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Research Article

Gendered Pain during The War on Terror in *A Door in The Earth*

A Door in The Earth'de Teröre Karşı Savaş Sırasında Cinsiyete Dayalı Acı

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Highlights:

- September 11 and the U.S. war in Afghanistan have created huge changes in world politics.
- The twenty-year war began with an initiative to save Afghan women from the Taliban and restore their rights, but later became a source of pain and suffering for them.
- *A Door in The Earth* by Amy Waldman (2019) portrays Afghan women's daily experiences in civil life during the War on Terror, highlighting the impact of power politics.

Abstract: September 11 and the U.S. war in Afghanistan have created huge changes in world politics. The twenty-year war seemingly started with its initiative to save Afghan women from the Taliban and give back their rights, which later proved to be nothing but more pain and suffering for them. Amy Waldman's second novel *A Door in The Earth* (2019) displays realistic depiction of civil life during the War on Terror with a female perspective that centers on the effects of power politics on Afghan women whose lives are driven into more painful experiences each day. An author and former journalist Amy Waldman, who spent five years covering Afghanistan during the Afghan war, largely uses the Afghan women's pain to fictionalize the reality of the country. Since the history of humanity is inextricably linked to the history of war, both of which are written from a male perspective, this study sheds light on the Western tendency to use the suffering of Afghan women to ensure the continuation of Western, and thus American power, through the works of dedicated postcolonial theorists in the field.

Keywords: 9/11, War on Terror, Afghan Women, Colonialism, Postcolonial Feminism.

Öne Çıkanlar

- 11 Eylül ve ABD'nin Afganistan'daki savaşı dünya siyasetinde büyük değişiklikler yaratmıştır.
- Yirmi yıl süren savaş, Afgan kadınlarını Taliban'dan kurtarmak ve haklarını geri almak amacıyla başlayan bir girişimle başladı ancak daha sonra kadınlar için acı ve ıstırap kaynağı haline geldi.
- Amy Waldman'ın *A Door in the Earth* (2019) isimli romanı, Afgan kadınlarının Teröre Karşı Savaş sırasında sivil hayattaki günlük deneyimlerini tasvir ederek güç politikalarının etkisini vurgulamaktadır.

Öz: 11 Eylül ve ABD'nin Afganistan'daki savaşı dünya siyasetinde büyük değişiklikler yaratmıştır. Görünürde Afgan kadınlarını Taliban'dan kurtarma ve haklarını geri verme girişimiyle başlayan yirmi yıllık savaş, daha sonra onlar için daha fazla acı ve ıstıraptan başka bir şey olmadığını kanıtlamıştır. Amy Waldman'ın ikinci romanı *A Door in The Earth* (2019), Terörle Mücadele Savaşı sırasında sivil yaşamın gerçekçi bir tasvirini, güç politikaları yüzünden hayatları her geçen gün daha acı verici deneyimlere

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sürüklenen Afgan kadınları üzerindeki etkilerini merkeze alan bir kadın bakış açısıyla sunar. Afgan Savaşı sırasında beş yıl boyunca Afganistan'da habercilik yapan yazar ve eski gazeteci Amy Waldman, ülkenin gerçekliğini kurgulamak için büyük ölçüde Afgan kadınların acılarını kullanmaktadır. Her ikisi de erkek bakış açısıyla yazılan insanlık tarihiyle savaş tarihi ayrılmaz bir şekilde birbirleriyle bağlantılı olduğundan, bu çalışma, Batı'nın Afgan kadınların acılarını Batı'nın ve dolayısıyla Amerikan gücünün devamını sağlamak için kullanma eğilimine, kendini bu alana adamış postkolonyal teorisyenlerin çalışmaları aracılığıyla ışık tutmaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 11 Eylül, Teröre Karşı Savaş, Afgan Kadınlar, Kolonyalizm, Postkolonyal Feminizmi.

Introduction

Within the repercussions of history, wars occupy a vast place. In its widely referred definition, war is "an act of politics, where the dictation of the law by one side to the other gives rise to 'a sort of reciprocal action'. War always consists of hostile bodies, and each has the same object – to force the other to submit" (Nordin & Öberg, 2015: 394). Since the opposing powers compete with each other to gain control through coercion, war is inherently politicised. The main element of the conflict, violence, uses strong rhetoric to disguise suffering and inevitably ends with the 'good' character of the 'civilised' finding its fulfilment in resistance against the evil opponent, whose people are perceived as essentially non-existent.

The twenty-first century witnessed one of the deadliest and longest wars in history. The United States of America invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of the War on Terror, backed by NATO Allies who "stood as though they had also been attacked" (10 Things You Need to Know About Nato, 2024). During twenty years of war, the U.S. legalized its military undertakings initially under the name of "Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-14)" and "Operation Freedom's Sentinel" (2015-21). The Global War on Terror, which was defined by President Bush as "a different kind of war," has left a lasting legacy due to its high death toll and the dubious mission for rebuilding Afghanistan against domestic and international terrorism. However, no discernible progress but harsher living conditions were detected in the nation a year after the war's conclusion in 2022. It is reported that

> even in the absence of fighting, unexploded ordnance from this war and landmines from previous wars continue to kill, injure, and maim civilians. Fields, roads, and school buildings are contaminated by ordnance, which often harms children as they go about chores like gathering wood. (Afghan Civilians, 2022).

