is what happens when a group takes its own conditions of what it is to be a group, as natural and self-evident, denying historical sedimentation (1998, 161). Within the grounds of shifting subject constitution what it is to be a member of a group highlights who is included and who is excluded within group-constitution (as an ideological apparatus). Significant to this train of thought is the idea that one cannot mark a group as an entity without sharing a sense of complicity in the formation of that group. A critical view of the subject of ideology in action asks: What it is to be a group member? Who is included? And who is excluded? With Ensler's text in mind, we can ask: What it is to be an Afghan woman? What it is to be an American woman? These considerations are relevant when analyzing socio-political discourses and the dehumanized view that emerges from a text like Ensler's.

At this stage in the monologue, the "regimes of representation"[18] have taken over and the woman under the burqa becomes that which the narrator says she is. She, the woman in the burqa is marked by the violence and poverty that are being used to represent her. Further, these become the properties of the burqa itself.

The burqa becomes the symbol of all of the forms of violence experienced during Afghanistan's time of civil war. Ensler's emphasis ignores the conditions experienced by Afghans and accentuates the association between the burqa and violence. The cloth of the burqa becomes the symbol through which all acts of violence and poverty are represented. Such a vision of Afghan women is further descriptively narrated:

> imagine bearded men that you could only decipher
> by their smell
> checking your socks and beating you
> because they were white
> imagine being flogged
> beaten in the streets
> in front of people you could not see
> imagine being humiliated so deeply
> that there was no face attached to it
> and no air. It got darker there
> imagine no peripheral vision
> so like a wounded animal
> you could not defend yourself
> or even duck from the sideward blows. (Ensler 135)

This excerpt allows us to see how mood and voice play essential roles in the monologue's construction. Descriptive and emotive passages offer the spectator the creation of a certain kind of image, portraying burqa-clad women as victims. This form of narrative, also referred to as narrative rhetoric, often uses time and history in combination with fictional stories to

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[18] In *Cultural Diversity and Global Media: The Mediation of Difference* Eugenia Siapera explains that the term "regimes of representation" is loosely based on Michel Foucault's concept of "regimes of truth," denoting the convergence of discourses within certain power structures and the mechanisms that work to sustain them as certain truths (131). When discourses converge in the guise of poswer structures some mechanisms work to exclude, constrain, modify, marginalize, and or control other ideas and/or discourses. From this account, the political implications of certain issues that speak to the distribution of power in society, claims of truthfulness and accuracy, and the exclusions that are imposed by certain "regimes of representation" (131). Note: by making "regime of representation" plural, it becomes possible to highlight the hegemonic character of representation – as no single representational regime is capable of fully controlling the field of representation.

show how historical events or moments in time have functioned (Kirkwood 30). And "Under the Burqa," as a form of narrative rhetoric, is not exempt from such characterizations. Ensler as the narrator creates the use of such points, and such images are recalled within the structure of the monologues (30). By creating a visual image for the spectator they are intuitively guided to follow the codes of the text to give further meaning to the cloth. It is through this lens that we see that the burqa is embedded with other imaginings that are both historical and visual.

This link between oppression and Afghan women is nothing new, it has become an incredibly popular and prolific form of representation, as can be seen for example in the number one bestseller *The Kite Runner* and its subsequent follow ups *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Khaled Hosseini's view of Afghanistan is presented through a 30-year period spanning from the Mujadjeen to the Taliban Regime and recalls the lives of two Afghan women and how they intersect. One of the most dramatic descriptions in the book is found in the opening of Chapter 11:

> Mariam had never before worn a burqa. Rasheed had to help her put it on. The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange seeing the world through a mesh screen. She practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on the hem and stumbling. The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving, and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth.
>
> "You'll get used to it," Rasheed said. "With time, I bet you'll even like it." (Hosseini 2008, 65)

In this passage the burqa is linked to further images recalling suffocation, impaired vision, and the loss of agency. Mariam, the central character in this excerpt does not like the burqa, but she is forced to wear it, and her much older husband Rasheed helps her put it on telling her she will "get used to it" and in time will "even like it" (Hosseini 2008, 65). This form of representation juxtaposes the loss of agency with the burqa: one cannot decide to willingly wear one, for it is something forced upon another. The narrative that emerges from texts like

A Thousand Splendid Suns frames Afghan women in a particular way: husbands, family members, the community, and their religion oppress them. The cloth that steals their vision and suffocates them, the burqa, also oppresses them. Such narratives essentialize and re-represent women under burqas as victims.

A similar form of representation appears in the *TIME* magazine article "About Face for Afghan Women" by Richard Lacayo in November of 2001. The second line of the article opens with:

> Now that the Taliban has (sic) fled the city, a few brave women have shed the burqa-the head-to-toe garment, to Western eyes a kind of body bag for the living, made mandatory by the defeated religious leadership. Men sometimes look in astonishment at these faces, as if they were comets or solar eclipses. So do other women. From the moment in 1996 that the Taliban took power, it sought to make women not just obedient but nonexistent. Not just submissive but invisible. (Lacayo)

Both the title and the opening lines of the article offer the reader the link between the burqa and the oppression of Afghan women. It is true that Afghan women were oppressed by the Taliban and lived through the ravages of civil war and religious persecution, yet to compare the burqa to a "body bag" and to reinforce its mandatory wearing by the ruling clerics presents a powerfully dire image for the reader. At these moments, we as readers begin to see a picture appearing, where the burqa has been directly associated with violence and fundamentalism. Interestingly, Ensler's vision of the burqa demands that the audience envisions the garment as what Lacayo and Jan Goodwin refer to as "a body bag for the living," or as she calls it, "a tomb." Goodwin's remarks also offer the reader a way to envision the burqa as a form of living death.

Dutch artist Chrystl Rijkeboer visually explores the metaphor that the burqa is a tomb or "a body bag for the living" in her sculpture series entitled, *Burka*. Her interest in this topic stems from her desire to explore recognizable images that illustrate stories about identity, emotion, memory, and religion (Rijkeboer). Since 1988, Rijkeboer has been using human hair as a working material for her craft-based 3 dimensional objects (her sculptures and

installations are often converted into photographs and video works). Out of curiosity and a desire to experiment with unorthodox materials, she came across the medium - of working with hair. Hair, for Rijkeboer symbolically functions in a number of different ways, first it contains memories (locks of hair are held in remembrance of the past), it also emphasizes our identity. Reflecting health and age, hairstyles or the covering of hair can be a religious statement. Finally hair can also show what group we belong to or want to belong to (Rijkeboer).

In *Burka in the Opera House in Leipzig*, a burqa woven from human hair dramatically hangs between the staircase railings at the Leipzig Opera House (see fig. 6). Rijkeboer has said that the covering or cutting of someone's hair is an extremely important personal decision; to cover hair with force is an act that works to take someone's identity away (Rijkboer). Such a dilemma is conceived of by the artist when she explores what is seen as "the duty to wear a burqa" in her sculpture series (off the map gallery). Her sculpture echoes a similar sentiment that resonates in the works of Ensler and Goodwin, offering a visual articulation of the burqa along the lines of it as a "body bag for the living" (see fig. 7).

Rijkeboer's use of human hair, a densely woven natural fiber, gives the viewer the impression that the sculpture is impenetrable. The opaque fibers with its thick weave call attention directly to the burqa (see fig. 8). Using the burqa as a metaphor for a tomb, coffin, or body bag within this context is both striking and entirely problematic. Rijkeboer's hair sculptures and Ensler's monologue offer the viewer or spectator a critical and static interpretation of the burqa. By presentating the burqa as "a tomb" or "a body bag for the living" the woman who wears the burqa is dehumanized. I would instead suggest that the material oppression of women in Afghanistan cannot be reduced to an array of "floating signifiers." Equally clear, however, is the danger of reducing representations of material conditions to the purported essence of Afghan women (Lidchi 162). The repetitious effect of

such narratives embeds them further into the collective cultural memory which works to keep such a vision alive.

Refigured into the popular imagination, the archetypal figure of the Afghan woman that emerges from these imaginings evokes a certain sense of fear and or anxiety in the viewer. Rijkeboer's sculptures draw upon these allegorical figures, that symbolize abstract concepts such as "impenetrability," "denseness," "tombs," or "body bags" and they are portrayed solely as victims of Islamic fundamentalism. Offering a visual articulation of the sentiments that characterize Ensler's performance, Lacayo's text, or Hosseini's passages, the artist's distinctive imagery offer a dark take on the cultural frames that are embodied in the dominant political narratives on the burqa in "the West." In these examples, Afghan women are portrayed as victims who are preyed upon and each of these respective artists shapes a particular vision of cultural identity that works to mold an idea of "Afghanness." Emphasis is placed on victimization, violence, and a lack of agency functioning as a highly affective text that evokes feelings of fearful anticipation of a future, shaped by a violent "recent" past. The complex processes of understanding that emerge as a result of such discursive imaginings can be summed up in a passage from Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parkers *Framing Feminism:*

> [meanings] depend on the relationships between a single image and its total cultural environment of images and social belief systems…For any viewer to understand any image she must carry a whole baggage of social knowledges, assumptions, values…What secures which connotations prevail as a preferred meaning is ideology, understood as a complex of meanings and practices which form the dominant order of sense, a regime of truth for a particular culture or social group. Therefore notions of images whose meanings derive from the conscious intentions of their marker gave way to an understanding of the social and ideological networks within which meanings are socially produced and secured. (125-126)

The forms of representation that dominate the monologue are supplemented by essentialized discourses that have constructed our knowledge about the burqa and the lives of the women under them. The assumptions, values, and norms that are used to characterize and talk about these figures function as "regimes of truth" offering a specific articulation of what life is like

for women as members of a group. These meanings then produce additional forms of knowledge about what life under the burqa is like, for example, what suffering looks like or feels like, in turn working with the dominant social and ideological forms of knowledge that produce and secure meaning. A return to the following lines of the monologue will allow us to see how suffering is further embedded within the burqa narratively:

> imagine you could no longer distinguish between living and dying
> so you stopped trying to kill yourself
> because it would be redundant
> imagine you had no place to live
> your roof was the cloth
> as you wandered the streets
> and this tomb
> was getting small and smellier everyday
> you were beginning to walk into things
> imagine suffocating while you were still breathing
> imagine muttering and screaming
> inside a cage
> and no one is hearing. (Ensler 136)

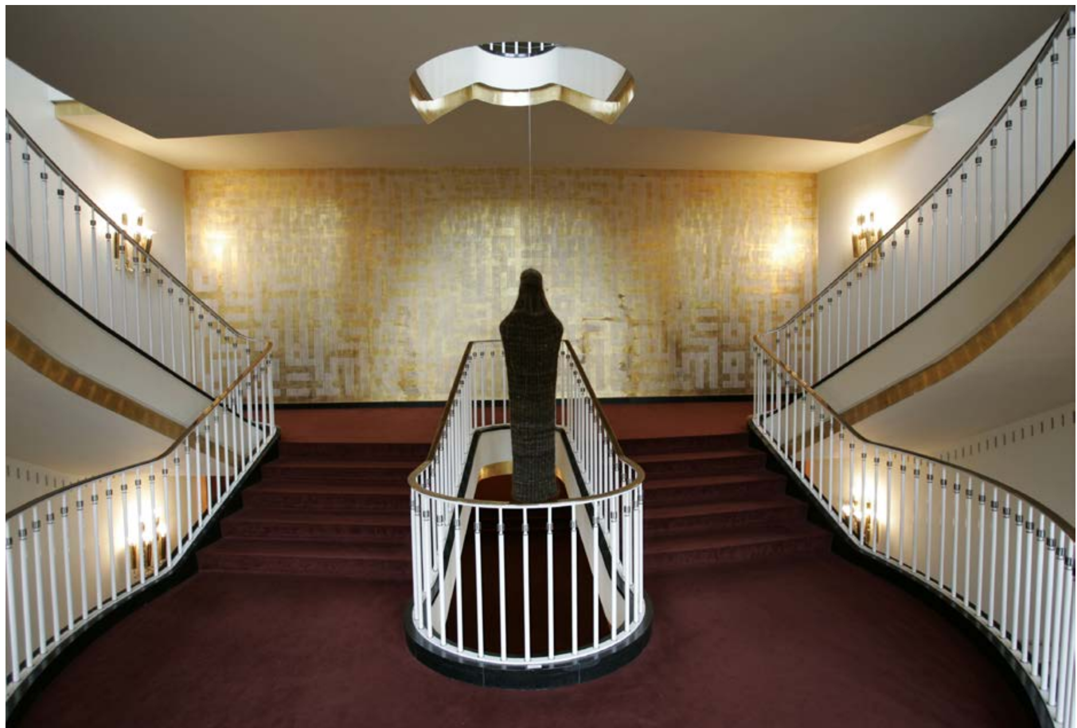

Fig. 6. Burka in the Opera House of Leipzig from Rijkeboer (2007).

Fig. 7. Side View: Knitted Burka from Rijkeboer (2007).
Fig. 8. Artful Burka from Rijkeboer (2007).

This excerpt illustrates how language is used within the monologue to appeal to the spectator on an emotional level. If we look at how language is used in this passage we will see that "you" appears repeatedly, on almost every line. It is this use of "you" that tells the spectator what the narrative of the text is (that all women under the burqa are abused, poor, victims, without agency or hope). Such narrative tools unite the greater grand narratives that comprise the generalizations and stereotypes associated with Afghan woman, (who are represented as victimized, oppressed, and without agency) and, here, they find themselves embedded within the text. Storytelling becomes an act, that which gives greater strength to the narratives that surround the burqa. The final lines of the monologue illustrate this further:

> imagine me inside the inside
> of the darkness in you
> i am caught there
> i am lost there
> inside the cloth
> which is your head
> inside the dark we share
> imagine you can see me
> i was beautiful once
> big dark eyes
> you would know me. (Ensler 136)

By structuring the text as an interior monologue, characterized by its use of a first-person narration, the passage allows Ensler as the playwright to separate her voice from her audience (Bal 1985, 30). It allows the narrative to be taken seriously, through both the structure of its language and the use of it. For example, when Ensler says "I," the "you" is established as a listener. The subjectivity of the audience is then affirmed throughout the monologue (30). The use of "your" within the fourth line of the excerpt, "which is your head," reminds the audience that they are further constructed as a second person within this text. The "your" serves to alienate the spectator from others and reinforces the idea of a clear division. This process confirms the viewers' own subjectivity. At this moment, the spectator is alienated from the greater community (the audience members) that they are active participants in. They become aware Ensler is speaking to them directly, appearing omniscient. Spectators, who become the "you" of the monologue, therefore find themselves interpreting the narrative through her lens.

For the French linguist Émile Benveniste, it is the use of such language within the constitution of subjectivity that is used for communication (Bal 1985, 31). For example, *I* and *you*, *here* or *there* as words can be taken as meaningless on their own but when they are uttered in a specific situation, such as the monologues, the subject is confirmed through the use of such language; what he calls *deixis* (31). Hierarchical texts, such as "Under the Burqa," allow the narrator to be representative of the text, the structure suggests judgment in her eyes. As the agent of the text, Ensler's narrator thus locates the spectator in a particular place where the monologue transitions throughout actions and experiences, bringing the audience into contact with the narrator. The spectator, who indirectly focalizes the text, becomes a hypothetical reader that in turn assumes the position of narrator (14). Later, the use of "you" and "I" in the monologue illustrate a further shift in the identificatory roles for

the spectator and the narrator. What are the consequences of structuring the text in such a manner that the spectator identifies him- or herself through the lens of the narrator?

My analysis of "Under the Burqa" finds itself aligned with Cooper's critique of *TVM* and it reveals that Ensler's representation of Afghan women jeopardizes the feminist ethos that lies at the heart of the play. The image she creates for the spectator is developed through a highly repetitive narrative that paints women in burqas as helpless victims. Ensler's control of the narrative does not allow the spectator any room for movement. Through the structure of the monologue, we find ourselves envisioning ourselves under the burqa: defenseless, homeless, in dire poverty, surrounded by violence and death. Ensler's burqa is embedded with the direst conditions; and as spectators, we cannot escape them.

Contrary to Ensler's preface, where she insists the monologue "…is not about the Burqa per se" and that "[w]earing one is obviously a matter of culture and choice," this monologue is about imposing the ills of the Taliban regime through the eyes of a second-wave Western feminist onto the burqa (135). The burqa in this monologue beckons iconographic status, through which we as spectators are to interpret the trauma of civil war and the dangers of a certain kind of Islamic fundamentalism are attached (Pham 389). By representing the monologue as a liberationist critique against misogyny and violence, Ensler symbolically reinvests importance into the garment. By filling the burqa with emotive language and narrative tools used to elicit a fierce reaction from the audience, she has removed any notion of subjectivity from the text. The portrait the playwright creates of the lives of Afghan women and of the burqa is highly repetitive (essentialized) and problematic. In choosing to represent the conditions women experienced under the Taliban (such as poverty, homelessness, and murder) in such a simplistic manner, she has harmed the image of Afghan women and has attached even further symbolic violence to the burqa.

Her iteration and reiteration is based on hegemonic discourses that have pervaded a certain train of Western feminism; those that claim that they can protect “Third-World women” from themselves and their communities. In her famous phrase, “White men saving brown women from brown men,’’ Spivak captures the crux of the argument (1988, 286). This sentiment was succinctly addressed in her provocative article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In it she discussed the dominant discourses that are used to dis-empower the Third-World. In her article, she questions static representations and the universalizations that underlie both the political representation and re-representation of the Third-World (286). Spivak’s concern in this text is the staging and portraying of political representations of the “Third-World” outside of dominant political discourses.[19] For example, the grim associations aligned with the burqa those based upon a desire to politically represent the Afghan woman “as she really is or desires” only serve to silence the woman, and re-represent her within complex representational processes (286).

The burqa, in other words, for Ensler, becomes an icon in which the political, social, legal, and economic conditions experienced by women in Afghanistan at the time can be represented. Ensler’s presumption that she can speak for Afghan women is also problematic. However, with this in mind, her text does not intentionally harm the spectator as she is iterating and reiterating citational discourses. Her restaging of such language is rhetorical and it is only one form of such utterance. In light of this, what can be taken out of Ensler’s text is how such discourse is utterable and how the power relations that contextualize this monologue need to be reconsidered.

[19] It is important to note that the subaltern cannot speak outside of dominant discourses, this is not disempowering nor does it render the subaltern as voiceless. Rather this opens up a discursive space where the subaltern can seek to construct a discourse outside the language of the oppressors.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the burqa has been discussed within the context of a monologue taken from Eve Ensler's V-Day performance of *The Vagina Monologues* (*TVM*) entitled "Under the Burqa," where the burqa emerges as an icon that symbolizes the miseries of civil war, gender-apartheid, poverty, and violence. Within the monologue the burqa is awkwardly located, initially situated in the prelude as a cultural artifact that is framed as being "…obviously a matter of culture and choice" (Ensler 135). This phrasing suggests that wearing the burqa is an issue of agency; a woman can choose to wear the burqa (as a symbol of culture) of her own volition. On the other hand, she quickly breaks from her preliminary remarks and uses the burqas' powerful visuality to frame Afghan woman as oppressed and terrorized.

Within the monologue the burqa is repeatedly used to denote ceaseless violence against a civilian population, abject poverty, and death. The symbolically laden burqa Ensler "imagines" for her spectator frames the cloth as an affective icon, one that represents suffering but also the loss of agency reinforcing familiar scapegoatings of Islam and Muslims along Orientalist lines as "barbaric," "backward," and "oppressed." This perspective has reduced the burqa to Afghan women during the Taliban regime and Afghan women to the burqa treating them all as abject. This view essentializes the woman under the burqa and the desire to represent her "as she is or desires" reflects a certain train of Western feminism that seeks to protect "Third-World women" from themselves and their communities. Such a vision of the burqa works with established Western hegemonic discourses that frame it as an icon indicative of the ills of Islamic fundamentalism and frames Afghan women as those who need "saving."

Throughout this chapter I have argued that it is from this position that further levels of symbolic violence are embedded in the burqa and that they are extended to images of Afghan women. When looking at criticisms of essentialized forms of representation by scholars such as Cooper, Mohanty, or Spivak for instance, we can see how stories that reductively frame burqa-clad women as static and essentialized figures contribute to and maintain exclusionary norms. In turn, the grim associations that are used to represent and re-represent Afghan women such as Ensler's do further harm to them within the representational process. These representations are particularly important in the case of *The Vagina Monologues* because spectators come face-to-face with simplified yet complex imagery that allows them to feel for the woman under the burqa. Subsequently spectators leave the play with a vision of what life in Afghanistan looks like framing Afghan women as brutalized by a patriarchal culture in need of saving. As a result, the violence of this text presents a form of victimization which can only position "the West" as superior and it is not helpful.

Ensler's framing of the burqa symbolically reinvests importance into the garment, and works to add another layer of discourse used to represent the burqa as an icon of "otherness" reinforcing generalizations and stereotypes of Afghan women as victims. The following chapter continues with this train of thought and looks at how such forms of representation have found themselves resuscitated in a satirical *faux* advertisement from the French puppet troupe *Les Guignols de l'info*.

Chapter 3 Burqa-Clad Barbie Dolls: Analyzing *Les Guignols de l'info*

Introduction

After 9/11 a great number of western mass media outlets characterized the burqa as what filmmaker Sharia Shah referred to as "Afghanistan's veil of terror" explicitly tying the burqa to political and religious extremism, deploying it as an icon of sexual repression (qtd. in McLarney 1). Ellen McLarney explains that when the Taliban fell several months later, and when women failed to unveil, there were noticeable changes in the media's representation of the burqa (2). Repeated exposure of the burqa in the postliberation era propelled it into an icon of "difference," transforming it into a commodity that was used to sell films, documentaries, news, magazines, and books (Kramer 69; McLarney 2). Travelling from the mainstream western mass media, where the burqa formed the focus of the news media to counterparts such as satirical news parodies, the burqa quickly became an icon of the mistreatment of women. It is this particular intersection, where the mass media meets satire, that I take as my point of departure for thinking about the intersection between the burqa, sexual repression, commercialism and violence against women.

Accordingly, in this chapter I embrace yet critically examine a sketch from the French satirical puppet troupe *Les Guignols de l'info* ("the News Puppets") entitled *Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse.* In this sketch, *Les Guignols* offers a powerful critique of violence directed at women by the Taliban regime represented through scenes of domestic abuse, corporal punishment and stoning in the form of a parody and by doing so, they reveal what they think is wrong or unethical. At the same time, they deploy "simplified representations" of what happened in the country during the time of the regime (1996-2001) wielding highly affective icons, burqas and turbans, to represent what gender apartheid looks like for viewers. In the

segment this is visible in the puppet troupe's appropriation of the US-American Barbie doll and her companion Ken, caustically rebranded as *Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse* and Ken Laden. By using icons of American culture *Les Guignols* extends the safety and security of the imaginary child's world (in which they live) to the violent world of Afghanistan under the regime. Using familiar characters they are able to use the Barbie doll's image to think about consumer practices and occupation, humorously taking her from her lavish American lifestyle and transforming her into a burqa-clad woman. Reversing the roles played by these particular cultural icons allows for this depiction to poke fun not only at popular culture and consumerism but also stereotypical portrayals of Afghan women that pervade the western mass media.

Importantly, gendered toys serve as representatives of cultural symbols but they are also used to mark victimization and repeated abuse within the sketch. Through my analysis, we see how these imaginings of victimization and violence are sustained at multiple levels in the form of the Barbie doll and also by the burqa. By unpeeling these layers of meaning in my analysis I am able to reveal a powerful visuality that is mediated in the skit through monolithic representations of Islamic fundamentalism (that are signified by both the burqa and the turban).

Subsequently the sketch serves as a useful point of departure for thinking about the representation of gender by western mainstream media outlets, ethnic generalizations of the burqa and its relationship to violence. It also serves as a way of thinking through fears and anxieties in hegemonic discourses about Islam and women in the French political arena. As a result, I read *Les Guignols* sketch as a condemnation of Islamic fundamentalism and the mistreatment of women, but also, by proxy, as a shaming of the burqa. Importantly the sketch also tells viewers something about the way in which we envision Afghan men and terrorism, where women are situated as victims of violence and men are the perpetrators (Kramer 69).

These concerns travel and today are reflected in anti-burqa laws that in the present day prohibit the garment in French public spaces. In this chapter, I seek to discover to what extent we can recognize the burqa as that which signifies the ambivalence of the victim/perpetrator dyad when it comes to discourses on female oppression.

Given the context of the *faux* advertisement, it may not be helpful to ask why is there so much violence directed at this burqa. Instead, this analysis asks: What is at stake in this sketch? What does *Les Guignols*' representation of the burqa via the Afghan Barbie doll *Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse* interrogate? With what is the imagined viewer confronted when looking at the forms of representation that dominate the sketch? And what does it tell us about our own stigmas/taboos, those associated with Afghan women and accessorized in this context, by the burqa?

In this chapter I analyze the relationship between imagined violence and the burqa by unraveling the layers of violence contained in both the narrative and imagery in this particular sketch. Rather than reading the burqa as an object that simply mediates levels of violence, I also want to consider how it aligns a viewer's fears and anxieties about contemporary discourses on the burqa and the changing ethnic and religious composition of France.

Drawing from Sara Suleri's article "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition" I argue that within the context of contemporary feminist discourse that the burqa serves as a signifier of gender apartheid. It also functions as a free floating metaphor for cultural embattlement. This is a productive way for thinking about how monolithic representations of Afghan woman and the burqa function within the sketch. I employ Jasbir Puar's discussion of the turban, which has in time come to stand for misogyny and the mistreatment of women especially in North America. These depictions coupled with stories that focus on inhumane punishments, such as those in Afghanistan work to create a

distorted picture of Islam for a public that has few alternate images to counter it. These kinds of imaginings are harmful, static or essentialized representations of Islam and Muslims that echo the legacy of Orientalism, situating men as violent and barbaric and women as helpless victims, conflating visible signifiers of difference such as the burqa and the turban with portrayals of systematic violence. However, before examining these points further, it might be helpful to provide information about the troupe. The following section will introduce *Les Guignols*, the legacy of *faux* news programming in France, and the power of their rhetorical choices.

Who Are *Les Guignols de l'info*?

Offensive, shocking, politically incorrect, and controversial are some of the words that can be used to describe *Les Guignols de l'info*. As trailblazers of French political satire, they have maintained a faithful fan base of young viewers (typically those under 35 years of age) since emerging on the cultural scene in the late 1980s (Rosello 2003, 140). The 1980s saw the blossoming and success of political satire on French television, and there were reasons for this. The end of state monopoly on television brought with it a shift in the balance of power, in favor of privatized channels and commercialization (Neveu 341). The loosening of political control and the institutionalization of independent regulatory authorities were at the time steps in the same direction (341).

Les Guignols emerged on the cultural scene shortly after the creation of a new television channel Canal+, in the period following the dismantling of the nationalized O.R.T.F. network (Rosello 2003, 140). At the time, Canal+ was a new concept, a television channel that was only accessible to paying subscribers (in the present day we are used to similar concepts with channels such as HBO and Cinemax). The principle of subscription

broke with France's state-controlled media that dominated the airwaves at the time, and with it new products were introduced and consequently new cultural practices emerged. Subscription introduced scrambled paid television content. Ambiguously, however *Les Guignols* were one of the few shows that were excerpted from subscription. Every weekday the seven-minute satirical news program or *faux journal* is televised *en clair* (unencrypted).

