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Starting from Below Fieldwork, Gender and Imperialism Now¹

I did not have the pleasure of being taught by Audrey Richards. However, when I first arrived in Britain in 1964 to study anthropology at SOAS², I came from the States as a Junior Year Abroad Student in African Studies. My focus was on East Africa. My dream then was to do fieldwork with the Chagga people, who cash-cropped coffee on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. I read Audrey Richards' work with great attention.

Her classic study from 1939, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, was something like a Bible for me, for here was a woman anthropologist who did extended and meticulous fieldwork in Africa on subjects – land tenure and household economy – which interested me greatly. I remember too how clearly she wrote, and the deep humanism she conveyed in her descriptions of the everyday lives of the Bemba.

Ideas are like a river, fed by many tributaries; scholars are nourished by many mentors. Pat Caplan returned from fieldwork on Mafia Island off the Tanzanian coast at the end of my first year at SOAS. I was frankly in awe of her. She was lovely and fierce, independent and utterly committed to her work. Pat gave the Richards Lecture in 1988. Rereading *Engendering Knowledge* (1992), her wise and witty text, I found the impetus for my talk today.

I will come later to issues of gender and imperialism in the Middle East. But my starting point is about ethnography, and the method of participant-observation, to which Audrey Richards' work is such an eloquent testimony. Pat's lecture was also about feminist anthropology. She argued that feminist anthropology "denies the split between epistemology and politics"; she noted:

"An important aim of feminist scholarship has been to break down boundaries – between one discipline and another, between domestic and public, between theory and practice, between expert and non-expert – for if the personal *is* the political, then much that was previously considered irrelevant is now seen to be highly relevant." (Caplan 1992: 73)

Let me begin with a brief discussion of the fundamental contradiction between conservative politics and our main method of study, participant-observation. It is a contradiction that frames the limits of anthropological studies today, as it has in the past.

The method of participant-observation systematically focuses on the everyday, and otherwise unheard, or muted, voices. Because anthropologists pay attention to the lives of ordinary people, they see society from below. From there, power and privilege stand out in sharp relief. This

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creates the potential to analyse social formations of inequality, and a disciplinary disposition to dissent. This is the social anthropologist's strength.

But anthropology from below only works if it also includes looking up. And ethnographies only become gripping, and relevant to the anthropologist's own life, when they include a commitment to make sense of ethnographic data in terms of explicit, coherent theories about regional and national elites, and their relation to all the other players in the global political economy (Lindisfarne 2000a; Nader 1969). And this is where things quickly begin to get scary. For two reasons – because making connections up seems both too ambitious, and too political. I don't think it is too ambitious. But I do think it requires a commitment to work with what Paul Farmer has called "willed interdisciplinarity" (1999), by which he means thinking and reading widely outside anthropology. Without such an intellectual commitment, I suggest that the relation between imperialism, ethnography and theory is as problematic today as ever it was in the middle of the 20th century.

And then there are the political questions. Anthropologist participant-observers relate to other people as more or less equals. But studying up means holding on to this personal commitment, and the premise of equality, in other situations, and across the board. Yet, as we all know, our disposition to dissent is limited by our class allegiances, and by the complex processes of censorship and self-censorship that are part of academic life. So anthropological studies are often muddled, and always in danger of being boring and politically safe.

Others, of course, have also made these same points. More than a decade ago Talal Asad recommended that anthropologists develop an anthropology of Western imperial hegemony, with the aim of describing and theorizing:

“[...] the radically altered form and terrain of conflict inaugurated by [Western imperial power] – the new political languages, new power, new social groups, new desires and fears, new subjectivities.” (1991: 323; cf. di Leonardo 1998; Gledhill 1994)

And David Price has set out the personal issues in his excellent guest editorial in *Anthropology Today* on Bush's War on Terrorism. Echoing David Aberle, Price challenges anthropologists to recognize that there is no such thing as an apolitical course of action, and that inaction is nothing more than political action which supports prevailing military policies (2002: 5).

I know that most anthropologists are unlikely saints or revolutionaries. But I do have a simple, important, suggestion. In the early 1970s, as the women's movement began to have an effect on anthropology, all of us learned to ask, systematically and repeatedly, what happens in our jobs, and in our ethnographies, and to our theories when we raise questions about women and gender. When we asked such questions, we found that the answers were invariably exciting, and revealing of earlier biases. And nowadays we know that the work of an anthropologist, male or female, who does not practise this feminist discipline is frankly not worth the time of day.

I am sure that each of you here has thought long and hard about American foreign policy, at least once a day during this past year. I suggest that it is now time to ask, systematically and repeatedly, about American imperialism, and its relation to our jobs, and our ethnographies and our theories. And, if we go one step further, and ask questions about gender and American imperialism, we double our explanatory power, and the impetus for political action. In doing so,

we make the personal political big time, and our anthropology becomes relevant to the world in which we live.

Anthropology of the Middle East

In the anthropology of the Middle East, the connections between imperialism and gender are obvious – so obvious that the real puzzle is why many prominent anthropologists have often failed to connect the dots. But to do so they would have to break a powerful taboo. They would have to name American imperialism and include its effects in their analyses.

