

An Apparent Feminist Approach to Transnational Technical Rhetorics: The Ongoing Work of Nujood Ali

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Compared to dreams, reality can be cruel. But it can also come up with beautiful surprises. —Nujood Ali

Introduction

Faez Ali Thamer married Nujood Ali when she was nine years old. Thamer had promised Ali's¹ father that he would not touch her until she had been through puberty. He lied. Nine-year-old Ali endured horrendous physical and emotional abuse—including repeated rape. Distressing though this is, Ali's story is not unusual. Child marriage is common in many parts of the world, and it leads directly to widespread abuse of girls. What is unusual about Ali's story, though, is that she was divorced at age 10. In 2008, Ali escaped her abusive husband. She went to the Sana'a courthouse and met Shada Nasser. Nasser—the first woman to head a Yemeni law office—became Ali's attorney, advocate, and mentor.² This essay, however, focuses on a part of Ali's story that is not so apparent in the developing accounts that already are being used to build histories: After her divorce, Ali chose to return to her family—including the father who married her to Thamer against her will—instead of pursuing her studies abroad, an option that was made available to her shortly after her divorce because of donations from supporters (159). This choice—and, more importantly, the way Ali has narrated her return—reflects courage and a refusal to be cast only as a victim as well as making apparent the complexities involved in Ali's efforts to seek female agency in Yemen.

Widespread Western media coverage of Ali's story ended with her divorce, despite the fact that her story continues.³ The hard cultural work Ali engages in every day *after* her divorce—which includes doing interviews and advocating on behalf of her younger sister—is deserving of attention in historical records. Drawing on Ali's story as an example, I situate this essay as a commentary on the nature and development of histories as transcultural technical rhetorical artifacts that wield great power because of their potential rhetorical velocity (Ridolfo and DeVoss). In other words, the opportunity to include Ali's continuing story in historical records now is a kind of early recovery; it is a chance to alter perceptions about female agency and reputation for Yemeni child brides before limited perceptions are reinscribed too many times on Ali's

“cultural career” (Bordo xiv). Making apparent Ali’s continuing dedication to female agency in Yemen is a transcultural project that stands to benefit many audiences—if only those potential audiences are paying attention.

To support these claims, I utilize an *apparent feminist* methodology (Frost). Apparent feminism manifests in three main features. First, apparent feminists respond to a kairotic moment in which the term *postfeminism* is in vogue and feminisms are assailed as ideologies of the past; in other words, apparent feminists seek to make the importance of feminisms in contemporary contexts—and particularly in technical rhetorics—explicit or apparent as a response to unrecognized instances of misogyny. Further, apparent feminists seek to do this in transdisciplinary ways that allow for more awareness of “the possible connections that can allow us to navigate” (Bay 33) diverse and fluid circumstances. Secondly, apparent feminists do this work while also embracing non-feminist allies. These allies are people who are interested in social justice. They are people whose philosophies and actions *appear* to be feminist in a given context, although they themselves—for whatever reasons—may not identify “feminist” as a permanent feature of her or his identity. Apparent feminism is a term that can be taken up without requiring its user to commit to an identity. Thus, the term *apparent feminist* is flexible in that it can refer to someone who identifies as feminist, but it can also refer (in a limited context) to a person who engages in action that appears to be feminist. Third, apparent feminism sponsors critiques of rhetorics of efficiency, which are too often used to silence those who speak from bodies marginalized by mainstream cultures. More specifically, apparent feminism—a theory emerging from technical communication scholarship, which itself is increasingly critical of notions of objectivity and neutrality—promotes a reframing of standardized understandings of efficiency. Instead of buying into normative efficiency-based arguments, apparent feminist critique is rhetorical in that it recognizes that truly efficient work requires a large and diverse audience in order to be most useful for the greatest number of people—and not just the people with access to economic and social power. More importantly, apparent feminism requires us to ask *who* efficiency serves in any particular context.⁴ In other words, apparent feminist rearticulates efficiency as dependent upon diversity.