Canal+ encourages the critique of this system, and has incorporated it into their programming but also into its merchandise. *Les Guignols*, for example are a Canal+ production and viewers have access to it whether or not they have a subscription. As a result, they are located both "inside and outside" of the system. As Mireille Rosello writes they are "in the position of that well-respected parasite, the King's fool. And since, in a democratic age, the Fool's functions have evolved *Les Guignols* do not amuse the King but the people of the European nation" (2003, 140). With a handful of other shows, daily *Les Guignols* temporarily transforms Canal+ into a rendezvous point for their typically young and loyal fans.

While one could consider many different shows as part of the legacy of *faux* news broadcasts in France, *Les Guignols* has been instrumental in the development of the genre (Doyle 41-42). Everyday for seven minutes, the troupe of puppeteers (through their puppets) deliver caustic commentary on stories and topics featured on the national and/or international news. Anchored by a puppet caricature of Television Francaise's 1 (TF1) iconic former news anchor, Patrick Poivre d'Arvor, the structure of the show has been both stable and predictable. TF1's former anchor is better known by his initials PPDA, yet *Les Guignols* mimics his image, dubbing the puppet news anchor PPD. PPD not only caricatures his model's unmistakable voice and manner, but he also introduces guests and conducts interviews. Despite the retirement of the actual anchor from TF1 in 2008, his puppet counterpart faithfully continues to deliver the eight o'clock evening news. Currently, PPD

opens the show by announcing, “we are in 2013 and you’re watching the ancestor of the Internet: good evening.” For years, however, PPD began with “you who believe everything they tell you on television: good evening” (Doyle 42).

What sets the show apart from its contemporaries is its ability to address contemporary political and cultural concerns head on, such as the French public’s skepticism toward network news. This point is visible in PPD’s opening line that pokes fun at the power of the news media but also its attitude toward its viewers. The opening line functions as a form of rhetoric, one that tells the show’s audience things aren’t the way they should be. At the same time, *Les Guignols* does not present its audience other possibilities, and this allows them to have an image of authenticity steeped in an aura of truth telling. Rosello explains:

> *Les Guignols* have a radically different approach. They neither commemorate nor celebrate, they expose what is wrong, unethical or scandalous. To say that *Les Guignols* are an integral part of French culture does not mean that their form of humor is universally appreciated. (2003, 141)

By exposing what is “wrong, unethical or scandalous” through their rhetorical choices, *Les Guignols* intervenes in controversial and unavoidable cultural, political, and social issues. True to their style and manner, they do not try and historicize their target or condemn it but rather, through allegorical representations and recognizable caricatures of public figures, they deliver their fast, nefarious cultural critique. With a team of young, avant-garde, leftist writers *Les Guignols* directly parodies guests ranging from politicians to movie stars and from rappers to football players - media stars in one shape or another. However, it is not only visible media stars that find themselves characterized by rubber puppets, those who attempt to present the news as objectively realist, such as television journalists are also targets of their attention (Neveu 343; Rosello 2003, 141). News events, particularly highly politicized events are hijacked and recycled by *Les Guignols* who target and satirize a range of cultural practices and productions: from rock music to movies. Neveu offers a number of examples that illustrate the troupe’s lampooning of politicans through satire. Memorably, in a parody of

Pulp Fiction, president Jacques Chirac is represented as a killer who attacks his opponents in the Gaullist Party (Neveu 343). In another sketch, the music from the *Jaws* soundtrack was used during a camera zoom on the face of the outspoken right-wing politician Jean-Marie Le Pen when he was the leader of the Front National (343). *Les Guignols* power cannot simply be understood in terms of their mocking but also of their conveying of such information in a way that pokes fun at an idea or reinforces it. The cultural references used by the shows producers go beyond movies, videogames, and television commercials and extend to political events. Another powerful example is to be found in the coverage from the Gulf War (in the 1990s) when *Les Guignols* lampooned the press coverage. News coverage of the Gulf War was extensively criticized by the troupe as being "…a highly mediatised event, but poor in informational content" (343). For the past decade they have been continuing these efforts, satirizing among other things the French military's involvement in Afghanistan and grotesquely commenting on discourses about the plight of Afghan women during the Taliban regime with its now iconic puppetry.

In *Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse*, *Les Guignols* implements its recognizable rhetorical strategy and stable structure, providing the viewer a series of images culturally quoting the burqa, the violence of the Taliban, and contemporary discourses on immigrant integration in France. This is a twofold process. First, the troupe introduces the Barbie doll as a symbol of consumerism and of western gender stereotypes. Secondly, the burqa is deployed as an object from which that we as viewers distill not only misogyny but also gender apartheid.

Masterfully wielding signifiers of femininity and combining it with representations of violence *Les Guignols* adds additional layers of signification to their parody using the turban to represent masculinity but also to symbolically charge Afghan men as perpetrators of violence. The burqa and turban are deployed as symbols that represent not only the suffering of Afghan women but also the violence done to them by their male counterparts. Functioning

as emblems of cultural embattlement, gender apartheid (the systematic discrimination of women on economic, social and political levels) is "read" by the viewer through "simplified complex representations" that enact contemporary discourses of victimization. Ultimately, what the parody offers viewers is a critical commentary on how we are sold potent narratives of victimization, that "the West" consumes and the segment illustrates how these narratives are enacted.

Playing the Afghan Woman

> Nouveau! cette année pour ton noël, toi aussi tu peux jouer à la femme Afghane! Découvre vite Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse. Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse reste toujours à la maison, s'occupe des enfants, cuisine, et ferme sa gueule. Pour l'habiller c'est facile, elle n'a que ça à se mettre. Pour le maquillage pareil, elle n'en a pas. Bien sûr quand tu la fais sortir dans la rue, fais la vite rentrer parce qu'elle n'a pas le droit d'y aller. Eh c'est trop top, voilà son mari, Ken Laden! Oh Regarde, il va lui foutre une grosse branlée, parce qu'il l'a surprise en train de rire. Bah oui, elle n'a pas le droit de rire non plus! En plus si elle a ri à un film avec Christian Clavier, tu peux la lapider toi-même! Mais ça c'est valable pour tes autres Barbie's et tes amies en vrai aussi. Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse c'est comme en vrai, c'est un jouet. *Petits cailloux vendus séparément. ("Barbie")
>
> [New! This year for Christmas, you too can play the Afghan woman! Here you will find Fucking bitch Barbie. Fucking bitch Barbie always stays at home, caring for the children, cooking, and keeping her fucking mouth shut. To dress her is easy, all she has is this [a burqa appears]. And it's the same for her makeup: she doesn't have any. Of course if you make her go outside make her come back quick she doesn't have the right to do so. Hey, it's cool here comes Ken Laden; see he's just about to beat her to a fucking pulp because he caught her laughing. Of course she doesn't have the right to laugh either. And there's more! If she laughs at a movie with Christian Clavier, you can stone her to death yourself! And this is also true for all the other Barbie's and for your real friends. Fucking bitch Barbie, it's like real life. *Little rocks sold separately]. (my translation)

The above quotation transcribes the voice-over from *Les Guignols de l'info*'s sketch from 2001 *Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse*. In less than 30 seconds, this short sketch offers viewers a spirited social critique of a televised Barbie doll advertisement. The parody caricatures a young French girl playing with her new toy, a burqa-clad Barbie doll on Christmas.

Powerfully contradicting the viewer's initial interpretation of the Barbie doll, the burqa contributes layers of meaning to the character, breaking her free from the one dimensionality she represents to encourage an alternative understanding of the doll. Most often associated with white middle-class, heterosexual, consumerist values, Barbie is an American icon.

Portrayed as the "perfect model of femininity" the Barbie doll is more than a child's toy she is an icon of female glamour (Toffoletti 58-59). In *Barbie Culture* the sociologist Mary Rogers explains that Barbie:

> [exemplifies] some set of values, beliefs, and norms in a society - gets a strong grip on a sizable part of the population. In North American and other cultures, for instance, Barbie attracts many young girls and growing numbers of Barbie doll collectors; she also attracts those who "love" fashion in affordable, accessible forms and those attuned to glamour and romantic fantasy. A cultural icon gets enmeshed in people's everyday lives and social relations; it can even claim center stage in the extreme as some fans become fanatics and some enthusiasts become addicts. (6)

Often criticized as fake and overtly sexual, for sending the wrong message about female empowerment, gender stereotyping and sexism the Barbie doll has been scrutinized extensively ("Chicago Tribune News"). Despite the negative press, Mattel Toys have successfully marketed and distributed the doll worldwide since 1959.

Controversially, the Barbie doll has been caught up in a number of scandals, most notably in the 1990s for the disastrous Teen Talk line that still haunts the company today. Teen Talk Barbie was an electronic model that both "thought" and "spoke" ("Chicago Tribune News"). Marketed internationally, the Teen Talk line raised concerns with consumers when they became aware of her catchphrases, including "Math class is tough" and "Party Dresses are Fun." Many consumers were angered by the superficial image these phrases sent to young girls, prompting petitions and a boycott led by the American Association of University Women. Later, the problematic pre-programmed expressions would be discontinued but the consumerism and superficiality associated with the doll still lingers today ("Mattel Says It Erred").

Since the emergence of the doll on the American marketplace Barbie has been caricatured[20] in a number of different ways, including the highly successful musical parody by the Danish pop band Aqua who in 1997 gained worldwide fame with their risqué song *Barbie Girl* (Buchakjian 1322). With highly sexual lyrics such as “you can brush my hair, undress me everywhere,…come on Barbie, let’s go party” *Barbie Girl* sparked strife with Mattel who quickly filed legal proceedings against MCA Records. The song portrayed Barbie and Ken, her boyfriend singing “I’m a blond bimbo girl” and “Kiss me here, touch me there, hanky-panky” (1324). To the dismay of Mattel and their most popular toy, Barbie, the song broke into the Top 40 internationally. Subsequently Mattel filed multiple legal lawsuits against the record company for trademark infringement (1324). In the wake of legal proceedings, the court determined that the song was a parody as the singers were ridiculing the dolls’ artificiality and targeting women who like the Barbie doll are “plastic, unreal, and easily manipulable by others” (1325). When considering “[the] song’s fast tempo and the singers’ exaggerated performances of their respective characters…the lyrics are not to be taken too seriously” (qtd. in Buchakjian 1325). Mattel Toys claimed that they were “unhappy with the lyrics because they are damaging” the dolls image (qtd. in Lewis 74). The court found that the parody presented a humorous view of the doll’s fantasy world and the “shallow plastic values” Barbie represents. Consequently, Aqua’s hit song was protected by the First Amendment - Freedom of Speech. The ruling struck a balance between trademark owners of cultural icons and musical parodists of such icons. *Barbie Girl* serves as an entertaining reminder of the critiques of superficiality levied at Mattels representation of women’s bodies and explicit consumerist values that are tied to the Barbie dolls image. Yet this caricature by

[20] The Aqua parody is only one of a countless many, the Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO) for example offered a number of parodies of Teen Talk Barbie and Totally Hair Barbie. Hijacking her catch phrases and swapping them out with more subversie phrases such as “Clit power,” “makeup resistant,” and “comes with her own Magic Toolbox” the BLO offer a more compelling appropriation of the doll (Lewis 1999, 159). Erica Rand in *Barbie’s Queer Accessories* has amassed a collection of chapters on the cultural appropriation of the Barbie doll over a three-decade period.

Aqua represents only one of many parodies, another more scathing version can be found in *Les Guignols*.

Critiques of consumerism and superficiality are tactically used by the troupe, who first deployed the image of the Afghan Barbie doll at the beginning of the occupation of Afghanistan, at a time when military involvement in the country was a fiery impassioned issue of public debate. When the sketch was aired her caricature signified a historical juncture, a time when France was involved with NATO forces occupying Afghanistan and fighting the Taliban. By appropriating the burqa and the Barbie doll *Les Guignols* lead viewers through a two stage decoding process, where they are to remember that Barbie is a symbol of American femininity and consumerism and then to recognize the burqa-clad caricature as a symbol of women who were repressed by the regime. The intertextual read of this sketch is predicated on the certainty that French viewers are exposed to global culture, international news, and American popular culture (Rosello 2003, 144).

Both the burqa and the Barbie doll serve as multifaceted signifiers of femininity and cultural embattlement for French viewers that are tied to contemporary discourses. Through these imaginings viewers are offered a hegemonic vision of victimized Afghan women, the burqa that represents her suffering and of their abusive male partners. Dramatically playing off the view that Barbie represents what men expect women to be, this parody alters the image of the doll and turns her into an even more troublesome character. The particular image that emerges is far removed from the overtly sexualized perspective that Barbie is traditionally criticized for and instead offers another vision of the doll, that sends a distinct message about gender stereotyping, sexism and consumption. Manipulating the codes of femininity through dress, bodily ideas and modes of behavior, the Barbie doll's rigid and slender body, smile, and immaculate grooming teaches through play that in order to be successful and popular, they must look good like Barbie (Toffoletti 60).

Offering a different instantiation of the Barbie doll, *Les Guignols* works with the all too familiar messages about sexism and stereotypes present in the Barbie doll and pushes them to their limit. By parodying the gender stereotypes that the Barbie doll typically represents, the troupe has been able to appropriate the doll and the tropes that surround it (Harold 189). A closer look at the sketch will illustrate these points further.

"*Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse*"

As an archetype, the character of *Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse* successfully follow the rules that are generally applied by *Les Guignols*, who satirically treats recognizable characters (public figures such as sports stars, politicians, and celebrities) and turns them into caricatures (Rosello 2003, 143). Modeled on the fictional Barbie doll, the Afghan Barbie doll parodies not only the image that surrounds the popular child's toy but also the stereotypical attributes that are applied to Afghan women, who are represented within hegemonic Western discourses as restricted to the home, abused, and forced to wear a burqa, existing in silence embodying what Jasmin Zine has coined "gendered Islamophobia (2006, 1)."[21] Succinctly, gendered Islamophobia can be understood as the way in which sexuality and gender is mapped onto Muslim bodies to define them as foreign (2006, 1). It is important to note that these representations, are as Hammer suggests "two sides of the same coin" (109).

In the sketch the burqa serves as an important clue to the Barbie doll's function: when she wears a burqa, she is represented in the public sphere where her movements are heavily

[21] Islamophia literally means "fear of Islam." It is as Juliane Hammer explains in her article "Center Stage Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women" not a natural fear but an ideological contruct that is "produced and reproduced at the nexus of a number of political and intellectual currents that need to be taken into consideration and assessed critically in each instance or event of Islamophobic discourse and practice" (108). Hammer defines Islamophobia as an ideological construction highlighting 5 key points that help situate it within a larger fraework for analysis (108). These points include shifts in domestic politics, imperial wars, racism and bigotry, feminism, political exclusion, and lastly civilizational discourses on moral and cultural superiority (108).

restricted, she is covered (head to toe), and is silent. When she is not wearing a burqa, she is represented in the private sphere caring for the children, taking care of the home, and is beaten by her husband. The abuse she experiences is an important element of the skit, as it is the primary focus of the narration offering additional clues for viewers. In the sketch Barbie's playmate Ken also finds his character turned inside out. Instead of personifying the non-threatening boyfriend of Barbie (the position to which he is generally relegated) he becomes "Ken Laden," a Taliban soldier with a turban, a large gun strapped to his back and a violent temper. Ken is the unrelenting fundamentalist (the perpetrator of violence) and the burqa-clad doll is his victim.

Within the limited time frame allocated to this ultra-short sketch, *Les Guignols* cannot offer a critical expose on the emergence of the regime nor a desire to be geo-political experts: they cannot take the time to explain exactly what gender apartheid is, but what they can do is illustrate what they think it looks like. The characters that are used in the skit, serve as a way of parodying the dominant discourses that linger in the Western collective imagination on the treatment of women in Afghanistan by the regime.

The violence that is enacted throughout the skit is consistent with what is sold to us about political involvement in the country, when NATO forces claim to be there to protect the rights of women and girls from the regime. With this said it is difficult to decide whether the forms of representation *Les Guignols* provides serve as successful interrogations of the issues at play. But the result is that the multifaceted phenomena they offer viewers draw attention to the similarities between what appears to be the marketing and consumption of the Barbie doll with the stereotype of Afghan women. This is the most provocative element of the skit, that the doll is marketed to us (viewers who play the role of the consumer). Her character is that of the quintessential victim (we are tipped off by her name and her burqa) and this image is sold to us time and time again. It is so prevalent that the puppet girl re-

enacts the abuse that has flooded the Western mainstream media in the immediate months following 9/11 playfully as if it was natural.

The image that I am referring to is found in the voice over, when the narrator declares "Fucking bitch Barbie always stays at home, caring for the children, cooking, and keeping her fucking mouth shut" (*Les Guignols*). Or later "here comes Ken Laden; see he's just about to beat her to a fucking pulp because he caught her laughing. Of course she doesn't have the right to laugh either. And there's more. If she laughs at a movie with Christian Clavier, you can stone her to death yourself!" (*Les Guignols*). These kinds of strategies are typical of the troupe, who put viewers in a place where they witness confrontations: the promotion of this image to "the West," who will re-enact these moments through their imagination from the safety of their homes. This final point is forcefully made in the closing lines of the voice over "…you can stone her to death yourself! And this is also true for all the other Barbie's and for your real friends. Fucking bitch Barbie, it's like real life" (*Les Guignols*).

The polemical tone of the sketch is marked by the mocking tone of the narrator who ridicules not only but the values and ideals that the Barbie doll represents through the voice over but also the doll herself. These sentiments are exaggerated by the *Guignols* and expose the imaginary world of Afghan woman. The troupe provides viewers with a specific definition of cultural relevance, using satire as a way of emphasizing what they disagree with rather than what they wish to celebrate (Rosello 2003, 142). Combining their popularity and caustic wit, marked by extreme exaggeration and full frontal attacks, they address controversial and unavoidable issues such as the occupation of Afghanistan, globalization, political corruption and rabid consumerism, all of which have been recurring themes since the early 2000s.

Les Guignols provide viewers over "simplified representations" of seemingly impossible topics such as gender apartheid to Western viewers. They mimick hegemonic

narratives about Afghan women by offering allegorical representations of the violence that is directed at them. Memorably, despite their corrosive wit they also represent important historical junctures, where internal French concerns and international politics intersect.

The sketch illustrates how issues of violence and suffering are culturally associated with the burqa. This approach is emphasized with the appropriation of the Barbie doll, the burqa-clad doll provokes the collision between Afghan woman and the world of the US-American Barbie.

Fig. 9. Barbie in a burqa from *Les Guignols* (2001).
Fig. 10. Detail of packaging from *Les Guignols* (2001).

Within *Les Guignols'* system, the innumerable layers that are attributed to these characters ask viewers to consider the initial representation of the Barbie doll. They also want us to think about the link between Barbie's, violence and the burqa. Quick and stinging, the sketch revolves around the expected reaction of the "ideal viewer," those to whom it is addressed, as potential consumers of the parody (Plantinga 12). As viewers we are interpellated in an Althusserian sense hailed in its very first utterances ("…you can play the Afghan woman" and "here you will find…"). From the opening lines, the viewer is drawn into the sketch by the narrator's inviting and excited tone. Shortly thereafter, the subject of the sketch is quickly revealed, making the point of the parody visible (see fig. 9).

A glance at the packaging of the appropriated doll tips viewers off immediately as to what is accomplished in the course of its utterance (see fig. 10). Loosely translated to

Fucking bitch Barbie, (*Barbie s'Spice di Counnasse*) her name, functions on numerous levels. It is a derogatory insult, it captures the viewer's attention. It also makes visible a level of misogyny that is supposed to be expected when we talk about Afghan women and the burqa. A certain kind of politics is announced, one where we, as viewers expect Afghan women to be treated poorly.

The term *counnasse* also speaks back to the contemporary cultural landscape of France. The name is a pun and *Les Guignols* use it over and over again in other sketches, especially when speaking about figures such as Osama Ben Laden or Saddam Hussein and their perspective on women (who are treated as second class citizens) (Doyle 43). For the viewer the pun registers the accented mispronunciation of *espèce de connasse* ("you bitch!") by a North African immigrant. The name makes audible a particular kind of national and grammatical pressure on immigration issues that are internal to French representational politics.

One might wonder what we can do when faced with this stereotype? What is particularly productive about the way in which *Les Guignols* wields insults in this sketch is that it reveals how power has been inscribed onto the burqa through the latest discourses. It works in a way that allows us to see the overlapping of "gendered Islamophobia" as it runs throughout politics, culture, and stereotypes inscribed in both language and imagery. The name itself reveals the social and ideological elements that find themselves tied not only to the representation of the burqa but also to the tired tropes of "Western" hegemonic discourses reflected in the framing of Afghan women as oppressed, abused and victimized. Within this representation, another level of absurdity is added, making it less threatening and more welcoming (like Christmas morning), as throughout the sketch the narrator's voice is excited and giddy visually complimented with animated hearts and stars.

The discourses of misogyny broadly tied to the image of the burqa make visible the complex relationship between the imaginary figures of the Afghan man (Ken Laden) and the Afghan woman (Fucking bitch Barbie). We now expect a certain amount of mistreatment toward (Afghan women) burqa-clad figures and are prepared to find a turbaned man (Afghan man) abusing them. In these instances, the viewer is interpellated along with the narration, hailed into the sketch to play along ("you too can play the Afghan woman"), which treats the doll and the woman she represents as objects (*Les Guignols*). The sketch pretends that this is a non-controversial statement: we are expected to know about such practices and adopt them.

The staging of these stereotypical associations about Afghan women counters and masks at the same time another set of stereotypes inscribed in the Barbie doll. The extreme juxtapositions surrounding the representation of femaleness raise questions about the levels of hostility that are directed at both the Barbie doll and women in burqas for being bad roles models for girls and women. The American Barbie doll with her unattainable bodily proportions (with a 39-18-32 frame) that makes women feel inadequate, are marketed as a model of female success and beauty (Heinecken 51). With a tiny waist, long blond hair and couture clothing the Barbie doll has been criticized by Urla and Swedlund as the "perfect icon of late capitalist constructions of femininity" (1995, 281). This particular fashioning of the self relies on material luxuries such as make-up, buying clothes, and other forms of consumption (Toffoletti 59; Motz 131-132).

The body of literature that portrays the US-American Barbie as a cultural commodity marketed towards white, heterosexual, middle-class girls argues that the doll encourages women to consume (Motz 128; Rogers 112; Spigel 326; Toffoletti 58-59; Steinberg 25). Marilyn Ferris Motz reminds us "Barbie is a consumer. She demands product after product, and the packaging and advertising imply that Barbie, as well as her owner, can be made happy if only she wear the right clothes and owns the right products" (128). Toffoletti

continues, explaining "[a]t the same time, Barbie is said to embody the idea that women in capitalist culture are themselves commodities to be purchased, consumed and manipulated" (60).

In her essay "The Book of Barbie: After Half a Century the Bitch Continues to Have Everything" Shirley Steinberg expands on this idea that the Barbie doll is seen as that which women do not want their daughters playing with: a doll that represents the failings of feminism, a woman valued for her appearance and not her abilities, marked by her willingness to embody the stereotype of the 1950s middle-class American housewife (who stays at home, cares for the children, cooks and cleans). The Afghan Barbie doll embraces these stereotypical connotations but now they are presented as exclusively foreign. Burqa-clad figures are criticized as bad role models, the burqa is the problem. But if we think about it, burqas are precisely what allows women to be in public. Symbolically burqas are used to let the wearer be in the private sphere even whilst out in public, allowing the wearer to inhabit a female sphere and to resist interaction with unknown men.[22] Consequently, a number of limitations are placed on Afghan women in the parodic form of the Barbie doll. Here the burqa is simply an emblem of the exotic "other."

With that said another kind of idea is culturally at work in the skit, transforming the rigid feminine ideal the Afghan Barbie doll represents. It is a paradoxical one, that reinscribes another kind of ideal that makes us think about Afghan women and the relationship between the burqa and violence. This element is present within both the narration and the imagery that works to provide viewers with an image to read this through. The negative stereotype that associates Afghan women's oppression with misogyny and violence is literally ascribed to the Barbie doll through the process of enactment. For example, in the final moments of the sketch, the burqa-clad doll is also presented as being in danger ("You can stone her to death

[22] The practice of seclusion is only one aspect of *purdah*. The burqa, according to Hanna Papanek, functions as a form of "portable seclusion" which precisely allows women access to the public sphere.

yourself!”) or as victimized (“He’s just about to beat her to a fucking pulp because he caught her laughing”), and these levels of abuse constitute her very presence and imaginary fields of action (*Les Guignols*). Such associations do not just serve to create character but something else: her victimization functions as a chain of events that are tied to the cloth, marking a recurrence of abuse that is signaled to the viewer by and on behalf of the burqa.

Fig. 11. Barbie in Afghan playhouse from *Les Guignols* (2001).
Fig. 12. Barbie with her children from *Les Guignols* (2001).

Returning to the idea that there are socially sanctioned models of womanhood, the parody clarifies how the Afghan Barbie doll is meant to be abused. Visual images enact the narration: viewers see her at home, washing dishes, cleaning up, and surrounded by children (see fig. 11). All of these images are heavily gendered, highlighting conservative social roles for women and performing experience-based narratives. The French puppet-child plays with her doll in different ways, enacting a rather old-fashioned and restrictive vision of femininity that is limited to the home.

The anti-feminism I read as intrinsic to the Barbie doll - any Barbie doll - is needed here for the parody to succeed. It links what is familiar, violence, to what is an unfamiliar space of violence, but all within the frame of a child’s game. This intertextual portal invites concerns about global consumer practices, gender and ethnic stereotypes, and occupation (war) by nesting those themes humorously. When juxtaposed with the images of the French

puppet-child, who receives the Barbie doll as a Christmas gift at the outset of the ad, the differences are striking.

The dark world of the doll is just an aspect of playtime for the puppet-child. Let's take her bedroom as our example, for it is how a viewer enters the ad. Her bedroom, where all of these events unfold, serves as an idealized view of what life looks like for middle-class children: it is warm, pink, and has indirect soft lighting (see fig. 13). Her room gives the impression of wealth, signified by the large white Christmas tree, and a stack of elaborately wrapped gifts that are the focal point of these shots (see fig. 14). We are offered a vision that promises safety and security for the young puppet-child. The room and the puppet's expressions offer us warm encounters; she is excited to receive her doll and quickly falls in love with it - excitedly playing with it. These sequences work to orient our vision, to grab our attention before shifting to the Afghan Barbie doll and the abuses that follow her. The contrast is striking but supposedly played down by the consistently humorous tone.

Fig. 13. Puppet-child from *Les Guignols* (2001).
Fig. 14. Opening her new gift from *Les Guignols* (2001).

The Christmas gift reinforces the production and contrast of binaries (between the French "self" and the Afghan "other"). The voiceover (in French, "selling" something to the child or to the French public) and content (the puppet girl is the one manipulating - or puppeteering - the Afghan figures) accomplish this partitioning. Meanwhile the images also convey another binary. Visually, the image of a Barbie doll, which only has a headscarf or a

burqa to wear, recalls the dichotomy of public and private spheres[23] that reinforces presumed Afghan gender roles. The next scene develops this further: we see Barbie put on her burqa and she is led out of the house by the puppet-girl unaccompanied by a male guardian (*mahram*). In the next moments she is brought back in (by the puppet girl) and is violently scolded by Ken.

