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## Gendered Orientalism: The Narration of Sisterhood and Western Intervention in Afghanistan

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### Abstract

*This study analyses how the sympathetic discourses highlighting women's issues in Muslim countries reaffirm the binary of the civilized West and the barbaric East. The research draws upon bell hooks<sup>1</sup> views on sisterhood that challenges traditional gender-based exploitation and Maryam Khalid's study regarding the significance of gender in Orientalism. In addition, the article interconnects with Hamid Dabashi's vision of the contribution of native intellectuals. The theme aims to analyze selected writings of activists to detect how their narratives justify western preconception of woman suppression in eastern society and legitimize NATO's intervention in Afghanistan. Through a qualitative method of evaluation of the literature analysis of different activists' works, this research discovers that the proponents of politics of sisterhood from Muslim countries in their campaign for women's rights falsely portrayed NATO's occupation of Kabul as salvation for Afghan women. This research will help in uncovering how a politicized depiction of the Afghan women supports the Western agenda that Muslim women require to be rescued by the West. Furthermore, this paper highlights the role of women activists in the developing countries as native informers through a gendered comparison between NATO and the Taliban rule.*

**Keywords:** Gendered Orientalism, Sisterhood, NATO, New-Barbarism, Native informers, Comprador Intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> Bell hooks, with lower case, is the name of Gloria Jean Watkins, an American feminist author and social critic of old traditional traits towards women.

## Introduction

In the contemporary globalized world, activism against different societal and traditional issues brings reforms in the society. However, when it comes to the dilemmas of the third world or the developing countries, particularly in the context of women's issues, societies are misrepresented by the politics embedded in activism. Moreover, the global representation of these issues in the post-colonial societies gets distorted by the demands of Western countries, which dominates the current discourse of knowledge. For instance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an inter-governmental military alliance of two North American states and 30 European countries, has executed a hegemonic role globally by every means available. So, the voices of oppressed remain unaddressed and popular, yet false, notions of liberation emanating from the West gain political mileage.

The term "First World" was first used in the 20th century during the Cold War to describe countries that supported capitalism and were allies of the United States. It was introduced by the UN in the 1940s and mainly included rich and politically stable countries in Western Europe, the US, and Canada<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the term "Third World" was first used in 1952 by French economist Alfred Sauvy to describe countries that were not part of the Western world or the Soviet Union. These countries were mostly in South America, Africa, Oceania, and Asia. They were mostly colonized by the West<sup>3</sup>.

This paper contributes an assessment of the selected literature that shows how social and literary activists from third world countries represent the condition of their native people and culture as miserable and completely at the mercy of their White masters of the western alliance. It is intended to uncover how these activists and journalists from non-western world, through their hegemonic discourse of sisterhood, depict a stereotypical picture of the Eastern countries, which adds to the legitimization of the military interventions of NATO in Muslim countries. For analysis, the author has examined the narratives of Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist, and Alizada, Zainab Pirzad, and Rubaba Rezai, Afghan journalists working for Rukhshana Media, an independent news agency in Afghanistan founded in

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<sup>2</sup> World Atlas. "The First, Second, and Third World Countries: Origin of Concept and Present Beliefs," accessed March 12, 2025. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-first-second-and-third-world-countries-origin-of-concept-and-present-beliefs.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

2020.<sup>4</sup> The chosen activists are journalists. They influence the society because their voices are heard worldwide and their articles are published in renowned news magazines.

For instance, their publications in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* are acknowledged at the global level and, therefore, construct the basis for “gendered Orientalism”<sup>5</sup>. The objective of the study is to explain how their narratives appear to serve as “comprador intellectuals” and “native informers” in legitimizing America’s military presence in Afghanistan<sup>6</sup>. To support the arguments, the study interconnects with the theoretical perspectives of “sisterhood”, “gendered Orientalism,” and “comprador native intellectuals” in the works of hooks, Khalid, and Dabashi, respectively. This paper helps in understanding the critical viewpoints of social activists whose voice the West uses to gain influence in the Muslim countries.