An apparent feminist approach shows that Ali’s actions since her divorce are complementary to feminist goals, that they hail allies and have had positive effects for other Yemeni child brides (several of whom have come forward, as I will discuss later in this essay), and that they implicitly critique a patriarchal ethic of efficiency. Further, my apparent feminist analysis emphasizes the challenges Ali—with Nasser’s support—continues to work through, including dealing with threats to her reputation and safety as well as the reputation and safety of her family, addressing transnational and local audiences

of varying cultural backgrounds, and navigating socioeconomic pressures and limited access to education. This essay demonstrates that apparent feminism is an especially useful mechanism for transnational work, since it recognizes and accepts a variety of different identifications and supports the inclusion of diverse audiences and rhetors. Further, this work shows that apparent feminism is useful precisely because it allows for recognition of people—children, men, those who don't know what feminism is—who do feminist work without identifying themselves as feminists. The question of whether or not Ali might identify as a feminist, for the purposes of this essay, is less interesting than the question of how she has already engaged in feminist work.

In sum, this essay widens understandings of what constitutes “rhetorical performance, accomplishment, and possibilities” (Royster and Kirsch 29). Further, it helps us to consider some of the potential effects of which stories we choose to include in histories and how those choices affect the development of empirical knowledge (Yu and Savage). I offer my analysis of Ali's post-divorce actions as one possible example of how we might recover a set of technical rhetorics that we recognize as a person's individual history; my analysis is not the only perspective or the final word, but rather a call for many potential re-framings. As Yu argues, we can benefit from dealing with examples that are “less like closed case studies and more like open stories” (Yu and Savage 4). Advocating the inclusion of Ali's continuing story in contemporary histories is one method for helping us to see how those histories shape what is possible in the public imagination, studies of technical rhetorics and composition practices, and transnational feminist work. In order to accomplish this, I first discuss the contexts of child marriages, arguing that it is an oppressive institution that particularly targets girls. Then, I apply an apparent feminist critique of Ali's experiences specifically and, in so doing, support a revisionist version of her experience. Finally, I discuss takeaways from that revised historical account and provide ideas for how apparent feminist activists can use rhetoric and composition scholarship to support the creation and maintenance of revisionist technical rhetorics about social issues in the public sphere.

Contexts of Oppression

Although it is not possible to represent the ubiquity and complexity of child marriage as an institution in the space of an essay, the following accounts provide some indication of the enormity of this problem. Thereby, they also provide some hint as to the complexity of the apparent feminist work that Ali engages in on a daily basis.

Child marriage occurs when a person under age 18 is married (Nour 1644). A 2005 UNICEF study showed that Niger, Chad, Mali, Bangladesh, Guinea, and Burkina Faso all had child-marriage rates of higher than 60 percent (United

Nations Children's Fund 4). Although both boys and girls are married as minors around the globe, child marriage disproportionately affects girls; in Mali, for example, just one underage boy is married for every 72 underage girls who are married (Nour 1644). Although some might argue that child marriage is a culturally relative issue that should be dealt with contextually, it is inarguable that child marriage disproportionately affects girls and significantly increases girls' chances of being physically and emotionally abused. Child marriage, for girls, "leads towards inadequate socialization, discontinuation of education, physiological and psychological damage to girls due to early and frequent pregnancies, and quite often an early widowhood" (Nagi 2). Drawing on a variety of interdisciplinary sources (Bunting; Gangoli, McCarry, and Razak; Mikhail; Nour; Raj, Saggurti, Balaiah, and Silverman), I argue that child marriage is a transnationally relevant human rights violation affecting girls in three main ways: Child marriage causes girls to be denied education, it makes girls vulnerable to abuse, and it increases girls' risk of serious health problems. Further, it affects girls' understandings of their own agency in the world, since entering into marriage as a girl is often deeply influenced by localized economics and thus is supported by family members who constitute the child's entire social network.