The severe consequences of the war have added to the country's decline both on the local and international stage due to its long-term effects. A high number of illnesses as well as

psychological and mental harm to the populace have been among further consequences according to reports:

> In 2009, the Afghan Ministry of Public Health reported that fully two-thirds of Afghans suffer from mental health problems. Prior wars and civil conflict in the country have made Afghan society extremely vulnerable to the reverberating effects of the US post-9/11 war. Those war effects include elevated disease rates due to lack of clean drinking water, malnutrition, and reduced access to health care (Afghan Civilians, 2022).

In the case of underdeveloped countries, the ones highly affected by the wars are generally children and women. The conflict that followed have revealed to be a battle for domination, despite official declarations to the contrary that the conflict will transform and improve the welfare of Afghan lands. Today, the war is remembered in many ways, from the prison in Guantanamo Bay to being a catalyst of Islamophobia in media discourses. However, Afghan women have received little attention despite the pain and suffering they were exposed to in the wartime. Regarding the exclusion of women especially in underdeveloped countries, Ania Loomba states that "the formulation that women are the 'site' rather than the subjects of certain historical debates, an idea which is often to be found in postcolonial studies" (2015: 214). Setting women's needs first in order to justify an initial military intervention—only to subsequently disregard them—demonstrates the tyrannical nature of what at first appears to be humanitarian intentions.

Amy Waldman, an author and ex-journalist who covered Afghanistan for five years during the 'war-against-terror', has fictionalized the Afghan reality, primarily through Afghan women's stories of pain in *A Door in the Earth.* Witnessing the experience post-9/11 in the Afghan soil, Waldman focuses on Afghan women as the most silenced part during the everlasting wartime situation. Set in 2009 and published eighteen years after the attacks, the novel shows the consequences of the American war on terror in Afghanistan under the guise of granting "kind power" (2019: 48) with a particular focus on pain in gender-specific terms. The novel opens with Afghan-American protagonist Parveen's quick admiration for American ophthalmologist Dr. Gideon Crane[1] and his bestselling memoir titled *Mother Afghanistan*, which is read by "the former President of the United States, who in 2001 had ordered the American military into Afghanistan, had read it, as had his wife" (Waldman, 2019: 161) and thus it has become "a bible for American

[1] Dr. Crane reflects echoes of American philanthropist Greg Mortensen, the author of *Three Cups of Tea and Stone into Schools*, who became famous as a builder of Pakistani and Afghan girls' schools and widely infamous for using the funds he raised at the Central Asia Institute for his personal affairs. In an interview, Amy Waldman states that in writing this novel, what interested her "was less Greg Mortenson himself than the people who had believed in him. And I really became fascinated by their reactions, which ranged from betrayal, you know? In your idealistic, you think you're doing something good..." (Waldman, 2019).

engagement in the country" (Waldman, 2019: front cover). The best-selling memoir tells that Crane visits Afghanistan out of a "hunger for adventure" (Waldman, 2019: 1) and within time "falls in love with" (Waldman, 2019: 27) the country. However, during his stay, he makes a fatal mistake by effortlessly witnessing the death of an Afghan woman, Fereshta. During intranatal, he fails the process as the baby's skull gets stuck inside, and the wife cannot cope with too much bleeding. To compensate for his fatal mistake, Crane builds a maternity facility in Fereshta's village as a memorial, "completely out of scale and character to the rest of the village" (Waldman, 2019: 64), using funds raised by well-meaning Americans looking to defend their country's actions in the "just" war. What catches Parveen's attention when she first sees the memoir in a café is "the cover that showed a photograph of a woman with dewy dark eyes, most of her hair hidden under a black headscarf, this image superimposed over the country's leaflike shape." (Waldman, 2019: 26).

After reading the memoir and attending one of Crane's TED Talks that has brought him millions of dollars as donations, Parveen soon finds herself in a remote village of Afghanistan where Crane's maternity clinic and Fereshta's family exist. Amid all the obscurity of the invasions in the country, Parveen gets more confused upon meeting Colonel Trotter who ends up in the same village through inspiration by Crane's memoir. The Colonel arrives in the village to build a road as he thinks the answer of further help to the villagers "was the road to the village" (Waldman, 2019: 161), which creates another confusion in Parveen because this appears soon after her getting more sure about the discrepancies in Crane's narrative and finally becomes convinced that Crane is no more than "an American white-collar-criminal-doctor-turned-philanthropist in order to right a wrong" (Feigel, 2019). After witnessing the real situation and listening to the local people, Parveen feels certain that "the village was a backdrop against which Americans played out their fantasies of benevolence of self-transformation or, more recently, control" (Waldman, 2019: 308). The novel shows how the exploitation of other people's suffering to maintain power and control — particularly through the suffering of women — has become one of the most commonly used justifications during the American invasion of Afghanistan. Waldman offers a thorough examination of Afghan women's experiences, which she connects to the American perspective on other people's suffering. Regarding the traditional American approach of carrying civilization, it is stated that the novel:

> is especially pointed in exposing the dangers of a "white savior" mentality – that is, the compulsion to see every non-white nation as needing to be rescued, often without understanding its traditions or history, or recognizing the way past American policies may be implicated in that history. (Toohey, 2019).

