

THE PRACTICES OF REPRESENTATION:

A comparison of Afghan women's identity in development policy magazines

Bachelor's thesis

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Kandidaatintutkielmani tarkoituksena on tutkia afgaaninaisten representointia kehityspoliittisissa lehdissä. Erityisesti tarkastelen identiteettien rakentamisen kielellisiä keinoja ja niihin liittyviä motiiveja. Tutkimus perustuu kriittiseen diskurssintutkimukseen ja näkemykseen kielestä sosiaalisena käytäntönä. Työssäni analysoinkin tapoja kuvata afgaaninaisten identiteettiä ja Afganistanin todellisuutta kehityspoliittisten tavoitteiden rinnalla. Vertailen kahden artikkelin tapaa kuvata naisia suhteessa esillä oleviin valtasuhteisiin ja kehitystavoitteisiin. Kuvatessaan afgaaninaisia artikkelit kuitenkin rakentavat samalla länsimaista identiteettiä, sillä kehityskeskustelussa peilataan kansainvälisen yhteisön ja Afganistanin suhdetta.

Tutkimuksen löydökset osoittavat että lehtien sekä toimittajien taustat vaikuttavat tapaan kuvata todellisuutta. Britannian ulkoministeriön julkaisema kehitysyhteistyölehti *Developments* rakentaa artikkelin naisille identiteetin kehityksen malleina ja osoituksena kehitysyhteistyön tehokkuudesta. Artikkelin naiset ovat rakentamassa itselleen ja maalleen parempaa tulevaisuutta kehitysyhteistyön ansioista. Analyysin toinen artikkeli puolestaan ilmestyi itsenäisessä kehityspoliittisessa lehdessä nimeltä *New Internationalist*. Artikkelin on afgaaninaisen kirjoittama ja kuvaa siten kehitysyhteistyön sekä afgaaninaiset hyvin eri näkökulmasta. Vaikka naiset nähdään artikkelissa osana yhteiskuntaa, heidät kuvataan yhteiskunnan perinteisten rakenteiden uhreina. Artikkelin kyseenalaistaakin nykyisen kehitysyhteistyön lähtökohdat, mutta kritisoi myös Afganistanin omaa hallintoa ja yhteiskuntarakennetta. Muutos on artikkelin näkökulmasta tapahduttava Afganistanin omien rakenteiden pohjalta, ei ulkoapäin annettuna.

Kahden eri näkökulman vertailusta ei voida esittää pitkälle vietyjä yleistyksiä, mutta voidaan huomata että artikkeleissa rakennettu afgaaninaisten identiteetti sekä taustalla oleva kehitysperspektiivi heijastavat lehtien edustamia arvoja ja tavoitteita. Lisäksi analyysi osoittaa molempien artikkelien perustuvan Idän ja Lännen vastakkainasetteluun, tosin eri näkökulmista. Lisätutkimus aiheesta laajemman aineiston pohjalta antaisi mahdollisuuden tutkia syvemmin Afganistaniin liittyvää uutisointia ja sen eri näkökulmia.

Asiasanat: critical discourse analysis, representation, ideology

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1. Introduction

What are the ways of representing, defining, giving meaning and the methods of making sense of the other? These questions are linked to the examination of the linguistic representation of Afghan women in relation to development objectives in my bachelor's thesis.

Muslim women have received increasing media attention after the 9/11 attacks in the Western media and have become the subject of controversial discussions on women's rights, veiling and oppressive patriarchal societies in relation to independent Western women. As recent studies on Islam and the media indicate, it is important to examine the ways of representation to reveal, for example, the frames of knowledge and value systems behind the headlines. Therefore, this study draws on earlier studies on representation of Third World women, critical discourse analysis and theorisation of Islam and Media to analyse the representation of Afghan women. The current study focuses on the portrayal of Afghan women by comparing the discursive practices used to represent and construct their identity in two development policy magazines. The study is based on the idea of language as social practice and hence the objective of the study is to recognize the discursive practices and discourses through which Afghan women are perceived in the data. At the same time, the study considers the interrelationship of 'we' and 'them', examining the identity of Afghan women in relation to power relations and ideological differences between West and Afghanistan in development cooperation.

This study aims to look at the linguistic structures and discursive practises forming the identity of Afghan women i.e. the representation of Afghan women from a development perspective. As a comparative study of two articles, the objective of the study is not to draw wider generalisations or conclusions, but rather to compare the ways of representation from linguistic point of view, taking into account the premises of the articles. Furthermore, the aim of the study is to highlight some of the ways and processes that are involved in representation and to identify the motives to particular choices that form distinct identities and realities.

2. Background - Analysing the representation of Afghan women

This section introduces the main concepts, theoretical frameworks and previous studies utilized in this study focusing on the fields of Discourse analysis and Cultural studies. In addition, Postcolonial and Feminist theory as well as Development theory could have been applied.