Let me clarify what I mean by the shorthand “American imperialism”. I am referring to the global economic and political system that serves the interests of members of an international ruling class. It is a system dominated by American and other corporate businesses and finance houses. It is legitimized by government institutions of the rich countries of the North, and underwritten by the force of the American military machine.

The US prefers economic domination by proxy. If a national ruling elite is sympathetic to US interests, and prepared to use force in the exploitation of their fellow citizens, and the expropriation of national resources, they receive financial and military aid from the US, from Western banks and from the IMF. If, however, there is popular opposition to the national elite and things threaten to get out of control, or the local ruler won't hand over the oil, or begins to talk about independence, then the US government starts talk about freedom and democracy, and standing up to tyrants. And if the US can't force regime changes by covert means, they will try to do so by sheer military power, and begin to wheel out the B-52s. The US has bombed more than 20 countries since 1945, some of them for over a decade. There are American bases in over 100 countries today. This, of course, doesn't mean that things are simple. They are not. American imperial relations with client states are immensely complicated, as we all know from what is going on with Blair, Sharon and Saddam Hussain, and in Afghanistan and Turkey. But I do believe there is absolutely no one outside Euro-America who is not fully aware of the contours of American imperialism, and willing to talk about it, whether they support American imperialism or not.

There are also plenty of people within Euro-America who do talk about American imperialism. Some of these are people of the left. Some are liberals. Some subscribe outright to the Madeleine Albright school of political philosophy. What I am saying is that academics are among the people most affected by the taboo, and among these are many academic anthropologists.

It is hard for conservative anthropologists to come right out, as Madeline Albright did, and say, of the 500,000 child deaths caused by the sanctions on Iraq, that “Sometimes there is a price that has to be paid” (Neale 2002: 166).

This means that writing by conservative anthropologists is evasive on questions of history and political economy. Such writing often lacks causal connections of the kind that are perfectly familiar to journalists, generals and ordinary people.

The writing of liberal anthropologists also lacks such connections. Though some do contextualize their ethnographies in terms of a particular state and its problems, typically they do not take their

analyses further. And when challenged to make a link with imperialism, their replies are likely to be dismissive: “Of course, everybody takes American imperialism as given. That’s old hat.” Yet American imperialism remains remarkably absent from their writing and teaching, which is prone to compartmentalization, non sequiturs, internal contradiction and sheer mystifying confusion.

Clarity in anthropological writing on the Middle East has come consistently from scholars of the left (see e.g. Alexander 2001; Ali 2002). Writing from the left, Pierre Bourdieu’s case is particularly instructive. Bourdieu’s first fieldwork was in Algeria where he was deeply politicized by the Algerian war. His early writing on Algeria is a model of cogent description (see for instance, 1958/1962; see also Johnson 2002; Wolfreys 2002). Yet, when his work lost political urgency, and was directed towards his middle-class colleagues, his writing style became abstruse and pretentious. A key to this contrast lies in a speech to demonstrators at the Public Sector Strike in Paris in 1995. The speech is in dense academic-speak. Then Bourdieu pauses, catches himself, remembers his audience, apologizes and simply and clearly declares his solidarity with those who are fighting to change society (1998). There is no mistaking the source of his clarity. It comes from his personal connection, and commitment, to the interests and politics of ordinary people.

I turn now to two detailed examples. My first concerns the gendering of the Afghan War. The second is about Islamism and veiling in Turkey. My aim is to show that we can learn far more about our own lives, as well as the lives of others, by daring to dissent: by adopting a perspective from below – by linking fieldwork loyalties and anthropological insights to an informed account of gender and American imperialism.

Photos of women in *burkas*, their faces hidden behind embroidered lace grilles, their bodies enveloped in gathered rayon cloth, have been a striking feature of US propaganda in the most recent Afghan War. The liberation of these women has been used as justification for the bombing of Afghanistan and the removal of the Taliban regime from power. These images, and the rhetorics of veiling used by the US and UK rulers, are both powerful and confusing.

The most important general question raised by the women’s dress is – why are dominant political practices so highly gendered? I shall return to this question later. But to make sense of what is going on, there are more general issues to consider first.

Contradictory attributions of “human nature” are elaborated wherever social hierarchies prevail. This is because ranked divisions between human beings are always based on lies which serve the interests of some people and harm others. Gender differences are among such attributions of “human nature”. Class and racialized differences are others. In any particular historical period, there are congruences between these different ways of describing inequality. The present dominant configuration of human nature has an ancient history, at least as ancient as the Mesopotamian myth of Gilgamesh. The configuration is deeply embedded in all three of the Middle Eastern monotheisms, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And it is embedded in their secular alternatives, and in old imperialisms and the resistance movements they fostered. Though we now associate this gendered discourse with orientalism (Said 1978), with Western origins in the Enlightenment, it is important that similar ideas about human nature have a long, independent history in Afghanistan and the rest of the Middle East.

