ariel: a review of international english literature
Vol. 54 No. 2 Pages 81–109

Fabric Matters: Feminist Dialogue and Muslim Veiling

Kimberly Clough

Abstract: This article postulates that Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* (2000) offers a feminist intervention into global social justice by building solidarity between North American and Afghan women resisting gendered oppression. *The Breadwinner*, written for young adult audiences, is frequently employed in North American multicultural curricula. Drawing on anthropological research, I argue that Ellis' imperfect and sometimes contradictory representations of the burqa and the chador initiate a dialogue about religious and cultural practices that models non-paternalistic feminist intervention into global women's oppression. Ellis' engagement with Afghan women's struggles avoids the two extremes—silence and paternalism—often present in western feminist reactions to global social justice issues. In analyzing the novel's representations of Muslim veiling practices, I demonstrate that Ellis productively grapples with her own western feminist presumptions in order to respectfully portray Afghan women as agential rather than implying that they need western women to save them. As such, *The Breadwinner* is a fruitful site for pedagogical and feminist discussions about global activism. Ultimately, I argue that feminism-in-action requires repeated attempts to understand global counterparts as a necessary impetus for political and social change.

Keywords: *The Breadwinner*, burqa, chador, feminist solidarity, Afghanistan

I. Introduction

As the Taliban retake control of Kabul twenty years after the United States' invasion of Afghanistan, the burqa is reemerging as an emblem

of human rights violations. Some western feminists, wittingly or unwittingly, supported the 2001 invasion when NATO forces deployed purportedly in part to aid oppressed Afghan women.[1] The infamous blue burqa featured heavily in denunciations of the Taliban. Popular feminist icons, such as Eve Ensler of *The Vagina Monologues* and TV show host Oprah Winfrey, staged "unveilings" wherein a western woman removed an Afghan woman's burqa to reveal her bare head and face (Fluri 245). These productions implicitly censured all forms of Muslim veiling practices, and this problematic tendency to project western ideals on Afghan women has rightfully been challenged.[2] With this troubled history of attempts to perform solidarity with Afghan women, feminists in the Global North, in light of the current situation, are in danger of either remaining silent about women's oppression so as to avoid doing wrong or being co-opted into patriarchal and colonial paternalism in an uncanny replication of 2001. I argue that Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* (2000) suggests an alternative route of feminist solidarity that does not provide "easy answers" (149, 15th anniversary edition) to Afghan women's issues but rather engages in productive dialogue with Muslim women's veiling practices.

Published on the cusp of 9/11 and now widely taught in middle schools, *The Breadwinner* was a product of Ellis' 1997 investigatory trip to Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan (Ellis, "Deborah"). The narrative follows Parvana, an eleven-year-old girl who passes as a boy to provide for her family after the Taliban abducts her father. Ellis professes a motivation to aid women and children affected by the conflict in Afghanistan (Ellis, "Deborah") that encapsulates feminists' sense of solidarity with women fighting gendered oppression. In tension with this aspiration toward global partnerships is her awareness of intersecting forms of marginality and the ways in which feminists who are white risk imposing historically dominant values on other cultures and women of color. What is appealing about *The Breadwinner* is that it enacts the struggle to practice solidarity without presuming western superiority. As I elucidate in my discussion of the novel's representation of Muslim veiling, the results are not always pretty. Ellis' efforts equate fabric and

oppression, an equation she does not seem in control of and which is complicated by the novel's incomplete understanding of the historical, political, spiritual, and cultural meanings of Muslim women's covering practices. However, the exigency of women's lived experiences of oppression necessitates this messy, imperfect attempt at strengthening the feminist networks that are necessary for political and social change.

The Breadwinner, I postulate, exemplifies a productive feminist reaction to international women's issues. To be clear, this article's imperative is not categorical; I do not debate whether Ellis is a so-called true feminist or if her book reflects the supposedly correct feminist ideals. Instead of theorizing an adjectival feminism (e.g., transnational, radical, liberal), I interpret Ellis' novel as demonstrating feminism-in-action, the repeated attempts to live out feminism. In refusing to qualify feminism, I clarify the boundaries of this article that aims to outline characteristics of feminist solidarity, uniting with rather than projecting needs onto women. My approach may be surprising, as invoking feminism often induces a taxonomic response. As a case in point, Ellis' introduction to *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-ending War* (2012) opens with the statement: "I am a feminist, which means I believe that women are of equal value to men" (8). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie understands a feminist to be an individual who "says, yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better" (48). Likewise, bell hooks writes that "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (xii). My refusal to categorize Ellis' feminism is not meant to disregard the crucial work of feminist scholars who theorize and may identify with specific definitions of feminism. Many of these scholars' works emerged to correctly point out feminist discourse's lack of inclusivity, even within efforts of solidarity. For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational concept of intersectional feminism elucidates the overlapping power structures that amplify oppression. In not adding a modifying descriptor to feminism, I am affirming that the feminist collective must consider forms of marginality alongside gender. I invoke the feminist collective because, as Sara Ahmed writes, "the postfeminist fantasy" is "that an individual woman

