Theresa Barton

Reflection 1

RLST Prof Kassam

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Zine introduces the double bind which Rochelle Terman would later expand upon in “Islamophobia, Feminism and the Politics of Critique” wherein a Muslim feminist must walk a tight rope between improving her local society, countering the cultural heritage of thousands of years of patriarchy, and providing intellectual fuel for foreign interests intent on characterizing Muslim societies as barbaric to justify violent domination. It’s notable that this double bind affects secular and religious feminists differently. A secular feminist is free to condemn all types of Islamic law, while religious feminists such as Alaa Murabi, a Canadian- Libyan activist, must simultaneously find space in religion while simultaneously criticizing it.

The military domination of oil rich, majority Muslim nations of the middle east in the last 40 years has been accompanied by increases in Islamaphobic discourse, for example a quick search revealed usages of “Terrorist” and “Terrorism” quadrupled from 1950 to 1980. Muslim feminists, Zine argues, living in targeted areas, geographically and intellectually, must be concerned about the potential impact of their work on how the Islamic world is perceived globally and if it will be used to justify violent intervention.

I was at first skeptical of precisely how the characterization of Muslims as barbaric, and their land as feminine, leads to combat. It’s difficult to disentangle true causation when so many factors are present – and it seems equally valid to assume that the United States would invade Iraq regardless of justification due to its key position in the oil trade and scramble together a post hoc explanation afterward. If this were the case, Arab Muslim feminists would not need mince their words about religion- Muslim majority countries in the gulf would be attacked regardless of their representation. Zine however provides good evidence that this is not entirely the case. For example, the US Army’s treatment of the prisoners of Abu Ghraib -a very specific brand of feminized violence- is the treatment only an aggressor so convinced of its object’s lack of human reason could condone. The Western representation of Iraqis informed

Futhermore, Zine identifies the strategic way veiled Afghan women were shuffled into the American consciousness via televised media just in time to sustain interest in the fight against the formerly United States backed Taliban. These women, invisible before and after the conflict,

Sources

[1] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres, ed., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51-80.

[2] Jasmine Zine, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: The Politics of Muslim Women’s Feminist Engagement,” in *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 3 (2006): 1, Article 5 (<http://www.bepress.com/mwjhr/vol3/iss1/art5>), 1-26.

[3] Valentine Moghadam, Ch. 1 in *Modernizing Women* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 2nd ed.