Fig. 15. Inside Playhouse from *Les Guignols* (2001).
Fig. 16. Burqa-clad from *Les Guignols* (2001).

Fig. 17. Barbie leaving the house from *Les Guignols* (2001).
Fig. 18. Puppet-child from *Les Guignols* (2001).

And the narrator declares:

> Of course if you make her go outside make her come back quick she doesn't have the right to do so, hey it's cool here comes Ken Laden [her husband]. See, he's just about to beat her to a fucking pulp because he found her laughing. (*Les Guignols*)

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[23] My use of private and public spheres within this context is taken from Jurgen Habermas' influential text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The public sphere "may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor (27). The public sphere then is a space that is marked through rational critical debate and discussion. On the other hand, the private sphere can be thought of a historically gendered sphere, the interior space of women (6).

These lines unite imagery and narration to foster the symbolic battle that is to come, between Barbie and Ken. The historical encounter to which this sequence refers works with countless news stories, literary productions, and films that recall the plight of Afghan women during this time. Questions about the violence women experienced at this time, through the series of edicts that were instituted by the Taliban were centre state in a number of prominent discussions in the French public sphere in 2001 (Collins 39-40).

In the early days of the occupation (in Afghanistan), focus was placed on freeing Afghan women and girls from the burqa, the object through which the power of the regime was read (Whitlock 7; Schwartz-DuPre 1471; Mackie 21; Cloud 286; Grewal 537). In the popular Western press the burqa not only represent the fanaticism of the Taliban but also a tendency within Muslim countries to enforce gender apartheid.

Just to clarify, the term “gender apartheid” can be understood as the denial of human rights based on gender. It is commonly used to refer to the position of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Interestingly, the term is highly contentious for many legal scholars who argue that it misrepresents the scope and shape of racial apartheid. The concept has a link to the US-American non-governmental organization, the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF), more commonly known as the Feminist Majority. In 1997 the FMF under the guise of President Eleanor Smeal launched the “Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan,” who lobbied both the US government and the UN to restore human rights for women and girls in the country.

In the United States, the campaign was incredibly successful increasing awareness about the position of women and girls. For example, Mavis Leno (the wife of the late-night talk show host Jay Leno) appeared on all the major US-American news and radio shows educating viewers and listeners about the conditions women and girls experienced in Afghanistan. In order to fund the project, they popularized the wearing of burqa swatches for

a $25.00 donation as an act of remembrance, trying to bring the issue to the American public and the world.

In Chapter 2 "Heroic Victims" I analyzed the forms of representation that dominate these kinds of narratives through a close reading of "Under the Burqa" by Eve Ensler. For Ensler, the representation of Afghan women is explained in terms of their difference to Western women, maintaining the key attributes and features that make the burqa-clad doll undesirable - the burqa, violence, and restricted movement. As the exotic "other" the vision Ensler brings to life can be interpreted as the epitome of ethnic and gendered stereotyping. What is challenging about fictionalized accounts such as this is that they exemplified Evelyn Alsultany's "simplified complex representations."

"Simplified complex representations" Alsultany explains are strategies that are used in depictions of Arabs and Muslim characters by writers and producers in the media (film and television for example). Particularly frequent after 9/11, they give the impression that the depiction they are offering is complex and true (22). Alsultany argues that these representations point to the representational mode of the so-called "post-race" era that signifies a new era of racial representation (22). These representations appear to challenge or complicate old stereotypes and contribute to an illusion of inclusiveness (22). Narratives work as strategies that order the parameters of simplified complex representations to facilitate ways of identifying strategies.

As reductive stories, simplified complex representations work to decontextualize and dehistoricize the political events that occurred in Afghanistan. The stories recounted in texts like *The Vagina Monologues* or books like *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which recount horrific and disturbing acts of violence such as scenes of domestic abuse or stoning are used to illustrate what appear to be the root causes of violence (such as the Taliban and Islamic fundamentalism). Yet, what these kinds of imaginings do is work to testify to the "barbaric

nature of Islam" by creating broad generalizations that work because of how they produce an excess of affect (74). They produce an explicit expression of outrage and sympathy. Representations of fictional terrorist men (such as the violent depiction of Ken Laden) rely on the regulation of affect - through a withholding of sympathy (74). The Western news media in particular has participated in the policing of the boundaries of feeling differently towards Muslim women and men in hegemonic imaginings of the global war on terror, producing a hierarchy of human life (74). It is this sentiment that is picked up and parodied by the sketch - illustrating the burqa-clad Barbie doll and her Taliban husband Ken as a way of distinguishing between "good" and "bad," as victims and perpetrators of violence. These representations are important as they affect how we understand the framing of women and men via binary oppositions.

The rise of fundamentalist power in Afghanistan at its core is not about misogyny, or sexism, but rather it is about complex historical, economic, and political problems. Following this train of thought, it is important to consider how affect is relayed in this story and also used to support intervention in the country, and legitimize US foreign policies (128). The burqa in this sketch stands for women who are victimized by the religious police, on the behalf of the Taliban.

The burqa's cultural meaning is displaced through the violence directed at the burqa-clad Barbie doll shielded by its satirical underpinnings.[24] The political dimension that is represented through other scenes that point to domestic violence adds new levels of violence. In this segment, signifiers of masculinity are also troubling because they rely on the representation of Ken as violent. What is striking about this sequence of events are the references to concerns about the mistreatment of women, echoing those vocalized by human rights advocates like the FMF. The Afghan Barbie doll is represented as a terrorized woman

[24] Much of the coverage that was circulated when the Taliban came to power was published by the FMF in the campaign literature to end gender apartheid, "Campaign for Afghan Women & Girls" who published a many images of women being beaten on the street and the edicts eliminating women's rights.

with an irrational fundamentalist husband, Ken Laden, who abuses his wife. The turban he wears plays an important role in this process of identification as it functions as one part of a greater ethnic generalization through which the viewer interprets violence and terrorism (see fig. 19).

In *Terrorist Assemblages* Jasbir Puar elucidates the power of the turban as a symbol in contemporary discourses on Muslim terrorist bodies. Her argument offers a vocabulary through which we can interpret the turban and its historical attachment to the Taliban. Ken, as a turbaned man has shifted from a familiar figure of patriarchy (father and/or husband) and becomes monstrous (Puar 2007, 175). His turban is encoded with nationalist, religious and cultural symbolism indicative of "the terrorist" (175). Despite the complexities related to taxonomies of the turban (geographies, genealogies, and time and space) it functions here like the burqa, as a monolith working to trouble and disturb national imaginaries and ideas of security (175). The turban is a symbolic object through which terrorism is read, serving as a masculine counterpart to the burqa (181).

In the sketch, the burqa recalls the language used to associate the turban within contemporary discourses on Muslim bodies (177). Instead of focusing on the power of male bodies, this vision offers the viewer a way of interpreting the female body via the burqa and how it has been marked by the regime. The burqa has become pathologically associated with the Taliban and their campaign of gender apartheid explicitly tied to tired images of violence and misogyny that linger in the collective memory. In "the West" the burqa has been represented as a monolith that swallows "nationalist imaginaries and their attendant notions of security" (175). Through such kinds of dominant imagery, the burqa has symptomatically come to stand for misogyny and the mistreatment of women (177). Like the turban, the burqa also finds itself in a precarious place controversially regulated by laws, especially in North

America (Canada and the United States) and Western Europe (Netherlands, France, Germany, and others).

Fig. 19. Ken Laden from *Les Guignols* (2001).
Fig. 20. Fundamentalist Ken from *Les Guignols* (2001).

Fig. 21. Abuse sequence from *Les Guignols* (2001).
Fig. 22. Heavy Ammo from *Les Guignols* (2001).

Functioning as an easy marker of "the other," the turban also works to reiterate the Western imaginary in regard to Islamic (Afghan) cultural and religious norms. It is through the wielding of this powerful symbolism, the deployment of the burqa and the turban in the sketch that *Les Guignols* develops and marks this encounter with a specific political and historical context. This encounter is further strengthened when "the Afghan male," Ken, is accessorized with a rocket launcher and a name inspired by Osama Ben Laden. Ken Laden is brutal and unforgiving: he enforces and patrols cultural norms such as the edicts that prohibit women from laughing or leaving the house unaccompanied. This representation works with Orientalist constructions of Muslim men as patriarchal, violent, and hypermasculine -

reinforcing images of Afghan men during this time that were presented as barbaric (Puar 2007, 181).

Ken Laden is framed as a typical fundamentalist, portrayed as unforgiving and relentlessly violent whose religion is a threat. Omitting to associate it within a resurgence of political movements worldwide, such as the Christian coalition or Jewish religious fanaticism, Bobby Sayyid argues that Islamic fundamentalism has become the metaphor for fundamentalism in general. All Muslim acts interpreted as extreme are constituted as Islamic fundamentalism, and then are linked to terrorism and to groups such as the Taliban (1997, 4). Yet, there is a vast difference between practices of Islamic fundamentalism and the popular religion observed by most Muslims, including those in Afghanistan and those living in France (North African migrants for example). Through this lens, Islam is perceived as a threat through its depiction as an alien culture, as "the other."

This claim is far from new, minority groups have consistently been portrayed as "the other" and situated as threatening because of immigration. The rhetorical device that deploys categories of "them" and "us" within popular discourses, suggests we are under attack (4). Within the French context, this kind of popular discourse was common in the 1950s and 1960s when Arab immigration was seen as a problem. The recurring theme of immigration as problematic has reappeared again, contemporarily, tied to conflict in the Middle East, and has recently been rejuvenated by the idea that there is conflict with Muslims in Europe (Poole 46).

The portrayal of peoples moving across borders has sensationalized ideas of infiltration and in Chapter 5 I examine a political campaign by the Sweden Democrats that does exactly this. These images of conflict, invasion, and infiltration further contribute to a fantasy of the new enemy. The combination of threat with Islam promotes the idea that it, Islam needs to be managed in a way that allows prejudicial practices to continue.

Representations of Islam work to bring together limited depictions that lack in positive and apolitical images. Dahlgren and Chakrapani argue that the:

> representation that appears to tell us more about the representers than the represented. This system of representation seems typical of reporting on the Third World in general, with its lack of political explanations and historical context and the routinization of violence within a framework of instability. (qtd. in Poole 47)

In sum, representations of Afghans in conflict are limited and offer a reductive image of Muslims. Such imagery also reinforces the idea that Muslim men and women are embattled in accordance with hegemonic discourses in "the West" that frame Afghan men as "barbaric," "backwards," and "uncivilized" and Afghan women as "victimized," "oppressed," and trapped - through the figures of Barbie and Ken (Dahlgren and Chakrapani 53). This framing lies in opposition to its binary, the French puppet child who wields her Barbie dolls with the playfulness, harsh exaggeration, and fantasy that mark the satire's artfulness.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that violence and the suffering of women have been culturally located in the burqa. The iconographic power of the burqa reveals how a specific time and space (Afghanistan during the Taliban regime) has been embedded in the cloth and exposes our fears and anxieties about Islamic fundamentalism, women and violence. These critiques find themselves re-problematized and repositioned, levied at burqas as symbols of what "the West" does not want. The role the burqa plays in contemporary political discourses (in this example the French context) highlights the overlapping of politics, culture, and stereotypes that have been etched onto the burqa through the repeated use of static imagery and language.

I sought to discover how the burqa signifies the ambivalence of the victim/perpetrator dyad when it comes to discourses on female oppression. What I have revealed through my

analysis of *Les Guignols* parody is that the troupe has exposed how the burqa is situated in the Western collective public memory as an interchangeable political accessory to gender apartheid and violence. Through their sketch *Les Guignols* has deployed stereotypical representations and static imaginings associated with burqa-clad figures and the global war on terror to elicit outrage and sympathy combined with broad generalizations that produce an excess of affect.

On the one hand, through this *faux* advertisement the viewer has empathy for the burqa-clad Barbie doll, a victim of her violent husband Ken Laden who stands for a regime the West actively fights against. On the other hand, this kind of antagonistic positioning reveals the withholding of sympathy viewers have for (Afghan or Taliban) men, highlighting essentialzed imaginings of the war, of women and men, and those who are simply depicted through binary oppositions as either "good" or "bad" or as "victims" or "perpetrators of violence." These depictions despite being masked as humor through satirical parody have consequences when trying to explain the rise of fundamentalism or of gender apartheid, which isn't only about misogyny, sexism, or violence but is a complex problem steeped in a myriad of historical and political concerns here only presented through decontextualized imaginings.

Yet, the events that are mimicked or parodied in this sketch highlight the predictability of viewers' representations of the burqa and turban as they are tied to the regime and point us to issues about how meaning is made. I conclude following the work of Alsultany that these "simplified complex representations" work to unite violence as an attendant part of the burqa emphasizing how powerfully it is steeped in "the West's" collective memory accentuating an image of Afghan men and women in a state of perpetual conflict.

Chapter 4 Analyzing The Burqa Project

Introduction

Fig. 23. The Burqa Project from Jean-Ulrick Désert (2001).

In this chapter I investigate Jean-Ulrick Désert's conceptual artwork, *The Burqa Project: On the Borders of my Dreams I Encountered my Doubles Ghost* (2001) which depicts a series of life size mannequins dressed in burqas fashioned from the flags of prominent Western nation states. Désert's installation serves as a salient point of entry into the politics of the burqa, as it deploys symbols that are representative of countries that are all at "war" with the burqa. Importantly each of the respective nation states that is depicted in the artwork have also played a role in the occupation of Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 as well as aggressively working to ban the burqa at home.

My interest in this aspect of Désert's work emerges from his deployment of these figures dressed in burqas that have been fashioned out of the flags of Germany, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Given the highly symbolic nature of these seemingly conflicting cultural artifacts, those symbols representative of nation states and religious

identities who are depicted in hegemonic discourses as being at "war" with each other, we as viewers are both intrigued and repelled by the installation.

Drawn by our desire to look and to explore what is presented we are also shocked by the political discourses that surround the imagery deployed, and angered by the aesthetic equation that reduces these complex representations of identity to simplified monolithic categories. Combined, these seemingly embattled visual symbols find their representational currency positioned against each other. Still we as viewers are at odds with the emotions that are brought into play in Désert's imagery, unable to affix one particular read to the installation. In this chapter, I seek to discover what happens when the burqa and the Western nation meet, or more accurately, when an artist tries to represent an encounter between national flags and burqas, two icons that hegemonic discourses normally treat as incompatible and mutually exclusive.

Inspired by Homi Bhabha and following Pekka Rantanen, I have chosen to begin with ambivalence because I believe that this approach is something that does not occur inside the artwork itself but is experienced by viewers, whose readings are historically and politically contingent (Rantanen 334). The problem of ambivalence also highlights the multiplicity of readings that emerge from this work as meaning is not produced inside the text but rather through the viewer's experience of light, color, form, shape, medium, and text. Meaning is then something that emerges from the viewer's experience of the artwork.

It is impossible to ignore the installation's context, as it was commissioned by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC) in 2001 to inaugurate their Points of Entry Public Art Series exhibition on the occasion of the first year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks (JN Ulrick Désert). Due to the controversial nature of the artwork and the sensitivities surrounding the tragic events that inspired their making, a

commentary-board was made available for visitors so they could voice their reaction and interpretation (JN Ulrick Désert).

In the decade that has passed since the installation was first exhibited its context has also changed with a series of developments: including more than a decade of war and occupation in Afghanistan, a fascination with the burqa in popular culture led by Western mass media outlets, and the implementation of anti-burqa laws throughout "the West." These concerns have worked to further problematize the symbolic weight of the figures that are prominently featured in Désert's installation.

It is in conversation with other artworks those that consider similar conceptual concerns such as the representational currency of flags (for example Jasper Johns *Flag* series) or installations (such as the *Negerhosen 2000* series) that *concept* becomes a defining issue in the creation and subsequent analysis of an art object. When these concerns intersect they highlight the need to work through the social and cultural frames that have created the political discourses that objectify the burqa. Such developments will be acknowledged through a discussion of the artwork below: the legacy of conceptual art, followed by the politics of occupation including the wielding of the burqa as a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism within the mainstream Western mass media, and this will be explicated through a series of examples of the ongoing battle against the burqa at home (banning of the burqa). Starting with a discussion of context, I want to begin this chapter by identifying the circumstances that surrounded the installation's setting when first exhibited.

Context

The Burqa Project, exhibited by New York's Tenement Museum on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, allows the viewer to locate the artwork within

what Benedict Anderson terms an "imagined community," consolidating national sentiment and consensus through the appropriation of the national flags and burqas (9). The fantasy attached to the burqa-clad figures is driven by political discourses that have mobilized the burqa as a form of representational currency in the global war on terror. The installation also has an affective level that can be situated with feminist cultural studies of emotion and affect built upon the precariousness of the period (right after 9/11).

Evoking the imagery that was deployed in and around the time of the 9/11 attacks by western mainstream media outlets *The Burqa Project* also recalls the series of retaliatory military operations that followed, beginning with the invasion of Afghanistan by US led Allied forces (October 7th 2001-present). The occupation began with a series of aerial bombings that targeted Al-Qaeda's training camps in conjunction with maneuvers intended to remove the Taliban from their positions of control in Kabul. This started with military offensives that were dubbed Operation Enduring Freedom (the mission name given to joint military operations in Afghanistan post 9/11), 2001-Present (Benini and Moulton 406).

When talking about the global war on terror or the occupation of Afghanistan, the burqa is wielded as a highly affective signifier that is used to signal a monolithic vision of what constitutes a certain kind of Islamic practice in the eyes of "the West," particularly pervasive in US-centric discourses about the Taliban. Imaginings from this time worked to promote US nationalist interests globally with discourses functioning through transnational displacements imprinted on the burqa. In some cases, these narratives were explicit, as in the aftermath of 9/11 or in the lead up to the invasion of Afghanistan where claims to gender exceptionalism were aided through the marking of certain bodies (such as women in burqas and men in turbans) as hostile or victimized (Puar 2007, 5; Ahmed 1992, 2; Rantanen 343; MacDonald 26). With these associations in mind, the link amongst these respective nation-

states, their role in the global war on terror, and the privileging of the burqa are highlighted within the symbolic operations of the artwork (Rantanen 343).

Several of the above-mentioned elements are embraced within the tradition of conceptual art, a movement that advocates for concepts or ideas playing a central role in the interpretation of art. Within conceptual art, social and political commentary is incorporated into the artwork itself and is exploited by the artist for its aesthetic experience (Ward 36). Conceptual artworks function as a form of critique, providing the viewer with an environment where they can contemplate the theme (or concept) that underlies the artwork as opposed to the traditional inquires into medium that are familiar in art (37). When recalling *The Burqa Project* the visual conflation of seemingly antagonistic icons often situated as at clashing with each other allows viewers to think about the complex relationship between markers of transnational communities, nation states, and religious identities.

Conceptual Art & Its Influence

As a conceptual piece, *The Burqa Project* is one that privileges concept as a driver of a set of decisions that are to be made and carried out in an artwork (Baldwin 35; Ward 36-37; Cray 235). Such works often have a social and political subject that is isolated and is used to exploit its possible meanings (Ward 36). In the case of Désert's installation, he privileges the iconographic power of the burqas and the national flags, and builds from their combined symbolism. Importantly, the subject of the artwork is not simply the result of how their meaning changes when these symbols are combined (the burqas and national flags) but rather how they are read in relation to their greater social background (context). Through this lens, the artwork invites viewers to think about the relationship between the subjects, objects, and concepts privileged in the installation. Expanding on this very point Tumelo Mosaka the

Associate Curator for Contemporary Art and Exhibitions at The Brooklyn Museum, who included the installation in a later exhibit, “Infinite Island”[25] writes in a passage from the exhibition catalogue, that Désert’s work echoes:

> [how] France, Germany, America and the United Kingdom are joined in their complex relationships with the Arab world. Here the viewer is forced to question the Western world’s role in the spread of Muslim extremism and the impact of such extremism on Western civilizations. (Mosaka, Paul, and Ramirez 100)

In this excerpt, Mosaka explains that the installation encourages the viewer to question the role that these countries (France, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom) have played in the spread of Muslim extremism and its impact on “Western” culture. By wielding flags and burqas as instantly recognizable forms, as a form of visual shorthand, viewers are able to reflect upon particular imaginaries of identity, nationhood and religion (Tarlo 24; Behiery 131; Yeğenoğlu 57).

Moreover, understanding the symbolism that lies at the heart of the artwork requires that the viewer addresses the icons and the oppositional meanings that are inscribed in them through discourse (Emad 955; Rantanen 342-343). What is at stake when static symbols of nation states are refashioned as gendered symbols such as burqas? What mythologies about these respective “Western” countries are being imagined and told through Désert’s installation?

As a symbol of France as a nation, Désert’s French flag offers a productive arena for applying Roland Barthes’ method of discerning “mythologies” - those myths that appear “natural,” outside history “evolv[ing] from the nature of things” (1957, 110). *Mythologies* tracks Barthes’ frustrations with the social and political landscape of France from 1954-56,

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[25] The Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art exhibition presented some eighty works that were made in the early 2000s and that reflect the mix of cultures, diasporas, and socio-political realities of the region. 45 established and emerging artists were included in the exhibit taken from the Caribbean and abroad offering multiple perspectives on Caribbean history and identity. Painting, drawing, installation, sculpture, and video works were included and the exhibition was grouped along 6 themes: history, memory, myth, politics, religion, and popular culture. Curated by Tumelo Mosaka the Brooklyn Museum’s Associate Curator the exhibition ran from August 31, 2007-January 27, 2008.

particularly the way in which meaning at the broader cultural level was wielded (semiotically) in everyday objects such as advertisements and newspapers. Through one essay per month in his *période journalistique* (journalistic period) Barthes explored the evolving nature of *myth* analysing meaning and messages through semiotic analysis (Emad 955). In his investigation of the way in which newspapers presented cultural artifacts such as wrestling matches, children's toys, and magazines as objects of "everyday" life he sought to discover how they had meaning ascribed or encoded in them (966). The method of reading outlined in *Mythologies* became a method for denaturalizing myths, those cultural meanings that are produced at particular historical moments (955). In the terms established by Barthes' method the French flag featured in the artwork is a cultural artifact that represents specific nationalisms with meanings that delineate an uneasy and often oppositional sphere of religion and nation.

In Désert's installation the combination of burqas and flags serves as a rich way of imagining the intersection of nationhood, religion, and gender at different historical periods. In the decade that has followed the installation's creation, the burqa has become an icon of women's oppression represented through imageries that conjure visions of fundamentalist Islam, associated with the "traditional" realm of femininity, and the private realm of women (Behinery 131; Bowen 2006, 208). The burqa-clad mannequins serve as a site for staging oppositional encounters between gender and nation, private and public, secular and religious and for structuring its tensions. Reading the figures and their corresponding symbols is an exercise that swings the viewer between extreme binaries.

Iconic juxtapositions, those that inscribe cultural mythologies with gender also appear in other projects by the artist including *Negerhosen 2000* (see fig. 24). In the *Negerhosen 2000* series (which is comprised of 10 different artworks), Désert "addresses the social phenomenon of the invisibility of ethnic minorities in American and European cultures"

(Mosaka, Paul, and Ramirez 100). Désert is known for incorporating social tensions, visual rhetoric/semiotics, and socially relevant commentary into his artworks. These strategies are embedded within his performances and installations in an attempt to liberate underlying principles such as race, ethnicity, and religion to challenge racial perceptions and stereotypes (100).

In *Negerhosen 2000* (2001-present day), this is achieved through images taken from his public performances staged throughout Germany, in which he walks around in Bavarian lederhosen. Mosaka explains:

> [i]nspired by a disturbing incident in which he was accosted in the heart of Berlin because of his race, Désert dons the traditional German outfit including lederhosen, or leather shorts, to challenge racial perceptions and stereotypes as he walks around in public spaces and encounters the German public. By involving other participants in his performance, inviting them to pose with him and evoking mixed reactions, Désert implicates them as witness and documenters. (Mosaka, Paul, and Ramirez 100).

In *Negerhosen 2000*, the lederhosen turned Désert into a spectacle, documenting the people he met through photographs and later writing details of these encounters on the images themselves (Mosaka, Paul, and Ramirez 100). In this performance piece he seeks to make visible the "under-acknowledged racism that exists in Europe" Désert uses lederhosen as a representative symbol to challenge viewers' perceptions of who is included and excluded from hegemonic notions of what German identity looks like in his performances (100). The lederhosen serves as an important form of non-verbal communication, transmitting social signals to viewers (see fig. 25). Within the language of semiotics, fashion and adornment (lederhosen) not only have a language of their own but can also be read as an explanation of culture. They are used as a canvas of sorts, used to project different symbolic claims about identity, such as tradition/re-fashioning and who belongs and who does not. Note: the art, according to Désert are the images taken of the performances and not the performances themselves.

The Burqa Project also offers its own socially relevant commentary. It challenges the viewer with commanding visual rhetoric such as the symbolism of the national flags and burqas to think through visual conflation. By repositioning competing symbols that are often read as "backward" the burqa-clad figures are a site where oppositional encounters are staged. As a result, the subject is compelling because of its visual conflations; incorporating layers of competing symbolism and a range of meanings to rewrite the burqa-clad body.

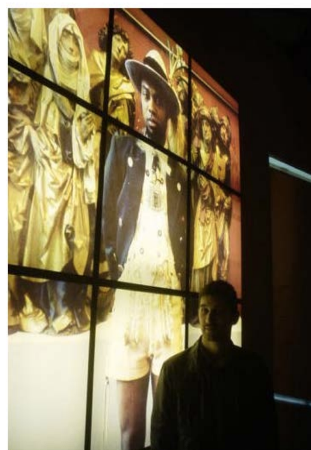

Fig. 24. *Negerhosen 2000* from Jean-Ulrick Désert (2001).
Fig. 25. *Negerhosen 2000* from Jean-Ulrick Désert (2001).

The installation also beckons viewer's forward. However, due to its rigid construction viewer feedback is less interactive than that which emerges from the *Negerhosen 2000* performances. As Désert is not out on the street with the in - your - face performances that are later expanded on in his studio (writing recollections on images and blowing them up for viewers see fig. 26). The commentary that is used to propel these images works to drive them forward both visually and conceptually. A similar strategy is at work in *The Burqa Project* but instead of recording the viewer's response and documenting them with a camera, only to later incorporate them into the artwork, he uses Internet message boards and guest books in gallery spaces to gather reactions. Incorporating feedback into the artwork as a form of running commentary adds another layer of meaning to the piece, which not only exceeds the

initial formulation of the work as that which is driven by a concept but also turns the work into a spectacle.

Fig. 26. *Negerhosen 2000*/*Postcards From My Loves* from Jean-Ulrick Désert (2001).