can bring what blocks her movement to an end" (*Living a Feminist Life* 5). The urgency of women's lived experiences of oppression necessitates the intervention of the global feminist collective.

Before I analyze the nuances of Ellis' representation of Muslim veiling practices, I want to briefly sketch the feminist history in which her work intervenes. In tracing this legacy, I note the general trends analyzed by theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, S. Ahmed, and hooks rather than assuming a monolithic body of scholarship. Historically, feminists writing about women whose identity they do not share tend to enact neocolonial paternalism when discussing global issues. Often, these writers justify their paternalism by positioning themselves as supposedly more advanced than their global counterparts due to their country-of-origins' modernity. Using their so-called first world status, feminists writing from the west often present themselves as the keepers of feminist knowledge and liberty. This universalist approach relies on two assumptions: that cultural and historical specificities do not matter, and that the individual or group imposing the universalist approach is fully rational while those who disagree are misguided.

In attempting to avoid paternalistic universalism, feminism has instead exhibited "an overwhelming silence" about oppression in global contexts (Mohanty 20). As disillusionment with global solidarity and humanitarian initiatives rises, silence on social justice issues is a genuine danger.[3] While I am not suggesting that humanitarian aid is the answer to all global struggles, disillusionment breeds silence. Although it is tempting because of its presumed safety, silence is not an ethical position for feminists. To the contrary, silence regarding injustice, as S. Ahmed argues, is predicated on a "fantasy of distance" that falsely allows the silent party to refuse culpability (*Strange Encounters* 167). By not speaking out against oppression, feminists imagine a distance between themselves and their global counterparts that does not exist. Women are already in relationship with and connected to their global counterparts through structures of labor, so women "cannot not encounter each other[;] what is at stake is *how*, rather than *whether*, the encounters take place" (S. Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 167; emphasis in original). Mirroring S. Ahmed's double negative rhetorical structure

to emphasize the inevitability of connection, Lila Abu-Lughod writes that "the problem is that it is too late not to interfere" (786). Silence on global social justice issues reflects a refusal to engage in an existent relationship. Speaking about Muslim veiling as a feminist, though, does not necessitate condemnation. Instead, as I will detail through my analysis of *The Breadwinner*, feminism should incorporate considerations of identity practices and ways of living motivated by religious belief. Amplifying Afghan women's issues prior to 9/11, Ellis' text proffers a model of engagement and demonstrates feminism-in-action.

II. Text Selection and Literary Context

What are the characteristics of feminism-in-action? What can feminists learn from Ellis raising awareness of and seeking to ally with her global counterparts? To address these questions, I turn to *The Breadwinner*'s representation of Muslim veiling practices, sartorial conventions that continue to be a global site of gendered injustice. While examples of oppression range from forced uncovering in France to the compulsory hijab in Iran, feminist discourse obsesses over examples like the latter. Further, Muslim women who practice covering continue to face opposition in feminist circles despite the rigorous work of theorists such as Abu-Lughod, Leila Ahmed, Saba Mahmood, Joan Wallach Scott, and Homa Hoodfar to deconstruct Orientalist stereotypes of the veiled woman with counternarratives from the lived experiences of women who cover. Mariam Khan poignantly encapsulates the contradictions Muslim women experience from other feminists who "will argue until they are blue in the face that women should have the right to decide how to dress themselves. And then those same people are unwilling to stand up for a Muslim woman who wears a hijab or burqa because they 'don't believe in it' or 'feel like Muslim women are oppressed.' They can't entirely explain or point to the oppressor" ("Feminism" 109). This experience is not unique.[4] Importantly, Ellis' approach to Muslim covering diverges from commonplace patterns of feminist discourse and representations of Afghan women produced by the west. *The Breadwinner* notes that many Muslim women cover for reasons other than patriarchal compulsion. While she harshly critiques the burqa as a symbol of the

Taliban's gendered oppression, Ellis does not equate Muslim veiling as a practice with oppression but instead seeks to normalize head coverings.