In its present dominant incarnation, orientalism works because it creates and sustains hierarchies *in First and Third Worlds alike*. That is why it has been such a powerful way of legitimizing the

spread of first mercantile, and then industrial and corporate capitalism. And, as many scholars have pointed out, orientalist discourses became particularly highly gendered with the emergence of the professional middle classes in the 19th century, and the related notion of “family values” in the 20th (see, for instance, Enloe 1989, 1993; McClintock 1995; Scanlon 1995).

I find it useful to think of the capitalist/orientalist paradigm as a set of stereotyped dichotomies that underpin ranked differences. Men and maleness are associated with the West, with science, modernity and civilization, with Christianity, whiteness, the upper classes, and with able-bodied, heterosexual adults. By contrast, women and femininity are associated with the East, with superstition, tradition and primitiveness, with Islam and other non-Christian religions, with blackness, the working classes, and the weak and disabled, and with homosexuality and childhood.

Put this way, the dominant paradigm seems nonsensical. However, when used piecemeal – *as it always is* – it can simplify and naturalize inequality in a series of endlessly variable formulations. For example, relations between owners and working class people in one setting are often expressed in terms that are strikingly similar to the relation between whites and blacks in others. Or, class and race may be conflated and gendered, as when the citizens of Afghanistan have been repeatedly described as a primitive, tribal people whose barbarism is evident in their oppression of women.

Descriptively, the capitalist/orientalist paradigm naturalizes inequality. And, it is used with the same facility by the Saudi ruling class as by the American elite. Analytically, the paradigm raises questions about the links between different systems of domination (such as those based on patriarchy, Islamism, race or social class) *and* structural inequalities (such as those affecting veiled women, or the sectarian and ethnic fighters in Afghanistan). And this linkage makes clear the extent to which inequality of all kinds (whether domestic, class-based or ethnic) is underwritten by force and violence.

In the capitalist/orientalist paradigm, the relation between men and women is premised on two fundamental lies. First, men can and must protect women (and by extension the whole society) from external social evil. Second, men can and must protect society from the weakness and evil that emanates naturally from women. It follows from the logic of the paradigm that men who fail in these respects are feminized. They become like women, as do workers, blacks, gays and children. They become the Taliban soldier whose castration was the main photograph on the front of the *Mirror* in November (14/11/01: 1). They become the front page *Mirror* headline, “Impotent”, over a huge photo of Colin Powell after his mission to Sharon in April (13/4/02: 1).

Yet, the logic of the paradigm can be turned on its head to resist oppression. Late in his life, a reporter asked Gandhi what he thought of Western civilization. “Western civilization?”, Gandhi replied, “Yes, that would be a terribly good idea.” Bashir Asad of Syria also reversed the logic of the dominant paradigm to embarrass Blair in a live press conference in Damascus in November (*Guardian*, 1/11/01: 1). Asad challenged the rhetoric of terrorism by asking Blair how the Palestinian freedom fighters differed from the French resistance and Charles de Gaulle’s Free French Army. Blair was not expecting the comparison and had no answer.

Gender relations in the Middle East, and the politics of veiling, depend on this same logic and also have both emancipatory and oppressive effects. And gender politics has been part of a much

bigger political struggle, the struggle between socialists and conservatives, throughout the 20th century. Afghans and Turks are no longer exotic others when we share the historical frame.

Early in the century, socialists in the Middle East, as in Europe, sought greater equality of opportunity, and equality of outcome, for everyone. Women's emancipation was part of a wider aim to remove class and race discrimination as well. For conservatives, women's emancipation remained tied to the other forms of gender, class and racialized discrimination that are basic to the capitalist system.

Religion didn't really come into it. In the Middle East, there were Muslims, Christians and Jews who were socialists and communists. Others of each religious background were colonial loyalists, and yet others were fervent right-wing nationalists.

However, the family household as an economic unit has been a crucial variable in this struggle between socialists and conservatives.

Among peasants, and the self-employed petty bourgeoisie, women's work is intrinsically tied to household units of production. The owning class has a different kind of investment in the family. For them, access to, and the control of, property is managed through the family and inheritance. In none of these cases does women's education or emancipation jeopardize a social hierarchy based on unequal property relations.

But among working-class people the situation is different. Among wageearners, individual men and women's education and work can be detached from family and household commitments. This poses a deep threat to property owners. They keep this threat at bay by subscribing to a system of "family values", with its attendant stigmas: against the so-called "dysfunctional families" of single, working mothers, and against the health, welfare and nursery provisions that would help working-class people.

By understanding the place of the family in the capitalist system it becomes easier to make sense of the state-sponsored dress reforms that were imposed by Atatürk in Turkey, Reza Shah in Iran and King Amanullah in Afghanistan (see Baker 1997; Norton 1997).

These leaders were all capitalist modernizers. Their dress reforms aimed to end women's veiling and put men in trousers. Atatürk, Reza Shah and Amanullah intended to homogenize regional differences and prepare people for capitalist development from which the national ruling class would benefit disproportionately. So these rulers were not opposed to the emancipation and education of women per se. But like their counterparts in Euro-America, they were frightened of workers' power, so they systematically sought to limit workers' rights and unionization. They also committed themselves to the notion of "family values" because gender inequality is such a good way of keeping class and other hierarchies in place.