### Theoretical Framework

To uncover the crucial contribution of influential individuals who advocate and encourage western influences in Muslim countries, the theoretical foundation has drawn upon bell hook’s concept of “sisterhood,” according to which the “political solidarity of women” liberates women from old structures of patriarchal domination<sup>7</sup>. hooks further explains how sisterhood at the same time serves to cover the “opportunism of manipulative bourgeois white women” and ignores the “women’s complex social reality”<sup>8</sup>. hook’s concept also explains how sisterhood is associated with gender discussion in contemporary global politics and can construct the binary of the sophisticated West versus the savage East. To understand the formation of this binary, the study interconnects with Maryam Khalid’s concept of “gendered Orientalism” which explains how the West represented as “good, civilized, rational and progressive” while the East as “bad, barbaric, irrational and backward” and it suits those ideas which endorse the global advances of the West to bring progress and freedom in accordance with its ideology in rest of the world.<sup>9</sup> The research also shed light on Hamid Dabashi’s concept

<sup>4</sup> Rukhshana Media is an independent news agency focused on women's issues locally and globally.

<sup>5</sup> Maryam Khalid. "Gendering Orientalism: Gender, Sexuality, and Race in Post-9/11 Global Politics," *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 10, No. 1 (2014): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Hamid Dabashi. *Brown Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 39 - 42.

<sup>7</sup> Hooks. *Feminist Theory*, 127.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Khalid. "Gendering Orientalism," 2.

of “native informers” and “comprador intellectuals”<sup>10</sup>. Dabashi is an Iranian-American scholar and serves as a professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York City. He defines “native informers” and “comprador intellectuals” as indigenous people who contribute to the reassertion of stereotypical portrayal of their native people by producing “useful knowledge” in the form of “exotic” stories about their indigenous lands<sup>11</sup>. Dabashi argues that the native informers are considered as authentic oriental voices by the West because their narratives do not oppose western thoughts nor do they oppose western dominance worldwide.

### Methodology

For qualitative analysis, three different articles were selected. The first article by Malala Yousafzai, entitled “I Survived the Taliban, I Fear for My Afghan Sisters”. This article is Yousafzai’s response to the shift of power in Afghanistan and its possible effects on the education of women and children. The next article by Alizada, titled “The US is leaving Afghanistan, the Taliban is growing in power, and education for girls and women is already at risk,” expresses concern for the girls’ access to the education and growing trouble for women in Afghanistan. The third article is on “I worry my daughters will never know peace; women flee the Taliban again,” discusses the situation in Afghanistan after the departure of the US forces in 2021, leaving the people in fear and uncertainty with a “serious threat for the Afghan women”<sup>12</sup>. To understand how the narratives by the above-mentioned native intellectuals contribute to justifying and glorifying the necessity of NATO in Muslim countries, an analysis of discourse has been attempted based upon the theoretical studies of bell hooks, Maryam Khalid, and Hamid Dabashi.

### Review of Literature

Hegemonic narratives of sisterhood by native activists and journalists contribute to developing a notion that Muslim women must be protected through the involvement of Western countries. These processes of saving and rescuing Muslim women involve military operations conducted by Western countries, for instance, NATO’s military raids in Afghanistan,

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<sup>10</sup> Dabashi. *Brown Skin, White Masks*, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Aliya Alizada and Amie Ferris-Rotman. "The U.S. is Leaving Afghanistan: The Taliban is Growing in Power, and Education for Girls and Women is Already at Risk," *Time*, July 7, 2021. <https://time.com/67872/afghanistan-with-drawal-taliban-girls-education/>.

apparently conducted to rescue or liberate Afghan women from Taliban rule. A review of various interviews and statements shared by Western media, specifically NATO representatives, show that they proudly celebrate how their military invasions in Afghanistan were necessary for Afghan women's safety and peace. The testimonies of third world activists and journalists play an essential role in showcasing the discourse that Muslim women require NATO military operations to save them from an oppressed environment. For instance, Marriët Schuurman, NATO's Special Representative, said that NATO was "eager" to rescue Afghan women and would "continue" its operations in Afghanistan<sup>13</sup>. Likewise, Schuurman specifically mentions how Afghan women's human rights defenders are grateful for NATO's continued support to protect women's rights<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, Schuurman emphasis is on how Afghan women representatives feel "deprived" of the safety Afghan women cherished during "two decades of Western-backed government following the US-led invasion in 2001"<sup>15</sup>.