Given the robust global discourse on Muslim veiling practices, my selection of children's literature may seem odd. I have selected this novel because of the subject position of its author, its curricular use, and its deviation from problematic patterns characteristic of works about Afghanistan created for global audiences. *The Breadwinner* is particularly salient to feminist and social justice discourses. The text speaks to issues of global feminist solidarity because, not in spite, of Ellis' subject identity as a white Canadian feminist writing from the west about an identity she does not inhabit. Importantly, Ellis' representation of Muslim veiling practices deviates from the paternalism or silence typical of western feminist involvement in global issues. In a pre-9/11 moment, Ellis intervened in the global outrage over the Taliban's treatment of women. The novel's feminism-in-action is explicit because Ellis writes didactically for her young adult audience, prompting them to participate in global solidarity. In using a limited third-person narrative style, Ellis inhabits the imaginative space of an Afghan perspective on the Taliban. The text, which is told from Parvana's perspective, allows her childlike positioning to simplify and educate the audience on the situation in Kabul. Because its intended audience is the same age as Parvana, the novel seeks to build global affiliations between children.

In my analysis, I use Ellis' name not biographically but as a shorthand for recognizing the role of context in the creation of the narrative. While there is a long tradition in literary criticism of questioning authorial intention as the source of meaning, there is an equally important strain of scholarship that considers the author as one possible locus of significance—not as the source of intention, but as a node through which the complex matrix of context in which a text was created can be understood. Ellis situates *The Breadwinner* not as mimesis but as representation. This representation matters in the context of diversity since the work is written representationally to educate the Global North on Afghan women's sartorial practices. The work does not suggest Afghan women cannot speak for themselves but aims to make space for and amplify their voices so that an Anglophone audience could hear a different

side of the narrative than was being shown in mass media at that time. Fiction is, of course, not a photograph of a cultural setting but is loaded with assumptions, values, and habits—only some of which may be evident to the author. The messiness of representation occurs because narrative invents.

Despite its popularity, the novel has garnered little attention from literary scholars. Within fifteen years of its publication, *The Breadwinner* had been translated into twenty-five languages and sold over two million copies (Jinje). The text has won international literary awards in countries (notably with NATO presence in Afghanistan) such as Canada, the US, Sweden, and Italy. Due to its popularity, Ellis continued Parvana's story in a series. The film adaptation of *The Breadwinner* was nominated for Best Animated Feature at the 90th Academy Awards, further increasing the novel's visibility. Most of the existent scholarship on the novel focuses on its efficacy in the classroom for informing students about gendered and international social justice issues.[5] In spite of Ellis' clear position that "bomb[ing]" Afghanistan "only made things worse" (*The Breadwinner* 138), the text is at risk of being used to imply that western white women need to "save" non-western girls and women (Sensoy and Marshall). In her subsequent publications, Ellis is even more explicit about her pacifist position generally and specifically decries the effects of the War on Terror. The fifteenth-anniversary edition's foreword states: "In today's warfare, ninety-five percent of the casualties are civilians. This means that when we give our governments permission to go to war, we are giving them permission to kill people who are just like us[,] . . . [p]eople who have done us no harm" (*The Breadwinner* 10–11). If indeed the novel has been co-opted by a militarist or interventionist impulse crystallized in the rhetoric justifying the invasion of Afghanistan, then its narrative project, as least in the terms Ellis outlines, has failed.

Marketed to young adults, *The Breadwinner* is often assigned in curricula since the novel explicitly catalogues the realities of life in Kabul during Taliban control. Due to recently renewed global interest in Afghanistan, the text is likely to see a surge in classroom use. In fact, Amazon currently includes *The Breadwinner* on a "teacher's pick" list curated by educator feedback ("*The Breadwinner*"). The text employs a

didactic approach for non-Afghan audiences. For example, Ellis writes, "the family ate Afghan-style, sitting around a plastic cloth spread out on the floor" (*The Breadwinner* 26), which would not require explanation if Afghan readers were her target audience.[6] Since *The Breadwinner* is often used to instruct children in the Global North about Afghan customs, including a somewhat flawed representation of Muslim veiling practices that I later delineate, I propose that, rather than using the text as a straightforward guidebook, an alternative critical angle is necessary to incorporate its nuances and positioning. I agree with Elizabeth Marshall and Özlem Sensoy that the flaws in the novel's representations of lived experiences should not prevent its curricular use, but audiences should critically engage with rather than passively consume the text. My approach determines where Ellis' assumptions come to the fore and where she productively grapples with her own experience and fieldwork.

