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Spectacular Subjects: The Violent Erotics of Imperial Visual Culture

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SPECTACULAR SUBJECTS: THE VIOLENT EROTICS OF IMPERIAL VISUAL CULTURE

by

MUNIRA MOON CHARANIA

Under the Direction of Wendy Simonds

ABSTRACT

The central concerns of this project are the visual constructions of feminine and feminist subjectivities, significations and semiotics of the (brown) female body, and the pleasures and power of global visual culture. I consider the primary visual fields that seek to tell the story of Pakistani women, and Muslim woman more broadly, after September 11th, 2001. Specifically, I offer detailed case studies of three visual stories: international human rights sensation Mukhtar Mai; twice elected Prime Minister of Pakistan and first woman to lead a Muslim country Benazir Bhutto; and female terrorists/religious martyrs of the Red Mosque events in Islamabad, Pakistan. I locate the relevance of these visual stories on three axes – human rights, democratization and the war on terror – where each operates as an arm of, what Jasbir Puar (2007) calls, the U.S. hetero-normative nation. I also examine the structures of affect, pleasure and eroticism that are embedded in these popularized representations and narrations in the U.S. cultural context. Finally, I offer ways to reread the potential radical subjectivities or possibilities that these visual subjects and their political labor open up.

INDEX WORDS: Visual culture, Feminist subjectivity, War, Empire, Pakistan

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by

Munira Moon Charania

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy Sociology

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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SPECTACULAR SUBJECTS: THE VIOLENT EROTICS OF IMPERIAL VISUAL CULTURE

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Had not the women enfolded in these pages braved the daggers of cultural misogyny, imperial patriarchy and national sedimentation, perhaps I would not have a story to tell on Pakistani women, feminist labor and the U.S. state/gaze. I am separated from these women not just by lines drawn in land, but by class and culture, by life and death. In my search for understanding, I can only hope that I have not missed understandings. And so, I re-author these women with equal degrees of nostalgia and irony, and hope that while they may not recognize themselves in these pages, my work is dedicated to their revolution, in all its complexities, for all its *unseen* labor...

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One

Visualizing the *Other*: Pakistani Women and the Politics of Visuality, War and Empire

Beneath the surface of Pakistan, these opposing forces grind against each other like two vast geologic plates, rattling teacups from Lahore to London, Karachi to New York. The clash between moderates and extremists in Pakistan today reflects this rift, and can be seen as a microcosm for a larger struggle among Muslims everywhere. So when the earth trembles in Pakistan, the world pays attention. National Geographic 29 August 2007

They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. Karl Marx, 1907, 72

Vision is always a question of the power to see — and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted? Donna Haraway, 1991, 147

In the climactic scene of the blockbuster movie *Sex and the City 2* (*SATC2*) (see fig 1), the intrepid Manhattan foursome of Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha take safe harbor in a mysterious, incense-shrouded chamber of veiled, Abu Dhabi women. The veiled women give refuge to the *Sex and the City* crew women after Samantha spills dozens of condoms from her purse in the middle of a spice market crowded with men. The men, overwhelmed by anger and shock, abandon their daily activities and busy life to encircle Samantha and condemn her as a harlot, leading to a confrontation between the four women and dozens of angry men in the Abu Dhabi marketplace. Mocking their indignation, Samantha proudly holds the condoms up high and dry humps the air, yelling “yes, I have sex!” Next, the scene changes abruptly, from screaming Arab men surrounding the four girls to two mysterious veiled women appearing like an oasis in the desert, silently nodding to the four women as an invitation. Our four cultural avatars follow the mere gaze (and nod) into a private space, reminiscent of an Urdu *zenana*¹, where the women of Abu Dhabi reveal the existence of a secret club attended by a dozen *niqabi*²

¹ *Zenana* refers to the part of a house belonging to a Muslim family in South Asian countries, such as India and Pakistan, reserved for the women of the household.

² The *niqab* refers to the face covering part of the burkha. *Niqabi*, a more colloquial term, refers to women who wear the *niqab*.

women. The foursome’s initial trepidation – even aversion – towards these veiled/oppressed women dissolves as the women drop their veils to reveal the same high-end Western couture that hang from the shoulders of our emancipated American foursome. Carrie wittingly states, “They’re just like us, but just not allowed to be!” The final shot of America’s favorite feminine/feminist fantasy scene lights up with the intermeshed sounds of all the women laughing at what *Salon* magazine glibly calls “sexisms’ funeral” (*salon.com*, 26 May 2010). It’s a scene that’s supremely unrealistic, woefully incongruous and purely pleasurable as it brings together *burqas* and *haute couture*.



Figure 1.1, *Sex and the City 2*, 2010, Desert Scene

This cinematic representation of Muslim women, in a number of ways, while more than faintly ridiculous, is reminiscent of orientalists’ caricatures and occidental self-congratulatory schemata. But the message(s) of the underlined “us” and “they” is clear: we are the white

liberated Americans and they are the oppressed brown women. The sharing of space and coutured bodies by both the brown and white women operates as a disavowal of the films' racist undertones, but the formula through which we have come to gaze at the Muslim woman, and her liberated American counterpart, is nonetheless strikingly transparent in this interface of power and pleasure.

Figure one, in all its visual excitement, illustrates the crisscrossing articulations of western feminine aesthetics and erotics with the exotic palatability of *otherness*, where both come to signify the visual face of sexual emancipation. The scene references an orientalist spatiality of sand dunes, deserts and sexy and sexually available (brown) women. But in situating the white foursome in this exotic space, wearing garments from these faraway lands, the visuality evokes a fantasied site of erotic and imperial play. The bright colors, the long hair, the jewelry, the display of cleavage, all elicit a fetishistic response from the viewer, naturalizing the hetero-erotic and the imperial gaze. From the excited brown men of the market scene to the disrobing women of the *zenana* to the erotic aesthetics of white women donning "Arab" silks, this representation reveals a subtle subterfuge of pleasure associated with such fetishized visualities of Muslim women.³

The scene, itself, incites a number of intrigues around Muslim women's bodies, since it vacillates between representations of oppression to danger to liberation, and the sexualization of all three. Indeed, at each level of the scene we see how the erotic often continues to provoke fears, anxieties and resistances. The scene illustrates how the female racialized body is irrevocably intertwined with discourses of perfected femininity that wrap white woman subjects in discursive adornments such as (faux)feminism, modernity, and consumption of the *other*. For

³ Indeed more than three quarters of the film takes place in Abu Dhabi (though it was filmed in Morocco) and is replete with mockeries of veiled women and Muslim men, what Salon magazine (26 May 2010) calls stunning Muslim clichés.

Carrie and for the audience of *SATC2*, the very act of disrobing these black shrouds of fabric is a step toward their emancipation, or “sexism’s funeral.” The act initially seems to reference a sexual economy of secrecy and disclosure, a promise of the truth of sex that underlies the *niqab*, waiting to be uncovered. Once again, the Muslim woman emerges as the quintessential veiled woman or the exotic whore, as Amira Jarmakani (2008) puts it. Indeed, both the scene’s self-congratulatory tone as having collapsed sexism and the visibility of white women crossing erotic and aesthetic borders constitutes an epistemic reality that feminism may be achieved through specific embodiments, such as skimpily dressed women as liberated.

But this apparently climactic scene confounds the erotic because it uses a dominant registrar of visibility, women removing their clothes, to frame another economy of desire and pleasure rooted in seeing the *other* as ourselves. When Carrie says excitedly, “they are just like us,” her statement elucidates how the construction of the *other* serves as a vantage point from which to observe the self. This scene interpellates a Western viewing public that is literate in all these referenced codes: the oppressed Muslim woman, the veil and the veiled as fearful, the erotic underlay of removing the veil to reveal a sexualized, racialized female *other*, and this *other* being/becoming “like us.” Indeed, this scene annexes the whole décor of Muslim culture into merely a *trompe l’oeil*⁴ visual universe in which all the particularities of nation, religion and sex can become parodies of themselves or can be cast off to reveal we are all one and the same.

In this respect, like most visual realities, what we see here is what Susan Sontag (2003) calls collective instruction. A key didactic modality of liberal humanism relies on flattening complex geopolitical realities into fetishistic cultural mythologies that support the sameness of freedom and the difference of oppression. The salience and power of this cinematic image of

⁴ The literal translation is “trick the eye” vis-à-vis optical illusion.

Muslim women is authorized, at least in part, by the contemporary geopolitical realities that have propelled Muslim women (and men) into the global gaze.

Adding, then, to the weight of collective visual instruction is the complex historical and contemporary tensions between the U.S. and a number of Muslim nations. The *SATC2* scene fastens this discursive tension, one that portrays brown men as an angry, common, repressive threat to all women.⁵ Indeed the bustling market disrupted by the visual display of sex and violence demonstrates anxieties about the inevitability of brown men's violence. The specific cinematic strategy of falling condoms, scantily dressed Samantha bending down to pick up the evidence of her vice, and large numbers of brown men encircling the four white women bespeaks the possibility of a gang rape, even as it caricaturizes it. Even in the *zenana*-like space, the barbarism of the Muslim male is both incited and mocked, as these women demonstrate through the revelation of skimpy couture beneath the veil, that brown angry men can be outwitted. Once Muslim women slip seamlessly into the empowered space of the liberal feminist project, all women can bond over despising angry, oppressive and dangerous brown Muslim men.

The *SATC2* scene animates a cultural landscape and an epistemological process that simultaneously seeks and produces queered fetishes, feminized fetishes and nativized fetishes at the nexus of geopolitical histories of desire for the *other* and exploitation of the *other*. The story of imperial legacies, (colonial) empires and their fetishes is familiar, though for the most part it seemed a story of the past. But after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, it has been revitalized, especially in the U.S. This burgeoning fascination has propelled both Muslim women and men

⁵ A contemporary example of this is Lara Logan, an American female journalist who was assaulted in Egypt during mass uprisings. The *New York Post* referred to the Egyptian men who abducted and sexually harassed Logan as "those animals," called on authorities to "find the beasts" and named sexual assault "business as usual in the middle east." While a number of problematics can be fleshed out of the news coverage of Logan, what's revealed is both how normalized it is to vilify brown men as excessively violent and sexual while simultaneously fetishizing the violence against (brown) women.

into the global gaze, unfastening their stories/realities from the conditions in which these subjects are embedded and erecting them as signifiers of dominant ideologies of liberal humanism, U.S. exceptionalism and third world barbarisms (Jarmakani 2008; Williams 2010). The post 9/11 reality is that the imperial impulse to make visible the “barbarisms” of the global south is especially pervasive, prompting representation even in mainstream magazines, press, and coffee-table books. What do we make of this post 9/11 proliferated interest in the feminine, racialized Muslim *other*? How does the act of constructing and gazing at this feminine, racialized *other* participate in relations of war, globalized hetero-democracies, and state-sanctioned violence?

My project, *Spectacular Subjects: The Violent Erotics of Imperial Visual Culture*, is situated at the convergence of discussions on visual culture, feminist subjectivity, postcolonial criticism and a queer rereading of the political, the erotic and the feminine. The texts I consider in this project are visual fields that seek to tell the story of Pakistani women, and Muslim women more broadly, after September 11th, 2001. I offer detailed case studies of three visual stories: international human rights sensation Mukhtar Mai; twice elected Prime Minister of Pakistan and first woman to lead a Muslim country Benazir Bhutto; and female terrorists/religious martyrs⁶ of the Red Mosque events in Islamabad, Pakistan. While my project focuses on Pakistan for a number of reasons I delve into below, I largely posit Pakistan as a symbolic antithesis to the U.S. which could be any *othered* nation represented and contained by U.S. American political forces and deterritorialized imperial apparatuses, as the *SATC2* discussion shows. Like the scene in *SATC2*, these sensationalized Pakistani women both incite and ease American anxieties, function

⁶ The female religious martyrs I speak about and analyze as a symbolic gender field are nameless, often spoken of or referred to as a group, a mass or a collective. It can possibly be argued that part of their radical resistance to advancing capitalism and U.S. imperialism is their refusal to be named. For an interesting discussion of naming and subject-hood, see Denise Riley (1988), *Am I That Name?*

as part of a neocolonial aesthetic, and operate as a fundamental domain in the constitution of the modern, (un)desirable subject.

The central intellectual, political and radical frames for this project are the visual constructions of feminine and feminist subjectivities, significations and semiotics of the (brown) female body, and the pleasures and power of global visual culture. The visual fields that I gather here speak directly and indirectly to the politics of embodiment, including narratives about how bodies come to take meaning, representation of bodies varyingly dressed and undressed, and the integration of iconic glimpses into a kind of propaganda that creates an understanding of how bodies may be treated, circulated, and interpreted without ever stating these as explicit injunctions. Each of my visual subjects are bound to this specific historical moment, a moment, I argue, that fixates, fetishizes, and fantasizes about the neocolonial woman. The contemporary emergence and sanctioning of the Pakistani woman subject is shaped by a number of simultaneous discursive processes – the events of 9/11, the war on terror, the NGO-ization of feminism, the surveillance/liberation of oppressed female subjects and the carnivalization of neoliberalism and globalization. Each of these processes constitutes the women subjects I analyze into an aesthetic and spectacular delight, taken in and enjoyed by the hetero-patriarchal, imperial gaze.

I analyze the ways my visual subjects are directly or indirectly linked to the war on terror, narrate or unravel contemporary meanings of democracy, claim or reorder human rights investments in them. Hence, I locate the relevance of these visual stories on three axes: human rights, democratization and the war on terror, where each operates as an arm of what Jasbir Puar (2007: xxv) calls the U.S. hetero-normative nation. Through an assessment of these visual fields, I argue that the U.S. hetero-normative nation actually relies on and benefits from the

proliferation of the brown female subject, especially in regard to her gender and sexual exceptionalism and its evil counterpart, the repressed fe/male terrorist. I also take an interest in another dimension of the named difference of these visual subjects; and that is the structures of affect, pleasure and eroticism that are embedded in these popularized representations and narrations in the U.S. cultural context. In taking seriously the work of Paur (2007), Žizek (2008) and Butler (2004), I examine the ways sexuality, and its varying components of pleasure and affect, is situated as an integral and integrated diagrammatic vector of power in these visual fields. Following Žizek (2008:78), I “look away” at these visualities, to queer ways of seeing the Pakistani feminine/feminist subject, the iconoclastic utility of her body, and her visual and discursive constitution as simultaneously or alternatively celebrated, grievable, demonic, or malleable.

Feminine/Feminist Subjects

Political projects have always revolved around particular bodies and aesthetics, whether it is the project of human rights or anti-colonial formations of democracy (Fanon 1963; Foucault 1977; Williams 2010). In referring to the three visual fields as *feminine/feminist subjects*, I allude to the contradictory ways the female body, read as desirably feminine when engaged in tropes of normative western femininity (read: lipstick or uncovered hair), operates as a metaphor for freedom; while the semiotic practices of brown femininity (read: *dupatta*⁷ or the *niqab*) function as synecdoche for oppression. The feminine/feminist formation allows me to visually, semantically and epistemologically juxtapose readings of the ways these women are read as

⁷ The *niqab* or *hijab* has never been a common part of the Pakistani cultural repertoire. Instead, a *dupatta*, part of the Pakistani *Shalwar Kameez*, which loosely covers the hair and frames the face, is most commonly worn. Often, the *dupatta* is worn as a shawl, and only put over the hair during prayer, when in the company of men or public, or within sacred spaces, such as the mosque.

im/possible modern women vis-à-vis their non/normative bodies. This theoretical rendering, then, works to reveal the continuum between the body as a text of femininity and the body as a site of empowerment.

In a number of ways, each of the figures I analyze are constantly cast as oppressed woman first and (im)possible modern subject second, with the exception of Bhutto, whom I will show came to represent, largely through the particularities of her body, the quintessential modern woman. By centering the words feminine and feminist simultaneously in my readings of these symbolic gendered fields, I want to keep taut the tension between biopolitics and liberatory politics. It is precisely within the interstices of feminine embodiment and feminist liberation that we find these brown women are being folded into life, or dismissed in death, thus fueling the oscillation between the naming of populations as racialized, the disciplining of the subject as feminine, and the controlling of populations as already free. Impelled by this folding of Pakistani female subjects into the biopolitical management of life, biopolitics delineates not only which brown women are (un)seen and (un)heard, but also *how* these bodies and subjects are (not) seen and (not) heard. If biopolitics seeks directly to discipline the entirety of social life, what we see and what we imagine (to see); then liberatory politics seeks to queer that regulation, the ways we imagine freedom and *see* subjects. I want to shift the optic that gazes at the Pakistani Muslim woman subject as a subject in need of saving (Mai) or appreciation (Bhutto) or obliteration (female martyrs) into one that understands and works against the biopolitical incitement of neoliberal/neocolonial forms of life, feminism, femininity, and most crucially, freedom.

I want to note here that I am not arguing that all the women I analyze in this project are feminist. Indeed, it would be a far stretch, despite the international acclamations of her as a global feminist icon, that Benazir Bhutto proposed or demanded a politico-ethical stance toward

understanding the ways in which all forms of culture condition or are conditioned by gender or sexual difference – much less other modes of subjectivity (such as sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identifications, nationality, class and so on). Nor do I argue that the martyrs of the Red Mosque, in spite of their anti-imperialist radical gendered activism, saw themselves as feminists engaged in transnational dialogues, coalitions and networks around issues of gender freedom. I further recognize the critical work done around hegemonic feminism, where scholars critique the common misperception that feminism originated in the West and diffused to the rest of the world, work against the conflation of (women's) liberty with free economic action, and undercut the straitjacketing feminism with American exceptionalism and modern quality of life (Grewal 2004; Al-Ali 2000; Alexander 2005; Mohanty 2003). However, I hold strong to my description of feminist for these subjects because dominant framings of their feminine bodies and subjects opens up interpretations on their state of freedom. For example, mainstream political discourses often interpreted Bhutto as a feminist, a reading I will show relied on her corporeal aesthetics while the more transgressive, anti-imperial subjectivities of the Lal Masjid martyrs were rendered unfeminist and Mai's feminist laboring came to interpreted as western-bred. I stand with other radical and decolonial thinkers who take the position that it is antithetical to the very project(s) of feminism to patrol the boundaries or map the parameters of who or what is read as feminist (Al-Ali 2000; Alexander 2005). The visual fields and the subjects that occupy them stage remarkable moments of confrontation with war machines, human rights and hetero-democratic empires. But in each case I will show how their visible embodiment is used to reconstruct the modern desirable subject out of their (brown) barbaric ruins.

(Queering) The Dominant Gaze

While the categories of feminine and feminist operate as central modalities to name or un-name these subjects; I need also to define the dominant gaze under which, in the realm of U.S. media culture, the presence/significance of these women was catalyzed. While it can be argued that each of these visual subjects may be *seen vis-à-vis* multiple gazes, both visual and discursive media portrayals rely upon what Mirzeoff (1998:7) refers to as “a dominant global gaze.” Such a gaze has been loosely defined by visual scholars, wherein the viewer engages each image within the framework proposed by the dominant visual regime – a regime conditioned by neoliberalism, *hetero-patriarchy*, late capitalism, (post)modernity, US American hegemony, Islamophobia, and the war on terror. This desire to *see* these images is compounded by and around mainstream acceptability, panoptical governance, and a hetero-erotic aesthetic.

In critiquing the grip of dominant culture on the female body and the woman subject, I do not want to cast the dominant gaze as a totalizing, seamless and univocal and cast active and creative subjects as passive dupes of ideology. I do recognize that the global gaze is much more complicated than a singular dominant reading. However, I do argue that such readings operate as powerful militating forces meshing complex realities into single authoritative histories and cultural portrayals. Indeed, visibilities and knowledges around the self and *other* are invented and represented by and through extraordinary machines like democracy, war and human rights. My subjects, quite literally, are teeming with racialized erotic codifications, determining their popularity, sensationalism, the degree of U.S. intrigue, and their place in empire.

In order to get at this, I consider the queerness embedded in both the subjects I analyze and in the modes of interpreting them to trouble and denaturalize the close relationship between hetero-eroticism, nationalism and empire. As Gopinath (2005: 176) tells us, “queerness names a

mode of reading, of rendering intelligible that which is unintelligible and indeed impossible within the dominant nationalist or imperial logic.” Queering the gaze towards Mai, Bhutto and the martyrs, moves beyond identity and visibility as empowerment to address questions of ontology and affect, political power and psychic pleasure, desire and control over the *other* brown body.

Pakistan in a Post 9/11 World: Neocoloniality and Feminine Subjects

In August of 2007, *National Geographic*'s cover displayed the face of a woman (see fig. 2) brown skinned, mouth closed, lips somewhat pursed, head lowered, her hair and much of her face loosely covered by a blue chiffon *dupatta* through which we can make out jeweled earrings hanging from her ears and embroidery on her clothing. The woman's posture is drooping and it seems her gaze is lowered, since we cannot see her eyes. All that peeks through the *dupatta* is a light profile of her nose decorated with a small, gold nose-ring, her lips unenhanced by makeup, her jaw line, while chiseled, seems resigned as it drops down. The picture gives off an aura of sadness and fatality of the unknown and the unseen. On one hand, we see this woman but cannot know her. On the other hand, she is made known to us even as she remains (fully) unseen. Fundamentally, she is invisible even as this photograph seeks to render her visible as contemporary global (oppressed) woman, as de facto Pakistan. The cover reads, “Struggle for the Soul of Pakistan.”

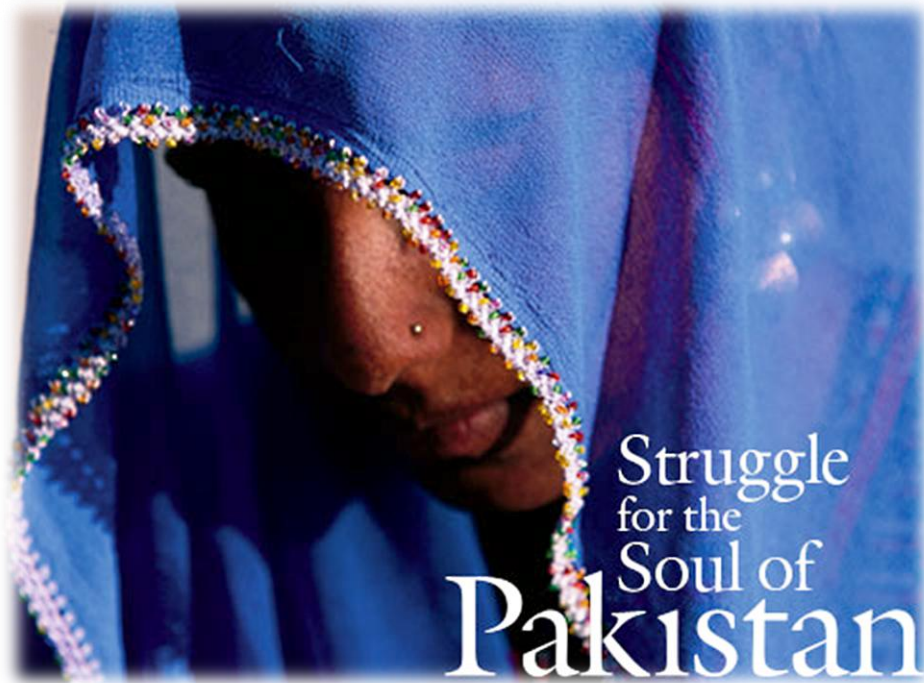


Figure 1.2, *National Geographic*, August 2007

Truly, this photograph tells the viewer nothing about Pakistan or Pakistani women. She could be a number of things. But her appearance on the cover of *National Geographic*,⁸ a magazine widely critiqued for inviting “readers to look out at the rest of the world from the vantage point of the world’s most powerful nation” (Lutz and Collins, 1993:7), the title of the cover story and the subtle affect-producing aesthetic posits both the photographed woman and the nation-state of Pakistan as imagined through a specific corporeality – a feminine, racialized, oppressed *other*. Actually, then, the photograph tells the viewer a lot. Or, as Heidegger (in Lovitt, 1977) state, she becomes “the world as picture.”

This image underscores our expectations of photographic documentation. The familiar composition of brown women cements U.S. ideas about what is real and what is artificial. This photograph successfully evokes anxiety through a number of tropes, such as the downcast

⁸For a more thorough critique of *National Geographic*, see Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (1993).

expression, the ethnicized aesthetic (i.e. nose-ring, hand-embroidered hair scarf, the plainness of the brown skin). The image lends itself to an eerie quality of the *other* woman subject, one which is simultaneously welcomed and suspect. The angle of the camera gives, perhaps intentionally, the viewer only half access to the woman's face, giving off the dual impression that she is a subject (of importance) yet, also seems to lack subjectivity. Every dimension of this photograph commands emotion, promising knowledge about the *other*. A slippery and seductive entity of Pakistani visual culture, the image enables a visual vocabulary that serves as means to consider the state of Pakistan and the state of the brown woman subject, both of which are ensnared in a scopophilic regime mediated by U.S. American media. Like the scene in *SATC2*, the photograph positions Pakistani women and their bodies as a central site of American sociopolitical spectatorship.

The article of the *National Geographic*, itself a four-page spread, centers largely on the political and economic history of Pakistan, its processes of militarization, its relationship to India, and its growing seeds of Islamic resurgence. Only briefly does it engage with more civil dimensions of the Pakistan's trajectory, such as healthcare, education, and women's issues. The irony of the article relying on a photograph of woman's body to engage in a discussion that only peripherally involves women's rights/roles in Pakistan is noteworthy. Indeed, the utility of this deeply gendered, ethnicized and classed photograph of a Pakistani woman to represent the "struggle for Pakistan's soul" reveals a different economy of imperial desire and American power that is reliant on the body schemata of women.

This photograph buttresses the trajectory of my larger project, where I argue that the geopolitical and biopolitical investment in Pakistan in the aftermath of 9/11 and throughout this war is signified in the visual traversal over the landscape of women's bodies. The photographs

and the paternal narratives that accompany them speak to the topographic inscription of imperialism, and hence its inverse, the representation of sovereignty (Spivak and Guha 1988). Indeed, the power of this woman's photograph is the way it resituates the contemporary colonial context as responsibly revitalizing the women subject, a subject otherwise dead by Pakistani culture; and in doing so, it authorizes itself as a crucial site of surveillance on the feminine, racialized *other*. The desire to render Pakistan transparent through the landscape of the female subject requires an examination of the politics of representation with the domain of desire, power and subjectivity.

Both the recent fetishization of Pakistan as “the most dangerous place on earth” and the U.S. American neoliberal fantasy of folding Pakistan into its modern, democratic embrace is where the “woman subject” of Pakistan is propelled into the global paranoid gaze (Mernissi 2005; Sharify-Funk 2008). While in 2008, both *Economist* (see fig.3) and *Newsweek* (see fig. 4) named Pakistan as the most dangerous on their respective covers, the following *CNN* (20 October 2007) clip elaborates the political concerns that subsume images and narrations of Pakistan.

Today no other country on earth is arguably more dangerous than Pakistan. It has everything Osama bin Laden could ask for: political instability, a trusted network of radical Islamists, an abundance of angry young anti-Western recruits, secluded training areas, access to state-of-the-art electronic technology, regular air service to the West and security services that don't always do what they're supposed to do. (Unlike in Iraq or Afghanistan, there also aren't thousands of American troops hunting down would-be terrorists.)

As the *CNN* clip points out, Pakistan is rhetorically framed as an angry, armed and radically Islamic country either without democracy or with a false sense of it. Unlike Afghanistan and

Iraq, Pakistan's war is seen as with itself, internally implosive⁹ with real possibilities of being externally explosive (to the West). Indeed, Pakistan is a complicated site, both internally and with respect to its place in the world. Entrenched in this political minefield, Pakistan has and continues to experience both a reterritorialization of the homeland simultaneous to a deterritorialization of the nation, through tumultuous acts of terror, U.S. social intervention, and political instability (Khan 2007; Weiss 2003; Jamal 2005).

What is striking to note is that the framing of Pakistan as "dangerous" relies on largely masculinist imagery, either through brown male corporeality as aggressive, dirty, barbaric (*Newsweek*) or in masculinist abstraction, the single nuclear bomb standing in for a symbol of a dangerous masculine nation (*Economist*). Juxtaposed to the *National Geographic* image, the contrast collides in a striking manner. It reifies the stereotype of oppressed, humble femininity against hyper-patriarchal, angry masculinity while simultaneously erasing the nuanced contemporary formations of Pakistan's political and cultural antagonism.

⁹ The false dichotomy framing Pakistan is a political seesawing on whether Pakistan is a country for Muslims or whether it is a Muslim country. This debate has been deployed and sustained by civil society groups, political parties, the military, the elites, and religious collective since the inception of Pakistan in 1947 but came to profound political fruition in the 1980's with the Zia-al-Huq militarized Islamic regime (Khan 2007; Jamal 2005; Suleri 1992; Siobhan 2005).

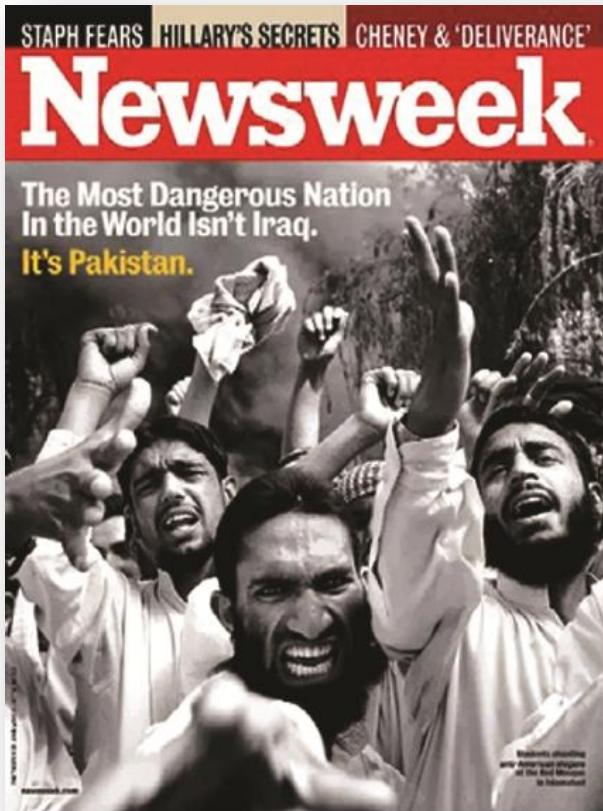


Figure 1.3 *Newsweek*, October 2008



Figure 1.4 *Economist*, January 2008

As a postcolonial Muslim state in a direct dialectical relationship with the United States and the war on terror, Pakistan offers a particularly unique lens for us to understand how the contemporary proliferation of the woman subject is mired in a strange chasm between the univocality of global rhetoric such as democracy and war, the unadulterated but oft-mediated transit and utility of international visual culture and the polyvocality of local interpretations of femininity and feminism. There is little dispute that Pakistan's global visibility is largely catalyzed by the events of September 11, 2001. As recently as November of 2010, *Newsweek* tells us, "The world is watching Pakistan, and rightly so. It's a happening place." In fact, many scholars demonstrate the ways in which the events of September 11 both allowed the U.S. to be seen (in ways perhaps it had never been seen historically) and see others who were, up to that

moment, largely invisible to the global eye (Mirzeoff 1998; Alexander 2005; Butler 2004). So, while 9/11 is a key descriptive hinge used to frame contemporary events of the war and its consequential burgeoning images, I want to work against any American exceptionalism in my reference to the events. Instead, in referring to 9/11, I allude more largely to a moment marked by the rise of imperial expansion, the policing, detention and deportation of immigrants, the construction of the foreign (brown) enemy, and the rise of Islamophobia, fundamentalist Christianity, the theocratic state and heterosexism, all of which are used to prop up the heated, and often violent, global dialectic between “third world” nationalism and notions of western democracy and equity (Alexander 2005).

Moving away from both the leftist tendency to see “Pakistan as the pilfered bottom to the Unites States imperial topping” (Arudhati Roy, guardian.uk, 13 December 2008) or popular framings of Pakistan as a patriarchal, under-privileged nation-state that creates the conditions under which such subjects (of global intrigue) are constituted (Kristoff 2009), I posit Pakistan as (too often) ideologically signified and discursively organized vis-à-vis the racial and gendered structuring of the female body and the woman subject. The semiotic war between nationalism and colonialisms, which has been heightened, at least, in its visibility since 9/11 registers an authority to the visual cultural industry, through which we come to *see* corporealities of "Pakistan" and the “woman subject.” As Jarmakani (2008) shows, women function as subjects through which imperial discourses transcend the boundaries of the “backward” nation-state disseminating an ideal of oppressed citizenship.

A number of feminist theorists have noted the metonymic relation of race, gender, and sexuality to the formation of the nation-state (Mohanty 2003; Alexander 2005; Paur 2007). Subaltern studies have shown how women’s bodies are more often than not utilized to form

borders and boundaries of identities, communities and nations, hence, cannot be abstracted from the political and socio-cultural formations of the nation (Gopinath 2005; Guha and Spivak 1988). They've shown that the constructions of the western nation depends on particular understandings of white domination and hetero-normativity, understandings that have clear visual and corporeal dimensions. These implicit connections are frequently shored up through a progress narrative, like we see with the *National Geographic* cover, which compares western ideas of sexual morality and empowerment to those of "primitive" races or countries which will develop only when they adopt "our" appropriate social norms. The silence and sanctioned ignorance around the use of women's (and men's) bodies that undergird these narratives is inseparable from (neo)colonial domination.

To be sure, I am not arguing that the women subjects I have introduced thus far or the figures I discuss in my chapters are intrinsically aligned with imperial power, but they do carry profound implications for the ways in which liberatory and decolonial politics and practice are imagined. My interests lay in the politics of representation around these women subjects. As Sangari (1999) suggests, the gender question in (neo)colonial studies is as material as it is ideological. This is particularly evident in the Pakistani woman subjects I analyze, as through them, human rights, democracy and war are (strategically) reformulated. The palimpsestic nature of the discursive field that has brought visibility to feminine/feminist subjects in Pakistan requires a reading that keeps taut the tension between the ideological, disciplinary and liberatory potential of these visual subjectivities. I want to work through the thickness of these visual stories by underscoring the ideological structure of an empire that relies on varying filaments of hetero-patriarchy and race/class/gender embodiment.

Dis/Locating Empire on the (Brown) Female Body

To begin, I turn to Hardt and Negri's (2000) notion of a dislocated, but discursively situated empire, one that relies not on old-school nationalized imperialism but a New World Order that is sustained through transnationalized moral instruments, borderless symbolic apparatuses, and neoformations of subjectivity, visibility, and affect. The history of colonial politics encompasses a particular kind of modernizing project caught up in the rise of global capitalism, which enables changing conceptions of the female subject, freedom and rights (Peirce and Rao 2006). In their groundbreaking book, *Empire*, Hardt and Negri (2000) present a remarkably controversial interpretation of empire in the current global state of post/high modernity and capitalist globalization. Central to their argument is the idea that we are now witnessing a new type of imperial system a "*decentered* and *detrterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (Hardt and Negri 2000: xi, xii, 333; emphasis in original). Emerging in tandem with the global market and global circuits of production are the key characteristics of the formation of this new Empire: such as the dissolution of the sovereign nation-state; the rescaling of the national and local to the level of the global; the fluid movement of capital and people; the eroding of the public and private spheres; and the transnationalized rhetoric on the autonomous subject endowed with rights. Given this contemporary state of affairs, empire can no longer be fashioned in terms of old school imperialism or the sovereignty of the imperial powers that be. Instead, what we see is a "global biopolitical machine," one that cannot be located within the boundaries of the nation-state, has no territorial center because it is always shifting and open. What is key to understanding this new formation of Empire is what Negri (2008) refers to as the "Byzantium move" an empire that constitutes itself not under American constitutional aristocracy but under

the globalized interest of capital and people, economic production and political representation all at once.

Understanding that the neoformations of Empire are de-centered and deterritorialized compels a more critical engagement with hegemonic epistemes, such as ways of imagining freedom and oppression, aesthetics and desire, pleasure and power, which persist in visual vocabularies. Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, “the Empire’s powers of intervention might be best understood as beginning not directly with its weapons of lethal force but its moral instrument” of which the most important forces are those “global, regional, and local organizations that are dedicated to relief work and protection of human rights” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 353). The hegemonic dimensions of human rights and the keys ways this discourse, unfortunately, participates in war machines is a central concern of my project. The imperialist structures of delegitimizing Pakistan as a modern nation-state can be examined through the increasing prolific transit between the ideology of human rights and the visual cultural industry.