The visual impact of *The Burqa Project* is heightened by the displaying of the figures in storefront windows. They peer out over the street offering a powerful image of these icons that are to be read in relation to each other so that their meaning unfolds in a number of different ways (fig. 23). Désert's burqas are large and looming; through their size and positioning they command attention and hold the viewer's gaze. The fabric drapes over the figures, falling vertically with their folds highlighting height and shape, drawing the viewer's eye to their linear focus. Strategically, the fabric of the burqas has been folded in order to emphasize the colour and band differences of each of the flags. For example, when gazing at the mannequin draped in the French flag covering it, the number of folds highlights the whiteness of the middle panel. The elastic band that holds the shape of the garment around the mannequin's head and the white grille that covers the eyes are emphasized through detailed stitching and a rather subtle contrasting of shapes. The fabric that cascades gently

from the head to the shoulders transforms the mannequin's body, making its left side blue and the right side red, the white band in the middle emphasizing the differences in color.

When compared to the mannequin positioned beside it, the burqa fabricated from the American flag, despite having a similar shape, is not as nuanced as its French counterpart. Here, the stars overwhelm the top half of the mannequin and the stripes appear to be cut down to size. The proportions of the flag are off, emphasizing the immediate recognizability of these shapes more than their actual physical resemblance. Proportionality finds itself at play with the German flag-draped mannequin that captures the viewer's gaze and pulls it to the black eagle in the midst of the flag. The eagle and shield, a medieval symbol of the Holy Roman Empire, are centered on the burqa, located in the midst of the bands of black, red, and gold. The bands of the German state flag (which includes the eagled Federal Shield, unlike its civil counterpart) have an official length-width ratio of 2:3; here, in Désert's artwork, the shield is out of proportion on part of the three-dimensional cylindrical drape needed to cover the mannequin. Consequently, what is brought to the forefront is the seemingly overly large size of the eagle as well as what the eagle stands for: emblematically it represents the Christian tradition. Taken together, the eagle and the burqa visually clash, demonstrating the artist's understanding of those populations inside the nation-state's respective borders (Rantanen 345). The clash also emphasizes nationalist symbolization itself: Germany's Federal Eagle converses with its statuary counterpart in the US-American flag and the Bald Eagle associated with it. Visual conflation is apparent, at this moment, the political is relocated within the artwork: specifically, through a staging of the competition between the flags and burqas.

The differentiation of size, shape, and form within the installation transforms the figures and also protects them. As they are displayed through glass, spaced horizontally, the figures transform each other materially and conceptually. *The Burqa Project* emphasizes the

interiority and exteriority of the figures. The artwork integrates the figures into the space of the glass, but also reinforces the space of the viewer relative to the installation (Désert's piece, depending on each installation, has been displayed both at street-level and in an elevated position).

The space that the installation is displayed in becomes relevant when we realize that the artwork peers over the crowds from a first-floor walk up in New York City, allowing the artist to incorporate the storefront as a cultural ritual. At this location, the mannequins are displayed as if they were goods to be consumed conferring a special status to the artwork. The elevated position means that viewers are potential participants in the installation and no longer anonymous viewers. Positioning the mannequins in the storefront windows allows the sculpture to echo the role of the commodity within the logic of capitalism, the mannequins are displayed in the windows for viewers who want to possess goods.

As a result of these many tensions coming together the installation not only investigates the symbolic powers of the burqas, flags, and the process of commodification within the logic of capitalism - uniting the formal elements of the artwork with the viewer's experience - but it also manipulates the process of viewing. Space, framing, and context all play a role in how the installation is received. From this perspective, the viewer not only focuses on the burqa-clad figures but also the setting. Considering these very elements is a feature of the artwork itself that works to focus the viewer's attention away from the physicality of the object itself. By incorporating these considerations into the artwork, Désert dislocates the power of the symbols: breaking them apart, and reuniting them, and in this process he creates something new: a new series of signifiers.

This is typical of conceptual art characterized as it is by anti-definition, anti-medium, anti-aesthetic, self-reflective, ironic, and esoteric concerns (Goldie and Schellekens 34). These very characteristics point towards the *idea idea* - unlike traditional art forms such as

painting where the means for expressing an artist's vision is reflected in the medium itself: (for example the visible techniques an artist uses in a painting or in an installation) (34). However, in conceptual art "there is no physical medium: the medium is the idea. This is, in essence, the *idea idea*" (34). Conceptualism is driven by a desire to dematerialize the art object, influenced by the intersection of commodity culture, institutions, and politics. The American conceptual artist LeWitt expands on this when he writes in the opening lines of his famous "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art:"

> [in] conceptual art the idea or the concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form in art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. (qtd. in Goldie and Schellekens 35)

Fig. 27 and 28 offer studies that provide the viewer insight into the planning of the installation: a three-dimensional vision of location, size, and lighting. Likewise, if looking to the right of the image a different emphasis emerges with a top-down approach to the figures, highlighting the shape of the mannequins in relation to the window in which it could be displayed. The viewer's eye is drawn to the silhouettes of the mannequins, as they stand illuminated by large lights that frame the composition and create a dramatic effect during the night.

The staging and framing of the mannequins, in their inaugural location in the Tenement Museum's front windows, reinforces the size and shape of the figures. The choice of bottom-up lighting serves to offer a dramatic effect, reinforcing silhouettes adding another element of theatricality to the work. Viewers are compelled to read the burqas in relation to the flags.

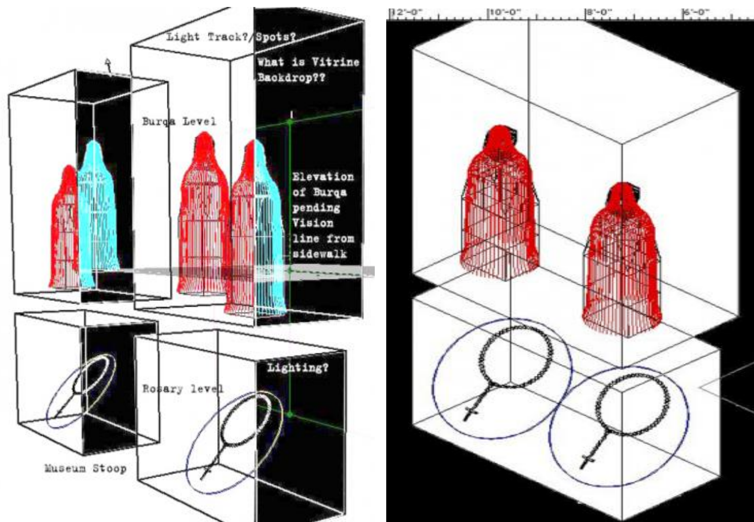

Fig. 27. (Front) Placement and Planning from Jean-Ulrick Désert (2001).
Fig. 28. (Rear) Placement and Planning from Jean-Ulrick Désert (2001).

The Burqa Project incorporates critical aesthetic and theoretical perspectives into an artwork. The installation is transformative, linking the practice of art to political critique. Relating this understanding of art as theory and practice to the installation requires the viewer to think of the work in relation to that which it disrupts. The principles of conceptual art that Désert has embraced in the artwork function as a form of attack on the privileged position of symbols in the piece itself. By appropriating the burqa as a symbol of religious communities (and/or of ethnic minorities/transnational communities and the national flags which recall similar forms of nation-states), he has been able to intervene in the binary operations that lie at the heart of the piece.

Taken together the deployment of the flags in the installation recalls the legacy of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, in particular that of Johns whose artistic works offered new ways of looking at conventional objects, such as flags. Désert's artwork takes into consideration the intertextual influences of his predecessors such as Johns.

Fig. 29. *Flag* (1954-1955) from Jasper Johns.
Fig. 30. *Three Flags* (1958) from Jasper Johns.

Flag and *Three Flags* are iconic artworks, cornerstones of Johns' legacy arguably two of his most famous renderings of the American flag that he created during the 1950s and 1960s. Joan Carpenter explains that the paintings made by Johns in the 1950s explore the content of the immediately perceived image, the structure and substance of what is below the surface, and also what we see above it (221). *Flag* can be read in a multitude of ways, with meaning residing in iconographic levels, in the pictures themselves, and through their densely textured paint surface that thinly veil elements of collage (224). Incorporating encaustic and plaster relief in his paintings he was able to explore not only texture but also three-dimensionality with the works projecting out towards the viewer.

More insight into Johns' acts of aesthetic intervention can be taken from the artist himself; he is quoted as saying that he chose flags precisely because they are "things which are seen and not looked at, not examined" (qtd. in Lewis and Lewis 443). Johns' inspiration for the flag series was rooted in his dreams, he recounts: "I one night dreamed that I had painted a flag of the United States of America and I got up the next morning and went out and bought materials and began to paint this flag. That's the way the first painting generally known was done" (MOMA, "Jasper Johns" 3). Later he explains, "[u]sing the design of the American flag took care of a great deal for me because I didn't have to design it. So I went on to similar things like the targets - things the mind already knows. This gave me room to work on other levels" (3).

What is highlighted in these excerpts is the social importance of the flag as a signifer of the nation serving as a reminder of American power. Philip Fisher in *Making and Effacing Art*, explains that perhaps what is significant about the *Flag* series is that it highlights the cultural and representational acts that are taking place when one encounters the flag (320). It is not just how the flag looks that is at stake but rather what we as viewers do with a flag (320-321). In agreement noted art critic Ben Heller writes:

> Jasper Johns paints…the American flag; but through the insistence of a flag rendered quite simply as a flag…Johns forces the viewer to actually *look* at the painting. This is a quiet forcing, a suggestive forcing, but an insistent one all the same. And it makes relevant the superbly worked surface, the quiet or bold color, the enjoyment of detail. (qtd. in Orton 141)

In the *Flag* and *Three Flags* paintings, Johns deploys striking political imagery to put what he called a "distracted public on alert" (qtd. in Lewis and Lewis 443). His flag-based works sought to regain the public's attention on four different levels of understanding flags: as an image, a surface, in terms of its materiality, and its physicality (Mitchell 1986, 208). In order to achieve this, Johns explored the US-American flag, as a sentimental totem of mass culture surround by national demagoguery (Mitchell 1986, 231; Orton 104). Juxtaposing size, color, texture, number, and materials, he pushed beyond the limitations of the symbols. As symbols of mass culture and the nation state, the flags have been transformed into another state where the viewer sees them as both unstable and changeable objects.

In Johns' paintings, viewers can break down the "aura" of the object touching upon Walter Benjamin's definition of aura in his essay "A Short History of Photography" as "the unique appearance of a distance, however close at hand" (49). By structuring and posturing the painting, playing with the painterly qualities of its surface and structure, and going from the visual to tactile, Johns plays with the conditions of art, its aura, and its breath (Mitchell 1986, 210). By using flags in atypical ways he asks the viewer to look past the conventional, to look at the flags through new eyes - as motifs of "national unity and imperial power"

(Mitchell 1994, 238). Returning to *Three Flags* this for example can be seen in his exploration of the emblematic imagery of the flag by superimposing three canvases - one upon the other - that appear to be jutting out at the viewer.

Figs. 29 and 30 (*Flag* and *Three Flags*) offer contrasting perspectives on flags; the first pulls the viewer into the American flag itself, emphasizing the absolute flatness of emblems, and the other as it projects towards the viewer offers an opposite vision. By appropriating objects laden with national demagoguery, the artist explores the subject matter in new ways by stretching the viewer's imagination. The power of the imagery to unsettle viewers resonates with both artists as each has experienced a backlash. For example, when *Flag* was exhibited at the Castelli Galley in the "New Work" show Robert Rosenblum asked if it was "blasphemous or respectful [unpatriotic or patriotic], simple-minded or recondite?" (53). Echoing a similar sentiment, noted art buyer Alfred Barr refused to buy *Flag* for the Museum of Modern Art, "fearing political repercussions" (qtd. in Mitchell 1994, 238).

Désert too seeks out the impersonal elements of the flags and burqas to explore them, in order, to paraphrase Johns, to view those things that are seen and not examined, to take the viewer beyond conventional readings so they can find another way of looking. In terms of the graphic exploration of signs and icons, both Pop Art and DADA have played a significant influence on both artists. Déserts' recognition of the formality of the flags, combined with a playful attitude towards the subject matter, breaks with the stark formal structure of the artwork. By gendering and embodying these flags those that are usually disembodied he brings a new light to them. By invoking the power of the flags as emblems of transnational communities, Désert takes the viewer to a place where they can break free of the conventional, the immediate, and the recognizable.

With this said, what is new about the installation is that it invites viewers to re-envision these flags in a space where no flag is alone. The mannequins serve as signifiers of

globalized transnational communities where individuals and groups are not representing nations but belong, regardless of their nationality (Ferree 13). Theoretical understandings of the economics of globalization often outstrip efforts to theorize its political and cultural dynamics. Explanations of globalization often focus on global capitalism, the international division of labor and information technology that has worked to speed up the integration of regional economies and the accelerated flow of capital, goods, and people. Yet, the transfer of political and cultural discourses from North to South has also left its imprint. Universal discourses on globalization in the 1990s singled out Islam and Muslim women as threats, obstacles or exceptions to this new world. In its quest towards homogenization, global intolerance of multiculturalism is linked to the attack of Islamic cultures, which seems to be the point beyond which this debate cannot progress (Ferree 22). Elements of these debates unfold in the following sections where I discuss the greater political context that surrounds the icons present in the artwork (burqas and national flags) and then move onto a discussion of them in relation to relevant political concerns.

Politics

In 2001, following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the US-American government, with the support of its allies and NATO, launched an attack on Afghanistan and the Taliban regime (who ruled the country at the time) (Weisbrode 63). The Taliban government was thought to be sponsoring, supporting, harboring, or abetting terrorism linked to Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden (Marsden 142). With the support of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1368, 44 contributing nations (more than all of the member states in NATO who initially led the international force), and under article 51 of the UN Charter, which was used to declare the government in Afghanistan “[a] threat to

international peace and security," military intervention in Afghanistan was justified as self-defense ("UN Security").

Shortly after the invasion, following the signing of the Bonn Agreement in December 2001, the United States installed an interim government, chaired by Hamid Karzai. However, after the initial coalition victory over the Taliban and the establishment of a provisional government, all forms of military intervention quickly began to sour (Jones xxviii). The Taliban insurgency, supported by warlords and the drug trade have put up a strong guerrilla-style resistance to the ISAF and the coalition over the past decade. In 2007, Operation Enduring Freedom and the ISAF merged under a single command and Afghanistan's regions were divided up among the allies in order to secure specific sections of the country, such as the South and the West.[26] British and American troops advanced into Taliban-controlled territories which situated in mountainous regions, for example, the Hindu-Kush region, that stretches between central Afghanistan and northern Pakistan hindered advancement and to this day offers pockets of protection to insurgents (xxviii). Despite the rise in numbers of troops deployed in the region in the past decade the results "have not been encouraging" with American troops from Iraq being used as reinforcements, and constant calls to allies to increase their efforts have become contentious (Greenway 4). The war in Afghanistan has fallen out of favor with support quickly dwindling as a result of increased political dissonance by the civilian population of those countries involved in supporting the war effort (America and its Allies). The war has been met with a growing backlash with civilians feeling that they are "being bogged down in an endless war" (Rubin 74). In an attempt to

[26] In "Afghanistan: War on Terror/War in Error" Raphael Veit offers a critical discussion of early American military intervention in Afghanistan. What is of particular interest is his discussion of the framing of campaign successes against loss of life and devastation. More specifically, Veit addresses the numbers of Afghans lost via invasion and military offensives and the spurring of massive refugee outflows, he successfully reads them in relation to military operations which have been deemed "operationally sound." When read in-conjunction with Fatima Ayub and Sari Kouvo's "Righting the Course? Humanitarian Intervention, the War on Terror and the Future of Afghanistan" the framing of the US governments war on terror as a political tool is highlighted against the backdrop of the alarming humanitarian crisis that ensued (646).

counter discord Barack Obama's presidency has changed the emphasis on military intervention as a war of necessity and not by implication, a war of "choice," pledging to develop an "exit strategy."

In 2010 a conference was called in London, bringing together all those countries involved in operations in Afghanistan to develop a disengagement agreement (Greenway 5). Talks with the Afghan government, shifting military capabilities and training to the country - with an eye towards national security, combined with an engagement policy, civil cooperation and reconstruction, and talks with "moderate" Taliban forces is attempting to ensure a gradual disengagement from the country (5). Despite all of this the responsibility, obligations, and preconditions that aim to secure the country are complex and the strategies to secure and strengthen government control present many obstacles to the Afghan government. Failure in the war effort has adversely affected the United States and its allies politically, who are thought of as engaging in "an endless war" with little possibility of resolving the situation. These countries, whose presence is reflected in the national flags featured in *The Burqa Project* also brings fore the respective political role each plays in the occupation of Afghanistan. In the following section I will expand on how the burqa-clad body became a site for staging these historical instances further.

Politics and Narrative Traditions

> Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity - a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent. Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. Yet the terrorists who helped rule that country now plot and plan in many countries. And they must be stopped. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women. (Bush 2001)

Long before the attacks on the United States in 2001 the US-American mass media began to quickly pick up on what the left-leaning European press and women's rights organizations had been saying for five years: that the Taliban regime was preying upon women (Stabile and Kumar 765-66; Hunt 116). In the months that followed 9/11, images were paraded across the front pages of the mainstream mass media that demonized the burqa. President George W. Bush referred to these "women of cover" and these images found themselves quickly leaking into mainstream political discourse (Szörényi 1; Terray 118; Schwartz-DuPre 443-444). Images of burqa-clad women proliferated in the popular press, appearing, for example, on the cover of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Vogue*, and *Women's Wear Daily*.

The attention given to the suffering of women in Afghanistan had its merits. On the one hand, the oppression of women at the hands of the Taliban regime had been extensively documented and was publicly addressed. On the other hand, women's liberation became precariously tied to the US-American government's attempt to "sell the war to the US public" (Stabile and Kumar 765-766). For example former Secretary of State Colin Powell is quoted as saying:

> The rights of the women of Afghanistan will not be negotiable…when the light is fully shed throughout all of Afghanistan, the United States is committed to working to ensure not only that the women of Afghanistan regain their place in the sun, but they have a place in their future government as well. (qtd. in Sparrow)

The protection of women would become immediately linked to the US government's military intervention, complemented by protection scenarios and Orientalist and neo-Orientalist discourses tied to imperialism (Riley 1192). The Taliban's mistreatment of women coupled with the vast number of human rights violations that were documented by international agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International served as further justification for military intervention by allied forces (Riley 1192; Innocent 38; Ayub and

Kouvo 647). The war was explained away with an Orientalist lens; constructing "the West" as a civilizer with an obligation to tame the Islamic world - a contemporary civilizing mission (Stabile and Kumar 766).

However prior to 9/11 the US government supported the Taliban financially washing their hands of the regimes many violations against women. Political relations between the American and Afghan governments were driven by greed, oil in exchange for vast sums of money. At the time the consortium CentGas was attempting to build a pipeline that ran through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean during the Taliban's siege of Kabul in 1996 (Rashid 179). Economic interests superseded democracy and women's rights, as they had in Saudi Arabia, an ally of the US with an atrocious record on women's rights. The similarities between the two countries, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan were striking at the time: both had radical strains of fundamentalist Islam, Wahhabi and Deobandi, and supported the financing of *madrassas* (religious schools) where the Taliban were trained (Stabile and Kumar 769).
These sentiments were conveyed by an American diplomat who is quoted as saying that the "Taliban will develop like the Saudis did. There will be Aramco, pipelines, an emir, no parliament and lots of Sharia law. We can live with that" (Rashid 179). What develops from this undermines the idea that the Taliban's treatment of women is natural, stemming from the tribal nature of that society (Stabile and Kumar 769). The pipelines took precedence over women's rights and human rights in the region and the US government turned its back on what had been happening. These events served to help create a specific vision of women in Afghanistan that developed out of two narrative traditions; those that draw upon protectionist scenarios and those that are drawn from Orientalism. Both perspectives derive their rhetorical power from discourses of imperialism and use liberatory rhetoric espousing concerns of protecting women and girls to rev up support for military intervention in the country. It is at

this juncture that narrative traditions and practices converged; combining protectionist scenarios with Orientalism.

For example, the argument that women and girls in Afghanistan need to be protected, serving as a justification for military intervention, combines elements from both traditions. Orientalist discourses (despite having their own colonial history) employ protectionist scenarios as a form of justification for imperialist actions (769). Protection scenarios can be thought of as a way of protecting a feminized version of the nation state from predatory advances that are real or imagined (770). In her article "Rape and the New World Order" Susan Jeffords describes a protection scenario as that which:

> [is] established through three categories that stand in unstable conjunction with one another: the protected or victim (the person violated by the villain); the threat or villain (the person who attacks the victim); and the protector or hero (the person who protects or rescues the victim or promises such aid. (204)

Protectionist scenarios as Abu-Lughod, Spivak and Ahmed have reminded us have played a significant role as a justificatory narrative in colonialist projects. Such assumptions are tied to Orientalist frameworks which are based upon domination and the denial of agency.

The general basis of Orientalist thought imagines along polarized geographies those that divide the world into unequal parts, the larger called the Orient and "the other" known as the Occident or "the West." This imagined geography has been used not only to polarize "us" and "them" but also to stereotype and caricature and bears little resemblance to reality. Islam in particular has fallen victim to a particular vision of the world that characterizes it as primitive and backward in relation to its "Western" counterparts. Said writes in *Covering Islam*:

> [the] world of Islam - its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding - is still mired in religion, primitivism and backwardness. Orientalism posits the West as modern, greater than the sum of its parts, full of enriching contradictions, and yet always Western in its cultural identity. (1981, 10)

Such a vision of Islam is often used to support military intervention, under the guise of the civilizing mission and they are tied to the construction of the Middle East and Central Asia. Almost a decade later, Said explains further in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*:

> [the] idea that some races and cultures have a higher aim in life than others… gives the more powerful, more developed, more civilized the right therefore to colonize others, not in the name of brute force or raw plunder, both of which are standard components of the exercise, but in the name of a noble ideal. (2000, 574)

What can be taken from this excerpt is that the "noble ideal" that develops from military intervention such as the war in Afghanistan, operates under the guise of protectionist scenarios that advocate for the liberation of women and girls (2000, 574). Protectionist scenarios and modern-day civilizing missions have been deployed as justifications for war on terror and the invasion of Afghanistan. The power of these sentiments can be observed in the American mainstream mass medias reporting of the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. For example, from 12 September 2001 to the 1 January 2002, 93 newspaper articles appeared, which was more than three times the number of articles that had previously appeared in 1999 and six times more than those had appeared in the 18 months before 9/11 (Stabile and Kumar 772). The civilizing missions used to "help save Afghan women and girls" increased dramatically when burqa-clad Afghan women became the subjects of political and public concern.

The following section follows the consequences of framing Islamic women with the burqa, where the burqa becomes an icon of what the West does not want to happen, and where it serves as a symbol of resistance to a particular form of religious practice. The artwork invites the viewer to think of nations together; posed in relation to one another, but it also asks us to think about whether we as viewers are recruited to think along these lines.

The Burqa as a Cultural Religious Marker

The burqa-clad mannequins prominently featured in Désert's artwork are presented as static, as immoveable, and as impenetrable to the eye. They are positioned not only in relation to the national flags but importantly they serve as a visual challenge to them. As gendered cultural objects that are associated with a certain kind of Islamic fundamentalist religious practice, the burqas confront prescribed notions of identity (Grace 12). As the burqa is a cultural object tied to hegemonic constructions of imagined communities, it serves as a form of visual shorthand for those who are united by discursive struggles (specifically those discourses that situate women as political entities within the nation state). What is compelling in this artwork is how the nation is imagined as a community and posed against other forms of identity, such as burqas that have come to represent changing social relations between groups (men and women) in a nation (Afghanistan) at a specific moment in time (1996- to the present). Burqas are objects through which Muslims - framed as the other - are represented in popular discourses, and has found itself shifting its way through a number of different and polarizing discourses about women (Riley 2013, 16; Razack 2008, 8; Hunt 117; Spivak 1988, 296).

What is made visible in this artwork is not just how the burqa is wielded as a signifier of Islam or as a marker of violence (that is done to women) but also those who are both limited and excluded from the confines of borders. Through this lens burqas are representative of the fighting of ideological battles within the confines of specific borders.

These concerns bring the viewer face-to-face with one of the central problems posed in this chapter. How does Désert wield the burqa as a challenge to dominant conceptions of Western identity (represented by the national flags of France, Germany, the UK, and the US)? Désert's artwork not only poses the flags and burqas in relation to each other, begging

them to be re-read, but he offers a space where such anxieties and fears can be opened up and explored. The cultural and political significance of such moments becomes even more visible when one imagines laws in the current day, those that have been passed banning the burqa. The nation and nationalism are juxtaposed with notions of the burqa, reflected in the national flags, as symbols of the nation-state and as signifiers of identities.

Cultural and religious traditions are reflected in Désert's burqa-clad mannequins but they are also posed in relation to draw attention to the economic and political aspects of nationalism. Focusing on these symbols as juxtaposing markers of cultural, religious, or political communities allows for different expressions of power to be visually expressed. These elements were reflected within the artwork when it was originally installed in 2002, and more than a decade later the symbols still have something to say to audiences.

The connection between the nation-state and times of political crisis becomes accentuated even further when we consider how nation-states wield citizenship as a way of defining membership. In France for example *jus sanguinis*, right of blood (and *jus soli*, right of land), is invoked as social policies when nationality is determined in part by the citizenship of parents - this practice is still prevalent today (Holton 151; Lentin and Titley 50). As a model of ethnonationalism, Smith's model proves valuable when addressing how identity can be understood in situations of challenge. Within this context, the link between the flag and the burqa becomes important, it makes the link between the two visible, displacing other possible readings. In the decade that followed the commissioning of the artwork, the debate around the burqa and Frenchness would become increasingly volatile. *The Burqa Project* explores these hostilities by making the viewer aware of the politicized nature of these competing symbols and this can be seen through the implementation of the "burqa ban" in a number of "Western" countries such as France where a recent law prohibits the garment from the public domain (as of April of 2011). Since the inception of the law, women in full-face

veils such as burqas have been prohibited from entering public spaces. French politicians who supported the ban said they were acting to protect “gender equality” and the “dignity” of women.

As a cultural artifact, the burqa represents a challenge to hegemonic notions of Frenchness. The case for this is derived from the burqa being explicitly linked to social groups who are set aside from the dominant social group. In Anthony Smith’s term, it functions as a signifier of ethnicity (*ethnie*). Through this context, the burqa works to differentiate social groups from others, those that threaten or oppress them, such a situation can apply to migrants who are threatened by the majorities within a country, in this example it is France. New meaning becomes tied to the cloth representing a lack of migrant assimilation within the mainstream (culture) (MacDonald 26). The form of political expression that emerges from such a train of thought is problematic in its positioning of emblems of the nation state that are poised against those that represent difference (the burqa) - reinforcing exclusion (Keaton 4). The nation state finds itself not only policing its territories and its “real” and “imagined” borders but also its “internal” borders those that serve to exclude those that transgress its norms (Grace 12; Keaton 4). This is what Désert’s installation is doing, by juxtaposing these highly emotive issues with these greater symbols offering a space where the viewer can negotiate the numbers of meanings.