During the 20th century, genuine socialist and communist movements from below became bureaucratic, brutal and authoritarian. They became Stalinist, or Maoist, parties wanting to rule from the top down. As in China and the Soviet Union, the rhetoric of socialism thinly disguised a centralized, hierarchical form of state capitalism.

In the Middle East, as elsewhere in the Third World, egalitarian nationalist movements filled the place of revolutionary communism. But many of the nationalist leaders also turned to forms of

top-down rule. Atatürk's right-wing nationalism borrowed heavily from the state capitalist model. And as in North Vietnam, Nasser's nationalism and state capitalist regime in Egypt is an example from the left. In such states, workers' rights and class politics from below were systematically suppressed. In this process, class more or less disappeared as an idiom for challenging capitalist, or state capitalist, hierarchies.

Then, as the century progressed, movements for national independence, and the Civil Rights movement in the US, made it increasingly difficult for conservatives to use racism blatantly to justify inequality. Ethnicity, and multiculturalism, became increasingly prominent as substitutes for racism. And discourses on "family values" altered accordingly: the families of the working poor were divided up and given ethnic labels. In Britain, Afro-Caribbean families, and particularly men, have different problems from those of so-called "traditional" Pakistani families. The important thing is they all have "problems", and these problems are highly gendered.

So class and racialized discourses became less marked, though ethnicity was made to do the job pretty well. Yet because conservatives themselves use families to sustain their privilege, sexism remained as a central way of construing inequality.

Dialectically, the dominant forms of sexism and the rhetorics of family values invite highly gendered responses. So oppositional movements are also highly gendered. Such is the case with political Islam which began to fill the void previously occupied by socialism and nationalism in the political spectrum.

Many ordinary Muslims have come to understand new veiling practices as a form of protest against repressive national governments, Euro-American imperialism and corporate capitalism. But the oppositional use of a rhetoric of veiling is always double-edged. Ordinary men may claim rights for themselves while oppressing their female co-religionists. Muslim and Islamist rulers (the Saudi ruling family, the Ayatollahs in Iran, and the Taliban), without being explicitly racist, and without having to acknowledge the class bases of inequality, may use veiling as a metaphor to support their own power, while oppressing the people they rule. Equally, Islamists can naturalize sexism, and veiling, as a metaphor for resistance, without acknowledging that non-sexist, secular, socialist alternatives might also serve such oppositional ends.

Gendering the Afghan War

Against this background, how has the Afghan War been gendered? (For background, see Albert and Shalom 2001; Ali 2002; Cooley 1999; Khattak 2002; Lindisfarne 2002; Neale 2001; Rashid 2000; R. Tapper 1983; cf. Banerjee 2000.)

The British created the nation state of Aghanistan as a buffer between their empire and that of the Russians. In this process, they fought three Afghan wars in which they were opposed by people united by the rallying cry of Islam. By the 1950s and 1960s, the dynamics of imperialism had changed. In response to pressure from below (there were elected communist representatives in the Afghan parliament in 1951), King Zahir Shah, and the ruling class of feudal landlords, sought some modernizing reforms with the help of US and Soviet aid.

Afghan development projects of this period included the emancipation and education of women. But they did not address “modern” forms of sexism – family values, glass ceilings or how consumerism is gendered – any more than such issues are addressed by conservative modernizers in the First World. Nor, of course, was the Afghan ruling class, nor their aid advisers, interested in forgoing their own class privileges. To this end they actively stifled industrial development in favour of cash-cropping and other kinds of agrarian change. And they emphasized ethnic and sectarian differences to create division among Afghan peasants and workers.

Yet in the early 1970s, among the people I knew best (N. Tapper 1991) – rural Pashtuns like those who later supported the Taliban – their Islam was a tolerant faith, and largely taken for granted. Women, and men, covered their heads out of respect for God. They laughed a bit at the few middle-class townswomen who wore the *burka*, noting that the *burka* was a pretension they did not need. They accepted the great social distance between themselves and the schoolgirls in the local town, and those middleclass women, in Kabul and other cities, who wore western-style clothes. They bore them no grudge.

Among these rural Pashtun peasants there was a gendered division of labour. But there was no divorce, in spite of what was permitted under Islamic law. Men and women of a household worked together for the whole of their lives to protect their families from destitution. And they were kind and generous parents, offering a model of child-rearing which Richard Tapper and I later tried to emulate as parents in Britain.

Then, in 1971–2 there was drought and a famine, like the one Afghanistan is experiencing now. The crisis revealed the deep corruption of the Afghan rulers. In 1973 the king was toppled, and in 1978 there was a communist coup.

The communists made women’s emancipation and education, as well as land reform, central planks of their political programme. They had the support of many middle-class Afghans, but failed to win enough support in the rural areas. Partly this was because the communists underestimated the strength of the feudal opposition who called on Islamism and Islamic family values to rally the peasants. It was also because the communists subscribed to an undemocratic model of top-down revolution drawn from the Soviet Union. This was a model that invited the abuse of power.

As they began to lose control of the country, the communists used force to impose their rule. In this process the emancipatory ideals they proclaimed became utterly contaminated by their brutality. This meant that the cause of land reform and women’s rights, and the whole egalitarian project, was lost. It also left Islamism as the most effective way to unite the motley resistance parties after the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979.