The film, *The Stoning of Soraya M*, a 2008 American film adapted from French-Iranian journalist Sahebjam’s 1990 book *La Femme Lapidée*, serves as a powerful example of the merger of empire’s ethical superiority advanced through the vehicle of visual culture’s overreliance on Muslim women’s oppression (see fig. 5). The film, constructed with the sobriety of a documentary, tells the story of a young woman in 1980’s Iran who is wrongfully accused of adultery and stoned to death. The movie’s heavy-handed style, visually as well as narratively harks back to the kind of 1950s Hollywood quasi-biblical epics that paraded themselves as sacred. Soraya is a beautiful martyred innocent. Her advocate and narrator of the film, Zahra, is a stormy feminist prophet. With the exception of two male characters, the men in the film are fiendishly villainous. The historical, cultural and geographical context of the film remains largely

elusive, in that the viewer remains unsure of whether this is a recent stoning or one that took place three decades ago. The stimulation of blood lust in the guise of moral righteousness, which the *New York Times* (26 June 2009) compares to *The Passion of the Christ*, confirms that human rights stories narrated through visual terrains hold provocative appeal. Interestingly, the *New York Times* (26 June 2009) review was the only critical review of the film, naming the ways the spectacular intensity of misogynistic destruction relied on “sickening exploitative touches” as well as the illusion of uni-dimensional character extremes.



Figure, 1.5, *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, 2008

Clearly, the interest in such a story and its narrative devices centralizes the fetishistic interest in Muslim women's human rights and its inverse, the perpetual reading of them as dead by culture¹⁰, as in the case of Soraya M. Like the *National Geographic* image, the viewer of Soraya M.'s story is dipped in a state of emotional horror that measures rights and subjectivity through a western epistemology. So while human rights are the subjects of these images and cinematic representations, it is also a means of creating subjects, visual subjects. As I will show, the symbiotic relationship between contemporary human rights and imperialism is most evident in the representations of and intervention in women's oppression and the feminist subject (Siobhan 2006; Williams 2010). Unlike earlier colonial politics where Spivak (1988: 279) tells us, "woman is the neglected syntagm," both the theoretical rendering that complicates imperial practices and the hyper-visibility of brown women's bodies in the war on terror, posits women as the paradigmatic subject of Empire.

As visual subject par intrigue, Pakistani women and Muslim women more broadly, index the current socio-cultural and political configuration that relies on what Spivak (1988:297) call, the "subject-deprivation of the brown female." The incessant dependence on visualizing the *other* as deprived supports the neoliberal imagination that locates notions of self and freedom in an agentic, autonomous and rational subject, with access to market freedoms, where human and market freedoms emphatically coagulate. The constitutive element of empire's deterritorial practices is the democratic voice coupled with a rights rhetoric, both of which come to be seen through the visual subject (Hardt and Negri 2000: Zizek 2008).

Feminist work around women's rights and human rights, unfortunately, operates within this discursive formation, or as Lila Abu-Lughod (2010) calls it, the "NGO-ization of

¹⁰ I invoke Uma Narayan's (1997) phrase in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminisms*.

feminism.” The unmistakable global dimensions of feminism in the twenty-first century can be dated to the 1980s,¹¹ an era that sprung to the global forefront the proliferation of academic and political feminist discourses, the establishment of women’s and gender studies departments throughout the globe, the emergence of United Nation conferences on the status of women, and the formation of transnational feminist networks such Women Living Under Muslim Law (WLUML).¹² At a theoretical level, we have learned from the labors of postcolonial thought that too often gender justice and radical women’s rights work has been saturated by human rights rhetoric, developmental concerns of/for women in the global south, and women’s NGO movements (Grewal 2006). Adding to this diffusion, Jacqui Alexander (2005) argues, orientalism assumed a certain form when it traveled within women’s studies, producing its own variant of alterity in the figure of the nonwestern, tradition-bound woman. Occluding the existing viability of decolonial practices by revolutionary activists and thinkers, the rhetoric of women’s-rights-as-human-rights, liberal feminist writings, and postcolonial insider narratives all came to utilize these visual constructions of the brown woman subject (Okin 1999; Katherine McKinnon 2006; Katha Pollitt 2008; Fauzia Afzal Khan 2010).

The profoundly cosmopolitan as well as imperialist photographic narrative that have been reinvigorated since 9/11 on the feminine, racialized *other* demonstrate that the globalization of culture and knowledge turns out to be less predictable and far more dangerous¹³ (Appadurai

¹¹ 1981, specifically was a watershed moment in feminist movements worldwide as “third world” scholars began introducing the complexity of race/class/gender nexus that militated against a theory of the universal woman. In the US, we saw the formation of the third world women’s caucus officially instated into the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) and the publication of the groundbreaking anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*.

¹² It makes sense that such a proliferating interest in women coincides with the rise of Islamic resurgence in the region at large. In Pakistan, the Zia Regime came into power in 1979, a regime known for its most devastating judicial crackdown on women.

¹³ Neomarxist thought, which brought vital recognition to the interconnectedness of ideology, socio-political practices, individual desires and resistances and economic processes of exploitation, can illuminate the contentious potential of globalization. Bourdieu (1998) denounces numerous problems with globalization, especially its guiding Darwinian philosophy of neoliberalism. He identifies the struggle against the depredations of globalization as rooted

1996; Grewal 2006; Eisenstein 2007; Moghadam 2005; Zizek 2008; Butler 2004; Paur 2007). A key example is the way the war in Afghanistan was strategically rationalized through both the language of feminism and the visibility of women's bodies (Ferre and Ali 2006, Eisenstein 2007, Butler 2004). The work of Chandra Mohanty (1991) has shown clearly how the discursive imposition of "western eyes," even feminist ones, flattens the multiple experience of a vast number of women over a vast terrain. Visual images of women have come into a certain prominence now because of the dynamic force with which they speak broadly to gender and sexuality injustices, even as they are co-opted as symbols of national conflicts, nationalist projects, and national resistance movements in ways that often do not serve women's interests (Kandiyoti 1992; Kelley, Bayes and Hawkesworth 2001).

Lets think about a contemporary and timely photograph that appeared on *Time* magazine's August 2010 cover (see fig. 6), which depicts the photograph of an Afghani woman whose nose is mutilated because "her nose and ears were cut off by Taliban for fleeing abusive in-laws" (1 August 2010). The cover boldly reads, "What happens if we leave Afghanistan." It is not a question, but a statement. As a site of both political fantasy, in that this woman's disfigured face justifies the war, and violent excess, as such forms of violence are disavowed by the U.S. hetero-normative state, this photograph operates as a crucial site of American spectatorship on the war, democracy and human rights.

in the particularly vexing recent retreat of national governments from adequately funding welfare, medical care, housing, public transportation, education, and culture. The neoliberal focus of the past few decades upon privatization, deregulation, and self-help practices are characteristic of advanced economies and are promoted globally by unelected and non-democratic institutions such as the World Bank and International Money Fund. These institutions and their ensuing ideologies fuel the economic and cultural destabilization of non-hegemonic nations. This new ideological make-up of the developed world often suggest an unabashed economic egotism; the fundamental divide is the one between those included into the sphere of (relative) economic prosperity and those excluded from it (Sassen 2008; Appadurai 1996). Chomsky (2003) and Sudbury (2005) point out that in the much celebrated free circulation made possible by globalization, we actually see a deeper and more profound segregation and exploitation of people, both of which occur under the guise of liberal agendas of empowerment, development, and rights.

Looking at this image, the viewer is in the same position as the camera; the experience of looking is sickening. Disapproval of the *other* is mixed with the fascination of gazing at the *other*. Slavoj Žižek (2008: 13) speaks poignantly to this phenomenon in his statement:

It is surprising how little of the actual (American) carnage we see no dismembered bodies, no blood, no desperate faces of dying people...in clear contrast to reporting on the third world catastrophes, where the whole point is to produce a whole scope of gruesome detail – Somalis dying of hunger, raped Bosnian women... .



Figure 1.6, *Time*, August 2010

The terrible distinctness of the photograph, in that we can see up close her disfigurement, gives us indecent and unnecessary information. Even so, the *Time* reporter cannot resist the melodrama of linking Aisha to the necessity of the U.S. - driven war, while simultaneously

reprehending the intolerable realism of this image. As Sontag (2003: 62) points out, “The frankest representations of war, and of disaster-injured bodies, are of those who seem most foreign, therefore, least likely to be known. With subjects closer to home, the photographer is expected to be more discreet.” So while we are told the young girl is named, Aisha, she is unlikely to be known to *us*.

This photograph, similar to the *National Geographic* image but much more severe, abstracts and reifies a racialized, feminine *other* in need of varying measures of benevolence vis-à-vis the access granted by war machines, human rights discourses and media apparatuses. In this visual rendering, the figure of woman is pervasively instrumental in shifting the function of discursive systems, wherein she becomes the signifier of the unsuccessful democratic nation-state and the war on terror becomes part of the natural evolution to women’s-rights-as-human-rights. The juxtaposition of this photo with its politically loaded caption performs a fetishistic paternalism that, I argue, is woven into my three axes: the war on terror, democracy and human rights. As Jarmakani (2008) argues, in her analysis of U.S. representations of Arab womanhood, “rather than revealing something about Arab and Muslim cultures, the images bespeak that peculiarly patriarchal logic of U.S. militarism in the war on terror.” This photograph and its accompanying rhetorical snap serve to occult some original deadlock. The sociopolitical fantasy *par excellence*, of course, is the myth of primordial women’s oppression where the narrative of women, one free and agentic, the other oppressed and bounded, provides the myth of the origins of human rights, obfuscating the violence of its actual geneology. *Time* magazine’s staging of America’s ethical superiority, and hence, the American woman as already free, rhetorically and literally, utilizes women’s bodies and feminism as a visible and tangible site of global democratic reform (Sangari 1999).

Time is not just using women to uphold a political and ideological view that supports militarism though. It is also using feminine beauty and the patriarchal fear of and disgust for deformed women to sell an agenda. Indeed, few things are more offensive to a society that privileges the visual than seeing a beautiful woman horribly disfigured. The fact that “Aisha was once an attractive girl with luscious black hair and piercing eyes” adds to the horror and disturbing nature of the cover. But this framing of Aisha also speaks to contradiction between the U.S. led war on terror as a means to liberate these women and its abstract machines of democracy and human rights as a means to justify the war, where all rely on the most visual of registrars: the hetero-erotic scopophillic gaze. Interestingly, the use of this hetero-erotic language to describe Aisha is seen as merely a narrative trope that allows the viewer to know her and feel aligned with her. Clearly such an interpretation misses the more nuanced eroticism embedded in using women’s bodies to justify war and democratization and masking the panoptical gaze of human rights. I do not mean to suggest that democracy and human rights in of themselves are imperial or erotic, but the cooptation of these discourses by war machines and an empire that eroticizes violence against women necessitates interrogation. The sexually loaded trope of describing Aisha as attractive, and then mourning the loss of that same attractiveness, signifies the erotic gaze embedded in gazing at women who’ve been victims of violence.

Like the *Time* and *National Geographic* photograph, visual stories of Mukhtar Mai, Benazir Bhutto and female terrorists all maintain a special sanctity about the object to which they speak – a dis/empowered female subjectivity whose hyperbolic (brown) femininity signals the hetero-erotics of empire. The ascendancy of these visual subjectivities as the privileged frame for Pakistan, and more broadly, Muslim *nation-states* and *The Muslim Woman*, marks new geographies of power that are located and layered in this hetero-patriarchal and racialized

complex (Eisenstein 2007). Examining these photographs is an effort to carefully delineate the masked problematic of the erotic gaze woven into the three axis of democracy, human rights and the war on terror, on which my subjects are positioned and through which they come to be known to the global gaze. The visual production and proliferated visual intrigue in the Pakistani feminine/feminist subject must be situated in these complex interactions of empire building, the war on terror, and hetero-patriarchal ideological apparatuses, such as the global gaze and imperial photography (Williams 2010; Gopinath 2005).

Given this, I ask through all my visual fields, what kind of U.S. empire extends its filaments through displays of particular bodies, specific aesthetics and strategic transgressiveness? The U.S. state, I argue, has entered the domain of paranoia,¹⁴ for it is only in paranoia that one finds simultaneously both deliriums of pleasure for the *other* and forebodings of the perpetual threatening *other*. The hetero-patriarchal, imperial structures of looking that capture, colonize and interpret Pakistani women are equally connected to the tentacles of U.S. paranoia that render Muslim women (and men) as impossible subjects, or possible only through modernists modes of intelligibility. I trace the sensational female visual figures of Pakistan, all of whom have been subject to patriarchal paranoid violence, to explore this crisis of desire and detestation of the feminine, racialized *other*. Through an exegetic tracking of their visual and narrative snapshots, I reveal how these subjects register(ed) a radical rupture with the liberal-humanist constructions of the feminine, racialized oppressed *other* and the free American woman subject.

¹⁴ I do not mean to suggest that U.S. alone has entered a domain of paranoia. Clearly, traces of paranoia towards/against the other can be traced in France, Italy among other Western countries. I do, however, argue that in the U.S., this paranoia has distinct visual dimensions that are unique to the media –driven culture of the U.S. For an exemplary discussion of this, see Puar’s discussion on the Abu-Ghraib tortures.

Photography in the Field of Power: Subject of/to the Global Gaze

As I've shown so far, the post 9/11 era is an epoch of proliferating visual constructs of the feminine, racialized *other*. Ironically, it is this reawakening of interest in the *other* that forces us to raise questions about the subtle violence of visibility and visuality, the various ways visual culture expands the imperial lexicon, and how its global miredness enables and eroticizes violence against women. It is important to note here that, in fact, all the women in this project were or continue to be subject to material violence in their political/public trajectories, in ways that are concealed and revealed by their visualities. Adrienne Rich (1979: 199) has described the imposition of invisibility on women as "the attempt to fragment you, to prevent you from integrating love and work and feelings and ideas, with the empowerment that that can bring." On a contrary note, Spivak (1988) tells us that the clearest available example of epistemic violence is the "remotely orchestrated, far-flung, heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as other." If Pakistani women's visibility must draw on imperial coordinates and war machineries to be intelligible, can visibility and visuality be a dimension of freedom?

Having mapped the modern processes that impinge on the question of (ways of) seeing the Pakistani feminine/feminist subject, let me now marshal aspects of visual cultural studies, postcolonial feminist theory and psychoanalysis to explain how invisibility/visibility are not origins of ignorance/knowledge, but consequences and elements of power relations. Visuality, which refers to the conditions of how we see and make meaning of what we see, is positioned within a discursive field of power where visual sign systems are deployed to achieve certain ends. Simply, visuality is a strategy. It is neither neutral nor static. Sontag (2003: 6) tells us visualities "are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create an illusion of consensus."

In a Foucauldian sense, visibility is productive, disciplining and consequential. It produces, through its reiterative strategies, a subject. Once produced,¹⁵ it disciplines that subjectivity through varying modalities, holding consequences for the audience of this visual image and for the visual subject herself. Mirzeoff (1998) defines the visual subject as a person who is constituted as an agent of sight (regardless of his/her capacity to see) and also as the effect of a series of categories of visual subjectivity. The subjectivity I speak about here is not an autonomous, voluntaristic subjectivity fashioned in a protean manner. Rather, I engage a Foucauldian (1984) distinction here – the subject that is formed within the limits of a historically specific set of formative practices and moral injunctions that are delimited in advance – what Foucault characterizes as “modes of subjectivation.” A major strategy of this production is surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975: 469), Foucault cautions that “visibility is a trap.” It is through this visibility, Foucault writes, that modern society exercises its controlling systems of power and knowledge. Increasing visibility leads to power located on increasingly individualized and corporeal levels. For Foucault, subjectivity is not an act of private cultivation, but rather an effect of modalities of power – power operationalized through a set of (moral) discursive codes that summon an individual to constitute herself in accord with its precepts. So visual subjects are themselves particularized in a discursive formation, by which they are, in turn, disciplined.

Because visualities are seen through certain matrices, or imperial norms, they may never be seen at all, except as they can be understood within a discursive system. The telling of these Pakistani women’s stories, rendering these female “selves” public must be rethought as a reciprocal relation in which visibility also structures one’s voice/story and what can be heard

¹⁵ While this may seem to presume finality, the production of a subject is an ongoing and always unfinished project, particularly when the subjects of interest are women, the very nature of the gendering process suggests imperfection, always becoming that which it can never become.

about this subject. Hence, my visual subjects may be articulated as strata – historical formations made up of images and words, from contents and expressions, from seeing and speaking, from the visible and the sayable, from the bands of visibility and the fields of readability. In other words, when a subject is rendered visible, “what is made manifest and fully disclosed,” as Judith Butler (cite) asks, depends precisely on the configurations of power in which the subject becomes visible.

Colonial and neocolonial forms of knowledge are inextricably folded into these contemporary visualities and stories of Pakistani women, both further punctuated by the forces of transnational networks and processes (Appadurai 1996). Following Said (1979), I position my work as refuting the merely cultural approach that views images and photographs as relatively autonomous or existing in a super-structural relationship to the political, economic and social spheres. As Said (1979:39) argues, to ignore or dismiss the cultural terrain in which “the colonizer and colonized coexisted and battled each other through projections as well as rival geographies, narratives and histories...is to miss the massively knotted and complex histories” of colonizer and colonized. It is this within this massively knotted and complex historical and contemporaneous space that my three visual fields become of interest.

Hence, the space of visually telling the Pakistani woman’s story has already been well prepared in ideological¹⁶ fantasizing. All these visual fields are consumed as a spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility. Such wide and repetitive distribution of these visual stories produces what Baudrillard (2010) calls ecstasies of the *hyperreal*¹⁷ while simultaneously

¹⁶ Ideology must be understood as both a material reality and that which needs to be expressed in material form to be known (Althusser 1977; Žižek 2000; Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

¹⁷ *Hyperreality* is where entertainment, information, and communication technologies provide experiences more intense and involving than the scenes of banal everyday life, as well as the codes and models that structure everyday life. The realm of the hyperreal (e.g., media simulations of reality, Disneyland and amusement parks, malls and

allowing for what Žižek's (2008) identifies as derrealization of our own horrors. The circuitous patterns of *fetishistic disavowal of the (hegemonic) self vis-à-vis visual experience/fantasy of the other* can be traced in the long history of colonial photography.

Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (2003) in their book, *Photography's Other Histories*, push for a more nuanced understanding of colonial photography as constantly and consistently portraying a largely negative alterity eagerly consumed by Western episteme formations which rely on this very construction of the other. Pinney and Peterson's (2003) point that such images are "eagerly enjoyed" invokes the Lacanian notion of *jouissance*,¹⁸ where *jouissance* is distinct from pleasure insofar as pleasure obeys the laws and limits of enjoyment and *jouissance* transgresses the laws of enjoyment, pushing the subject beyond the pleasure principle and into more transgressive spaces of extreme or deep pleasure.

The visualities discussed thus far demonstrate that such displays of brown bodies are not merely ideological distortions convenient to an emergent global political order, but densely crafted visual fields that organize and produce Muslim wo/men as political and pleasurable reality (McClintock 1995). Going back to *SATC2* scene discussed earlier and the images of Pakistani men depicted in Figures three and four, the fetishized Muslim subjects allow the imperial, hetero-patriarchal gaze and its innumerable spectators to lay claim to the space of freedom and the politics of feminism by reading oppression back onto the *other* woman and

consumer fantasylands, TV sports, and other excursions into ideal worlds) is more real than real, whereby the models, images, and codes of the hyperreal come to control thought and behavior. In this postmodern world, individuals flee from the "desert of the real" for the ecstasies of hyperreality and the new realm of computer, media, and technological experience. For Baudrillard, the "ecstasy of communication" means that the subject is in close proximity to instantaneous images and information, in an overexposed and transparent world. In this situation, the subject "becomes a pure screen a pure absorption and re-absorption surface of the influent networks" (1988: 27). In other words, an individual in a postmodern world becomes merely an entity influenced by media, technological experience, and the hyperreal.

¹⁸ A French word which derives from the verb *jouir* meaning to have pleasure in, to enjoy, to appreciate, to savour; with a secondary meaning, as in English, of having rights and pleasures.

danger back onto the *other* man. The demonization of Muslim men and the consistent representation of them as unintelligible, or only intelligible as dangerous, is key to the successful visual portrayals of Muslim women as intelligible, hence salvageable, through human rights, democracy and war (Paur 2007; Battharchaya 2008). Indeed, both the *SATC2* cinematic display of the Muslim world and Figure three, specifically, testify to the entertaining value of this unfurling, virus-like masculinity. In the Orientalist imaginary of the imperial camera, the labors of feminism and oppositional consciousness that my visual subjects demonstrate are successfully eclipsed and folded into the space of (sexual) fantasy and (political) excess.

To bring to scrutiny the authority of these visual stories is a task that requires reading visual practices and their rhetorical narratives as arising out of Empire's unfolding axes of war, democracy and human rights. The Empire's project of making (Pakistani) experience and subjects visible relies on primarily hegemonic premises, such as the integrity and coherence of visual regimes, normative gazes that desire to see women (bodies), and imperial presumptions that fluently equate seeing with knowing, with knowledge, and with truth. My purpose here is to disturb these habits of visually thinking about Pakistan, the woman subject, and feminist labor, disrupting the ways nation, politics and gender are all "weighed down" in de Beauvoir's (1952: xxiii) words, by the female body.

Methodological Intentions and Quandaries: A Project Map

As an immigrant woman of color writing and living in the USA, my diasporic consciousness and research creates tension with the pursuit of the *other*, marking my project with disaffections, ruptures and incomprehensions. Skepticism, and a respect for the integrity of difference, replaces the research goal of total understanding and representation. Hence, my account of these Pakistani, feminine/feminist fields is at odds with (any) patriotic/imperialist

nationalism and deconstructive of Western categories of analysis. Gayatri Spivak (1988) frames the deconstructive position as saying an impossible *no* to a structure that one critiques, yet nevertheless inhabits intimately, in my case, through simultaneous levels of sociological knowing, teaching and writing in the American academy. In this regard, then, I push towards critical levels of deconstruction using epistemic possibilities emerging from the corpus of work in postcolonial studies, psychoanalytic studies and scholarship around Empire. As a feminist researcher and postmodern critic, neither the correctness of representation nor its fidelity to some original form of the “true Pakistani woman” are my goals. Instead, I work to examine the visual and linguistic texts that have proliferated around “the Pakistani woman” – a discursively produced subject who is rooted in particular structures of narration and modes of intelligibility. Hence, the images and texts I deconstruct must be seen as both real and imagined, a Deleuze and Guattarian (1988) becoming and a formation, incomplete and a totality. This is not to advocate a postmodern fetishization of incoherence or fragmentation of the subject. Instead, I struggle to situate these visual subjects (and myself as yet again authoring these subjects), outside of the binary frames within which they are narrated and within the heteroglossia of political instability, wartime urgency, and modernist telos wherein their subject-hood becomes intriguing, entertaining and concretized. I regard my gesture, as James Clifford (1988:9) puts it, “as a state of being in culture while looking at culture.”

“Spectacular Subjects” emerges as a story about various events and figures that operate as snapshots of Pakistani women to probe the matter of female bodies and visual experience, or female bodies in global visual space. By centering my interest on the linguistic styles, figures of speech, narrative devices, and visual tropes deployed to *see/constitute* these women, I work to answer a number of questions. What discourses are central to these visual and rhetorical fields?

What are the functions of these discourses? How do these visual stories operate as central sites of spectatorship? In what ways do these images serve as sites of social and psychic satisfaction?

Both because these Pakistani women are public figures and because I want to critically engage the mainstream read of their visual representations and narratives, I employ discourse analysis. I examine the media narrations and photographs emerging out of well-respected American newspapers and media, including the *New York Times*, *CBC*, *Huffington Post*, *American Prospect*, *Time*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek* and *National Geographic*. I also look at International Press such as *BBC*, *Dawn*, *Pakistani Times*, *Geotv* and *All Things Pakistani*. Finally, I look specifically Mukhtar Mai's recently released book: *In the Name of Honor: A Memoir*, Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl Wudunn's widely acclaimed book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity*, as well as the film based on this book, and the recently released documentary on Bhutto, *Benazir Bhutto: The Film*.

The methodological approach of discourse analysis allows me to explore discursive structures and rhetorical strategies of what is broadly termed the text – which could be speech, film, photograph, newspaper, or any other social artifact imbued with meaning. Such an analysis pays attention to the ways discourse(s) are articulated through visual images and written and oral texts. The methodology “involves all the levels and methods of analysis of language, cognition, interaction, society and culture” according to Teun van Dijk (2008:10). The specific formations that shape and are shaped by the image and text can be situated in institutions of power, ideological apparatuses, and within varying technologies of power and resistance. As the reader moves through the varying photographed and narrated fields of Pakistan, you will see that I analyze each photograph and text for what social modalities it allows, organizes, elides and

constrains. I maintain that the ideological implications of these photographic narrations replicate narrow racial, class, sexual and gender national ideals.

One of the most useful and powerful analytical devices in the critical study of discourse is the “systematic analysis of implicitness” (van Dijk 2008:180). Van Dijk explains:

Much of the social, political and ideological relevance of news analysis resides in making explicit implied or indirect meanings of functions of news report: what is not said may be even more important, from a critical point of view, than what is explicitly said or meant.

John Fiske (1996: 89) notes that discourse has three dimensions at the level of practice: a topic or area of social experience to which its sense-making is applied; a social position from which this sense is made and whose interests it promotes; and a repertoire of words, images, and practices by which meanings are circulated and power applied. He (1996:3) points out that discourse analysis:

relocates the whole process of making and using meaning from an abstracted structural system into particular historical, social and political conditions. Discourse, then, is language in social use, language accented with its history of domination, subordination and resistance, language marked by the social conditions of its use and its users. It is politicized, power-bearing language employed to extend or defend the interests of its discursive community.

While I recognize that society is multi-discursive and that all texts are intertextual, as in any given text can and does embody multiple meanings, I map the deeply embedded dominant discourses that constitute my visual subjects as (pleasurably) globalized. The ascendancy of the hetero-patriarchal, imperial gaze, in varying degrees with varying permutations, to reproduce the rampant exploitation and/or cooptation of these Pakistani women paradoxically compels a queer theoretical labor, one that links violence to liberal deployments of diversity and the valorization of life.

Finally, discourse analysts choose their images on the basis of how conceptually interesting they are rather than how statistically representative they are of a wider set of images (Rose 2007). Precisely because I want to get at mainstream constructions of feminine, racialized *other*, I chose three detailed case studies of iconoclastic images and stories that produce and sustain hegemonic discourses of the Pakistani woman. I queer the ubiquitous circulation and unquestionable popularity of these discourses in order to engage in an analysis of ideology, power, pleasure, and discourse.

Heuristically speaking, each chapter in this dissertation possesses its own analytic integrity and as such could be made to function and be read on its own. Intersecting thematics are restated under apparently different visual fields to sharpen the analytic agility with which I understand these photographs and stories. For instance, all of the chapters critique imperial practices of producing the feminine, racialized *other*, foregrounding the ideological imperatives that are deployed to function as truth or otherwise naturalize (brown) violence. Moreover, I connect all of visual subjects to the hetero-patriarchal erotic gaze, a gaze which implicitly operates through the three axes of human rights, democracy and war.

In chapter 2, “Victim *cum* Feminist: Deconstructing Global Concerns/Celebrations of Mukhtar Mai,” there is a particular insight I gleaned from using Pakistan’s most contemporary human rights story. The media sources through which Mai’s gang rape story became sensationalized relied on normative categories of the oppressed *cum* liberated brown women, allowing me to trace the ways in which the putative race-neutral rights market masks the interstices of power over the *other* and how the gaze through which her story entered the rights market came to be carried out through a number of erotic tropes. Working from Inderpal Grewal’s, Talal Asad’s and Raymond Williams’s suggestions that human rights regimes misuse

cultural narratives of the *other*, Mai's story allows me to demonstrate how imperialist structures of representation on the feminine, racialized body function as a key link in modern projects of women's-rights-as-human-rights. I interrogate the discursive chain of visual events that turned Mai's life into a story of American-style heroics to work against the visible and cognizant field of sight that registers her as the *real* woman of Pakistan, fantasizes about her as an oppressed *other*, and interprets radical freedom as an accomplishment of developmental discourses.

The field of human rights, however, is not the only field of representation that carries over from the Pakistani context to the U.S. context. Benazir Bhutto, who was heralded as global feminist icon and democratic *célèbre* in the U.S., is a key figure through whom we can deconstruct the power of a very specific sociopolitical fantasy around the feminine, racialized *other*. In the next chapter, "Is there a Queer Democracy, Or – Stop Looking Straight: Benazir Bhutto and the *Hetero-erotics* of Democracy," I address the photographic representations of Bhutto and the consistent aestheticized framing of her to illustrate the way in which the images of Bhutto were able to provide meaning for the sustenance of American empire. In the midst of madly wrought representations of Pakistan as the "most dangerous place on earth," the figure of Benazir Bhutto emerged as both a stable and comfortable emblem of emancipated modernity and a visual opportunity to narrate empire through a multicultural hetero-normative democracy. As a romanticized character who evidences the (f)utilities of democracy, Benazir Bhutto functioned to assuage collective fears about the destructive capabilities of Pakistan. The hyper-western aestheticization of Bhutto contours deep structures of cultural exclusion and political delegitimization that fractures democracy, but also dresses colonial psychic wounds in amnesiac white contemporary fantasies.

In Chapter 4, “Never A Feminist, Always a Woman: The Ruins of Decolonial Resistance in Pakistan,” I examine the globalized political event of the Red Mosque which brought front and center a fantastic fear of today’s times: veiled Muslim women who engage in abrasive, anti-American, pro-Pakistan political action to their death. As one among distinctly categorized (brown) *others*, the Pakistani female religious martyr is evocatively connected to contemporary dialectics on decolonization and women’s liberation. In this chapter, I engage in a close visual and discursive interrogation of the event of the 2007 Red Mosque, in Badiou’s sense, where an event offers some sort of exceptional (though invariably ephemeral) break with the status quo. In laying bare the ways of seeing both the event and actors of the Red Mosque, I work to explore how these feminine, racialized *others* transgressed the dominant global gaze in ways that queers Western structural subject formation and assembles a distinctly queer political subjectivity. I highlight the discursive confinement of these subjects from monstrous and unrecognizable to erotic and licentious, where both forms sought to destabilize the symbolic threat these women embodied as political martyrs.

Through a brute calculus of racism and imperial geopolitics emerges an interest in the Pakistani feminine/feminist subject, her brown female body, the story of her oppression, and the question of her (as) nation. The public and personal texts produced for and by these women are implicated in a colonizing enterprise that *others* the Pakistani woman, a condition that ascertains, albeit with different valences and contexts, whether the *other* is perceived with dread or desire. To talk about visualities of Pakistani women is really to talk about female bodies in public space and to talk about female bodies in public space is fundamentally to talk about power over seeing and reading the *other*, power over constituting the intelligibility and the viability of the *other*. By

asking questions about what these visual subjects *do, say or reveal*, my project works to necessitate a theoretical emptying of the terms “woman subject” “feminist” and “freedom.”

In this era of war-torn globalization, some argue that old imperial hegemonies have become “dispersed” (Appadurai 1996) or “scattered” (Grewal and Kaplan 1996). How do we negotiate these dispersed hegemonies while also acknowledging that the historical thread or inertia of First World domination remains a powerful presence? The *SATC2* scene with which I opened my chapter demonstrates that even something as incidental as mainstream entertainment relies on its management of ideological portrayals of western superiority, demonic Muslim men, and brown women waiting for American forms of liberation. The localized stories and figures I re-narrate do not produce a fragmented mosaic of unconnected stories nor do they produce a master narrative of global women’s oppression; rather they are deeply and intricately connected through the globalizing ideologies and structures that this project seeks to unravel.

Two

Victim cum Feminist: Deconstructing Global Concerns/Celebrations of Mukhtar Mai

“Something becomes real – to those who are elsewhere...” Susan Sontag, 2004, 21

One must move softly, and there is a whole drama of having to lay bare little by little the workings of processes that are seen in their totality.” Frantz Fanon, 1963, 188/189

“The task under postmodern cultural conditions is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are.” Foucault 1983, 216

In 2004, a story hit the global media complete with all the visual and narratives trappings of a good “old-fashioned” American fable. Traveling through the Western world with celerity, the story of Mukhtar Mai exploded in the global visual media, with the most fanfare – almost obsessive fanfare – in the U.S. There is no *real* way to tell this story, no *truth* in how to introduce this subject – as she is and has become a subject mired in a long and deep discursive chain of events and formations. It is through the discourses surrounding her and constructing her that I will impart and interrogate the story of Mukhtar Mai.

Mukhtar Mai is a 30-year-old Pakistani woman from the village of Meerwala in the rural county of Jatoi of Pakistan. In June of 2002, Mukhtar Mai suffered a public gang rape as a form of honor revenge, on the demands of a village court (*jirga*), or by some accounts, on the orders of a (*panchayat*) tribal council. Mai's then 12-year-old brother, Abdul Shakoor, had been seen walking with a girl from a more influential tribe; this tribe demanded Mai's rape to avenge their "honor." Mai's family sat helplessly while she was dragged into a room, even as she screamed and pleaded for mercy. To further humiliate her, and make an example of those who would defy the power of local strongmen, she was paraded naked before hundreds of onlookers. Her father covered her with a shawl and walked her home.

In many cases, women who have been shamed by such public sexual violence have or have been expected to commit suicide after such an event. Mai, however, decided to press charges, and took her case to court. Her rapists were arrested and charged. Within months, her case was picked up by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). According to well-known women's rights activists, Asma Jahangir¹⁹:

It is a testament to how terrible what happened to Mukhtar Mai was that news of the attack on her sent shock waves across Pakistan, where sexual assault and violence against women is commonplace. The vast majority of perpetrators go unpunished. Yet Mai refused to remain silent. She said she would rather "die at the hands of such animals" than "give up her right to justice" and pursued her case despite the threat of further violence. –*TimeAsia*, 4 October 2004

Against the odds, Mai won. Six men involved in her rape have been punished, with two of them sentenced to death. The government awarded her compensation, approximately 43,800 Rupees (US \$7,300). Mai remained in her village and has used the money to open a school for girls in their village, the Mukhtar Mai Women's Welfare Organization. According to a November 2009 *New York Times* article, Mukhtar Mai, her friends, colleagues and their families continue to be at great risk from violence by local feudal lords, and/or the government of Pakistan.

Mai's case gained international attention in 2005, when then-president General Pervez Musharraf placed restrictions on her movement, claiming that her work and words could potentially hurt the international image of Pakistan. At that time, Asma Jahangir on *CBC*, Kristoff in the *New York Times*, and others in *TimeAsia*, *BBC*, and *All Things Pakistan*, all said that the Musharraf administration had confiscated Mai's passport and prohibited her access to an American visa. That same year, 2005, *Glamour Magazine* named her

¹⁹ Asma Jahangir is a founding member of The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings. She is one of the most well-known public activists in Pakistan.

"Woman of the Year." After much battling and with the help of Jahangir, Mai traveled to New York, her first trip out of Pakistan, to receive *Glamour* magazine's "Woman of the Year" award. According to Cindi Leive, *Glamour*'s editor-in-chief, in choosing this awardee, *Glamour* (*glamour.com*, November 2005) looks for:

strength...persistence a woman of the year is someone who believes that women can do whatever they set their mind to, and Mukhtar illustrates those qualities better than anybody. This is a story that's going to shock everyone who hears it.

She also traveled around the U.S. to speak on the plight of rural women. In April 2007, Mukhtar Mai won the North-South Prize from the Council of Europe. Mai's story has been retold in the 2006 documentary *Land, Gold and Women* and has come out in a recently released autobiography, *In the Name of Honor: A Memoir* (2007). According to the *New York Times* (2 April 2006), "Her autobiography is the No. 3 best seller in France, movies are being made about her, and she has been praised by dignitaries like Laura Bush and the French foreign minister." *Bitch* magazine, a well-known American feminist magazine, released a statement in February of 2009 that Mai's story will be the subject of an upcoming American feature film.

Mukhtar Mai's story no doubt induces a social and cultural vertigo. Her story of women's rights is enthralling in the way that it loops between reality and Hollywood dream, ultimately capturing the civic miracle of Mai's survival/humanitarianism and promulgating fetishization of brown women being saved from brown men by white men.²⁰ The allure of Mai's tragedy is deeply connected to the geopolitical and biopolitical complexities of the war on terror. Within Mai's story, Pakistan becomes the locus of the paranoid colonial and liberal gaze, and the U.S. emerges as a state of/for women's security and public empowerment. Here, we see the link between biopolitics and geopolitics in that security and care are cast as impossible in Pakistan

²⁰ I refer here to Spivak's (1988) quote that famously called out western neo-imperial tendencies for "white men to save brown women from brown men."

because of the inherent violence attributed to its men. But through the American spotlight, security, safety and humanitarianism become possible. In other words, underneath the authentic Pakistani woman, the modern subject is waiting to break free. The *real* Pakistani woman gets legitimated in her humanitarian mission by virtue of a (non)fictionalized representation. Mai's story reinvigorates the 1970's feminist Orientalist scholarship²¹ that defined Muslim women as passive others bereft of the enlightened consciousness possessed by their Western sisters, however, with a neoliberal twist. Mai, as a desirable subject of these neoliberal/neocolonial times, departs from this Orientalist fantasy and becomes, instead, a story of the disparaged Pakistani women who reaps justice (through the market) against all odds.

