Examining the Narratives around Women’s Rights in Afghanistan

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Introduction

When the US decided to leave Afghanistan to the Taliban on August 30, one of the main concerns was for the future of Afghan women and girls. People from around the world took to social media platforms to make a plea for Afghan women. This plea had several reasons, including the horrendous restrictions that the Taliban had previously imposed on women in the 1990s. Women were not allowed to work, study, use their names in public or go out in public without a male relative (Gohari, 2001). Although this outrage has cooled down on social media since the takeover, the Taliban continues to put restrictions on women and girls, with the latest being based on a new “religious outline” that calls on Afghan TV channels not to show dramas and soap operas that include actresses, and for women journalists to wear a headscarf while on air.

This paper discusses how the Western media has used the discourse around women’s rights to justify the US invasion of Afghanistan and how that has shaped concerns around the future of Afghan women today. To do so, it will analyse how women in Afghanistan were presented prior to the 2001 war, what happened during the war, and what has been happening since. The paper will also try to explain the discriminative perception of Western feminism (white feminism) regarding women in the Middle East.

First, the paper will explain the general history of women’s rights in Afghanistan, colonial feminism, ‘purplewashing’ and white feminism. It will also look at the imperialistic approach of the West and the idea of the white man/woman saving the brown man/woman. The paper will present speeches and texts published prior to the war that show politicians using the topics of women’s rights to gain the public’s sympathy and support. The paper will also offer a short analysis regarding the entertainment sector and how it played a role in making the 2001 invasion more palatable. The paper will also try to examine how, or indeed whether, the situation has improved for women since 2001. Moreover, it will examine the reasons behind the recent global outrage regarding the rights of Afghan women, how media played a role in shaping the discussion, and how decision-makers have used this strategy as an excuse to increase sympathy for military intervention.
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General outlook on women's rights in Afghanistan

Women’s rights in Afghanistan have undergone various transformations throughout the years. Women first received the right to vote and stand in elections in 1964 during the ‘decade of democracy’ of King Zahir Shah. The 1964 Constitution guaranteed equal rights for men and women. In the mid-1960s, four women entered the House of Representatives, one woman was appointed as a minister, and several others were made deputy ministers. During that time, women protested against forced mandates such as wearing the veil in public. During the Soviet-Afghan war between the 1970s and 80s, women continued to advocate for their rights. However, after the 1990s, especially during the era of Taliban rule, women lost the little rights they had advocated for over the years. The Taliban banned most of the education for women and girls. They confined women to their homes unless a male family member was with them, denying them access to most jobs — or even freedom to leave their house for a walk (Gohari, 2001).

In 2001, when the US invaded Afghanistan, and the new government was formed under Hamid Karzai, women were also included. In 2004, with the new constitution, 27% of the 250 seats in the House of the People were allocated women in accordance with article 84 regarding members of the house of elders:

**Article 84:** The President shall appoint fifty percent of these individuals from amongst women. The individual selected as a member of the House of Elders shall lose membership to the related Council, and another individual shall be appointed in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The constitution also mentioned specific articles for women’s rights, including article 44:

**Article 44:** The state shall devise and implement effective programs to create and foster balanced education for women, improve the education of nomads as well as eliminate illiteracy in the country.

The 2004 constitution offered Afghan women all kinds of rights along with social and economic growth that seemed set to improve their conditions. When considering the fact that there were no health care or medical services available to women during the Taliban era (Faiz, 1997) and that the post-Taliban regime has allowed for the construction of more than 3,000 health facilities, it could be said that the US invasion and subsequent occupation has contributed to Afghans in terms of the 136% increase in the number of functioning primary health care facilities from 496 facilities in 2002 to 1,169 facilities in 2007, and an increase in the proportion of those facilities having female physicians, nurses, or midwives from 24.8% to 83.0% (Accera, 2009). The health management information system indicates that there has been nearly a four-fold increase in the number of outpatient visits from 0.23 visits per capita per year in 2004 to 0.94 in 2007. However, lack of security, poor infrastructure, and the consequences of war indicates that accessing these facilities, especially in the rural areas, has only improved slightly. Furthermore, the question of access to these facilities in the wake of the Taliban takeover remains an open question.