However, establishing understandings of the dangers of child marriage cross-culturally—a first step toward preventing child marriage—is not easy. Child marriage is "linked to social and economic expectations" and is affected by "conflicts and pressures to maintain social and gendered behavioural norms" (Gangoli, McCarry, and Razak 428). Gangoli, McCarry, and Razak found that the difference between an arranged marriage and a forced marriage is often blurred; girls are socialized into wanting to please their parents and adhere to their home culture, making it extremely difficult for them to refuse an arranged child marriage even if they live in a country where legal help is available to them. Bunting showed that the age of consent is a controversial issue. Further, Gorney's reporting shows that families often believe that marrying girls protects them from sexual predation because their husband will protect them from rape—at least, he will protect them from rape by men besides himself. In most cases, local cultural resistance to the criminalization of child marriage occurs for many complex reasons and is extremely strong.

Even more troublingly, child marriage primarily impacts girls from rural and poor families, who may see girl children as an economic burden (Kamal; Singh and Kapur). In some cases, families marry their daughters early in hopes that they will have better lives with a husband than the family could provide (Gorney; Worth; UNICEF). Whatever the reason for the prevalence of the underage marriage of girls, child marriage certainly is an issue influenced by intersectional identities. Religion, ethnicity, class, nationality, and other factors

affect the likelihood of child marriage, making the issue ripe for third-wave feminist analysis and intervention (van Wormer and Bartollas). Feminists should be particularly invested in intervening in systematic patterns of child marriage since it perpetuates generational cycles of inequity, disempowerment, and poverty—all of which already affect women in greater numbers than men.

Addressing the problem of child marriage is also complicated by the fact that such marriages often are conducted in secret or at the least are not officially recorded. Scholars report that child marriage is closely connected with human trafficking of minor girls, and investment in covering up this criminal activity further distorts efforts to understand the prevalence of and cultural reasons for child marriage (Ghosh; Mikhail). For example, only 490 cases of child marriage were reported in India for the five-year period preceding 2006, although experts believe “the percentage of under-18 marriages of girls in the country has increased from 34% in 1998–99 to 45.6% in 2005–06” (Ghosh 723). Several sources estimate that around 60 million currently living girls and women are victims of child marriage (Terkel; UNICEF).

Despite this massive cover-up, child marriage has recently become more apparent in the popular press on an individual level, largely because of Ali. Her courage resulted in a precedent-setting legal case when she was granted a divorce, went home to her family with the protection of a variety of authorities, returned to school, advocated for her younger sister and other Yemeni girls, became an international symbol of resistance to practices that oppress girls and women, and demonstrated to other girls in similar situations how they could take action. Such cases provide positive role models for other victims of child marriage who may have avoided seeking divorce for a variety of reasons—including fear, cultural shame, violence, and the possibility of losing the chance to ever marry again—and they aid feminists and activists in describing the individual consequences of child marriage because they help put faces to an otherwise largely unapparent institution.⁵ Cases like these also provide increased impetus for transnational media to discuss child marriage and its implications for girls and women. For example, *Essence* and *National Geographic* magazines have both published pieces on the devastating effects of child marriage in the past several years (Amber; Gorney). Further, Ali’s own book has made significant headway in increasing global awareness of child marriage. However, child marriage is still largely unapparent in that it gets little attention relative to the enormity of its effects.