The constitution of Mai as a vital visual subject of contemporary Pakistan demonstrates how the racialized, feminine *other* is produced to perform a role crucial to contemporary neocolonial and neoliberal sensibilities. Mai's presence in global visual culture communicates the centrality of oppressed *cum* emancipated feminine subjects in the global gaze. In this chapter, I examine the visual and discursive texts surrounding Mai to consider the structure of their narration and the modes of (un)intelligibility they move forward. I argue that the visual and discursive tropes deployed to tell the tale of Mai invariably replicate imperial, hetero-patriarchal structures of looking. I will show how the feminine, racialized body gets deployed as a metaphor for the restoration of freedom and functions as a key link in modern projects of bodily autonomy, visual objectification, and privileged subjectification. By interrogating the discursive chain of visual events that turned Mai's life into a story of American-style heroics, I work against the visible and cognizant field of sight that registers her as the *real* woman of Pakistan, fantasizes

²¹ My point of reference can be most quickly captured by the famous feminist text, *Gyn/Ecology*, written by Mary Daly in 1978. In this radical feminist treatise, Daly relies on and reproduces a number of hackneyed stereotypes of the oppressed third world women, exacerbating the narrative that the West is the best. Hardly an antiquated argument, Susan Moller Okin (1998) rearticulated such a feminist position in her more liberal debates with postcolonial thinkers, in her book, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*

about her as an oppressed *other*, and interprets radical freedom as an accomplishment of developmental discourses.

(Un)Free Bodies: Mai as Metaphor and *Reality* for Freedom and Oppression

The cover of the *New York Times* magazine showcases a woman – brown-skin, dark eyes, head bowed, gaze lowered, head covered loosely, sublime, humbled and tragic (see fig. 1). The photograph is mostly a headshot. The viewer is privy to her drooping shoulders, a deliberately lowered posture implying that she is humbled, shamed, broken. Her hair is covered loosely with a black headscarf, *dupatta*, with wisps of black hair coming through. A tear gathers at the corner of one eye. She is not looking at the camera. The absence of her direct gaze suggests she is a woman in fear, in distress. Her trauma is etched on her face; the barbarism of her circumstance comes through. A mere look at this image invokes a tremendous emotional reaction. Just as *Glamour Magazine*'s states, Mai's story (and photograph) will "shock anyone who hears it." We are made to wonder. We sympathize. We empathize. We grieve.



Figure 2.1, *New York Times* Magazine, June 2004

This photograph of Mukhtar Mai, taken on the heels of her gang rape in Meerwala, Pakistan, constitutes Mai as the visceral and symbolic presence of traumatized femininity and feminism in Pakistan. Returning to Leive's broader statement on what *Glamour* values in naming someone "woman of the year," the "shock" value of Mai's story is quite pointless yet clearly important to contemporary sensibilities that find desirable this movement from racialized victim to publicly emancipated subject. This photograph incites the symbolic power of visual experience in the making of the feminine *other*. While this photo of Mai first appeared in the *New York Times*, it has been reprinted over and over again by varying international presses, *BBC*, *CBC*, *Dawn*, *Pakistani Times*, as well as in a plethora of human rights, NGO and civil society websites such as Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (hrcp.org), Woman Foundation (auratfoundation.org) and sepiaanutiny.com, a radical South Asian political web forum.

As a largely unfinished,²² precarious but deeply redeeming visual story emerging under the umbrella of human rights, Mai's visual narrative becomes an exploratory analogy for the proverbial woman question. The porousness of this question, and its clear corporeal dimensions, is apparent in the visual field of this sensationalized Pakistani, *The Muslim Woman's Story*. This photograph situates Mai as the *real* Pakistani woman and produces this reality through a particular coordination of her body, posture, and gaze. I italicize *real* because I use this term in a Lacanian (1992) sense. For Lacan (1992), the notion of the *real* is the state of nature from which we have been forever severed by our entrance into language. Hence, there is no real. What we call "reality," Lacan tells us, is articulated through signification (the symbolic) and the characteristic patterns of images (the imaginary). This imaginary seeks to domesticate the symbolic through the imposition of fantasy, *jouissance* and ideology. As far as humans are

²² According to Nicholas Kristoff of the *New York Times*, Mai's story is far from finished as she continues to face threats and obstacles in her journey to educate and empower women in rural Pakistan.

concerned “the real is impossible” (Lacan in Zizek, 2006: 23). Still, the *real* continues to exert its influence, to be something we constantly desire to see or express. The *real* is constituted in the interstitial spaces between images and ideologies, in constant tension with the symbols that try to capture it.

This photograph of Mai, along with several others of her that I will introduce, is situated within this very idea of a transnational imaginary and the national symbolic, the (American) fantasy and *jouissance* of her *real* (Pakistani) story. As I move through these images, my analysis is positioned as a query: what does the neoliberal, hetero-patriarchal, imperial gaze come to see in these photographs and the captions that accompany them? What images of freedom and oppression, the American *self* and the Pakistani *other* prosper and which decay? Simply, what do these images of Mai *do* and what do they *do to us*?

Looking at Figure one, the image of Mai employs a number of visual devices to portray the reality of female oppression. Her head is bowed, her gaze lowered, her hair covered. Her headscarf is black with a slim multi-colored slim embroidery along the border, framing her face in way that suggests sexual modesty, humility and national authenticity. Her eyes are dark and teary. She is mesmerizing, in spite of her brutalization. It seems the camera has caught her, unprepared, engrossed in and by her own devastation. She doesn't seem to be posing. She is almost folded into herself. She has been photographed in what seems her most natural state. She knows not that she is watched. The effect of this image is that Mai's tragedy, her “self” as a figure of global importance, has been made *known*. She exists outside of the West, made visible by the West, for the Westerner's view. And in being privy to her story, we become privy to a brutally gendered Pakistan. Operating within a deep genealogical genre of photography on the

other, this picture of Mai functions as documentation. In capturing her essence, the viewer comes to know her. She is nature. We are culture, interpreting her.

This image arrests its audience, both physically and ideologically, evoking fear and revulsion, but also fascination and thrill. The literal content of the image – Mai, her head scarf, her facial expression, her posture – works with the text of her story to invoke the tragedy of grand human suffering, woman's pains, emotional excess and emphatic conflicts that organize reality for women in the global south. As Rose (2007: 138) states, pictorial images perform a vital cognitive function in linking the ideological and the observable, materializing the ideology and fetishizing the object, instructing the mind through the education of the eyes. Each dimension of Mai's corporeal visual objectification is part of a system of perception that uses the female body to systematically map in/visible national and cultural characteristics. In rendering Mai visible and sensational, the image idealizes (even eroticizes) the oppressed female form. The posture of Mai's body provides a fluency in Pakistani women's grievances. Her image points out and notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes on us. If, indeed, as Sontag (2003: 67) says, "the photograph has the deeper bite," then the sharpness of this photograph rests in the way it demands from its viewer a cultural competence, a shared knowledge of what a broken woman looks like, feels, and experiences. It produces (invents) feelings of loss, despair, and a certain thoughtfulness on the role of women in (Pakistani) society.

The pleasures incited by this image of Mai are catalyzed by the fact that Figure one is aimed at an audience that shares a cultural repertoire of themselves as free women and of Mai, and generally Pakistani women, as unfree. The visual tropes of this photograph successfully authenticate this ideology. The image, embedded in a larger discursive field of human rights savior narratives, corroborates that Pakistan is a failed state, not only incapable of taking care of

its most vulnerable citizens, but guilty of producing the very conditions of their vulnerability. The image comforts the viewer even as it unsettles her. It reassures the western social actor just as it allows her to relish this racialized feminine *other*. The key point I make is that the (re)production of this image is not innocent. This photograph of Mai is not a transparent window but rather an optic through which the hegemonic gaze can interpret her world.

This photograph operates as a double bluff because, even as it connects us with Mai, it isolates her reality from our reality. It is an image which takes us in and acutely distances us. We can congratulate ourselves on our perspicacity. We are not her, but she can become one of us – the *other* folded into the desirable western mold. As visual image, it assuages and arouses profound social and political anxieties and desires regarding white, middle-class privilege in an international class system. Invoking knowledge on what it takes to be a free subject, this *real* photograph of Mai provides us with a position from which to say: “Yes, I am free.” The contours of this image interpellates the viewer into a specific subject position – culturally competent, empathetic Western viewer – an individual seduced by the image even as she is comfortably distanced from its reality.

The first of a spate of images of Mai, this image encodes female oppression and conversely, female freedom through the landscape of this woman’s body. It is no coincidence that this photograph, the most viscerally inciting image, has also held the widest audience. The visual coordinates that fix Mai as victim of Pakistan inevitably invoke *reality* in that it is perceived as adequately reflecting that which is outside itself; in this case, the *reality* of Pakistani women’s lives. The photograph’s power (and pleasure) lies in its successful ability to conceal its constructedness.

For the American press, and its audience, however, it is axiomatic that photographs are a reliable source of knowledge on the *other*. This notion of the photograph as a document of reality has been brought under scrutiny by a number of visual scholars, Barthes (1981), Tagg (1988), McClintock (1995) among others. Lutz and Collins (1993) have provocatively shown how images emerging out of the global south, historically and contemporaneously, have largely been exotic, idealized, naturalized and sexualized. Frederic Jameson's (1981) position that mass culture is neither entirely manipulative nor entirely authentic is hence relevant here. In Jameson's view, images operate by arousing fantasies and desires within structures that defuse them. Mass culture could not do its ideological work, if on some level, it did not utilize utopian ideals. It could not manage desires and anxieties about social order if it did not deal in fears and fantasies that are recognizable. Hence, mass cultural imagery pleases the eye through the spectacle of particular bodies and violations of those bodies, both of which then seem to exist at a distance from the viewer.

The visual regime that captured Mai took shape around the problem of saving Pakistani women. Hence, *vis-a-vis* her body, techniques of individualization, specifically the movement from object of oppression to subject of freedom, are affirmed. Mai's specific photographic trajectory is of great intrigue as she translates for the global political theatre what dis/empowerment supposedly looks like for Pakistani woman. Her progress is consumed as a spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility a spectacle that relies on conceiving of culture in visual terms – “clearly bounded,” “oppressed,” “sexual savaged/s” – all of which are read through the female body.

In Figure two, Mai takes the stage after her case has received international attention. In this photograph, the Interior Minister, Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao is “solacing” Mukhtar Mai

after a meeting with the Executive Director Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights (PakTribune, 17 March 2005). Mai is standing to the side of the Interior Minister (at what is probably a press conference), her head loosely covered and bowed as Khan places his hand on her lowered head as a gesture of consolation. This image of a public figure offering a rape victim his sympathies in a public forum and supporting her battle for justice is something we hardly see in the United States, where criminal legislative processes are largely privatized by state judicial systems and government spatialities. But, this image, as it is positioned in both the *New York Times* and *BBC* is a far cry from an applause for the Pakistani national system. This photograph is instead reminiscent of a particular genre of patriarchal relations that produce spaces of deep deference, hierarchy, and gender segregated spaces. This photograph, like Figure one, is an important indictment of Pakistan, a state visualized as organized by oppressive gender and sexual stratification rather than egalitarianism. Mai's position as woman/ victim/citizen claiming rights comes through as the imperial camera catches her at this angle.



Figure 2.2, *PakTribune*, 17 March 2005



Figure 2.2, *PakTribune*, 17 March 2005

The photograph following this (see fig. 3) is Mai at a podium speaking at the press conference. Again, her corporeal practices remain familiar – her hair is loosely covered in a yellow headscarf, she is leaning forward towards the microphone, her mouth slightly open, clearly the camera has caught her midsentence. Her posture from Figure one to Figure two and three has shifted. In the latter images, she is a cognizant public figure, aware that her rape symbolizes the battle for women’s rights in Pakistan – a battle watched by the globe. She moves from object of pity to subject of knowledge. First, she bows her head to a Pakistani patriarch and next, she addresses a global audience on her/woman’s plight in Pakistan. These two images operate as a means of persuasive pedagogy, demonstrating the process of disempowerment to empowerment, object to subject, victim to feminist. This kind of iconography sets into motion specific epistemic regimes that naturalize Pakistan as an oppressive state and (western) visibility as a means of empowerment. Insofar as these photographs cannot be read separately from the

Pakistan-American geopolitical transaction and the war on terror's vested gaze on the Pakistani female subject, this image becomes an event of cultural production, a moment in which "oppressed subjectivities" are constructed and free subjects are imagined.

The principles of such visual experience employ a definition of Pakistani women as always and already oppressed and in need of transcendence to a higher, freer state. In the case of this photograph, a number of ideologies are written on the body. The dichotomies through which Figures one through three are structured – between Mai and the Pakistani government, silence and speech, self-denial and self-fulfillment, Pakistan and America, local and the global – implicate Mai's story in a familiar teleological narrative of progress offered by the west. Consequently, it is against this crucial narrative in which the "non west" comes to be read as only premodern and unfree. All of the mainstream U.S. presses stressed the failure of Pakistan to articulate and enact women's equality intelligibly, which in turn signifies the failures of the non-west to progress toward the organization of sexual and gender equality prevalent in the west.

Mai's visual story contributes to dominant American liberal ideologies insofar as they produce and effectively sustain the American woman as transcendent subject and the Pakistani woman as immanent object. Within this dominant grid of intelligibility, freedom comes to exist within the individuals' ability to move from the state of in-itself to a state for-itself, where she acts and lives in a way that moves her from immanence to transcendence. In today's war on terror, geopoliticized field of subjectivities, there is a notable trend in neoliberal, democratic institutions to celebrate this triumphant movement from immanent object of patriarchy to transcendental subject of the modern world (Grewal 2006; Esteva and Prakash 1998). In marking Mai as the *other*, the media simultaneously offer her a way to bypass marginality through the definitive strategy of visibility and voice, tropes strategically embodied by subject *pour-soi*.

As the symbol of an indigenous imagination meeting liberal feminist normativization, these images of Mai reorder the audience's field of vision by rendering her intelligible, relevant, sensible. The discourses of visibility that characterize Mai's narrative and the visual practices that accompany her story make clear the crucial link between woman's oppressed identity and vision and visibility. In this visual regime, oppression is something we can see, often on the body of women. The natural inverse, freedom, too, can be identified on the body, a point which becomes more apparent in my discussion of Benazir Bhutto. Mai's story revolves around her images and what can be said about them, around who has the ability to see her (as oppressed) and the talent to speak for her, around the sensible properties of freedom and the liberal possibilities of action. Her presentation and speech, both imparted for her and by her, prepare her spectator for the processes of identification desired and necessary to be considered free.

The reprinting of Figure one in presses around the Western world speaks volumes about the tremendous symbolic and discursive weight attached to racialized, female bodies and practices. Stuart Hall (1997) pushes us to pay close attention to the cultural processes by which the visible differences of appearance come to stand for natural properties of human beings. Specifically, in Figure one, the performative effect is the most profound as the artificial auratic projection is intended to manipulate the subjective gaze for ideological/political purposes. The discursive practices are more clearly in play in Figures two and three, where Mai becomes a symbol of successful human rights regimes – she takes the stage and educates the global masses. Indeed the weight of each image is mired in multiple and inconsistent contents and I recognize that we cannot know the full extent of their appeal. It seems, however, that within an imperial imaginary that relies on particular displays of brown women, Mai's visual victimization holds appeal insofar as it forges an alliance to western modes of liberation. Her corporeal practices are

immanent so long as they elucidate the gender repression of Pakistan, her freedom desirable insofar as it testifies to the American Dream. Within such mythic understandings, Mai, as a revolutionary citizen-subject, to invoke Sandavol's (2000) term, who rises from the ruins of patriarchy, neocolonialism and nationalism is dismissed; she remains the incomplete, mysterious, trainable and homogenized *other*.

These images are symptomatic of the ebb and flow of politics and visual aesthetics where the former is encapsulated by the totality of the latter. So the image(s) of Mai become the world of Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan is both incited and silenced, referenced and ungraspable. As the sublime in a field of geopolitical wars and nationalisms, Mai most effectively stands as witness to an encounter that is mostly un-representable – colonists' imagination of the *other*. The proliferation of Mai's image can be attributed to the vitality of a modernity that links the conquests of postcolonial photography to the victories of emancipation. In other words, the capture of Mai by the imperial camera cements the post state of colonial times, obscuring the neoformations of contemporary coloniality, of empire. In this way, Mukhtar Mai's images become the specular surface through which the dangers of misrecognition are dismissed to support the political agendas of these times (Butler 2004; Peirce and Rao 2006; Paur 2007). As an evocative emotional visuality, the story of Mai cripples all complexities of the Pakistan-American geopolitical nexus; thereby serving as evidence for the prosecution of "foreign" nationalist patriarchy. By capturing Mai's story, the desire for the oppressed *other* that will be a viable counter to the American feminine/feminist self is set firmly in place.



Figure 2.4, *Islamabad Courts*, 2005

In the theatre of exaggerated neoliberal visibility, let me bring two more images to bear in this discussion. Figure four is a camera shot of Mai on what appears to be a news channel or a press conference. The image is of Mai sitting in front of a microphone, her head covered, her posture familiarly downcast. She sits next to a man, perhaps a news reporter, who speaks into a microphone. Mai is leaning towards two microphones, while a hand extends another toward her. The text at the bottom of the image reads: “What dangers do you face now?” Mai answers: “Many, now that I have spoken out.”

This photograph positions Mai as an important international subject where she swings from metaphor for oppression to the ironies of freedom. It is her emergence as a sexual assault victim, versus the assault itself, through which she becomes subject to American restorative

forces that want to accelerate her toward a (better) modern life. Through the tropes of risk and voice, Figure four catalogues the Pakistani female body as made frail and fragile by Pakistan men and Islam. To be sure, in this visual and discursive framing of Mai, it isn't Mai's rape itself that marks her as unsafe and in danger; it is her quest for justice from the Pakistani government and patriarchal lifestyle that propels her into the global gaze. In the U.S., a woman is raped every 45 seconds and African American women are three times more likely to be victims of sexual assault than white women (Rowland 2002). These statistics hold relevance here because despite these staggering numbers and patterns of sexual assault in the U.S., rape as part of an eroticized, racialized American patriarchy does not define American culture overarchingly, neither in the eyes of U.S. citizens nor in the global gaze. But Mai's rape has served as evidence of Pakistan's severe, inhumane patriarchy and her pursuit of justice as testimonial to Pakistan's lack of human rights and civil society. She is ultimately, to cite Narayan's (1997) provocative phrase here, "dead by culture." Such a narrative framing of Mai's story produces a *jouissance* around the *others'* tragedies. The ecstasies of the *hyperreal* (Baudrillard 2010) are evoked simultaneously to a derrealization of our own horrors (Zizek 2008).

The accompanying text also relies on an American audience. Roland Barthes (1981) has described the "anchorage" function that captions play for photographs. A caption serves to "rationalize a multidimensional image; it loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination" (Barthes 1981). The text in this photograph of Mai directs her audience toward some meanings (the dangers of speaking out for women in Islamic societies) and away from others (the system that eventually reaped justice for Mai was a Pakistani court of law). This image, with its exhortation of danger, positions Mai within a larger discursive urgency directed at (saving) brown women in the post 9/11 war on terror landscape.

Foucault's (1978: 59) striking and provocative argument that "Western man has become a confessing animal" is relevant here. The quintessential western desire to confess, or hear to *others* confess, operates as the main ritual for the production of truth and plays a role in all realms of life, from forms of justice to states of victimhood. Foucault's confessing animal powerfully interlinks with his larger critiques of western society's indulgence in publicizing (a clear distinction from politicizing) the personal so as to receive social and/or political redemption. In this regard, personal narrative, as a cultural enterprise, has become so important that it can be labeled as a commodity spectacle, where an individual's story becomes of great significance for public consumption and discourse.

The victim, Mai, is obliged to confess her victim status, where confession plays a vital role in the identification process, articulated as the price for freedom. In light of contemporary sociopolitical events in which Mai is positioned, this idea of narrative *cum* public act raises questions of identity, location, freedom, intent and interpretation. The question, "what dangers do you face now" crystallized the ways in which nationalism and empire predicated on the notion of women's bodies as communal property (Boehmer 2000) is also invested in these women's stories.

While Mai is commended by her American audience for challenging the Pakistan judicial system to prosecute her perpetrators, her statement about facing many dangers challenges the notion that the proper route to empowerment is visibility. Mai's statement confronts the politics of visibility, naming them as potentially decadent and dangerous. But more than likely, her statement is situated within at least two normalizing discourses. One, Mai's words are legible as they speak to American heroic narratives, where one citizen is propped up to create justice for all who come after her. Two, this text functions as comfortable and unsurprising to the Euro-

American gaze as through it; Mai remains perfectly victim, Pakistan irreducibly dangerous and America completely civil.

These normalizing discourses become even more transparent in Figure 5 and its accompanying story (BBC, 13 June 2005). Here, we see Mai being escorted by Pakistani female guards. Mai is dressed in a yellow *shalwar kameez* with her head loosely covered by her *dupatta*. The photograph has caught her mid-step with one hand at her side and the other lifted towards her shoulder, gripping her *dupatta* as it hangs at the nape of her neck. As in other photos, she is not looking at the camera, but her gaze is directed to the right, uncomfortable and vigilant. Behind her are two female guards, dressed in white uniform *shalwar kameez*, identifiable as police through their uniformed national caps. The guards' faces are covered with a *niqab* style *dupatta*, one guard uses her hand to hold her white *dupatta* across her face in place. Behind them, there are two male police officers, not active with or engaged with Mai, but present as power symbols in the landscape of the photograph. Nobody in this image looks directly at the camera. The most direct gaze is Mai's. She nebulously appears as a woman in danger or a woman deemed dangerous by the Pakistani government. The photograph remains curiously indistinct as to whether Mai is being protected or pursued, escorted to something or marshaled out. The text of the image simply states, "*Mai with escorts.*"



Figure 2.5, *BBC*, 13 June 2005

This photograph appeared in *BBC* on the 13 of June in 2005, when Mai was being obstructed from leaving Pakistan to travel to the United States. Two days later, *Dawn* (15 June 2005), the most widely published, English-language newspaper in Pakistan, in a report titled, “Airports put on alert to stop Mukhtaran,” elaborates:

The foreign office on Saturday directed the interior ministry to take effective steps to stop Mukhtar Mai, the victim of Meerwala gang-rape, from proceeding to the United States, official source told *Dawn* on Saturday. The government had already placed Mukhtaran Mai on Exit Control List (ECL) on June 4, fearing that she might malign Pakistan’s image during her stay in the US.

President Musharraf, in an effort to hide Mai’s story from the global gaze, was accused of repossessing Mai’s passport and keeping her from traveling to the U.S. where she had been invited to speak by Condoleeza Rice and *Glamour Magazine*, among others. According to

Kristoff and WuDunn, in *Half the Sky*, Musharraf wanted “Pakistan to be known for its sizzling economy and not notorious for barbaric rapes” (2009: 72). According to Kristoff, Musharraf was concerned with Mai’s story going global as potentially “airing Pakistan’s dirty laundry” and damaging the already tenuous position Pakistan held with America in the war on terror (*New York Times* 8 April 2007). Whatever the intentions, it can be argued that Musharraf, not unproblematically nor wholly inaccurately, recognized that Mai’s entrance onto American soil was really an invitation into American living rooms, where her oppressed *cum* liberated body could be celebrated.

Within the dominant discourses in which Mai’s story gained popularity, this story of passport repossession and government impediments lures its (American) audience. Mai’s body and subjectivity became the topography through which Musharraf and America competed over the right to represent the Pakistani nation. Hence, as she takes place in the most visual of registers, Mai is best seen as a cultural body with edited movements, oscillating between free and unfree, sustaining and suspending the danger and security, swinging our gaze back and forth.

These five most prominently seen images of Mai serve to provide a common vocabulary for American spectators, one that leaves unresolved the contradictions and multifaceted oppressions Pakistani women face and the forms of freedoms they negotiate. Implicit in this vocabulary is a sense of the Lacanian *real* that I alluded to at the very beginning of this section. The imperial camera is deployed as a means for imagining the racialized feminine *other* within those spaces from which the dominant gaze is otherwise perpetually excluded or denied entrance. Mai’s body allows the dominant gaze access to the site of an imagined feminine purity and authenticity. Lacan argues that there is an intimate relationship between that which coordinates our desire (to see Mai) and that which threatens to undo all desire (to know Mai), the latter being

the emptiness of material reality (because we can never know). Connecting this to the dominant construction of Mai, I argue that the desire to see her is a misrecognition of her fullness – she becomes nothing but a screen for our western narcissistic projections. Because the dominant gaze is shaped by such lack, it engages in a circular desire to ensure we continue to project/produce her in this way. As Žižek (2008: 42) queries, “can there be a more emphatic contrast than the one between respect for the Other’s vulnerability and the reduction of the Other to mere bare life regulated by administrative knowledges?”

It is here that Mai, as metaphor for freedom and oppression, becomes just another story we are telling ourselves about ourselves, a narrative in which apparent supremacy over the *other* Pakistani, oppressed, mythic, barbaric, etc. is only grounded in the historically contingent Western “regime of truth.” If Mai is the modern Janus, in that she allows us to imagine a new beginning for real Pakistani women, in ways not even offered by her free counterpart, Benazir Bhutto, she also allows the dominant gaze to envision a primordial, ideal past subject while at the same time facing a modern future. This is the contradiction of her visualities – the promise of rendering transparent Mai, hence Pakistan’s reality, and the inevitable opacity of reality.

Raison d'être: Revealing Power in Stories of Human Rights

In the dialogical space of human rights, it is safe to say the zeitgeist has shifted. In the school of liberal feminism, the concern for American women is diminishing. There is a general sense of the fact that (western) progress has come to a desirable fruition alongside a sensibility that exaggerates (Muslim) regression (Okin 1999). Liberal thinkers and writers like Katha Pollit, Nicholas Kristoff, Andrea Dworkin and Thomas Friedman have explicitly protested this foreign enemy of women’s rights and write and speak more directly as representatives of human rights.

Despite a change in rhetoric around these issues in Obama's administration, where he famously humanized the global south as friends, not foes; human rights within the discursive field of first world hegemony continue to run the risk of flattening women's experience into the all too seductive binary of *us* and *them* (Grewal 2005; Esteva and Prakash 1998). But what is even more intriguing about human rights discourses is their heavy reliance on visual displays of particular (oppressed) bodies, through which the viewer comes to sympathize with the *other*, but more crucially, I argue, develop a phantasmic relation to this *other* as erotic, exotic, and in dire need of (white) saviors.

The most recent example was the August 2009 *New York Times Magazine* (see fig. 6) dedicated to the theme, "Why Women's Rights are the Cause of Our Time." The cover features a woman sitting on a *charpai*, a wicker bench, with two young girls who appears to be her daughters. The setting of the photograph is perhaps the front of a house. But all we see are the bleak gray cement floors and background wall. The woman's face is downcast, dejected. A loose *dupatta* is draped over her hair and she wears a pink and white *shalwar kameez*. One young girl is working with her hands on something, perhaps needlework, while the older girl stands, looking down at them, forlorn. The photograph is evocative in its display of gendered poverty. The entire magazine featured stories about women across the world, from Pakistan to Afghanistan, Burundi to Somalia to Liberia, and India to China. Scattered throughout the magazine were also ads for various women's NGO's and nonprofits, from the Global Fund for Women (12), HauteColeour (17), an organization that "empowers women with the tools to enter the global market force", The New York Women's Foundation (19), and PathFind (21), "A global initiative in reproductive health." The magazine also included an interview with Hillary Clinton, in which she argues for "pushing women's rights issues on the international stage" (33).



Figure 2.6, *New York Times Magazine* Front Cover, 2009

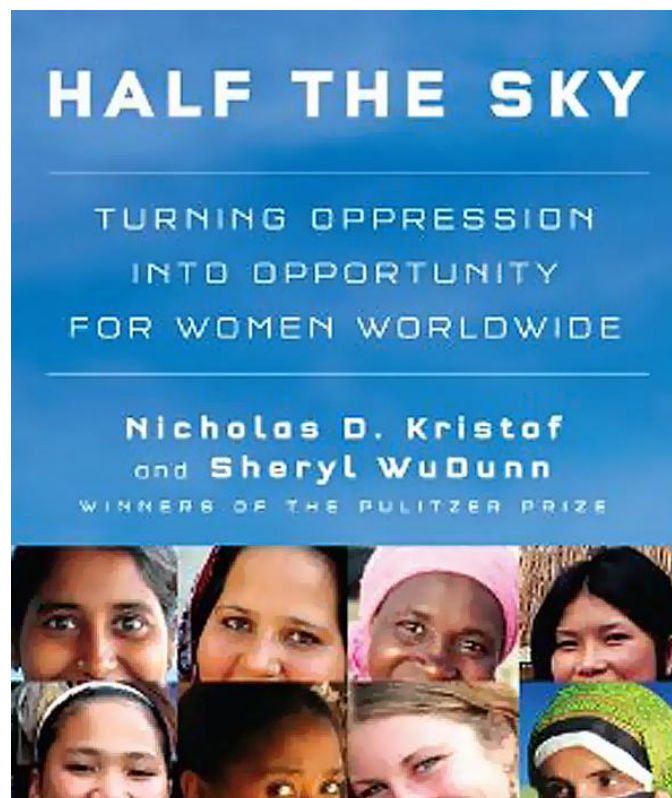


Figure 2.7

Following the success of this magazine, Nicholas Kristoff with Sheryl WuDunn published *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity* (2009), where they explore what

they call, “the rampant gendercide in the developing world.” Featured on *Oprah*, *CNN News*, and *Dateline NBC*, *Half the Sky* is currently on the *New York Times* bestseller list and is a favorite across the globe. Tom Brokaw, a reviewer of the book, said “the book's stories about real women will pierce your heart and arouse your conscience.” On March 4th, 2009, CARE sponsored an International Women's Day event, featuring an exclusive two-hour film of *Half the Sky* in 450 theatres in the U.S. and Canada.²³ Dr. Helene Gayle, president and CEO of CARE promoted the event, stating, "*Half the Sky* is more than just a night at the movies – it's a rallying cry to stand up and join a growing worldwide movement to empower women and girls to fight global poverty" (*CARE Website ad*, 4 March 2010).

At the film premier of *Half the Sky* in Atlanta on March 4, 2010, the theatre was packed with mostly white women. A handful of South Asians and African Americans dotted the audience. Beginning with the epigraph, “changing the world one woman at a time,” this film featured famous actresses such Marisa Tomei, well-known political figures, such as the Duchess of York, and showcased its proud sponsors, *Ladies Home Journal*, American Association of University Women, and WalMart, among others.

The film begins with the story of Woineshet, a young rural Ethiopian girl who had been raped and forced into marriage with her rapist. The film opens in rural Ethiopia with Woineshet, in a pink dress, running barefoot through dirt fields, past huts, laughing that innocent laughter reserved for children. We see her bare legs as they swing through the air with ease. Slowly, carefully, deliberately, the legs become heavy, the scene shifts from color to black and white, the pink dress suddenly tattered by the loss of color, the laughter turns into shrieks and large brown

²³ It was the 4th of March, when I sat writing and muddling through this section on Mai as a symbol of human rights when I received an invite to attend this film. The irony of writing about this event as I opened an invitation to the film settled deep inside of me. I debated whether or not I should go and support what is now the only way to support women's issues – through participation in economic platforms, i.e. purchasing tickets, donating dollars to NGO's, etc.

arms lift Woineshet's bare legs as she is taken, screaming. Like Mai, Woineshet's story induces vertigo – replete with third world horror, brutality, barbarism, and eventual vindication through Kristoff's column and American visibility. The power of this display of victimized brown women, whether Woineshet or Mai, is the way it operates as a visual synecdoche. Through a strategy of synecdochic substitutions, Woineshet's visual story, like Mai in Figure one, represents the violent plight of all brown women. As synecdoche, these visual stories become the *raison d'être* of human rights. Woineshet's cinematic story is the first of five short films coming out of Kristoff and Wudunn's book. Each short film features a story from *Half the Sky*. While Mai's story is up and coming, I want to argue that Woineshet's story is Mai's story. Indeed they are all, more than likely, the same story.

I highlight these recent publications and events because they indisputably demonstrate the significant anxiety around the issue of brown/black woman's rights and their presumed inevitable oppression by patriarchal nationalism and politicized Islamism. I use this term, brown/black, as an allusion to Spivak's (1988) statement that I cited earlier in the chapter. I also use this description of Mai, as a brown woman in which a white audience takes interest, to make clear an insidious investment on the part of human rights regimes. As an apparatus of neoliberal, neocolonial and the war on terror's machinery, human rights in its (over)use of such visual tropes and imagery to paint a picture of brown oppression, demonstrates a simultaneous allegiance to “whiten” the brownness of these women's lives while using that same brownness to mobilize a narrative of the *other*. Mai, more than the veiled martyrs of the Red Mosque or Benazir Bhutto, marshals this descriptive phrase because her visual story relied on raced bodies, in ways that, as I will show in later chapters, Bhutto's tried to erase and the Lal Masjid women tried to disembody.

The International Women's Day event wholly relied on this perception, making it seem so elemental that it requires no further interrogation, just American publicity and dollars. The curiously free-floating, decontextualized structures of cinematic and visual narration that produce the "good," "vulnerable," "at-risk" and violable brown women remain not only largely unquestioned, but they are often commended. In the film premier of *Half the Sky*, actress Marisa Tomei applauded Kristoff's column: "I thought to myself [after reading Kristoff's comments], are we really talking about women's issues, front and center, every day, every week? Yes, we are!" That the women's issues we are talking about are colored by race and nation yet unhinged from the neocolonial and neoliberal practices that have brought them to Tomei's "front and center" is rendered conveniently invisible. What is made aptly visible is the social rhetoric on brown women as oppressed which readily slips into a normalizing epistemology entrenched in the American national psyche.

Reading Mai as Pakistan's most contemporary tale of women's-rights-as-human-rights, I situate her in the interstitial site of the many formations that utilize her – rights discourses, neocolonial machineries such as the war on terror, and neoliberal imperatives such as the World Bank, CARE, among others. I want to analyze their persistence in submerging Mai's work into the framework of human rights, and ask how do we understand this proliferated interest in subjects like Mai? Taking Grewal's (2005: 139) point that "human rights became transnationalized through powerful technologies of knowledge production in a number of regions throughout the world," it seems relevant to ask how these technologies are specifically visual and corporeal. In other words, the images of Mai, while clearly fitting in the broader struggle to advance human rights norms in the post 9/11 world, relied on a highly strategic and deeply specific posturing of women's bodies to construct the racialized, feminine *other*. I want now to

reveal the multiple labors and social tensions that hold Mai in place as a triumphant human rights project and the neoliberal, neocolonial value of her body and oppression.

To be sure, I'm not critiquing Mukhtar Mai or her story. I appreciate the way Mai's case has come to some justice due to the fact that so many activists came forward to fight for her case. However, the paradox of tolerance and human rights, or what Žižek (2008) calls "the obscene underbelly of liberal tolerance," emerges subtly but powerfully through her visual story, a story that achieves its goals largely through the confines of a highly nostalgic and pleasurable rhetoric: Pakistani women as victims, Pakistani men as terrorizers, America as paternalistic saviors, and American visibility as a safe and desirable space. Hence, I am asking, how has her story been used, in whose service, for whose pleasure?

The media that covered Mai's story with the most fervor and interest were the U.S. American media. Judith Blau (2007) has shown that American nationalist tendencies have been especially exaggerated since 9/11; Americans are far more likely than others around the globe to feel they have a monopoly on freedom, are exceptional as a culture, and as an economy. Adding to this, Hollinger (1995:115) argues, Americanism has come to mean "an expansion of 'our' democratic-egalitarian ethos through immanent critique of and the expansion of 'human rights culture' as far as social circumstances will allow it to spread." These theoretical renderings are made apparent in Kristoff's *New York Times* column, which regularly brings to the *Times* readers stories of oppressed young brown girls in the developing world. It is unsurprising, then, that the U.S. takes the keenest interest in Pakistan's political morality, given the geopolitical access and the material interests it holds in Pakistan, which are afforded invisibility by the published versions of this (human rights) anxiety.