The article by NATO, titled "Women's Rights: Making Progress in Afghanistan," highlights how native intellectual women are grateful for the "international support" that arrived with NATO's military interventions in Afghanistan<sup>16</sup>. According to the article, after NATO's invasion Afghan women were "enjoying women's rights" and the freedom to shape their own lives<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, in an article, titled "A vital role of women in the Afghan National Police," a NATO representative proudly lauds how Afghan women under NATO's military occupation experienced combats that they had never experienced before<sup>18</sup>.

Likewise, in the article, titled "Stability Providing New Opportunities for Afghan Women", the NATO representatives emphasize how Afghan women's activists pleaded with NATO to fulfill "certain expectations" of a

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<sup>13</sup> NATO. "NATO Special Representative: Women Are Essential to Building a Safer Afghanistan," (March 18, 2015), para. 2. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_118968.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_118968.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> NATO. "Women's Rights: Making Progress in Afghanistan," (March 7, 2012). [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_85083.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_85083.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> NATO. "A Vital Role for Women in the Afghan National Police," (May 5, 2011). [https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/news\\_73199.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/news_73199.htm?selectedLocale=en).

“continuous flow of help” for the protection of Afghan women<sup>19</sup>. Lastly, in another article, “Women’s Rights Essential for lasting stability in Afghanistan”, a NATO representative shares the difficulties “a delegation of Afghan women from the Ministry of Women Affairs” faced to reach “NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium” to request the “long term cooperation” from NATO for the survival and safety of Afghan women<sup>20</sup>. Thus, the above-mentioned statements of NATO representatives prove that discourses of sisterhood develop “gendered Orientalism,” which paved the way for the reconstruction of Afghan land and society. Hence, women activism carved out its space in every sector of society under NATO presence in Afghanistan.

### Analysis

Malala Yousafzai’s work appears to portray her Afghan sisters as the victims of injustices at the hands of the Taliban and tends to depict NATO’s intervention as a way to empower Afghan women. It is quite obvious that Yousafzai’s stance promotes “gendered Orientalism” and legitimizes intervention as a rescue mission to save Afghan women from Afghan men<sup>21</sup>. In this context, Dabashi’s explanation of “native informers” is relevant in a way that their generated discourses encompass striking stories regarding the fright and disdain of native people<sup>22</sup>. Dabashi uses the terms “comprador intellectuals” and “native informers” for the Eurocentric indigenous people who contribute to the reassertion of Orientalism by producing “useful knowledge” in the form of “exotic” stories about their indigenous lands<sup>23</sup>. In this regard, it is observed that the narratives of Yousafzai and Alizada are basically an exaggerated picture of devastation of the lives of Afghan women as repercussions of NATO’s withdrawal.

Through the exaggerated depiction of Afghan women as victimized souls, these activists appear convinced that the safety, liberation, and education of women are possible only under Western governance. For instance, Yousafzai draws a comparison between her problematic life in Pakistan and the current empowered and privileged status that she has acquired in the West.

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<sup>19</sup> NATO. “Stability Providing New Opportunities for Afghan Women,” (April 6, 2011). [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_72069.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_72069.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>20</sup> NATO. “Women’s Rights Essential for Lasting Stability in Afghanistan,” (March 17, 2011). [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_71676.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_71676.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>21</sup> Khalid. “Gendering Orientalism,” 2.