In a similar vein, Ngugi wa Thiong'o stresses the discomfort over the Western dominance in *Decolonizing the Mind*, as "it seems it is the fate of Africa to have her destiny always decided around conference tables in the metropolises of the western world" (1986: 4), Afghanistan's destiny has long depended on the decisions of developed countries.

The aim of this article is to examine the situation and subordination of Afghan women through the concept of pain in Amy Waldman's *A Door in the Earth* (2019). Since the history of humanity is not detached from the history of wars, both of which are narrated from a male perspective, this novel presents the double subordination of Afghan women from a postcolonial feminist perspective, with a particular focus on the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. This article draws on the works of postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Ania Loomba and Chandra Mohanty for analysis. As history of humanity is not something adrift from history of wars, both of which are from masculine perspective, this study underscores the Western tendency to utilize the pain of Afghan women to secure maintenance of power.

American Masculine Discourse, September 11 and Saving Afghans

Colonialism, with its systematized dynamics of domination that promote oppression and inequality, has become a defining feature of international relations. In the analysis of the relationship between colonialism, class and gender, postcolonial feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty initially draws on "the ideological construction and consolidation of white masculinity as normative and the corresponding racialization and sexualization of colonized peoples" within the "symptomatic aspects of operation of imperial rule" (2003: 58) In times of conflict, this concept is associated with racialized masculinity due to the rigid division between oppressors and the oppressed. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the world has become polarized into 'us' and 'them' with Bush's iconic speech. The 'us' represented and followed common rhetoric that displayed and focused on families who have lost their family members, widowers, orphans, the traumatized and broken families due to the attacks. These people with different stories have become unified through their shared agony, enabling them to enter a new phase in their lives. Conversely, Bush's mention of the "them" discourse created mainly two permanent outcomes and triggered the intention of invasion. One issue that arises is the worldwide Islamophobia. In one of his interviews, Bhabha states that there is increase in societal polarisation especially after the 2001 attacks: "After 9/11, if

you wore a turban, you were a follower of Osama bin Laden. […] Surveillance, vigilantism, - has become part of the everyday experience and the enunciations of political life" (Gairola & Ali, 2017: 152). Public surveillance and military intervention have become the initial means to secure the welfare of the civilized nation against the Muslim enemy who are "regarded as people who can never successfully assimilate into Western societies, or who are culturally conditioned to be violent" (Loomba, 2015: 12).

Social unrest has long been a concern for Americans and immigrant Muslim Americans. The problem of the "othering gaze", especially for Afghan-American Muslim immigrants, also takes place in *A Door in the Earth*:

> When the attacks were launched, she'd been fourteen, just a few weeks into high school, her adolescent insecurity at its peak. The new animus toward Muslims felt personal, and the recycled images from Afghanistan of women in head-to- toe burkas and bearded, gun-toting men had posed an almost existential threat. (2019: 27).

Another most apparent outcome of the "them" discourse is the determination of removal of the Taliban regime with high support of Western countries. Spivak, focusing on the abstracted case of the war, considers that "the US is fighting an abstract enemy: terrorism. […] The war is part of an alibi every imperialism has given itself, a civilizing mission carried to the extreme, as it always must be" (Spivak, 2004: 82). Mohanty similarly considers the war as a means of powerful countries' gaining control:

> Witness the struggle for control over oil in the name of ''democracy and freedom'' in Saudi Arabia. Witness especially, the ''war against terrorism'' after the events of 11 September 2001. The borders and autonomy of nation-states, the geographies of nationhood are irrelevant in this war, which can justify imperialist aggression in the name of the ''homeland security'' of the United States. (2003: 121).

Before Parveen leaves for Afghanistan, she feels quite disoriented in her home in Northern California and struggles to find a reasonable explanation for all the blurred components of the war on terror. The novel shows the ambiguity of the miserable state of affairs that makes Parveen pensive:

> A few weeks before Parveen arrived in Afghanistan, an air strike in the western province of Farah, had killed more civilians, it was said, than any similar incident since 2001. It made the news in America, but Parveen, preoccupied by preparing for graduation and her journey, had barely noted it at the time. Now she couldn't escape it. It was believed that a hundred or more people had been

> killed, and most of them were children, mainly girls. "[…] She'd expected to find clarity about the war by coming to Afghanistan. Instead, the blur had worsened. (2019: 58).

Parveen experiences more and more ambiguity as the war worsens and the more she realizes that her presence in Afghanistan can be of little help amidst all the military forces supported by the government, which seem far from over.