2.1. Islam and the Media

Representations of Islam and Muslims in the media are more often than not negative, highlighting terrorists, human rights and women's rights abuses, and war. In the light of recent studies, the western media regards Islam with a problem based attitude with normative ideas of improvements. As an illustration of this, a recent research about British media and the representation of Muslims, "The search for the Common Ground, Muslims, Non-Muslims and the UK media", revealed that 91 % of the articles in the national newspapers of UK present Muslims in a negative light. The research included a media study where articles related to Islam and Muslims were examined during one week including in total 352 articles. The findings were that in addition to the 91 % of negative articles, 5 % were interpreted as neutral and 4 % were positive. Furthermore, the examination of the articles showed that in nearly half of the articles Islam was represented as a threat and as something thoroughly different from the West.

These findings echo the theorisation of the relationship between media and Islam as well as the discourse of Islam as the other, where Islam is demonised and women represented as victims. To begin with, both Macdonald and Dahlgren (2003: 151; 1999: 87) have identified that Islam's multiple voices and forms, the variety of people, states, ideologies and politics, are being reduced to a static image of evil Islam that includes fundamentalists, terrorists and that oppresses women. Furthermore, Myra Macdonald (2003: 151) describes the West as demonizing Islam with a "discourse of risk" that has been established due to the collapse of communism, with the rise of international terrorism and increased attention on women's rights. Moreover, she (2003: 163) points out that "Discourses of Islamic fundamental militancy do not merely denigrate 'the enemy', they also produce influential discourses of how the West sees itself." In other words, demonizing Islam constructs an image of West as just and peaceful, unlike Islam, and hence legitimizes the actions of the West. Furthermore, women within this "discourse of risk" are typically presented as victims and their identity is constructed through veiling. Macdonald argues (2006: 19) that

The image of the veil continues to exercise discursive power over perceptions of Islam and Muslim women. Expressions of surprise, even in the twenty-first century, that veiled Muslim women can appear as Olympic athletes, “suicide bombers,” feminists, politicians, musicians, or even comedians, underline the tenacity of beliefs that Islamic veiling is intrinsically incompatible with women’s agency in the construction of their identities.

Women’s agency is, indeed, alleged to be nonexistent within Islam and further encourages the demonizing representation. In this study, then, the confrontation between Islam and the West in the media is regarded as the basis for the discussion. Furthermore, this theorisation provides the reasons for examining media representations and the discursive practices.

2.2. Critical discourse analysis

This study is based on critical discourse analysis and hence on the view of language as social practice meaning that language use is socially bound and constructs the social reality. The field of discourse analysis (or discourse theory, a concept used for example by Sara Mills) is comprised of a variety of methods, trends and emphases as well as definitions. However, the analysis is based on the social constructive view point about reality; language use as a system of meaning and system of communication is seen as constructing knowledge and reality among other social elements and forces. Furthermore, language use is bound and produced by discourse practices and therefore has ideological consequences (Hall 1999: 99). Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, connects the examination of language use with power relations (Macdonald 2003: 3). Critical discourse analysis has its roots in the 1970s and has been considerably influenced by Foucault (Mills 1997: 1-28, Hall 1997: 47-51). Within the critical discourse analysis, the concept of discourse emphasises the production of knowledge, power relations and social aspect of language as always contextually bound (Mills 1997: 1-28, Hall 1997: 47-51). Consequently, as a research perspective critical discourse analysis typically concentrates on the discursive connections between knowledge, identity and power, ideology and social structures (Pietikäinen 2000: 191-193).

In this study, I follow Fairclough’s adaptation of critical discourse analysis that focuses on social identities, relations and systems of knowledge and belief. Fairclough’s (1995) view on critical discourse analysis is formed by a three dimensional framework comprising of action, representation and identification that unites social analysis with linguistic analysis. For Fairclough (1995: 17) “Discourse analysis can be understood as an attempt to show systematic links between texts, discourse practices and sociocultural practices.” At the centre of analysis of representation, then, are linguistic choices that construct a specific form of reality as Fairclough (1995: 103) indicates:

The analysis of representational processes in a text, therefore, comes down to an account of what choices are made – what is included and what is excluded, what is made explicit or left implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded, what is thematized and what is unthematized, what process types and categories are drawn upon to represent events, and so on.

Critical discourse analysis in this study, hence, is applied to examining the linguistic choices that form the representation of Afghan women's identity and the social context by analysing the tensions arising from the text.