Eight years of war against the Soviets, and a decade of civil war, followed. The infrastructure of the country was utterly destroyed, some 5 million people became refugees, and less than half of Kabul had been cleared of landmines before the Americans began bombing the capital in October 2001.

Through these tragic years, Islamists dominated the guerrilla war and also effectively controlled the refugee camps in Pakistan. Veiling and other practices associated with Islamic family values became a way of creating an oppositional Muslim identity and supporting resistance to the Soviet army. Curtailing women’s freedoms, and their right to middle-class work, was a way of

masculinizing and militarizing power. In practice, however, only the warlords and their lieutenants were actually empowered by enforcing the laws against women. Most men were terrified, and left helpless to protect their families against the brutalities of these tyrants. Meanwhile the new Islamism encouraged women to accept and admire their husbands and sons as brave warriors and willing martyrs, while shouldering the care of children and men disabled by war. For Afghans, khakhi, as much as the *burka*, had become the new black (Pyne 2001).

The incidence of rape is a measure of how gender relations changed over these 20 years. In the eight years following the Russian invasion, when millions of Afghans fled to refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran, there were almost no reports of rape by either the Afghans or the Russians (Lindisfarne 1997). This was not because the rape of women in war was unknown to the Afghans, nor was it unknown to the Russians. Rather, it was army commanders on both sides who did not allow it to happen.

Then, during the ten years of the following civil war, a real change in gender relations occurred. For a decade, conservative *mujahedeen* (the Northern Alliance Islamists and the Taliban) systematically used the control of women as a way to claim legitimacy for themselves and to discredit others, and to terrify a population already brutalized by poverty and war. By the end of that decade, dominant styles of masculinity were so deformed that military rape became a reality, and a source of great fear, just as it had been in Vietnam and in the Yugoslav war. Rape became a way of demarcating the warring groups. Rape shamed and feminized opponents, and it created terrible divisions among Afghan peasants and workers who had previously managed to get along together reasonably well. And along with rape came massacres and ethnic cleansing.

Veiling, and the control of women, also served the leaders of the resistance parties (the Northern Alliance and the Taliban) in other, contradictory ways. These parties were funded by the USA, and by the dictatorships of Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. By inventing increasingly vicious laws targeting women in the name of Islam, the resistance parties could pretend that they were purer, or more holy, than their corrupt foreign sponsors. It was a way of distancing themselves from their sponsors' sleaze and political ambitions. It also distracted attention from the fact that virtually all the work of government and public service was in fact done by aid agencies that were also funded by the US, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Conversely, for the foreign sponsors, support for fundamentalist versions of Islam served their various national and imperial interests. Thus, in spite of the American government's habitual Islamophobia, US rulers were prepared to ignore the oppression of women by Afghan Islamists and, after 1994, by their creatures, the Taliban, just as they do for their allies, the Saudi ruling family. Oil politics is the key in the Saudi case. In Afghanistan, the US government sought Soviet expulsion from the country by proxy. And in that war, and in the civil war that followed, they benefited politically and financially from the arms trade and drugs, and the possibility of controlling the vast gas and oil reserves in Central Asia.

In varying degrees, US interests overlapped with those of the regimes in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan. These latter states also benefited directly from their support of political Islam abroad. It was a policy that damped down internal dissent while legitimizing imperial projects, such as Iran's ambitions in Central Asia, and the Saudi rulers' interest in funding Sunni Islamism across the globe.

Others too had an interest in tolerating the *mujahedeen* oppression of women. Many aid agencies could only function if they accepted the strictures on women's freedom. To make this step more comfortable for themselves, they reified the new kind of gendered inequality and violence as something basic or "natural" to "Afghan culture", and "Afghan Islam". For over 20 years, liberal aid agencies in the refugee camps and in Afghanistan have deemed "Afghan culture" and "Afghan Islam" sacrosanct areas where they should not interfere. It is notable that foreign aid agencies are now pleading for foreign troops in Afghanistan. Without such troops the aid workers don't feel safe. Yet is this surprising, when most aid agencies are not neutral, but are funded by the invading powers? By comparison, aid workers in Palestine are safe because Palestinians know the aid workers who come are on their side. It is also notable that much NGO effort in Afghanistan is now directed towards women, as if helping women is sufficient to salve a liberal conscience.

"Afghan culture" was sacrosanct until the US turned against their clients, the Taliban, between 1996 and 1998. Only then did we begin to hear about Afghan women. Since then, the US and UK officials who have favoured the Afghan War have focused on veiled women, and ethnic and sectarian divisions, to underwrite stereotypes of Afghans as brutal, tribally organized natives.

In November, Laura Bush and Cherie Blair loudly lamented the plight of veiled Afghan women whose oppression no one can doubt (BBC Online News, 16/11/01). But their comments were massively loaded. Wealthy warmongers' wives were using the full weight of the capitalist/orientalist paradigm to justify an imperialist war against some of the poorest people on earth, by blaming the victims, who are both Afghan women and Afghan men.

