

When longer heard. afghan women had served their

[Government](#)



When analysing the way in which the Bush administration proceeded to enforce their feminist stance it is clear the government was completely misled. Female rights discourse became strongly fixated on the burqa, but this seems to have been a propaganda tool, used for “geopolitical manipulation” (Fluri, 2011). Following interviews and participant observations with Afghan families, Jennifer Fluri revealed that in fact the complexity of the burqa was not understood by US aid workers and that rather it seemed they were regurgitating requests from the US government or simply following development ideologies (Fluri, 2011). It seems that there was unwanted concern surrounding female body and dress.

This begs the question of why then was the government so concerned with the corporeal? It is likely that this was because of its use as a visual propaganda tool. The imagery of Muslim women dressed in a burqa acted as tangible evidence of the oppression they were submitted to under the Taliban; visually differentiating the ‘liberated’ Western women from the oppressed and victimised Muslim women, and helping to reinforce the West as an archetype of civilisation. When the Taliban was defeated images of Afghan women ripping off their burqa were mass-produced and circulated by US media, in effort to relay the success of the ‘War on Terror’ campaign (Steans, 2008).

However in reality the situation did not vastly improve for women under the new US supported regime, despite this their voices were no longer heard. Afghan women had served their purpose and were no longer of use or of interest to political elites (Steans, 2008). Thus demonstrating that the Bush administration’s concerns for women’s rights were a façade. In addition, <https://assignbuster.com/when-longer-heard-afghan-women-had-served-their/>

analysing the relationship between the RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) and the Bush administration is very insightful. Women from the RAWA were invited to contribute to the table of high politics following the declaration of the 'war on terror' and the subsequent promise to protect women's rights. However their suggestions were often ignored, for example they strongly advised against intervention, believing, as many other Muslims did, that this would cause "resentment of US imperialism and create the conditions in which fundamentalist and terrorist groups would flourish" (Steans, 2008). Further they asked the US "not to support other fundamentalist regimes that denied women their most basic rights" (Steans, 2008) such as the Northern alliance.

But the ignorance of these requests exemplifies the dismissive attitude of Western men toward women, and shows us that the promise to protect women's rights was a political guise. Throughout the 'war on terror' there is a sense of Western men glorifying themselves as the benefactors of freedom but as such they are exerting dominance over women in a backhanded way; they hold the power to grant them rights and to give them involvement in the cause. In reality, however, it is all on their terms and serves them a purpose. The idea of men as the protectors of women was cultivated right from the initial media coverage of 9/11 which seemed to completely ignore the courageous efforts of female fire fighters, police officers and other on ground workers, in an attempt "masculinise" the 'war on terror' (Steans, 2008). This would domestically ingrain the idea of men as the protectors and women as those to be protected, which would subsequently feed into the international conflict. The trend of "white men saving brown women from

<https://assignbuster.com/when-longer-heard-afghan-women-had-served-their/>

brown men" (Chakravorty Spivak, 1985) has been prevalent throughout history.

Much like the claims to defend women in the 'war on terror', during the 1800s, the British abolition of the Hindu suttee ritual was justified as a protection of women. However, this was also an example of Orientalism, of the West imposing its values onto the East and using women to validate imperialism; as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak outlines in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' "The gravity of imperialism was that it was socially cathected as a 'social mission'" (Chakravorty Spivak, 1985). As we have seen, the 'social mission' is sometimes gendered, but the West's claims to superior masculinity and women's rights are often flawed. The basis of women's rights should not be, men deciding which rituals and practices they think are 'good or bad', but rather giving women the freedom and power to decide for themselves.