Ali as Apparent Feminist

Recent historiographical efforts to include female contributions to rhetoric and composition studies have shown that such endeavors do not simply

recover lost histories and add them to a pre-determined body of work, “but rather recast the condition of study” (Gaillet and Horner viii) and make apparent new ways of thinking about feminist tools and areas of influence (Enoch).⁶ Following in the tradition of advocating epistemic shifts, this essay uses apparent feminism to show how contemporary activism can set the stage for—and complicate—the writing of transnational feminist histories in the present. As I have argued above, child marriage constitutes a significant and transnational act of violence against girls and women, and action is necessary in order to protect girls from the consequences of being married as children. Part of that action is historiographical critique; as such, the remainder of this essay uses apparent feminism to enact that critique by demonstrating how some of Ali’s most important work—the work she has engaged in after her divorce—is in danger of being minimized or even erased in historical records. In fact, the divorce—the very circumstance that brought Ali to international attention—can be (and has been) cast as a cultural and familial betrayal in local contexts; as I will discuss below, Ali’s relationship with male family members remains contentious in part because of media attention brought about by Ali’s divorce. Such reactions are further evidence of the need for feminist perspectives that support Ali and girls and women like her.

Apparent feminism is a theoretical response to understudied and unrecognized misogyny in technical rhetorics, including laws and customs that support and propagate institutions like child marriage. As stated above, apparent feminism asks its practitioners to make feminisms explicit, to hail allies in social justice, and to critique rhetorics of *efficiency*. I suggest that Ali’s courageous return to her family and community is complementary to feminist goals and should be studied as such, that it hails allies and has had positive effects for other Yemeni child brides, and that it implicitly critiques a patriarchal ethic of efficiency. I focus, in this analysis, on news articles that have appeared with quotations from Ali in addition to including information from her memoir. Although Ali’s memoir certainly constitutes her most direct apparent feminist work, I am interested in seeing how Ali has affected technical rhetorics in the social realm, and her book is only one piece—and, in fact, probably not the most commonly circulated piece—of that rhetorical assemblage.

It is important to note that my recognition of Ali as an apparent feminist—someone who does not (to my knowledge) identify as feminist but who is doing work that is feminist in nature—is also a partial construction. The work I do here is not biographical; it is not intended to report on the totality of Ali’s life. It is, rather, a selected assemblage of technical rhetorics that Ali has contributed to. My analysis is intended to help apparent feminists and social justice advocates to learn about Ali’s work so that we might support it, expand on it,

consider its importance as a model, theorize its effects on feminist networks, and take other action that I have not yet imagined.

I begin this work by pointing out that Ali's decision to return to her family and community as an activist—a choice I find astonishing and brave—is deeply feminist. I make this claim, despite the fact that I do not know Ali's perspective on the term *feminist*, because of the effects her actions have had on her family, community, and the world. Faced with several options—including attending school abroad—Ali became determined to return to her family so that she could protect her little sister, Haifa, continue her own education, and work to change opinions in her community about how girls should be treated (Ali 159). She made the choice to stay involved—and continues to make that choice, every day—despite the fact that her family and community are not always supportive. “Mohammed, my big brother, is not pleased. Ever since the session in court, he often yells at Haifa and me. . . . He [says] all this publicity about our family isn't good for our reputation” (Ali and Minoui 130-131). Ali's determination to stand against this rhetoric makes her an apparent feminist, not because she explicitly identifies as such, but because she is doing work that other activists can recognize as feminist and can support and build upon.

Since her divorce, Ali has made her goals, which are complementary to feminist movements to empower girls, explicit and public—or, apparent. She has spoken to many reporters from a variety of countries and she has publicly advocated against the marriage of young girls; this includes speaking against her father's intentions to arrange a marriage for young Haifa, a challenging rhetorical project that requires constant attention. With the help of Delphine Minoui, Ali co-wrote a book about her experiences and agreed to support her family with the proceeds (Ali and Minoui).⁷ In fact, *The Guardian* (a British daily newspaper with an international readership) recently reported that Ali's father has squandered much of her money and has kicked her out of the new family home—and yet Ali remains dedicated to her mission of ensuring safety for her sister. “I won't let it happen to her,” she says, when asked about the engagement her father has arranged for Haifa (Sheffer). Ali continues to do feminist work that is possible only because she has chosen to remain a member of the community her family belongs to. To be clear, it is the *way* that Ali has returned to her family and community—not the mere fact of her return—that makes her return an example of apparent feminist activism.⁸ It is her constant advocacy for her sister and her careful, smart engagements with reporters that make her current trajectory an apparent feminist move.⁹ It is her willingness to engage in hard work and the fact that she is still living this story that makes it so important for others—including Western feminists—to pay attention.