The point here is not that *The Burqa Project* simply mobilizes a particular set of differences such as nationalism and religious identity posited in relation to each other. Rather it is through the mobilization of these icons that their impact comes to be recognized by the viewer. In other words, the differences harnessed, such as religion and ethnicity, function as social identifiers that are the result of a series of struggles. They are positioned in relation to greater signifiers of a group of people, in a certain series of borders. This distinction can be illustrated by Raymond Firth’s study on the role of flags in modern life which distinguishes

the symbolic and signaling functions of flags (356). Firth's study is one of the few that explores the functions of flags in contemporary society. National flags for Firth have a symbolic function; they are a "condensation symbol" with "a focus for sentiment about society" (356). Citizens revere the flag because it represents the sacredness of the nation, and, despite this, they have no informational content per se: their sole job is to interpellate the viewer. A flag's purpose is visible through its power to invoke a particular series of emotions, functioning like a signal. Importantly, what distinguishes the symbol from the signal is the conscious awareness of the national flag on the recipient (Billig 39).

The power of national flags becomes cemented through use, for example there is a distinction between the waved and the unwaved flag. Roland Barthes' iconic essay, "Myth Today," takes up a similar distinction when he reads the photo of a young black soldier. Barthes reads the image of the soldier in relation to French imperialism and explores how the magazine *Paris-Match* offers a particular representation of culture:

> I am at the barber's, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (1957, 115)

For Barthes, the object of his cultural critique is the magazine and the framing of the young soldier, who is presented as included and excluded from contemporary society. What is important about this image and his reading, is how an image can be read as a myth by linking its message to a construction of Frenchness; within this context, it serves as an example of national culture. The soldier is read in relation to his apparent saluting of the flag; he becomes an object through which pride in nationality is read.

Désert's modified burqa-flags spark a moment of iconic recognition between viewer and object. By employing the precepts of conceptual art, he breaks the symbols free from

their fixed and traditional categories by uniting them with their political and social significance.

Conclusion

What happens when seemingly antagonistic symbols of national and religious identity (the Western nation and the burqa) intersect in an artwork? Or when an artist tries to represent an encounter between two icons that hegemonic discourses normally treat as incompatible and mutually exclusive? The burqa-clad mannequins in *The Burqa Project* serve as a site for the interplay of politically and culturally oppositional spheres staging a visual space for viewers where they swing between extremes: gender vs. nation, private vs. public, secular vs. religious, backward vs. progressive, as well as pre-modern vs. modern. The intersection of these separate spheres is reconciled through the conflation of national flags and burqas that encourages viewers to consider the politics of the burqa.

With multifaceted layers of social and political critique, Jean-Ulrick Désert invokes powerful symbols (national flags and burqas) to recall the first year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the US led occupation in Afghanistan, and the global war on terror aided by allied forces (notably Germany, France, and the United Kingdom). At the same time, the artwork also points viewers to the aftermath of occupation, to countries aggressively working to ban the burqa at home.

By problematizing political discourses that situate burqas and national flags as seemingly antagonistic icons, the installation beckons viewers to rethink static icons of identity. Braced by notions of "embattlement" viewers are drawn to think through the complex relation of nationhood, religion, and gender. Here, the artist visually conflates

burqa-clad mannequins and national flags to incorporate additional layers of competing symbolism to rewrite the body.

In this chapter, the burqa emerges not simply as a symbol of what “the West” does not want to happen at home or abroad, but it is also a symbol of resistance to certain forms of politics and religion (occupation, stereotyping, and the Taliban’s particular brand of Islamic fundamentalism). When these symbols are combined, the artwork calls for another reading. We are asked to imagine who is included and who is excluded from the boundaries of a homogenous national identity.

Jean-Ulrick Désert’s installation reveals a great deal about pervasive cultural and political imaginings of gender, nation, and religion. The burqa-clad mannequins featured in his artwork serve as a site where viewers can imagine joining these separate spheres and breaking them free from their monolithic confines to reveal greater socio-political entanglements.

Chapter 5 The Sweden Democrats

Introduction

When the *Sverigedemokraterna*[27] (translated from Swedish to English as the "Sweden Democrats," hereinafter referred to as SD) unveiled their campaign advertisement for the 2010 parliamentary election,[28] they used a series of images which positioned immigrants as scapegoats by creating a link between immigration and the domestic budgetary crisis. While the advertisement associates immigration and Islam with the economic failings of Swedish society, the SD also energized new forms of representation, a new embodiment of Swedishness and, additionally, of conceptualizations of the other. On the surface, the controversial campaign advert identifies economic concerns and moral corruption with immigration, women, and Islam. Perhaps, as a result of this immediate reading, the state's leading broadcaster, TV4,[29] banned the advertisement for inciting hate speech before it even aired on Swedish television. The act of censorship thrust the ad center stage, with a flurry of international media coverage and the SD proclaiming unlawful persecution. Paradoxically, or, perhaps, expectedly, censorship of the advertisement, and the ensuing public debate about censorship, dramatically increased awareness of the party and their message, in various and complex ways.[30]

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[27] The SD are a far-right anti-immigrant party who did well in the election taking 5.7 percent of the vote and securing 20 seats in parliament with increased gains in the aftermath of the 2010 election (Nyberg). They were formed in 1988 and describe themselves as a nationalist movement, since the 7th of May 2005 they have been led by chairman Jimmie Akesson and Björn Söder the party's Secretary (Klanzad).

[28] On September 19, 2010 Sweden's general election was held with 349 seats up for election and a total electorate that amounts to 7,000,000 voters with a turnout that averages approximately 80% for the last 60 years (The International Republican Institute). For almost all of the 20th century, the country has been ruled by the Social Democrats who set the left-of-centre social and economic policy including an unbroken 40-year run in government between 1936 and 1976 (The International Republican Institute).

[29] TV4 is the only commercial television channel with national coverage in the analogue network in Sweden, that like its national terrestrial channels is subjected to Government license (Herzog 275).

[30] Interestingly an audio version of the controversial advertisement intended for the radio was also banned with similar concerns that it would breach the country's hate speech laws ("Racist Political Ad").

By analyzing the SD campaign advertisement and the censorship surrounding it, I aim to develop a critical understanding not only of representations of cultural, ethnic, or religious difference, but more specifically, of how the burqa is represented. In this chapter I seek to discover how the burqa has been wielded as an icon indicative of that which Western societies must fight against. At issue here is whether anti-immigrant discourses and popular notions of the Afghan woman, who are represented as subjugated and victimized by the burqa have been condensed into a single body. Within the context of this advert, otherness[31] is produced and reproduced through a complex combination of images, text, sound, and narration. Burqas are presented as parasitic and ubiquitous among immigrants; they symbolize an unknown threat. The recoding of the burqas significance does not stop there. For example, the woman beneath the garment is not depicted as struggling to escape the patriarchy that has put her there. Instead, the ad advances the idea of the burqa as symbolic of that which Swedish society must fight to overcome: it is a symbol of a call for Swedish opposition to Islamic immigration.

In large part, the conversation that surrounded the SD in the 2010 election was concerned with questions of censorship and victimhood. Rather than engaging or opposing the act of censorship itself, in this chapter I look to the work of Judith Butler and her discussion of discursive censorship in *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative.* To do so, I employ the practice of close reading to analyze the representations and concepts deployed in this advertisement and illuminate the ways they are vulnerable to both reinterpretation and new citations. Butler's work on censorship matters because it serves as a response to existing social concerns such as hate speech and censorship. Her work sheds light

[31] The concept of "the other" that I mobilize in this chapter is spelled out in Chapter 2 Heroic Victims where I employ Spivak's understanding of the "other" as it emerges from her discussion of ideology and the shifting grounds of subject constitution in "The Politics of Interpretations" from *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. In this text the "other" is loosely defined as a by-product of sociopolitical discourses, where some members are excluded from group constitution (those who have legitimacy and power). Importantly, it is worth noting that within this essay, woman is considered as the ideologically excluded other and it is this discussion that her text works to correct. Succinctly, "the other" can be articulated as the ideologically excluded subject.

on how social and political acts such as those performed or authorized by institutions are often reactionary in their political aims. Within the context of the censored SD ad, the act of censorship does not deliver its intended consequences, but rather diminishes public spaces for contestation. Indeed, censorship serves to counter its own effects and produces a new set of consequences that may even heighten the power of the speech that it sought to silence.

The Right Wing in the Political Context of Contemporary Sweden

Given the long-term entrenchment of politics and policies that have shaped the classic vision of the welfare state, Sweden has not provided receptive ground for right-wing populism. For decades the country has been considered "a viable alternative to Thacherite neo-liberalism, while for many currents within Europe's dwindling group of ruling Socialist parties Sweden has come to represent the light beckoning at the end of a long tunnel of austerity and restructuring" (Pontusson 6). Jonas Pontusson's quote highlights Sweden's image as a safe haven for the Scandinavian project of Social Democracy juxtaposed against the impinging demands of neoliberalism. For more than seven decades, Sweden's liberal welfare state has been guarded by the Social Democratic Party (SAP) in conjunction with members of the left-wing bloc, composed of Social Democrats and Communists/ex-Communists, that stand in opposition to the right-wing bloc of Conservatives, Liberals, and the Center Party (6).

Since the postwar period, Sweden, like its Scandinavian counterparts, has experienced pronounced social, political, and demographic changes (Runblom 624). Immigration in particular has played a significant role in altering the model of "Swedishness," moving from an "ethnically homogenous population to one with mixed ethnic background" (624). With

new population groups settling in, Sweden has worked to politically satisfy its inhabitants and introduce a new model that encompasses its burgeoning cultural diversity (624).

In 1975 Sweden declared itself officially "multicultural," ushering in a model based on "equality," "freedom of choice," and "partnership" (Joppke and Morawska 13). The implementation of this "multicultural model" was a crucial moment in the recognition of the cultural diversity of immigrants and religious minorities in Sweden. Yet with economic tensions mounting in the mid-1980s, followed by a number of challenges to its "immigration policy," Sweden would turn away from an official definition of "multiculturalism" in the 1990s. Against the backdrop of entry into the European Union (1995), rising unemployment, and the emergence of neoliberal discourses on self-sufficiency, public sentiment began to change. Immigrants were no longer embraced as distinct minorities and the "multicultural model" was disavowed in favor of assimilationist policies.

The move away from "multiculturalism" prepared the ground for a pan-European sentiment with populist right-wing parties emerging, such as the New Democracy, that brought with them illiberal and xenophobic rhetoric (Widfeldt 265). Targeting the vast numbers of asylum seekers and refugees who sought safety in Sweden during the Balkan conflict, the New Democracy initially drew a considerable amount of attention, but then disappeared a few years later. From the ashes of the far-right tradition, a number of neo-Nazi parties such as the *Nordiska Rikspartiet* (Nordic Realm Party) would emerge, and would be revitalized later in small splinter groups such as the Sweden Democrats.

Following the 2006 parliamentary election, the left-wing bloc, led by the SAP, experienced massive losses at the polls. In what would ensue, SAP party leadership was singled out for not focusing on the effects of the economic crisis, downplaying the consequences of unemployment, and for ignoring the needs of voters. This error in the left bloc's thinking served as a turning point; right-wing populists claimed that mainstream

parties were out of touch with voters. It is in this climate that the Sweden Democrats would begin to emerge and bring their political viewpoints into the limelight (Rydgren 2005, 430).

Formed in 1988, the SD self-identifies as a nationalist movement. In the late 1990s they renounced Nazism. In addition, they modified their provocative stance on abortion, on adoption from outside Europe, and on capital punishment (Rydgren 2006, 108). Marked by a strong culturalist sentiment and an aversion to liberalism, the Party frequently wields accounts of "multicultural collapse" supported by xenophobic statements against ethnopluralism (109). This point of view is reflected in their manifesto from 2002: "[th]e Sweden Democrats' primary political goal is to defend our national identity" (108). Not only does the SD position itself as a defender of the traditional Swedish nation state but it also uses its status as a political outsider to drum up support from disenfranchised voters.

With its anti-immigrant stance, a high degree of disillusionment with established political parties, concerns with unemployment, and the changing face of Sweden, the SD mobilizes highly charged racial signifiers within simplified debates. Such an agenda becomes visible in the strategic co-opting of veiled Muslim women's bodies as "the other" in the controversial 2010 campaign ad, which would be subsequently censored. This is a useful entry point for this critical discussion about the ways in which messages of cultural inferiority and dysfunction are disseminated within the SD's campaign.

Sverigedemokraterna's Campaign Advert

In synopsis, the *Sverigedemokraterna's* (SD) 2010 election campaign advertisement dramatically depicts an aging white pensioner in competition with a faceless mob of women in burqas for the Swedish government's financial resources. The advert is multifaceted, offering the viewer a number of narratives to interpret and characterize the figure of the

Islamic immigrant on cultural, religious, social, and economic levels. The SD represents the threat to Swedish society as large and fast moving, difficult to identify, and overwhelming. On the surface, the ad tells the viewer a story about the ills of immigration and the strain of immigrants on the Swedish economy. Although the ad's elements are persuasively implemented and designed to appeal to voters on an initial level, such a simplistic display of scapegoating, the practice of signaling out any party for unmerited negative treatment is precarious and immediately caught by issues relating to freedom of speech and censorship.

A closer examination of the campaign advertisement yields further information. My analysis identifies a complex combination of framing devices at work in the ad highlighting the importance of image, sound, text, and narrative.

The opening sequence begins with a quick shot of the *Statsbudget* (state budget) on a counter, beginning at 505,926,342,293 krona, but quickly decreasing (fig. 31). A narrator's voice declares, "Politics is all about making priorities" (see English translation of the Swedish on YouTube). A number of heavily edited images follow that focus the viewer's eyes upon a dimly lighted room and two bureaucrats, one male and the other female, sitting at desks processing handfuls of bank notes from cardboard boxes.

The use of the narrator's voice in the opening sequence, as an anonymous and omniscient storyteller helps reinforce the proposed objectivity of the message. Moreover, the narrative voiceover works to situate the visual material and reinforce the campaign subtext.

Throughout the clip, the narrator's voice functions in conjunction with the actors through conceptual overlap, and reinforces the SD's political message. In addition, narration serves to clarify the storyline and shape the campaign rhetoric. As a speaking subject, the narrator's voice enables the viewer to read the images in combination with the narrative form of the text. It is important to recognize that from the start, the advert is framed as a factual account. SD's narrator serves a particular role, not simply as narrator, but also as a vocal participant in

the ad. Discourses relating to class struggle, gender, nationalism, and xenophobia begin to emerge and take shape as her voice acts to reinforce the message and broadcast the meanings of the ad.

Fig. 31. *Statsbudget* counter from SD (2010).
Fig. 32. Countdown of the *Statsbudget* from SD (2010).

As the ad continues, stacks of cardboard boxes surround the two figures as they process Swedish krona (bank notes). Images of the *Statsbudget* (state budget) counter are interspersed with images of the bureaucrats, until a final tally of 100,000,000 is reached and dramatically flashes on the screen. The multiple close-ups of the budget serve to reinforce the narrator's message (fig. 32). The many references to bureaucracy and technology that appear in the opening sequence - the money-counting machines, emergency lights, and sirens - serve to suggest an overburdened state budget (see fig. 33 and 34). Framed and represented together, these technologies serve as a visual warning system to the viewer.

Fast-paced editing helps set the rhythm of the storyline. Despite the number of images intertwined within the thirty-second clip, the shots do not break the ad's continuity; rather, each frame serves to contribute further to the advert, as all segments contain information meaningful for the overall effect. The frames are carefully selected to reinforce the narrative of the campaign clip, since each image relates to the narrator's text and adds particular pieces of information. As the visual material accumulates and the ad proceeds, the narrator interjects: "Now you have a choice." After which, a siren starts to sound, and the two tables

with bureaucrats who are illuminated by a flashing emergency light (fig. 35). The voice continues, beckoning, “What is your choice?” The sirens and lights further reinforce what *Sverigedemokraterna* perceive as “alarming” progressive demands on Swedish society.

Fig. 33. Bureaucrats from SD (2010).
Fig. 34. Kroners from SD (2010).

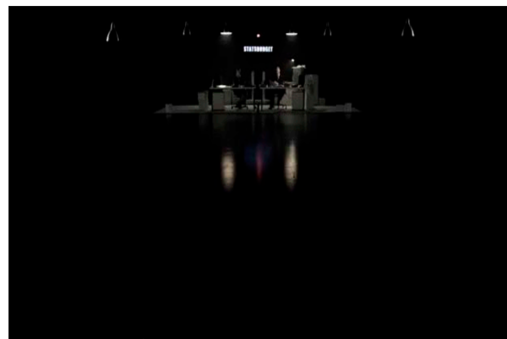

Fig. 35. Final statsbudget from SD (2010).
Fig. 36. Bureaucrats at a distance from SD (2010).

At this stage in the clip, the viewer as the addressee of the text begins to interpret the sirens as an emergency event. The story of the advert is by now operating on several levels, with multiple and embedded discourses at play. The following sequence provides further information on how the story unravels both explicitly and implicitly. Immediately in front of the two desks, two handbrakes dramatically appear from the ceiling. One has the word “Pensioner” written on it, while the other bears the word “Immigration” (see fig. 37 and 38).

As the narrator says "Now you have a choice," the sirens begin and the emphasis of the ad becomes clear: the demands of pensioners and immigrants are competing for state funds, each group represented by its respective handbrake. Mirroring, ideological duplication or reproduction of the battle between pensioners and immigrants is reflected throughout this ad, supported by visual cues, the narrator's voice, emergency sirens and lights, and embedded text. The ad then zooms in on an elderly white woman with a walker. The camera pans in on her and she moves slowly with her walking aid toward the direction of the handbrakes (dropped earlier), each of which hangs suspended by chains from the ceiling. A series of shots frames the walking woman, making it emphatically clear that she needs physical assistance. Now, the viewer's attention is drawn to how the walker helps support her while "racing" to pull the "immigration" handbrake. The woman's frailty reminds the viewer that some support must come from the larger community. The pensioner's body represents the aging population of Sweden - and its need for increased health care - and serves as a signifier of the imagined Swedish nation state. Her body is used to both represent and interpellate the target audience for this political ideology.

Tobias Hübinette and Catrin Lundström explain that in "contemporary Sweden, the idea of being white without doubt constitutes the central core and the master signifier of Swedishness and thus of being Swedish, meaning that a Swede is a white person, and a non-white person is not a Swede" (1). This very element lies at the crux of the SD's ad, where the distinction between natives and foreigners is not only mobilized but also employed as a strategy. "Whiteness" serves as a signifier of native Swedes within the national imaginary of the SD, positioned against the "non-whiteness" of foreigners (Tobias and Lundström 2).

Fig. 37. Handbrakes with Emergency Lights from SD (2010).
Fig. 38. Handbrakes from SD (2010).

The image of the pensioner, within the language of the SD's patriotism, does not immediately denote strength as usually presented within national discourses. Instead, the ad offers a more powerful reading that alludes to a "deserved" need for aging white pensioners. Concepts such as "deserving" and "undeserving" within this context echo the rhetoric of neoliberal globalization policies entailed in arguments about the political economy of the global labor market (Levenstein 226). Since the 1970s such language has been used to distinguish between those who are deemed "worthy" of social protection and "those who are not" (226). The moral redefinition of poverty within such rhetoric has been revitalized and mobilized to reinforce oppositional classifications of groups of people - those who require aid through no fault of their own versus those who are undeserving of help (for example the "unworthy poor") (Katz 14). It is these neoliberal binaries that are employed by the SD within the logic of their political rhetoric, defining who is "deserving" of assistance and who is not.

It is at this stage in the ad that immigration finds itself in a race against pensioners. This form of representation visually articulates not only difference but also how difference can be used to frame and reinforce social antagonisms. "Nationness," as a textual and social affiliation, finds itself represented in symbolic visual language. The problem of difference is set against the ad's careful use of visual and textual signifiers of the nation and national identity or the "people," with the latter posited as subjects existing in static social and cultural

narratives. By doing so they become subjects who exist within a vast range of social and literary narratives. For example, while the elderly woman with the walker represents Swedish pensioners she also serves to present something larger: a potent image and reminder of Sweden's past. Her image is used to juxtapose past and present in a way for the viewer to see her as an ideal representation of Sweden's contemporary conception of their past (a white, non-descript woman). By juxtaposing this highly emotive image with peripheral shots of burqa-clad women overtaking the pensioner, the ad signals and fuels white fears that unidentifiable foreigner-mobs are taking over Swedish society. Such images are used to manipulate ideas of past and present - and to offer the viewer metaphors that speak to the visibility of the past and the present - to aid in the reinforcement of a pre-existing narrative that positions Swedes against foreigners. This is not represented through one shot, but rather through a series of images that develop the idea as a story, a narrative of past and present.

The nation becomes symbolically signified hierarchically over class (those in need of governmental assistance), and such representations offer the viewer insight into how such recipients are framed. Within the advert they are not situated in a particular moment of time, but rather they are used to offer the viewer a visual articulation of how struggle is presented. When addressing such forms of representation, those that articulate difference through imagined communities - in this case migrant and/or the native - what Bhabha calls "the temporality of representation" appears. In *The Location of Culture* "temporality of representation" is used to refer to that which moves between social processes and cultural formations without a centered logic (141). This occurs, for example, when cultural movements, despite their heterogeneity, are envisioned as homogenous, invading, and other. This kind of representation is brought to life when foreigners in this advert are portrayed as a burqa-clad mob whose needs physically and economically drain the country. SD's depiction of the burqa marks certain kinds of faces and bodies conflates visible signs of difference (for

example the burqa and the niqab as all-consuming garments) with phobic discourses on religion, class, gender, and migration, and inscribes them within culture.

The burqas, in various ways, refer to all of these issues. The unidentifiable women under the burqas are fixed by these markers of difference, and transformed into a visibly identifiable threat in the narrative. What is problematic about such forms of representation is that they are ahistorical; there is no sense of historical memory or the capacity to locate these figures as historical agents. The advertisement is framed within the authoritative narrative of a right-wing political party, the SD, who are openly opposed not simply to all forms of immigration but also to Islamic immigration (Wikstrom). The concepts that have been superficially represented need to be circumscribed. The following segment further illuminates the ways in which foreigners are represented as a homogenous group.

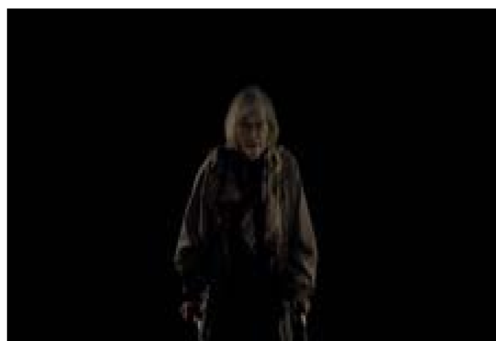

Fig. 39. View from Walker from SD (2010).
Fig. 40. (Wide) Pensioner from SD (2010).

Besieged by Burqas

In the following sequences, we as viewers witness the aging pensioner turn her head, and in her peripheral vision she sees a crowd of burqa-clad women besieging her. The image of the pensioner is now positioned against another cultural force, an invading army of covered women. In the series of quick shots that follow, the camera pans and focuses on the figures, of which five are in black burqas and a sixth figure in a black niqab. Two are pushing

baby carriages and appear from the darkness behind. In the subsequent clip, the camera immediately pans out and offers a close-up of the grille covering one of the figure’s eyes.

The shot pans to a hand, its fingers tightly gripping the handle of a baby carriage, which attributes a sense of urgency and violence to the mob (see fig. 42). Oppositional representations of the nation and identity are progressively defined through these figures; the burqa-clad figures with their baby carriages serve as signs of foreigners, Muslims who pose a threat, resonating with the earlier discourses that frame “the other” as a threat. The mob of burqa-clad women is presented as a challenge to the vulnerable Swedish pensioner, and the voter risks allowing them to overtake her. Immigrant demands on the system, represented through the fast, unrecognizable, and mobilizing mob rushing for the “immigrant lever” are confirmed to the viewer through a number of heavily edited shots. The burqa-clad women are visually defined as both a challenge to Swedish society and a threat to the well being of the nation.

Fig. 41. (Detail) Burqa SD (2010).
Fig. 42. Grip on Carriage from SD (2010).

The advert creates an image of religious Muslim women as an imminent and ominous threat in a number of different ways, for example burqa-clad figures are also used to suggest a body that cannot be read - a body that is at first glance, isolated yet physically present - serving as a challenge to the pensioner (see fig. 41). The subtext is not nuanced or discreet: the bodies of the burqa-clad foreigners are positioned antagonistically in relation to the white

Swedish body. The suggestion is that a challenge is occurring within society and that pensioners have been betrayed and victimized by immigration and the needs of foreigners. The burqa-clad women (Muslim) are not presented as victims, nor are their children, but rather it is the Swedes who are suffering on account of the demands of immigrants. The mob is used to marginalize the elderly Swedish woman and the greater Swedish population are empathetically presented as those who suffer. The narrator's voice returns and we hear "on the 19th of September you can choose the immigration handbrake above the pensions handbrake" (see fig. 46) (Sweden Democrats). Here the narration is used to bridge the visual imagery and the SD's rhetoric, calling on voters to slow down or stop the funding of immigration and immigrants. The use of particular images and bodies within this ad positions and inscribes subject positions upon the viewer to believe that there are choices and priorities to be determined, based upon a particular indexing of those bodies by the SD.

Fig. 43. Burqa-clad Mob from SD (2010).
Fig. 44. Mob Overtaking Pensioner from SD (2010).

In the next sequence, the mob seems to overtake the pensioner as hands reach for the "Pensioner" lever. As the ad fades out, the elderly women cannot grab the "Immigration" handbrake in time. The triumph of immigration is represented. The image then freezes and the background transforms from blackness to whiteness as SD's logo appears (see fig. 46). At that point, the narrator calls on the viewer to "vote Sweden Democrats." In this final scene the relationship between the visual imagery, embedded text, and the narrator's voice binds

the network of narrative acts and establishes the stakes of the ballot through the aforementioned representations.

The advertisement's use of the state finances and budgetary concerns as a framing device creates an overly simplistic representation in which pension and immigration funding are presented as mutually exclusive. This is an approach that takes economic conditions and represents them opportunistically, as a potential threat to established nationalist discourses. The idea that the budget cannot withstand more financial pressure encourages Swedish voters to see the election as a vote for either "them" (immigrants) or "us" (native born).

Fig. 45. SD: Safety and Tradition from SD (2010).
Fig. 46. Final Frame from SD (2010).

On the one hand, the story told is relatively straightforward, as emphasis is placed on the need for Swedish voters to take care of their own. On the other hand, the dramatic, grand generalizations used to frame and represent immigrants are problematic. The overarching image of immigrants as an homogenous group, symbolized as "the other" - an image achieved by the ad's strategic use of the burqa - employs many of the narratives already embedded in the burqa as a cultural object. The coded burqa is deployed to represent vast cultural and religious differences at a time when there is "no time," as indicated by the ticking and rapidly decreasing *Statsbudget* counter and competition-themed narrative. Burqas are used as a form of visual shorthand for cultural and religious difference, one that creates

quick and emotive associations between the simple fact of the garment, racist fears, and a sense of impending threat.