Afghan women stage a protest for their right to education and work in Kabul, Afghanistan on October 10, 2021. (Bilal Güler - Anadolu Agency)
In 2003, less than 10% of girls were enrolled in primary schools. However, by 2017, that number had grown to 33%. Female enrolment in secondary education increased from 6% in 2003 to 39% in 2017. Nevertheless, the 2004 constitution’s first 3 articles state that Afghanistan is an Islamic state, and thus the rules and regulations set forth must be in accordance with Islamic principles.

**Article 1:** Afghanistan shall be an Islamic Republic, independent, unitary, and indivisible state.

**Article 2:** The sacred religion of Islam is the religion of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Followers of other faiths shall be free within the bounds of law in the exercise and performance of their religious rituals.

**Article 3:** No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, this has paved the way for the misconduct and misinterpretation of Islam by individuals, which has limited the improvements to women’s rights. Some of the rights that they had previously received were quickly eliminated under the guise of “Islamic rulings”. For example, in March 2012, President Karzai endorsed a “code of conduct” issued by the Ulema Council. Some of the rules in this “code of conduct”, claimed to be based on Islamic law, stated that women should not travel without a male guardian and not mingle with strange men in places such as schools, markets, and offices. Human Rights organisations and women activists said that by endorsing this code of conduct, Karzai was endangering “hard-won progress since the Taliban fell from power in 2001”.

It is also vital to note that while the situation for women in major urban areas improved, women living in rural areas faced many problems. For example, in 2013, the United Nations published statistics showing a 20% increase in violence against women, often due to domestic violence being justified by conservative religion and culture. In February 2014, Afghanistan passed a law that includes a provision that limits the ability of the government to compel some family members to be witnesses to domestic violence. Human Rights Watch described the implementation of the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women as “poor,” noting that some cases were ignored. There have been some trivial advancements, such as including women’s names on their children’s birth certificates and identification cards. Although this law has been considered a significant victory for Afghan women’s rights activists (with the hashtag #whereismyname), women still faced issues in presenting their names in public, which has recently resurfaced again, with a recent article on Afghan women continuing to face domestic issues in presenting their name in public services, especially in essential places like health care (Nowrouzi, 2020).

In August 2021, when Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country in the wake of the US withdrawal, the country once again came under the control of an all-male Taliban government. It has yet to be recognised internationally in part because of the issues of women’s and minority rights. However, the Taliban has emphasised that women’s rights will be respected. Despite their recent announcement of plans to educate girls, their immediate actions include restricting women’s access to education and work. The classes girls are allowed to attend have been separated based on gender, and girls have been completely banned from attending higher education, including university. Currently, the Taliban is basing these decisions on security concerns; however, the situation has yet to be revised, and no clear path forward has been offered.

Currently, the protests that Afghan women have organised have faced violent backlash. The women have appealed to the UN to provide support for Afghan women. The current situation offers a degree of proof that the improvements made during the two decades of US occupation have not been long-lasting for women’s rights.

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2. The Ulema Council is a group of influential Sunni and Shia scholars, imams, and Muslim jurists from across the country reflecting the network of provincial ulema councils.
Colonial feminism (also known as imperial feminism or intersectional imperialism) refers to the use of feminist arguments to justify colonialism or acts of imperialism. It is a concept used primarily to criticise white feminists attitude towards non-whites or non-Western countries and considers white women (Western women) more privileged than other women of colour and nationality. Zillah Eisenstein summarises imperial feminism in her article “Hillary Clinton’s Imperial Feminism” (Eisenstein, 2016):

*Imperial feminism privileges inequality through gender-bending that masquerades as gendered equality. Imperial feminism privileges empire-building through war. It denies that women lack access or opportunity on the structural basis of their gender oppression. Its view is privatised and individualised with little commitment to the masses of women or non-binary gendered peoples.*

*Imperial feminism is not intersectional. It assumes a unitary stance of structural misogyny for empire even though discrimination towards women is critiqued. As long as the critical prism is not explicitly multiracial and multiclass, it remains white and privileged.*

