

*Globalizing Afghanistan: Terrorism, War, and the Rhetoric of Nation Building*. Edited by Zubeda Jalalzai and David Jefferess. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

*Land of the Unconquerable: The Lives of Contemporary Afghan Women*. Edited by Jennifer Heath and Ashraf Zahedi. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

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**S**ince September 11, 2001, Western powers have used the discourses of capacity building, women's empowerment, and the universality of democracy to deny their imperial domination of Central Asia and the Middle East. Nation building from outside and above has excluded the majority of the population and has exacerbated ethnic, religious, class, and gender conflicts while undermining the prospect of a local democracy.<sup>1</sup>

The two books under review here make an important contribution to the literature on the impact of foreign intervention into socioeconomic and political developments in Afghanistan, particularly in relation to women's and gender issues. In *Globalizing Afghanistan: Terrorism, War, and the Rhetoric of Nation Building*, Zubeda Jalalzai and David Jefferess have assembled a range of articles that discuss how the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan requires an engagement with the framework of globalization. Chapters provide analyses of the ways terrorism, war, security, and the rhetoric of state and nation building provide insight into a globalized Afghanistan. This book also discusses the role of Afghanistan as a site of evolving articulations of transnationalism, particularly in a feminist frame.

Hence, a number of contributors to this volume demonstrate the importance of including diverse Afghan women in the process of nation and state building to ensure attention to women's rights issues. Nigel C. Gibson argues that Afghanistan is a product of the dark side of modern globalization, as its economy relies on international aid and illegal trade in drugs, particularly the production and sale of opium. Therefore, Afghan farmers, who supply poppies used in opium production, must also be included in the processes of socioeconomic and political development. In a context in which there are millions of Afghan refugees who bear a marginal status in neighboring countries, Kamran Rastegar's chapter discusses

<sup>1</sup> For this discussion, also see Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion* (New York: Zed, 2007).

how the Iranian cinema has represented Afghanistan to a global audience. Internationally, however, Rastegar notes, Afghan life in diaspora has largely been ignored. Rastegar therefore highlights the importance of including refugees in processes of socioeconomic and political development. Rodney J. Steward provides a historical analysis of how, in the face of imperial powers, Afghans' survival has depended on their ability to maintain their religious and cultural identity. And Altaf Ullah Khan discusses how the current conflict in Afghanistan represents the continuation of foreign control of Afghan politics and not the "clash of civilizations" suggested by a number of Western academics and media figures. In the context of Western media, Gwen Bergner reveals how images of Afghan women oppressed by the Taliban were first mobilized to further the United States' imperialist agenda. The US and other Western governments' current policies of negotiating with the Taliban, however, are a retreat from women's rights issues.

One of the most important contributions of this book is the chapter on transnational feminism. Maliha Chishti and Cheshmak Farhoumand-Sims discuss how transnational feminism is entangled with the international aid and military apparatuses. Hence, the gender agenda in Afghanistan is based on neoimperial power relations—interactions between the outsider givers and the insider receivers of aid. In this context the Western feminist campaign to liberate Afghan women is nothing but an orientalist desire to advance a neoimperialist agenda.<sup>2</sup> They conclude that transnational feminists' work with a small group of Afghan women oversimplifies the complexities of Afghan religion, culture, and history. This has created tensions between the minority of Afghan women who work with global feminists and the majority of Afghan women and men. It is therefore crucial that transnational feminism be aware of the needs of the majority of Afghans and their objections to the outsiders' gender programs.

In *Land of the Unconquerable: The Lives of Contemporary Afghan Women*, the essays collected by editors Jennifer Heath and Ashraf Zahedi argue that the war in Afghanistan is fought on the backs of women and therefore that sustainable security and development must include women's rights issues. To achieve this, women and men, equally empowered, must be involved in decision-making processes.

A number of contributors provide historical analyses of women and gender issues. Anne E. Brodsky demonstrates the resilience and resistance of Af-

<sup>2</sup> See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), and *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

ghan women dating back to the tenth century. Shireen Khan Burki argues that, since 1919, the gender policies of a westernized elite based in Kabul have been disconnected from the issues and concerns of the majority of women, who have complex socioeconomic, political, and cultural needs. Further, Anna Larson demonstrates that since the fall of the Taliban and Western invasion, Afghanistan's legislature has not promoted women's interests.

As an example of the neglect of women's interests in the Afghan legislature, four women members of Parliament share their grievances in the chapter after Larson's: Massouda Jalal argues that powerful, violent forces continue to attack Afghan women's rights activists. Malalai Joya states that only 5 percent of girls pursue an education, while 25–31 percent of Afghan women suffer physical, sexual, and psychological violence; 57 percent of Afghan women are married before age sixteen; and between 70 and 80 percent endure forced marriages. Girls as young as nine are sold as "opium brides" to pay off family debts. Most prostitutes are widows with children, who often feel that suicide (self-immolation) is their only alternative. Fawzia Koofi's work, therefore, concentrates on violence against women and children. And Azita Rafat discusses women prisoners who are punished for "moral crimes"—for instance, those who have been kidnapped, raped, and forced to engage in drug trafficking only to be punished for running away from home when they return.

Other authors (Lizette Potgieter, Deborah J. Smith, Aunohita Mojudar, and Alisa Tang) also discuss women prisoners, forced marriages, and the sex trade, which has thrived in a climate of poverty and unemployment. Sima Samar, Pamela Chandler, and Mary MacMakin discuss maternal death, child mortality, and women with disabilities. Nahid Aziz highlights the psychological impact of war, in particular among refugees, and Elizabeth Stites demonstrates how the majority of the population suffers from high food prices but is unable to access food through producing it directly. Lina Abirafeh and Ashraf Zahedi argue that images of oppressed Afghan women and oppressive Afghan men played important roles in aid intervention, and they stress that it is imperative that women and men come together to find their path toward empowerment and gender equality. In the light of ineffectiveness of aid, Rachel Lehr provides an interesting analysis of how Afghan women, and the country as a whole, can benefit from capacity building from the grass roots. In this context, Wahid Omar discusses women's councils, which are engaged in planning, budgeting, and participating in making decisions about the welfare of the whole community.

Other authors also provide interesting analyses of women's capacity for social action and empowerment. Margaret A. Mills, Lauryn Oates, and Zu-

zanna Olszewska discuss the importance of traditional tales, poetry, music, and art, as these factors can create commonalities across ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural differences. And Sakeena Yacoobi draws attention to the relationship between women's empowerment and education.

Dinah Zeiger challenges the Western media's obsession with liberating Afghan women from their burqas and argues that the image of oppressed Afghan women without agency is used as a tool to sustain Western interest and maintain the flow of funds toward a military solution.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, she looks at several films on YouTube that offer images of Afghan women who act with agency and are capable of empowering themselves according to their own culture. Jo Grace and Adam Pain also demonstrate how Afghan women are able to invest in building social relations through access to credit for consumption purposes and through marriage.

The writers in these two collections remind us that the impetus for women's rights must come from Afghans themselves. They show that transnational feminism needs to step away from the imperial agenda and incorporate the diverse views of Afghan women, as well as women of Islamic and other cultures, to become broader, more inclusive, and ultimately a stronger force for change. ■

<sup>3</sup> For this discussion, see Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783–90; and Iris Marion Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29, no. 1 (2003): 1–25.