Meanwhile, Ali's story has both created and made apparent and accessible a variety of allies for Yemeni child brides—and, indeed, has called some

of those child brides into becoming allies to each other, as well. The *New York Times* reported that another Yemeni girl, Arwa Abdu Muhammad Ali, 9, came forward to accuse her husband of maltreatment shortly after Ali (Worth), as did Rym, 12, who had first attempted suicide as an escape from her marriage (Ali and Minoui 163). Both enlisted the services of Nasser in filing for divorce. Ali said, "I was proud to learn that my story had helped them find the means to defend themselves" (Ali and Minoui 164). Arwa and Rym are not the only girls to take up Ali's tradition of resistance; since Ali's divorce, Nasser has been "receiving calls about girls, some younger than Nujood, trying to escape their marriages" (Worth). Ali engages in work I recognize as apparent feminist activism because she is both aware of and active in forming relationships with allies—like Nasser; Nadia Abdulaziz al-Saqqaf, editor in chief of the *Yemen Times*; and Yemeni judges Mohammad al-Ghazi, Abdo, and Abdel Wahed—and, in fact, dedicates the book to "Arwa, Rym, and all the little Yemeni girls who dream of freedom."

Finally, Ali's return to her family is an implicit critique of an implicit ethic of efficiency. Ali's choice to put herself at risk in order to enact change in her community demonstrates her understanding of a systematic and oppressive patriarchy that must be disrupted. In the epilogue of *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*, Minoui wrote, "In Yemen, many factors drive fathers to marry off their daughters before they reach puberty," including poverty, custom, lack of education, family honor, and fear of adultery. Ali's father claims to have married Ali off because her older sisters had been kidnapped and raped, resulting in "forced" marriages; he saw Ali's early marriage as a way to keep her from her sisters' fate. Clearly, he was not protecting her from rape; rather, he was "protecting" her from a forced marriage where a dowry would be foregone. Ali's marriage at the age of nine was an efficient course of action for Ali's father since his main loss when his older daughters had been kidnapped was the loss of the dowry he would have received had they been married off purposefully. Marrying Ali so young was the most efficient way for her father to use her for financial gain.

Ali, engaging in apparently feminist activism, is now adamant that she can intervene in this oppressive, efficiency-based, patriarchal system and "can be an example to other girls and encourage them to demand their rights" (Ali and Minoui 177). Ali's return to her family—her insistence on being on the front lines of this struggle for female agency—demonstrates that she has learned to speak in her own voice, make her own allies, and be an example herself of how to intervene in the patriarchally efficient status quo.

Avenues for Action Through Revised Technical Rhetorics

Apparent feminist social justice workers (and perhaps especially those operating from within rhetoric and composition) can both draw on and contribute to Ali's work by recognizing the need to revise and critique technical rhetorics. When I invoke the term technical rhetorics, I mean any rhetorical assemblage that attempts to persuade a specific audience with a specialized set of knowledge (Frost and Eble). I encourage apparent feminist activists to support the creation and maintenance of revisionist *technical rhetorics* about social issues in the public sphere. In Ali's case, this assemblage includes most prominently newspaper and magazine articles (Daragahi; Sheffer; Worth) and Ali's own book (Ali and Minoui), which together constitute Ali's written history and which are aimed at an audience of those interested in female empowerment and equality on a global scale. To be clear, this essay is one example of a way to do this work; this analysis contributes to the rhetorical velocity of Ali's message.