A similar terminology that primarily popped up in reference to economic exploitation but has been recently expressed in political terms is “purplewashing”. Purplewashing is the act of the state’s or organisation’s exploitation of women’s rights to redirect attention from its harmful practices. It also defines the political and marketing strategies that profess a supposed commitment to gender equality. To do this, it often refers to the images and notions of Western countries, which themselves have not achieved genuine equality between men and women, such as the issues surrounding women’s safety and gender-gap payment inequality but criticise inequalities in other (usually Muslim majority) countries or cultures. In essence, purplewashing is used to describe the exploitation of women’s rights (without regard to their ethnicity, skin colour, religion, location, etc.) for profit. Its essence comes from Homonationalism, which is: “an assemblage of geopolitical and historical forces, neoliberal interests in capitalist accumulation both cultural and material, bio-political state practices of population control and affective investments in discourses of freedom, liberation and rights” (Puar, 2013). It has inspired conceptual tools such as whitewashing, purplewashing, pinkwashing and greenwashing, among others. Examples of purplewashing include the use of women’s rights issues by world-renowned brands in the fast-fashion industry, such as H&M, Nike and others that promote women’s rights and empowerment, especially during March through their products and advertisements (H&M Foundation, 2019) (Brar, 2019), while financially, physically and mentally exploiting women and girls working in their factory in third world countries (Bensusán & Tilly, 2010) (Hitchings-Hales, 2018).

An example of purplewashing in the political realm can be seen in Israel’s attempt to empower Israeli women (especially in the Israel Defence Forces) in service of advancing a narrative that is genuinely concerned for the rights and freedoms of women. In 2019, the UN launched a one-week campaign called “My rights our Power” in Palestine to raise awareness on the fundamental rights of women. These fundamental rights were framed around five factors: The right to live free from violence, the right to justice, the right to have equal opportunities, the right to make a decision, and the right to seek help. However, while doing so, the report omitted the major barrier to Palestinian women, namely the Israeli occupation. Instead, it mentions the number of Palestinian men physically abusing their intimate partners and framed the leading cause of the omission of these rights around domestic violence. These strategies involve representing Palestinian women as the abused in a patriarchal order, which creates a narrative that feminism or women’s rights only exists in the West. This ideological framework, which scholars refer to as colonial feminism, misappropriates women’s rights for the service of power or state. In the context of Palestine, the Palestinian Arab/Muslim

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is framed as an “other”, who is culturally or religiously subjected to misogyny. This is contrasted with the framing of a liberal, modern Israeli, primarily through Israeli women’s role in the military. Ultimately for Israel, this purplewashing represents a means to improve its image and incorporate women into its colonial, racist, violent systems and institutions. However, the fact that these systems suppress other - usually Palestinian - women are hardly mentioned. Furthermore, Israeli forces even use Palestinian women as instruments of torture to convince Palestinian prisoners for information by threatening to harm their mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters (Baroud & Aljamal, 2019).

We saw similar instances of purplewashing and acts of colonial feminism post 9/11 and prior to the US invasion in Afghanistan. When America announced the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, women became a tool to justify the war. During the events leading up to the war against Afghanistan in October 2001, images of and articles about women being denied their fundamental rights were rampant across the international media landscape. Even those who were sceptical of Western feminists’ desire to “save Third World women” showed support to the campaigns held around women’s rights in Afghanistan. Hence, we were left to believe that the United States, with all of its political and economic power, could help improve this situation. Likewise, we were constantly reminded that the US would be the Afghan women’s saviour by providing them with the opportunity to live in peace and harmony and acquire their fundamental rights (to work, study, etc.). Speeches and images on how The Taliban oppressed Afghan women were published on a global scale. Then-US President George W Bush, along with the first lady, constantly parroted the narrative around the insufficient rights of women and children in Afghanistan. In 2004, President Bush repeatedly emphasised that the US had won in Afghanistan because women were set free from the abuse of the Taliban:

“Three years ago, the smallest displays of joy were outlawed. Women were beaten for wearing brightly coloured shoes. Today we witness the rebirth of a vibrant Afghan culture.”