In addition to the children, Afghan women faced severe restrictions due to the Taliban's fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, which included exclusion from public life and strict conservative dress codes. Seeing this imprisonment of women as an opportunity, Bush's speech aimed to construct the picture of freedom for Afghan women with the prospective war. On November 17, 2001, the Department of State declaration announced that

> today, with Kabul and other Afghan cities liberated from the Taliban, women are returning to their rightful place in Afghan society -- the place they and their families choose to have. Schools are preparing to reopen, and women are praying again in mosques. The international community stands with Afghanistan and with Afghans in reclaiming their traditions and their rights. (Report on the Taliban's War Against Women, 2001).

Turning the attention to world peace and global philanthropy, there appears immediate concern about Afghan women's condition because invading the country without stating certain politicized and stereotypical pleas, the war on terror would have been certain violation of human rights. Depending on the Western ideals of global correction, the type of national defence revealed immediate mobility in military terms, a case quite familiar in America's masculinized strategy of expansion and justice since the early dates. John Winthrop's *The City Upon A Hill* (1630), which is one of the most initial and fundamental influences that have directed America's path over the centuries combines religious content that states the importance and necessity of God's guidance over the Puritans, and that it encourages the thought that New England is a "selected" country destined to have prosperity and power over others:

> may the Lord make it like that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. […] We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. (John Winthrop Dreams of a City on a Hill, 1630).

In addition to this, historical texts such as *The Crisis*, *Speech to the Second Virginia Convention* and *the Declaration of Independence* exemplify this hegemonic inspiration for the American Revolutionary War (177 -1783) as the new nation openly stated the extremely discomforting treatment of England since the 1600s and even after America's *Declaration of*

Independence (1776). Monarchy, invasion, lack of democracy and liberty were among the biggest obstacles to the country's independence and uniqueness. However, after the Revolutionary War, America's promise of "liberty and democracy for all" became valid only for whites, leaving black people and the natives aside for centuries. Regarding American exceptionalism, Howard Zinn states that the new nation soon showed its intention for expanding with the annexation of Texas in the 1830s, which was soon followed by the annexation of Chicago in the1880s (Howard Zinn at MIT 2005 - The Myth of American Exceptionalism, 2019). Belief in the statement "the eyes of all men are upon us" has served to justify the nation's concern to interfere and demand justice in the lands America has targeted since the nation's founding with a strong reliance on its "philanthropic character" within the country. In terms of nation, Bhabha states that "in the effort to make this universalizing intent (the artificial and arbitrary nature of nation) prevail, the instrumentalities of state power—the military and police, religious and educational institutions, judiciary and legal apparatuses—are deployed" (Juan, 2002: 13). The nation's quick reaction resulted in the US government taking a defensive posture and declaring war on terror less than a month after the assaults. At that time, Bush's statements were quite alike in their continual mention of the country's power as they depended on the institutionalized mechanisms of power as Bhabha mentions. Bush frequently reaffirmed his strong conviction that the United States of America is the most powerful nation that has never been the object of such devastation: "Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done" ('Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation', 2001). The perception of justice has also evolved into a multifaceted concept, as exemplified by America's initial response to the tragedy: "Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating. The Taliban must act and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists or they will share in their fate." ('Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation', 2001). The war's length, content and vagueness also take place in *A Door in the Earth*:

> When Parveen chanced on the memoir, America's war in Afghanistan was already more than seven years old. […] America had disrupted al-Queda and driven the Taliban from power, but the nation's intervention had dragged on long enough, with vague enough aims, to see the Taliban return as insurgents, thereby necessitating the war's continuance. The previous year, 2008, had been the most violent since 2001. (2019: 26).

The U.S. government's decision to counterattack Afghanistan sparked nationwide vengeance for gendered humanitarian interference, causing a unified national sentiment towards the country. Laura Bush spoke for the first time on a weekly radio address "to kick off a worldwide

effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the Al Qaeda terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban" ('Text: Laura Bush on Taliban Oppression of Women', 2001). American scholar Miriam Cooke claims that this radio address, together with governmental speeches so far, resemble "the return of the civilizational binary that constructs the logic of empire" (2002: 469). Over the years, the United States has gone through credibility losses due to escalating casualties in conflicts like the Vietnam and Gulf Wars. This has clouded prospects for the future, particularly for women and children. Nearly every factor associated with premature death —poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of access to health care, environmental degradation — is exacerbated by the current war. About 243,000 people have been killed in the Afghanistan/Pakistan fronts since 2001. More than 70000 of those killed have been civilians (Afghan Civilians, 2022). It has been reported that "war creates acute and long-lasting health problems in men and women, but many aspects of war affect the health of women disproportionately through societal changes that may subordinate them and not prioritize their life and health" (Kastrup, 2006: 33). Waldman voices this drawback through the clinic/maternity hospital built in a remote Afghan village. Everything about the clinic, its appearance and the equipment looked "state-of-the-art" except for the absence of staff; there is even not a full-time doctor in it. She criticizes this attitude in an interview by saying that there are "a lot of American efforts in Afghanistan where we built good structures and all kinds of schools and all kinds of things. But we didn't really staff them" (Waldman, 2019). When the Afghan villagers mistake her as the doctor of the new clinic, she says that she is not a doctor and in turn asks:

> "The clinic doesn't have one?"
>
> "The lady doctor comes once a week. We've instructed our wives to get sick or give birth only on Wednesday, but they don't listen.
>
> The small crowd of men who gathered laughed; Parveen didn't find it funny." (Waldman, 2019: 62)