<sup>22</sup> Dabashi. *Brown Skin, White Masks*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

She expresses gratitude for her own career path, which she has attained in the West. She further states that she cannot imagine losing her empowered life by “going back to a life defined... by men with guns”<sup>24</sup>. However, Yousafzai’s appreciation for her contented life in the West and her intent not to return to the land of “men with guns [the East]” seems to reinforce the idea of “new barbarism”<sup>25</sup>. Yousafzai’s gratitude for the education and empowerment she has received from the West suggests that her Afghan sisters can only be rescued by the West. The intended politics behind these statements can be explained through Dabashi’s idea, according to which, “comprador intellectuals” work as “subservient byproducts of colonialism; writing accounts of Islam and Muslim-majority societies” in ways that legitimize and justify post-9/11 American imperial projects<sup>26</sup>.

Yousafzai highlights that during NATO’s rule in Afghanistan, Afghan women acquired education and liberty. She further expresses her concern that the arrival of the Taliban might restrict Afghan women from the education and liberty they had attained under NATO-occupied Afghanistan. Her statement evidently asserts that the utmost freedom and security of Afghan women is possible only if their country is administered by America. Yousafzai states that “in the past two decades, millions of Afghan women and girls received an education. Now the future they were promised is dangerously close to slipping away”<sup>27</sup>. It is observed that Yousafzai in fact asserts the binary between America as “progressive” and the Taliban as “backward”. It will not be inaccurate to contend that Yousafzai is generating a kind of discourse which, according to Khalid, is “oriental” as well as “gendered base”<sup>28</sup>. In addition, Yousafzai tries to identify herself as a victim, but her privileged position does not conform to this association. In her statement, for instance, “I am grateful for my life now, I cannot think of going back,” Yousafzai explains her alienation from the circumstances her sisters are living in<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Malala Yousafzai. "I Survived the Taliban: I Fear for My Afghan Sisters," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/17/opinion/malala-afghanistan-taliban-women.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Dag Tuastad. "Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in the Middle East Conflict(s)," *Third World Quarterly* 24, No. 4 (2003): 592. <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/17189048.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Dabashi. *Brown Skin, White Masks*, 39, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Yousafzai. "I Fear for My Afghan Sisters."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid; Maryam Khalid. "Gendering Orientalism."

<sup>29</sup> Yousafzai. "I Fear for My Afghan Sisters."

Nima Naghibi, while observing the arrival of British women missionaries in Iran, explains that although their sisterhood was devoted to the concerns of “social justice,” at the same time, their sisterhood possessed a “problematic conception” because of having “the West as the model of progress and enlightenment”<sup>30</sup>. Naghibi, an academician, specializes in postcolonial and diaspora studies, immigration, and exile literature. She is vocal on human rights and social justice. Naghibi argues that “women located themselves within a particular position of authority initially by declaring the backwardness of their Eastern sisters and then by setting themselves the task of civilizing their inferiors”<sup>31</sup>. In the light of Naghibi’s views, Yousafzai’s claim of sisterhood appears to be hegemonic and represents the West as the civilized.

Yousafzai, in the guise of sisterhood, through the portrayal of deprived Afghan women tends to create “Oriental fantasies”<sup>32</sup> to validate Western intervention in Afghanistan. Dabashi discusses the “native informers” and how they create “Oriental fantasies” by drawing upon their “personal accounts divorced of history or context” through which they “construct a narrative that paves the way for ‘public consent to imperial hubris’<sup>33</sup>. Likewise, Yousafzai can be regarded as belonging to the “native informers” who ignore material realities of Afghanistan. She neglects the long history of the NATO’s rescue mission in Afghanistan which is the significant cause of economic instability for the Afghan women<sup>34</sup>. This is where her solidarity with Afghan women becomes problematic as her role becomes limited to that of a native informant who uses sisterhood as a tool to Orientalize Afghan women and to rationalize the American intervention in Afghanistan.