Indeed, American nationalism, or Americanism as Grewal (2005) calls it, occupies a unique position in the discourse on today's political hot buttons, democracy, civil society, freedom, material wellbeing and social mobility. The rhetoric surrounding America's progressivist exceptionalism insists that American achievements have not only simply surpassed those of any other society in degree, they have reached quite distinctive levels of enactment and refinement. Here, Grewal (2006) provocatively captures the inescapable relationship between Americanism, as a uniquely transformed nationalist discourse, and the fields of gender, democracy, feminism and consumer culture. She argues that theorizing Americanism cannot be done outside of the "symbolic and specular aspect of consumer culture" and I would add here, women's freedom, both of which are critically linked to America's national and imperial identity (Grewal 2005: 30). Instead, in today's post 9/11 world, Americanism has become deterritorialized and has come to signify, less the imagined space Benedict Anderson (1983) refers to, and more the imagined embodiment that hegemonic forms of liberal feminism alludes to as the inter-articulation of rights, consumption and liberation inscribed on the gendered landscape. Hence, every time we see the trope of oppressed Muslim women as displayed through American media, the flipside is absolute freedom, offered by white hands and the click of the imperial camera.

Both the critique of American exceptionalism and Americanism's overreliance of the symbolic and specular aspects of rights and liberation reveal the sublimated colonial assumption that Muslim women need protecting. Pathak and Rajan (in Butler and Scott 1992: 263) argue that discourses of protection directed at Muslim women serve to camouflage power politics. In their analysis, Pathak and Rajan (1992:263) elucidate how, within the ideological parameters of protection, "an alliance is formed between protector and protected against a common opponent

from whom danger is perceived and protection offered and sought and this alliance tends to efface the will to power exercised by the protector.” Similarly in Mai, as the subject in need of American protection vis-à-vis global human rights, we see how the terms of human rights and American protectionism conceal the complex terrain between protector and protected, homogenizes subalternity for its own purposes, and tears Mai from her radical moorings. Protectionists’ arguments appear to be inherent in any women’s issues, in that any discussion on gender-based oppression may generate victim cum savior narratives. They are not altogether easy to avoid, nor are they necessarily insincere. However, there are multifarious relations of domination and subordination that circulate within the term “protection,” in ways that defer, mask or sugarcoat their meaning.

Drawing on Foucault’s (1982) reading of scientific discourse, it is possible to argue that the proliferation of risk and empowerment of/for women in Pakistan within the context of human rights and building democracy is blind to the “truth games” that underlie such ambitions. Fears about Pakistani women’s lives, or exploitation of their bodies, either by dangerous Pakistani men or by civil institutions that fail to reap justice for them, become a discursive strategy, a comfortable and legitimate home for American social and political anxiety. Human rights discourses rely on tropes of risks as key to their discursive field. These tropes have an important strategic role and are part of the conditions that authorize and legitimize the work of this war, democratization and American power (Foucault, 1982: 70). By representing Pakistani women as a distinct population in need of charity and care of the West and through which they will become sovereign, autonomous subjects; we meet a key tenet of Foucault’s (1977) governmentality. In other words, this is where the third world victim becomes a global subject.

The analytical move in western feminism that ultimately produced the persecuted woman subject utilizes a universal woman, avoiding the histories of genocide, American/western domination and neoliberal exploitation of these very same subjects. For the most part, this avoidance has been established and promulgated by the narrative of violence against women. Certain international configurations of women's-rights-as-human-rights projects based in the west are critiqued for imposing western notions of the self, of the human, of rights on postcolonial societies in modes that collude with western governments or operationalize the colonial savior narrative (Spivak 2000; Mahmoud 2005; Al-Ali 1999). For these scholars, women's-rights-as-human-rights represents the apotheosis of what has been called the dehistoricized and deterritorialized mapping of others (Abu Lughod 2010, Mahmoud 2005; Grewal 2005; Spivak 2000). Indeed, women's-rights-as-human rights is an offshoot of human rights regimes, by which we see the networks of knowledge and power that inserted these discourses into geopolitics.

Hence, what gets lost in the utility of Mai as triumphant human rights case is the notion of First World domination because her triumph occurs, at least in part, through American visibility. Mai's images suggest that empowerment for women and resistance against patriarchy lies in visibility and voice, two liberal tropes that have been widely critiqued by postmodern feminist scholars (Nicholson 1999; Gopinath 2005; Britzman 1989). As categories that effectively produce the political meaning of what it describes as "rights" and "woman," voice and visibility work their silent violence in regulating what is and is not designatable as oppression and freedom.

Let me elaborate here. A curious logic belies the humanitarianism underscoring Mai's story, one that is closely linked to narratives of colonial exceptionalism. Through the display of

her body and the repeated images that tell us she is (not) free, we become privy to the neocolonial/neoliberal imperatives that determine her practice(s), her “self,” and her body as oppressed. These neocolonial corporealities not only elucidate the lexicon of American control but also demonstrate the increasing fascination of human rights narratives in Muslim women’s bodies. For example, Kristoff strives on a biweekly basis to create representations of women “like” Mai, yet his ideological hyper-concern with their bodily practices, such as headcovering, clothing, and feminine aesthetics creates theoretical and political dissonance with what he conceptualizes to be representations for self and social empowerment.²⁴ A sign of her path towards liberation, according to Kristoff (2009: 76), was when Mai shook hands with American men and realized “the world will not end if her scarf drops.” The contortions of logic and rhetoric that characterize these attempts to define empowerment testify to a total lack of recognition of their imperialist stance which constructs the essentially paternalistic project of American representations of the *other*. Fanon (1965: 39) pointed out in his analysis of French colonial attitudes and strategies concerning the veil in Algeria that the colonialists’ goal here was “converting the woman, winning her over to foreign values, wrenching her free from her status,” as a means of “shaking up the native man” and gaining control of him. Grewal (2005) argues that central to discourses on Americanism was the narrative of progress and freedom within a framework of American exceptionalism, wherein the embodiment of an “American way of life” could exist inside and outside of the borders of American nation-state. What must be noted in her statement is that American-ness as a uniquely global concept allows for a shifting and changing

²⁴ Kristoff displays an incessant need in his discussion of women’s oppression in the developing world to describe them, both physically and aesthetically. For example, in his chapter title, “Microcredit: The Financial Revolution,” he describes two Pakistani women (one educated at Wharton, the other Mount Holyoke) who “wanted to save the world, and so they joined the World Bank.” He describes these women as a “striking pair: well-educated, well-connected, well-dressed and beautiful” (189). For a more a thorough discussion on aesthetics and politics, and aesthetics and political empowerment, see Chapter three: “Is there a Queer Democracy? Or Stop Looking Straight: Benazir Bhutto and the Hetero-Erotics of Democracy.”

national subject, a heterogeneity that still explicitly exhibits the fundamental tenets of a liberated, democratic subjectivity, a subject poignantly embodied by Benazir Bhutto. The semantic tools and cultural visualities deployed by the dominant American press to tell Mai's story indeed speak to these theoretical renderings.

The images of Mai are chief ideological sites through which power and pleasure are sought, distributed, and confirmed. The potency of these images of eroticism and violence, submission and rebellion is integrally related to colonialism in its newer political, economic and cultural form. Here, the female body, sexualized or empowered through violence, is intertwined with narratives of economic liberalization (i.e. CARE), local gendered practices (i.e. the *dupatta*) and American opportunity (i.e. human rights, America visibility). Clearly, these representations link back to Moghadam's (1994) argument that women and their bodies are located in national projects of cultural hegemony.

Kristoff's interest in the actions and presentations of brown bodies and subjects is in line with hegemonic expressions of human rights that utilize displays of brown women's bodies as always and already tattered and shattered in ways that invoke a *jouissance* to the American gaze. This visual production of Mai's body, like all brown bodies of human rights interest, extends beyond its actual physicality, situating her as an object of cultural value in a technologically-mediated postmodern and imperial world (Zita 1998). Mai's body, and largely the bodies of racialized and colonized women that have come in contact with the imperial camera, is produced as spectacle by the machinations of power and pleasure that sit at the foundation of American interest. Mai's (un) free body is restored as a body that matters, a discursive representation of freedom that is more real than (her) reality. Because the (neo)colonial context is inherently dehumanizing and inegalitarian, and relies on specific displays of brown and black bodies, it

deprives both human rights discourses and the subjects to which they speak, of freedom or even humanity. By placing Mai, along with other human rights subjects, in the category of the *other*, a position both injurious and inherently unstable – freedom comes to be defined through relation to whiteness as a fantasy.

One of the most compelling and redeeming features of Mai, as an internationalized visual story, is her indigenouslyness – the reading of her body as naturally and normatively Pakistani. This reality is produced palpably (for the viewer) by the physical and feminine sublimity of Mai's photographs. She becomes the means through which the dominant imaginary visualizes, disciplines and inscribes difference, a visuality that relies on both the surface of the body and the conduct of the new empowered subject. Her photographs provide a visual and conceptual fusion of repression meeting emancipation. Through her, a new, neoliberal mode of social perception is established, a way of disciplining difference and making it socially usable, desirable, satisfactory.

Foucault (1982), in *Discipline in Punish*, explains that the panopticon was the architectural design of French prison in which each prisoner and prison staff could be monitored. He describes the theme of the panopticon as "at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency" (p. 217). While this analysis is directed at prisons, Foucault acknowledges how the panopticon metaphor extends into systems of education, medicine, psychiatry, etc. The theory behind the panopticon was that not only should the delinquent's behaviors and movements be observed but the observations should trace back to his motivations, his psychological viewpoints, social positions and upbringings in order to understand any and all proclivities (Foucault 1977: 221). Foucault's (1977) panopticon operates as a central metaphor for the modern production of bodies subjected to multiple spectral

and omnipresent surveillance techniques, fundamentally “normalizing bodies.” But alongside this production of *seen* bodies, I want to suggest, with other visual scholars, that meanings of the body are partly produced in a semiotically infused physical exchange of erotic energy between object-looked-upon and the adoring gaze (Rose 2007; Zita 1998; Meese 1992). Hence, I want to position Foucault’s original panopticon as one that is erotic, pleasurable in its satisfaction, accomplishment, and production to the American liberal gaze.

Combining visual scholars’ theorizations on the erotic gaze with Foucault’s panopticon, we see how this erotic panopticon magnifies, manipulates and multiplies images of these bodies. Mai, read less through her subjectivity and more through her brown female body within this erotic panopticon, becomes mythic, hyper-oppressed and simultaneously hyper-enabled. This erotic panopticon discursively produces a feminine, corporeal Pakistan by successive waves of neocolonial and neoliberal ideologies to incite a pleasurable nostalgia around women’s bodies as violable, victim, and virtuous. As a hyper-represented body in media, narrowing geopolitical complexities into visual nuggets of alternating *jouissance* and fear, Mai’s photographs function to pleasure the viewers’ gaze with a viscerally-felt connection. I am not saying that the pleasure induced by the imagery of Mukhtar Mai is the same as erotica, in the conventional sense. Instead I am attending to how visualities of brown women as victims of sexual violence constitute them as erotic nationals, whereby their victimization invokes political *jouissance* as it affirms narratives about dangerous brown men as well as a visual *jouissance* in that the dominant gaze directed at these oppressed brown bodies underwrites a neocolonial sexualization of the *other*. So, just as Kristoff is pleased with Mai’s “liberatory” practice of shaking hands with men, her broken display after her assault incites a different form of pleasure, one we see at the nexus of eroticism and violence.

As an example of an image that communicates the affective essence of pleasure (through eroticized violence), I return to Figure one. This stylized, emotionally graphic, starkly colored photograph intended to depict a woman brutalized by sexual assault, is interlaced with an eroticization of the brown, female body. Every detail in this display is ideological even as it appears to have captured Mai in her most organic state. On aesthetic grounds, this image of Mai can be condemned for its derivativeness, repetition, vulgar sentimentality, garishness and crass simplicity. On ideological grounds, this photograph is part of a commercial culture industry that feeds off the credulity and ignorance of the American liberal-ish masses, in particular as it reinscribes patriarchal, feudal structures of representation. Ideologically and aesthetically, Figure one of Mai incites a pleasure, a thrill of transcendence into this *Real* space. Mai's affirmative positioning in the American media and her hyper-enabled Pakistani feminine and feminist traversal taps into an American erotic imagination that fantasizes about supernatural. Mai stabilizes in the American imaginary a (brown) woman who is pure, loyal, modest, forgiving, patient – the balancing symbolism of womanhood but also a super hero in her ability to take on an unimaginable oppressive national system — Pakistan. In many ways, then, Mai's visual story is a mastery of dressing up psychic wounds in brown fantasies.

This is not to say that Mai doesn't experience her body and subjectivity uniquely. But discourses of rescue, particularly those emerging out of 9/11, become read through the visibility, sexualized liberty, and entrance into political/civil spheres by the female subject/body. As an eroticized victim of a high profile crime, Mai's figure operates somewhat similarly to the eroticization of high-profile crimes in America. Writing about the ways high profile crimes become hotbeds of social causes, Chancer (2005) argues that such crimes operate as cultural events that, for better or worse, give concrete expression to latent social conflicts in American

society. Chancer explores how criminal cases become conflated with larger social causes on a collective level, “producing wrought ambivalent effects on social movements simultaneous to pleasure and satisfaction in the spectator” (2005:78). This point is relevant here. On the one hand, Mai’s high profile rape offers important opportunities for emotional expression and raises awareness of social issues. On the other hand, it confounds the American-Pakistan geopolitical nexus, taps into the pleasures incited by eroticized violence, and meshes race and sex fantasies onto the body of the Pakistani woman subject. Consequently, the long history of colonial photography that produces, with direct political ends in sight, the racialized *other* as either hypersexual/hypersexist simultaneous to generating erotic possibilities out of violence against (brown) women is strategically dismissed (McClintock 1997).

Instead, the erotic panopticon restores Mai’s desirable womanhood. But it also desperately reproduces the good/damaged woman divide, while smearing the edges of the damaged woman moral panic. This avowal of Mai, despite the mark of deviant sex (her gang rape), allows the American gaze the specular pleasure of seeing Mai, within the dominant paradigm of femininity, as virtuous but violable, chaste but inevitably carnal, good but aphrodisiacal. I am not suggesting that the media intrigued by her cast her in this eroticized manner, but the work is already done by the cultural misogyny in place that creates, despises, and eroticizes violence against women. The paradigmatic representation of Mai that comes through in Figure one is an embodiment of forced sex, in all its horror and fantasy. This image, in its hyper-circulation, restores the violence against her even as it attempts to posit her as an agentic subject

Earlier, I argued that Mai’s images operate as a double bluff, where the viewer is both distanced by and engaged in Mai’s reality. I want to call upon this double bluff again within the

context of the erotic pleasures incited by human rights visualities. Within this ethical regime, the histories of fear around demoralized/damaged women undergird their offering of freedom; as such, we can see an almost fetishistic disavowal of the possibilities of women's anger. The sublimated thought "*I know that women are angry but I refuse to assume the full consequences of that knowledge*" undergirds human rights discourses. So, while human rights recognizes the anger that mobilizes women to act against misogynistic practices and catalyzes its machines to put in place condemnation of these acts in the name of rights and civility, the sublimated underbelly of the axis of empire allows for this knowledge to remain partial and take on the form of pleasure on brown bodies as the primary landscape of contemporary oppression. Put simply, human rights regimes recast this anger within the most comfortable framework of economic advancement, educational opportunities and access to American (read better) quality of life. This becomes even more apparent in the next two chapters where I argue that the pleasure incited by Mai's photographic presentations is cast against Bhutto's anglicized aesthetics and the dangerous, angry and monstrous femininity of the Red Mosque martyrs. Inherent in these images and the discursive fields within which their social meanings are produced is the fantasy that all these subjects can/will experience freedom in the same way, and if they don't, they are dismissed.

The strategies of the imperial camera aim to revive and restabilize Mai as a heroine. The camera seems to stave off the negative images of broken bodies, of sexual violence, of heterosexual wrongdoing, and death, even as it uses all of these tropes to produce the racialized feminine *other*. But the recalcitrant danger that the photographs invoke require closer interrogation. Mai's body as fraying on the edges of discursive dangers speaks to the holes in human rights operations that can never truly liberate women, any women, from their feminine corporealities. *Hetero-erotic* and patriarchal readings of the female body are both challenged and

deployed by this regime. Insofar as human rights discourses cannot contain this seductive reading of the feminine, racialized *other*, it relentlessly uses it to promulgate its rhetoric. Moreover, the erotic panopticon marks out the shadows of race hatred and fantasy as well as white/American paranoia in sexual racism while holding these elements in check as long as Mai stays sublime.²⁵ This sublimity relies on her body, a body buoyed by the forces of human rights regimes and their constant restoration of Mai's individual power and her feminine purity. Mai's body is situated at the intersection of a number of significant determinants – race, nation, class, gender, sexuality, violence, ability – but the ethereal quality of Mai is entwined with a life story that hails the American dream.

It is important to remind ourselves that the contours of freedom in the visual world are, at the least, traced, if not broadly established, by the photographer/writer's work. The photographer, and hence savior of Mai, is and always has been predominantly, literally and symbolically, a white man: Nicholas Kristoff. And not just any white man, but the whitest and most masculine version possible: the great adventurer, free to roam the globe in search of its visual treasure, flamboyantly virile in his freedom from observation and evaluation, and his bravery in entering the dangerous realms of the earth, in continents still dark for most of his audience (Said 1979, O'Kelly 1975, Lutz & Collins 1993). Cultural capital accrues to those who represent the *others*, rather than to those who are represented, producing a version of what Michel Foucault (1979) calls the "speaker's benefit." In representing Mai, (Kristoff as proxy for Pakistani women), Kristoff is also perforce re-presenting himself (Kristoff as portrait). These deliberate narrativizations must be noted as constituting the social field of human rights, weaving into its

²⁵ The sublime is the quality of greatness or vast magnitude, whether physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual or artistic. The term especially refers to a greatness with which nothing else can be compared and which is beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement or imitation.

potential liberation a nuanced power relation threaded with colored and sexualized bodies.

The cultural anxiety embedded in human rights discourses is what ultimately produces this erotic panopticon, an anxiety that multiplies with each figure of human rights – from Mai to Woineshet – mobilizing fears of brown masculine sexual excess/power and hopes of brown feminine sexual containment/powerlessness. Hence, embedded in human rights discourse’s visual reliance on brown women’s bodies as always and already savaged is the persistent demonic portrayal of brown male bodies. Drawing on Jasbir Paur’s (2007: xxiii) point, “The depictions of masculinity most rapidly disseminated and globalized at this historical juncture are terrorist masculinities: failed and perverse, these emasculated men always have femininity as their reference point of malfunction, and are always metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of mind and body – homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, madness and disease.” In fact, in Kristoff and Wudunn’s film premiere, they identify that part of the problem for women in the developing world is that “public space in the third world has the same atmosphere as, say, a men’s locker room.” In *Half the Sky*, the same authors use the language “testosterone-heavy” to describe the public spaces of the third world. The *Newsweek* photograph (see. fig 1.3) discussed in the previous chapter captures this fear in a gross exaggeration of angry brown male bodies. Undoubtedly, the exaggerated pathological condition attributed to brown and black men in the global south is a deeply useful political and social rhetoric in these war on terror times.

The specter of brown-on-brown violence that emerges out of Pakistan, specifically, has precise material effects. One, it generates fears that lead American authorities to specific military operations in Pakistan. The idea of a Pakistani male menace ignites the contemporary production of the “subject that is supposed to terrorize and rape” (Zizek 2008: 103). Even Kristoff’s statement on Mai speaking out against her perpetrators, where he states: “It’s difficult for people

outside of this place to understand what kind of courage that took” regenerates the notion of brown masculinity as operating through virus-like masses, maliciously aligned against women’s voices (*CBS Special Report*). This production allows us to separate brown women, who become Kant’s sublime, from brown men, who become the screen for the projection of American fears, anxieties and secret desires (Zizek 2008; Pear 2007). It is here that Zizek’s (2004: 128) “obscene underbelly” holds intense poignancy in deconstructing Mai as a visual symbol of human rights and (neo)liberal multiculturalism. Zizek (2004: 128) explains that any normative structure or ideological rhetoric relies on some unwritten rules that must remain unspoken in order to sustain itself. “These rules always have an obscene dimension”²⁶ (Zizek 2004: 128). Human rights, as a normative and desirable ideological apparatus, has explicit principles (rights, civil society, autonomy, bodily dignity and so on), but in order for these explicit rules to function they need an obscene supplement. That is, all the obscene unwritten rules that sustain the need for human rights regimes – pleasure of tolerating the other, the erotic desire to discipline the other, the hyper visual display of the other, the opportunity to gaze at the other, limiting the scope of what the other can accomplish, the unabashed reliance on the dangerous other and so on. The cruel irony of the situation is that all these productions of the racialized feminine/masculine *other* and the projections of danger and anxiety onto particular bodies occur under the language of freedom and rights.

It is not my attempt to dismiss any and all attempts to address violence against women and the ways in which visibility can create awareness around these issues. Undoubtedly, Mai’s voice and story are vital to any liberatory project, in that any such project recognizes the plurality

²⁶ Zizek (2004), in an interview with Glyn Daly, engages in a scathing critique of contemporary feminism in the developed Western countries, pointing specifically to American feminism. He says “it is always ready to legitimize army interventions into feminist concerns and does not shrink from making dismissive patronizing remarks about third world populations – from its hypocritical obsession with clitoridectomy to (Catherine) McKinnon’s racist remarks about how ethnic cleansing and rape is in the Serbian genes.”

of voices. However, it is also vital to note that voice, as a central tenet in liberal paradigms often contains essentialist epistemological positions regarding subjectivity which become regulated and manifest as forms of discipline (Britzman 1989). The brutal instrumentalization of brown male subjectivity as only a subject that rapes and terrorizes and a brown female subjectivity that can and must be saved by white hands is what I seek to interrogate.

Mai, as the desirable racialized feminine *other* through whom American fantasies on the undesirable racialized masculine *other* are legitimized shows precisely how human rights discourses exclude or foreclose upon true possibilities of freedom (Hunt 2007; Grewal 2005). The epistemological moves that establish human rights foundations and grant authority to their (racialized and imperial) practices are undergirded by hidden conditions. Today's culture of human rights subsists through a radical intolerance towards any true *otherness*; any real threat to existing conventions. So while, Mai's visualities are understood as redressing historical exclusions of dis/empowered Muslim women, they actually operate as essential to the diversification and reinvigoration of the dominant neoliberal culture and subject (Grewal 2005; Siobhán 2005).

The tenuous reach of this dominant neoliberalization of human rights practices is curiously demonstrated in both the convincing images of victim/heroine binary and the rehabilitative strategies of human rights that follow. Human rights regimes appropriate and claim Mai's revolutionary feminist laboring within the common sensical, natural development of girls and women into autonomous, self-defining subjects. It is precisely this neutralization of Mai's revolutionary work into the spontaneously accepted human rights agenda that marks the power of this regime at its purest and its most effective. Human rights appearance as non-ideological is

what allows it to proliferate and what renders it difficult to critique. Kristoff and Wudunn illuminate my point in their claim that human rights are good (for) American national security.

According to Kristoff (237), “emancipation of women offers another dimension in which to tackle geopolitical challenges such as terrorism.” Kristoff argues that after 9/11, the US poured money and weapons into Pakistan to help fight terrorism, which led to U.S unpopularity, the Musharraf regime’s instability and the extremists’ popularity. Kristoff (2009: 237) stated: “Imagine if we had used the money instead to promote education and microfinance in rural Pakistan, through Pakistani organizations. The result would likely have been greater popularity for the United States and the greater involvement of women in society.” Kristoff goes on to say that when women gain a voice in society, there’s evidence of less violence. “After the Musharraf government collapsed in 2008, a cloud lifted from Mukhtar’s operations, the intelligence agencies began to spy on terrorists instead of on Mukhtar” (79). Using the example of Bangladesh – a country part of Pakistan up until 1971 which “suffered the same political violence and poor leadership as Pakistan,” Kristoff and Wudunn (2009) assure us of a strikingly different (gendered) future. While they tip their hat to the varying reasons for this difference – “the cancer of violence that spread from Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Bengali intellectual tradition which moderated extremism”– they argue that surely one of those reasons is that girls in Bangladesh are more likely to attend schools and, afterwards to hold jobs. As they state: “the upshot of this is that Bangladesh today has a significant civil society and a huge garment industry full of women who power a dynamic export sector” (81).

Embedded in this highly popular hypothesis is the irony of the invisibility of American terrorism, which corroborates the most poignant discursive shift of these times, the move towards secrecy versus the desire for visibility. Kristoff’s proposition silences, despite its heavy

emphasis on women's voice, power altogether – whose terrorism do we see? Whose terror is rendered invisible? Whose body is afforded visibility? Who remains unrepresented? Foucault's (1982/1977) notions of governmentality and expert practice²⁷ come together in this interplay of texts and images to form a thick account of power, where (Kristoff's) expertise is mobilized to better the other and the *other* betters (her) "self." By linking gender discrimination to national security, first world hegemony is not just glossed over, but strategically re-imagined, perfectly reconstituted and rightfully enshrined within the field of (brown) global human rights.

Talal Asad (2003) asks, "Who – in the world of nation-states – has the authority to interpret and the power to promote the conditions that facilitate human rights and the human they sustain?" Asad's critical query and Kristoff's more directly articulated connection between human rights and western norms demonstrate the symbolic mastery of human rights as what Max Weber (Weber 1919/1994) calls charismatic domination. Like Weber's charisma, human rights discourses function as an effective medium for the horizontal diffusion of charismatic qualities (such as rights, autonomy, access to material reality, discipline) among lay people. As a form of charismatic domination, human rights operate as a regime of truth that has taken control of the vocabulary, concepts and meanings of oppression and freedom. As antiracist, decolonial feminists, we are positioned to formulate the problems it invents in the words it offers. As an eminent body of knowledge on free and oppressed subjectivities, human rights regimes have captured our imagination through a mastery of symbols of brown women's bodies and

²⁷ Foucault's (1977) governmentality refers less to a mythological symbolic practice that depoliticizes social relations and more to the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty. Foucault deploys the concept of governmentality as a "guideline" for a "genealogy of the modern state" from Ancient Greece up until contemporary forms of neo-liberalism.

incantation of free, white bodies. It is a regime to which we submit willingly because of our thirst for freedom, our hunger for pleasure.

My critique of the pleasure interwoven in liberal discourses is not unfamiliar. It is a recognition that a banal feature of advanced capitalistic societies is the desire to consume. However, in firmly situating pleasure within human rights visualities and semantic conventions, I push this recognition from a banal feature to a primary quality of the discourse. The pleasure the audience and advocates of human rights advancements gain through conceiving of culture in visual terms, “clearly bounded,” “oppressed,” “sexual savaged/s,” allows for seduction of the *other* through visual pleasure. But as we know, the U.S. doesn’t only seduce its opponents through pleasure. It is prepared to use devastating force. The war in Afghanistan was presented by the American media not only as the pursuit of terrorists but also as the liberation of Afghan women. This idea allowed for the proliferation of another pleasurable idea – the American woman as free. Mai’s hyper-symbolization as victim *cum* rights advocate engenders the idea that freedom and America are virtually interchangeable.

It is also worth asking why other renowned women’s rights cases in Pakistan, such as that of Dr. Shazia Khalid, are received so differently than Mukhtar Mai. Dr. Shazia Khalid (see fig.8), while less a sensationalized figure than Mai, was raped by a Pakistani Army officer in



Figure 2.8, *CBC (cbc.com)*, 2006

2005 on a military base where she was an onsite physician. Her rape surfaced quickly to the national press and then was just as quickly swept under the rug. Her case, however, attracted publicity and outrage internationally when then – President Musharraf proclaimed to an inter/national audience that “crying rape was an easy way for a Pakistani woman to make money and get a visa to Canada” (*CBC* 2006; *Washington Post* 2006). Eventually Khalid did obtain a visa to Great Britain, however, and left Pakistan with her husband and son and settled in London.

When Laura Bush, in a video tribute at the *Glamour Magazine* Banquet, (8 November 2005) says, “Please don’t assume that it’s only a story of heartbreak. Mukhtaran... proves that one woman can really change the world” it is important to note how shifting the focus from a woman who fought the system and won (somewhat) to a woman who escaped to the suburbs of London (Shazia Khalid) challenges our understanding of American power, human rights regimes and the interlaced notion of visual and narrative desire and pleasure. I want to ask, why isn’t the human rights regime enraged by Khalid’s rape? Where is the American audience to speak up against her lack of justice by the Pakistani judicial system? Where are her Western advocates when she is coerced to relocate from her homeland to the Pakistani diasporas of Great Britain? In the field of human rights, there is perhaps no more important set of questions, given that the

power of human rights resides in the “business of making visible acts of extreme cruelty” (Williams 2010: 35).

The answer, in part, lies in the unfortunate fact that the realities of Khalid’s case don’t fuel the same global infuriation. The gaping visual and discursive silence on Khalid’s case raises interesting questions about which women become global symbols of human rights and which fall to the margins. Locating Khalid in the dominant gaze of the imperial camera and the hegemonic field of human rights, it becomes quickly apparent that in this rape of a Pakistani woman, the proverbial shoe doesn’t fit. Khalid’s rape by a military official, her status as a doctor, as a wife, as a mother, her lack of visual presence in the inter/national press, and her eventual exodus from Pakistan, all bring to light a powerful indictment of human rights regimes. Is it the crime that interests this regime, the act of sexual and physical violation that occurs against women across the globe, with soaring numbers in America; or is it the subject, a particular subject, that captivates this regime and, hence, the click of the camera?

Khalid’s visual story lacks cinematic currency, with only few images of her available in all presses combined. Her rape is not a decree by feudal lords that demonstrate the backwardness of the Pakistani nation-state but by a military officer on a military base on which she was a medical practitioner. Her rape is too common to the American gaze, which operates in a particular denial about its own military assaults on American female soldiers. Khalid is not an illiterate, peasant woman by whom the American woman may measure her literacy and worldliness. Khalid is an educated professional Pakistani woman living and practicing medicine inside the borders of Pakistan, disrupting the American and human rights imagination on the racialized feminine *other*. Even Musharraf’s deeply troubling statement that catalyzed awareness (finally) around Khalid’s rape fizzled out rapidly because it accessed a sublimated fear around

immigration practices into American and Canada. Finally, Khalid unsuccessfully battled the system (with the help of activist and lawyer Asma Jahangir) and eventually due to pressure from the military regime, left Pakistan and began a new life in London. Khalid's invisibility in the global gaze juxtaposed to Mai's hypervisibility can be framed through Jacques Ranciere's (2003) term, "distribution of the sensible":

The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community. It defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. it is a delimitation of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.

Rancière's (2003) point poignantly elucidates how women's bodies and stories become the surface on which competing and shifting notions of freedom and oppression are screened within the realm of neocolonial global culture. Khalid's departure from her homeland functions curiously differently than other famously galvanized human rights cases, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali (author of *Infidel*). Unlike Ali, Khalid accesses a deeply sublimated self-denial embedded in the contemporary marriage of neoliberalism and human rights within global contexts. Both neoliberalism and human rights are fields that rely on particular discursive formations to promote themselves – the first resting on human intelligence, self-ownership and material acquisition and the latter on emotion, natural rights and a "state of being like us." Combined, these intelligent and emotional machines deny that more than likely the subject produced is one who is likely to escape her hellish confines, rather than reform it. That Khalid did just this alludes to the more rooted battle of human rights than the one that gets publicly acclaimed – that is, the battle to tear down the socio-ideological wall and to change society so that people will no longer desperately try to escape their own world.

Instead, in the international field of human rights, Khalid disappears and Mai takes the stage. Figure nine speaks to this poignantly. Figure 9 is a close-up photograph of Mukhtar Mai, draped in her *dupatta*. She is smiling and holding her book, *In the Name of Honor*. Figure eight is the cover of her book, *In the Name of Honor*, published in 2007 by Washington Square Press with a forward by Kristoff. The cover photograph is not unlike Figure one, evoking similar auratic tragedy but Mai is strategically dressed in white, her head-covering white, her gaze again directed away from the camera. The construction of the subject-in-need, Mai, interpellates, organizes and mobilizes subjects who come to see themselves as bearers of the responsibility to rescue –good humanitarians who, however critical of imperialism, come to participate in the ethos of Empire. Indeed, the publication of Mai’s book and its subsequent position in the *New York Times* bestseller list, speaks poignantly to the “market” piece of human rights – its ironically capitalist dimensions. This image, and the publication of her book, elucidates that human rights has become a floating signifier that can be attached to or detached from various subjects, with the flash of a camera or the ink of a pen held by the most powerful nation-states. Asad (2003: 158) sums up this elegantly when he says, “who is to be counted as human, what the capabilities are of the human subject, will be decided through the global market.”

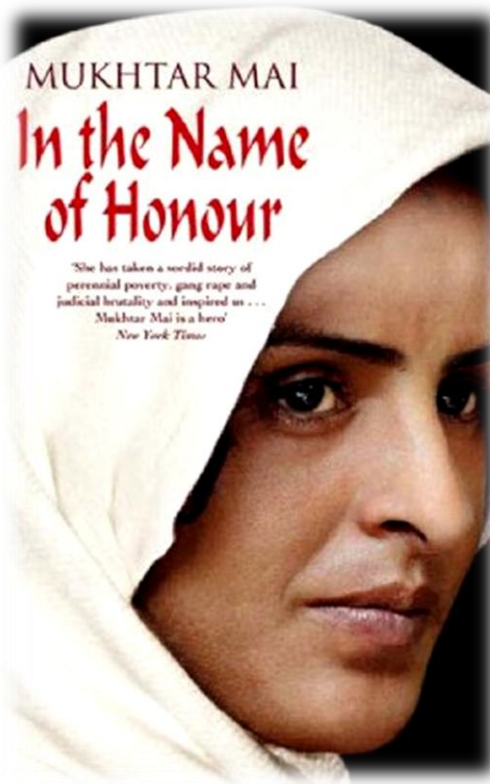


Figure 2.9

But Mai is more than a symbol – she demonstrates a complex subject positioning and resistance that human rights discourse, in its hegemonic manifestation, lacks the language to describe and the epistemic grounds to understand. Her revolutionary possibilities, her radical resistances are made to fit the vernacular of contemporary times, insofar as her contribution to women in rural Pakistan is folded into some “appropriate” and desirable American category, co-opted by developmental discourse and institutions of microfinance. Is it not significant that the Figure of Mukhtar Mai, a gang-rape victim who took on the judiciary of Pakistan and won, is presented not as a reminder of some decolonial, tame-free radical past but as the benefits of modern Western power itself?

Who domesticates whom? Mai as the revolutionary citizen-subject

Admittedly, as I began this chapter, the emotional effect of her images kept assaulting me even when I felt I'd developed a desensitization to them. As I worked through the story of Mai I found myself cringing, with each edit, at the term *gang rape*. Every time I looked at Figure one of Mai, I felt my intellectual faculties tighten so as not to reinforce the possible emotional impact of her photograph. Mai, visually and narratively, distressed me, moved me, upset me. But simultaneously, as I wrote this chapter, I felt my feminism, my decoloniality, challenge and test me. I saw Mai as a figure who defied the imaginary logic of human rights in ways that kept getting erased by the perpetual embrace of her by the dominant gaze and rhetoric. Yes, indeed, Mai adheres to the developmental narrative of Pakistani women, which underlies dominant Euro-American discourses on non-western women's empowerment. But even as she does this, she confronts it. I see Mai as both an articulation of the structures within which she lives and moves and as a subversion of those very structures that contain her, both nationally and internationally. I want to, then, close this chapter with an attempt to make explicit the revolutionary nature of Mai's methodologies of liberation – a liberatory method that emerges from her location of political, national and cultural insurgency that is demonstrative of Sandavol's (2000) differential consciousness and resistance.

In her important theoretical treatise, Chela Sandavol (2000: 68.9) defines "the methodology of the oppressed as a set of processes, procedures and technologies for decolonizing the imagination." Sandavol pursues these lines of affinity among and between women of color's oppositional consciousness, a faculty that develops under circumstances of schizophrenic oppression, forbidden freedoms, shattered minds and marginalized bodies from war, poverty, violence. Under what Sandoval (2000: 10.1) calls "late-capitalist, postmodern,

neocolonial global systems of exchange,” emerges a new possibility for revolutionary subjectivity, a hermeneutics of love, a decolonial, unalienated imaginary.

Mukhtar Mai, under deeply demoralizing circumstances, rose to the challenges of a late-capitalist, postmodern, neocolonial, patriarchal society. In the same rural town of Meerwala where she was gang raped and forced to walk nude through the town, Mai remained and opened a school for girls and is in fact trying to enroll her rapists’ daughters in her school. The *Mukhtar Mai School for Girls* is in plain sight from the house where the four men raped her. She has, according to a 2009 CBS special report on Pakistani women’s status, also opened two other schools for girls, a crisis center for abused women, and a clinic offering free legal help. By no means a small feat, Mai and her work crucially mark the feminist culture and oppositional energy that emerges from such oppressive circumstances. Not formally educated herself, her feminist laboring and desire illustrate that Mai understands key aspects of women’s freedom in a transnational context, particularly as they intersect with struggles around citizenship, fundamentalist movements, rights language, war, violence, poverty, civil liberties, and social/sexual identities.