2.3. Representation

The concept of representation is central in this study as it refers not only to the processes of constructing meaning but also to the power relations involved. The concept is multidisciplinary connecting domains like discourse analysis, media analysis and cultural studies, and has been used, for example, also in postcolonial studies. Representation refers to the connection between language and the 'real' world, where language or systems of representations are used to construct reality and meaning (Hall 1997). However, the meaning is always negotiated and bound by its context and the relationship between language and the real world is incoherent. As Hall (1997: 28) reminds us "There is no simple relationship of reflection, imitation or one-to-one correspondence between language and the real world." Furthermore, as meaning is negotiated and constructed by language use, one key aspect, then, is who has the power to represent and circulate particular meanings. For this reason, Fiske (2003: 131-153) defines the culture of power as the culture of representation. Fiske perceives representation as signifying and making meanings with language that is inherently connected with the power to represent, to be the normative referent and to construct the other. For Fiske, then, othering is central in representation and it is intertwined with the possession of discursive and material power.

2.4. Previous studies

This section reviews some previous studies of the so called Third World women's representation comparing two recent studies on Sandra Talpade Mohanty's article from 1986.

Sandra Talpade Mohanty's article *Under the Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* from 1986 is regarded as one of the fundamental studies on the field of postcolonial and post-structural Feminist Studies. In her study she examines the category of Third World women and its production through discourse analysis of Western Feminist writing. That is, the colonizing practices of Western hegemonic scholars and the discursive methods of producing "Third World woman" as the other are evaluated. Mohanty (2006: 21-22) argues that the "Third World woman" is constructed as a singular, monolithic subject in feminist writing by using women as a category of analysis, with methodological universalism and with a specific model of power. Further, Mohanty indicates that the category of Third World women is construed by disregarding their social, historical and cultural context and other ideological institutions and frameworks. In addition, she suggests that the construction of this category of Third World woman also constructs the notion of Western woman and feminist (Mohanty 2006: 21-22):

This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "Third World" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions.

Her article, then, highlights the power relations that are connected to the representation of the other and emphasises the self-representation in this process.

Over 20 years later, similar discourse practices as identified by Mohanty appear to be to a certain degree dominant in representing Third World women, though also other practices and discourses are noticeable. Riitta Elina Manninen (2008), for example, observes in her pro gradu thesis that alongside other discourses, women's identity is mostly framed in discourse where Third World women do not have agency, but rely on Western development. Manninen examines the discourses of Third World women based on 26 articles published in a Finnish development magazine *Kehitysuutiset* between 2005 and 2006 using critical discourse analysis. By evaluating the discourses of representation, Manninen identifies five distinct sub-discourses in addition to the general development and globalization discourses that depict Third World women. She specifies these sub-discourses as "equality", "misery", "change", "heroism" and "life story discourse". The

study, then, focuses on the functions, representations, structures and identity constructions of these sub-discourses and their relationship to the postcolonial discussion about Third World women. Compared to the study conducted by Mohanty in 1986, where women from development countries were framed through the discourse of misery and victimization, the scale of representation seems to have widened to portray women as heroines or simply as ordinary women. However, the analysis of Manninen illustrates that the prevailing discourses represent and produce Third World women as the objects of help and development within development discourse. Hence, this kind of representation practice constructs the West as the point of comparison and as possessing the expertise within development cooperation.

The representations of Muslim women, on the other hand, have been mainly analysed by focusing on veiling and the veiled identity. Eltantawy (2007), for example, analyses newspaper articles covering veiled Muslim women in her paper *Muslim Women, the Western Press, and the Discursive Paradoxes of the Veil*. Eltantawy examines the representation of veiled women in the US and foreign newspapers and discusses two recurring themes in her paper: sympathetic representation of intelligent and independent women and stereotypical view of veiled women as oppressed and victimized. In the same way as Manninen (2008) observes the prevailing discourse practices being similar to Mohanty's findings, Eltantawy (2007: 28) notes that Mohanty's category of Third World woman dominates the description of veiled Muslim women, though there is also more room for variety and voices of Muslim women. Though Eltantawy's paper is not as detailed and extensive as Manninen's study, she also identifies similar identity positions for Muslim women as oppressed, victimized or superwomen. However, Eltantawy does not consider the representation of Muslim women in relation to the non-Muslim women's identity.

These studies indicate that the dominant practices of representation seem to maintain and produce difference between the developed countries and the Third World countries. It seems that these practices are important methods of self-representation, constructing and validating Western expertise, for example, in development discourse. On the other hand, the discourses that represent women as heroines or as ordinary women should also be taken into account, and can be seen as efforts towards women's empowerment and equality. The question remaining is, however, what kind of discourse practices should be used to represent the seemingly distinct and unfamiliar.

3. Data and Methods

This study examines the discursive construction of Afghan womanhood and the arising social and political relations, tensions and realities between Afghanistan and the Western world. The starting hypothesis for the study was that similar discursive practices would be identifiable within the data as in the previous studies. In other words, my expectation was that women's identity is constructed and represented with a victim discourse, highlighting Western superiority and expertise based on the fact that veiled Muslim women are mainly represented and interpreted as submissive and passive victims in the Western media as Macdonald (2003), for example indicates. Furthermore, Afghanistan and Afghan women evoke problematic images of rights and freedoms, while the realities of Afghanistan remain unfamiliar. For this reason, articles focusing on Afghan women appear as a valuable data for analysing representation.