Parveen, who initially cannot understand Dr. Crane's actions, by building a clinic but not providing staff for it, finds herself assisting the woman doctor who only comes to the clinic once a week. However, her astonishment heightens when she sees sick children in this place: "Even though it was a women's clinic, mothers brought their children, for there was nowhere else for them to be treated, which meant that children with coughs and rashes and the runs were squeezed into the rotation too" (Waldman, 2019: 57). The War on Terror worsened the country's living conditions a great deal. According to UNICEF's reports, poverty, inadequate sanitation and hygiene problems, reduced access to wash facilities, malnutrition, safe drinking water, the low rate

in school attendance, lack of infrastructure at schools, child labour, and forced and underage marriage are among the fundamental problems especially children have to face (Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Afghanistan, 2021).

Michaele L. Ferguson argues that "the Bush Administration is not actually committed to women's equality and rights, but has cynically used this rhetoric to increase support for its foreign policy and to win re-election by appealing to women voters" (2005: 10). With the arrival of the 'prince charming',[2] things get calmer in the country throughout the years. The barbaric image is erased as he says: "the nation of Afghanistan was once the primary training ground of Al Qaida, the home of a barbaric regime called the Taliban. It now has a new constitution that guarantees free election and full participation by women," (Rights and Aspirations of the People of Afghanistan: President Bush's Remarks, 2004). Yet, the Minister of Health reported the actual state of women in Afghanistan in October 2009 as follows:

> Shortly after 9/11 and the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, only nine percent of Afghans living in rural areas had access to basic health services. […] Still, the figures tell us, 15 percent of the rural population has no access to basic health services. That percentage represents some five million people. Women and infants continue to die in large numbers during pregnancy and childbirth because of the inadequacy of our health facilities, the lack of professional health workers, and the poor road access in remote parts of the country (Veil of Tears: Afghans' Stories of Loss in Childbirth, 2009: 3).

> Invasions led to various disruptions in daily life. In 2015, it was noted that eighty-five per cent of Afghanistan's roads are in "poor shape, and the majority cannot be used by motor vehicles" (Peter, 2015), which is a case exposed in the novel. There is also a high number of deaths due to arbitrary ordnance in the streets and rural areas where children play. Due to the lack of proper roads, thousands of women have lost their lives during delivery.

The alleged Afghan women's rights issue in the wake of the attacks, turns into an 'instrumental good' to extend the discourse to new contexts "as if Americans ought to be committed to ensuring women's rights as a good in and of themselves" (Ferguson, 2005: 26) yet sounding more like anti-feminist.

[2] Ferguson's definition of a "damsel in distress" brings to mind this word's usage.

Power and Pain in post-9/11 in the Post-Colonial Feminist Context through *A Door in the Earth*

American discourses in the War on Terror are constrained by strict binary oppositions such as democracy vs. tyranny, freedom vs. oppression, civility vs. barbarism, Christianity vs. Islam and progress vs. tradition. These binaries, which have their roots in the narratives of imperialist, colonial and orientalist heritage, tend to use gendered rhetoric with the superiority label they have been loaded with for centuries. Mentioning the absurdity of the counterattack after September 11, Mohanty points out that "in imperial democracy, women serve as an alibi for neocolonial adventures in war-making, and in so-called humanitarian and peacekeeping missions" (Mohanty, 2011: 77). In its more specific and visible aspect, she claims that:

> Afghan women are seen as "nation-builders" by western occupation forces with a stake in producing the neoliberal gendered subject necessary for market democracies. At the same time, they are seen as "nation-betrayers" by the Taliban and their supporters. Imposing "peace-keeping" or humanitarian projects on top of colonial occupation remains a form of imperial control, no matter the rhetoric of democratisation that accompanies these projects (2011: 80).

The imperial determination of a civilizing mission, to secure and maintain this against any kind of terrorist attempt results in the modern and thus civilized nation's further engagement in combating terrorism "under one common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonialist and postimperialist" (Loomba, 2015: 10). In her essay *Women's Text and a Critique of Imperialism*, Spivak remarks that "it should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (1985: 243). In almost a decade later, also inspired by Spivak, Edward Said contents that:

> what I am saying about the British, French, and American imperial experience is that it has a unique coherence and a special cultural centrality. England of course is an imperial class by itself, bigger, grander, more imposing than any other; for almost two centuries France was in direct competition with it. […] America began as an empire during the nineteenth century, but it was in the second half of the twentieth, after the decolonization of the British and French empires, that it directly followed its two great predecessors (1994: xxiii).

The characteristics of internalised dominance are easy to see when one considers the origins and principles of America. Being powerful has interwoven the nation with its necessities, as the great historical myths of national prosperity and unity demonstrate. When considering the situation of women in times of political turmoil, the female body, limited by the physical myth of

vulnerability due to reproduction and the notion of lacking, is seen as bound to constant suffering under the dominant discourse of power, which considers the presence of women as trivial. Especially for women in underdeveloped countries, women confront the legacy of oppression in which they have neither autonomy and nor any influence.