Similarly, Alizada and Rotman review the condition of the Afghan women after the withdrawal of NATO’s military forces from Afghanistan. Throughout the article, they compare the period of American control in Afghanistan with the reign of the Taliban. The authors first inform how Western rule has guaranteed the liberation of Afghan women from the shackles of domination and has provided them with opportunities to progress. Their narrative

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<sup>30</sup> Nima Naghibi. *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Dabashi. *Brown Skin, White Masks*, 70.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

appears to provide justifications for NATO's military intervention in Afghanistan. For instance, they mention how "educating Afghan girls...became a U.S. focal point in Afghanistan"<sup>35</sup>. In this regard, Tuastad pointed out that "it was women who almost exclusively have been symbolized as victims in official US 'War on Terror' discourse"<sup>36</sup>. Alizada shares the same view, "... soon after the US invasion, tens of thousands of schoolgirls... began attending schools across the country... and have become symbols of tangible progress"<sup>37</sup>.

It is important to note that they ignore the dynamics of exploitative political agendas at play, and the only discursive notion they are concerned with is how American rule has assured women's education. Abu-Lughod rightly perceives that "gendered" discourses have always been helpful in producing "justifications made for American intervention in Afghanistan in terms of liberating, or saving, Afghan women"<sup>38</sup>. We see that the images of NATO's mission of civilizing and educating the women in Afghanistan is the persistent motif in the discourses of the abovementioned women activists. Such representations of Muslim women as lacking and oppressed souls help in producing and supporting Orientalism on the basis of gender.

The representation of the barbaric East is created by demonstrating a "homogenous image of oppressed Muslim women," and these images provide an effective reason for the intervention of the West in the Muslim countries. Here, the reason was "War on Terror" in Afghanistan<sup>39</sup>. Khalid explains that the depiction of "Afghan men as dangerous to Afghan women" operates through "gendered Orientalism"<sup>40</sup>. For instance, Alizada and Rotman explain that after the departure of American forces, the Taliban started placing restrictions on the education of Afghan women and girls and restricted their progress. They narrate the story of their Afghan sister, Nadia, who has consistently worked for the empowerment of Afghan women. Nadia has been teaching women how to read and write and has also been conducting workshops to educate Afghan men about the rights of their

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<sup>35</sup> Alizada and Ferris-Rotman. "The U.S. Is Leaving Afghanistan."

<sup>36</sup> Tuastad. "Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis," 8.

<sup>37</sup> Alizada and Rotman. "The U.S. Is Leaving Afghanistan."

<sup>38</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod. "Do Muslim Women Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 14, No. 3 (2002): 783.

<sup>39</sup> Khalid. "Gendering Orientalism," 07.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

wives. The authors discuss how Nadia's efforts for the empowerment of Afghan women have been discontinued abruptly after the withdrawal of the American forces from Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup> Khalid explains how media discourses in the West, for example, *CNN*, *Fox News*, *NBC*, and popular news magazines *Newsweek* and *Time*, "used images of the veiled Afghan woman to illustrate the barbarity of the Eastern 'Other' in support of the military intervention into Afghanistan"<sup>42</sup>. She claimed that the "gendered discourse" has been used to "feminize Afghans by showing their inability to resist the dominance of the Taliban"<sup>43</sup>. For instance, Alizada and Rotman writes an entire paragraph in which she acknowledges and respects America's invasion of Afghanistan as mandatory for the women empowerment:

Girls' education was once a pinnacle of the success of foreign intervention... It was a signature achievement heralded by Washington... When U.S.-backed forces ousted the Taliban from power in 2001, there were almost no girls in school across the country. Today, there are millions and tens of thousands of women attending university, studying everything from medicine to miniature painting... the hundreds of billions of dollars spent fighting the war in Afghanistan... allowed women especially to thrive in media, government, education, and civil society.<sup>44</sup>

The research argues that these statements are problematic because they appear to reaffirm the Western-propagated notion that Eastern women require the civilized West for their liberation and advancement. The reaffirmation of this Western-propagated idea provides supremacy to the West. While discussing the contentment of Laura Bush over the intervention of American military forces in Afghanistan, Abu-Lughod points out that the liberation of Afghan women has been central to the American "War on Terror". According to Abu-Lughod, "It is deeply problematic to construct the Afghan woman as someone in need of saving" because the delight of saving other women ultimately provides a sense of dominance to the Westerners<sup>45</sup>. He explains that such type of discourse provides "justifications ... for [the]

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<sup>41</sup> Alizada and Ferris-Rotman. "The U.S. Is Leaving Afghanistan."