My focus on technical rhetorics that influence and prescribe social action is purposeful. While legal action—like Ali's divorce—can be compelling, it is social action—like her work since the divorce—that has the greatest power for change (partly because social action most often precipitates legal and other sorts of actions). Gaffney-Rhys argues that, while law is important for establishing understandings about child marriage, national and local social programs are better for preventing it. This essay suggests that social policy is now far more important in working to prevent child marriage than legal policy¹⁰ and that Ali is on the front line of that struggle. Social programs like those discussed by Erulkar and Muthengi would support awareness and education about child marriage in countries where early marriage is the norm. Such programs could help girls and their families gain access to alternatives in cases where girls are married for protection. Further, aggressive and culturally sensitive social programming would significantly impact the steadiest indicator of child marriage: education.¹¹ Better education for girls will likely have the result of decreasing the prevalence of child marriage. Finally, at the very least, social programs could provide girls with more knowledge about how to take care of themselves in the instance that they are married and facing health complications or abuse. Such programming stands to improve the situation of girls and women on a global scale.

Making apparent the importance of technical rhetorics like social and cultural programming is necessary because child marriage is a widespread act of transnational violence against girls and women. This is true because of its prevalence and its negative consequences for girls' health and education;

child marriage puts girls at significant risk for physical abuse, including sexual assault. I suggest that composition and rhetoric scholars, because of their understanding of persuasion and privilege, are uniquely situated to create new technical rhetorics that disrupt hegemonic systems. Privileged rhetors have an obligation to organize, participate in, and pay attention to social programs (like those mentioned above) to educate girls and their families about the dangers of child marriage and about other viable options for girls' social success. The critical part of any such venture, however, is engaging as an apparent feminist ally rather than as a colonizing authority. It is essential that all parties see themselves as participating in reciprocal networks, much like the mentoring networks described by Gaillet and Eble, wherein "we all benefit from the opportunities afforded by our mutual connections." Further, we can best do this complex transcultural work when we recognize the already existing nodes or "productive spaces" (Bay 36) of "the cultural network of life through which we are all connected" (Bay 39).

Part of such networks are the assemblages of technical rhetorics—the artifacts that make up histories, both written and oral—that give those networks exigence. It is important to acknowledge, though, that any such assemblage of technical rhetorics is both partial and—like the mentoring model Gaillet and Eble describe—recursive. For example, I have focused in this essay on written artifacts because they are accessible to me as well as being static enough to allow for analysis. However, Ali's history—and any technical rhetorical assemblage—also includes oral technical rhetorics, which are harder to represent and examine in a forum like this one. The conversations that surround an artifact like a newspaper article not only continue important discourses begun by the article itself, but also affect how that article might be read in the future. As such, the term technical rhetorics encompasses a set of artifacts as well as the conversations that both emerge from and re-situate those artifacts.

These dynamic, oral conversations represent the first and most important point of intervention for apparent feminists. For example, because the news media focus on circumstances that are exigent, it is likely that stories on Ali's situation will continue to decrease in frequency over the coming years. By drawing on rhetoric and composition scholarship and practice that emphasizes the importance of oral histories (Bryson; Ramsey; Rhetoric and Composition Sound Archives), apparent feminists can continue to emphasize and make apparent the importance of Ali's continuing efforts to solidify female agency—even, perhaps, in the face of a lack of information about her most recent work. Despite waning reporting, we can continue to take up her story as a model for feminist apperency.

In addition, promoting Ali's continued presence in technical rhetorical textual formats—including scholarship in field journals, digital publishing venues

like blogs and online reference sources, the documents that support and explain organizations devoted to social justice, and more—also contributes to the goal of doing justice to Ali’s story by making apparent her continuing cultural work. It is vital, though, that activists and scholars who wish to participate in this work must do so as allies and not colonizers. It is important to tell and re-tell Ali’s story, but it is equally important to recognize that no single re-telling (including this one and excepting only, perhaps, Ali’s) is the final word on the issue. By focusing on the recursive nature of technical rhetorical assemblages and on the simultaneous subjectivity and validity of perspective-based knowledge, we can work towards new understandings of Ali’s work and ways to productively and responsibly intervene in situations of unjustly reduced or limited female agency. In addition, by doing this work in this context, we will also learn—and model—new ways of using our disciplinary knowledges to change social practices in positive ways.