The figures used to present national identity and the idea of "we as the Swedish peoples," offer a double narrative. On the one hand, a crowd of burqa-clad women does not correspond to the reality of Swedish immigration. Instead these images reflect the xenophobic and Islamophobic discourses wielded by the SD within the election campaign. Their campaign not only deploys symbols of difference, such as burqas and niqabs, but also and more importantly uses them to aggravate the tensions and anxieties surrounding contemporary migration, particularly of Islamic refugees and asylum seekers. The double axis of these events highlights the inconsistencies that are used to drive the SD's controversial election campaign forward and also it offers a space where the gaps between reality and the imagination come to life.

To add more depth to this analysis it is important to consider the preliminary figures released by Statistics Sweden prior to the 2010 election. From a population of just over nine million inhabitants (9,340,000) in 2009, approximately 14% of Swedes were born abroad. The largest group was comprised of those born in Finland (173,000 persons), followed by those born in Iraq (117,000). Most pertinent to this discussion are the figures related to immigration prior to the 2010 election, when approximately 102,000 persons immigrated to Sweden during that calendar year. The largest segment of this group were emigrating Swedes, followed by Iraqis, and Somalis (Statistics Sweden). The motives for immigration differ from group to group, but many from the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as from Iraq and Iran, represented in the numbers, were fleeing violent conflict.

Despite the logic associated with the numbers, the SD have intentionally targeted Islamic immigrants by using easily understood signifiers (burqas and niqabs). Divisively manipulating the empirical evidence, the SD has generally misrepresented Muslims or Islam

as proof of the “failure of multiculturalism” by deploying certain kinds of bodies (burqas) as icons of failed immigrant integration to reflect the problems associated with social cohesion (Kooman et al. 192). The juxtaposition between the imagined native Swedes and foreigners serves as a symbolic enactment of the body politic as defined by the Party. The use of these bodies comments on the current social moment, suggesting that Swedish society is indeed a body (politic) in crisis.

A contested conceptual territory appears, where nationhood is read through a nationalist lens provided by the SD. The commentary the Party offers on immigration - through the burqa-clad women - draws on a prior discourse already embedded in the burqa itself. And of course, the ad contributes to the perpetuation of these discourses. In the ad, the women in burqas are seen to be dangerous, both physically and mentally: we do not know who they are, what they want, or have any idea of their motives. The embattled juxtaposition of the elderly Swedish woman with the burqa-clad figures serves as a visual signifier of good and evil. The race enacted within the advertisement, the race to pull the immigration and/or pension lever, serves as an allegory and enacts specific kinds of boundaries the SD presumes to guard. As guardians of Swedish society the Party assumes the role of protecting an idealized nation state. The pensioner stands for deserved need, representing the need to protect Swedish society from perceived threats. Indeed, the burqa-clad women are bodies that threaten tradition and represent the ills of the contemporary nation state. For the SD it is this particular battle between the imagined past and the present that is enacted within the ad. In this respect, the advert is entirely in keeping with the Party’s political platform, which is both anti-immigration and anti-Islam.

The framing of the burqa makes the ad significant: the controversial representation of the mob and the story that followed were core issues in the censoring of the ad. When Swedish television refused to broadcast the ad because it was deemed to contain race hatred,

the ad quickly gained the attention of the international media, with the SD proclaiming that they were the victims of unlawful persecution. The next section will analyze the consequences of TV4's act of censorship. Here, the act of censorship emerges as a regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse, focusing on how censorship counters its own effect by diminishing public spaces for contestation. The significance of the term "speakable" within this context refers to how we think about what is thinkable, sayable, or legible in speech acts, highlighting the power of discourse (Butler 1997, 128).

Excitable Speech

By reading the campaign ad alongside Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative*, I will discuss the ways in which the regulation of speech via censorship displaces possibilities of actually contesting speech deemed "hateful" in the public sphere. Moreover, it is possible to theorize how speech and representation could be democratic sites of contestation which are never fixed or delineated in advance. I am not suggesting that all forms of discussions concerning forms of representation and textual narrative have been removed through censorship, but rather that such possibilities are always already governed by that which is commonly held as general truth in the public sphere. Therefore, I will look at the SD's election advertisement and the subsequent censoring of the ad through Butler's work on censorship to examine how the act backfired and effectively silenced the group it sought to protect.

Although conventional discussions of censorship usually frame the act as something exercised by forms of government, the censorship enacted by Sweden's TV4 to pre-empt airing of the ad was intended to regulate content deemed offensive by the broadcaster (Butler 1997, 128). For Butler, these measures "labor under a fear of contamination," wherein the

"attempt to purify the sphere of public discourse by institutionalizing the norms that establish what ought properly to be included there operates as a preemptive censor" (129). The immediate impact is, of course, that "such regulations introduce the censored speech into public discourse, thereby establishing it as a site of contestation, that is, as the scene of public utterance that it sought to preempt" (130). Indeed, Butler's insights proved applicable to the case of the advert. In re-circulating the *circumstances* of censorship, the media's "attempt to prevent Sweden Democrats [SD] from getting its message out have been counterproductive, handing the party the chance to portray itself as is a victim of censorship" and heightening the speech as a site of contestation (Wikstrom). In terms of censoring the speech's dissemination, what became clear is that by mid-September of 2010 (just before the Swedish election), "after TV4 refused to air SD's campaign, the clip was viewed more than 600,000 times on YouTube" (Wikstrom).

The claim of injury by language and representation takes us into unfamiliar territory, where we find ourselves ascribing agency to words and empowering them to injure us. In discourses concerning censorship, language is framed as having the ability to act upon us, against us, or on our behalf. In hate speech discourse, offensive speech is not only defined by the state but it is also literally enacted by the state. Here speech acts, as they have been defined by the state and solidified through hate speech laws have the ability to act or to "injure." Through this perspective, we as subjects are formed and constituted within the structure of language and are unable to break free of the conditions or decisions we might have as a result of its power. Butler by contrast, argues for the power of counter-narratives to emerge through the performative and through pluralistic public debate:

> The subject's production takes place not only through the regulation of that subject's speech, but through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse. The question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all. To become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject. (1997, 133)

Drawing from Butler's approach then, we can say that the problematizing representations and narratives found in the SD ad have the ability to interpellate us. Speech then serves as a totalizing object, that which precedes the text and exceeds the censor. Speech, from this perspective, finds itself responsible for the production of offensive or hate material (speech).

Censorship, as a state practice, has been a highly contested area. Critical accounts have attempted to focus upon the scope of such forms of speech - such as those deemed able to injure. In this case, arguments in support of censorship are often characterized as those that are a response to offensive speech: censorship is thus an act in response to that speech which is deemed problematic. But what the act of censorship does in this case is remove the possibility for those who are spoken for to respond to and contest the forms of representation that dominate the SD campaign ad. Therefore, any attempt to censor speech through such a programmatic reading makes the offensive speech inescapable. Butler explains that offensive speech, such as hate-speech, is a "category that cannot exist without the state's ratification … (that is) the state produces hate speech" (77). Reactionary or arbitrary acts of censorship are both counter-productive and harmful in their power to assign and delimit what is offensive and what is not.

When thinking in relation to the SD's campaign ad, the impact of the offensive speech - the message - is not delivered through the ad itself, but rather through the way in which the speech is conveyed. The deliberately delivered speech - contained in the ad through narrative accounts, texts, and forms of representation - does not originate in the ad itself. Rather, it is reiterated speech, language, meaning, and intent. The SD is not the originator of this message, as it has already been produced within historical discourse. The speaking subject is citational, which means the speaker uses such language as a demonstration of a community conveying a particular message. If speech is then understood as perlocutionary, meaning that speech leads to effects but is not itself the effect, then injurious speech is only problematic

when it produces a set of effects. The performative force that results from these linguistic utterances, what the ad says or how it facilitates a set of effects for the viewer fosters its reiterability.

In light of this reading, the burqa is interesting in this particular ad and subsequent censorship because it is framed in a political discourse of stark either/or choices in both instances. In the ad, Swedes are compelled to choose between allocating resources either to burqas or walkers. When we censor the ad, we fear that representations of the burqa can and will contaminate public discourses. Censoring the ad positions TV4 as a defender of the public sphere from utterances deemed hate speech, to again speak on behalf of those represented in the ad. To support this claim, I look to how Butler expounds on the performative. She adds:

> If hate speech constitutes the kind of act that seeks to silence the one to whom it is addressed, but which might revive within the vocabulary of the silenced as its unexpected rejoinder, then the response to hate speech constitutes the de-officialization of the performative, its expropriation for non-ordinary means. Within the political sphere, performativity can work in precisely such counter-hegemonic ways. That moment in which a speech act without prior authorization nevertheless assumes authorization in the course of its performance may anticipate and instate altered contexts for its future reception. (1997, 160)

The burqa, as a link in a chain of citations in this ad, is censored because TV4 cannot imagine a counter-hegemonic speech emergent in public discourse to critique or repudiate the ad. From a "need" to control our imaginings of burqas, and those subjects who wear them, the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse only further re-circulates those toxic politicizations of the burqa. Because "we" cannot imagine a new critical emergence of insurrectionary discourses where the ad's unintelligible and unspeakable subjects do speak, the ad's depiction of the burqa is recited. The burqa, with all the attendant confusion of a social narrative in crisis, is drafted to fit and fill a momentary political.

The act of restricting speech defined as injurious becomes, in turn, even more injurious. The minorities depicted in this ad have no form of recourse within the act of

censorship and no way of engaging in a debate about the speakable. Intervening in such forms of discourse could have re-framed the debate and repositioned the religious minorities within the context of the speech that was deemed injurious. To engage with these discourses in the public domain, those represented would have had the ability to counter, exceed, and confound the authoritative contexts from which they emerge (159). By not allowing such forms of engagement to take place, the agency of such groups is compromised. The speech model that refers to race or religion is undermined and no longer works without producing additional problematic consequences. Racist discourse has been deployed in order to make false claims about the economic condition of the country, the relations between immigrant groups, and the prevalence of Islam within the country. The complex social and economic conditions that underlie such issues have been brushed aside in the service of a highly charged and politicized representation. Fortunately,

> [the] speech act, as a rite of institution, is one whose contexts are never fully determined in advance, and that the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers a unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking. (Butler 1997, 161)

By reading the burqa as a performative cultural object, Sweden's public discourse has the capacity to gesture toward a politics of both hope and anxiety, a (Foucauldian) "politics of discomfort" (161), where speech and representation are a democratic site of contestation, never fixed or delineated in advance. Earlier in *Excitable Speech*, Butler writes,

> Those who seek to fix with certainty the link between certain speech acts and their injurious effects will surely lament the open temporality of the speech act. That no speech act has to perform injury as its effect means that no simple elaboration of speech acts will provide a standard by which the injuries of speech might be effectively adjudicated. Such a loosening of the link between act and injury, however, opens up the possibility for a counter-speech, a kind of talking back, that would be foreclosed by the tightening of that link. Thus the gap that separates the speech act from its future effects has its auspicious implications: it begins a theory of linguistic agency that provides an alternative to the relentless search for a legal remedy. (1997, 15)

To seek a remedy in the public protection of speech as TV4 has attempted to do, can only foreclose the field of intelligibility, and the ability of the burqa to speak back culturally. On the other hand, to create the possibility for insurrectionary speech acts is to advocate a critical politics of discomfort in the hope of social change and progress.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed a controversial campaign advertisement for the 2010 Swedish parliamentary election by the Sweden Democrats. I sought to discover how the burqa was wielded by the SD as an icon indicative of that which Western societies must fight against. My analysis revealed that by engaging a series of images that positioned immigrants as scapegoats against Swedes in need the party created a link between the present domestic budgetary crisis and immigration. The ad associated immigration and Islam with the economic failings of Swedish society; it also offered new conceptualizations of the other. Thus burqa-clad figures were represented as dangerous, overwhelming, and parasitical emerging as an icon that must be fought against.

Inspired by Judith Butler's work on discursive censorship in *Excitable Speech* I argue that censorship does not deliver its intended consequences, but rather diminishes public spaces for contestation. Censorship has the ability to counter its own effects, and in turn produces another set of consequences that heighten the power of the speech it intended to silence. In the SD election advert, a number of complex elements worked together to deliver a nuanced series of mutually reinforcing images and narratives. By refusing to air the advert on public television, the broadcaster acknowledged the politically regressive character of the video. Yet at the same time, the censorship of the ad served to underscore problematic representations of the burqa and immigrants. The act of censorship thrust the Party into the

limelight with the SD proclaiming themselves victims of censorship. Coupled with the explosive power of the Internet and video hosting services such as YouTube, the ad quickly went “viral” and ensured that the party would lobby increased public support (locally and internationally). Mobilizing public sentiment with claims of injury, for the first time in Sweden’s history the Sweden Democrats would enter parliament, as the sixth largest party with 20 seats and 5.7% of the vote. Despite TV4’s pre-emptive censoring of SD’s controversial campaign ad, the Party would have their victory with their message disseminated.

Concluding Remarks

At the time of writing, the dominant representations of the burqa that I encountered in Western mainstream mass media outlets characterized it as a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism, emblematic of a violent force that needed to be "managed" in the world. The message that accompanied images of women in burqas associated violence with the suffering of women; particularly prolific were images that came out of Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Wielded as a symbol of the ills of Islamic fundamentalism, the burqa was portrayed as an object that not only caused women's suffering (through its construction and structure) but it was also used to represent it, violence against women, in visual and literary texts. Narratives of women's suffering were so cogent that they were deployed by governments and the media throughout "the West," as a symbol of that which "the West" must overcome on behalf of the women of "the East." Until 9/11, the West's political attitude towards Taliban rule in Afghanistan has been characterized by Mary Anne Franks as one of "indifference" (2003, 141). There are a number of explanations for this "indifference," the first is concerned with complicated political interests, such as oil and gas rights that were easier to ignore than it were to condemn the regime's human rights violations (141-142). The images associated with these violations have been embedded in stereotypical representations of the burqa. As a result, it is vital to examine the ways in which the stereotypes that emerged in the decade that follows share, overcome, or reiterate these imaginings.

In this dissertation, I explored representations of burqas, examining their cultural and literary influence considering not only issues of "representational legitimacy" but also issues of socio-political power. My decision to work with a wide range of cultural objects, taken from contemporary art, literature, television, theatre, politics, and the news media allowed me to consider not only the political elements but also their aesthetic and intertexutal references.

Such a perspective is directed at having an impact on how "practices of looking" (how we observe and recognize the world around us), affect the static and essentialized vision of the burqa that we as "Westerners" are offered by mainstream mass media outlets (Sturken and Cartwright 10). For readers I hope that their awareness of "othering" and alterity when encountering representations of the burqa will become heightened to highlight current fears and anxieties being channeled into and through the garment. My analysis reveals that a preferred meaning has been encoded in representations of a monolithic subject - the burqa, reflecting narratives of victimization and oppression reducing it to a stereotype (Hall 1997, 228). For this purpose I apply an interdisciplinary methodology drawing from semiotics, the practice of close reading, and methods of visual analysis under the framework of cultural analysis to argue that the immobile vision of the burqa (a singular burqa with one meaning) offered by the Western mainstream mass media has in fact a *plurality* of meanings. My objects of analysis privilege minority representations that work to highlight the burqa's *multiplicities*, disorienting the static imaginings which are rooted in the present day.

"The Burqa" and its Implications

This dissertation began by asking a number of questions: What has been done to the burqa in Western hegemonic representations? And consequently what can minority representations and cultural analysts do? To a certain degree, what motivates this research project is the concomitant simplification and excess of meaning that affects the concept of the burqa linguistically, visually, socio-culturally, and also politically. The burqa means too much and too little at the same time. I start from the principle that it is urgent to *pluralize* the burqa and rethink the assumptions that circulate when it is represented in "the West."

This is especially salient with the revival of Orientalist and neo-Orientalist constructions of Islam that have taken center stage in the past decade, as a by-product of the 9/11 tragedy. Accordingly, all of the objects I explored have engaged this overload of meaning associated with the burqa. I analyzed the emergence of the burqa as an object of concern and this lies at the very heart of my research interests. My goal is to engage the politics that surrounds representations of the burqa and to confront them from a number of different angles. The minority representations I have harnessed in this project have been productive as they highlight the stagnancy of hegemonic imaginings and offer counternarratives. Simplistic representations of the burqa in "the West" can be resisted and worked with.

When using the term "the burqa" I have referred to the enveloping outer garment that is worn by some women in Islamic traditions, (especially prolific in the "Western" cultural imaginary when thinking about Afghan women and conflict in the past decade) which is used to cover their bodies while out in public (see fig. 3). Specific to this definition is the monolithic vision of "the burqa" as a symbol of women's oppression that dominates the Western mass media. At other times, I interchangeably wield the term "burqa-clad" to refer to visual and textual representations of women in the enveloping garment that have become "trademarks of Islam's repression" (Zine 2006, 2).

In the process of analyzing specific representations of the burqa in "the West," Western Europe and North America I have focused my attention on how they influence the collective imaginary through hegemonic discourses. These representations fall into 3 distinct categories, where women in burqas are situated as: victims, threats, and/or invaders.

These kinds of imaginings emerge in part from a lengthy historical genealogy, to a certain degree they reflect Orientalism a historical discourse that spans the past two hundred to three hundred years (Kahf 177). As a term, Orientalism broadly is used to speak about the "…discourse that codifies 'knowledge' about the 'Orient' from a position of Western cultural

hegemony and material dominance over that 'world'" (177). Orientalist tropes, to paraphrase Edward Said in *Orientalism*, label Islam and Muslims as "uncivilized," "barbaric," and "terrorists." Muslim women, particularly media images of burqa-clad women have become marked as "trademarks of Islam's repression" (Zine 2006, 2). These images have been used to justify military action, in its many shapes under the trope of "liberation," as was the earlier formula for intervention and control in the Muslim word by colonial powers (2).

Criticism of the "Western" narrative tradition originates in the Saidian critique of Orientalism that not only works to dismantle the boundaries of Western hegemony but also asks us to work through uniform images of Muslim women in Western culture (Kahf 177). Revealingly an explicit link between colonial and missionary discourses and issues of representational legitimacy arise when speaking of the burqa in the present day, these discourses have been used to produce a certain kind of "knowledge" about what "the East" looks like for "the West." This sentiment can be traced back hundreds of years but it is also resurgent in popular culture today where it has been picked up by politicians, artists, satirists, journalists, and writers.

Following a long tradition that has been manifested in the arts, politics, and military operations the figures that have emerged from these imaginings have employed historical symbols of the Orient (such as veils or burqas) to envision a uniform form - the image of a burqa-clad Muslim woman in "Western" culture.

In the present day, the image of a woman who wears a burqa in Afghanistan has been appropriated and prolifically wielded by mainstream mass media outlets as a symbol that represents what Western culture does not want. This idea has been picked up and disseminated, images of burqas are visually deployed as symbols indicative of threats to culture, societies, nation states, ideas of cultural homogeneity and national identity, as well as religion.

When looking at minority representations of the burqa, those that comprise this research project taken from theatre, literature, satire, and conceptual art this very point needs to be kept in mind. As viewers, we need to consider how these stereotypical imaginings are dangerously at work and present today, the highly symbolic burqa is now used to paint the women who wear them as: victims, threats, or invaders. These sentiments are at work in the array of objects that I have chosen with examples taken from photography to theatre, sculpture to contemporary art, literature to radio addresses, and popular television to controversial political campaigns. These points are illustrated as a result of my analysis that worked to dismantle the uniform image of women in burqas as victims in Western culture in four ways.

This very sentiment is visible in the work of the celebrated American playwright and activist Eve Ensler in a monologue entitled "Under the Burqa" from her celebrated V-Day rendition of *The Vagina Monologues* (*TVM*). In this chapter I sought to discover how it has become possible to reduce the burqa to Afghan women during the Taliban regime, and Afghan women to the burqa, and treat them all as abject; I also sought to understand if we do so while still speaking from a feminist perspective that aims at liberating all women for the possible contamination of the burqa.

My analysis of the monologue revealed that the burqa, which was initially positioned as a symbol of piety and as an object of free choice, was quickly redeployed as a feminist battle call - a call for universal solidarity - in the fighting against the oppression of women in Afghanistan. Problematically, Ensler recycles stereotypical imaginings of women in Islam, loading the burqa with emotive and interpellative language. She inscribes the victimized Afghan woman who is represented by the burqa with relations of power - that cannot be resisted or countered within the text.

Homogenous notions of patriarchy and masculine domination accompany the ahistorical conditions represented in the monologue. When read in relation to writings on

"Third-World women" the larger debates about women's oppression and subordination remain unaddressed and emerge as irresolvable contradictions implicit within the text. Inspired by the work of the post-colonial literary critics Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty in this chapter, I address the portrayal of burqa-clad women as monolithic subjects, "Third-World women."

The theoretical framework that is offered by the intersection of texts from Spivak and Mohanty is productive because it allows me to critique the dominant forms of representation that runs throughout the monologue, I use them to explain structural domination - and the violent suppression of the subjects in question. My analysis reveals that by (re)creating a discursive monolithic subject, "Third-World women" Ensler jeopardizes the feminist ethos that lies at the heart of her project. Reiterating stereotypical imaginings, the burqa that dominates Ensler's monologue is saturated with "memorable qualities" that reflects the production of a certain kind of knowledge about Afghan women.

The few, abstract, "memorable qualities" that reduce Afghan women to the burqa, and fix it as "natural" are representational practices known as stereotyping (Hall 1997, 256; Bhabha 94-95; Rosello 1998, 37). Homi Bhabha in his readings of colonial stereotypes, which he describes in terms of their "fetishistic nature," offers a way of envisioning the "memorable qualities" of a stereotype. Bhabha writes:

> Likewise the stereotype, which is a major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated…as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (94-95)

This excerpt highlights how stereotypes are forms of knowledge, those that are not simply already known but also that they are anxiously repeated (95). In *Declining the Stereotype* Mireille Rosello expands on Bhabha's definition of the stereotype and adds another layer to it, she writes:

> An ethic stereotype is like a form of contamination: it is a strong element of iterativity that insinuates itself like some sort of bacteria to a general statement about a group or a community. The stereotypical infection then turns this nondemonstratable statement into an instantly memorable formula that parades as common sense, truth, and wisdom. In the next stage, the ideological content, the supposedly descriptive element of the stereotype --that is, what the stereotype says about a certain racial or ethnic group - then appears to be the stereotype itself. (1998, 37)

Even though we cannot prove the stereotype, it does function abstractly, we can conceptualize it through its intensity and repeatability. Returning to Ensler's monologue the vision that emerges from it is marked not only by its endless repetition, ideas of victimization, general statements of groups of people, and importantly what this reveals about its use. The survival of the stereotype depends on the power of its iterativity. This very sentiment also finds itself at work in a segment taken from the French satirical puppet troupe, *Les Guignols de l'info* ("the News Puppets").

In their parody of the iconic US-American child's toy, a televised Barbie doll advert, *Les Guignols* deploy this image of the abused Afghan women and use it to illustrate the abuse Ensler brings to life in her monologue. By doing so they offer their viewers a depiction that is quick, violent, and shocking to tell the story of the abuse and death of a burqa-clad woman at the hands of her Taliban solider husband, re-enacting the very things Western mainstream mass media outlets reports they do, savagely. In this chapter, I sought to discover to what extent we can recognize the burqa as that which signifies the ambivalence of the victim/perpetrator dyad when it comes to discourses on female oppression.

My analysis revealed that the representations that dominate the *faux* advert highlight how the image of the abused burqa-clad body has travelled and has become problematically identified with notions of what a homogenous vision of Islam looks like. Offering a way of understanding the particular kinds of knowledge that "the West" knows about Afghanistan, women, and the burqa. As a signifying practice, stereotypes are a way of "making sense" of the ways in which we know about Afghan women, in this example: violence is pathologically

tied to burqa-clad women. It reveals something about the social and symbolic order that surrounds the burqa and sets up borders that signify what does and does not belong, or what is "the other," insiders and outsiders, and us and them (Hall 1997, 258).

The core part of my analysis of *Les Guignols* parody is rooted in the work of Jasbir Puar who in *Terrorist Assemblages* discusses the symbolic representation of certain bodies as either perpetrators of violence or victims (turbans and burqas). This specific iteration is influenced by Saidian critiques of Orientalism; however Puar in her analysis of the turban highlights its symbolic functioning in the American public sphere as an aggregate carrier of violence in the "collective memory." I extend her reading of the turban with the burqa and this understanding points to concerns of the fetishism of Afghan women's bodies which are particularly relevant when thinking about how burqas have been deployed by the media, where they have been deemed "deviant" or "primitive" in "the Western" imaginary in line with gross inequalities of power.

By displacing what "the West" could not imagine and/or incorporate into the domain of the "primitive" burqas have become symbolic of what cannot be conceptualized with the "West's" logic (McClintock 1992, 72). Through zones of sexual and racial "degeneration" imperialist logics have deployed uniform images of the Muslim women in "Western" culture coupled by discourses that produced knowledge about them in fetishistic ways, working to conceal imperialist logic (71). The "deviance" that emerged from Orientalist imaginings was constituted in Europe and worked to reduce and establish, a poetics of the body with privileged Western narratives that have their origins in the etiology of fetishism (72). Functioning as a prototype for other kinds of deviations, including the social, cultural, or religious the figure of the "primitive" has been extremely powerful (72). Not only does the "deviant" (covered Muslim women's body) have a symbolic place, it stands for that which the West does not want, the fetishism of burqas is hidden in contradictions, in social values in historical guises (72). The fetish then functions as an emblem of the crisis in historical value,

a symbolic displacement, an embodiment of one object in relation to incompatible codes of social meaning, that cannot be resolved at a personal level (72). As a result, the invention of the fetish (the burqa as a fetish object) has been destined to its ritualistic repetition where it is haunted by its historical memory, a composite symbolic object that embodies historical memories or traumas in contradiction (72).

These very concerns, where colonized peoples (in this case Afghan women or Muslim women who are represented by burqas) are figured as "deviants" are themselves highlighted in the conceptual artwork of the transnational Haitian-American artist Jean-Ulrick Désert. In his installation, *The Burqa Project* he deploys static symbols, burqas and national flags to juxtapose icons that are often seen in conflict with each other by the Western mainstream media, press, and politicians. In this chapter, I wanted to discover what happens when the burqa and the Western nation meet, or more accurately, when an artist tries to represent an encounter between national flags and burqas, two icons that hegemonic discourses normally treat as incompatible and mutually exclusive. These symbols (burqas and the national flags of the United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) emphasize significant issues, including the politics behind the burqa including military operations in Afghanistan, the American government's use of the cloth as a call to arms, to save women and children from the Taliban - with a desire to "save" them or "liberate" them, and colonial embodiment. Such rhetorics, those that treat burqas and Western nation states as incompatible and mutually exclusive within this context have been used to shield deeper geo-political concerns that are at work in the present day. Hegemonic imaginings of burqas in the Western public sphere are so powerful that the fetish value of them seems to have taken over and guards these issues.