<sup>42</sup> Khalid. "Gendering Orientalism," 8.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Alizada and Rotman. "The U.S. Is Leaving Afghanistan."

<sup>45</sup> Abu-Lughod. "Do Muslim Women Need Saving?" 789.

American intervention in [the] Afghanistan in terms of liberating, or saving, [the] Afghan women"<sup>46</sup>. This shows how Alizada appears "to support official US 'War on Terror' discourse" by representing the "images of oppressed Muslim women" as "symbol of the threat posed by the "irrational, backward, violent, and dangerous masculinity of the enemy"<sup>47</sup>. Khalid asserts that discourse of "gendered orientalism" has constructed Afghanistan as "a territory that can be penetrated" by "US masculinity, through the exercise of Imperial power"<sup>48</sup>. In short, the gendered discourses of various Eurocentric activists, due to their superior position, tend to reinforce Western hegemony and Orientalism through their description of the dilemmas of Muslim women.

Furthermore, the concept of "new barbarism" also needs to be discussed. It refers to a discourse of racialization, through which 'the East' particularly Arab or Muslim is constructed in opposition to the West"<sup>49</sup>. Orientalism, according to Edward Said, misperceived by West and establishes binary oppositions by which many American and European authors "constructed the East as irrational, backward, exotic, despotic and lazy, while the West was civilized, rational, moral and Christian"<sup>50</sup>. Said, a Palestinian American academic, activist, and literary critic, analyses literature through social and cultural politics while advocating for Palestinian rights and statehood. His work *Orientalism* presents a paradox, as he critiques Eurocentrism while employing its methodologies. However, his primary goal is to expose the West's misrepresentation of the East. To fully grasp his critique, it is crucial to magnify non-Western perspectives independently rather than interpreting them solely through Western frameworks.

In this regard, Tuastad discusses that Orientalism has been replaced by neo-Orientalism, according to which native people produce biased portrayals of the Middle Eastern countries to support the Imperial agendas of the Western countries<sup>51</sup>. Similarly, the biased discourse produced by Afghan writers legitimizing NATO intervention in Afghanistan is an example of neo-Orientalism. "New barbarism" as a "contemporary expression of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 783.

<sup>47</sup> Alizada. "The U.S. Is Leaving Afghanistan."

<sup>48</sup> Khalid. "Gendering Orientalism," 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

<sup>51</sup> Tuastad. "Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis," 592.

Orientalism... imply that violence, corruption, and irrationality are embedded in 'Other' cultures"<sup>52</sup>. A native culture is shaped by the traditions, beliefs, and practices of an indigenous group, with its truest definition coming from those who experience it first-hand. Understanding it requires direct engagement and respect for their self-identification. In alignment with new barbarism, it is maintained that the third world activists and journalists as native informers use racist imaginaries to imply that violence and barbarism are deeply ingrained in the local culture of the Muslims society.<sup>53</sup>

Another misleading term used by pro-western activists is "Islamist militants," that tend to portray Islam as a hindrance to the advancement of Muslim world and women. Alizada and Rotman view that women in Afghanistan, after the departure of American military forces, have received "pamphlets and letters... ordering them to stop teaching girls"<sup>54</sup>. The authors further highlight that those "pamphlets and letters" contain "the seals, signatures, and stamps of the 'Islamic Emirate,' the name Taliban uses for itself"<sup>55</sup>. The authors concerned by recalling that the once agentive Afghan women "from journalists to health workers" have been brutally killed by the "Taliban and groups aligned with Islamic State"<sup>56</sup>.