While flaws exist in its didactic presentation of life in Kabul, *The Breadwinner* avoids many of the problematic patterns of western cultural productions about Afghanistan. Ivanchikova writes that Afghanistan was largely absent from global cultural productions pre-9/11 but has since become a "cultural franchise" (3). *The Breadwinner*'s publication date puts it into conversation with more recent narratives because, as Ivanchikova points out, post-2001 texts about Afghanistan often elide 9/11. However, Ivanchikova also identifies a trend in narratives about Afghanistan of interjecting western subjects into Kabul; *The Breadwinner* refrains from this, as all of its characters are from Afghanistan. When in the series' later installments, western characters appear, their scenes highlight the failures and limits of humanitarian efforts. For example, in *Mud City* (2003), a family from the US briefly takes in Parvana's friend, Shauzia, after she relocates to Pakistan. However, her stay is cut short by the family because she extends the food and shelter they have shared with her to others in need.

The Breadwinner also avoids the trap of humanitarian logic wherein the Muslim girl can be saved from her supposedly oppressive culture by western aid. Sahar Ghumkhor and Maree Pardy note that representations of Muslim girls often present humanitarian aid as a solution that can interrupt impending tragedy for this "innocent" population (398).

Humanitarian logic is present in the apparatuses surrounding the text; to assist in her aim of aiding Afghan women and children, for example, Ellis donates the royalties of *The Breadwinner* to organizations practicing situated philanthropy. However, the text does not position the west as Afghanistan's savior and instead emphasizes that Parvana and others like her cannot be protected. Damage has already been done; it is too late to save anyone from harm. Parvana, as a representative Afghan girl, has already lost an older brother to a landmine explosion prior to the novel's events, and her father is arrested by the Taliban in an early scene. Her father's absence leaves Parvana as the sole earner for her family, which includes her mother, Fatana; her seventeen-year-old sister, Nooria; her five-year-old sister, Maryam; and her two-year-old brother, Ali. The older women in her family are unable to contribute financially because the Taliban have barred women from public and economic spaces; Parvana passes as a boy to circumnavigate this prohibition. Parvana's efforts to provide cause her further harm. In a disturbing episode, Parvana earns money by digging up graveyards and delivering human bones to the "bone broker" (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 105); the skulls haunt her "every time she close[s] her eyes" (113). The text does not posit humanitarian aid as able to preserve the presumed innocence of Afghan girls.

Global assistance is absent from the text in part because the novel's Afghan women are agential. This representation contrasts with early cultural responses to 9/11 that presented Afghan women as passive victims (Ivanchikova 4). Further, the agency of Afghan women in *The Breadwinner* diverges from a materialist empowerment model. As Purnima Bose observes, representations that portray Afghan women as agential often rely on women's entrepreneurship that is rooted in materialism and, more specifically, in the beauty industry (15). *The Breadwinner*, however, depicts Afghan women's subversive efforts as focused on educating children and engaging in political activism, as I will later describe, rather than participating in capitalist ventures.

In *The Breadwinner*, Ellis picks up the feminist injunction to expose (especially gendered) injustices. While the novel does show Taliban dictates that affect men's bodies, *The Breadwinner*'s primary focus is women

because of asymmetric gendered oppression. Ellis writes: "When the Taliban first came and ordered all men to grow beards, Parvana had a hard time getting used to her father's face. He had never worn a beard before. Father had a hard time getting used to it, too. It itched a lot at first" (*The Breadwinner* 27).[7] Men acclimate to facial hair while inhabiting the public domain; however, women are confined to the private realm. The severity of the enforced custom is lessened for men. Further, the Taliban are not presented as an undifferentiated horde. Parvana, dressed as a boy, takes up her father's practice of earning money through reading and writing services. A member of the Taliban, much to Parvana's surprise, sheds a tear and "tremble[s]" with emotion as Parvana reads a letter addressed to his wife (79). Even within this humanizing example of the Taliban, however, the emphasis is on the toll war has on women, as his wife has died.