The data of the study is comprised of two articles focusing on Afghan women and change in Afghanistan published between November 2008 and December 2008 in British development political magazines. The articles "The everyday battle" and "Beyond the burqa" were published in magazines that discuss and approach development policy issues and global wellbeing from different perspectives. That is, *Developments* is a free quarterly magazine published by the UK Government's Department for International Development, and is described as "designed to increase awareness of development issues", whereas the *New Internationalist* is an independent magazine for subscribers and published around the world.

The method of analysis used in this study is critical discourse analysis. Hence the structural properties, the discursive and social practices and meanings of the texts were analysed. As the research aims to distinguish whose voice(s) are heard and determining the power relationship connected to representation, lexical and semantic choices as well as grammatical choices were of particular interest. In addition, the choices of what information was included or excluded in the articles were examined. Furthermore, corpus linguistics was used as a support tool; the concordances of some key words related to gender, for example, were analysed with AntConc concordancing programme. Though the concordance analysis provides the number of instances within the text, my purpose was not to do quantitative analysis, but rather examine the contexts of particular words. Especially as my data is small, quantitative analysis based on the frequencies, for example, did not seem suitable or applicable. The methods of this study exclude, furthermore,

visual analysis as the main purpose of the study is to examine the linguistic methods of constructing meaning.

The research questions of the study are:

- What kind of identity is constructed to the Afghan women in the articles in relation to the arising Western identity, the power relations and the development policy objectives represented by the magazines?
- What kind of discourses can be identified in representing Afghan women?

4. Analysis of the articles

The articles “The everyday battle” and “Beyond the burqa” are analysed in this section focusing on the identity construction in relation to the arising power relations and development policy views. To highlight the differences, the articles are first considered individually and then a comparison of the practices of representation and further analysis is made in section 4.3.

4.1. “The everyday battle”

“The everyday battle”, written by Glyn Strong in the issue 44 of the *Developments*, promotes the successful development outcomes funded by the international community in Afghanistan by describing some of the means and activities that are taking place in Afghanistan in order to bring change for Afghan women. The issue 44 of *Developments*, published by the UK Department for International Development, was published in December 2008 with the theme “Stories in Development” meaning that all the articles cover ongoing development initiatives and follow the progress of Millennium Development Goals. Though the magazine informs that “The views expressed do not necessarily reflect official policies”, I argue that this particular issue and article reflect the official policies as focus is on the development cooperation outcomes. Therefore, the fact that the magazine focuses on the development initiatives funded by the UK government, explains some of the discursive practices around the text: the text is produced to inform and to promote the development activities that the UK government is taking part in. The magazine is free for UK citizens and also available on the internet, so the information has to be, furthermore, accessible to the general audience. Moreover, the purpose is to convince the reader that the aid and funding (paid indirectly by tax payers) is, in fact, effective especially as the article mentions and acknowledges

voices of counterclaims. The article, then, discusses development in Afghanistan with a particular view point that reflects in the identity of the Afghan women.

4.1.1. “Inspirational women”

The identity of Afghan women is constructed in the article by demonstrating the importance of the funding provided by the international community in the process of development. “The everyday battle” focuses on women’s initiatives, such as small-business activities, education for midwifery and garden activities that have been funded by various aid organisations and non-governmental organisations working in Afghanistan. The article is framed in the conflict between genders and classes highlighting the powerless position of women but also indicating the different actors and voices that participate in the conflict of Afghanistan. A comparison is made at the beginning of the article between ordinary women who are powerless victims of the circumstances and who do not benefit from the aid and the men with standing who make the decisions as well as gain the benefits of aid. However, the main body of the text aims to correct this opinion voiced by an Afghan MP by introducing individuals who do benefit from the aid and are able to provide for their families as well as change Afghanistan by helping to reduce pregnancy related deaths or taking part in the activities to bring electricity to Afghanistan. The article concentrates especially on few individuals; Fatima and Arifa from Kabul, who make their living with curtain making and embroidery; Victoria Parsa, who is the Head of Midwifery in CURE hospital; engineers Shafiq, Halima and Samiya, who are introduced as bringing Afghanistan sustainable electricity, and Najiba, who is an example of having a successful business at home with a kitchen garden and home workshop.