In this newest version of the Great Imperial Game, Afghans have been portrayed as people too backward to understand democracy and sort out their own affairs. These stereotypes were used to justify the crushing of democratic aspirations – first by the US-backed Taliban, and then by the American military itself after it turned against its erstwhile Taliban allies. Now the Afghans have been landed with Hamid Karzai, the interim leader, an American puppet who was formerly an official of the UNOCAL company with interests in the oil and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Persian Gulf.

And since 11 September, there have been domestic consequences in Euro-America as well. The Afghan War has fuelled Islamophobia and has led to hate crimes against women and men and the incarceration of Muslims. In the United States in the first few months of the Afghan War, some 11,000 people were detained without due process of law, yet only four of these people seem to have any kind of link at all with terrorist organizations (Davis 2001). Such a draconian policy is an extraordinarily powerful way of dividing working-class Muslims from other workers, and for creating real fear of the price of dissent, domestically and abroad.

The rhetorics of veiling have proved a versatile political tool. Generalizing arguments often appear compelling because they suggest that the "veil", or "veiling" is a unitary phenomenon. Yet the power of the imagery of the veil lies in its vacuity: everything depends on who is describing veiling, for whom and to what end. In Afghanistan, the veiling rhetoric has been used by Islamist and other Muslims to signal loyalties and interests that are not particularly religious or sectarian in any sense. Yet others, in both Euro-America and the Middle East, have focused on the veil to identify and castigate the "fundamentalist" threat by contrasting the "repression of women" with their own women's "emancipation".

Islamism and Gender in Turkey

Let me pursue the theme of veiling but in another setting, this time in Turkey. The comparison is instructive. My argument here too rests on an understanding of how the capitalist/orientalist paradigm works. The historical frame is again the struggle between socialists and communists in the 20th century.

My Turkish case study is less dramatic and violent than the Afghan one. Indeed, at first sight, it may seem only tenuously connected to the Afghan tragedy, and rather closer to home – after all, the Turkish state is NATO’s “Muslim” ally, and the Turkish state is keen to join the European Union. Yet just because of its apparent familiarity, the Turkish case makes it easier to ask why gendered inequalities are crucial to class hierarchies in nation states, and to imperialism now.

There is currently an enormous debate about democracy, gender and Islam among the people in Turkey, across the Middle East and among Euro-American academics. The debate polarizes into two positions. To simplify, one position supports secular dictatorships like the Turkish military, Mubarak in Egypt, Arafat in Palestine and the Algerian state, on the grounds that they are modernizing and good for women. The other position supports Islamist (i.e. “Islamic fundamentalist”) movements, on the grounds that they are anti-imperialist and based among ordinary people.

I take a third position. I argue for democracy and women’s liberation, but I’m on the side of ordinary people, including Islamists, against the states and imperial system that oppress them. This is an important argument for many people who feel torn between dictators and Islamists.

In Turkey since the 1980s there has been much discussion about “veiling” and what is called in Turkey, as it is in France, “the headscarf question”. Much of what is said and written has a strongly classist character. Let me explain what I mean.

Under the Turkish dictator, Kemal Atatürk, a national Turkish identity became attached to a modernizing state based on a state capitalist economy. Since the 1950s, a democratic façade has partially disguised a military dictatorship that rules in favour of the urban bourgeoisie. From the beginning of the Turkish republic, an opposition between the labels “traditional” and “modern” has been the coded way of talking about class hierarchy. And, meanwhile, secularism has been treated as superior to both past styles of Muslim belief and practice and those of contemporary Islamists.

From the beginning, the Turkish army has been the embodiment and instrument of secular republicanism. For the last 55 years, Turkish army policy has been to secure and sustain the NATO alliance and US military funding. To do so, the army instigated coups in 1960, 1970 and 1980. They invaded Cyprus in 1974 and went to war against the Kurds of Turkey after 1991. And, in a situation reminiscent of Algeria, the Turkish army was also behind the so-called Velvet Coup in 1997 that forced the democratically elected Islamist party out of government. And if the war on Iraq goes ahead, staving off financial collapse seems to be the price the US will have to pay for Turkish military support. There is no secret about military ties between the Turkish state, the Turkish army and the United States (see Chomsky 1999).

Richard Tapper and I did extended fieldwork about practised Islam in Turkey in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Lindisfarne 2000b, 2001; R. Tapper 1991). Recently I was fortunate to return to Turkey for a year to teach anthropology at a university in Istanbul. There I heard both students and teachers comment sympathetically about young women who were determined both to wear a headscarf and study in a university – something which is presently illegal in Turkey. The sympathizers' support was often linked with a principled stance about human rights, with which I completely agree. But in any particular case, few were interested in the young woman's own understanding of her decision – which some of her liberal supporters actually deplored. And relations between the young woman and her teachers were fraught, and made nearly impossible, by the fact that the state has placed the burden of monitoring women's dress on the academics themselves.

What became clear was that, above all else, the young woman was making a political statement. The headscarf stood for a rejection of the prevailing ideas and presiding powers in Turkey. It was a statement that there are other and better values than those of the present Turkish state. And the headscarf said loudly, but without words, I would rather appear superstitious, traditional and working class, than look like the daughter of a general.