“People have got a sparkle in their eye and women now all of a sudden no longer fear the future but believe that we’re there to stay the course and we will help a free society emerge.”
-President Bush’s remarks in a news conference, June 1, 2004

“In January, Afghans approved a new constitution that protects the right of all Afghan citizens, including women [...] they agreed upon a fundamental law that respects tradition and establishes a foundation of modern political
rights, including free speech, due process, and a vote for every citizen." (President Bush's remarks on Development in Afghanistan, Washington Convention Center, May 18, 2004)

"[...] the women and children in Afghanistan have a much brighter future because we removed a barbaric regime that refused to even educate young girls." (President Bush's remarks, Buffalo, New York, April 20, 2004)

"Women were given no rights. Young girls did not go to school. It was a barbaric regime [...] People are [now] free in that country." (President Bush's remarks on Freedom for the People of Afghanistan, Hershey, Pennsylvania, April 19, 2004)

"Now the country is changing. There are women's rights. There's equality under the law. Young girls now go to school, many for the first time ever, thanks to the United States and our coalition of liberators." (President Bush's remarks on the National Economy, Appleton, Wisconsin March 30, 2004)

Even if Bush's speeches' central theme was not framed around women's rights in Afghanistan, persistent comments on this topic not only reflected a discourse of purplewashing and colonial feminism, but the portrayal of Afghan women as victims helped establish and further promote and commercialise the view that the war was indirectly necessary, especially for the good of Afghan women and girls. Following the 9/11 attacks, the Afghan woman became the symbol of the misogynistic abuse of the 'Muslim man'. This illustration, which was encouraged by the Bush administration and the mainstream (Western) media, served as a central element around the idea that the Taliban and anything that they symbolise must be destroyed. This strategy forced any attempt to improve the discussions around the war, the acts of the Taliban, or what is good for Afghanistan to be refuted with the accusation of being hostile to Afghan women’s and girls’ rights. In other words, since the US military was presented as the only solution to provide Afghan women what they considered fundamental rights, the idea that speaking out against the war meant disregarding women’s rights. As Laura Bush put it in her radio speech to the nation on November 17, 2001 (The Washington Post Company, 2001):

"Civilised people throughout the world are speaking out in horror—not only because our hearts break for the women and children of Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us."

However, while George and Laura Bush outlined the horrors of Taliban rule and interrelated the war against terror with the liberation of women from a clearly misogynistic regime, they omitted the critical history of a US policy that had quietly heralded the rise of this repressive force in the past to eliminate the Soviet Union’s reign in the region, nor did they mention the casualties post-invasion. Similarly, those who stated their commitment to speak and act on behalf of women's rights in Afghanistan in discussions that paved the way towards the war conveniently failed to associate the difficulties that women in Afghanistan faced with the vast US military existence. What is more, the economic support provided concerning the Cold War strategy for the most extreme Afghan religious militant groups that, if not initiated, forced these misogynistic oppressions to another level.

Other instances of purplewashing were also visible in the literature. Khalid Hosseini, an award-winning author, has used the Taliban and Afghan men's treatment of women to “raise awareness” about the cultural and religious issues women face in the hands of the Taliban regime, especially in his novel, A Thousand Splendid Suns. The book provides a vivid image of a country that ideological leaders and internal forces destroy. The story is about Laila and Mariam, who begin their lives in entirely different environments and family dynamics and ultimately become intimately connected and dependent upon each other. The way in which Hosseini narrates the lives of the women in his story, much like the country of Afghanistan as he states in his interviews, reflects the notions of the Taliban, culture, and society. Moreover, his books, which are banned in Afghanistan, have illustrated images that reflect the mindset depicted in the mainstream media. In one of his interviews, he explains his inspiration for the story as follows (RheadBooks, 2007):

In the spring of 2003, I went to Kabul, and I recall seeing these burqa-clad women sitting at street corners, with four, five, six children, begging for change. I remember watching them walking in pairs up the street, trailed by their children in ragged clothes, and wondering...
how life had brought them to that point. What were their dreams, hopes, longings? Had they been in love? Who were their husbands? What had they lost, who had they lost, in the wars that plagued Afghanistan for two decades?

However, it should be noted that in Hosseini’s interviews, he emphasises that while women in Muslim-majority countries do suffer from male-dominated oppression, he does not believe that Western intervention will help them. Although he states that this intervention is “noble”, he also notes that it is “simplistic” and that a change should come “from a Muslim society’s own fabric” (‘Khaled Hosseini author interview’, 2007). Thus, it must be emphasised that even though the writer has not directly used purplewashing to profit from his books, it can be said that international institutions have used his books to promote, create and in some ways profit from the images that reflect the sufferings of Afghan women through critical praises and awards.