The identity of these Afghan women is twofold: on the one hand, each of the women in the article is described as ”making slow, significant progress” but, on the other hand, it is the funding provided by UK government which enables these women’s agency. While these women are described as active participants in making change and rebuilding Afghanistan at the grassroots level and not as victims of patriarchal society and veiling as Muslim women are mostly described in the media (Macdonald 2003: 167-173), the activities carried out by the women are not solely their own achievements, but made possible by international development cooperation and especially UK government. In fact, the activities of the women to make their own living are described as being enabled by different aid agencies and their funding. For instance, Najiba’s activities are described in the following way: “It [the kitchen garden] is also a thriving commercial enterprise that *owes its existence to* international aid and mentoring. – It is a breathtaking testament what *can be done with*

advice, *provision of* quality seed and cookery lessons.” (p. 31; my italics). In addition, the text illustrates how aid in the form of loans “*enabled* them [Fatima and Arifa] to make money from curtain making and embroidery. Loans of 10,000 then 15,000 AFS (£250 in all) *made it possible* for Fatima to open a shop, train and employ other women and enrol her son in English and computer classes.” (p. 29; my italics). Hence, the identity of these individuals as the change makers of their own lives and society is constructed at the same time as objects of official help.

However, the women are not described as passive victims, but their role in changing Afghanistan is admired as the success of the development policies. In fact, the women and their projects and ventures are praised and glorified in the text as these individuals are described as *ordinary* but *inspirational* who *save and transform lives*, bring *education, training*, work opportunities, electricity to women and children and also enhance the quality of life of their children and families. This discourse presents these *ordinary* women as saints, or altruistic mothers of the nation as opposite to men who “have defined Afghanistan together with war” and who “have included politicians, religious leaders, foreigners, and warlords.” (p. 29). This juxtaposition of men with big titles versus ordinary women emphasises in my opinion the significance of how these individuals live their lives and how their activities demonstrate the functioning of the women’s empowerment for the UK audience. In addition, the juxtaposition of rural and urban circumstances, for example “Women attending a residential midwifery course at – will take skills back to their remote villages that will save lives.” (p. 31) stresses the empathetic and glorifying tone. This highlights at the same time the success of the Afghan women introduced in the article, but also the success of international development cooperation, which legitimizes the operation in Afghanistan. As Mohanty, Macdonald and Fiske, for example, have argued, representation of the other thus involves simultaneously constructing self-representation. The overall picture of the women’s identity in the article is idealizing and a contrast to the dominant discursive practices representing Afghan women as victims.

Indeed, the oppressive traditional value system and patriarchal society that are usually associated with Afghanistan are not mentioned in the text at all. Furthermore, women are not described as dependent on the regulations set by their family or husband, on the gender relations on a more general scale nor on the society’s norms. On the contrary, women appear as independent decision makers and small business owners, who do, however, rely on aid given by the international community to organize their lives in the chaotic and embattled Afghanistan. The role of development cooperation is hence emphasised in discussing the achievements of these individual

women. Though women are not characterized in the article as victims, per se, they are discursively construed as objects of help. The image of these women as members of the Afghan society is, then, underprivileged; they gain opportunities in the embattled Afghanistan through international development cooperation. This representation validates the development cooperation in Afghanistan and reflects the official policies of the international community.

4.1.2. Identity formation in the light of the objectives of the magazine

The article presents Afghanistan with a women's empowerment discourse while constructing the legitimacy and efficiency of development cooperation in Afghanistan. The view on women and Afghanistan is presented through the perspective of an individual; hence giving a limited view of a complex situation. The reader receives pieces of information, but not a comprehensive view of the women's situation in Afghanistan or of the situation in Afghanistan in general. The omission to discuss the value systems or oppressive social structures, for instance, makes it difficult to situate the text in a broader context that is, however, framed with few sentences at the beginning of the article by describing what Afghanistan *still* is. Moreover, the article focuses on *ordinary* women, individuals that in the article represent the more underprivileged classes, omitting a wider perspective on women regardless of their social, economic or geographic background. These women and their activities are represented as indicators for effective development cooperation and change. Furthermore, the short factual information in the end of the article named "Changed for good" further validates the influence of international development and cooperation. Therefore, the aim of the text, as mentioned earlier, is to promote the development policies that the UK government is taking part in and to accentuate its successes.

As an official Development magazine funded and produced by the UK government, the view of development is positive and reinforcing although questioning voices are mentioned. The text is framed within the discourse of development and women's empowerment and overall the text has a positive tone implying that progress, development and change is happening. Though the nouns *progress* and *change* already carry connotations of positive outcomes, the positive tone in the text is furthermore created through auxiliary modal verbs such as *can*, *will*, and *may*. In addition, the overall tone is future oriented, and the adverb *still* is used as a contrasting element. In fact, the adverb *still* is used to indicate the realities of Afghanistan and hence reasons for development cooperation; "the country is *still* described as a failing or failed state. It is *still* a battleground on many fronts. --- Corruption is a fact of life and freedom of movement for women *still* a pipedream"

(p. 29, my italics). Furthermore, the lack of development is highlighted as for example Najiba “is *still* engaged in a daily battle for survival.” (p. 31, my italics). The word choices and practices of representation therefore validate the need for development cooperation in Afghanistan and assure, on the other hand, that change is happening.