However conceptual art and its legacy offers viewers a space where they can contemplate the intersection of geo-political, social, and religious concerns. The juxtaposition of these symbols is significant because the installation, without leading the viewer through a particular reading, invites them to examine their own thoughts about the relationship of the

national flags and burqas. The collective imaginings that underlie their meanings speak to protectionist scenarios and visions about what life looks like for women under burqas. As discussed above, these concerns emerged from historical constructions yet they are still active but have been re-awakened in the contemporary with new discourses that have cross-connections. Reflecting more than geo-politics, religion, or war, discourse of Western relationships with Islam, discourse of gender, and universal calls for feminism operate in the background. Through this lens representations of burqas and the women who wear them within this installation find themselves tied to discussions about how burqa-clad figures are discursively deployed by Western governments and the mass media as ammunition in the global war on terror. Another layer of meaning unfolds from the burqa and its static imagining that dominates the collective unconsciousness and becomes affected by historical and cultural questions highlighting the borders that symbolically fix and exclude meaning to the burqa.

A final example of how monolithic representations - static imaginings - highlight the violent hierarchy that emerges from ethnocentrism and the wielding of binary oppositions, where women in burqas are envisioned in the present day as threats is illustrated in my analysis of a Swedish parliamentary election campaign advertisement. In this chapter, I wanted to answer the following question: how has the burqa been wielded as an icon indicative of that which Western societies must fight against? In my reading of this banned political advertisement a group of burqa-clad women is used to illustrate the threat of Islamic immigration to Sweden. The burqa is wielded as a symbol of that which is siphoning valuable economic resources from the country, burqa-clad women are used to represent the parasitical drain of Sweden's resources via immigrants.

What is new about the depiction that is delivered in this banned campaign ad is that as viewers we are offered a different kind of imagining of women in burqas. In this example, they are not depicted as those who need "saving" or are "desirous of liberation" but it is the

Swedes who require protection from the invading army of Muslim immigrants, who are symbolized by the burqa.

At the same time the controversial political advertisement also offers a compelling articulation of Swedishness that deviates from hegemonic imaginings of the nation. Instead of offering an image of a strong and powerful Sweden, viewers are instead persuaded that they need to care for and to protect the elderly pensioner who loses the race for economic resources against the burqa-clad mob - a pensioner who needs to be protected from them. This is an interesting swap of the victimization, protectionist scenarios that were seen in the preceding chapters (Ensler and *Les Guignols*). In this example, these roles have been powerfully reversed and burqas are symbolic of imminent threats to the Swedish nation. There is no peaceful coexistence between immigrants and natives, the burqa in my analysis is a symbol of the violent hierarchy that lies in the midst of the Sweden Democrats vision of what Swedish society looks like.

In these chapters, static and essentialized representations of burqas and the women who wear them are offered which work with historical imaginings of women in Islam, especially within the legacy of Orientalism. Yet sadly these representations are still at work today and they have been employed by governments in North America and Europe as well as the media as a symbol of the ills of a certain kind of Islamic fundamentalist practice, as symbols of Islam's repression of women. Despite generations of post-colonial writing these depictions are still active, dominant, and being absorbed in Western culture and as a result burqas are used to illustrate the oppression of women by Islam - a sentiment that runs throughout all levels of society reflected in the variety of objects analyzed in the preceding chapters. These imaginings travel from high art to low art, from the newspaper to the theatre, from the opera house to (banned) political advertisements on television or on the internet, they can also be seen in popular literature as a theme that runs through books like *The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns*, or the more recent *The Taliban Cricket Club*.

Burqas in the Western imaginary have become powerful and prolific symbols of what "the West" needs to overcome. Burqas have become a form of visual shorthand often deployed on "behalf of" Afghan women, representative as those who are in need "saving" or "liberation" recalling a dark and lengthy legacy that is steeped in Orientalism. The burqa's dominant mode of representation not only resuscitates Western discourses from the 18th century affirming Muslim women as repressed, oppressed, or victimized but in the present day, this manifestation has also been swapped out for something new, a vision which re-imagines women in burqas as threats who are invading (infiltrating/ coming to take over "the West"). This latest depiction has significant implications in the present day and can be seen in the past decade's push to enact laws restricting the burqa in public places in a number of countries from Canada (December of 2011 banned face coverings during the swearing of oaths of citizenship), Belgium (December 6 2012 the Constitutional Court upheld the 2011 burqa ban), Dutch government (banned the burqa in 2013), France (September 14 2010), and, in September 2013, with Swiss voters in the canton of Ticino who voted to impose a ban on face covering veils. Resonating in Australia, these debates are currently taking place and, in some states such as New South Wales, restrictions have been placed on face coverings in public spaces, informally dubbed the "burqa ban" by the press (fine of AU $5,500 fine and a 12-month prison sentence for anyone who refuses to remove face coverings when requested to do so by police). These measures seeking to outlaw burqas in the public sphere function as a form of scapegoating, punishing members of religious communities and immigrant populations. Such actions cause even further violence to the women they claim to protect, ostracizing and alienating those who were once welcomed (as immigrants and guests) and representing them as threats of the nation, as a central object caught in the midst of raging identity debates. In this thesis I ask exactly how Muslim womens bodies find themselves positioned within the geopolitical stage. The objects I analyzed confirm the persistence of

stereotypical views but they also critique such assignations and let us imagine other representations.

Through a combination of intersectional theory and post-colonial theory supplemented by methods taken from cultural analysis and cultural studies in this thesis I have been able to work through the production of knowledge about the burqa in the West and the constitution of the subject. I have been able to make a contribution to the studies of how the burqa as a cultural object functions as a discursive practice within contemporary culture. To avoid the risk of generalizations, I treated each object as an ambivalent site of stereotyping and resistance against the steroetype. My cultural analytic perspective allowed me to not assume that a prescribed theory is available for each object. Instead, I was willing to let the object dictate the theory. My focus was on the ambiguity of the saving/liberating-oppressing/excluding paradigms. In these chapters, I have looked at images that both manifest and resist such contradictions.

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Summary

In this thesis, I analyze the way in which various discourses produce knowledge about the burqa. Particularly, since the attacks on the twin towers and the London bombings, Orientalist and neo-Orientalist tropes have been revitalized and propelled forth by ideologies of Islamophobia at work to radicalize Islam and Muslims. Of concern in political and policy debates as well as in media and scholarly discourses in Western societies is the framing of Muslims as potentially threatening and dangerous. In the present day, the politicization of Islam has had significant consequences ranging from the implementation of laws that restrict the presence of the burqa, as the symbol *par excellence* of Islamic fundamentalism in the Western imaginary, to the denial of citizenship for wearers (Hirschkind and Mahmood 341; Moors 2009, 402). The burqa more than any other religious symbol has become increasingly stigmatized and criminalized, restricted in countries such as France, Germany, Netherlands, and Belgium. In the present day, as of August 2014, other countries such as Spain and Austria are debating whether or not the burqa should be banned. Arguably no other symbol, since France's *affaire de foulard* (headscarf affair) has warranted more spirited public and political debate. Images of covered Muslim women, especially those in burqas, are framed as threats to the ideals of the secular Western nation state and as a barrier to successful immigrant integration. For these reasons, the politicized representation of burqa-clad women as potentially threatening requires a closer, deeper, and more detailed examination.

Accordingly, this thesis addresses the following question: How can we recognize, denounce and resist the way in which the burqa is traditionally represented in "the West" (in countries such as Canada, the United States, and Western Europe)? In order to answer this question, I begin by interrogating a number of different representations of the burqa in both literary and visual forms through an interdisciplinary perspective. The theoretical framework that I employ in this thesis combines intersectional theory and post-colonial theory as a way

of interrogating the dominant tropes that frame women in burqas as victims, threats, and/or invaders in the West. Each chapter tackles one specific aspect of this broad question reformulated around specific case studies (objects). These objects have been taken from contemporary culture ranging from conceptual art to sculpture, theatre to photography, literature to the news media (including politics). Each reading of each object highlights the framing of these figures and critiques the message that *any* burqa is a dangerous and or threatening icon that endangers Western ideals.

A close reading of these objects sheds light on the sociopolitical conditions that make these images meaningful. They clearly reveal that Orientalist and neo-Orientalist constructions of Islam are by-products of 9/11 and the subsequent global war on terror. The resurgence of Orientalist tropes that systematically stereotype Islam and Muslims as "backwards," "barbaric," and "uncivilized" have become so naturalized that it is unfortunately necessary to look, closely, slowly and sometimes patiently at phenomena that may appear obvious, simple and self-evident. We think we all know that the burqa has something to do with discrimination and with some sort of suffering. But we disagree about who is doing what to whom, who is suffering and why. This thesis proposes to examine what exactly happens when various types of representation of the burqa smuggle a message *about* our way to think about the burqa. As the following chapters show, this message is either overt or explicit, either self-reflexive or ironically self-contradictory.

It may be controversial but not particularly original to suggest that Western mainstream mass media outlets have iconicized burqas, wielding them as symbols of through which Islamic fundamentalism is read. These representations then may be used to justify military intervention in Afghanistan. What we then see deployed is the trope of "liberation:" for example, Laura Bush in her well-cited radio address to the nation declared "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Bush 2001). She then credits the United States with helping to liberate Afghan women. She states "Because of our

recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment" (Bush 2001). In this example, the American invasion and subsequent occupation of the country (this past decade) is unambiguously tied to the experiences of Afghan women under the Taliban, and it functions as a part of their rationale. The invasion of Afghanistan was lauded as that which would liberate Afghan women from the control of the Taliban (Hirschkind and Mahmood 341). Burqas have become the icon indicative of the fanatical Taliban Regime and they have become weaponized as discursive ammunition in the global war on terror.

Afghan women are (again) in need of "saving," so that the earlier formula for colonial intervention and control of the Muslim world finds itself reiterated. All this may well be familiar to my readers. But what clearly appears as soon as this conversation develops is that we then usually disagree about what we would like to resist and how to go about resisting such acts of representation.

Against this backdrop of familiar scapegoating, I argue that it is crucial to see what specific forms this phenomenon takes today. How exactly do Muslim women's bodies find themselves positioned within the geopolitical stage? I suggest that they serve a double function as emblems of the ills of Islam in the eyes of the West: they are a symbol of something wrong (they flag problems for modern, secular societies) but also are the proof that there is something right in Western nation states (we may now claim to represent freedom). In each of the chapters, I look at objects that force us to reconsider the consequences of such stereotypes in our representations of the burqa. Given the prevalence of the concepts of victimhood and abjection, it is no surprise that a woman in a burqa should be represented as having no voice and no agency. I have selected objects that can help us think through how some representations of the burqa *reinforce*, *resist,* or *critique* such stereotypes. At the same time, unraveling the cultural production of knowledge about burqas allows for a greater understanding of the way in which discursive practices and modes of power operate.

In this thesis, I examine very specific representations of burqas that position the women wearing them as victims, threats, and/or invaders. "They" are represented as victims of "their" men, of "their" society, not of gender inequality in general but of the kind of gender inequality that the West supposedly knows how to solve. They are therefore to be protected not only against their men and culture but potentially against their own internalization of victimhood as the only possible status. This ambivalent positioning of the savior would already be complicated by the fact that it denies the woman in a burqa any agency or voice. But that discourse of liberation and salvation is further problematized by the fact that the victim is also a threat. By presenting women who wear burqas as consenting victims, the West puts them in the position of accomplices of the very ills that they suffer. As a result, the woman under the burqa becomes the infiltrator, who threatens the benevolent savior with contamination and violence. When positioned in the West, the woman under the burqa is now presented as the invader rather than as the victim. And yet, discourses that recommend banning and excluding continue to do so in the name of gender equality and liberation. The fundamental ambivalence makes it impossible to analyze representations of the burqas in a way that is not itself contaminated by ambivalence. But I argue that it is important to intervene within hegemonic discourses in order to analyze how these representations do violence to women under burqas.

Violence is done in a number of different ways; my point of departure is that hegemonic representations of the burqa are violent images that pretend to fight against violence. Violence occurs on multiple levels. There is a first level of violence involved in the naming of the victim as powerless. This kind of symbolic violence is tacit and it is used to maintain social hierarchies, positioning some over others. I will propose to resist discourses about "Third World women," common within a trend of second wave liberal feminism because they tend to reproduce colonial logics with claims of "we know what is best for you" or "you cannot see your oppression" (Ashfar 1991; Goodwin 2003; Goodwin and Neuwirth

2001; Moller Okin 1999; Huntington 1996; and Hirsi Ali 2008 are just a few among others). This stance leads to a rewriting of history or struggle, removing the opportunity to engage in insurrectionary discourses where subjects can and do speak. By not allowing representatives of religious minorities to "speak back," a group's credibility is undermined.

Moreover illiberal discourses that try to pass themselves off as liberal produce subsequent levels of violence within the political and legal realms: for example governments in many Western nation states have banned the burqa in public spaces (such as schools, hospitals, or government buildings), and denied citizenship to woman wearing burqas in France. In this instance, the burqa becomes a border that defines who is included and excluded within the imagining of the nation state. The woman under the burqa becomes the victim of fears and anxieties about immigration and immigrant integration at the very moment when her status as a victim of others is denounced.

Propelled forward by discourses that situate women in burqas as those who are either in need of saving, desirous of liberation, or willing accomplices in their own victimization, such rhetoric has the power to exclude. With roots in colonial discourses and missionary rhetoric, such representations arise from a historical narrative on Islam that was already prevalent in the eighteenth century. The core tenant is that Islam is oppressive to women, that the segregation of women is epitomized by the burqa, and that these customs are the fundamental reason for the backwardness of Islamic societies, Mohja Kahf explained (16). The crux of this narrative, to paraphrase Edward Said in *Orientalism*, is that Muslim (Afghan) women are victimized by barbaric Muslim (Afghan) men (1978, xiv). One of the many variations of this narrative suggests that the woman under the burqa may be trying to escape victimization, which reductively frames Afghan women as subjugated. Blame is thus placed on another culture that exists seemingly in another far away world, which works to justify the idea that such women require saving.

Representations of the burqa and the women who wear them in the past and present have inherited decades of colonial discourses on Islam. In the current day these tropes are still at work, and the shards of these discursive engagements still exist and are found in mediated representations of Afghan women, symbolized by the burqa that runs throughout the cultural traditions of the West (the literary and artistic production of Orientalism).

Today this imagery is intimately linked to the geo-political climate, where representations of burqa-clad women are wielded as discursive ammunition in the global war on terror. These representations, Lila Abu-Lughod suggests that Afghan women quietly shuffle along voiceless in their burqas. They have been employed by the media to drive liberatory rhetoric. The imagery that emerged as a response works to enhance the story of the victimized Afghan woman that culminated after 9/11 infusing it with what Evelyn Alsultany calls an "excess of affect - an explicit expression of outrage and sympathy" where news media outlets frame women and men differently, resulting in an affective hierarchy (72). Importantly this affective hierarchy does not work to demonize *all* Afghans, but rather suggests that Westerners should have sympathy for *some* (women in particular), so the "good" (victims) and "bad" (perpetrators), can be distinguished. Emotions such as pity and outrage, powerfully affective emotions, are deployed within mainstream representations used to reproduce Western discourses that memorialize women in burqas as innately oppressed, or paradoxically for those who do not fit within the confines of these discourses where they are situated as threats. While calls of "women who are in need of saving" are nothing new, they highlight their prevalence and saliency.

To shed light on claims of saving and its prevalence, I extend the conceptual framework that is concerned with affect and witnessing through an analysis of the memorialization of Afghan women through an analysis of Steve McCurry's iconic portrait of the Afghan girl. The photograph functions as a form of witness and it is a useful way of understanding how information is produced and can work to transform audiences,

theoretically. The image moves beyond journalism and functions as a carrier of the "collective memory," offering a simplified version of the past in the present; viewers may or may not know about Afghanistan's civil war and the plight of Afghan refugees as framed by mainstream mass media outlets. McCurry's image does different things; it highlights the framing of Afghan women as burqa-clad figures who appear as ghostlike and anonymous, illustrating how images have objective value, to paraphrase Peter Hamilton (1997). It also illustrates how photographs serve as more than documents, they also work to confirm a sense of testimony to that which has been seen, "bearing witness." Photography and journalism work with visual evidence of worldwide events (in this case civil war and persecution) and mediate through different forms of technology (photography, film, and television). What is conveyed as history-in-the-making facilitates the viewer's sense of witnessing (attesting too).

At its most basic level, witnessing is as Barbie Zelizer explains "a specific form of collective remembering that interprets an event as significant and one deserving of critical attention" (2010, 10). In terms of coverage, mediated imagery produces the "photographic illusion," the idea that the image carries the viewer to the scene of that which is being conveyed (history-in-the-making). Zelizer's formulation of witnessing is productive when looking at representations of burqas from 9/11 onwards to represent conflict (military, terrorism, and social unrest). In the bulk of this thesis, I use this perspective as my starting point when examining representations of the burqa and the discourses that frame women in burqas as those who require or desire "saving" and/or are in need of "liberation."

My dissertation will show that there is no innocent example. Images may tempt us to think in terms of archetype, but this dissertation intends to show that no image is archetypal or even simply stereotypical. They all occur within a specific context and each of them teaches us or tries to teach us something different.

This thesis is divided into two sections. In the first part of the dissertation, I focus on representations of the burqa worn by women in Afghanistan (over there, where the archetype

sees them as oppressed by their culture), and in the second part of the dissertation, I turn to images that represent the burqa in our midst, within "our" Western world. And this time, the woman is represented as a threat as well as a victim.

In the introduction, I introduce the theoretical framework that hinges on intersectional theory and post-colonial theory and illustrate how this combination can be valuable when analyzing representations of the burqa. Chapter 2 analyzes precisely the type of representations that seems to go without saying and to which we, in the West, are used. In this first case study, I critique the way in which the material oppression of women in Afghanistan is reduced to a symbol of what differentiates them (burqa-clad women) from the West positioning them as oppressed women who must be saved and liberated. Such images and the metaphors that accompany them enable us to pay no attention to the historical elements that go into the construction of this discourse (colonial, xenophobic, and Islamophobic rhetoric) but also it neglects the current socio-political and economic conditions surrounding Afghan women. I employ the practice of close reading intertwined with narratology as strategies for reading the tropes of victimization and liberation. In this chapter, I illuminate how a certain strain of second-wave feminist perspective reduces the suffering of Afghan women during the Taliban to a series of static and essentialist representations that posit a universal woman. Shortly thereafter this rhetoric eventually backfires and endangers the very woman they claim to protect.

In Chapter 3, I move over to objects that attempt (and sometime fail) to critique the way in which the burqa is treated as a highly affective icon that signifies the ills of Islamic fundamentalism (the Taliban Regime and a strain of Wahhabism). Here, I analyze political critiques of the burqa that are charged with symbolic meaning. In this chapter, I discuss the burqa's relationship to violence where viewers come face-to-face with representations of domestic violence, corporeal punishment, and death ubiquitous in the Western imaginary. I quickly move beyond, the criticisms of essentialized notions of womanhood that characterize

a certain strain of second-wave feminism to consider how stereotypical narratives of Islam's oppression of women are relayed.

The image of veiled Muslim women, Afghan women in particular, that emerges in these objects works with contemporary narratives that build on the legacy of colonialism and missionary rhetoric as a way of framing contemporary fears and anxieties about the integration of North African migrants in the French political sphere. The basic trope is that women are forced to live in seclusion, cannot leave their homes, and are abused by their husbands for transgressing cultural/political norms. This oversimplified logic coincides with hegemonic representations of Muslim women, and these representational strategies have been picked up and employed by today's politicians. The use of the burqa in this analysis points to the ambivalence of the victim/perpetrator dyad when it comes to female oppression. Defining the oppressor is part of the oppression because it subjects the victim to the liberator's oppression. This chapter shows that the burqa is turned into icon of that which Western mass media outlets and governments alike actively work to scrutinize, ban, and fight.

The fourth chapter deepens the symbolic reading of the burqa moving to an object that explores the relationship between the burqa and another highly charged political icon: the national flag. I examine a conceptual artwork that exposes the clashing of burqas and national flags as antagonistic icons within the Western imaginary. I begin by focusing on the legacy and importance of conceptual art and the privileging of an idea or concept and how it is then used to explore the link between nation states and religion in times of political crisis. By superimposing the burqa and national flags, the artwork forces us to bring together icons that discourses normally tread as incompatible and mutually exclusive. The "clash of civilizations" is now put into a different context where window-shopping, fashion, nationality, politics, religion, and feminism all collide uncomfortably.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the appropriation of the burqa by a far-right political party. I interrogate the representation of burqa-clad figures as representatives of what is

perceived as indicative of failed immigrant integration (burqas and niqabs) in relation to a new articulation of Swedishness by means of a close reading. I discuss not only the controversial representation of Islamic immigrant women who are framed as fast, overwhelming, parasites who drain the Swedish welfare state. But I also address how within the context of neo-liberal discourses, those that associate economic failings and moral corruption of Sweden with Islamic immigration. Aided by Judith Butler's work on discursive censorship in *Excitable Speech*, I do a close reading of the act of censorship discussing how the representations deployed in this advertisement are vulnerable to reinterpretation and new citations. Butler's theory is helpful when analyzing how censorship fails to meet its intended causes, politicizing the burqa even further. It also offers a way of understanding how the act of censorship can backfire and in fact worked to empower the political party who cried "victim" problematically silencing the very women the censors claimed to protect (Muslim women).

This thesis ends with concluding remarks, in which I reflect on the links between the burqa and its characterization via mainstream Western mass media outlets and governments alike as a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism, emblematic of a dangerous and threatening force that needs to be "managed" in the world. The message that has accompanied hegemonic representations of the burqa clearly associates violence with the suffering of women: particularly prolific were images that came out of Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Wielded as a symbol of the ills of Islamic fundamentalism, the burqa was portrayed as an object that not only caused women's suffering (through its construction and structure) but it was also used to represent suffering and violence against women, in visual and literary texts. Such narratives of women's suffering were so cogent that they were deployed by governments and mass media outlets throughout the West, as a symbol of that which the West must overcome on behalf of the women of the East.

Accordingly, all of the objects (case studies) I explore engage this overload of meaning associated with the burqa. Through a series of mediations I analyzed the burqa's emergence as an object of concern, this very point lies at the heart of my research interests. This thesis inquires into not only what has been done to the burqa, but also what we can "do" with it. Must we resist or work with the overload of meaning that has been woven into certain representations of the burqa that have been disseminated via Western mass media outlets?

This thesis differs from the majority of research conducted on the burqa in a number of ways. First, this thesis focuses solely upon representations of burqas and the women who wear them. When research is conducted on the burqa, the focus is usually placed on the paternalistic rhetoric around veiling debates (Ayotte and Husain 115; Mohanty 1991, 80; Terray 2004, 120; Scott 2003, 156; Mojab 20). Or research addresses the problem of associating the burqa with women's oppression in Afghanistan, locating it to what McClintock refers to as "a single genesis narrative" (Kensinger 2; Abu Lughod 2002, 785; McClintock 1995, 68; Hunt 117). This includes documenting the maltreatment of Muslim women by colonial powers and missionaries (Ahmed 1992, 127-129; Kahf 13; Keddie 63; Lewis 2001, 20-21; Alloula 21; Hoodfar 1993, 6). Or the other side, proposing that the burqa can be productive within resistance movements (Ahmed 2012, 204; Franks 2003, 919; Fanon 1959, 165; Hoodfar 2003, 3-40; Mahmood 2005, 5-16; Bilge 14). Moving away from these concerns and onto other challenges associated with Western representations of the burqa, I look at discourses that work to reinforce familiar scapegoatings of Muslims and Islam as "barbaric," "backward" and "oppressed." In this thesis I ask exactly how Muslim womens bodies find themselves positioned within the geopolitical stage. The objects I chose confirm the persistence of stereotypical views but they also critique such assignations and let us imagine other representations.

The originality of this thesis lies in its:

I. Refusal to generalize (each object is treated as an ambivalent site of stereotyping with the possibility of resisting).

2. Deployment of a cultural analytic perspective which allows me to not assume that there is a prescribed theory at reach for each object but instead let's the object dictate the theory.

3. Interest in the way in the ambiguity of the saving/liberating-oppressing/excluding paradigms. In these chapters, I look at images that both manifest and resist such contradictions.

Through a combination of intersectional theory and post-colonial theory supplemented by methods taken from cultural analysis and cultural studies in this thesis I have been able to work through the production of knowledge about the burqa in the West and the constitution of the subject. I have been able to discover how the burqa as a cultural object functions as a discursive practice within contemporary culture.

Samenvatting

In dit proefschrift analyseer ik hoeverschillende discoursen kennis over de boerka produceren. Vooral sinds de aanvallen op de Twin Towers zijn Oriëntalistische en neo-Oriëntalistische tropen nieuw leven ingeblazen en zijn deze door actieve Islamofobische ideologieën uitgedragen om de Islam en de Moslims als geradicaliseerd neer te zetten. Moslims worden in politieke debatten en beleidsdiscussies en ook in de media en in wetenschappelijke discoursen in Westerse maatschappijen vaak als potentieel bedreigend en gevaarlijk gerepresenteerd. Tegenwoordig heeft de politisering van de Islam grote gevolgen, uiteenlopend van de invoering van wetten die een grens stellen aan het dragen van de boerka - in de Westerse beeldvorming bij uitstek het symbool van Islamitisch fundamentalisme – tot het afnemen van de nationaliteit van de draagsters (Hirschkind en Mahmood 341; Moors 2009, 402). De boerka wordt meer dan enig ander godsdienstig symbool in toenemende mate gestigmatiseerd en gecriminaliseerd, en het gebruik ervan wordt in landen zoals Frankrijk, Duitsland, Nederland en België beperkt. In andere landen, zoals Spanje en Australië, wordt op dit moment (augustus 2014) een debat gevoerd over de vraag of de boerka officieel moet worden verboden. Zeer waarschijnlijk is geen enkel ander symbool sinds de Franse *affaire du foulard* (de hoofddoekjesaffaire) zo'n effectief recept geweest voor hoogoplopende openbare en politieke discussies. Beelden van gesluierde moslimvrouwen, in het bijzonder als ze boerkas dragen, krijgen de lading van een bedreiging van de seculiere Westerse natiestaat, en van een belemmering van een succesvolle integratie van immigranten. Om deze redenen is een nader, dieper en gedetailleerder onderzoek nodig naar de gepolitiseerde manier waarop in boerkas geklede vrouwen als potentiële dreiging worden gerepresenteerd.

De vraagstelling die hier voor dit proefschrift uit voortvloeit is de volgende: hoe kunnen we de manier waarop de boerka in "het Westen" (in landen zoals Canada, de Verenigde Staten, en in West-Europa) van oudsher wordt gerepresenteerd herkennen,

aanklagen en weerstaan? Om deze vraag te beantwoorden, begin ik ermee een aantal verschillende, zowel tekstuele en visuele representaties van de boerka vanuit een interdisciplinair perspectief te onderzoeken. In het theoretische kader dat ik in dit proefschrift gebruik, worden intersectionele theorie en postkoloniale theorie gecombineerd om de dominante tropen te onderzoeken die vrouwen in boerkas voorstellen als slachtoffer, bedreiging, en/of indringster in het Westen. Ieder hoofdstuk behandelt een specifiek aspect van deze brede vraag, die wordt geherformuleerd rond specifieke casestudies (objecten). Deze objecten komen uit de hedendaagse cultuur en omvatten conceptuele kunst, beeldhouwkunst, theater, fotografie, literatuur, nieuwsmedia en politiek. Via een close reading van elk object en een analyse van het kader waarin deze beelden geplaatst worden, wordt de boodschap bekritiseerd dat *elke* boerka een gevaarlijk en/of bedreigend beeld is dat een gevaar vormt voor de Westerse idealen.