Another example of purplewashing, and especially the reflection of imperial feminism, can be seen in the movie Zero Dark Thirty. In this movie, the issue of gender equality is emphasised through white women being equal to white men at the expense of brown men and women. According to Rafia Zakaria, the author of Against White Feminism, it is one of the most important films that depicts the “new flavour of feminism that has evolved in the white and Western world since 9/11 and the War on Terror (2021).” This movie, which is based on the true story of a female CIA agent, is also a great example of purplewashing and also ‘securofeminism’, a term coined by Columbia University anthropologist and social science professor Lila Abu-Lughod (2019) that describes the particular installation of women in leadership positions of initiatives to counter violent extremism. Thus, attaching feminism to foreign policy goals aims to prove that the invasion has authorised the US not only to playact that they are working to develop gender equality abroad (purplewashing), but they are also working for the empowerment of women at home through their military (securofeminism). Therefore, while there was one of the goals of “liberating” Afghan women that mitigated the invasion in Afghanistan, this goal of enforced freedom has been made stronger by the images of new female faces in the US military.

Furthermore, what makes Zero Dark Thirty unique from most Hollywood movies that reflect the justification of imperialism and the notion of white women/men saving the brown women/men is that in the past, feminism (specifically white feminism) was considered a movement that opposed the patriarchal systems that states have been formed around, and thus their decisions. Feminism was an alternative voice to criticise, and it existed as the “other”, which is why it has received so much criticism. However, as it is in this movie, after 9/11, we witnessed feminism that tries to prove its existence and empowerment within the system that it once criticised. As Zakaria states (2021):

“This identification with state interests, and the idea of going out to conquer the world with the same mindset of subjugation and domination possessed by white men, seems to have become a warped feminist goal. Put another way, white women wanted parity with white men at any cost, including by avidly taking on the domination of black and brown people. As white feminists have progressed within their societies and begun to occupy increasingly important positions, they are constructing a feminism that uses the lives of Black and Brown people as arenas in which they can prove their credentials to white men.”

In support of the war, some American feminists worked around bringing Western conceptions of women’s rights to Afghanistan. After 9/11, the subsequent war was considered retribution for the loss of American life and the “first feminist war” (Zakaria, 2021) that would liberate the women and girls of Afghanistan. This, sequentially, has created a dilemma. On the one hand, this, in all its essence, is a war that brought devastations and atrocities to civilians, as the history of US wars always did. But on the other hand, they bore the reassurance that this was a way out for women, children, and minorities in Afghanistan. Thus, using feminism in US foreign policy goals (purplewashing) has paved the way to make war seem more justifiable. This is what led celebrity feminists such as Meryl Streep, Mavis and Jay Leno, Susan Sarandon, and Eleanor Smeal to initially support Operation Enduring Freedom, the first airstrikes of which marked the beginning of the war in 2001 (Zakaria, 2021b). Considering that war has always been an extremely gendered issue, with women facing more harm than their male counterparts, the feminist approach to this war in Afghanistan is a strategic tactic designed to disregard the atrocities and chaos that the war brought.
What's next for women in Afghanistan?

Now that the US has left Afghanistan to the Taliban, the primary goal of freeing Afghan women is no longer a major concern for US foreign policy. Afghan women have been calling out to the international community, condemning the US and international organisations for not providing the necessary access to aid, and leaving them at the mercy of the ones they promised to protect from in the first place. One of them is Mahbooba Seraj, a member of the Afghan Women's Network's leadership whose interview for TRT WORLD went viral after her call to world leaders:

“Shame on you. I'm going to say to the whole world: 'shame on you' for what you did to Afghanistan, why did you what you did?... Are we just a pawn in your hands? [...]" The talking time is over, we talked, we asked, we demanded everything, and nobody paid any attention. They just made decisions with their gut feelings. They are destroying something that we have worked so hard for.”

Rafia Zakaria criticises the unsustainability of women’s rights in Afghanistan because no one asked Afghan women what they wanted; this was the war of white feminists demanding what they deemed was right for the women in Afghanistan. Hillary Clinton’s depiction of the war as a “restoration of hope” and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney wearing a burka and describing its claustrophobic effect without any regard to the cultural or religious background of the covering were all symbolic assumptions of what they thought was a fundamental right for Afghan women, who would consider it right too. Nevertheless, women in Afghanistan did not want war; they did not want the suffering that came with it, but what they wanted had no impact because, according to the white feminists, they could not know what they wanted.