These practices of representation form an identity of West as a model and helper in development cooperation concurrently with the representation of Afghan women and Afghanistan. While the identity of Western women is not described, per se, it is clear that concepts of freedom of movement, childbirth and housing, to start with, are presumed to have a different meaning for Western women. Furthermore, the prospects enabled by development cooperation like education, and acquiring skills such as language and computer skills are mentioned in the text, giving the impression that those are necessary skills for a better and modern life. Western identity, as noted by Manninen (2008), in the dominant discourses of development therefore appears to be connected with expertise and as the point of comparison.

4.2. “Beyond the Burqa”

Afghan writer Zuhra Bahman examines critically women’s position and the Western development cooperation activities in Afghanistan in the article “Beyond the Burqa” that was published in the November 2008 issue of the *New Internationalist*. As the article is published in an independent magazine and by an Afghan woman, the practices of representation differ to the *Developments*, and criticism is directed at both the Afghan society and the development cooperation performed by the international community. The article discusses the repressive practices of the Afghan society on women such as the burqa, underage marriage and segregation that the writer suggests originate from the “traditionally conservative Afghan society which pre-dates the Taliban” and the possibilities to transform the society. The focus of the article is on women from an Afghan perspective; information is given for the Western subscribers on how Afghan women arrange their lives to negotiate between tradition and modernity. However, the article also discusses Afghan society as incorporating male point of view and subjectivity.

4.2.1. “Freeing Afghan women from the burqa...”

Afghan women are in the article framed as victims of the traditional Afghan society run by men. Bahman discusses how women regardless of their age, marital status or standing “are managing the struggle between modernity and tradition.” She identifies burqa as the “symbol of traditionally conservative Afghan society which pre-dates the Taliban, in which women are viewed as men’s possessions, to be hidden from other men.” In addition, she mentions gender inequality, underage marriage and segregation as traditions that oppress women. In the article women are discussed mostly in a generic manner, with the noun ‘women’ modified, for example, by relative clauses: “women who are raped are imprisoned; women who try to escape the hardship are punished.” On the other hand, when individual women are named or mentioned, their stories exemplify the norms and suppressive institutions of the society that apply to all Afghan women. For example, Friba’s and Mursal’s stories highlight the negotiations that women undergo to gain the right to have education. Only in few exceptions individuals are named as illustrations of cases of positive outcomes, like “Wazhwa Frogh, who is challenging the practise of child marriages and child abuse at a grassroots level.”

The lack of power and voice of Afghan women in the society as a whole is apparent in the text. The syntactical choices communicate that women are affected by the actions of others and decisions are made on their behalf, as in “Karzai *has kept* his wife behind closed doors” (p. 12, my italics). When active voice is used women’s behaviour is described mostly as an exchange for something: “One prominent female parliamentarian and human rights activist *has decided to remain* in a bigamous and violent marriage *in exchange for* kudos--” (p. 12, my italics). Furthermore, though Bahman introduces many accounts that portray the constricted society, Afghan women are mostly not given voice (except for Shofoga, whose story is separate from the main article and not analysed). In contrast, their stories are filtered by the narration of Bahman through a mixture of indirect report and free indirect speech more often than through direct speech. For instance, Homaira’s story is narrated by Bahman and hence it is unclear whose opinions the reader hears: “When the search didn’t bear fruit, *Homaira requested* her parents and brothers *to allow her to go back* to her in-laws --- Leaving the house against her brothers’ wishes was *a big mistake*” (p. 11, my italics). On the other hand, male voices are heard through direct speech in the text, setting the rules and reflecting the structure of the society: “They [the speaker’s sisters] *can go* to university but they *can’t be* friends with men. When they get married they *can change, depending on* their husband” (p.12, my italics). Perhaps this choice enables Bahman to address the problems of the society and highlight the

double standards that women, including her, face from men in Afghanistan. Although Afghan women are represented through the contradictions of the society, they are not passive victims but the ways of rebelling and forcing change are discussed. However, negotiation is still the key word, outlining a male dominated society.

Afghan women in Bahman's article struggle in the traditional structures of the Afghan society. Their lives and goals are restricted by male leaders in general, but also by relatives, like a father who gives approval for her daughter's education if she wears the burqa, or a brother who does not want her sisters to be friends with men. Male perspective and reasoning have considerable room in the article, perhaps to allow Bahman (p.12) contest it:

Perhaps it is not the personal wish of Zabi or Mr Karzai to keep their female relatives segregated, but they and millions of ordinary Afghan men feel compelled to follow Afghan tradition, which provides them with a collective security but leaves little room for personal opinions, freedoms and rights.

Age or class of women in Bahman's article do not influence the situation, but the generation relations are evident: "Women usually lose out in the negotiations, while older men, the representatives of conservative traditional society, have the upper hand – which they use to their advantage." (p. 13). Similarly, she illustrates how local governing institutions such as jirga and shuras are "largely democratic, but old and male". In addition, she points out that "Some officials use their office to impose traditional values." In other words, Bahman describes the Afghan society to be under male leadership and while there might be tensions between men, women regardless of their social position have to abide the rules set by men.