In the headscarf debate, class and gender issues are completely intertwined. However, the dominant position treats the headscarf as an argument between secularists and Islamists, and in terms of relations between women and men, while class issues drop out of sight. Yet the headscarves also act as class markers.

In Turkey many so-called "traditional" women, peasants and many working-class women wear headscarves, while so-called "modern" middle and ruling-class women do not. Now, through veiling, otherwise "modern" Islamist women have reopened questions of class.

Most Islamists in Turkey are from working-class backgrounds. The new versions of Islam promoted by the revivalist Islamist political parties – the Welfare and Reform Parties – are a class discourse that challenges bourgeois values. This is true even when the Islamist leaders use Islamism cynically to enrich themselves and join the ruling class. Because it is a class discourse, Islamism provokes considerable hostility among people of the ruling and middle classes. This makes the headscarf an icon of difference, and headscarves such an incendiary issue.

Earlier in the century Atatürk's imposition of a Western dress code served bourgeois interests. But what is confusing is that even when dress is used to oppose neo-liberal capitalism and imperialism, as in the case of Islamist veiling, it still serves the status quo. This is because it forefronts Islamism and gender, but not class.

First, it allows bourgeois women and men to express class antagonism by deploring the patriarchal control of Islamist women. This is so because, whatever else she is saying, the young woman in the headscarf is also saying that she finds certain Islamist forms of patriarchy acceptable. And because these enjoin her to mark her belief sartorially, she becomes visible in public in ways that male believers are not. So Islamist women, and not Islamist men, are subject to discriminatory laws, and middle- and ruling-class pity and scorn.

The middle- and ruling-class arguments that decry Islamist forms of patriarchy have the same structure as another set of arguments used by the well-to-do. Such people often say Islamist women wear the veil to gain financial support, or scholarships, for themselves or their families

from Islamist parties. Such statements have the character of urban myths. They are based on the premise that the Islamists are insincere. The secularists accuse Islamists of being bought by the Islamist parties, while ignoring the fact that the secularists of the middle and ruling classes are also bought by the political parties of the centre-right through tax concessions, policies on army conscription and in many other ways.

Islamist women are also convenient targets because they displace attention from the sexism in “modern”, secularist women’s lives. The student with the headscarf, and the woman without one, are both wearing clothes that are responses to dominant masculinities – though these masculine styles of control differ from each other, and are ranked and privileged in different arenas. “Modern”, secularist women in Turkey, as in Euro-America, are subject to patriarchal control in their homes, at work and in public places. Turkish feminists have long been arguing that the “modern” legal code of the country is replete with sexist biases. But few secularists decry, or even notice, these “modern” sexist strictures because they, like “modern” consumerist styles of dress, create and sustain class identity.

Indeed, feminism in Turkey has itself had a troubled history, in large part because of the confusions sown by the rhetoric and practices of state secularism (see Arat 1993; Sirman 1989). In the United States and Britain, the feminisms of recent decades grew out of the civil rights and anti-war movements opposed to American imperialism. They are an emancipatory discourse, and depend on a mass movement from below.

In Turkey, the impetus for middle-class feminism can be seen as coming from the West, and therefore as part of an imperialist, capitalist and modernizing political project. So working-class Turkish women who are opposed to the West have found themselves opposed to feminism, while middle-class feminists have all too often lined up with the authoritarian Turkish state. This has meant that the challenges offered by Islamist women to Western-style feminisms have had little resonance or impact compared with the effects the scathing critiques of women of colour have had on the white, middle-class feminisms of Euro-America.

Consider again the young Islamist student in the headscarf. Her scarf threatens privilege and inequality – that is why it is forbidden. But because the headscarf debate is also couched in terms of “religious freedom”, many of the political implications of political Islam – to do with welfare and greater social equality – are lost from view. The woman’s scarf also defends the inequality the Islamists want to see between men and women. There is a contradiction here between the headscarf as a sign of both quasi-socialist policies from below and a right-wing style of patriarchy. Many secularist middle-class feminists have been unable to deal with this contradiction because they accept that the only choice is between a conservative, yet secular Turkish state and conservative, working-class Islamism.

And this contradiction is, of course, also part of the story about the women in *burkas* in Afghanistan. Laura Bush and Cherie Blair would be in deep political trouble if they talked of the oppression of veiled women in Detroit or Bradford, or about the head coverings of Orthodox Jewish women in New York or London. But they can, with impunity, attack Islamist patriarchy abroad. And in doing so, they simultaneously denigrate the emancipatory anti-capitalist elements of Islamism as well.

We get an even better idea of why Laura Bush, Cherie Blair and the Turkish secularist women are so vociferous in their condemnation of Islamist patriarchy, if we start from a different place.

This brings us to the most important general question raised by the headscarf debate – why are dominant political practices so highly gendered?

A partial answer is that unequal gender relationships ensure, through their intimacy and near universality, that inequality and hierarchy are fundamental premises, and a continuing feature, of everyone's everyday lives.