Door close reading van deze objecten wordt licht geworpen op de sociaal-politieke voorwaarden die deze beelden betekenis geven. Ze laten duidelijk zien dat Oriëntalistische en neo-Oriëntalistische constructies van de Islam nevenproducten zijn van 9/11 (de aanslag op de Twin Towers) en de erop volgende wereldwijde *war on terror*. De heropleving van Oriëntalistische tropen die de Islam en Moslims systematisch als “achterlijk,” “barbaars,” en “onbeschaafd” stereotyperen, zijn zo ingeburgerd geraakt dat het helaas nodig is om van heel dichtbij, heel langzaam en soms geduldig naar schijnbaar ondubbelzinnige, simpele en vanzelfsprekende fenomenen te kijken. We geloven dat we allemaal weten dat de boerka iets met discriminatie en een of andere vorm van lijden te maken heeft. Maar we verschillen van mening over wie wie iets aandoet, door wie er geleden wordt en waarom. Dit proefschrift onderzoekt wat er precies gebeurt als verschillende representaties van de boerka een heimelijke boodschap overbrengen over *hoe* we over de boerka moeten denken. In de volgende hoofdstukken zullen we zien dat deze boodschap impliciet (maar tegelijk niet mis te

verstaan) dan wel expliciet wordt gebracht, en ofwel zelfbespiegeling behelst dan wel - ironisch genoeg - intrinsiek tegenstrijdig is.

Het is misschien controversieel, maar niet bijzonder origineel om aan te voeren dat de Westerse mainstream massamedia boerkas in de beeldvorming tot symbolen voor de interpretatie van het Islamitisch fundamentalisme hebben gemaakt. Deze representaties zijn ook als rechtvaardiging voor militaire interventie in Afghanistan gebruikt. Zo werd "bevrijding" dan als trope gebruikt. Laura Bush, bijvoorbeeld, verklaarde in haar vaak aangehaalde nationale radiotoespraak in 2001 dat "de strijd tegen het terrorisme ook een strijd voor de rechten en waardigheid van vrouwen is" (Bush 2001). Vervolgens krijgen de Verenigde Staten lof voor hun hulp bij de bevrijding van de Afghaanse vrouwen: "Door onze militaire opmars de laatste tijd in grote delen van Afghanistan zitten vrouwen niet langer in hun huis opgesloten. Ze kunnen naar muziek luisteren en hun dochters lesgeven zonder dat ze bang hoeven te zijn dat ze straf krijgen" (Bush 2001). In dit voorbeeld bestaat er een ondubbelzinnig verband tussen de Amerikaanse invasie en de daarop volgende bezetting van het land (in het voorbije decennium) en de situatie van vrouwen tijdens het bewind van de Taliban, die als zodanig deel uitmaakt van de grondgedachten achter de oorlog. De invasie van Afghanistan werd geprezen als een daad die de Afghaanse vrouwen zou verlossen van het Talibaanse gezag (Hirschkind en Mahmood 341). Boerkas zijn het icoon geworden dat het fanatieke Talibanbewind kenmerkt en als zodanig zijn ze getransformeerd tot discursieve ammunitie, ingezet in de wereldwijde strijd tegen het terrorisme.

De Afghaanse vrouwen moeten (opnieuw) "gered" worden, en als gevolg hiervan zien we een herhaling van de vroegere formule voor koloniale interventie en macht over de Islamitische wereld. Dit betekent echter nog niet dat we weten wat we willen weerstaan en hoe we het zo representeren van de betekenis van de boerka moeten weerstaan.

Tegen deze achtergrond van het vertrouwde spel van zondebokken zoeken is mijn stelling dat het van cruciaal belang is om te kijken naar de specifieke vormen die dit

fenomeen op dit moment aanneemt. Hoe precies worden de lichamen van moslimvrouwen op het geopolitieke toneel gepositioneerd? Mijn onderzoek wijst uit dat boerkas hier een tweeledige functie hebben. Aan de ene kant zijn ze in de ogen van het Westen een symbool van de kwaden van de Islam - ze zijn het teken dat er iets mis is (een signaal dat er een probleem is voor de moderne, seculiere maatschappij), maar aan de andere kant dienen ze als bewijs dat er iets goed is in de Westerse natiestaten (we kunnen nu zeggen dat we de vrijheid vertegenwoordigen). In elk hoofdstuk kijk ik naar objecten die ons ertoe dwingen om de gevolgen van zulke stereotypen in de manier waarop wij de boerka representeren opnieuw te bekijken. Gegeven het feit dat slachtofferschap en vernedering wijdverspreide concepten zijn, is het geen verrassing dat een vrouw in een boerka wordt gerepresenteerd als iemand zonder stem en zonder macht. Ik heb objecten uitgekozen die ons kunnen helpen na te denken over de manier waarop sommige representaties van de boerka dergelijke stereotyperingen *versterken*, *weerstaan* of *kritiseren*. Tegelijkertijd kan door de ontleding van de culturele productie van kennis over boerkas beter worden begrepen hoe discursieve praktijken en machtsmechanismen werken.

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik zeer specifieke representaties van boerkas, waarin de vrouwen die ze dragen neergezet worden als slachtoffer, bedreiging en/of indringster. “Zij” worden gerepresenteerd als slachtoffers van “hun” mannen, van “hun” maatschappij, niet van sekse-ongelijkheid in het algemeen, maar van het soort sekse-ongelijkheid waarvan het Westen denkt dat het die kan oplossen. Ze moeten daarom niet alleen tegen hun mannen en cultuur beschermd worden, maar ook tegen hun eigen internalisering van slachtofferschap als de enige mogelijke toestand. Deze *ambivalente* positionering van de redder zou al gecompliceerd worden door het feit dat deze de vrouw in een boerka elke macht of eigen stem ontzegt. Maar dat bevrijdings - en reddingsdiscours wordt nog verder geproblematiseerd door het feit dat het slachtoffer ook een dreiging vormt. Door de vrouwen die boerkas dragen als *instemmende s*lachtoffers voor te stellen, positioneert het Westen hen als medeplichtig aan

exact die kwaden waar ze onder lijden. Het gevolg is dat de vrouw onder de boerka de infiltrante wordt, die de goedgezinde redder bedreigt met besmetting en geweld. En wanneer een vrouw in het Westen een boerka draagt, wordt ze eerder als indringster dan als slachtoffer voorgesteld. Desondanks doen discoursen die verboden en uitsluiting bepleiten dat nog steeds in naam van sekse-gelijkheid en bevrijding. Door de fundamentele ambivalentie is het onmogelijk om representaties van de boerka op een manier te analyseren die niet zelf door ambivalentie is omgeven. Toch is mijn stelling dat het belangrijk is om hegemonische discoursen open te breken, zodat we kunnen analyseren hoe deze representaties vrouwen onder boerkas geweld aandoen.

Geweld wordt op een aantal verschillende manieren gepleegd; mijn vertrekpunt is dat hegemonische representaties van de boerka agressieve beelden zijn die de pretentie hebben geweld te bestrijden. Het geweld doet zich op meerdere niveaus voor. Het slachtoffer als machteloos bestempelen is een eerste niveau van geweld. Dit soort symbolisch geweld vindt stilzwijgend plaats en wordt gebruikt om sociale hiërarchieën in stand te houden, waarbij sommigen hoger staan dan anderen. Ik zal voorstellen om discoursen over "derdewereldvrouwen" te weerstaan, omdat deze discoursen, gebruikelijk in een bepaalde stroming binnen de tweede liberaal-feministische golf, met beweringen als "wij weten wat het beste voor jou is" en "je kunt je eigen onderdrukking niet zien" vaak leiden tot een reproductie van koloniale logica (Ashfar 1991; Goodwin 2003; Goodwin and Neuwirth 2001; Moller Okin 1999; Huntington 1996; Hirsi Ali 2008 om maar een paar voorbeelden te noemen). Dit gezichtspunt leidt tot een herschrijving van de geschiedenis of tot strijd, wat de gelegenheid wegneemt om rebellerende discoursen aan te gaan waarin subjecten hun stem daadwerkelijk kunnen laten horen. Als het vertegenwoordigers van religieuze minderheden niet wordt toegestaan om iets "terug te zeggen," wordt de geloofwaardigheid van een groep ondermijnd.

Bovendien produceren niet-liberale discoursen die pretenderen liberaal te zijn binnen de politieke en juridische domeinen verdere geweldsniveaus. Zo hebben de autoriteiten in veel Westerse natiestaten de boerka op openbare plekken (zoals scholen, ziekenhuizen of overheidsgebouwen) verboden en wordt in Frankrijk het staatsburgerschap ontzegd aan vrouwen die een boerka dragen. In dit geval wordt de boerka een grens die aangeeft wie er in de beleving van de natiestaat wel en niet bij hoort. De vrouw onder de boerka wordt het slachtoffer van angstgevoelens en bezorgdheid over immigratie en de integratie van immigranten, precies op het moment dat men haar status als slachtoffer van anderen aanklaagt.

Zulke retoriek, die extra krachtig wordt door discoursen die vrouwen in boerkas neerzetten als vrouwen die gered moeten worden en naar hun bevrijding verlangen, of juist als vrouwen die willige medeplichtigen zijn aan hun eigen slachtofferschap, heeft het vermogen om uit te sluiten. Zulke representaties, waarvan de wortels in koloniale discoursen en de retoriek van de missie liggen, komen voort uit een historisch narratief over de Islam dat in de achttiende eeuw ontstond. De kern ervan is volgens Mohja Kafh dat de Islam vrouwen onderdrukt, dat de boerka de segregatie van vrouwen belichaamt, en dat deze gebruiken de fundamentele verklaring vormen voor de achterlijkheid van Islamitische maatschappijen (16). De essentie van dit narratief is, vrij naar Edward Saids *Orientalism*, dat Islamitische (Afghaanse) vrouwen door barbaarse Islamitische (Afghaanse) mannen tot slachtoffer worden gemaakt (1978, xiv). In een van de vele variaties op dit narratief wordt de suggestie gewekt dat de vrouw onder de boerka mogelijk probeert om aan slachtofferschap te ontkomen, hetgeen Afghaanse vrouwen terugbrengt tot onderworpenen. Op die manier wordt schuld geladen op een andere cultuur die schijnbaar bestaat in een andere ver verwijderde wereld, waarmee het idee wordt gerechtvaardigd dat zulke vrouwen gered dienen te worden.

Representaties van de boerka en van de vrouwen die ze in het verleden en het heden dragen, dragen de erfenis van vele decennia met koloniale discoursen over de Islam. Deze

tropen zijn nu nog steeds in gebruik, en de scherven van deze discursieve betrokkenheid bestaan nog steeds en zijn te vinden in de representaties van Afghaanse vrouwen in de media, gesymboliseerd door de sluier die overal in de culturele tradities van het Westen opduikt (de literaire en artistieke productie van het oriëntalisme).

In de huidige tijd is deze manier van verbeelden nauw verbonden met het geopolitieke klimaat, waar representaties van in boerkas geklede vrouwen als discursieve ammunitie in de strijd tegen het terrorisme worden gehanteerd. Deze representaties wekken volgens Lila Abu-Lughod de suggestie dat Afghaanse vrouwen stilletjes en zonder stem in hun boerkas rondschuifelen (2002). Ze worden door de media gebruikt om de bevrijdingsretoriek kracht bij te zetten. De beelden die als respons verschenen geven het verhaal van de tot slachtoffer gemaakte Afghaanse vrouw extra lading, wat na 11 september een hoogtepunt bereikte, en het slachtofferverhaal in de woorden van Evelyn Alsultany doortrok met een "overdaad aan affect - een expliciete uiting van verontwaardiging en sympathie," waar nieuwsmedia mannen en vrouwen verschillend voorstellen, waardoor er een affectieve hiërarchie wordt gevormd. Belangrijk is dat deze affectieve hiërarchie niet *alle* Afghanen demoniseert, maar eerder de suggestie wekt dat Westerlingen voor *sommige* (vooral vrouwen) sympathie zouden moeten voelen en er dus een onderscheid mogelijk is tussen "goede Afghanen" (de slachtoffers) en "slechte Afghanen" (de daders). Emoties zoals medelijden en verontwaardiging, sterk affectieve emoties, worden bij gangbare representaties gebruikt om Westerse discoursen te reproduceren die vrouwen in boerkas beschouwen als van nature onderdrukte wezens, of paradoxaal genoeg als bedreiging indien ze niet in de lijnen van deze discoursen passen. Oproepen waarin wordt gesproken over "vrouwen die gered moeten worden" zijn niets nieuws, maar ze maken duidelijk dat ze wijdverbreid en belangrijk zijn.

Om duidelijkheid te scheppen over de claims met betrekking tot de 'noodzaak te redden' en het veelvuldig voorkomen van zulke claims, breid ik het conceptuele kader voor affect en getuigenis uit met behulp van een analyse van de manier waarop Afghaanse

vrouwen in onze herinnering terechtkomen aan de hand van Steve McCurry's beroemde portret van het Afghaanse meisje. De foto fungeert als een vorm van getuigenverklaring en is als zodanig nuttig om te begrijpen hoe informatie wordt geproduceerd en het publiek in theorie kan beïnvloeden. Het beeld wordt meer dan een journalistiek product en functioneert als een drager van het "collectieve geheugen." Het biedt in het heden een gesimplificeerde versie van het verleden; personen die het zien zijn misschien wel of niet op de hoogte van de Afghaanse burgeroorlog en van de benarde toestand waarin Afghaanse vluchtelingen verkeren zoals die door de massamedia worden beschreven. De foto van McCurry doet verschillende dingen; de foto maakt duidelijk zichtbaar dat Afghaanse vrouwen worden voorgesteld als in boerkas gehulde figuren die er uitzien als geesten en die anoniem zijn. Dit is een voorbeeld van de objectieve waarde van beelden, om Peter Hamilton te parafraseren. Het laat ook zien hoe foto's meer doen dan documenten, zij kunnen het gevoel van getuigenis van het geziene bevestigen, "met feiten staven." Fotografie en journalistiek gebruiken visueel bewijs van gebeurtenissen in de hele wereld (in dit geval burgeroorlog en vervolging) en dit komt met behulp van verschillende technologieën (fotografie, film en tv) in de media terecht. Door de boodschap "hier wordt geschiedenis gemaakt" krijgt de kijker gemakkelijker het gevoel dat hij er getuige van is (en er getuigenis van doet).

Op het meest basale niveau is getuige zijn volgens Barbie Zelizer "een specifieke vorm van collectieve herinnering waarin een gebeurtenis als significant wordt opgevat en als een gebeurtenis die kritische aandacht verdient" (2010, 10). In termen van dekking produceren in de media verspreide beelden de "fotografische illusie," het idee dat het beeld de kijker naar de plaats brengt van wat wordt overgebracht ("hier wordt geschiedenis gemaakt"). Zelizers definitie van getuige zijn is productief als je kijkt naar de manier waarop representaties van boerkas sinds de 11e september worden ingezet voor de weergave van conflicten (gewapende machten, terrorisme, sociale onrust). In een groot deel van dit proefschrift gebruik ik dit perspectief als vertrekpunt bij mijn onderzoek naar representaties

van de boerka en van discoursen die vrouwen in boerkas beschrijven als mensen die "gered" moeten worden of daarnaar verlangen en/of "bevrijd" moeten worden.

Mijn dissertatie zal laten zien dat er geen onschuldige voorbeelden zijn. Beelden kunnen ons ertoe verleiden om in archetypen te denken, maar de bedoeling van deze dissertatie is om aan te tonen dat geen enkel beeld archetypisch is of zelfs maar een stereotype. Ze doen zich allemaal voor in een specifieke context en elk beeld brengt ons iets anders bij of probeert dat te doen.

Dit proefschrift is opgebouwd uit twee delen. In het eerste deel van de dissertatie richt ik mij op representaties van de boerka die door vrouwen in Afghanistan wordt gedragen (een ver land, met het archetype dat draagsters van de boerka door hun cultuur onderdrukt worden), en in het tweede deel van de dissertatie richt ik de aandacht op beelden die de boerka in ons midden representeren, in "onze" Westerse wereld. Daar wordt de vrouw voorgesteld als zowel een bedreiging als een slachtoffer.

In de inleiding introduceer ik het theoretische kader dat op de intersectionele theorie en de postkoloniale theorie rust en laat ik zien hoe dat een waardevolle combinatie kan zijn voor de analyse van representaties van de boerka. In hoofdstuk 2 zoomt de analyse in op het soort representaties dat voor de hand schijnt te liggen en waarin we in het Westen gewend zijn. In deze eerste casestudy bekritiseer ik de manier waarop de materiële onderdrukking van vrouwen wordt gereduceerd tot een symbool van wat hen (de in boerkas gehulde vrouwen) onderscheidt van het Westen, en dat hen neerzet als onderdrukte vrouwen die gered en bevrijd zouden moeten worden. Zulke beelden en de metaforen die ermee samenhangen stellen ons in staat om geen aandacht te besteden aan de historische elementen die gebruikt worden bij de constructie van dit discours (koloniale, xenofobische en Islamofobische retoriek), maar ze gaan ook voorbij aan de huidige sociaalpolitieke en economische omgeving waarin Afghaanse vrouwen zich bevinden. Ik vervlecht de close reading-methode met narratologie als een strategie om de tropen van slachtofferschap en bevrijding te

interpreteren. In dit hoofdstuk belicht ik hoe een bepaalde stroming in het perspectief van de tweede feministische golf het lijden van Afghaanse vrouwen tijdens het regime van de Taliban reduceert tot een reeks statische en essentialistische representaties die uitgaan van een universele vrouw. Die retoriek heeft na korte tijd onvermijdelijk een averechts effect en brengt de vrouw die zij nu juist wil beschermen in gevaar.

In hoofdstuk 3 ga ik verder met objecten die proberen (en er soms niet in slagen) om de manier te kritiseren waarop de boerka wordt behandeld als een beeld met een hoge gevoelswaarde dat een teken is van de kwaden van het Islamitische fundamentalisme (het Taliban- bewind en een stroming in het wahabisme). Ik analyseer er politieke kritieken van de boerka die met symbolische betekenis geladen zijn. In dit hoofdstuk bespreek ik de relatie tussen de boerka en geweld, als kijkers rechtstreeks worden geconfronteerd met representaties van huiselijk geweld, lijfstraffen en dood die alomtegenwoordig zijn in de Westelijke verbeelding. Ik blijf niet lang stilstaan bij de kritieken van geëssentialiseerde noties van vrouwelijkheid die typerend zijn voor een bepaalde stroming in de tweede feministische golf en beschouw dan hoe stereotype narratieven van de onderdrukking van vrouwen door de Islam worden doorgegeven.

Door de combinatie van het beeld van gesluierde moslimvrouwen, Afghaanse vrouwen in het bijzonder, dat in deze objecten verschijnt, met hedendaagse narratieven die voortbouwen op de erfenis van kolonialisme en missionaire retoriek kunnen hedendaagse angsten en zorgen over de integratie van Noord-Afrikaanse migranten in de Franse politiek in een kader worden geplaatst. De basistrope is dat vrouwen gedwongen worden om in afzondering te leven, hun huizen niet kunnen verlaten en door hun echtgenoten worden misbruikt omdat ze culturele/politieke normen schenden. Deze zwaar gesimplificeerde logica valt samen met hegemonische representaties van moslimvrouwen, en deze representatiestrategieën worden door de huidige politici opgepakt en ingezet. Het gebruik van de boerka in deze analyse wijst erop dat de slachtoffer/dader-dyade ambivalent is met

betrekking tot vrouwenonderdrukking. De onderdrukker definiëren maakt deel uit van de onderdrukking, want dit onderwerpt het slachtoffer aan de onderdrukking van de bevrijder. Dit hoofdstuk toont aan dat de boerka een beeld wordt van hetgene dat evenzeer door de Westerse massamedia als door overheden actief in de gaten wordt gehouden, wordt verboden en wordt bestreden.

Het vierde hoofdstuk verdiept de symbolische interpretatie van de boerka. In het object dat hier aan de orde komt wordt de relatie onderzocht tussen de boerka en een ander zwaarbeladen politiek beeld: de nationale vlag. Ik bestudeer een conceptueel kunstwerk dat de botsing aan de orde stelt tussen boerkas en nationale vlaggen als antagonistische beelden in de Westelijke verbeelding. Eerst richt ik mij op de erfenis en het belang van conceptuele kunst en op de vraag hoe een idee of een concept boven komt drijven, en hoe dat vervolgens wordt gebruikt om het verband tussen natiestaten en religie ten tijde van politieke crises te onderzoeken. Door de boerka en nationale vlaggen bijeen te voegen, dwingt het kunstwerk ons beelden bij elkaar te brengen die in discoursen doorgaans als onverenigbaar en elkaar wederzijds uitsluitend worden beschouwd. De "botsing der beschavingen" heeft nu een andere context gekregen waarin *window shopping*, mode, nationaliteit, politiek, religie en feminisme alle op ongemakkelijke manier met elkaar in botsing komen.

Het vijfde hoofdstuk is gewijd aan de manier waarop een extreem-rechtse politieke partij zich de boerka heeft toegeëigend. Door middel van close reading onderzoek ik de representatie van in boerkas gehulde figuren als voorbeeld van wat gezien wordt als een teken van de mislukte integratie van immigranten (boerkas en niqaabs) in relatie tot een nieuwe articulatie van het Zweeds-zijn. Ik bespreek niet alleen de controversiële representatie van Islamitische vrouwelijke immigranten die gekenschetst worden als haastige, overdonderende parasieten die de Zweedse welvaartsstaat uitzuigen. Ik behandel ook degenen die in de context van neo-liberale discoursen de economische problemen en morele corruptie in Zweden met de immigratie van Moslims associëren. Geholpen door het werk van

Judith Butler over discursieve censuur (*Excitable Speech*) geef ik een close reading van een casus van censuur en bespreek ik hoe de representaties die in de betrokken advertentie worden gebruikt gevoelig zijn voor herinterpretatie en nieuwe citaten. Butlers theorie is nuttig om te analyseren hoe censuur niet tot het beoogde resultaat leidt, maar de boerka nog verder politiseert. De theorie kan ook duidelijk maken hoe censuur een averechts effect kan hebben en in feite bijdroeg aan de versterking van de positie van een politieke partij die zichzelf als "slachtoffer" bestempelde, waarmee echter helaas precies de (moslim)vrouwen die de censor wilde beschermen de mond werd gesnoerd.

Aan het einde van dit proefschrift trek ik conclusies over het verband tussen de boerka en de typering daarvan, via de kanalen van de mainstream Westerse massamedia en evenzeer door de overheid, als een symbool van Islamitisch fundamentalisme, als een symbool van een gevaarlijke en bedreigende kracht die in de hele wereld "onder controle" moet worden gehouden. De boodschap die hegemonische representaties van de boerka vergezelt, verbindt geweld duidelijk met het lijden van vrouwen: bijzonder overvloedig waren de beelden die uit het door de Taliban beheerste Afghanistan kwamen. Als een symbool van de kwaden van het Islamitische fundamentalisme werd van de boerka het beeld gecreëerd van een object dat niet alleen oorzaak is van het lijden van vrouwen (door het ontwerp ervan) maar dat ook werd gebruikt om het lijden van en het geweld tegen vrouwen te representeren, in visuele uitingen en letterlijke teksten. Dergelijke narratieven over het lijden van vrouwen waren zo overtuigend dat ze in het gehele Westen door overheden en kanalen van de massamedia werden gebruikt, als een symbool van hetgene het Westen in het belang van de vrouwen in het Oosten moet overwinnen.

Alle objecten (casestudies) die ik heb verkend hebben dus deze excessieve lading van met de boerka geassocieerde betekenis. Op basis van een reeks media-uitingen analyseerde ik de opkomst van de boerka als een voorwerp waar men zich zorgen over moet maken, de kern van mijn onderzoeksbelangstelling. Dit proefschrift stelt niet alleen de vraag wat men de

boerka heeft aangedaan, maar ook wat we met de boerka kunnen "doen." Moeten we ons verzetten tegen de excessieve hoeveelheid betekenis die verwerkt is in bepaalde, via de kanalen van de Westerse massamedia verspreide representaties van de boerka, of moeten we ermee werken?

Dit proefschrift verschilt op een aantal punten van het meeste onderzoek dat met betrekking tot de boerka is gepleegd. Ten eerste richt dit proefschrift zich alleen op representaties van boerkas en van de vrouwen die ze dragen. Gewoonlijk ligt bij onderzoek naar de boerka de focus bij de paternalistische retoriek die in debatten over de sluier wordt aangetroffen (Ayotte and Husain 115; Mohanty 1991, 80; Terray 2004, 120; Scott 2003, 156; Mojab 20). Of onderzoek behandelt het probleem dat de boerka in verband wordt gebracht met de vrouwenonderdrukking in Afghanistan, waarbij deze wordt afgebakend als wat McClintock *a single genesis narrative* (een enkel ontstaansnarratief) noemt (Kensinger 2; Abu Lughod 2002, 785; McClintock 1995, 68; Hunt 117). Het documenteren van de slechte behandeling van moslimvrouwen door de koloniale machten en de missionarissen valt hier ook onder (Ahmed 1992, 127-129; Kahf 13; Keddie 63; Lewis 20-21; Alloula 21; Hoodfar 1993, 6). Of de andere kant, die stelt dat de boerka productief kan zijn binnen verzetsbewegingen (Ahmed 2012, 204; Franks 919; Fanon 165; Hoodfar 2003, 3-40; Mahmood 2005, 5-16; Bilge 214). Buiten deze vraagstukken en problemen die de Westerse representaties van de boerka oproepen, kijk ik naar de discoursen die leiden tot versterking van het verschijnsel dat Moslims en de Islam met termen als "barbaars," "achterlijk," en "onderdrukt" als zondebok worden aangewezen. In dit proefschrift vraag ik hoe de lichamen van moslimvrouwen in de geopolitieke arena precies worden gepositioneerd. De objecten die ik selecteerde bevestigen de hardnekkigheid van op stereotypen gebaseerde opvattingen, maar zij vormen ook een kritiek op zulke attributies en geven ons ruimte om andere representaties te bedenken.

De originaliteit van dit proefschrift wordt bepaald door:

1. Generalisaties worden afgewezen (elk object wordt behandeld als een ambivalente plek voor stereotypen waartegen verzet mogelijk is).

2. Gebruik van een cultureel-analytisch perspectief. Ik hoef daardoor niet aan te nemen dat er voor elk object een gegeven theorie van toepassing is, maar laat in plaats daarvan het object de theorie vormen.

3. Belangstelling voor de tweeslachtigheid van de paradigma's van redding/bevrijding-onderdrukking/uitsluiting. Ik kijk naar beelden die deze tegenstellingen zowel visualiseren als weerstaan.

Door intersectionele theorie en postkoloniale theorie te combineren, aangevuld met methoden ontleend aan de culturele analyse en culturele studies, ben ik in dit proefschrift in staat geweest om de productie van kennis over de boerka in het Westen en de constructie van het onderzoeksobject te doorgronden. Ik heb laten zien hoe de boerka als cultureel object binnen de hedendaagse cultuur als discursieve praktijk functioneert.