III. The Burqa and the Chador

Showing cultural sensitivity, Ellis distinguishes between the burqa and chador. However, the text's representations of this difference imply that gendered oppression is measurable by the amount of fabric covering a woman's body rather than the choice available. While Ellis' representation of Muslim veiling practices is not always accurate or faultless, she performs solidarity by pointing out gendered injustices as filtered through her own experience of interviewing Afghan refugees. In dialogue with Afghan practices yet obfuscated by western assumptions, the text evinces inconsistencies in representing the burqa. In other words, the messiness of the narrative indicates dialogue with rather than an uncritical projection of western beliefs onto Afghan women. Dialogue presumes a decentered, as opposed to hierarchical, relationship to learning about the world from others. *The Breadwinner* rejects simplistic representation of Muslim veiling practices because it seeks to denounce oppression while respectfully depicting cultural specificities for its global readership. Intriguingly, Ellis' updates to the paratext in the novel's fifteenth anniversary edition and subsequent novels in *The Breadwinner* series point to evolution as a vital feature of feminism-in-action, as the

texts evince the author's growth in awareness of the culture and conditions of Afghanistan.

Productively breaking from western traditions, Ellis distinguishes between the burqa and chador because they differ materially, culturally, politically, and linguistically. Western discourse concerning Muslim women's veiling practices often conflates terminology: the chadri, paranja, niqab, al-almira, shayla, khimar, haïk, boshiya, dupatta, hijab, burqa, chador, headscarf, and burkini vastly differ in practice, language, and material form, but western discourse labels all as "veil." *The Breadwinner* insistently uses specific sartorial terms with only singular uses of the less specific "scarves" and "veils." For instance, Parvana reminisces that, prior to Taliban control of Kabul, Fatana and Nooria wore "light scarves around their hair" (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 23).

The novel's differentiation between covering practices is, in part, didactic. *The Breadwinner* continually draws attention to the donning and doffing of a head covering as women exit private spaces to enter the public realm and vice versa. Readers are informed first that "Parvana slipped her feet into her sandals and wound her chador around her head" (36) and, later, that "she slipped her feet into her sandals, then reached for her chador" (69). The text couples the chador with shoes (you can walk outside without them, but why would you?); this is stressed in the second instance because Parvana is reminded that she "won't be needing" the chador because of her culturally male hairstyle and clothes (69). Reiterative descriptions of covering normalize the chador in its sociohistorical setting to educate western readers about Kabul customs.

Ellis' description of the chador is also culturally appropriate. The chador's material form differs by region. For example, the chador can sometimes refer to a full body outer garment, draped over the head and held together in the front. In contrast, anthropological work indicates that the chador in Afghanistan is "a long, folded length of cloth that is draped over the head, with one end looped over the opposite shoulder" (Emadi 148). Nancy Hatch Dupree clarifies that the chador in Afghanistan generally "cover[s] about three-quarters of the body" (152). Similarly, *The Breadwinner*'s glossary defines the chador as "a piece of

cloth worn by women and girls to cover their hair and shoulders. Girls wear this outside" (169). The glossary indicates the chador's use in Afghan culture prior to Taliban control, as women are included in the definition. Apart from flashbacks, the novel is set during Taliban control of Kabul, so the chador in the narrative is worn by prepubescent girls. Parvana, prior to passing as a boy, wears a chador as opposed to the burqa that the novel's adult women wear. Indicative of the novel's strategy for representing the chador, the definition's verbs "worn" and "wear" lend an agential connotation to the practice. This gesture aligns *The Breadwinner* with other cultural productions that teach children about culturally expected items of clothing. Because of the quotidian nature of the chador, garments covering hair are not presented as inherently problematic in the novel.

The chador marks gender even prior to the compulsory burqa. When her hair is cut so that she can pass as a boy, Parvana enacts her gender performance through the disuse of the chador, because this garment in her socio-historical setting is even more important to perform gender than hair length. She would still be marked as a woman in her culture if she wore a chador or burqa over short hair. This reliance on garments to communicate gender implies that gender itself is performative, a notion subtly suggested by the protagonist's name, which means "butterfly," and more overtly by characters vacillating in what gender they assign Parvana despite knowing her sex assigned at birth (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 63, 86, 156, and 164). Thomas W. Bean and Helen J. Harper note that *The Breadwinner* "separates the performance of a gendered identity from the sex of the performer" ("Reading Men Differently" 26).