Everyone, daily, experiences cross-gendered relations: in interactions between mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and lovers in heterosexual and homosexual relationships. All of us live gendered inequalities all the time. They infuse our bodies, our sexuality and our social practices.

By contrast, class, sectarian or racialized inequalities do not necessarily affect each and every one of us so intimately, so regularly and in such a marked way. Indeed, it is through gendered relationships that inequality is most completely naturalized. And through the capitalist/orientalist paradigm, these gendered relationships can, in turn, be used to naturalize all other unequal social relations. They can be used to create wider expectations of inequality as “natural” or “legitimate” at work, in the law, and in nationalist and secularist discourse.

To put it another way, inequalities at work, and elsewhere, would be far less acceptable if people had the daily experience of equality within intimate sexual and family relationships. If there were a radical discontinuity in people's experiences of equality, and inequality, in different social settings, resistance to inequality would be far more widespread, easier and much more threatening to those who are privileged in hierarchical societies.

If we start from the idea that inequalities of gender reinforce, justify and reproduce other, wider social inequalities, including those perpetrated in the name of the Turkish state (and those perpetrated in the name of the British or American states), then we can look at the woman in the headscarf and ask how to fight inequality in her particular case.

The answer, for me, is that I support her right to wear what she chooses, because I support the right of all women to dress as they please. This is because I support the right of women and men to control their own bodies and to control them in equal measure. I recognize too that her scarf is a protest against wider social inequalities. And on that basis, I would want to argue with her personally that Islamist policies will lead to more inequality, between both women and men, and rich and poor.

Such an argument links different systems of domination (whether based on patriarchy, Islamism or social class) *and* structural inequalities (such as those affecting the women who choose not to veil in Afghanistan, those who wish to veil in Turkey, as well as the voiceless Kurdish speakers in Turkey, and the Muslim victims of hate crimes in Britain and America).

It also makes clear the extent to which inequality of all kinds is underwritten by force and violence and how the freedom to dress as one chooses is directly connected with the freedom to speak or broadcast in any language one chooses in Turkey, or the freedom to be Muslim and safe in Euro-America.

Conclusions

There are many local, civil wars being fought in the world today. Most of these remain invisible to us, though the amount of violence and brutality we do see in our newspapers and on television is astonishing and horrific. Yet in spite of this, it is remarkable how few ethnographies challenge the tyrannies that surround us. As John Pilger has written,

“[...] we observe the ‘terrible tragedy’ of human rights abuses, but do not even discuss, let alone deal with their true causes. An almost wilful refusal to trace the contours and true motives of great power, simply because it is ‘ours’, transforms those paid to keep the record straight to mere moral sightseers [...]” (Pilger 1999, quoting David Edwards)

The taboo against naming American imperialism has crippled the anthropology of the Middle East and, I would guess, the anthropology of the rest of the world as well. Much that is written is as full of holes as Swiss cheese; or, more perniciously, it obfuscates and reproduces new kinds of highly gendered capitalist/orientalist discourse. The process of dumbing-down is deeply conservative. As Steve Bell has it, in George W’s Operation Blind Justice, Uncle Sam needs us to keep looking the other way (2001).

Donaldo Macedo (1993) has described as “stupidifying” the academic and media coverage of Papa Bush’s Gulf War. A decade after that Gulf War, many academic anthropologists of the Middle East continue to be stupidified and silent. Yet 9/11, the Afghan War, and the new kind of censorship associated with George W. and Blair’s war on terrorism have created a world which is much more dangerous, and truly to be feared.

This is a depressing scenario. But it is only one side of the story, and there are other grounds for optimism. Of these, the most important for our purposes is that, contrary to what many academics imagine, it would seem that academics *follow*, rather than lead, popular interests and concerns. And where dissent is unrepresented by public voices, it is difficult to predict the rise of a revolutionary movement.

In this respect the anti-capitalist demonstrations in Seattle against the World Trade Organization in November 1999 are a watershed. For years before Seattle, the majority of people throughout the world had been struggling against Structural Adjustment Programmes, Third World debt, immigration controls and other aspects of the new, neo-liberal, world order (see, for example, Walton and Seddon, 1994). The level of protest in Turkey, in India, in China, is great, though we may hear little about it. And popular movements have fought for democracy in Indonesia, Serbia and Venezuela.

After Seattle, anti-capitalists won discursive space in First World political debates in government and in the media. After Seattle, Naomi Klein’s book, *No Logo*, stayed on the bestseller lists for non-fiction for over a year. Now Michael Moore’s *Stupid White Men*, a hilarious and uncompromising condemnation of George W.’s administration, is at the top of the bestseller lists in the *New York Times*, on Amazon.com and on Waterstones’ list in the UK. In early March, some hundreds of thousands of trades unionists and anti-capitalists demonstrated against

privatization in Barcelona. A week later, some three million people did the same in Rome, and many in that crowd, and in Barcelona, were wearing Palestinian headscarves.

If academic fashion *follows* popular fashion, then perhaps we can expect some heartening changes in anthropological concerns. Indeed, I would like to think my talk today is one such manifestation of a new wave of political activism in the academy.

So just do the feminist thing. Ask those awkward questions, systematically and repeatedly, about gender and American imperialism now.

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