At times when Parveen spends time with the women of the village, the only place she can talk to the other women is in the home or garden of their houses, as they are not allowed to go outside alone. In these places, the women talk about their lives, which consist of difficult access to water, lack of food, restrictions and frequent pregnancies, many of which end in miscarriages or the death of the mother. Before she arrived in the country, she was already aware of the suffering of Afghan women and considered Crane to be a truly benevolent soldier working on behalf of the rural population. But the disillusionment that soon followed, together with her country's political stance, made her remember Professor Banerjee's lecture-like talks and warning that such problems serve "as a pretext for more years of intervention, however "kind" […] its nature may be" (Waldman, 2019: 47). The professor also informs her about the overt practice of exploiting the pain of Afghan women to support US invasion when Parveen tells about her intention of going to Afghanistan to see the situation herself and that whether Dr. Crane has correct inferences about the country and Afghan women:

> The first thing Professor Banerjee said was that she didn't need to read *Mother Afghanistan* to know it was meretricious. Parveen's mouth fell open a bit in surprise. The book had been subjected to "withering postcolonial critique" in the anthropology community (Waldman, 2019:41).

The power dynamic between the West and the East is based on the needs and advantages of the West, in this case America, which charges itself with the dynamic of superiority. Since the country was founded and governed according to the ideals of the Christian God, the tradition of divine providence is integrated into governmental and military power. Professor's view of the American myth of male power is as follows:

> Professor Banerjee objected to a white male American, however well intentioned, ventriloquizing for that most powerless of females, an Afghan village woman, thus reinforcing the very power relations he claimed to challenge. Memoirs by oppressed subjects, native people, or voiceless women were righteous, legitimate, and worthy of both pedagogy and embrace. Those by privileged Westerners- especially if they were about the oppressed, native, or voiceless, - were problematic at best. (Waldman, 2019: 43).

In the case of Afghanistan, Islamic rules have weaved the whole face of the country, especially since the late 1990s.[3] Islamic radicalism, one of the main reasons that started The War on Terror and posed a significant threat to the democratic and civilized U.S. was announced in several mediums. Even though there was an ongoing Western prejudice against Islam and the veil, more people joined Islamic intolerance, particularly with the appearance of Laura Bush as she stressed disapproval and urgent intervention in Afghan women's cases. The "war propaganda" out of a "feminist" cause (Bahramitash, 2005: 221) by and large, initiated that the war is quite problematic as it heightened the prevalent ideas where Muslims are seen as uncivilized and that "Muslim women are victims of an inherent misogynism in Islamic tradition" (Bahramitash, 2005: 222). In one of the conversations between Parveen and American colonel Trotter, in which he interests in "schooling her" (Waldman, 2019:171) Parveen talks about the Brazilian government's indifference about the rate of child death in Brazil and that the situation is being regarded as normal for the families too. Colonel Trotter thinks this is quite an issue of predestination and turns the topic to Islam:

> Especially when you have a religion as fatalistic as Islam as your guiding principle," Trotter agreed. "It just about killed me in Crane's book when our friend Waheed there kept calling everything God's will." He caught himself for a moment and paused. "Sorry—you're probably Muslim, but you grew up with a different mentality (2019: 172).

Colonel Trotter, whose nation invaded Afghanistan by the will of God, believes that a Muslim would do differently in a similar situation, since the Muslim's interpretation of God's will in this case is associated with a lower social class, otherwise he would have had to criticize Crane's devotion to Christianity in order to recover from the fraud and turn into philanthropy. Having been sentenced to do five hundred hours of community service (Waldman, 2019: 20), Crane informs us of the court's approval of carrying out this service abroad with the immense trust and confidence of belonging to a mighty nation: "God provides, and He guides too. I chose Afghanistan. Where else did America have a strong interest? Where else was there such a strong need? In Afghanistan, I could be a soldier without a gun" (Waldman, 2019: 99). This soldier, who favours "kind power", tries to convince himself that there is no difference between him and the people in this rural part of the world. However, when the mullah, who has fought against the Taliban and American forces

[3] Afghanistan has been an unstable country since the 1960s: "Afghanistan was transformed into a cockpit for the cold war struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union that reached its climax with the Soviet invasion in 1979 and its withdrawal ten years later. In the subsequent civil war that erupted in the 1990s, Afghanistan became a failed state, ignored by the world. At the beginning of the - twenty-- first century it burst back on to the world scene when radical Muslim jihadists planned the 9/11 attack against the United States from there and provoked a U.S. invasion in retaliation. Since that time, a new Afghan government has struggled to bring stability to the country in the face of an Islamist insurgency." (Bartfield, 2023: 1).

and lost his two sons, asks him to cure his wife's eyes, he puts his surprise into words: "Love among those we label barbarians should not surprise us. They are as human as we are" (Waldman, 2019: 118). Trotter, on the other hand, encouraged by Crane's memoirs, believes that the best solution to save the Afghan women is to build a road to Fereshta's village, which will also help the country to prosper in other fields. His determination about the road is so firm that accepts no negation:

> The road was going to be widened and paved, he said, so that cars and trucks could drive in an out, which would allow women in medical peril to get help. This was why he had come; this would be a gift from the American people to the village. Not just its women; farmers would benefit too, because they'd be able to sell their crops all over the country. Roads had transformed the lives of earlier Americans, linking them into a market economy. They'd do the same for Afghans. […] "Your productivity goes way up. Your incomes go way up. Progress." (Waldman, 2019: 161).