Dabashi explains that after 9/11, Western countries have become inquisitive about Middle Eastern people, particularly about the Muslim world and their women<sup>57</sup>. For this purpose, Western literary markets have been filled with literature regarding the Islamic world. After the attack on World Trade Center, the literature produced by "native informers" portrayed the Muslim world as following the requirements of NATO's propaganda "to justify the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan"<sup>58</sup>. The way Alizada and Rotman accentuate the contribution of America in educating Afghan women by simultaneously using the phrases "Taliban", "terrorists," and "Islamist militants" indicates their support for the post-9/11 American war in Afghanistan<sup>59</sup>. Such type of discourse contains the language of Orientalism and portrays Muslim countries as "abusive of women" and, therefore,

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<sup>52</sup> Khalid. "Gendering Orientalism," 3.

<sup>53</sup> Tuastad. "Neo-Orientalism," 595.

<sup>54</sup> Alizada and Ferris-Rotman. "The U.S. is Leaving Afghanistan."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Dabashi. *Brown Skin, White Masks*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>59</sup> Alizada and Rotman. "The U.S. is Leaving Afghanistan."

fighting against “Islamic terrorism” means to save the brown women from the domination of their men, and “hence the white men saving brown women from brown men”<sup>60</sup>.

On the other hand, an American critique of NATO’s protection narrative; Katherine Wright in “Telling NATO’s Story of Afghanistan: Gender and the Alliance’s Digital Diplomacy” critically examined that the depiction of Afghan women as a creature who viewed NATO as the ‘protector’ was more rhetoric.<sup>61</sup> Wright views these narratives as “instrumentalization of Afghan women... to support a justificatory narrative for intervention”<sup>62</sup>. In fact, NATO’s actions reinforced a “masculinist protection logic” rather than empowering Afghan women.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

A comprehensive interpretation of the articles written by Yousafzai, Alizada and Rotman reveals their activism and journalism, through their narratives, play a crucial role in disseminating and publicizing the justification and legitimacy of the Imperial agendas of the West in the developing Muslim countries. For this purpose, the American military intervention in Afghanistan has been discussed concerning the narratives of the above-mentioned influencers. By analyzing these narratives in the light of hooks, Khalid, Tuastad, and Dabashi’s concepts of sisterhood, gendered Orientalism, new-barbarism, and native informers respectively, this paper has attempted to uncover the politics behind the narratives produced by women native informers in the guise of their “false sisterhood”<sup>64</sup>.

This essay has reflected upon the role of women activists and journalists who generate political knowledge about the Orient through the narration of “exotic stories” of Afghan women living under Taliban rule. These stories contain the elements of “gendered Orientalism” and “new barbarism” and represent Muslim women as the victims of Muslim men's oppression<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Dabashi. *Brown Skin, White Masks*, 60.

<sup>61</sup> Katherine Wright. "Telling NATO’s Story of Afghanistan: Gender and the Alliance’s Digital Diplomacy," *Media, War & Conflict* 12, No. 1 (2019): 96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635217730588>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 127.

<sup>65</sup> Khalid, *Gendering Orientalism*, 1; Tuastad, "Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis," 591.

Moreover, the depiction of NATO's rescuer posture has been critically evaluated and found to be mere fantasy and rhetoric. NATO's mission in Afghanistan eventually ended up with political failure. However, its introduced reforms and infrastructure developments may have a long-lasting impact on Afghan society as limited freedom for women prevails so far.<sup>66</sup>

It is significant to note that before reaffirming the binary of the civilized West and the barbaric East, there is a need to understand the historical and cultural context of Muslim countries. The military invasions cause negative consequences on the economy, culture, and history of the invaded countries. Hence, there is a need to re-evaluate the narratives produced by some pro-western activists to dismantle the narratives that encourage military interventions.

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<sup>66</sup> "Afghanistan: Taliban restrictions on women's rights intensify," *UN News*, May 1, 2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1162826>.