4.2.2. New Internationalist and critical voices: Afghanistan and the West

The relationship between Afghanistan and the international community in relation to the women's positions and rights is discussed in the article and a rather ignorant and demonizing identity is formed on the West. Bahman represents the West by contesting the Western views on Afghanistan and development cooperation. To begin with, she mentions that "During the Taliban era, many in the *liberal world* saw the burqa as the symbol of Taliban era" (p.11, my italics). However, she continues that still today, even when the Taliban does not rule Afghanistan, "burqa remains firmly on the heads of all sorts of Afghan women. – Because the burqa is a symbol of traditionally conservative Afghan society which pre-dates the Taliban, in which women are viewed as men's possessions, to be kept hidden from other men." Furthermore, she claims that "Most people who, to an *untrained* Western eye, appear liberated and educated may have had to choose a severe injustice

in order to gain and practise the freedom that we see.” (p.13, my italics). She hence aims to correct the wrong perceptions that exist in the Western world about Afghanistan. Although the writer is keen to reform Afghanistan, it is apparent that in her opinion it should not be done in the Western ways (p.12):

Although Western NGOs are working to strengthen the central justice system, its institutions are ill-equipped and often inaccessible to those who need it. --- It is futile to demonize the traditional system and expect people to subscribe to an alternative that is unknown to them.

In addition to these failings, moral questions concerning stimulants are mentioned: “The urban centres of Afghanistan now have huge expatriate communities where prostitution, alcoholism and drugs are rife.” The Western identity, though embodying positive characteristics in terms of freedoms and human and women’s rights, appears as negative in relation to development interventions in Afghanistan due to shortcomings of knowledge. In this perspective, the hegemony of the West in development cooperation as developed and omniscient is questioned.

However, the writer criticises the *traditional* and *conservative* Afghan society as well as the *liberal* West and suggests that change and development should be introduced according to the terms of the society and not imposed from outside. Her view towards international development and cooperation is negative and represented as flawed and ignorant of the needs of Afghanistan. Furthermore, change in this article is not self-evident and almost unlikely to happen if it is forced by outsiders: “The international community, too, must recognize that Afghanistan’s traditional systems have survived for hundreds of years and they cannot suddenly be swapped for western ones.” In contrast, Bahman suggests that change can be reached through working with the existing traditions and changing them *slowly* and *gradually*. Change, then, constitutes of abandoning the traditional customs and values and for this reason it is not seen as self-evident or straightforward.

4.3. Comparison and further discussion

The two articles present a very different view of the situation in Afghanistan and, therefore, of women's position and identity. Whereas "The everyday battle" focuses on individuals whose lives are improving with the help of international development agencies and funding, "Beyond the burqa" focuses on the structures of the society that restrict women's freedom and seeks solutions from inside the Afghanistan. The framing of the articles is, furthermore, different. While both articles characterize Afghanistan through war, male leadership and male privilege, "Beyond the burqa" discusses the situation in Afghanistan with a critical and more comprehensive view. In fact, "The everyday battle" mostly overlooks the negative issues associated with Afghanistan and deliberately focuses on the successes of individuals and development cooperation. However, in both articles, it is clear that women and politics do not concur. Consequently, the lexicon of war including verbs such as *to struggle*, *rebel*, *fight*, and *survive* is employed in both articles to illustrate that women do not endorse the situation in Afghanistan passively. Furthermore, this vocabulary highlights the difficulties that the women face everyday. The constructed reality that appears from the articles is, however, not coherent, but rather seem like two different depictions reflecting the writers' and the magazines objectives.

Women's identity in the articles is constructed based on possibilities and restrictions set by the society, but also in relation to the development cooperation. The women in "The everyday battle" are represented as examples of success stories of international aid in embattled Afghanistan in a similar way as in the discourse of change identified in the study of Manninen (2008: 47-49). Their employment and education opportunities are enabled by development cooperation and they are portrayed as the grassroots level change makers of their own lives and Afghanistan. On the other hand, "Beyond the burqa" describes women who have access to education and labour market, but appear as victims due to the oppressive structures of Afghan society. Though these women are active participants of the society, their lives are regulated by a set of strict norms in relation to, for example, dress code and social life. These aspects are not discussed in the other article except for the non-existent "freedom of movement". The identified problems are, then, very different. "Beyond the burqa" discusses structures that are deep inside the society's traditions, whereas "The everyday battle" concentrates on the daily living conditions. Moreover, the reasons for women's situations are not congruent; the restrictions for women are explained with the ongoing war and the past Taliban regime in "The everyday battle", not as socially constructed as in "Beyond the burqa".