Conclusion

By making apparent and continuing to talk about the work of Nujood Ali and the ways her work is—and is not—discussed in major media outlets, apparent feminists can engage as allies in critiquing the patriarchally efficient institution of child marriage. By recognizing that people like Ali are already leading the way and functioning as nodes that connect vast networks of technical rhetorics, we can recognize new ways to engage with, intervene in, and mediate between disparate networks. Further, we can look to Ali’s work as one example that underscores the importance of recovering contemporary histories that are left out when we depend solely on dominant narratives. In other words, paying attention to Ali’s continuing story and taking it up as an apparent feminist intervention can help us to understand how the supposed efficiency with which major media outlets operate sometimes causes us to miss important pieces of cultural histories. This, in turn, makes apparent both the necessity and the means to tell alternative histories so that we might develop more diverse, efficient, and culturally informed understandings of the world.

Notes

1 Although many citation traditions advocate using first names to identify minors, I use Ali’s last name as a measure of respect and to signify that her work is challenging and important by adult standards.

2 I hope it is obvious that this version of events is extremely abbreviated. For a more detailed account, see *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced* (Ali and Minoui).

3 To be clear, some reporters have continued to write about Ali and her life after her divorce. However, their stories are less frequent than they once were, and media outlets are not featuring them nearly so prominently.

4 Note that this is a critique that can be—and has been—applied to some feminist work. For example, Mohanty has critiqued white, Western feminist rhetorics for too often considering “third-world women” a homogeneous group. While Mohanty does not herself employ study of efficiency rhetorics as a major component of her critique, we can recognize that the rhetorical trends she is talking about developed as a matter of efficiency (for white, Western feminists) rather than as malicious intention. For this reason, critiques of efficiency are especially important to take up—and they are most important to take up precisely when they are difficult to recognize.

5 Movements that utilize this strategy include the Half the Sky Movement, the Girl-Child Network Worldwide, Women Thrive Worldwide, and Tapestries of Hope.

6 For some examples of this body of feminist historiographic work in rhetoric, composition, and technical communication studies, see Bokser, Brasseur, Durack, Flynn, Glenn, Lippincott, Lunsford, Logan, Madaus, Neeley, Ritchie, Skinner, Sullivan, Wells.

7 Ali’s agreement was no doubt affected by the fact that Yemeni law would not allow the proceeds to go to a minor.

8 I feel compelled to point out that, while I find Ali’s choice to remain in her community to be brave and responsible, I do not suggest that this would necessarily be the best—or even the most deeply feminist—course of action for other girls in similar situations.

9 Ali’s smart and careful managing of publicity related to her divorce also serves to protect her safety—which is, of course, a basic necessity in order for her activism to remain tenable.

10 International bodies, most notably the United Nations, have expressed disapproval toward child marriage. The UN has opposed child marriage since 1948. “Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that persons must be at ‘full age’ when married and that marriage should be entered into ‘freely’ and with ‘full consent’” (Nour 1644). Despite this international statement, anti-child marriage legislation has proven difficult to pass even in the United States. Republicans in the House of Representatives successfully blocked the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2010—even after it passed the Senate—because they believed it would lead to increased abortions (Terkel). In addition, legal and social policy opposing child marriage meets with overwhelming opposition in countries where child marriage is the cultural norm. In effect, laws against child marriage

actually contribute to the invisibility of its victims as they cause child marriages to take place in secret.

11 The importance of education for girls has recently been made internationally apparent by the young Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai. As a pre-teen, Yousafzai wrote publicly in favor of education for girls, an action which resulted in a 2012 attack in which a terrorist shot her in the head in an attempt to silence her. Yousafzai recovered and has since been a powerful advocate for girls' education.

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