Clearly, Mai’s resistance is a much more complex category than its dominant framing within the parameters of American visibility, human rights or liberal-humanist narratives of voice offer. As a shifting citizen-subject, she meshes together transhistorical, oppositional anticolonial, and pro-woman feminist methodologies that elude symbolization. Mai opens up possibilities for a decolonial, anti-patriarchal revolution, through her body, her public subjectivity and at the doorsteps of her organizations – a revolution that is strategically submerged by developmental discourses and underutilized by feminists around the world. Mai’s feminist laboring and hybrid subject positioning renders modernist categorizations of freedom at

best inconsistent, and at worst, vain and useless. As she moves from victim to advocate, from Pakistan to America, from loyal citizen to critical subject, from woman to feminist, she employs a shifting subjectivity that utilizes different modes of liberatory methods simultaneously. Reading Mai as a figure who disrupts compels us to see how she challenges this American-centric inter/nationalist patriarchal terrain in ways that refigure key aspects of gender and freedom and bodies, grounding each of these in political, economic, cultural, and spatial contexts of state and cultural power.

As Hardt and Negri (2000) highlight, insidious technologies of power, such as war and violence, also constitute the possibility for the project of the multitude – the multiple and plural social masses who engage in social action aimed at transformation and liberation. Mai's work can be located in this multitude in a number of ways. First, Mai does her work within the dangerous state of a neocolonial apartheid that insists on difference (in oppression) while it contends that freedom is resolutely the same. Mai reworks western narratives of freedom through her public subjectivity and corporeality (i.e. her body movements, her persistent enrollment of her perpetrators daughters, her insistence on the *dupatta*, her pro-woman language, etc...) confronting the assumption that emancipation for women can be wholly consumed by the powers that be. Second, Mai's work and her words as sites of resistance illustrate that intense violence doesn't produce intense hate, that pleasure is rooted inside and outside the home and nation. She blurs the lines between feminist rethinking of empowerment and state-sponsored assistance. She allows us to identify the ways those who occupy impossible spaces can transform them into vibrant, livable spaces of possibility. Third, her labor and her words demonstrate Sandavol's nuanced love – a decolonial love for national communities and people but one with new logics of

affiliation, an affiliation that is connected to the intimacy and power of women's lives and the lands in which they develop relationships to their bodies and minds.

Mukhtar Mai's declaration in a *BBC* article (*bbc.com*, 21 June 2005) is exemplary of these points. She stated, "But I feel the government is very suspicious of me. I wonder why? Maybe they feel had I gone to the US, I would have talked against Pakistan. Little do they know that had anyone dared say a word against my country I would have shut that person up there and then." Her statement works against the possibility of her rape being used as evidence of Pakistani barbarism (which indeed it was) even as it simultaneously renders intelligible nationalist discourses. What is important point to note here is that Mai's case was first brought to the judicial eye by a male Muslim cleric and then picked up by Asma Jahangir, a Pakistani feminist activist. Both these crucial facts are undercut by the American media sensationalism around her case, which framed Mai's success around discourses of American visibility. Mai's statement disrupts the binary of women belonging to either empire or nation, encouraging critical feminist and social justice actors to move towards culturally situated, pluralistic understandings of these categories.

Figure ten illuminates this point even more powerfully. This photograph, (which was not widely distributed) is a snapshot of a women's rally. Mai is at the center of this image, her hand raised by her fellow activists as a sign of victory. A small but humble smile spreads across her lips, a look of wisdom in her eyes. The rally is successful but there is much work to be done. The radical reality of Mai's work evidences a decolonial logic which displaces the hetero-patriarchal, imperial gaze from where it's nestled in the lap of natural law and instead launches its critique of hegemonic constructions of both nation and woman and freedom from the vantage point of an uncontained, impossible subject.



Figure 2.10, *pakistaniat.com*, June 2006

In Mai's words (*Ms. Magazine*, Spring 2007), "I am battling against a system and I know it will take time. This is not an easy task, but I am trying to bring the first drop of water in a heavy rain." An alternative resistance movement is indeed notable in Mai's work as an instance of situated knowledge and shifting subjectivity as she catalyzes civil society. Mai's work overturns and disrupts the familiar binary opposition that structures freedom in neoliberal discourses and human rights regimes. She offers a more complicated formulation of the reality of doing women's rights work in the backyard of state and feudal powers, militarized patriarchy and violent domesticity. Mai's revolutionary work is formed in and through her relation to developmental dialogues, even as she reterritorializes this space. Her radical work, humble and victorious, places the brown female body and subject at the center of national and transnational public space. Dominant state and (inter)nationalist frameworks attempt to inculcate Mai into the domestic human rights subject, yet she remains ambivalent and impossible against their neocolonial logic. The imbrications of her story into developmental discourses to reclaim the

“truth” of modernity and its machines of war, hetero-democracy and human rights, pushes postcolonial subjectivity towards more elusive and fragmented modes of being and being represented.

The physical and psychic gestures of Mai that allow the west to visualize her and come to desire her simultaneously threaten to give us the experience precisely of the Lacanian gaze, the realization that behind our visuality is nothing but our lack of reality/knowledge. In other words, in getting too close to Mai’s materiality, a citizen-subject who disrupts and revolutionizes women’s issues would stare back at us. While it may seem that Mai’s differential consciousness and human rights discourses do share an engagement with affect and agency, or emotion and politics, Mai’s resistance doesn’t rely on a narrow and deeply carnal affect of fantasized racialized female bodies. Instead her affective agency emerges out of the radical ambiguity of freedom and oppression; of being seen and rendering oneself invisible and visible for others.

This is made aptly visible in Mai’s live *CBS* interview during her visit to the U.S. In the interview, she was repeatedly asked, so what it is like to be gang raped? Mai indignantly replied: “I don’t really want to talk about that.” Kristoff, (2009:73), the biggest advocate of her visibility, noted that “Mukhtar had a disastrous live interview on the *CBS* morning news in which she was asked about it (the rape).” And when she refused to answer, Kristoff said, “there was an awkward silence.” This was just one among many American interviews. Like Fanon’s (1965) Antillean spectator who suddenly finds himself the fetishized object of the gaze in the European movie house, Mai’s finds herself uncomfortably aligned with the norms of American confession within the dominant white American imaginary. Her response to these American interviews during her trip to the U.S. speaks to both her resistance to the clean visibility offered by American public culture and to the self-denying but vainglory of American voyeurism. Mai’s

refusal to confess *what it's like to be gang raped* in the CBS interview and her earlier rebuttal of anti-Pakistan sentiment are categorical rejections of colonial logic and an assertion of her own enlightened politicization, despite the perpetual framings of her as illiterate. Mai's candid response here undercuts the paradigmatic discursive visual formation of brown women. Her journey is not a triumphant entrance into American visibility with an indigenous return to home, a passive acquiescence into American voyeurism.

In rejecting the progress narrative embedded in Mai's story of freedom through American visibility and renunciation of Pakistan, I have attempted to enable a queer reworking of the very space of freedom itself, a space made possible by Mai. The ostensibly rigid binaries of speech and silence that Mai's story is located in are queered through her own radical silence, her critical speech. Hence, labor and speech are precisely what make Mai a queer feminist figure. Queerness can be understood regarding Mai, not as pertaining to sexual identity and practice, which perhaps may also be possible, but as speaking to a mode of resistant feminist cultural practice that prevents the reconstitution of patriarchal, neoliberal masculinity and that disturbs the space of homeland, the notion that freedom exists outside Pakistani borders, and the singularity of the normative path to female empowerment. So I read deliberately against the grain. Mai belongs to no modern or postmodern ideal. She is not the Deleuzian schizophrenic subject nor is she liberalism's desired citizen, endowed and endowing others with rights. Entrenched in biopolitical wars on race and gender, Mai, as a deliberate subject, shifts and moves, challenges and embraces, enters and exits the archives of women's lives, the destroyed lines of women's lives, and she picks up the pieces, hers and others. She is a story of rupture, splitting open the possibilities of freedom.

Three

Is there a Queer Democracy? Or – Stop Looking Straight: Benazir Bhutto and the Hetero-erotics of Democracy

Instead of interrogating a category, we will interrogate a woman. It will at least be more agreeable. Denise Riley, 1988, 35

“I do not paint a portrait to look like the subject; rather does the person grow to look like [her] portrait. Salvador Dali, 1943

On December 27th, 2007, Benazir Bhutto, the leader of Pakistan’s largest political party, was killed. I was in Pakistan at the time of her death, attending a family wedding in Karachi. I had just come from an intense day and half conference in Lahore ironically titled “Pakistan in the Global (Dis) Order.” I sat with several of my cousins at a women’s salon, when one woman came running into the room, weeping, saying that Bhutto had been killed. My cousins and I didn’t believe it. We agreed that Bhutto was killed off every day by her foes, only to emerge alive and lovely as always. But indeed, the young girl was correct and we were quickly shooed out of the salon so they could shut their doors before the riots broke out. On our way home, our driver quickly informed us as he raced through the densely-packed, narrow streets of Clifton, a Karachi neighborhood, that the roads were dangerous, the people angry, and the city would soon go mad. My cousins and I, all part of the Pakistani diaspora that left Karachi a decade or more back and settled in varying parts of the U.S and U.K., again scoffed. The city would mourn, indeed, but political madness among the masses? This was an urban legend.

Again, we stood corrected. Within two hours, violent uprisings and protest in the forms of arson and killings swept through the nation, predominantly in Karachi, which was known as Bhutto’s most loyal city. Stories of car and bus burnings, government offices set ablaze, civilians pulled out of cars and beaten, and store lootings rang in everyone’s ears as the nation sat glued to

the few working channels on television. In a matter of minutes, the entire city of Karachi was shut down, wedding receptions and parties canceled, businesses closed, stores padlocked, military officials arrived on main roads ordered to shoot on sight any miscreant behavior. The country had officially gone into mourning.

Unprepared for a three-day city shutdown, we had all headed to a two bedroom flat in the heart of the city, already occupied by extended family. And so I sat with twenty or so extended family and friends, entranced and devastated by her death and even more by the aftermath of her assassination. The political madness that hit the streets within hours of her murder covered TV screens, instilling fear, trepidation and awe. The street violence that followed Bhutto's murder was a powerful testimonial to Fanon's²⁸ (1963) contribution on violent corporeal agency – the only agency afforded to the colonized. His tragic accuracy politicized and saddened me. These Fanonian readings intercepted my thoughts, compelling me to understand how, caught up in the spiral of history, these dispossessed subjects of globalization trigger/ed change through the echo of violence.

I sat with my family, listening to tales of Bhutto's manipulative endeavors, her phoniness, the hatred towards her pro-western rhetoric, the hypnosis of her rhetoric. "She was beautiful," someone said. And "smart shrewd actually"²⁹, another voice chimes in. Her death is poetic justice, they agree, deserved. She had laid herself bare as a target, beckoning her enemies with her pro-western stance, her hyper secularism and perhaps, even her femaleness. But, Moon must have loved her, someone said. They all turn to me. After all, she was a woman and I was a feminist.

²⁸ Fanon (1963) in *Wretched of the Earth* engages in a devastating treatise on violence in the colony, among the colonized.

²⁹ The conversation actually took place in Urdu. The word used to describe Bhutto was *churi*, which literally translates to knife, as a means to imply how sharp, shrewd and intelligent she was but through a largely pejorative framing.

I open this chapter with this memory of the evening of Bhutto's death to show that there are many ways to talk about Bhutto. While there is no unified narrative of events that capture Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan's political scene, nor a disengaged objective recital of facts that detail her political work, there are a series of common facts that require articulation in order to establish her importance to feminist discourses around the globe. Benazir Bhutto, a prominent political leader of the Peoples' Party of Pakistan (PPP), was often depicted as the symbol of democracy by both Western political discourses and Pakistani national politics. She was overwhelmingly read by both political discourses in Pakistan and in the West as the solution to Pakistan's national crisis, in terms of resisting the rise of Islamization and developing a democratic nation-state.

Born in 1953, Benazir Bhutto was reared in Pakistani politics under her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who founded the Peoples Party of Pakistan (PPP); presiding over Pakistan from 1971 – 1977, until he was charged with political corruption and murder, and publicly hung in 1979. Benazir Bhutto became the nation's and the Muslim world's first female prime minister in 1988. Twice elected to and twice expelled from that office, she spent much of her later life in exile, battling charges of alleged corruption. The dismissals typified her volatile political career, which was characterized by numerous peaks and troughs. Bhutto's return to the Pakistani political scene after the events of September 11, 2001 was catalyzed by a rising distrust in the Musharaff regime both by national parties and western political forces – the U.S. emerged as a key figure in encouraging her reentry. The U.S. powers saw Bhutto as a popular leader with liberal leanings who could bring much needed legitimacy to Musharraf's role in the war against terror. Hence, Bhutto reentered Pakistan in 2007, a year that has been named the most violent in Pakistani history. Her reentry was marked by violence from the start, ending with her assassination on the

27th of December, 2007. *BBC* (*bbc.com*, 27 December 2007) tells us, “Benazir Bhutto followed her father into politics, and both of them died because of it he was executed in 1979, she fell victim to an apparent suicide bomb attack.”

Oft compared to the Nehru-Gandhi family in India and the Kennedys in America, the Bhuttos of Pakistan are one of the world's most famous – and troubled– political dynasties. According to *BBC* (27 December 2007), “at the height of her popularity, shortly after her first election, she was one of the most high-profile women leaders in the world.” Similarly, *American Prospect* (*prospect.org*, 31 December 2007), describes Bhutto:

To the West at large, she spoke the language of secular democracy. To American women, Bhutto spoke the language of feminism, filling a void left by the absence of a female American counterpart to mirror her ascent to power in Pakistan.

Amidst this, Benazir Bhutto emerged as the most elaborate articulation of Pakistan’s modernity. Photographs and stories of her dominated the front covers of media in the U.S. and in Pakistan itself, as both nations struggled to make or deny space for this female political leader. With vacillating descriptions of “young and glamorous,” to “a successful and refreshing contrast to the overwhelmingly male-dominated political establishment,” Benazir Bhutto, albeit unevenly and contradictorily, ascended into the global gaze as political spectacle, feminist symbol, democracy’s icon, and modernity’s emblem.

In this chapter, I am concerned with the representational imagery and narration that positioned Bhutto as a visual form of democracy and modernity that was fashioned with and functioned towards particular power modalities. As I’ve argued throughout this project, representations are never irrelevant, never unconnected to the world of actual social and power relations. I locate Bhutto as a feminine, racialized *other* successfully folded into the West’s modern democratic embrace (*BBC* 27 December 2007). The political and cultural labyrinth in

which she was caught and through which she came to be both symbol and spectacle speaks to the subtleties of empire that work to render the *other* palatable. In examining her appropriation by the west and visual culture's role in that appropriation, I work to move Bhutto from the dominant uncontested optical regime to a complexly textured discursive field that conceals many different corporeal desires and (geo)political depths. To deconstruct Bhutto is to demystify the exposure she received, to uncover the material interests at stake in her symbolization, to reveal the ideologies that held her in place, and to ask: through Bhutto, what forms of democracy and liberation advanced? What forms were deferred, displaced, defeated?

Ideological Topographies: Bhutto as Fantasy, *Jouissance* and (American) Politics

Situating Benazir Bhutto in the discursive dilemmas that constituted her post 9/11 reentry into Pakistani politics and her automatic specularly in the dominant and sub-dominant global gaze requires a deliberate critical gesture that examines the language and visualities through which Bhutto came to be, arguably, Pakistan's most spectacular subject. One of the chief sources of the in/appropriation of Bhutto in the global political theatre lies in the way she was consigned to visibility. This consignment is the result of an epistemological mechanism which produces social difference vis-à-vis bodies and which (post)modernism magnifies with the availability of visual realities (Mirzeoff 1998; Sontag 2000; Hawley 2001). In approaching photographs and narrativizations of Bhutto as the objects of criticism, I interrogate the ways in which she has been reduced to an object of the heterosexual fe/male gaze, analyze the epistemological foundation that supports the ways in which she was seen and the logic that positions political feminine/feminist *others* into bifurcated categories of oppressed or free specularly, where the possibility of both come to be read through the landscape of the female body.

To begin, I want to highlight an excerpt from an article written on Bhutto in the *American Prospect*, by Adele Stan on the day of her assassination. The *Prospect* (prospect.org, 27 December 2007) states:

From the moment she appeared on the international scene, she was destined to be an icon. To the West, Benazir Bhutto, the first democratically-elected woman to lead a Muslim nation, looked like a Disney drawing of a beautiful fairytale princess from an animated fable set somewhere in the mysterious Orient.

This description edifies the foreign gaze, producing both itself as a species of rhetoric and Bhutto as an object of American fascination, replete with fragments of the past, the trappings of the modern, and fantasies of the hyperreal. At the very least, the *Prospect's* description of Bhutto yields cognitive dissonance with her as democratic, feminist figure (of a Muslim nation, no less). But, if we, like Foucault (1977) and Derrida (1983) consider language, that is to say, discourse – as a modality of power, then we see how this excerpt repositions Bhutto as a symbolic machine and an abstract subject who came to play a significant role in neocolonial *jouissance*, democracy's fantasy and the hetero-erotic gaze. Through such a narrativization, Bhutto is reduced to a kind of discursive game, one in which she serves as the link in a political economy that hinges on enjoying particular feminine corporealities and fantasizing about specific forms of neocoloniality.

The language of the *Prospect*, “somewhere in the mysterious Orient” speaks to an American fantasy that relies on the construction of an *other* who signifies a premodern, topographic distance whose crevices cannot be traced, whose depth is unmapped, unknown but desired. For a moment, this description of the feminine *other*, as Mulvey (in Jones 1993) notes, allows the spectator to imagine the *other* as powerful. The description of Bhutto as aesthetically beautiful and politically powerful through recognizable and desirable political enterprise renders her “far away” distance closer through the familiar language of democracy and western beauty.

But this power is quickly neutralized by specific semantic conventions that reduce women to their gazed-upon bodies. The contradictions in the *Prospect's* statement speak to both the desire felt toward the feminine, racialized *other* simultaneous with a desire to construct (through political enterprise) the desirable modern *other*. This excerpt hints at what Mulvey (in Jones 1993:52) refers to as fetishistic scopophilia, the “pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object.” I am not implying that images of Bhutto are the same as erotic pictures. Fetish, as a key psychoanalytic concept, is not simply about really liking or desiring something. The key point of fetish is that it displaces and alleviates anxieties about the radical/primitive/violent *other*, transferring powerful or taboo energies from that which can't be looked at or apprehended directly into something that can. By extending Mulvey's point to Bhutto's visual story, I argue that a fetishistic scopophilia, in varied manifestations, is embedded in hetero-patriarchal imperial politics, which builds up the physical beauty of the female object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself (Mulvey in Jones 1993).



Figure 3.1, *American Prospect*, 27 December 2007

Correlative to the metaphors woven into the description of Bhutto are the images through which the world came to *see* and know Bhutto. The photograph that accompanies the *Prospect* article, (see fig.1) is of a candlelight vigil held by her female supporters in Lahore, Pakistan. In the foreground, we see a poster of Bhutto as a young Prime Minister (rather than of her as an older oppositional candidate of Musharraf, which is the context of her assassination). The picture is of Bhutto's face – her face is tilted upwards, her complexion is immaculate. She is looking forward, her mouth turned upwards in a slight smile, a white headscarf loosely frames her face, and diamond earrings glitter from under her hair. Her posture, the tilted face, the empowered demeanor, the glossy but serious expression, the perfectly applied makeup all reveal, consciously and unconsciously, the social structures in which Bhutto was embedded and the ways in which her body came to symbolize the hinge through which Pakistan would swing open its doors to democracy. Bhutto's disposition in the poster is largely anglicized, organizing the ways in which she exudes western power simultaneous to Pakistani nationalism. Bhutto, all tropes in order, emulates both nation and empire.

There is thus an aesthetics at the core of politics that we see emerging out of Bhutto's visual story. The necessary conflation of her aesthetics with democracy that the passage suggests implicates beauty, within mainstream discourse, as not only a feminine standard or goal, but as a mechanism of power that reproduces class positions and racist stereotypes. As Eisenstein (2007) argues, stylizing images of the *other* is decisive to empire building. The symbolic appropriation of Bhutto as democratic and as free is crucial to maintaining race, gender and class distinctions in global politics. Indeed the *Prospect's* description and its visual support mesh together democracy, a political enterprise, with the heterosexual gaze, an apparatus of patriarchy. It seems safe, then, to argue that the heterosexual gaze, which constitutes what is and is not beautiful,

maps out in readings of what a democracy can look like. Consequently, Benazir Bhutto as the self-consciously modern, Pakistani democratic heroine functions as a representation of democracy ensconced in dominion and domination.

In the backdrop of this poster, we see a number of Pakistani women, some with their hair loosely covered, others not at all, some lighting candles, others looking onwards with grief-stricken faces. Surrounding the immediate rows of women, we see grieving men. The juxtaposition of Bhutto as a powerful, glamorous woman leading Pakistan toward a democracy against the masses of Pakistani working and middle class wo/men allows us to visualize the wide range of Pakistani cultural structures while simultaneously using the bourgeois body to signify modernity, political desirability and the power of heterosexual aesthetics. The image of men and women grieving Bhutto functions as the media's (empty) gesture towards authenticity, an opportunity to imagine the Pakistani masses. But the vitality of the photograph lies in *jouissance* of looking upon an *other* that is perfectly palatable to the west, and hence, grieved.

In keeping with the ethos of modern political grief, this visuality demonstrates a number of things. The visual techniques figure Bhutto as a heroic protagonist who deserved protection but did not receive it, while the masses bear the weight brought about by her assassination through the failure of the Pakistani or international institutions to intercede on Bhutto's behalf. The message is poignantly directed: *Bhutto should be alive: she could have saved Pakistan*. It is the interplay of the two parts of this photograph that grounds, filters and transmits the moral message of Bhutto as catastrophe and consumption of Pakistan. This picture is organized around the enormity of Pakistan's political strife even as it reduces its sheer size to one political heroic figure. This photograph finds ample ideological support in the asymmetrical theatre of witnessing

that allows the west to view, read and comprehend the ruins of *othered* nations (Williams 2010; Zizek 2004)

One of the key goals of this chapter is to illustrate how language and visualities of Bhutto produce rather than reflect knowledge, subjectivity and regimes of democracy. First appearing in *The DailyMail*, a British press, and reprinted in a number of venues from the *New York Times*, *BBC*, *The Washington Post*, *Daily Times*, and *Time* magazine, after her assassination; I want, now, to point to Figure two. The photograph is a double shot of Bhutto, a before and after shot of her entry into political life. To the left, we see Bhutto as college student – young, demure, her hair a touch disheveled, dressed in western clothes, described as an “Oxford party girl” and “party throwing student.” The picture is black and white. To the right and in color, we see Bhutto as a woman, just inaugurated as prime minister of Pakistan. She is wearing a brown printed Pakistani tunic, and in what will become the quintessential Benazir look, a white *dupatta* loosely frames her face, covering her hair just slightly so that it still “gleams through” (*American Prospect* 27 December 2007). The heading of the article reads, “Benazir Bhutto: Oxford Party Girl Cursed by Blood Soaked Dynasty, *dailymail.uk*, 28 December 2007).



Figure 3.2, *dailymail.uk*, 28 December 2007

Laced with the contradictions of nation, class, and gender, these photographs allow us to see how Bhutto came to iconoclastically represent both Pakistan and the West, the imperial and the *other*, the local and the global, America's darling and Pakistan's daughter. Indeed, this visual rendering demonstrates the inescapable (western) aestheticization of Bhutto in the global political theatre. Both photograph and text, here, reveal the subtle and schizophrenic investment in constructing an *other* that is at once *othered* and embraced, exotic and modern, erotic and Cartesian. The media that capture her and bring her to (western) spectators operates as a factory for the interpellation of subjects into ideology. Indeed, this photograph interpellates a hip, modern audience that comes to gaze at the feminine, racialized *other* as re-fashionable and re-definable in the western cultural contexts.

As a median destined to obtain precise ideological effect, the juxtaposition of the young “party girl” with an older, mature, coiffed, ethnically Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto makes clear how subjectivity is read through specific feminine tropes. That Bhutto was more often not narrated through the tropes of western hetero-erotics confronts the symbolic democracy that was articulated through her. As Boehmer (2005) argues, beauty functions as an index to democracy in the postcolonial field. The political utterance and its organizing visuality that places female national subjects as beautiful draws attention to the politics of a sexualized democracy that shapes the constitution of desirable feminine/feminist subjects and the ways this politics participates in the reproduction and enabling of empire. The *SATC2* scene, where the Muslim women’s disrobing of the *niqab* reveals their liberation through the textuality of their couture body signs into the imperial gaze a phallogocratic dimension, a fetishistic scopophilia that interrupts a liberatory democracy. *Time* magazine’s photograph (see fig 1.7), discussed in chapter one, of the young Afghani woman’s disfigured face as sound evidence for a democratizing war affirms this point as well. But, of course, Bhutto is a multidimensional political figure. She is neither a fictional, entertaining character nor an oppressed brown woman. Her presence in the modern world’s political field implies a changing of the subject that has dominated national and imperial politics. But does it?

Benedict Anderson (1983) has spoken of particular kinds of text as tightly associated with the compositions of nationalists’ imaginations and movements. But I want to assign to Bhutto’s textuality a very crucial place in the inscription of, not the Pakistani nation, but of empire. Portrayed as a powerful woman pushing against the often bleak portrayal of the feminine, racialized *other*, this supposition firmly rests on her upper-class status, her conciliatory relationship to the U.S., and her ability to usher western sensibilities into Pakistan. As I’ve

shown thus far, the dominant framing of Bhutto as symbolic of democracy occurred most poignantly through her visual and corporeal landscape. This invisible dialogue, or pact even, between democracy and the body is curious as it opens a space to interrogate the necessary conflation of hetero-erotics, white aesthetics, and western democracy. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *habitus* demonstrates that the values, attitudes and ideologies of society are literally embodied. Body size, clothes, aesthetics demeanor, ways of eating, sitting, speaking, and making gestures all reveal the social structures embedded in the body. Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1982) redefines the body as the site where political power is exercised. Through Figure two, we see how American democracy, through its value-inculcating and value-imposing operation, helps to form a general, transposable disposition towards democratic culture and the inscription of the bourgeoisie (Bourdieu 1984).

The democratic leader is an object of admiration because she most efficiently and accurately reproduces mainstream cultural images of success, heterosexual aesthetics, hard work and glory and because she efficiently and in the most advanced manner represents culturally legitimate interests, lifestyles and successes. Her body is a topography saturated with elitist class. Bhutto is produced as a subject of democracy who is not only intellectually outstanding but morally in tune,³⁰ aesthetically pleasing, and in touch with the value of femininity and heteronormativity. She is democratic not only because she believes in this political enterprise, but because she is the perfect complement to the "truth" of modernity and is eminently likable, hence faithful, to the west. *The American Prospect* (*prospect.org*, 27 December 2007) substantiates this in the statement: "deftly wielding her Ivy League education, she had plenty of intelligence to accompany her beauty and charm, as well as an uncanny ability to synthesize the

³⁰ While Keirkegaard was one of the first in Western philosophical discourse to speak of beauty as a moral project, this idea has clearly been taken up by a number of theorists, such as bell hooks (1989), Patricia Hill Collins (2006) and of course, can be traced through varying colonial trajectories.

aspirations of her South Asian nation with the longings of its Western patrons.” The equilibrium assumed between the aesthetic and the ethical, the modern feminine and democratic potentialities signify the relationship between symbolic freedom and the erotics of empire.

The conditions of entry into democracy marked by acquisition of tastes, manners, attitudes, desires and forms of leisure can be traced through the visual portrayals of Bhutto. Bhutto’s symbolic mastery of western life and aesthetics render her deeply palatable to the dominant gaze and infuse her with authority on the transmission of democracy (Bourdieu 1984). Democracy, citizenship, civility, productivity and high arts are ideologies that are by and large reproduced by and reflected in Western bourgeois lifestyles, concerns and epistemologies. Conceptually, democracy is presented as the opposite of bourgeois values, as a political ideal and practice that privileges participation, immanence, deliberation and inclusion (Dean 2009; Young 2000; Held 1995). But real, existing constitutional democracies privilege the wealthy as they install, extend, and protect neoliberal capitalism (Dean 2009; Held 1995). Bhutto, both linguistically and visually, illustrates a proclivity towards these ideologies. Her dress, style, self-responsibility, sexualized, feminine embodiment are inherently linked to classist notions of goodness and humanity, while her engagement of the political sphere, the language of democracy, and tropes of modernity are integrally connected to capitalist privilege.

Aesthetics in capitalist society function as a mechanism of power, of acquisition of, not just material wealth, but cultural belonging. Bourdieu (1984: 76) writes:

It is also a sense of belonging to a more polished, more polite, better policed world, a world which is justified in existing by its perfection, its harmony and beauty, a world that has produced Beethoven and Mozart and continues to produce people capable of playing and appreciating them. And finally it is an immediate adherence, at the deepest level of the habitus, to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which, more than declared opinions, forge the unconscious unity of a class.

The message the media transmit, through Bhutto's photographic narrative, is a highly provocative and class saturated message. Aesthetics serves, either consciously or not, as a measure of how modern Bhutto can be. Discourses on aesthetics, and beauty specifically, are heavily associated with ideologies that reflect, encourage and reproduce class in highly bourgeois ways (Bordo 1997; Collingham 2001). These discourses continue to transform in problematic ways "necessities into strategies, constraints into preferences and...generates the sets of choices constituting lifestyle" (Bourdieu 1984: 175). The status of Bhutto as democracy's political fantasy, then, has deeply social, symbolic, and libidinal mechanisms (Dean 2009).

To elaborate, let me bring another intriguing photograph (see fig. 3) to bear on this discussion. Here, we see Bhutto's profile, the white *dupatta* framing her hair, a red flower from the garland around her neck peeping through. With one hand she holds a mirror up to her face and with the other, she applies and adjusts red lip gloss. As stated by the *UK DailyMail*, "seconds before she takes the stage for her final rally, Bhutto is seen applying makeup" (*dailymail.co.uk*, 27 Dec 2007). Thirteen years earlier, during her stint as Prime Minister, a *New York Times* (15 May 1994) statement reaffirms this intrigue in her feminine aesthetics. The *Times* states, "Her red-lipsticked visage on an election poster offered a promise of modernity in a nation that suffered an inferiority complex next to its rival and motherland, India."



Figure 3.3, *dailymail.uk*, 27 December 2007

The metaphoric use of lipstick to signify both beauty and modernity indeed substantiates Anzaldúa's (1990: xv) striking point that "the face is the surface of the body that is the most noticeably inscribed by social structures, marked with instructions on how to be *mujer*, *macho*, *working class*, *chicana*." The framing of Bhutto as modern vis-à-vis her red lipstick or as aesthetically oriented vis-à-vis lipstick application before her (fatal) rally, however, raises a number of concerns. What Collingham (2001) calls the processes of Anglicization, where the

brown Indian body in British colonial times was subtly transformed and reformatted to give off distinctly Anglo-Indian signifiers of Britishness, is a useful rendering here. The application of the red lip gloss metonymically functions to westernize her, make her more familiar to constructions of western femininity. But they also point to how the ideologies of aesthetics and prestige that ordained readings of Bhutto in the global political theatre bolstered the imperial formulas of racialized bodies gaining power through an embodiment of racial and class superiority.

The relentless representation of Bhutto's body and aesthetics as relevant to global readings of what democracy looks like is indeed troubling. These narrations of Bhutto locate American interest in her, not within the realms of her metonymical relationship to the life-worlds of the Pakistani people and political transitions of the Pakistani national government, but within the field of hetero-erotics wherein she articulates, through her body, the changing time and space of postcolonial Muslim nations, while holding in place the exotic aesthetics of femininity and ideological distance of the *other*. Moreover, the *Times* move to strategically posit a backward Pakistan (that can move forward) through an invocation of the feminine subject and body is an important, if not problematic, one. Rhetorically shaping Pakistan as insecure to its "rival" India and that these insecurities are ameliorated (or not) vis-a-vis particular feminine corporealities is a key dimension of imperial democracy, as Eisenstein (2007) and Enloe (2006) argue. The language used by the *Times* cements how Bhutto's appeal was expressed largely through the landscape of the (elite) female body and how Bhutto inspired a palatable Pakistan, one that could only be imagined through the landscape of her domesticated body. Grewal's (2005:95) point that American concepts of democracy and women's liberation circulate transnationally, and that women and their chosen or unchosen representations "absorb, utilize and rework the notion of

America into particular agendas and strategies within which their bodies play an uneven and heterogeneous role,” is relevant here. Lipstick as a synecdoche for modernity, seems to render visible geopolitical insecurities, which, then, effectively instantiates a form of democracy that distinctively relies on and utilizes a hetero-erotic gaze.

Narrative, like metaphor, can be said to have discursive materiality; therefore the story of Bhutto permits the forging and testing of particular kinds of affiliations and loyalties. Bhutto’s story is said to embody Pakistan. But in pointing to the tropes and devices through which her story came to be told and desired, I engage in a refusal to overlook the necessary conflation of Bhutto qua democracy and Bhutto qua beautiful. Instead, to the extent that Bhutto’s story became virtually synonymous with notions like democracy, modernity, progress, and beauty, I depart from the sanctioned narrative of Bhutto as Pakistan, and instead locate her as empire’s subject par excellence.

As chapters one and two have shown, in the American imagination, the brown female subject enters into discussion only when she can critically function to evidence the barbarism of such nations, as we see in Mukhtar Mai, or if she serves in the popular mobilization of the construction of the New Woman, as is the case with Bhutto. Whereas Mai, dipped in the metaphoric surplus of the fantasy of brown oppression, came to signify national authenticity but one replete with precarity due to the kind of anti-patriarchal work within which she engaged, Bhutto’s (white) aestheticized femininity secured her iconic status as democratic leader. The symbolic valence of democracy under which Bhutto becomes popularized conflates sexual politics with imperial geography. The slippery semantics and gaze directed at Bhutto taps into the varying ways pleasure and power produce particular cultural meanings over and through the female body. Whether Bhutto’s visual and narrative subjectification is rooted in material facticity

or a purely fictive invention, this storytelling in producing such a seductively powerful contemporary feminine figure relies on racist, classist and imperialist formulations of gazing at the *other*.

Benazir Bhutto's signification as a Pakistani, democratic, modern, desirable, public and feminine Figure is not fixed in advance. Once imagined, this "politician with the spellbinding looks of a 1940's movie star," comes to signify and symbolize these identities through a narrative and nonnarrative metaphoric surplus (*New York Times*, 15 May 1994). By fixing Bhutto beneath the evaluative epithets "spellbinding looks" and "beauty and charm" the dominant narratives give way to its tendency to objectify women even as it grants them access to the global political theatre. Within the socio-symbolic field in which Bhutto came to be iconoclastic, descriptions of her oscillated between this fetishistic fascination with her beauty, a voyeurism rooted in *seeing* her (body and bodily practice) and the (un)easy exhibitionism of her political/cultural habitus. In Bhutto's projected image lived a meeting of east and west, and a glimpse at what a modern South Asia could be: cosmopolitan, erudite, stylish, and friendly to the west. Indeed, she had the smile down pat. The metaphorical meanings laced in the repertoire of Bhutto's images confirm an ideal love of the West, as a form of style, aesthetic and freedom. The creation of Bhutto as democratic icon is indeed one of the ideological implications of these set of photographs. Within this reading, Bhutto's gender was no impediment; it was, perhaps, her best accessory. Her very womanhood signaled a departure from the two main directors of Pakistani politics: the military and the mullahs, popularized by the *PBS* (2003) documentary on Pakistan titled, *The Rock Star and the Mullahs*.

Visual scholars have well established how photographs constitute a subject, often through the illusory delimitation of a central location (Sontag 2003: Baudry 1985). Images of Bhutto

corroborate with a marked efficacy in the maintenance of political and (western) feminine idealism. It is important to recognize that the construction and proliferation of Bhutto as heroine qua Pakistan is predicated upon figuring an individual that is palatable to the West. In order to function as a deserving heroine-victim, Bhutto's racial difference must be domesticated, a process visual and postcolonial scholars have often alluded to as central to the colonial and imperial fields (Bhabha 1996; Collingham 2001; Williams 2010). Bhutto's domesticated worthiness emanated from her ruling-class pedigree, from her *habitus*.