The above mentioned differences illustrate that the discursive practices behind the choices of representation are connected to the development objectives supported by the magazines and writers. “The everyday battle” portrays the relationship between the actors i.e. the international community with development cooperation and Afghan women as positive and necessary, whereas “Beyond the burqa” as negative and intrusive. Consequently, these development objectives differ reflecting the ideology and objectives of the magazines. The development policy view seems to be structural in “The everyday battle” highlighting technical assistance for governance and participatory projects. Moreover, the international community is seen as holding the superior position in development cooperation in “The everyday battle” and bringing possibilities for Afghan women that the Afghan society could not provide for these women due to the ongoing war and male privilege. As the voice of the UK Government’s Department for International Development, *Developments* is, then, promoting and legitimizing the actions that it is taking part in. In fact, the article is successful in showing that development agencies and funding make a difference – at least in the lives of these fortunate individuals. In contrast, “Beyond the burqa” does not consider development cooperation led by international community successful in bringing change to Afghanistan nor perceives the past Taliban regime as the reason for women’s poor position in the society. Moreover, the focus is not on reaching the Millennium Development Goals as in “The everyday battle” but on reforming the social structures oppressing and threatening women. Written from an Afghan point of view, “Beyond the burqa” does not identify development cooperation in the existing form to bring the needed change to the structures of the society. Rather, the effectiveness of the aid provided by international community is criticised and Afghan society is presented as containing all the elements for change including knowledge, though universal ideals like human rights from the west are incorporated in the desired line. It seems, then, that *The New Internationalist*, as an independent magazine, voices criticism on issues that could not probably be published in the *Developments*. In fact, the article “Beyond the burqa” questions the hegemonic power structures connected to knowledge in development cooperation and the relation between Afghanistan and the West that are represented and constructed in “The everyday battle”.

The emerging practices of constructing Afghan women’s identity are related furthermore to the confrontation between the West and Afghanistan. It seems that the particular word choices and viewpoints construct distinct realities with different discourses. A prevailing discourse practice in “The everyday battle” is connected to the dualistic view of the world where the less developed countries are what the developed countries are not. Hence, similar discursive practices emerge that reflect the prevalent knowledge patterns and sociocultural practices discussed by Manninen (2008).

That is, Afghan women in the article are represented in relation to the development cooperation and as indicators of change. Furthermore, as noted by Manninen, the dominant discourse constructs and maintains the representation of women as oppressed and as passive objects of help and models of development. In addition, the existing power relations within development cooperation are not questioned, but are actually maintained. In contrast, “Beyond the burqa” illustrates a reverse discourse from Afghan point of view that questions the current power relation between Afghanistan and the international community. The article questions the authority and the knowledge of international community and represents development cooperation as ineffective and instrumental. Furthermore, the article questions the prevailing development policies in Afghanistan by suggesting a comprehensive reformation of the society using its own traditions. Nevertheless, a similar discourse of constructing ‘us’ and ‘them’ is evident in both articles. Both articles are constructed on the confrontation between East and West – reflecting the powerful ideologies on both sides. In conclusion, the analysis of the practices of representation in this study, then, highlights some of the existing cultural values and the assumptions connected with particular groups and development cooperation.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on questions dealing with representation of Afghan women in relation to power relations, development objectives and change in Afghanistan. It was expected that Afghan women's identity is constructed in relation to western identity as victims and powerless human beings in the articles similarly to the findings of the earlier studies. Furthermore, Western expertise in development cooperation was assumed to be found. The aim of this study was to examine the discursive practices in Afghan women's representation and to consider the motives behind linguistic choices using critical discourse analysis as the method to discuss production of certain kind of knowledge of Afghanistan.

In the articles, Afghan women's identity was built, on the one hand, on Millennium Development Goals and women's empowerment and on the social structures limiting women's independence and rights, on the other hand. While women were discussed as victims of embattled and male lead society, in both articles women were still active participants, combating the powerless position with different strategies with or without Western help. Furthermore, the articles and the identity of women were framed in the relation between Afghanistan and the international community. The ideologies and objectives of the magazines had a noticeable impact on the representation of Afghan woman and development cooperation. As the official magazine of the UK Government's Department for International Development, *Developments* has a different focus than an independent magazine like *New Internationalist* that can voice differing opinions. However, though the starting points of the articles were different, in both articles an 'us' – 'them' relationship seems to occur. "The everyday battle" constructs a superior position to the international community that legitimizes the development cooperation in the article, where as in "Beyond the burqa" this status is questioned.

This study seems to indicate that it is possible to see connections between linguistic choices and the construction of meaning, though as a limited study with a small data making generalisations is difficult. It would be, then, interesting to examine a wider selection of texts to enable broader generalisations. Furthermore, a broader examination of Afghanistan in the media could provide an interesting insight into the politics surrounding the topic. In addition, visual analysis and development theory could be applied for a more comprehensive analysis.

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