Ellis' emphasis on the role of sartorial choices rather than hairstyle conventions in gender performance also reflects the cultural practice of *bacha posh* in Afghanistan. *Bacha posh*, which means "dressed as a boy," are prepubescent girls whose families choose to raise them as boys generally until puberty (Corboz et al. 586; Nordberg 70). By practicing culturally male sartorial practices, *bacha posh* enter educational, commercial, and vocational arenas that exclude women. Ellis' work, in both published interviews and fictional representations, predates much of the global scholarship on *bacha posh*. Recent quantitative research

provocatively suggests that the practice is "relatively common" in Kabul (Corboz et al. 594). Intriguingly, Ellis represents two *bacha posh*: early in her performance as a boy, Parvana comes across Shauzia, a former classmate, who has been passing as male for several months. Ellis' representation of *bacha posh* is influenced by interviews she conducted with women familiar with the practice (*Women of the Afghan War* 231–32). Her reliance on a translator may have precluded her knowledge of the term and thus explain its absence.

In contrast to the normative, gender-performing chador, Ellis' glossary defines the burqa as "[a] long, tent-like garment, which the Taliban have decreed women must wear whenever they go outside. It covers them completely and even has a narrow mesh screen over the eyes" (*The Breadwinner* 169). Whereas the chador is merely "worn" to "cover," the burqa is "decreed" and enveloping. *The Breadwinner*'s definitions accentuate the material differences between these garments—the chador is a "piece of cloth" as opposed to the encasing burqa. The glossary communicates that the burqa is oppressive because it is forced under the new Taliban rule and "completely" covers the body including the face. Chadors are quotidian and part of a cultural practice rather than compulsory.

The Breadwinner, like other western narratives, assumes that the burqa was not customary in Afghanistan prior to the emergence of the Taliban. While navigating Kabul's streets, which have been ruined by foreign entities bombing the city, Parvana questions her father (prior to his abduction) about the burqa, queries she would not pose if she was not familiar with it:

> "How do women in burqas manage to walk along these streets?" Parvana asked her father. "How do they see where they are going?"
>
> "They fall down a lot," her father replied. He was right. Parvana had seen them fall." (17)

The question-and-answer dialogue between child and parent communicates censorious views of the burqa that is presumably newly introduced to Afghanistan. Given the novel's educational purpose, one may

conclude that Parvana's confused queries are for the readers' benefit and are meant to overtly provide context for sartorial customs. However, the chador does not receive a similar introduction. Readers must infer what the chador is at the novel's opening when "Parvana whisper[s] into the folds of her chador" (7). The chador is only defined in the glossary, and the text does not follow the convention of italicizing non-English words to indicate that the reader should refer to the paratext. In terms of how sartorial practices are introduced in the novel, the burqa is presented as anomalous for Afghanistan.

Yet in contrast to western assumptions, "the Taliban did not invent the burqa" (Abu-Lughod 785). Anthropological studies in Afghanistan generally categorize Muslim veiling customs with the terms chador and burqa, but both are considered traditional women's clothing. For the more encompassing garment, this research generally employs either the Pashto term chadari or the Arabic burqa, both of which occur in a variety of transliterations.[8] I use the term burqa for continuity with *The Breadwinner*; this authorial choice may be attributed to Ellis' fieldwork in Pakistan, a region that favors the term burqa. The Taliban were not the first to implement clothing standards for women in Kabul; the Mujahideen, who controlled the capital from 1992 to 1996, also instated a mandatory burqa (Ahmed-Ghosh 7). Apart from the burqa's compulsory use by these extremist groups, the most frequent wearers of the burqa in Afghanistan were rural Pashtun women when they travelled to urban areas (including Kabul) or were in the presence of unrelated men. In general, the burqa is rarely worn by women performing physical labor because, like any long garment, it impedes manual work. Due to this practicality, some communities in Afghanistan view the burqa, in addition to its religious significance, as a marker of class; wearing a burqa communicates that the wearer is privileged enough that they do not have to labor. As with all garments in any cultural setting, the burqa does not have a fixed interpretation in Afghanistan: women don the burqa to perform a variety of meanings.