The next several photographs speak poignantly to the in/appropriation of Bhutto as a palatable subject. These images of Bhutto are part of a *BBC* series, entitled a *Life in Photos: A Cursed Dynasty*, produced in December 2007 after her assassination. A set of 15 photographs trace the trajectory of Bhutto's political life, with the last of six photographs visually spelling out her final fatal rally and the uprisings after her assassination. The photographs I highlight speak provocatively to the anglicized aesthetic that shaped global readings of Bhutto as democratic symbol par excellence. Figure four, a photograph of Bhutto, taken in the mid 1990's, was reproduced throughout 2006 and 2007 when she reentered the Pakistani political scene. It is obviously of a younger Prime Minister Bhutto. The photograph focuses on her face, black kohl lining her eyes, and red lipstick perfectly etched on her lips. She is sitting and her hand is raised and folded under her chin, propping her face upwards. Her face is chiseled and smooth. Her expression is serious and sober. We see her dark hair. A white *dupatta* loosely frames her face.

Indeed, every image of Bhutto follows these aesthetic conventions (see fig 5–11). They are usually of Bhutto sitting on a sofa or speaking from behind a podium. More often than not, the camera is angled downward from above her shoulder. Rarely do we see her full body. Her expression is almost always subdued but not daunting, not overly serious, but sober and pleasant.

A white *dupatta* always loosely frames her face and often, we see an adornment or two, perhaps a ring on her finger or an earring shines out from under her hair. Black khol lines her eyes, which sometimes fully engage the camera and other times appear to dismiss the camera when it has caught her in action or in thought. Figure five captures her in her noticeably western youth. The image is black and white. The camera has caught her mid-laughter in her Oxford days, familiarly dressed, desirably engaged. In this photograph, Bhutto is a deeply familiar subject. Her posture, her dress, her affect effectively locate her in a western *habitus*, a *habitus* that signifies more than class, alluding to white multiculturalism and white fantasy. Figure seven and eight depict Bhutto as her days as prime minister. These images hone in on her face, one has caught her mid-speech, while she appears posed for the other. In both, her aesthetics, her posture, her demeanor speak to a desirable, recognizable *habitus*. Figures nine through eleven shows us the most contemporary Bhutto, the Bhutto the American audience became privy to in a post 9/11 landscape; a Bhutto through whom the west began to imagine the possibilities of a democratic Pakistan. Yet they continue to relentlessly focus on her face, in ways that renders her palatable, desirable, and recognizable. She is wistful or smiling, as in Figure ten, the cover of her autobiography, *Daughter of the East*, or reflective, which we see in Figure eleven, her hand is over mouth and she appears in deep thought. Her eyes are dark, her mouth red, her aesthetics largely anglicized, ethnicized only by the white *dupatta*, which doesn't disrupt her aesthetic as Kristoff claims it interrupts Mai's road to empowerment. Bhutto is positioned uniquely to this Pakistani feminine attire in that it doesn't upset her "modern" self presentation. Instead, it authenticates her as the *Real* Pakistani woman, but one that confirms western aesthetics, bears out democracy despite resistance, and validates the desire to see Pakistan as palatable.



Figure 3.4 *BBC* December 2007



Figure 3.5 *BBC* December 2007



Figure 3.6 *BBC* December 2007



Figure 3.7 *BBC* December 2007



Figure 3.8 *BBC* December 2007



Figure 3.9 *BBC* December 2007

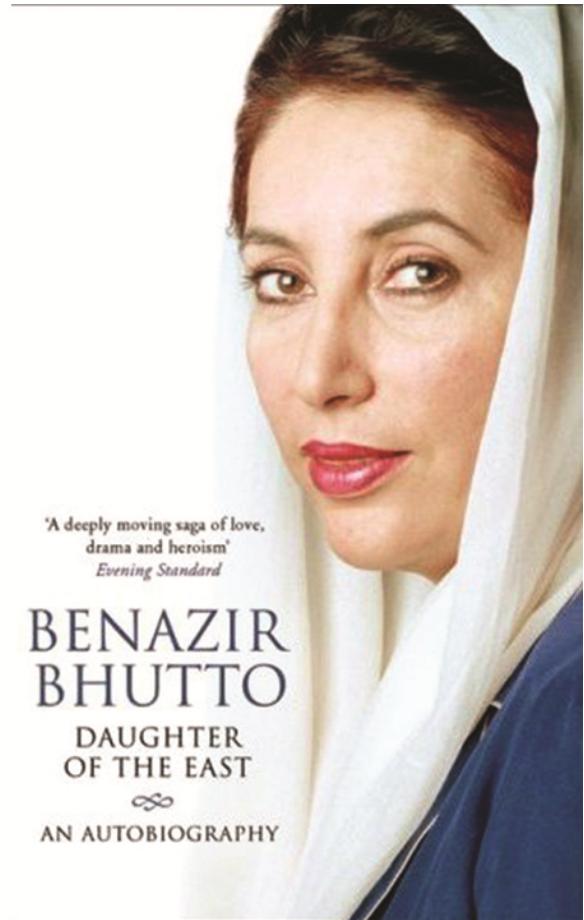


Figure 3.10 *BBC* December 2007



Figure 3.11 *BBC* December 2007

In all these photos, Bhutto is ossified as a desirable *other*. So, while, thus far, I have located Bhutto on my axis of the feminine, racialized *other*, in a number of ways she was never constituted as the raced *other*. Frankly speaking, she wasn't the picture of what the west imagined as "brown;" in that she was lighter-skinned. From the taunts of early colonialism to the benevolence of the cult of empire, the sun-darkened skin, often seen as stained by outdoor manual work is the visible stigma of brownness (McClintock 1995; Said 1979). The vocabularies constructing Bhutto and the ways in which she was more often than not photographed were predicated on an anglicized body, one that that we see in Figure four. The metaphor unfolding around Bhutto was predicated on a deeply classed, anglicized physical beauty, a phallocratic obsession with her as beautiful. With the burgeoning images of brown men as dangerous, alongside the growing vision of brown women as victims, Bhutto came to be intimately associated with an aesthetic Pakistan, a magically beautiful cleanser of a polluted country. Bhutto's light-skinned, bright-lipped representations served as a technology of Pakistani purification, inextricably intertwined with the semiotics of empire's new racism as well as class denigration. This racist logic is what allows Bhutto to emerge beautifully as the quintessential compliant *other*. As a feminine/feminist subject, Bhutto lived and moved within the constraints of highly regulated gender schemas, but schemas that produced her as the paradigmatic Pakistani female leader, making intelligible the domain of livable, desirable bodies but also the domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies (read the female religious martyrs of the Red Mosque).

Let's turn to Figure twelve and thirteen. In Figure twelve, we see a younger Prime Minister Bhutto (in black and white) while in Figure thirteen, we see an older, campaigning Bhutto (in color) from the 2007 Pakistani electoral politics. In both photographs, the camera has caught her in the midst of adjusting her *dupatta* to keep it from falling off. In a gesture well-

known throughout Pakistan, this image of Bhutto adjusting her *dupatta* was one of the most common ways she was photographed. While many critics of Bhutto saw her donning of the *dupatta* as merely a social mask of her (inauthentic) Pakistani femininity 2007, when she reentered the political scene, Bhutto stated that democracy shouldn't mean the sacrifice of the *dupatta* for women (*Huffington Post* 8 January 2008). This statement by Bhutto coupled with the ideological effect of Bhutto adjusting her *dupatta* as she moves through masculine political fields raises a number of anxieties around the Pakistani female body and its relationship to democracy. It seems wise to ask why the *dupatta*, an article of clothing, is held as oxymoronic to democracy, a political system. Does democracy require an expungement of unfamiliar feminine tropes so much so that Bhutto must publicly reconcile one with the other?



Figure 3.12, *Huffington Post*, January 2008



Figure 3.13, *Huffington Post*, January 2008

I argue that Bhutto's *dupatta* functioned as an elusive play between fantasy, politics and desire. Her statement captures the antinomies of social difference, underscoring the ambivalence and incomplete character of modern identities or democratic processes as they actually are inhabited. Her desire to symbolically coalesce this dichotomy, the *dupatta* with democracy, dramatizes the significance of the female body to western political enterprise. This dichotomy is a serious one. On the one hand, we know democratic subjectivity relies on Cartesian formulations of the modern political subject, which produce gender-neutral rather than a gender-embodied democracy. The action of the photographs fasten Bhutto's (however dubious) statement; hence, reorganizing the Cartesian nature of democracy while simultaneously placing

both the woman subject and the female body in the tenuous contemporary position of having to evidence that Islam and democracy were reconcilable.

As Susan Bordo (1993:143) makes clear, “women, besides *having* bodies, are also associated with the body, which has always been considered a woman’s sphere in family life, in mythology, in scientific, philosophical and religious ideology.” Hence, on the other hand, both image and rhetoric stress the hyper-relevance of the body, reproducing Descartes’ dualistic axis of mind over matter, where the body functions as “a cage” or a “prison” (Augustine in Pine-Coffin 1961). If the rational self of the West is secured in its universal scope and authority by performing necessary exclusions of all that is bodily, feminine, emotional and intersubjective, how, then, is Bhutto secured as desirable political subject to the west, within the constraining fields of race and gender (Butler 1999; Grosz 1994)?

The fantasy of democratization, in its most contemporary manifestations, relies on a particular kind of racialization and hetero-eroticism that allow Bhutto to prevail as democratic *célèbre*. The brown female subject, whether one subjected to the human rights gaze or one awakened by U.S. democracy, is rendered desirable through the dual processes of anglicization and hetero-eroticization. Consequently, I argue, even her donning of the *dupatta*, a Pakistani headscarf that has long symbolized feminine modesty, became the perfect complement to her otherwise anglicized self. This becomes apparent in a caption offered by *American Prospect*:

She wore it in an acutely stylized and regal manner always white, loose, flowing, perched far enough back on her head to accent her high cheekbones and gleaming dark hair. It said, "I am woman." It said, "I am timeless." *American Prospect* (31 December 2007)

What is this obsession with Bhutto’s body or more largely, with these markers of femininity, the aesthetics of the female body and the woman subject? The *Prospect’s* description of Bhutto locates Bhutto in Bourdieu’s category of the “effortlessly elegant,” as an embodiment of cultural

capital by right of birth. But it is not so seamless. As a Pakistani woman, in spite of her class and political position, she falls also into the realm of subjects that need to be trained in the reproduction of aesthetic and cultural excellence. If, as Irigaray (1985) suggests, women stage femininity as an ironic performance, Bhutto's necessary masquerade of the *dupatta* and the fantasizing spectacle of her *dupatta* begs the integration of the female body as a vital element in (inter)national racist discourse, both on a symbolic and pragmatic level.

The language used to describe her donning of the *dupatta* functions to make this (foreign) practice palatable, desirable and, indeed, erotic. That her *dupatta* was "acutely stylized and regal" and "perched far enough back on her head to accent her high cheekbones and gleaming dark hair" keeps Bhutto, as a feminine, racialized *other*, both aesthetic and visible. In fact, the language literally shifts her subject positioning from an *other* who covers her hair to a stylized, recognizable subject. With her "high cheekbones and gleaming hair," Bhutto comes to be rhetorically rearranged in ways that create political subjectivity without the sacrifice of feminine desirability nor the erasure of colonial constructions of the mystic orient. The language imposed upon Bhutto suggests a meta-ideological operation: an epistemic operation that presses against the conscious to interfere with both her racialized and sexualized positioning in public space. Indeed, it is remarkable that the *dupatta* in Mai's case is seen as an impediment to her empowerment while in Bhutto's case the *dupatta* is utterly decontextualized and reoriented to timeless womanhood. The logic of hetero-democracy is that the *other* is welcomed "in" vis-a-vis their ability to rearrange their feminine, racialized "selves."

Recalling again the veiled women from the *SATC2* scene, we see how their "selves" were welcomed "in," deemed desirable and identifiable only after they dropped their *niqabs* to reveal their couture attire. In this way, the semiotic inclusion of racial others is carefully evacuated of

any undomesticated difference, such as unfamiliar aesthetic tropes (read veil) as well as critical voice and agency (read they just want to be like “us”). Hence, insofar as the walls of acceptability and desirability are constantly being thickened, this form of racist democracy holds practical function as well being rendered identifiable depends not on whether the *other* has free “choice” but on whether the *other* makes “choices” similar to ours (Zizek 2004; Butler 2004).

Bhutto’s statement on the *dupatta* and the press’s statement on her *dupatta* rely on an empire whose racist and sexist character, as James Clifford (1988) has reminded, “allows us to say *this* about *that*.” As a racist overture, this narrativization essentially creates that which is identifiable as undesirable, i.e. the foreigner, Islamist, and terrorist, to the floating identity, those *other* figures who are identifiable, intelligible, desirable. Hence, in the logic of the U.S. press, we see empire’s double speak: in the invocation of universal beauty, global civil society, human rights, and democracy is the correlate obligation to be identifiable at all times, to keep oneself visible, aesthetic, modern and desirable before the state. The obvious inverse here is the field of veiled women (invisible subjects to, say, the French state³¹), masked terrorists who take actions against states, and of course, the veiled women martyrs of the Pakistani state, whom I discuss in chapter four.

Within these neoformations of racialization which rely on women’s hypervisibility, democracy is nothing more than a vacuous term, holding no meaning because it is not a fixed standard of judgment but a qualifier whose meaning is fixed in relation to something else. Democracy becomes fashioned into a commodity, or something on a woman’s body, that can be exported, sold to, or staged for consumption by the United States (Wallerstein 1983; Dean 2009). As democracy is granted primarily through these framings of Bhutto, “democracy” loses

³¹ I refer here to recent events in France where the *burqa* is being banned. For more on this, see *Time*, 3 May 2010 or *BBC*, 8 April 2010.

whatever substantive meaning it may have and becomes confined to the insidious hetero-erotic corporealities that seem to exercise it. It comes to operate as an axis that work towards reconceptualization of gender/race/class hegemony and inter/national hierarchies, inversely welcomes its accompanying objectification and fetishization.

The feminine ideal takes shape and thus finds its reflection in a political ideal that, under the sign of democracy, combines U.S. American imperial interest and the movement toward Pakistani sovereignty. But this feminine ideal, as we know historically from writers such as Bordo (1995) and Irigaray (1985) engenders a deeply sexual gaze. Bhutto was consistently read through her body even as there existed a total denial around her as an erotic subject. Insofar as all these descriptions of Bhutto depend on the female body and its normalized conventions and aesthetics, we see how this discursive gesture writes hetero-erotic aesthetics into key readings of democracy.

Benazir Bhutto is surely the most startling and striking illustration of how cavalier power relations are with respect to representing powerful, feminine, racialized *others*. Yet she is also the canvas on which we come to see how deeply these power relations are etched on female bodies and how well these bodies serve them in a number of ways, ways that Mai resisted and the Red Mosque martyrs eschew all together. In many ways, Bhutto's constant reduction to her aesthetic practices and body can be paralleled in readings of American female political leaders such as Hillary Clinton or Sarah Palin, where they are varyingly reduced to feminine tropes of sexual objectification, as either pathologically desexualized or fetishistically hyper-sexualized as America's sex kitten. Clinton, specifically framed as a "castrating" public figure (*Huffington Post* 3 March 2008), was in the odd position of having to prove that she's tender enough within an American political terrain where women usually have to prove they're tough enough

(Rowland 2002). Ironically, no similar discourse was at stake in the American political investment in Bhutto.

Doesn't it seem relevant to ask why Bhutto's gender was not emphasized in this all too familiar narrative as she stood to preside over "the most dangerous place on earth?" What ideological contours can be traced in the American political interest in Bhutto as President of Pakistan when her desirability within western political discourse relied not on her machismo, but dwelled on her femininity? Representations of Bhutto suggest that the safety (and desire) found in her is, indeed, palimpsestic, containing many layers of American desire, western security and Pakistani (male) servitude. The excesses of Bhutto's aesthetics served a distinct and critical function in reference to the war on terror.

It is crucial to note that Bhutto, as feminist and democratic *célèbre*, did not flourish when imperial ebullience was at its peak. She emerged during an era of impending Pakistani crisis and international terrorist calamities, serving to preserve, through feminine fetish ritual, the uncertain boundaries of class, gender and race identity in a social order felt to be threatened by the fetishistic effluvia of (male) terrorism, anti-American sentiments, imperial competition and anti-colonial resistance. Bhutto offered the promise of imperial regeneration through the landscape of her modern, feminine aesthetics, restoring the threatened potency of the imperial body politic and the white(r) race. But her visualities also disclose a crucial paradox. On one hand, Bhutto embodied the hope of empire's progress. At the same time, Bhutto's popularity in the Pakistani political scene also complicates the gaze that cast Pakistan as a tight, unyielding patriarchy. Her popularity raises new questions about the relationship between Pakistani national discourse and female political figures, pointing to the deliberate unevenness of definitive patriarchies.

Contemporary metaphorizations that followed Bhutto's political rhetoric and self-presentation are so amorphous that they tend to repudiate any locality for cultural thickness, yet they spoke lucidly to Pakistan's contemporary repositioning in the global context. The figure of Bhutto tends to function in a very specific way as the embodiment of modernity, financial capital, anti-terrorism, pro-American and so on. Indeed, she locates herself in this function. *Parade*, an American popular culture magazine, offers another compelling visuality. This photograph (see fig. 14), one of the most widely distributed photographs of Bhutto in varying aesthetic conventions, can be found in the *New York Times*, *BBC*, *Washington Post* and in Pakistani media, such as *All Things Pakistan*. In this image, we see Bhutto in her classic public face. She is wearing a white *dupatta* loosely over her head so we still see her dark hair. Red lipstick, what the *Huffington Post* calls her "signature bright lipstick," covers her lips as they spread in a quintessential Bhutto expression. It is neither a smile nor a frown. It is a look of pleasantness, but strong, interested yet aloof. Her eyes appear softer than her mouth. To the side of this photo are the words, "I am what the terrorists fear the most – a female political leader fighting to bring modernity to Pakistan. Now they're trying to kill me" (*Parade Magazine*, An Interview with Gail Sheehy, Fall 2009).



Figure 3.14, *Parade*, January 2006

In Bhutto, we see nothing but the desire to modernize Pakistan, a modernity that occurs largely through a marriage of neoliberalism and democracy (Dean 2009). As a number of scholars have articulated, in Pakistan, modernity and the multiplicity of processes and manifestations associated with it sits on an ambivalent terrain invoking legitimacy and desirability simultaneous to inciting an urgent antagonism with the current state of affairs (Rashid 2006, Jamal 2004). The words accompanying this photograph show that imperial modernity is not shaped around a single privileged category, such as democracy (Dean 2009). Instead, the formative categories of imperial modernity – race, class, gender, sexuality, nation – are articulated in and through each other in dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependencies.

The ideological charge of Bhutto as (Pakistani) nation functions, in effect, to justify the rearrangement of her privilege and authority in situating Pakistan as a player in the modern world. The narrative of Bhutto as democratic subject par excellence in the throes of terrorist danger and death cashes in on a narrative currency that rigorously polices women's bodies and sexualities in order to read them as modern or not. Bhutto's gender rituals and her western aesthetic merge here to overdetermine her as the symbol of what the terrorists most fear. Bhutto is cast as without (Islamic) ideology, performing politics in the service of the global economy, avoiding any hint of critical agency. The potentially disrupting or disturbing facts of woman-ness and Pakistani-ness which might otherwise disqualify Bhutto from her meritorious heroinification, is neutralized in her apparent desire to accept Pakistan as subordinate to America and, more broadly, in the global economy.

But, of course, this narrative of heroics is inversely gendered, where (brown) masculinity is yet again charted as excessive, dangerous, and untrustworthy. Let us, for example, examine the implications of juxtaposing then-President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharaff (see fig. 15) to Benazir Bhutto. Musharaff was oft described as a Pakistani leader who "wore a western suit and tie," who "liked dogs" (something named anathema to Islam) and who possessed an "ease with Western ways" (*The National* 18 August 2008, *Hindustani Times* 11 October 2005, *New York Times* 7 January 2007). The *New York Times* (7 January 2007) sums Musharraf up in its caption: "a dictator with charm and guile and a modernist veneer who rules exotic, dangerous lands." These seemingly absurd contours that allow the West to trace modernity through subjective social and corporal behaviors suggest that, despite shifting readings of Musharraf over his political tenure, he, like Bhutto, was brought in line with western notions of the unique and autonomous individual. What's interesting to note is, in Figure fifteen, is how differently

Musharraf is photographed than Bhutto. The viewer is looking up at him (an angle of reverence); he is in the midst of gesture, his hands raised as he articulates a point in conversation. He is not posing for the camera nor has the camera fragmented him or his body in ways often seen in Bhutto's photographic displays. Certain photographic styles and techniques are linked to objectification. Most often when women's bodies are involved, the photographs are shot from a closer angle, honing in on aspects of face or body or clothing, cutting off a piece of time and space, allowing the viewer to relish and fixate on its object. Figure fifteen of Musharraf keeps him at a distance. His is largely an unromanticized body. Hence, both Musharraf and Bhutto personified the autonomous individual that human rights produces as subject par excellence – a citizen endowed with rights, Aristotle's speaking political being,³² and self-consciously modern wo/man.



Figure 3.15, *New York Times*, 14 November 2007

³² Of course, it is important to note that Aristotle's original formulation excluded both women and people of color. But according to liberal multi-culturalism, the solution to such racist and sexist exclusions is simply to "add and stir."

However, despite this remarkable accomplishment, Musharaff was still located within imperial machinery that could only conjure the brown man as the dangerous *other* or the surreptitious greedy *other* (Bhattacharya 2008; Paur 2007; Jarmakani 2008). The male political figure, unlike Bhutto, functions in the imperial imagination as one of moral liminality, as one distinctly linked to the excessive patriarchies of Pakistan and Islam. As we know, occidental masculinity relies on geopolitical fantasies of brown male violence, in this case, Pakistani men. The imperial gaze which constitutes itself as the liberator of the Muslim woman is masked by the feminine, whiteness of Bhutto, whose symbiotic authenticity (and an assassination presumably by Taliban members) renders truthful this perception.

Bhutto is all smiles, wit, grace, and fashion: Musharaff is plodding, industrious, sober and precise. Such a reading is, of course, based on ideologies around brown men as menaces as opposed to Bhutto's visual seductiveness, where both readings have no real presence in Pakistani reality. As we know, ideology sustains, at the level of fantasy, precisely what it seeks to avoid at the level of actuality. So ideology appears to involve both sustenance of (particular) bodies and avoidance of *othered* bodies (Zizek 2006). Indeed, framing Bhutto as the missing piece in a Pakistani political puzzle dominated by mullahs and the military successfully lures the spectator into a political aesthetic that is both successfully redolent of a vanishing orientalist nostalgia but controllable. Bhutto comes to represent the *other* over whom there is complete mastery.

When prompted by *CNN's* Wolf Blitzer (17 October 2007), Bhutto said of Pakistan's Islamist groups, "[T]hey don't believe in women governing nations, so they will try to plot against me, but these are risks that must be taken. I'm prepared to take them." Similarly, in 2007, Bhutto said, "Pakistan is under severe threat of being taken over by extremists. This is why I feel it is essential to save Pakistan through democracy" (*Aljazeera*, English, 2 November 2007).

Bhutto's words here spell out the economics of the imperial gaze, where she becomes both complicit in reestablishing the hierarchy of America over Pakistan, west over east, even as she defies the gaze that pigeonholes Pakistani women as weaker (or more oppressed) than their male counterparts. Her statements blur the lines between Pakistan's patriarchy and imperial patriarchy, drawing directly from the former in order to render the latter invisible and deniable.

As such, Bhutto presents a spectacular textual event that the imperial camera fantasizes about and indeed, develops a monopoly over. Positioning her at the intersection of two worlds, coagulating race, nation, class and gender into seamless aesthetic spectacles, the camera and accompanying rhetoric constitute Bhutto as an erotic national heroine. The spectacle of Bhutto controlling Pakistan's political terrain is actually a voyeuristic substitute for the psychological reinforcement of a Pakistan that needs to be tamed. By strategically projecting violence and sexual excess onto the brown male *other*, the dominant gaze constitutes the brown man as the repository of sexual and gender excess. Bhutto, however, translated and explained Pakistan as a trainable political object whose cultural, temporal and geographical distance and male citizenry were expressed in metaphors of danger, secrecy and deceit. Bhutto functions as the perfect foil to them, as she then seamlessly sanitizes the hyper-masculinized/nationalized space with her aesthetically feminized and modern self (Gopinath 2005; Paur 2007). From *Sex and the City 2*'s trading in banal, unsophisticated orientalist fantasies to Bhutto's syntax on Pakistani men, we see how propagation anti-Muslim propagation is becoming the most expeditious passage to national belonging

Frantz Fanon (1963) observed how the national bourgeoisie was needed for the success of colonizing politics. Identity formation draws upon the image of the *other*, through contrast and inversion. The content of the category non-western or "primitive" changes over time, but as

Clifford (1988, 2) has argued, it is almost always used to construct an alterego or confirm the western self. Bhutto's visuality is the seductive repository of the west's most tenacious and precarious self-idealization. Bhutto's politicized visual imagery creates such a strong sense of subjectivity in the spectator (of that image) that all other subjectivities (through which to reimagine that image of Bhutto) are thoroughly drained. By making the colonized *other* palatable in a certain way, the public unconscious could also be manipulated, the chaos of the nation domesticated, the racialization of the *other* secured and upheld. As we know, democratic societies rely not on force but on propaganda, engineering consent by necessary illusion and emotionally potent oversimplification (Chomsky 2003; Dean 2009).

These potent oversimplification and visual illusions become even more apparent in the recently released documentary on Benazir Bhutto. Premiering at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival, in the tradition of documentaries, was *Benazir Bhutto: The Film* (see fig. 16). The cover, advertising the film, reads: "DEMOCRACY IS THE BEST REVENGE." The trailer runs like this: "From one of the most dangerous places on earth, in a land where women didn't matter, comes the story of a woman who had the courage to accept her destiny." These phrases come intermittently, in between vacillating images of jeeps filled with brown men holding large guns, women in *niqabs* with downcast eyes, shadowed foreboding mosques, fleeting images of past and present Pakistani dictators surrounded by a posse of men, and then Bhutto, young and stylish, eloquently speaking English as she moves through the masculinized spaces of Pakistani politics, claiming that the "regime couldn't touch her." The trailer literally fades off with these bold words: martyr, accused, savior, scandal, charismatic, arrogant, courageous, controversial, legendary, and daughter, each word accompanied by an image of Bhutto's lip-sticked face, eyes, sunglasses, hair, raised arm, etc...

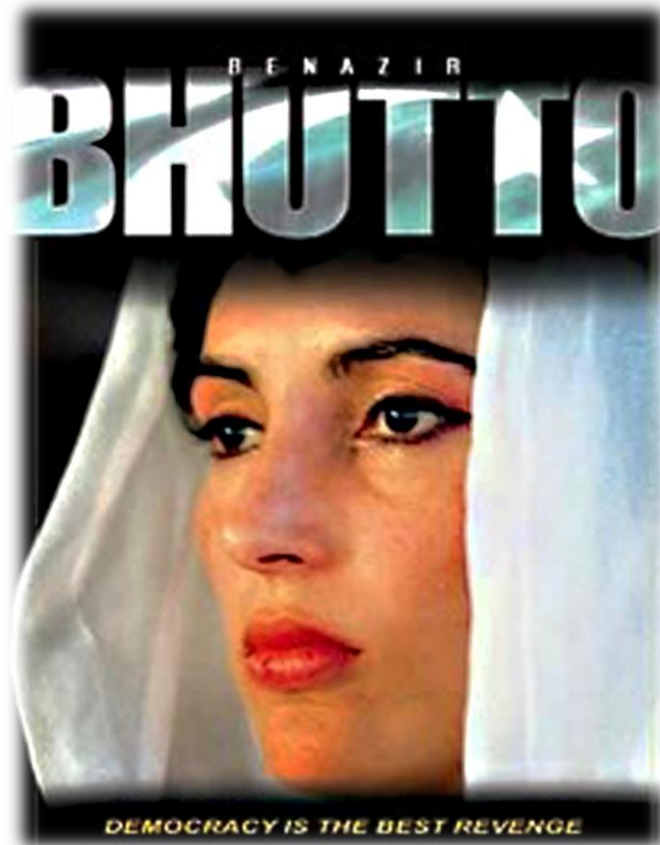


Figure 3.16, *Benazir Bhutto: The Film*, 2010

The film, itself, however, doesn't rely on the same sensational tropes as the trailer. It operates as an informational history of Pakistan's formation, its political seesawing between democratic and military regimes, and the role of the Bhutto family dynasty. While there is a definite romanticization of both Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto as stellar democratic figures through whom Pakistan experienced both stability and modernity, the general tone of the documentary is functional rather than sensational. Moreover, while the film critically lays out the ills of the U.S. in allowing for the proliferation of Islamist radical groups, it does overarchingly frame U.S. presence and intrigue in Pakistan as benevolent. For example, while the documentary acknowledges that the U.S.'s abandonment of Afghanistan after the Cold War led to the Islamic resurgence that Pakistan now experiences, it largely posits this abandonment as innocent. As the

narrator states in a reference to September 11, 2001, “it didn’t occur to the U.S. that post Cold War despair would sow the seeds for events two decades later.” The discursive environment of the film supports American exceptional interest in Bhutto as well engaging in a reservoir of terms and phrases that maintain the sanctity of this exceptionalism. Moreover, while the film only ambiguously locates Pakistan on Bush’s “axis of evil,” the viewer leaves the film having witnessed the excesses of (brown) colonial violence, despair, rage, and despotism. Hence the function of Bhutto’s story, through the film, is to locate her outside of this and in the annals of democracy, modernity and western aesthetics. Described in the film as both an “enrapturing woman” and “daughter of Pakistan” this cinematic representation posthumously continues the semantic traditions under which Bhutto came to be constructed as the desirable *other*.

The transmutation of Pakistan’s labyrinthine political history into the lesson of Bhutto speaks to the modernist ethos that locates democracy and women’s rights firmly on the shoulders of the west, as at the least, the west can tell the story of the (unsavable) east. The symbolic capacity of a feminine, racialized political *other*, especially one whose racialization is domesticated by white aesthetics, to represent the perfectionist illusions of interventionary political action at a time when Islamic nationalism threatened the whole of western culture reveals the specific utility of the discursive frames within which Bhutto came to symbolize democracy. As I argued in chapter two, using Mukhtar Mai’s visual presence, humanitarian missions rely on images of domestic alterity (ideals of erotic domestication). The political imperative of making visible the (exceptional) *otherness* within which Bhutto’s film operates is achieved at the cost of continually reanimating the ideological structures of legitimization that provide a convenient cover for the interventionary designs of new imperialism (Williams 2010). As R.W. Connell (1995) clarifies, the state is much more complicated than being governed by

those who are identified as men or masculine. In hyper-aestheticizing Bhutto simultaneous to over-politicizing her national legacy to democracy (vis-à-vis her martyred father); empire cements its virility and pride even as it appears to emanate the empowerment of women. The stylized narratives on Bhutto's well-done femininity, her desirable aesthetics, and her sexual conduct came to represent quite crucially the rationalization for a new Pakistan, but a Pakistan that teetered on striking that perfect balance between Cartesian politics and embodied democracy.

What is carefully expunged from the trailer and the film are the contradictory traces that reveal the production and reproduction of postcolonial violence. The narrative and theatrical techniques deployed critically deflect the power relations of north/south divide, engaging an imperialist historical amnesia around what generates violence and rage in the colony. The cultural scripts through which violence is viewed outside of the west are sanctioned in this cinematic display of Bhutto whose people couldn't keep her alive. Slavoj Žižek (2004: 114) has argued, that "all politics relies upon, and even manipulates, a certain level of economy of enjoyment." In this regard, Bhutto's visual story is conceived and anticipated as metaphor and myth, as power and pleasure, as real and unreal. The political stakes in Bhutto's visuality are made readily apparent. The violent and incongruous juxtaposition of Bhutto as aesthetically and politically pure (read: "a woman who had the courage to accept her destiny") versus the reminder of Pakistan as always and already barbaric and misogynistic (read: "in a land where women didn't matter") depends on the deeply specific technologies of all these bodily displays, the veiled women, the gun-toting men, the suited politicians and then, Bhutto. The film both freezes her as spectacle and moves through her contradictory embodiment as fetish. As fetish, Bhutto and her body are effectively reorganized to embody her own status, to visually organize a

singularity around democracy, hence women's freedom, in ways that became both carnivalesque and crudely naturalistic.

The final image (see fig. 17) caught of Bhutto, seconds before her death, elaborates this point. All conventions are in place – the red lipstick, white *dupatta* loosely framing her hair, her hand raised to adjust it from falling to the nape of her neck. This photograph portrays Bhutto as happy, ecstatic even. A generous smile spreads across her lips, her mouth slightly open in what looks like laughter. There is brightness in her eyes, as she stands upright into the sunroof of her bulletproof vehicle, wearing flowers around her neck and bangles on her hands. She is quintessentially Pakistani, elite, feminine.



Figure 3.17, *BBC*, 27 December 2007

In its exclusive focus on the victim-heroine and the failure of the Pakistani government to save her, this photograph encodes the dense materiality of violent history into a master narrative of virtual witnessing. On one hand, the image affirms the impossibility for an enlightened future in Pakistan, one accomplished through Bhutto. On the other hand, the axis of democracy shifts to

the axis of spectacle, where the possibility of democracy in Pakistan is always and already dead by culture. The footage of Benazir Bhutto's death was played ad nauseum – is this not evidence of the carnivalesque character of democracy's liquidation? Indeed the axis of democracy is revealed here to be embedded in the conventions of spectacle.

The transmutation of the American imperial intervention in Pakistan into the testimonial of a failed state (one that annihilates its democratic figures, especially if they're female) is the emplotted product of the repeated footage of Bhutto's death. Like *Time* magazine's image (see fig 1.6) and Mukhtar Mai's most widely distributed photograph (see fig 2.1), what is particularly aggressive about this final image is that in all its anticipatory horridness and (predicted) goriness, there lies a challenging kind of beauty, the sublime, an awesome or tragic register of the beautiful. So while Mai's post-rape image invoked a sublimity on the feminine, racialized oppressed *other*, this final photograph of Bhutto registers a spectacular parody of democracy because the viewer knows what happened after.

Figure seventeen, the final shot of Bhutto right before her assassination, is but one of several shots that necessarily spectacularized her death. The exhibitionism with which Bhutto's body was offered to her world viewers as textualized spectacle marginalizes what actually happened to Bhutto; the reality of her assassination remains lost in a web of conspiracy theories. History is reduced to a traumatic historical event – singular and archaized – to be consumed elsewhere as an entertaining injunction of “not again.” That Pakistan has suffered cyclical problems of governance stemming from a weak political culture and an overdeveloped state (basically colonial in its original and present construction) together with several economic distortions, numerous ideological dissensions and regional challenges remain marginalized. Meanwhile, the voyeuristic spectacle of Pakistan's overall political and economic situation is

successfully portrayed as dispiriting, confusing, and barbaric. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to attempt to discuss the labyrinthine and deeply controversial history of Bhutto's political trajectory, it seems a fair assessment to locate her fate within an epistemological framework through which Pakistan could be imagined and empire could be acted out. As such, through the screened consumption of Bhutto's death, the global mission of America is reanimated, secured and sanctified.

The spectacle of her death is indeed a celebrated instance of how dramatic nationalism and learned democracy come together in Said's (1979: 78) "Orientalist theatre." The idea of repeatedly representing her death is a theatrical one: she is the stage on which the whole of Pakistan is imagined. Pakistan seems to be not a field in and of itself, but a theatrical stage affixed to America. In the depth of this stage, all my visual subjects nurture the American imagination. Bhutto, however, strategically operates as a figure whose outline needs to be sharpened to press ideological myths into the service of an advancing empire. Her visual subjectivity constitutes the power of feminine embodiment and hetero-erotic aesthetics as specifically promulgated by contemporary processes of democraticization.

Queer Democracy or Straight Power: (Mis)Uses of the (Female) Body

In her essay, titled, "Is there a Queer Pedagogy? Or Stop Reading Straight," Deborah Britzman (1995) asks us to rethink the constitution of bodies of knowledge and knowledge of bodies within educational spaces, particularly as they organize perceptions of the gay and lesbian *other*. Through an exegetic discussion around the "unthought" in education, Britzman unsettles the sediments of what the dominant gaze imagines as normalcy and difference, empowerment and subordination, bodies of knowledge we compel and knowledge of bodies we impel. Tracing out the contours of ignorance that shape hegemonic reading practices, Britzman refuses the

unassailability of *otherness* and the exorbitant normality of sameness. She compels a queer imagination around subjectivity, and hence, freedom of those subjects, that moves beyond voyeurism, spectatorship, and the materiality of the presence. In other words, she asks her reader to look beyond liberal tropes of inclusion, rights, voice and visibility to more radical imaginations on the free subject.

In invoking Britzman's (1995) title to frame my discussion of Bhutto, I too, render unstable the reading practices of democracy where the grounds of (empowered) identities are still confined to the mastery of (western) aesthetics and intelligibility. In reading Bhutto's visualities within the discourse of imperial hetero-erotics, I point to the misrecognitions, silences and ignorances embedded in straight democracies. To work within the terms of critical feminist, postcolonial, and queer theories, I've attempted in this chapter to think through the structures of disavowal within democracy that produce the feminine, racialized *other* as desirable or disruptive through a straight reading of her body.