The Colonel's mentioning about the gift echoes with Crane's coinage word "kind power". According to Crane, Trotter's attempt to build the road proves dysfunctional and pointless because even if the road facilitates access to the clinic, there is no doctor there or the villagers, who live far away, do not have suitable vehicles to bear their pain until they reach the clinic. Said considers such approach of facile help under the promise of progress and improvement as colonial moves woven with ideology under the guise of "American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom." (1994: 8) The Afghan locals, both men and women, are aware of the vain and pious attempts issued under the name of growth and progression yet they are made numb and fated to the land to provide everlasting prosperity to the Western nations. The distrust heightens when Trotter's soldiers kill Dr. Yasmeen, the only doctor to come once a week to the clinic. Jamshid, who knows the history behind Fereshta's death, angrily cries out:

> So any of us could be killed", Jamshid said hotly, "if we don't follow the Americans' orders. If we drive too fast or too slow. If we don't hear them or we hear them and choose not to listen. If we're in the wrong place. […] "The Americans came here saying they could solve our problems," he said, "but they only grow them." (Waldman, 2019: 361).

The rescue rhetoric with its elements of kind gift and kind power falls behind the historical reality of the United States, and the rescue rhetoric becomes ambiguous and unplausible. In her article "Ground Zero", Diana Taylor reminds us that despite the fact that everyone knows that the ongoing violence is about oil drilling and territorial control, the fetishized man in uniform is in a pseudo attempt of rescuing the woman from the frightening others. (2002: 454).

The gloriously sophisticated nature of the white men who promised to keep the superpower by spreading everything "good" and "kind" to the wicked and unsophisticated becomes the nightmare of Afghanistan. With Jamshid's statement like an outburst, the narrator clarifies that

> in that statement was a history every Afghan knew- a history of imperial armies that had attempted to conquer and subdue Afghanistan. The British. The Soviets. And now the Americans. […] Jamshid understood that there was no such thing as benevolent occupation. (Waldman, 2019: 361).

Cooke adds to the criticism of the American approach and the urge to improve women's condition in Afghanistan, stating that "Politics in the era of the U.S. empire disappear behind the veil of women's victimization" (2002: 469). According to her, gender issues are put forth so as to blur and obscure the expansive imperial actions and the power dynamics inherent in it. In the novel, Parveen is warned by her professor about the misleading feminism in the discourse of war by criticizing Crane's infamous word coinage "kind power" which she will bitterly experience and approve as first-person witness:

> "Why kind power?" she said. "Why not just kindness?" Because power, she insisted, was what it was truly all about. Power meant continued military intervention. Power meant you could revert to weapons and bombs when your kindness failed to persuade. Surely it wasn't a coincidence that just as public support for the war was dropping, Gideon Crane came along to remind Americans why they needed to be in Afghanistan—to save the women, of course. "Parveen, beware feminism that serves imperial or colonial interests or that, in my friend Gayatri's perfect phrase, involves 'white men saving brown women from brown men.' We tell stories in order to occupy. […] that the military's humanitarianism was nothing more than contemporary imperialism." (Waldman, 2019: 45).

The widespread portrayal of Islam in the media also provided a sufficient basis to categorize any religion but Islam as demonic. The veil and the beard became two important evil symbols labelled as "barbarians" (Waldman, 2019:141) in the evil part of the world. Cooke further states, "in the Islamic context, the negative stereotyping of the religion as inherently misogynist provides ammunition for the attack on the uncivilized brown men" (2002: 469).

The growing consensus to save Afghanistan centred on a seemingly devoted cause, namely the rights of Afghan women and their liberation from the devastating conditions they have suffered for nearly four decades. The propaganda prevalent in the media about the immediate and mandatory invasion of the country, which was originally intended for women, also finds a place in Waldman's novel. The author implies Ngugi's "conference table decisions" as "America's

hunger for information," and more generally, she depicts Westerners "as if they'd discovered Afghanistan the way Columbus had discovered America" (Waldman, 2019: 20).

Viewing Afghan culture as threatening and barbaric, entrenched above all in the image of the veil and the beard, deliberately sets limits to the pain of "the other" and makes it non-existent for the powerful, which depends to a large extent on the power relations between nations. Furthermore, the reality of female pain plays the most important role in the justification of violence. It becomes invisible as it is neither important nor urgent once the privileged man uses it as the most important step to make his case credible. Crane's *Mother Afghanistan* takes the attention of hundreds of American people with its cover page that also attracted Parveen. Behind this iconic image of Afghan women lies the unconscious pain that belongs to the others, which is considered normal and naturally bearable because it has long been defined as a characteristic of Third World women. In its global sense, Scarry opines that it is the "politics of representation that flattens the experience of pain by being able to capture only the visible causes or expressions of pain" (Dauphinée, 2007: 142). Furthering her idea with the images of imprisonments like the concentration camps, she suggests "in the imagining of pain-causing phenomena and of bodies in pain, the specificity of the interior experience of pain, and the subject that experiences it, is elided or even entirely evacuated. People become representations of their plight" (Dauphinée, 2007: 142). The novel gradually focuses on Crane's misleading figure and all the media work he has thrown himself into. Telling in his memoir that he "had fallen in love with Afghanistan" (Waldman, 2019: 20), with its improper roads, adventurous donkey ride, its delicious food, nebbish man such as Waheed, and an angel-like figure Fereshta, he creates a lovely country image where the pain is seen like an embroidery item fitting into the pattern of victimizing.