What we also witnessed while addressing the women’s rights issues in Afghanistan was how white feminists that supposedly provided mass rights to women in Afghanistan were promoted more in media outlets. At the same time, Afghan women were hardly heard or only depicted in documentaries as the strong individuals among the weak Afghan women who could only change their own fate or no more than the fate of their family. As Zakaria emphasised in an interview:

“After killing Afghan women and kids, as a way to put a moral gloss on what they did, they said: 'we are here to build schools, health centres, women's shelters essentially flooding the NGO sector in Afghanistan with money. Firstly, this destroyed any possibility of indigenous Afghan feminists holding their own because now you have millions of dollars that the US is ready to..."
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give you. They also created this false impression of rights where there were kind of trappings of women’s rights; you constructed schools and shelters, you organised seminars on women’s participation in politics in major cities like Kabul, but behind that, there is nothing.”

She further explained how, after a 2016 audit, the more than $410 million the US allocated to provide 75,000 women training, internships, and jobs, it was found that only two women were documented to have benefitted from the programme. Furthermore, the whereabouts of the rest of the money is unknown. There may be several reasons for this: 1) The funding was being siphoned off elsewhere, 2) Afghan women did not know how to access these resources, 3) they did not have the physical access to attend these courses (security issues etc.), 4) they did not want to be seen as sympathisers of the invader and, 5) they did not prioritise economic independence and work. These are the issues that must also be addressed to understand the instability and the concerns surrounding the future of Afghan women.

Conclusion

Since it regained power in August 2021, it seems that the Taliban’s “reform” around women’s rights issues has become a political stance rather than an ideological one. In other words, the safety and concern of women’s rights in Afghanistan is not in their ideologies, but instead, a political tool, which only fans the flames further of a two-way war between feminists worldwide and the Taliban, leaving Afghan women in the middle. When they first regained power, the Taliban immediately restricted access to education, work etc., stating that the restrictions were temporary measures being implemented for security reasons and that the necessary reforms would take place within the framework of Islamic law. However, we have yet to see concrete action. The global worry and fear are understandable for, primarily, the safety of Afghan women, since having rights in an unsafe environment where its application becomes a threat to women’s safety is an effort in vain. Nevertheless, we must understand that the Taliban is not going anywhere. Thus, if the international community and feminists genuinely want a permanent improvement of women’s rights, it must be, willingly or unwillingly, done with the cooperation of the Taliban.

Now that US troops have officially left Afghanistan, liberal feminists must not fall into the same mistake of encouraging military solutions as they did in 2001. With the uproar on social media demanding the protection of women from the wrath of the Taliban and as Sheryl Sandberg, Amanda Gorman, Charlize Theron, and many others co-signed a letter (Ibrahim, 2021) that ambiguously calls on President Biden to “protect and invest in women in Afghanistan,” we must be careful not to fall into a direct and indirect intervention that has been enforced upon us by a small elite group. Feminist groups should not allow women’s rights to be used as a tool or excuse to inflict violence or promote war. We must also refrain from implementing an ideology that bears no respect for Afghan culture and religion, which is usually equally fundamental for women and men, especially in rural areas. If we genuinely care about the future of women, girls, and minorities in Afghanistan, we should protect them for being tools of a patriarchal system that aim to advertise them for political or even economic profit. To prevent this from happening and obtain the safest and best way to assist Afghan women’s empowerment, we must initially acknowledge and recognise the issues from their perspective, which is as simple as asking them. However, despite the constant emphasis on feminism and female empowerment of this dispute, the UN, Governments, and Aid Agencies continue to send all-male convoys to Talk to the Taliban (Barr, 2021). This not only prevents women from having an actual voice in a topic that directly affects them or their peers and establishes a male-dominated narrative but also implicitly acknowledges the Taliban’s method of excluding women. Thus, including experts and senior female representatives who are better equipped to communicate with Afghan women within the framework of their religious and cultural values can pave the path for more realistic goals and long-termed solutions.

Feminism is, in its essence, a form of resistance and cannot be the product of any state. It exists to seek empowerment, not power. This empowerment should not be a tool granted or forced by a system or state; it should be earned and independent. As stated by the Black feminist scholar and author of Resisting State Violence, Joy James (1996):

"State feminists will agree that there is chauvinism, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia. They will not agree that […] the state is a hunter, that imperialism is a zone of terror because once they do that, the funding dries up."
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