The influx of Bhutto's imagery in the global political arena was said to have a significant affect on gender, destabilizing the media and political configurations that render women invisible or only visible as sex objects, if only because it makes us aware of how very rare it is to see a woman political leader. But depictions of Bhutto as exotic and erotic (in contrast to the destitute brownness of Pakistani *reality*) disrupt the possibilities of a politicized feminist and racialized self at which Bhutto's figure occasionally hints. In becoming American political spectacle, Bhutto bypasses a mode of subaltern and/or feminist compassion and, in ways too similar to Fanon's (1963) national bourgeoisie, she takes white society as the standard of measurement. The spectacle of Bhutto's female body "dusted over with colonial culture" (Fanon 1963) as representative of Pakistani, and more broadly, global democracy conceals the contestations and

cross-linkages between the popular visual realm that relies on the white gaze and the subaltern imaginary that traverses the uneven and unstable framings of racialized political *others*.

My point here is not in Bhutto's collusion in the imperial economy and white aesthetics. That Bhutto had power that the other subjects I analyze don't have access to indeed catalyzes feminists' demands towards her, one which is superimposed on her and one I feel she navigated to disappointing ends. I do think Bhutto was strategically privileged to open up possibilities for redefining Pakistani women. For example, in Beijing, at the 1999 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Bhutto was a key speaker advocating for the empowerment of women through education, employment and population control. She railed against female infanticide and misogynist interpretations of Islam (Khan 2007). Her presentation here is as a liberal humanist universal subject equally participating in a society that advocates an equality supposedly abstracted from race and gender, even as it relies on class and aesthetic appearance. Bhutto's feminism was glorified only as it successfully effaced the radical praxis of feminist activists' lives, relied on the normalizing power of her imagery, incited a *jouissance* in her corporeal aesthetic and rendered invisible the continued global north/south realities of domination and subordination.

When she transforms silence into voice, a woman transgresses, says Anzaldua (1995: xxii). But Anzaldua, even as she invokes this liberal trope, demands more of her feminist sisters and says, we have to choose with which voice and in which voice do we speak. Fanon tells us that being colonized by a language has larger implications for one's consciousness: "To speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (1963: 1718). Fanon elaborates by stating that speaking French means that one accepts, or is coerced into accepting, the collective consciousness of the French, which identifies blackness with evil and sin. Bhutto's

ideological articulations at the Beijing conference, and throughout her post 9/11 political trajectory, proceeded from irreducible moral frameworks, such as democracy, human rights and modernity; hence, they impatiently foreclosed on the complexities of politics, the power embedded in representation and the imperial histories of her own specific context. Both democracy and feminism, if conceived through the spectacle of Bhutto, are imagined only in these specific and strategic visual terms, through the lens of imperial hetero-erotics.

Bhutto's discursive symbolization teeters ambivalently for and against configurations of power. In addressing the internal misogyny of the Muslim world, Bhutto remains unsatisfying to critical, postcolonial feminist callings. In speaking most fluently the language and logic of liberal, humanist frameworks, Bhutto attempts to escape the association of the feminine racialized *other* with oppression. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that rewriting Pakistani women's relationship to radical feminist work through a rewriting of Bhutto is an extension of the struggle between the feminist subaltern and the political elite. The seductive enterprise of female political visibility works within depoliticized democratic frameworks, perhaps what Zizek (2004) and Ranciere (2003) call post politics, where singular figures of resistance are allowed visibility within the deeply liberal-humanist and pleasurable cathartic frame of individual heroism and Pakistani failure. Fundamentally, then, no discursive destabilization occurred through Bhutto as, on the one hand, she was sandwiched between imperial motives, colonial wounds, national politics, the hetero-patriarchal state and cultural systems, and on the other, she reaped the benefits of each of these exploitive enterprises. So while, through Bhutto, gender appears more nimble; she perhaps functions as Eistenstein's (2007) sexual decoy, where she brings into being the illusion of the power of political participation and the pleasure of freedom. By highlighting the ways Bhutto's visual aestheticization collided with nodes of power

that use women's bodies to interpret freedom, oppression and global south/north relations, I wish to stress that most, if not all, relations between domination and subordination remain intact.

In queering the space between Bhutto and democracy, between Bhutto and empowerment, my attempt is perhaps to make something queer happen to the signified – Bhutto's body – and the signifier – to language and representation. Fundamentally, I underscore the precariousness of Bhutto and draw attention to the limits of the conventions and rules of freedom that were advanced through her. In her essay on the struggle for progressive pedagogy, Walkerdine (1997:21) asks "at what costs this fantasy of liberation?" Similarly, in engaging the *hetero-erotic* "structures of intelligibility," to use Foucault's (1982) term, that rendered Bhutto desirable, I refuse the cultural conditions that make bodies matter only as sheer positivity or significations of individual empowerment. I queer the intelligibility that produced Bhutto as the proper subject of democracy by explicitly, transgressively, perversely and politically drawing attention to her body. The pernicious production of Bhutto as symbolic of democracy relied on her body, even as these structures of gazing (straight) at her disavowed such corporeal interests [or only affiliated with it insofar as it fetishized difference], making it exist and not exist at the same time.

How could the Western media have managed Bhutto's (liberal) feminist body and subjectivity without turning her into a mystical beauty queen of the orient: a restrained, coiffed, accessorized, elite, beautiful woman attached to a bloody legacy of democratic attempts in Pakistan, only to die in that same effort? It couldn't have. Mediated by metaphors and semantic grids, Bhutto was visually organized to animate perceptions of freedom for Pakistani women, but this was little more than a fantasy instituted and inscribed by a particular set of corporeal gestures that named her as free and modern and through which the dominant gaze imagined both

democracy and women's rights in Pakistan. Whether unconsciously reproduced or deliberately crafted to appeal to the psychic contradictions and ambivalent desires of her spectators, the paradox of Bhutto's framing comes from the recesses of our most sedimented, unquestioned notions about gender and power, or (correct) democracy and (acceptable) *otherness*.

The general consensus in political discourse that concedes sexuality to the *other*, the queer, crumbles here as political life, feminine aesthetic, imperial scripts and oriental desires submerge around the popularly accepted framings of Bhutto. Constructing its substance through varying points on the female body that can be marked as democratic, through gendered behavior that sharpens the modernity of Pakistani nation-state or renders it dangerous, and through feminine sexuality that serves the nation and hetero-patriarchy simultaneously or enables their fragility; hetero-democracy plays on the intricate filaments between patriarchy, imperialism, sexuality and gender. Fundamentally, by queering the discursive construction of Bhutto, I've pointed to the libidinal mechanisms and practices through which democracy and feminine freedom are imagined. I have sought to render lucid the oft invisible link between heterosexual gazing and empire building as well as the centrality of Bhutto's public visualities to a bodily life that cannot be theorized away.

Four

Never A Feminist, Always a Woman: The Ruins of Decolonial Resistance in Pakistan

“We must all be of one and the same mind when we look upon the photographic evidence. It is in these photographs that Americans can meet on the common ground of their beloved traditions. Here we are all united at the shrine. Francis Trevelyan Miller, 1911, 278

The fact that we approach suicide bombings with such trepidation, in contrast to how we approach the violence of colonial domination...indicates the symbolic violence that shapes our understanding of what constitutes ethically and politically illegitimate violence. Ghassen Hage, 2003, 71

Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and brains in a new direction. Let us to try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth...” Frantz Fanon, 1968, 145

In July of 2007, the infamous events of the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad unfolded, and Pakistan took center stage on the global political theatre as the students of Jamia Hafza Madrasa, the enjoining religious school for women, rose in a violent resistance against what they perceived as foreign impositions of secularism and immorality. The Red Mosque's two affiliated seminaries launched a campaign for Shari'a, occupying a nearby children's library and embarking on vigilante raids throughout the capital to stop what they called "un-Islamic activities," such as DVD vendors, barber shops and a Chinese-run massage parlor. This uprising by the madrasa began when female students abducted three Pakistani women accused of running a brothel and six Chinese masseuses working in this “brothel,” claiming initially that they were only attacking “Chinese girls who were prostitutes and CD shops who sold pornography.” They released them the next day,³³ but it paved the way for the final

³³ By some accounts, the Chinese women were held for three days within the women quarters of the mosque (GeoTV – *Mere Mutabik*, Translated, *In my opinion*). But most American and British media accounts state the women were released the next day.

confrontation, the siege of the Mosque and Madrasa by the right wing Islamists (see fig. 1).



The

Figure 4.1, *BBC*, 14 July 2007

The Red Mosque became the site of a violent week-long siege between the mosque's seminary students and the Pakistani military. "More than 100 burqa-clad women also gathered outside the mosque, which was the site of a deadly government siege in 2007" (*theindian.com*). While the standoff between the Red Mosque and Musharraf's administration involved thousands of Islamic activists, at the frontlines of the demands were veiled women. *BBC* (27 July 2007), tells us "The security personnel were met by baton-wielding women, who refused to let them enter the mosque or seminary compound." As stated by the *New York Times* (24 July 2007), "shortly before the siege began, female students had come out of the school, draped in black burqas, waving bamboo sticks and taunting troops stationed nearby. The Pakistani news media dubbed them "chicks with sticks.'" The veiled female students demanded the resignation of the then-current Pakistani administration and advocated an Islamic regime that would reinstate Islamic morality and return Pakistan to a state of Islamic purism. Despite the visibility and

activity of the female students, when the events came to an end with the death of over 70 male students and the recovery of six women's bodies (veiled and burnt), the press released a statement that these women were held against their will and their bodies burned. These women were described by both their Islamic counterparts and oppositional journalist parties as martyrs. The final note, as the events faded into Pakistan's now infamous militant Islamic history, was uncertainty on whether these women, those dead and those who surrendered, were "fighters" or "victims."

As a globalized political event, the 2007 Red Mosque in Pakistan brought front and center a fantastic fear of today's times: veiled Muslim women who engage in abrasive, anti-American, pro-Pakistan political action to their death. As one among distinctly categorized (brown) *others*, the Pakistani female religious martyr is evocatively connected to contemporary dialectics on decolonization and women's liberation. Indeed the events of the Red Mosque roused public intellectuals, Western political actors and social justice activists to the plight of Pakistani women. The intellectuals' dismissal of these veiled martyrs as nonviable/nonacting subjects speaks to the Aristotelian fantasy that subjectivity requires a distinct, recognizable, speaking subject, bounded by law, empowered (at least potentially) by rights. The global feminists'³⁴ amplification of these female martyrs as faux subjects, women whose subjectivity is denied by the severe patriarchy of Islam and nation in Pakistan, speaks to the modernist fetish of an autonomous and gender-blind citizenry. *BBC's (BBC, Women's Hour, 27 May 2009)* query captures this concern, "But why are more and more families sending their girls to religious schools? Are they linked to Islamic fundamentalism or was the Red Mosque a one off?"

³⁴ I am invoking Grewal's (2005) analysis of the ways specific kinds of feminism have become conflated with developmental discourses, disseminating neoliberal technologies of choice and confusing higher living standards with liberation. A more detailed deconstruction of hegemonic feminism is covered in the chapter two, *Victim cum Feminist: Deconstructing Global Concerns/Celebrations of Mukhtar Mai*.

Combined and contemporized, both the denial by the intellectuals and the concern by the human rights activists speak to the neoliberal inflation of a disciplined, neutral and recognizable citizenry.

As I will show, every image put forth of the Red Mosque event was inflected with provocative ponderings. *Are these women victims or are they political actors? Are they pawns of a tight, un-nuanced patriarchy or are they the new agents of anti-American violence? Are they abject/repressed or dangerous/licentious? Should we fear them or fold them into our democratic embrace? Are they grieving their nation? Can we grieve them? Are they grievable? Can they be disciplined, empowered, made into recognizable modern subjects?*

Given these questions, in this chapter, I interrogate the hetero-patriarchal, imperial structures of looking that captured, colonized and interpreted these women as impossible subjects. I argue that the reduction of these women (or images of them) to the subordinate colonial, the political monster or the irrelevant nonsubject speaks to a crucial interstitial site in the building of empire, the war on terror and production of desirable neoliberal/colonial subjects. In laying bare the dominant gaze, I explore how these visual subjects transgress dominant paradigms of subjectivity in ways that queer western structural subject formation and assemble a distinctly queer political subjectivity. In working through and working with the anti-racist anger that triggered the Red Mosque events, I ask, who are these women as political subjects in this postmodern world?

“Chicks with Sticks” – Dominant Readings of the Women Martyrs

The female body and the woman subject both have a strikingly insistent persistence throughout the story of the Lal Masjid. The fetishistic preoccupation with these active female

political subjects, reduced to ideological caricatures such as “daughter,” “burqa-clad,” and “baton-wielding” necessitate the question: what is *seen* in the visual portrayal of the women of the 2007 Red Mosque events? As Barthes (1981) tells us, the camera is (presumed to be) an instrument of evidence and there is an existential relationship between the *Real* thing that has been placed before the camera lens and the resulting photographic image. The material reality offered to the viewer of any of these photographs, however, must be located in the conscious and unconscious processes, practices, and institutions through which the photograph(s) can incite fantasy. The photographs I move through below were politically hailed as visual evidence of a number of Pakistani and Islamic pathologies. But a central ambition of this project is to unmask the social and semiotic processes through which all of these photographs come to stand in as truth.

In image after image of the Lal Masjid (see fig. 4.2), we see masses of women, shrouded in full black *niqab*, carrying bamboo sticks arrested sometimes in air as they pound the dirt floor with them. We do not see flesh, except around the eyes, which tend to be described as dark, angry or emotionless. The images are either taken from a distance, encompassing the masses of female bodies “draped in black burqa,” or through honing closely in on one face to see, as Somini Sengupta of the *New York Times* (nytimes.com, 20 July 2007) describes, “lively eyes sparkling out of a black burqa.” Many of the images of women depict hair covered, mouths open, presumably chanting Islamic praise or shouting out political demands – the embodiment of feminine irrationality, Islamic monstrosity, and nationalist backwardness. The images feel anachronistic to the modern imperial gaze; these women cannot be our contemporaries, the journalists tell us.



Figure 4.2, *New York Times*, 20 July 2007



Figure 4.3, *New York Time*, 17 July 2007



Figure 4.4, *New York Times*, 18 July 2007

In one image (see fig 4.5), the camera is positioned so that the masses feel endless, terrorizing and overwhelming. We see the black shrouded figures fade into and around each other in what appears to be a white stone spiral stadium (see fig.4.5). The image invokes simultaneously a temporal, futuristic and anti-future emotion. The photograph perceptibly brings into play a feeling of harking back in time with bodies that are incommensurable to the project of modernity. The specific corporealities of this image politicize the aesthetic of the photograph.



Figure 4.5, *BBC*, 17 July 2007

The image performs. It enacts a fear. It is a photograph of Pakistani women, the gendered *nation-state*, which projects both the future that needs to be avoided and the future that cannot be overcome. The images of the veiled martyrs operate as repetition, one after another after another, rendering subjectivity impotent. By looking, we experience all we need to know. We remember images and not the event or the politic, we remember the veils, the covered but clearly feminine bodies, the bamboo sticks, the rows of shrouded women, a mosque, the smoke of gunfire. We remember the mass of bodies – clearly female bodies; but as women they are unrecognizable,

monstrous, demonic, and victim. This is precisely the power the images hold. The event ceases in relevance. The images, in their silence, speak.

My point is more thoroughly elaborated by Figures six through eight. We see, in all these photographs, rows of women standing around one another in what clearly takes the shape of a protest, their bodies uniformly veiled, their arms raised holding erect bamboo sticks, the dirt floor under their feet, the gates of what is clearly a mosque (denoted by the Arabic lettering over their heads) behind them, a megaphone pressed against one woman's mouth – shouting again what the audience presumes to be Islamic slogans or political demands. This image combined and parceled out tells a tale of Pakistan, of Islam, of militancy, of unfamiliar womanhood, of curious subjectivity. It isn't a quiet image, a pleasing visual aesthetic; rather it is a loud, carnivalesque image of Muslim women ; it taps into our most basic bourgeois, American, neoliberal sensibility: it tells us of feminine irrationality (i.e. the raised arms, bamboo sticks, burqa); it tells of these women's militant stance (i.e. the sense of anger, the contained bodies, asexualized femininity), and it tells us about the female body as marked by Islam, trained by nation, emitting signs of anti-American rage and national grief. This image distresses and troubles our senses, leaving us with a lingering sense of confusion.



Figure 4.6, *New York Times*, 18 July 2007



Figure 4.7, *New York Times*, 17 July 2007



Figure 4.8, *BBC*, 18 July 2007

However, it does something even more crucial than this. It infuses within its audience fear, a fear of losing power over its own interpretation of modernity, this “good world.”³⁵ These women contradict the univocality of modernity, belie the reach of modern apparatuses of power – their bodies haven’t given in to modern machineries that manipulate the economy of its movements. These bodies have an unfamiliar economy. This image plays into a deep-seated panic that is most significantly about the power and life force of nationalism, neocolonial anger,

³⁵ Here, I refer to a Heideggerian sense of “goodness,” employing a Manichean rationality that both goodness and evil are recognizable cultural artifacts and behaviors. Familiarly, this is the rationality imposed during the Bush Administration to draw up support for the war-on-terror, a relevant point here given that this campaigning of support relied upon a particular image of Muslim women, a particular contour of the face of the enemy, and an increasingly specific characterization of the unstable nation-state.

and Islamic monstrosity. The very capturing of this event tells its audience that modernity is in danger. These visual subjects, angry Pakistani, identifiably Muslim women, can potentially wrench modernity, American and bourgeois sensibilities from their comfortable anchors in neocolonized worlds.

The singularity of each of these figures lies not only in what it represents – tradition/modernity, feminine/masculine white/ brown, patriot/terrorist, assimilated/monstrous – but in what they perform, in the temporalities they issue forth, in what their images *do*. These images simultaneously summon fear and indifference. In other words, these photographs articulate with an American blasé attitude that rejects the threatening reality of events outside of America. As with images of war, the viewer both engages the screen and disengages moments later. So while these images are clearly of politicized, Islamic women subjects who usurp the conventions of western modernity and goodness, the threat sparked is fleeting because these women are often reduced to what Haeri (2002) calls “windup Muslim dolls.”

This term, offered by Haeri (2002) in an effort to critique dominant conceptualizations of women in pious Muslim movements, calls for deconstruction. First, the idea of these women as wound-up clearly invokes a machinistic non-active subjectivity. The phrase also frames them as vulnerable; a vessel of the nation but an empty one, a site of erotic curiosity but Spartan in its display. As dolls, the phrase implies that these women don’t possess a political subjectivity and are reduced to gendered metaphors that feminize and infantilize them. This phrase does exactly what it critiques – it caricaturizes the (female) subject as nothing but a pawn of a larger, more intentional discursive formation. These windup dolls are threatening only insofar as what undergirds them is threatening, so long as the hand that winds them is menacing. As such, even as these images threaten dominant conceptualizations of modernity, freedom and the war on

terror, they operate as a strategic trope to stabilize while they simultaneously destabilize the western, free, unveiled subject.

The (imperial) camera and the (colonized) veiled subject, in these images, are old acquaintances, with the former constructing both its subject of gaze, but also simultaneously conjuring the (faux) feminist subject absent in these visualities. The photographs of the women are powerful life-forms because they provide the necessary visual focus on a certain unrecognizable subjectivity, or rather recognizable only as oppressed, as in the case of Mukhtar Mai. The acuity of the camera's gaze almost forces upon its viewer the most visibly expected form of (Islamic) oppression. In other words, we are clear that "free" actors are not being represented.

Though implicitly contrasted to the bourgeois, neoliberal subjectivity (whether Pakistani, American or European), the women are identifiable as oppressed and bounded in ways indefinable, but absolutely recognizable as "Islamic" –as defined within the visual vocabulary of American and British media. The imperial camera amplifies the modernist bifurcation of the woman subject because in producing this (oppressed) visibility we come to recognize the (western) self as free. In dominant feminist alliances, while racialized, feminist subjects may be physically present and even hypervisible, as in the case of Mukhtar Mai or Benazir Bhutto, there is not necessarily any real attempt to engage with their conditions or with them as subjects (Grewal 2005; Bacchetta 1994). It is in this sense that the dominant feminist subject is never produced in isolation, but rather in relation to other subjects and nonsubjects. The Lal Masjid women, as non-recognizable subjects, become the perfect foil through which to imagine the dominant (free) self. This situation of simultaneous subject-production-and-effacement can be seen as what Bacchetta (1994) calls a *representation/effacement configuration*. In the images of

the Lal Masjid women, we never see this “other” woman – but in each image of the veiled martyrs, in each angle of the *niqab*, in every shot of the pounding bamboo sticks, this “other” woman is referenced, implicit. The bourgeois viewer imagines her agentic, unveiled self. In other words, this nameless, faceless, feminine martyr functions to regenerate the desirable “normal” subject of these neoliberal and war on terror times.

As colonized photographs, the martyrs are reduced to the dualities of western epistemologies, (ab)normal and (un)desireable rather than, as Deleuze and Guattari (1980) suggest, part of the rhizomatic machineries of war. In their groundbreaking theoretical exposition, Deleuze and Guattari (1980) reconceptualize a rhizome, a characteristically horizontal stem of a plant that sends out roots and shoots and nodes. They proffer a rhizome as a philosophical concept that refers to shifting configurations of mediaelements; a conflation of language, images, epistemologies. A rhizome is characterized by principles of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity and disrapture. Rejecting Western philosophy’s overreliance on dualities, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980) notion of the rhizome provides an intriguing platform to situate the war on terror, the Red Mosque events and these feminine visual subjects. Using this concept, the war on terror and the myriad neonationalisms it has brought forward can be situated as a semiotic chain of events connected to very diverse ideological, economic and political modes. As such, these veiled martyrs are embedded in the connections between the varying semiotic chains and organizations of power.

However, the dominant consensus put forth by the dominant gaze affectively reduces the different regimes of signs, status plays and acts of resistance to a comfortable Western duality – that of the “free,” unveiled woman versus that of the abject, veiled woman. The visual devices that cement these martyrs within a Western binary suppress the shifting multiplicities and

detrterritorializations these visual subjects enact. For this reason, in the gaze of the imperial camera, these feminine subjects serve as a perfect foil to the western liberal rational woman/ (faux) feminist subject and in doing so, sublimate the anxiety of managing rhizomatic, neonational terrorist networks. All the visual and discursive tropes of gender repression and feminine irrationality woven into each image of these women, allow the American liberated woman to attain new height. The Muslim woman, at the end of the day, is unsavable whereas the American woman becomes feminist *par excellence*.

Colonized and interpreted by the paranoid global gaze, these women are a nightmare for those who are free and agentic. These visualities can only exist as a catastrophic destiny. To be sure, in this post 9/11, global constellation characterized largely by paranoid securitization and visual surveillance, these images function as a fantastic fear module of the possibilities of the free racialized *other*. The signification of these images is that, through their reiterative force, they create an illusion of freedom and oppression – both of which, yet again, come to be read through the female body. These highly specific and deeply strategic visual signs operate within a discursive field of power deployed to achieve certain ends. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create an illusion of consensus.

As part of a visual project that presents a cultural portrayal of Pakistani women, these images are more than illustrative. Through visual repetition, these images produce discursive formations that participate in both neoliberal imperatives and western fetishizations. On the one hand, through the visual repetition of “windup Muslim dolls,” these images take part in a neoliberal iconography that reveres a particular subject (read Bhutto), a subject not seen in these visualities. On the other hand, these visualities figure into media-driven iconography rooted in fetishism, a fetish repeatedly displayed through the landscape of Muslim women’s bodies. These

images of the female martyrs provide a particular pleasure because they supply visual evidence for a political fantasy first articulated by Laura Bush in 2001 when she stated Muslim women needed saving. This pleasurable invocation serves, both linguistically and visually, as a heuristic device that flattens out the polydimensionality of gender politics and Pakistan geopolitics.

Here, what must be noted is Pakistan's understated complexity in the war on terror and how this Pakistan-U.S geopolitical nexus have utilized these visual subjects' to support American exceptionalism. Described by American, British, Indian and Pakistan media with phrases such "*burqa brigade*," "*baton-wielding*," "*fearsome, stick-wielding, burka-clad young women....pouring out of the mosque*," and "*chicks with sticks*," these imaged coupled with the text alludes to how the visual subject is continually invoked as both *real* evidence of Pakistan as an unstable *nation-state* and America as a stable and free nation. Because state power has historically always been imagined through hegemonic masculinity (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007); the Lal Masjid women seemingly prop up narratives that name this specific type of racialized *other* femininity as deranged, wild and irrational. The women's involvement in such Islamic insurgent projects underscores the desperation of Pakistani society and the impossibility of diplomatic settlements with, more broadly, the Muslim world. Involving women makes Pakistan more uncivilized, legitimizing the continued and insidious use of force in the region. But it also fundamentally marks the region as more dangerous to America, constructing an imaginative geography that dovetails with two claims of Pakistan's exceptionalism – its unique ability to support U.S. efforts to counter (Islamic) terrorism and its radical potential to sleep with the enemy. Both Pakistan's exceptional position in the war on terror and America's exceptional interest in these visual subjects demonstrate the vitality of these images the repressed, feminized,

irrational, disturbed figures that seem to scoff at neoliberal, global feminist and nationalist concern.

In spite of the perception that Muslim women, many twentieth century conflicts have prominently featured Islamic women. During the first Gulf War, a quarter of Iraqi soldiers and half of Kuwaiti soldiers were women (Sjoberg 2006). Women were heavily involved in the Algerian revolutions against the French; women fought against the Taliban during their rise to power in Afghanistan, and the Iranian Mujhahideen have an all-female combatant unit (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). What's most obvious here is that women, despite their political activity, are not dealt with as political subjects, but instead are incessantly contained as victims or passive dupes. Indeed, the state machines themselves relied on conventional symbols of femininity, as the *Prospect UK*, (28 July 2007) tells us, "even as the writ of the state was being openly defied, the chief negotiator appointed by Musharraf described the burkha brigade militants as "our daughters" against whom "no operation could be contemplated.'" As part of this sociopolitical fantasy of saving the oppressed *other* there is a notable desire to dismiss the threat of (female) bodies. If the dominant gaze can reduce these women from intentional, rhizomatic political subjects to oppressed women in need of American saviors (like Mai), then the fantasy stays intact.

But this framing of veiled women as only oppressed is further complicated in the media narratives of the Lal Masjid subjects, as their potential danger was sexualized. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) have pointed out that when women engage in "evil," their evil is sexualized. Moreover, it has already been well documented that the war on terror has revealed deeply sublimated sexual anxieties (Paur 2007, Faludi 2007) and the employment of the erotic panopticon in Mai's photographic trajectory captures the conundrum of this war's anxiety

towards and utility of brown women's bodies. I argue that the empirical puzzle of the Red Mosque women coagulates only when the threatening potency of these bodies/subjects is weakened by the dominant gaze, a dilution that occurs through the clever trope of eroticizing these women. In the media coverage of the Lal Masjid women, this reduction becomes apparent when words are mixed with the images. The (imperial) camera embodies panoptical power to display the *real* events, collect the *truth*, and discipline its object.

The Lal Masjid events were clearly marked by a sexual discourse demonstrated by the juxtapositioning of veiled women (read: pure and virginal), holding prostitutes (read: tainted and dirty) hostage, and the eroticized vocabulary used to describe these (potentially threatening) political actors. In telling the story of the Lal Masjid women, the question persists – where are the images of prostitutes? In none of the images of the 2007 Red Mosque events is the spectator privy to a single photograph or dialogue about the prostitutes that were abducted. The absence of these images juxtaposed with the ubiquity and endlessness of the veiled women's images demonstrates McClintock's (1997) point that the Orient is feminized in a number of ways: as mother, evil seducer, licentious aberration, and lifegiver. In the hyper-display of these aberrant lifegivers, "windup Muslim dolls," the erotic undergirding of these images is denied and displaced. Additionally, unlike the ways these images conjure up the neoliberal "free" woman, they do not similarly conscript the image of the sexual *other*. Here, the visualities of these women are both technologies of representation and technologies of power. The invisibility of the prostitutes from the discourse and the photographs conceals the violence done to them both by the women of the Mosque and the imperial camera that never recounts their story despite its heavy reliance on the modern Western trope of visibly empowering subjects (Mirzeoff 1998). Perhaps, what can be noted from their absence is the larger insignificance attached to prostitutes'

personhood, where the prostitute as morally depraved subject is denied subjectivity in ways that even these martyrs aren't denied a visible identity.

Through the visual absence of the prostitutes and hyper-presence of veiled (read unerotic) women, it would seem that the erotic is displaced in the Lal Masjid events. I argue, however, that within these rhizomatic, unrecognizable political spaces, the purportedly unerotic female bodies comes to represent the *erotic national*, a subject constituted through the sexualized and nationalized gaze, even as the dominant gaze denies it. The media that rendered these women visible did so, not to destabilize the dimension of political life that seeks make the body irrelevant, but to invoke a *jouissance* associated with constituting female bodies as operational national texts, where their religiously aesthetic political presence creates a (pathological) ménage a trios of the nation, woman and God. Like the erotic panopticon that gazes at Mai's violated brown body, this aesthetic capture by the imperial camera relies on a hetero-patriarchal gaze that frames the martyrs' (almost) death as an eroticized, sensationalized, fantasized spectacle. However, the potency of this possibly threatening spectacle requires the force of panoptical normalization. What I mean is that insofar as these women visually challenge liberal categorization of everything from (masculine) nation to (feminine) freedom, the dominant gaze must remap them as erotic and disempowered.

Here, I refer to the linguistic fantasy behind naming these women, "chicks with sticks." As mentioned earlier, both *BBC* and a number of Pakistani media outlets such as *Daily Times*, *All Things Pakistan* and *Daily Star* labeled the women protestors "chicks with sticks." According to the *New Yorker* (23 July 2007), these English-language jokes were quickly abandoned when the women kidnapped prostitutes, threatened video-store owners, and made bonfires of books, videocassettes, and DVDs that they regarded as unIslamic. The media, as we know, have their

own agenda – to increase revenues – thus making sensationalized language part of the competitive game to increase readership. But telling the story of Muslim men and women has precise material effects, or as *Aljazeera* (*aljazeera.com*, 27 January 2011) states, “coverage of Islam has turned into an industry specializing in the engineering of images, scenes, and messages.” But what sociopolitical realities and libidinal fantasies allow the Western gaze to transform veiled women who protested American political intervention in Pakistan to “chicks with sticks?”

The erotic vocabulary used against these women elucidates how the sexual/erotic operates as a particularly efficient and dangerous conduit through which to exercise power. Thus, to say that the Lal Masjid events were marked by a sexual discourse is to, at once, say too much and not enough. Following Foucault (1978), technologies of sex create and regulate, rather than reflect, the sexual bodies they name. The sexual subtext labeling these women as ‘chicks with sticks’ needs to be contextualized within a range of practices and discourses that lasso sexuality in the deployment of U.S. patriotism, nationalism, and increasingly, empire. In the use of such erotic grammar to describe these women as (non) actors, the discursive formation reveals a negotiative play between materiality, sexuality, national and hegemonic politics.

Muslim women’s bodies have almost always been framed within a context of patriarchal, nationalist, racialized and de-eroticized specularities (Khan 2007). This process dates back to the onset of colonialism and the subsequent juggle of colonial to postcolonial to neocolonial temporalities. However, a more convoluted visual and discursive formation is evident here. While the bodies of these Pakistani, Muslim, political women are de-aestheticized and de-eroticized, there remains a vested right by the imperial pen to capture a particular erotic aesthetic that it uses to its advantage. In naming these women “chicks with sticks,” the gendered political

action at the Lal Masjid is reduced to an interplay of eroticism and political dismemberment. At first glance, this erotic language seems incongruent with the dominant gaze's vested perception of these women either as threatening and nightmarish or as mere pawns of a larger male-dominated movement. But the media's persistence in naming these women only as "chicks with sticks," and then later deflecting responsibility of this phrase, must be more deeply interrogated, not just for effect, but for intent.

In order to dis-identify these women as terrorists and reify them (through jest) as women, a number of sexual tropes are employed. First, the veil as a symbol of sexual modesty and purity is deemphasized in the semantic shift from "veiled women of the Lal Masjid protested" to "chicks with sticks." This lingual fantasy demonstrates that the female body is incapable of being viewed through a neutral lens. It is always and completely sexed by the dominant gaze (Bordo 1993; Grosz 1994). The body, as Grosz (1994) details, signifies a meaningful and functional subject capable of being read or interpreted symptomatically, in terms of what it hides or displays. Body movement, clothing and behavior are simultaneously the ways in which women may be known to others and the means by which they might betray themselves. Applying Grosz's (1994) idea here, we see that it is the (female) body that is constantly threatening to reveal these political subjects as women, a fear that resides both in the imperial camera and in those it seeks to capture.

Second, the use of the phrase fetishistically reduces these women to the specularities of their sexual bodies. Here, the lingual fantasy of these women as "chicks" illustrates the need to produce and secure a nondangerous subject positioning through the most familiar trope of all – reducing women to sex objects. The phrase functions to make them impotent as political actors; as "chicks," they cease to be dangerous, except in their licentious potential for seduction. The

phrase “chicks with sticks” is also obviously a play on “chicks with dicks,” linking them with lesbians and transgendered people, and more broadly some abject notion of queerness and aggressive female sexuality in ways that are deeply unredeemable.

Third, the figurative imagery embedded in this phrase tactically serves the masculinist and imperial fantasy of disciplining the colonial subject and, in reverse, being (sexually) disciplined by that same subject. The women must lose political power in order to gain sexual prowess, becoming the subject Orientalist tropes have long relied upon – subjects of sexual arousal who are also subjected to sexual discipline. The erotic is both enshrined in the language used to describe the women and inadvertently denied as the women are increasingly read as politically dangerous. This is where these women can be understood as *erotic nationals* – where erotic subjectivity is the simultaneous effect of neocolonial politics and hetero-patriarchal national discourses to overdetermine the use/utility of these feminine subjects/bodies. As erotic nationals, images of the Red Mosque women as “chicks with sticks” become sites of social and psychic satisfaction for the dominant viewer. The images of the veiled martyrs combined with the absence of images of the prostitutes, fastened by the erotic grammar, afford the global gaze the voyeuristic illusion of penetrating the “enigma of Muslim women,” but in ways that don’t compromise his/her visual control over these subjects. The construction of these women as “chicks with sticks” speaks to the modernists’ longing to reconcile this colonial “other” with subject/object of desirability, in a way that advocates a particular, familiar subject performance women in Western politics have long been reduced to their sexual bodies. Spivak and Guha (1988: 35) sum this up in their statement, “subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of the ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up.”

However, this presumed powerlessness of the veiled martyrs as visual subjects consistently reduced to the erotic is by no means aggregate. These visualities cement both the masculine nation and the androcentric gaze, but also possess a power beyond this voyeuristic fantasy – a power that speaks directly and threateningly to the geopolitics of contemporary Pakistan and the war on terror. This site of political interface and erotic tension in the Red Mosque photography is where we can begin to understand how such visualities threaten the neoformations of Empire and imminently destabilize structures of nation and woman. In the section that follows, I will show how media representations of the faces of the (female) enemy actually efface what is most crucial about this discursive moment: a (non) recognizable subversive woman subject linked to the biopolitics of Empire and neocolonialism.

Reading Sideways: The Transgressive Semiotics of the Lal Masjid Women

In the first section, I showed how the complexity of these martyrs is largely erased by the dominant global gaze, a gaze that signifies these images only through the fantasy of these women as faux subject or through fetishizing their violence. In this next section, I ask, what would a transgressive reading look like – a Deleuzian method, a sideways reading of these visualities? Locating the event of the Red Mosque, and specifically the female religious martyr, within the paradoxes and pathologies of the war on terror, induces an exceptional (though invariably ephemeral) opportunity to break with the status quo that signifies this feminine, racialized *other* and this feminized global event as (in)visible.

Badiou's theorization of "the event," his effort to expose and make sense of the potential for profound, transformative innovation in any situation, provides a useful lens in my sideways reading of the Red Mosque events. As Badiou says, every such innovation can only begin with

some sort of exceptional (though invariably ephemeral) break with the status quo, an 'event'. An event can occur at any time but not in just any place; an event will generally be located close to the edge of whatever qualifies as “void” or as indistinguishable in the situation. Situations, such as the Red Mosque, are a prime “evental site” where the prevailing forms of discernment and recognition of both political subjectivity as well as feminine subjectivity cease to have any significant purchase. Badiou argues that a truth then expands out of this “evental site” insofar as it elicits the militant conviction of certain individuals who develop the revolutionary implications of the event, and by doing so constitute themselves as the subjects of its truth.