As a fitting criticism, Taylor states that "images of smiling Afghan women peering shyly out from behind their veils suddenly made many in the United States feel better" (Taylor, 2002: 454). The victims' pain is simply prolonged by a refusal to recognise and accept the colonial causes. Because the weaker side can hardly cause serious harm to the stronger troops, their suffering during a war is frequently ignored. Seen as the weakest, under-represented and vulnerable group other than children, Afghan women were among the most neglected agents during the War on Terror. In her reinterpretation of Trinh Minh-ha, Shahnaz Khan highlights that:

> "Trinh Minh-ha reminds us that such accounts of the third world women's pain and oppression have made them inmates in a private zoo (1989). Within such a zoo, the image of the veiled woman, even when accompanied by a speaking subject, remains limited to the immediate sensory experience of what it is like to be confined." (2001).

Women who give birth, who work inside the house both for domestic work and to earn some money weaving rugs and some in agriculture, who take water from wells and carry it all along their homes, who breastfeed when they are themselves are hardly fed, whose intelligence is limited to the private domain, are still considered weak. In the–memoir, Crane praises this domesticity through Fereshta. He admires and even loves the situation of Afghan women and narrates this over Fereshta's image, which becomes more impressive, especially after her tragic disappearance. Remembering his stay with the Afghan family during his hunger for adventure, which later turned out that he stayed in the mosque, he describes Fereshta as " "a luminous Afghan rose" who tended to him with grace and generosity, cooking savoury meals and supplying him with tea and blankets even as she mothered six children and carried her seventh" (Waldman, 2019: 30). Fereshta's pregnancy and her heavily domestic life with almost seven children in a physically deprived land sounds quite exotic for Crane. The author reminds us that thousands of women share Fereshta's fate, which is quite reasonable for empowered and politicized masculine perspective and their desired passivity of women that revolve around a vicious pain cycle. Spivak explains the ignorance, and intentional reluctance towards taking Third World women as individuals as "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears [...] into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak, 2010: 61). The solution to the exemption of "uncivilized" women is reflected through Gideon Crane. Glorifying everything about Fereshta, her being a housewife with seven children, her cooking, beautiful face and behaviour, he conceals that he has been among the responsible ones for having caused eternal pain for Fereshta.

Ramazani says, "it was our (American) government that had created Al-Qaeda, and that those whom we call the "enemies of freedom" we referred to only yesterday as brave 'freedom fighters'" (2007: 8). He insists on the irrelevancy of the whole procedure, which is also an irrelevant way to end Afghan women's pain, saying this is not the proper way "while arming, training, and bankrolling ruthless dictators (including, until recently, Saddam Hussein) in Africa, Central America, Asia, and the Middle East. Is there not a "cruel" irony in the pretence to liberate a people by bombing their homes or levying lethal economic sanctions against them?" (2007: 8).

Conclusion

Amy Waldman's *A Door in the Earth* provides the reader with global witnessing to the effects of September 11 and its legitimizing the Afghan occupation. The iconic yet notorious "us" and "them" rhetoric is transmitted through the global convincing to improve Afghan women's condition both in health matters and social terms. However, Afghan women's pain is eliminated

with the entrenched essentialist and colonial idea of female vulnerability in which the saviour has the privilege of proclaiming it to the world as a means of expanding power without anyone questioning or following up on what actually happened to the pain. The claim to end pain in the context of women's rights by invading the land involves an imperial race of male forces with the main focus on mass destruction and an abundance of deaths with disguised purpose of Western expansion and power. The novel lays out that female suffering and pain have been taken for granted for lifetime pain so that the powerful ones can "tell stories in order to occupy" (Waldman, 2019: 45). Taking for granted that they cannot claim their rights, like those long silenced, the images of victimized women appear through the saviour country that has always cared for the welfare of all nations, with the support and confidence that they have always been the good ones. While unfolding the colonial causes of the Western world, Waldman implies that in all the haste, women were the ones left behind in constant pain, reminding the reader that they were her country's top priority at the beginning of the war. The novel, which recreates the everyday reality of Afghanistan during the War on Terror with its artificial narrative of peace, is seen as a powerful source for understanding the drawbacks of American intervention in Afghanistan. Through postcolonial (feminist) theories, the bitter reality of the War on Terror to maintain homeland security, the double interiorized Afghan women continue to be the target on the surface as they fall far behind the sole priority of prosperous US.

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