Within this rendering, these martyrs' role in the contest over freedom cannot be understood either as contained within a postcolonial discourse that marginalizes women as objects of reform or as revered in radical theorizations where woman is subject of/for revolution. This shift from a unitary subject of revolution to fragmented and dispersed events of multiple acts of resistance and interpretations of these acts is evident in the Lal Masjid figures. In a *GeoTV* (*geotiv.org*) interview, a major Pakistan network show titled, *Mere Mutabik* (Translated – *In My Opinion*), when asked why the women needed to resort to arming themselves with sticks, one woman of the Jamia Hafza madrassa answers, “They came into the private women’s quarters of Mosque, with grenades and tears gas, twenty-odd commandos. We had been threatened, our children had been threatened, our mosque had been invaded by the military...were we supposed to greet them with flowers?” Clearly, these women had legitimate political grievances that created the momentum behind the Lal Masjid events, but narratives by both international media and state machines gender the conflict and its participants, obscure the political reality. Fareed Zakaria makes a relevant point here. Zakaria (2003:57) points out, “we (the west) treat suicide bombers as delusional figures, brainwashed by imams. But they are also products of political

realities.” While Zakaria crucially complicates readings of terrorists, it would be naïve to simply frame these women’s resistance and rage solely within the confines of anti-imperial, anti-war narratives.

The powerful images of veiled women demanding the establishment of an Islamic government, holding prostitutes hostage and eventually carrying their mission to a death, destabilizes the larger cultural narrative that seeks to allocate women to the private sphere and reserve public space and political reform to the dominant male order. That these female activists were advocating, in a sense, the traditional ordering of gender and demonizing its state of disintegration (read: prostitution); they were doing so, arguably, through the *very* subject-positioning made available to them by their feminist counterparts. The irony is indeed powerful.

The visual subjectivity that comes through in the Lal Masjid narrativized photography is one that move us out of the binary visible/invisible and brings to analytical access a continuum that spreads from the hypervisible, to visible, to invisible, to the erased. These figures unpredictably, and perhaps unintentionally, deploy radical feminist analytical categories that shift powers and subjectivities through dynamic affect and politics. As unruly subjects, these feminine/feminist subjects, women who are insufficiently socialized into laws of gender or nation, undo the state, even as they simultaneously imbricate the state and its margins (Das and Poole 2004). This mutuality gets continually denied because liberalists’ universalizing on political subjectivity, sees unruliness outside of democracy and political freedom, as Bhutto comes to demonstrate, or because modernist discourses have claimed “saving” the woman subject, as we see in the case of Mukhtar Mai. Blind reliance on these modernist formations results in a complete elision of the rhizomatic resistance and rage these women enact and the deeply pathological narcissism of the West (Paur 2007, Butler 2004, Hardt and Negri 1994). I

argue that these woman subjects, in both their corporeal semiotics and their unrecognizable political loyalties, demonstrate a centrifugal movement, a transgression that escapes relations of power and discharges a complicated critique of the neoliberal global constellation.

To begin, I want to draw attention to Hardt and Negri's (2005) provocative description of the power of the multitude – "this Empire's intentional, powerful constitutivity of contemporary militant subjectivities" or, what Negri (2008: 84) names Empire's political monster. This political monster is not a simple entering of an existing landscape of modern subjectivities, but is constituted by modern formations as a site of militancy and resistant subjectivities (Negri 2008). Negri (2008) defines the political monster as outside the economy of being, *being* in the Heideggerian sense is linked to a eugenics of truth and authority found in the Western self. What Negri is referring to here can most easily be paralleled to the colonial American notion of Manifest Destiny – a narrative that relied heavily on the American self as inherently good and free – a state it then imparted to others. The political monster opposes such divine notions of the western self and in so doing becomes a nightmare for those who are "beautiful and good." Yet the monster is a crucial part of this global terrain's masses, masses that can no longer be subjected immediately to the hierarchical order and command. Negri argues that hegemonic power's attempts to impose upon the monster the classical definition of reason and autonomy, of beautiful and good, "shatters against discursive impossibility" (Negri 2008: 200). Moving away from the conventional use of the term, monster, Negri theorizes a contemporary militant subjectivity constituted by and against these (neo) liberal times to challenge western narratives on the free and good subject. Negri's political monster, while hardly heralded as the forerunner of social justice, is an important figure that defies meanings of political freedom, national resistance, and gender empowerment. Indeed, the monster works against dominant

configurations of these abstract notions, and retools them in ways largely unintelligible to the dominant gaze.

The photographs of these women suggest a field of Negrian monstrosity, a resistance that is embedded in this neocolonial, neoliberal constellation and zealously dismissed by the hegemonic gaze. In the case of the female martyrs, as has been the case historically with political monsters, collective violence and the force of life come together in a tight and rich manner, which is overdetermined by the dominant gaze as catastrophic and counterproductive. When Abdul Rashid Ghazi, the Mawlana of the Lal Masjid says, “these women were faced with military weapons and highly-trained commandos, but they are nothing less than commandos themselves” (Interview with *GeoTV*, *geotv.org*, *Mere Mutabik*, translated – In My Opinion), we see the material and symbolic power of these women. As feminist scholars have argued, the body is a symbolic fiction (Butler 1994, Grosz 2000). However, this fiction has performative power and symbolic/discursive efficiency.

The power of these veiled, political bodies is illusory but also enormously tangible because they have the power to perform great acts of destruction. These monsters/martyrs, in flooding the space of the political, invading the space of the public, mass mobilizing against these dominant terrains, become “the real political and technical subject” of the war on terror (Negri 2008: 206). These feminine *others*, like Negri’s political monster, don’t just demonstrate a form of struggle, but insurrect rhizomatic resistance in their very figure of existence. Like Negri’s political monster, these monsters/martyrs are identified through their images, the fabric of their bodies, the corporeal shape of their imagined subjectivity. To be sure, I am not speaking of corporeality in the abstract. Rather I am directly concerned with the ways in which these bodies are materialized and the political consequences of the forms that process of

materialization takes in terms of both the global visual gaze and the (possibly dismissed) postcolonial/postmodern gaze. This is a notoriously difficult ground – this taking up of the politico/analytical force of the female martyrs’ bodies, and perhaps largely, the bodies of women who don’t seamlessly mold into the neoliberal/neocolonial fantasy of empowerment.

In the matter of images of these women, then, their transgression can be first examined at the visual level. Let us begin by framing these female martyrs as political monsters that contest the western authoritative self – a centrifugal framing that repositions these women from docile bodies to active, agentic subjects. As political subjects and active women, these martyrs/“monsters” resistance does not map onto the logic of liberal and modern thought, hence they are, as already discussed, reduced to docile dolls. However, poststructural theories strongly suggest that agency cannot be seen as fixed in advance but rather as emerging through specific modes of being, responsibility and effectiveness (Mahmoud 2005). If we are to take this theoretical laboring seriously, agency should be understood from within the discourses of domination and subordination that create the conditions of these women’s political enactment (Mahmoud 2005). Such a characterization of resistance is external to Western romanticizations which frame resistance within the metaphysical question of individual agency.³⁶ Instead, these women’s political activity suggests that agency and action must be re-imagined to understand the possibilities these women put forth.

The images of the martyrs as agents of political reform, a reading inconceivable to the dominant gaze, defy the natural sovereignty presupposed to the category of agency and demonstrate, instead, the fragments and monstrosity of dissent. These visualities demonstrate women politicizing themselves in a gesture through which they abdicate their own powers and

³⁶ The anthropological use of the notion “resistance” has been rightly criticized for underestimating the strength and diversity of power structures. See, for example, the article of Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance,” *American Ethnologist*, 17(1), 1990.

transform their acts of “mastery” into moments of passivity. As political subjects, these women shift into an ever-increasing multiplicity of positionalities, intentional and portable sites which both escape and invent their locatedness. Viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility as the dominant gaze suggests can be conceptualized as a form of agency.

Frantz Fanon’s (1963) analysis of Algerian women’s role in the revolution against France is quite useful here. In laying bare the radical role Algerian women played, Fanon moves Muslim female subjects from their perceived domestic and sexual passivity to public and revolutionary activity. Naming her as “woman-arsenal,” Fanon (1963:58) tells us the veil functions as anti-colonial camouflage to carry various essentials for the revolution. The photographs of the Lal Masjid women, then, can be read as embodying the antithesis of American/western Empire, the militant subjectivity of the feminine masses, and in this way confront imperial power, imagination, and ubiquity.

The images of the women martyrs are, arguably, a realistic representation of women’s corporeal force in political space. Returning to Figure five, we see what appear as endless numbers of veiled women, spiraling up and around an open stadium – they appear menacing, hurtling bamboo sticks, drawn like a breathing, ominous magnet to a living mosque. Politicized religious nationalism is presented here as an insistent, powerful force with a life of its own. This photographic construction reflects the psychological reality of neocolonialism – a state these women are unwilling to distinguish from death itself (Fanon 1961). In the words of Fanon (1961:16), these women may be dominated but they are not domesticated. These martyrs queer readings of Muslim women in public space – where they are agents of, rather than subject to, violence. Thus, what has often been described and prescribed for veiled women (even those in

public space) as political exclusion, the property-less colonial subjects' needs to be re-described as an interplay of political retrieval, realization and relativism. These women's bodies are both powerful and intimidating. They are a totalizing movement, subjects in their own right. They express power. The hierarchical instruments of biopower that want to fix her into a desirable position – laborer within capitalism, citizen within state, the slave within family, symbol within nation – are broken by her own ambiguity as all and none of these hierarchical connections stand.

The female presence in the Lal Masjid produced a great sense of loom and destruction in its audience. The war on terror, American intervention into Pakistan, and neoliberal apparatuses of globe-trotting freedoms all serve as perpetual beckoning presences, their sanctions on Pakistan feed these visualities, hardening the elusive power of these bodies (Enloe 2004). In this event of intense decolonial dramatization, like Fanon's (1963:50) Algerian woman, the Pakistani feminine, racialized veiled *other* "rises directly to the level of tragedy."

These female martyrs alternatively, and perhaps willfully, represent the cultural narrative that positions the body as cultural text, a text on which both the categories of "woman" and "Pakistani" are highly relevant and exceedingly specific. However, these veiled martyrs cannot be seen as emerging from a particular point of original departure, such as practitioners of pure Islam or pawns of traditional patriarchy, because they combine myriad socio-cultural processes, practices, and images to generate new structures of resistance. These subjects, in image and in action, are politicized and gendered in ways that resist the very notion of purity and authenticity. They confront the ways western narratives attempt to construct homogenous social realities out of the heterogeneity of subaltern lives. So, even as these women seem to appear in obdurate binaries, these feminized political monsters expound an ontological and material position that

uses ideological zones of body purity (read: the burqa) to reconstruct or dislocate them. Reading these “*burqa-clad women*” as trapped in a Western obdurate binary obscures the deliberate ideological apparatuses and political narratives that benefit from this interpretation. As Barthes (1972) argues, meanings of images and objects easily proliferate, complicate and rise to a “mythical” level. Hence, the veil and the female body consistently read in only one way erase the continuity between the revolutionary women (we have always seen but dismissed in colonial battles from British India to French Algeria) and the contemporary feminine, racialized *other* who transforms herself from oppressed *other* to border protector. Fanon’s (1963: 23) oft-cited saying comes to theoretical fruition here: “The colonized, underdeveloped man is a political creature in the most global sense of the term.”

The feminine (body), here, serves as a specular surface which receives the marks of both nation and masculinity, only to give back a reflection which reifies and undercuts both. This reification and resistance is complex. These visual subjects participate in a multiplicity of threatening contradictions: veiled bodies as both within and outside the structure of their mosque, woman as nation but also disrupting nation, female bodies reinstating Pakistan and engaging a radical sensibility, embodied subaltern femininity querying U.S. American masculinized politics of penetration even as it restores another form of patriarchy. Hence, it is at the intersection of feminine corporeality, political martyrdom, and the temporality of the Lal Masjid that these women dislocate any and all permanent phenomenon, queering total symbolization and domestication.

These figures ensure the incompleteness of the liberal projects that seek to empower them or the fundamentalist agenda that works to contain them. Each structure the images seem to affirm becomes mythical and porous. Nation, patriarchy, gender, and Islam become deprived

structures because their determining capacity (Read: woman as pure, nation as impenetrable, patriarchy as over determining) is disavowed and deeply queered. Foucault (1982) argues that suffering, within any margins of domination, produces a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy or friction that slides against advancing power by engaging and disengaging. Similarly, the complexity of these women subjects is visually demonstrated as exceptional gendered violence slides against U.S. American imperious politic intervention, creates a friction between high-brow masculinized politics and low-brow femininized resurgence, and an inverse energy comes to play between Pakistani nationalism and the war on terror.

When Laura Mulvey (1970/2003) argues that “woman stands in a patriarchal society as a signifier for the male other, bound by the symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through command of these visualities;” she recognizes the ways historically, visualities are vital to gender intelligibility because they tie the woman to bearer, not maker, of meaning. Mulvey’s point is relevant to the way the dominant gaze attempts to imprison subversive or subordinate subjects. But, in reading these images sideways, I seek to reconfigure the dominant interpretation of these veiled, active, political raging *other* bodies and illuminate how empire’s contest over subjectivity and freedom becomes a versatile discourse, discursive beeswax that the *other* can mold and reinvent. On one hand, the images of the veiled female martyrs portray Muslim women as the “subordinate colonial” (Khan 1999: 307). On the other hand, the Muslim woman becomes, au contraire, one such insubordinate postcolonial subject whose corporeal presentation within the public and political fields, even while shrouded, undercuts the imperial doctrine within which she is forced to move. Chakrabarty (2002:10) writes, “it is through political struggle that the rebel appropriated and/or destroyed the insignia of his enemy’s power and hoped thus to abolish his own subalternity.” As disruptive figures, these

feminine/feminist subjects bespeak the subaltern voices of resistance. Hence, read differently, it is the semiotics of domination and subordination that the subaltern classes sought to challenge, the way these images of female bodies produce both a disruption and a reminiscing of notions of Western bourgeois freedom, locating such freedoms into necessary and critical query.

Feminine/Feminist Subjects: Labyrinthine Subjectivity in Pakistan

Clearly, the female presence in the Red Mosque events led to a conflicting discursive explosion on what to make of these women, politically as subjects. The images of these women, represented as both victims and fighters, as terrorists and erotic nationals, as martyrs and monsters, demonstrate the complex dance of positionality that Pakistani Muslim women perform during these times. Through reiterative strategies, these images produce a subject – but which subjectivity is seen and which subjectivity denied. In this final section, I return now to my original question: who are these women as political subjects in this postmodern world? I have already established how Western conceptions of subjectivity, freedom and empowerment wholly fail these women and their politicized gendered field. I want to now examine how this failure of the language of liberalism, the conventions of modernism, and the desires of the West, have kept us, as feminists, from understanding and grieving these feminine/feminist subjects.

To frame my argument on the martyrs' labyrinthine subjectivity, I turn to my original theoretical formation – these women, through dominant and subversive semiotics, come to represent the feminine/feminist subject of Pakistan. Indeed, in naming these women as feminine/feminist subjects, I elucidate how their feminist identity (read: dislocating political action) had a sublimated relationship to their feminine identity (read: veiled women) where the visual technologies of the latter produce the subjective impossibilities of the former. Saba

Mahmoud (2005) speaks to this dilemma in her ethnographic study of pious Egyptian women who actively construct and participate in an Islamic movement. She challenges the modernist project that seeks to categorize these actively pious and veiled Muslim women as non political subjects or antifeminist. Similarly, by constructing this formation of feminine/feminist, I highlight how the labyrinth of the body remains a potent, seductive and consuming refrain because feminist identity is understood, rather reduced, to a state of public corporeality, as I depicted in my discussion of Bhutto. In these photographs, every visual trope enacted to capture the events of the Red Mosque relied upon femininity as dominantly understood – erotic, repressed, protected, and shrouded. Consequently, the intelligibility of these women as intentional, empowered political subjects is never considered or is deeply sublimated by the dominant gaze. These martyrs, then, are seen and cast always as women and never as feminists.

On one hand, feminist subjectivity has always been recognized by markedly feminine figures, identifiable as woman. On the other hand, feminist subjects have, to a large degree, rejected feminine conceptions of desire, embodiment, space and power. These martyrs, as visual subjects, complicate both tropes – because their femininity retains what are seen as conventional codes of feminine embodiment (the veil), even as they decode feminine space (their occupation of public and political space) and feminine action (violence against other women and decolonial political labor). When *BBC* (19 July 2007) quotes a young Red Mosque student, saying, “The 18-year-old told the BBC Urdu Service that she was not held hostage by militants but had willingly remained behind during the weeklong siege. The woman, who asked not to be named, said she was prepared to carry out a suicide attack to defend the mosque,” we see the ambivalent construction of her as both feminine subject (read weak) and political subject (read anti-imperial), where both feminine and political fail to describe the complexities of her choices. Yet,

neither this crack in feminine conventions nor these women's more thunderous anti-hegemonic political action marks them as feminist. Here, this possible subjectivity is lost on the martyrs altogether.

These women's subjectivity, in being reduced to "feminine" in its most historically pejorative manner, keeps hegemonic forms of feminism intact – a feminism we saw strongly reproduced over and through the visual iconicity of Bhutto and whose rigorous labor attempted to co-opt Mai's revolutionary feminism. I want to point out here that it is through the visual landscape of the martyrs that Bhutto is most readily imagined as (*faux*)feminist, as intelligible and desirable. In reducing these women to feminine, racialized, oppressed unredeemable *others*, a range of epistemologies are enacted. We neither grieve these women as women nor as anti-colonial political subjects that make visible the rage of black and brown people to systematic neocolonial, racist violence. If feminism is understood as a political and oppositional framework that allows women to question different locations of power, then these martyrs must be grieved as feminists. If feminists look for women (female bodies), gender (the characterizations of traits assigned on the basis of perceived membership in sex groups) and genderings (application of gender tropes to social and political analysis); then we must see the necessity of *looking* at this story of women's violence and women's subjectivity in violence.

These martyrs' (visual) subjectivity interrogates the western empowered subject and in so doing, moves the Pakistani–western nexus into a contradictory labyrinthine neocolonial temporality. In such a geopolitical maze, perhaps the only way to understand these women is as political subjects that confront the norms and intelligibility of the subject that comes to be the (*faux*)feminist in stable, uncolonized, hegemonic spaces. The martyrs demonstrate subversive political action and reconfigure subjectivity from cohesive to labyrinthine in their deliberate

rejection of Cartesian selfhood and in their deliberate faceless and nameless public presence. Through a variety of tropes and techniques, the veiled martyrs engage in a public display of politicized Islam and politicized womanhood, hence rejecting the Cartesian epistemology that Benazir Bhutto works to embrace.

In image after image of masses of veiled bodies pounding bamboo sticks, we see political subjects who reject this concept *tout court*. Instead, they proffer a self who makes the materiality of her body highly relevant to the political schema and to her political knowledge. In so doing, they rupture the codification of Cartesian empowered subjectivity – an empowerment that rests on the excision of the corpus from the *real* ideal subject. Instead they demonstrate a subject constituted by relationships and interconnectedness whose moral agency is a function of that constitution. In other words, these female martyrs, veiled women occupying the public space to make a political statement are saying that we are not separate from our bodies; we *are* our bodies.

Second, the female religious martyrs in the Lal Masjid events are nameless, often spoken of or referred to as a group, a mass or a collective (see fig. 9). The language of the press mounds these women together as “*fearsome, stick-wielding, burka-clad young women....pouring out of the mosque*” (New Yorker, 23 July 2007). It is through presumed invisibility that these martyrs as (non)subjects challenge Western definitions of subjectivity. If subjectivity is defined epistemologically as knowable through observation and confession; ethically, as moderate, autonomous, civilized; and technically, as the regimens and practices we do to improve and become autonomous, free and fulfilled – then these martyrs confront all dimensions of western subjectivity. Their techniques of the self, in the Foucauldian sense, incorporate a radical resistance to hegemonic, neoliberal subjects as free and fulfilled (Foucault 1982). Within

Western points of departure wherein a speaking being is a political being, these subjects not only downsize the twin processes embedded in neoliberal subjective formation, but deeply complicate epistemic political visions.

In their refusal to be named, these martyrs negate the modern and deeply Western strain of thought that preaches visibility as power and naming as liberation. Peggy Phelan (2003:112) captures the contradiction in this Western trope on visibility when she writes “if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young, white women should be running Western culture.” Like Phelan, I want to highlight an important point here about the martyrs as women who refuse such bodily visibility and its subsequent liberation.



Figure 4.9, *New York Times*, 19 July 2007

These women, as active agents enacting their democratic obligation to refuse such coquettish freedom, rearrange the political and cultural apparatus that requires freedom through visibility, voice and naming. Their quasi-public (in)visibility demonstrates the empire's inability to govern their private selves, their intimate subjectivities, their interior lives (Rose 1989). While a number of feminist scholars argue that female terrorists do not make a gendered point because they are mentored in the masculinist organizations, to say that gender is not at all recoded is perhaps naïve. In their reading of Palestinian women's role in war, Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argue that Palestinian groups often characterize women's participation in martyrdom attacks as a sign that women are equal in their society. The counter-narrative in Western responses is that gender emancipation through political violence is simply a continuation of their traditional, subordinated role in society. This cultural conflict over whether martyrdom liberates or oppresses women trumps any real discourse on these subjects and elides alternative imaginaries on either freedom or subjectivity.

In the making of governable subjects, subjects we can identify as free or oppressed, these women fail both ends of the binary. As self-realized actors, they engineer the antithesis of neoliberal sensibilities on woman and freedom. Spivak (1988:91) is correct in suggesting that, "when it comes to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work cannot say becomes important. In the semiosis of the social text, elaborations of the insurgency stand in place of "utterance." Similarly Fanon (1963), in his work on subaltern resistance and revolution, discusses the simultaneous and contradictory coexistence of both anti-colonial conservatism and anti-colonial radicalism. What Fanon (1963) teaches us is that in revolutions, there is no singular, pure, perfect group of agents or social change, but more a combination of radical political actors and actresses from several sectors of society who, for

varied reasons, are deeply dissatisfied with both white supremacy and colonialism, as well as American conceptions of democracy. It is also this combination of political actors and actresses who grow tired of reprehensible rhetoric spewing from both the bourgeoisie and leftist sectors of society, who fundamentally, as shown through the figure of Bhutto and the human rights movement's (attempted) cooptation of Mai, recycle the new postcolonial nation in ways that maintain colonial power relations. These martyrs are neither mundane nor minor, nor are they extraordinary or vital – they just are in their namelessness, voicelessness and facelessness a force de resistance whose own heavy gaze crumbles Western concepts of subjectivity.

As Shohat (2001) points out, it is not possible to recognize an "other" as subject until the other is understood as contemporary to the self. The concept of *progress* presumes the colonized are not yet full subjects. If, within the dominant Western grid of intelligibility, a subject is not a subject until she conforms to dominant notions of the choice-desiring individual, to specifically liberal notions of egalitarianism, to particular notions of universalism (which have not been stable historically), and to "progress" toward dominant notions of civilization, then it is possible that these Pakistani women will not ever be recognized as subjects.

Butler's discussion of "what makes for a grievable life" is highly relevant here. In discussing the grievable subject of this endless war on terror, Butler elaborates on the example of Daniel Pearl – a subject par excellence of the public and visual sphere – as he was surrounded by narratives that produced him as quintessentially human, familiar and grievable. Similarly, the conventions that produce Bhutto as the quintessential symbol of democracy or Mai as the contemporary victim of feudalism undone by the forces of American visibility set the stage for the grievable Pakistani feminine/feminist subject. Drivability, as Butler continues, is constituted

by the condition of familiarity, solidarity and the concretizing of celebrated subjectivities. Will these martyrs ever be as human as Benazir Bhutto, Mukhtar Mai, or Daniel Pearl?

It is here that these demonic, unsavable, nonsubjects, become “ungrievable,” as their death “makes a mark that is no mark” partly because they are so outside of the normative feminist subject/feminine body and partly because these martyrs are seen as suspended in that space between life and death (Butler 2004: 36). As I’ve noted, the media that covered the Red Mosque events spoke little of these women, except to make light of their politics by naming them “chicks with sticks” or reducing their intentionality by identifying them as victims. Either way, their names were never uttered, their identities were diffused into the visual masses and their political presence was disavowed. I want to question whether colonized women have a say in their own existence (or death). Mourning these women, I argue, is itself a political act, one which we, as feminists, are not ready to do. It is not my intention to foreclose upon discussions which problematize the ways these women may be exploited by masculinist politics or the limitations of politics that potentially reproduce women as gatekeepers of culture. Nor is it my intention to hail these women as feminist. Indeed, I feel my own feminist ambivalence about these martyrs. But to the extent that the tilt of the current political climate is such that all forms of Islamism (from its more militant to its more quiescent) are seen as products of roving irrationalities, I feel a certain decolonial and feminist responsibility to expose the erotic, the power, and the rationale gained from rendering (only) demonic this domain of Pakistani women. Hence, I am bound by that same feminism to critically question why some gendered political presences are grievable while others dismissed, in ways that too often reproduce American feminist exceptionalism.

When imperialism is patterned into a cultural language of mourning that simultaneously is the language of self-congratulations, grieving and celebrating subjects becomes nothing short of an alibi for patriarchal privilege. As Jasbir Puar (2007: 236) has said, “these are queer times indeed and such queer times require even queerer modalities of thought and analysis.” All dimensions of these martyrs’ labyrinthine subjectivity – their visual resistance, political practice and namelessness/facelessness, ungrievability – come together in a devastating mediation on this contemporary war on terror. They are this empire’s most queer assemblage – denaturalizing, destabilizing and destructive. Their dissolution of self into *other* and *others* into self produces a systematic challenge to the entire order of Manichaean rationality that organizes the rubric of good versus evil. They deliver a message that will get through by no other means but the body and, at that, the feminine body. These martyrs (or images of them) force a queering because even as they give way to normative identity markers, they assemble a new becoming that disbands the use of the “other” and perverts the visible and named “normal” and “free” subject.

These women, as exceptional subjects and (non)exceptional bodies, allow for a scrambling of sides that must be made intelligible in feminist discourses on freedom. By insisting on the transgressive subtext and subject possibilities that the dominant visual regime denies these women, I hope to create a cacophony in the regimen of seeing these feminine, racialized veiled *others* as non-actors, non-subjects, always women, never feminists.

Five

Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up? Meditations on Visual Culture, the Female Subject and Feminism

We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*

If I take a chamois and rub real hard on the bone, right on the ledge of your cheek bone, some of the black will disappear. It will flake away into the chamois and underneath there will be gold leaf... And if I take a nail file or even Eva's old paring knife ...and scrape away at the gold, it will fall away and there will be alabaster... Then I can take chisel and small tap hammer and tap away at the alabaster. It will crack then like ice under the pick, and through the breaks I will see the (fertile) loam. –Toni Morrison, *Sula* (112)

Twenty one years ago, Gayatri Spivak (1988:19), forced us to apprehend the discomfoting (lack of) answers to the question, “Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern?” Working through her own query, Spivak (1988: 91) states, “in seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual systematically unlearns female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized.” Though it may be somewhat ideal to think that a process of unlearning can truly occur, Spivak directs us away from rudimentary understandings of the subaltern woman, as one that simply needs to be “saved” or made visible. Instead, she positions us, as feminists, to develop a more complex syntax if we seek to engage, rather than claim, the subaltern woman.

A key ambition of this project has been to call attention to the textuality of imperialism and the politics of representation that claim to tell the story of the Real Pakistani woman, and more broadly, the Muslim woman. Throughout this project, I have articulated a feminist agenda

by comparing the visual fields of different Pakistani women as they've become popular, relevant or demonic to the U.S. hetero-normative state and gaze. What seems at first glance like an opportunity to render visible invisible Muslim women is actually a reinvigoration of the neocolonial trappings of brown oppression and barbarism and western liberation, trappings which are strengthened by the U.S. hetero-normative state's contemporary practices in the regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. To generate these understandings, I have deployed critical measures that gesture toward the ways in which the female body as both nation and empire, free and unfree, aesthetically desired or monstrously denied can be refigured within critical decolonial and queer imaginary. Thus, I have attempted to extend a line of intellectual inquiry taken up by feminists to position resistance to patriarchy with and against historicized colonialism and neocolonialism. I also thread together key cultural practices (like visibility, voice and story-telling on/of the *other*) to explain how these embodied subjects are made to function according to complementary U.S. narrations of human rights, democracy and war. I have shown how representations of Mai and Bhutto were often conflated with the liberal-humanist project of women's voice and empowerment and seen as politically, socially or culturally neutral. But representations of the *other* are and always will be a political move, a social undertaking, a cultural statement, functioning simultaneously as a "phantasmic social force" and a "high-powered medium of domination" (Taussig 1999:23).

Using different socio-cultural registers to read female bodies imbricated in various postcolonial predicaments, I build upon this body of scholarship to refine feminist schemas by incorporating newer arguments around the affect, pleasure and the erotic embedded within the women's representations. Using democracy, human rights and the war as my three axes, I explain the effects of three of the most pernicious legacies of colonization — the

production/reverance of the liberal subject, the vacuity of liberatory political enterprise and the subtle violent erotics that constructs the feminine, racialized *other* — to demonstrate how they serve as the base for postcolonial forms of patriarchal control. Each chapter underscores how the erotic becomes palpable through queer rereadings of the dominant gaze to result in different degrees of domination and discipline imposed over these women subjects. I have stressed, through each photograph and each visual subject, the violence of visibility, the patterns of domination and subordination through which these images have vacillated, and the hetero-erotic gaze that has been recuperated through them.

For example, in chapter three, I trace how Benazir Bhutto's popularity and emblematic status in the American political scene imagines democracy from the vantage point of the hetero-erotic gaze, while in chapter two, Mukhtar Mai's unwillingness to embrace western aesthetics troubles the hetero-erotic gaze even as it subjects her to its panoptical force. The female-led uprisings discussed in chapter four elude the tight assumptions of Pakistan's over-determining patriarchy even as these women rebels structure their resistance along hetero-erotic and national lines, through the kidnapping of Chinese prostitutes. Indeed, it is amazing how the public, largely U.S. driven discourse shifts from viewing these women as veiled victims of fundamentalist extremism to licentious perverts or gender deviants. Hence, in all three visual cases, the erotics of empire tug readings of these women in at least two directions – toward an impossible idealized heterosexual femininity and towards its nightmarish opposite – utter degradation or utterly uncontrollable – conditions which pivot on simulations of aesthetics and embodiment.

I have argued that it is precisely because both white racism and white multiculturalism work at containing the increasing role and resistance of Pakistani women, and Muslim women broadly, that they qualify as fantasies. I have argued for a recognition of the ways the erotic

contours both the desire for any one of these photographs and the consequent ways in which each photograph is gazed upon, both of which can be mapped by heterosexual, white capitalizing processes. Throughout my work on these photographs, I have traced the material and ideological exploitation of these subjects vis-à-vis their visual landscapes to show the systemic, interdependent relationship between the implicit erotic heterosexuality of these photographic narratives and brown bodies as the new capital.

From Bhutto's sun-kissed, unblemished smile to the mob-like female masses of the Lal Masjid, I have remained skeptical of the largely western framing in which the corporeal is analyzed as a key modality of freedom, as the constitutive model to determine these subjects' liberatory or oppressed relations. In the absence of a coherent critical position telling us how to read these images, the individual images themselves become preeminent, hypnotic, fixating. I emphasize the psychic processes, erotic pleasures, and the articulatory schemata that, while deeply sublimated, are key to the construction of these figures. I have shown that whether these figures are read or not read as feminist, democratic, modern, and so on is contingent largely on the practices of their body; a reading which anchors freedom in liberal paradigms, woman in essentialized notions of identity, and nation in racist discourses.

Turning the (global) public's attention away from the complexities of Pakistan, these photographic narratives reduce deep-rooted polemics that have tethered Pakistan to the narrow terms of moral crusades or visual moments of *jouissance*. Janmohamed (1985:134) offers a provocative idea when he says that the ambivalence of colonial representations does not represent genuine confusion with the colonial mind. Rather, he maintains, "the imperialist is not fixated on particular images or stereotypes of the other but rather on the affective benefits proffered by the Manichean allegory." This includes the ability to create an *other* whose

goodness and badness seem absolute and not merely social, or so extreme as to be neither human nor historical. From the human rights trials of Mai to the spectacular gendered terrorism of the Lal Masjid, we see how these visual stories propose the sameness of freedom that hides under the veneer of culture and nation while simultaneously reifying the cultural and national boundaries that it seeks to depict. The narrative and visual didactic used to tell these stories and constitute these subjects are interlocked in a suffocating disciplinary network, a new machinery of gazing and constituting the *other*. Hence, I have sought to document and challenge the visual culture through which conventional feminist and liberal humanist discourses appropriate and name or forget and criminalize female bodies, feminist resistances, colonial histories, and women's lives.

My analysis has shown how the sensationalized interest in Pakistani women hints at the idealization of the liberal-humanist subject, exemplified by Benazir Bhutto and the feared loss of the liberal-humanist subject, exemplified by the female religious martyrs, both of which reinforce the ideological dualities that allow for the romanticization of feminine, racialized *other*. I came to understand the project of empire as not simply of conquest and pillage, of moral and political paternalism, but also invested in a broad orientation of how to familiarize itself with the *other*. What is seen as paradoxically inimical to the western "self" must be refashioned, often under the teleological process of improvement, a process I've illuminated in both Bhutto and Mai. While one figure is reduced to a stable site of shame and abjection, another is deployed in the name of American excellence and symbolic democracy, and yet others are offered up as the monsters/whores of this war.

This volatile trinity of women, sexuality and nation captures the roving eye of the imperial camera, allowing it to construct a single idiomatic discourse about the other. But in

working through these visual fields of political and misogynistic violence, I have attempted to shift their visualities from one rooted in a particular structure or to one that is perhaps more accurately framed as rhizomatic, extending tentacles and filaments through various points of power and pleasure. To quote Foucault (1977: 224), "the exercise of power is not a naked fact, an institutional right, nor is it a structure which holds out or is smashed: it is elaborated, transformed, organized; it endows itself with processes which are more or less adjusted to the situation." Hence, another prevalent thread running through this text was the discursive construction of a feminine/feminist subjectivity that framed its epistemic knowledges in highly classed and raced ways. These visualities are organized in silent and unobtrusive ways that allow for the illusion of empowerment. For example, in chapter two, I have shown how freedom is measured through Mai's corporeal posture and practices. These assumptions, coupled with the narrations of Bhutto as always and already free compromises feminist possibilities as they are premised on contracting oneself with certain values, aesthetics, and subjectivities. Weedon (1997) has poignantly captured this space of contention between entry into the visible world of rights and democracy. She argues, "it is one thing to admit women into mankind and extend to them the rights of liberalism, it is another thing to challenge the humanist conceptions of man, woman and the nature of power and language" (Weedon 1997: 137).

In claiming to render Pakistan transparent through the canvas of the female body, the U.S. hetero-normative state participates in what Alain Badiou (2003) identifies as "a passion for the Real," a Real which culminates in theatre spectacle and fetish rather than in material reality, a Real that can be characterized as the most vacuous of terms and the most precarious of identities. My chapter title invokes this irony of the real, a real which simultaneously exists and doesn't exist, in each image, through each subject, elucidating to a white neoliberal civilization and

culture that what it often calls the real Pakistani woman, and more largely the Muslim woman, is a white (wo)man's artifact. As signifiers of the charged complexity of Pakistani national identity, these visual subjects demonstrate ambiguous allegiance towards and disruption of gender and national boundaries. Hence, neither my queries nor my queering of these women produce a clear, consensual, and whole alternative. Rather my work encourages a lusty, rigorous, enabling confusion that deterritorializes established way of thinking and seeing (these women) and splits open the naturalization of the prevailing system of representation. To rupture the "truth" of these representations opens a point of entry into unnamed, unidentified forms of freedom, a point around which a different kind of subjectivity might crystallize.

Within forced environments of war, terrorism, national instability, and patriarchy, these women deny their own frailty. The epistemological splitting that occurs through these Pakistani women and their globalized photographic narratives discloses the irresolvable contradictions embedded in notions of freedom. They simultaneously protect and trespass borders, just as they queer and normalize the category of woman and feminist. But, enclosed within the outlines of an imperial geography, encased in the physicality of misogyny and racism, imprisoned by the imperial camera, they have become exhibits in a contemporary war on terror museum. My resistance to these dominant framings of the feminine, racialized *other* has become thick with urgency. It hangs here, this intellectual rage, this impassioned anger, an indelible imprint crossing into the tremors of Mai's resistance, fastened by the caricaturization of the Lal Masjid women's political labor, unwilling to be absorbed by neoliberal conceptions of Bhutto's democracy.

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