Like many sartorial customs, wearing a burqa and other forms of covering is not only a cultural practice but also a political act. *The Breadwinner* gestures at political use when Parvana's father relates the

legend of "Malali of Maiwand," a folk hero who rallied Afghan troops against colonizing British forces during the Battle of Maiwand:

> [Malali] ran to the front of the battle and turned to face the Afghan troops. She ripped the veil off her head, and with the hot sun streaming down on her face and her bare head, she called to the troops.
>
> "We can win this battle!" she cried. "Don't give up hope! Pick yourselves up! Let's go!" Waving her veil in the air like a battle flag, she led the troops into a final rush at the British. The British had no chance. The Afghans won the battle.
>
> "The lesson here, my daughters," he looked from one to the other, "is that Afghanistan has always been the home of the bravest women in the world. You are all brave women. You are all inheritors of the courage of Malali." (28–29)

Here, the "veil" becomes a standard of Afghan rebellion against invading British forces. Throughout the novel, Parvana recalls Malali as a reminder of women's courage.

Western assumptions about the burqa's atypical presence may be due to Afghanistan's debates about women's sartorial practices in the twentieth century. Like many countries with the religio-cultural practice of veiling, Afghanistan's ruling elite have vacillated on the question of whether women should cover. Injunctions for women to uncover have been tied to modernization efforts, especially when forming political ties with western nations (Ahmed-Ghosh). Women living in Kabul, the center of modernization efforts, have been subject to pendular demands concerning sartorial practices since the turn of the twentieth century. It is important to note that much of the public and circulated discourse on Afghan women's veiling practices has revolved around urban upper- to middle-class women rather than rural or lower-class urban women who have historically been more consistent in their sartorial practices (Wide 176). Parvana's parents would have been influenced by the modernization efforts that occurred during the Soviet occupation (1979–89), since Parvana was born when the former Soviet Union left Afghanistan (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 13). Furthermore, the Mujahideen regime

implemented a compulsory burqa during the interim period between the USSR and Taliban control of Kabul (Ahmed-Ghosh 7; Corboz et al. 586). In contrast to the novel's presumptions, the burqa was likely present in Kabul prior to the novel's events.

While accurate in distinguishing forms of women's covering practiced in Afghanistan, *The Breadwinner* makes a common western presumption that the amount of fabric women wear is indicative of the liberty they possess. Ellis' assumption is partially explained by the sources on which she relied while writing *The Breadwinner*. She was influenced by western media coverage of the Taliban's oppressive regime and had not yet been to Afghanistan while writing *The Breadwinner*. Instead, she drew from her interviews of refugee Afghan populations in Pakistan (Ellis 9, 15th anniversary edition).[9] This population is described in Ellis' *Women of the Afghan War* (2000), which is written for adult audiences. Ellis' goal in this nonfiction text is "feminist consciousness-raising" through published interviews of women from Afghanistan and the former Soviet Union (xiii). Notably, Ellis' Kabul sources were forced to flee the country. These women did not originally wear burqas but were mandated to do so. Moreover, most of Ellis' interviewees from Kabul had enrolled in or completed postsecondary education. Apart from highly educated women, the other Kabul interviewees were prepubescent at the time of Taliban control. Their compulsory introduction to the burqa, a more expansive and physically restricting form of covering than the chador, featured in their experience with puberty. Unsurprisingly, the interviewees were passionately opposed to wearing the burqa—an emotional response that is mirrored in *The Breadwinner*. Ellis' fieldwork provides an explanation for the novel's lack of exploration into why women may choose to cover with the burqa. *The Breadwinner* does not present a pro-burqa sentiment from any character other than violent, male, Taliban voices. I state this not to support compulsory burqas nor to diminish these women's responses but to point out that the text contains no support of the burqa that the reader can view as ethical (or at the very least ambivalent). The novel's efforts to normalize the chador, coupled with the absence of a sympathetic Afghan voice supporting the burqa, establish an association between less fabric and more freedom.

IV. Inconsistent Representations of the Burqa

While Ellis's censure of the burqa creates a false bond between clothing and liberty, the text grapples to uphold this link. Ellis' struggle to enact feminist solidarity without neocolonial paternalism by respectfully portraying Muslim veiling practices emerges in the inconsistencies of her representation of the burqa. Emphasized by the plot hinging on characters' (dis)use of this sartorial practice, *The Breadwinner*'s burqa both enables and restricts, attempts yet fails to erase singularity.

On a surface level, the burqa in *The Breadwinner* symbolizes women's confinement to the domestic realm. Parvana's family is particularly inhibited by the burqa, even prior to her father's abduction. His injuries—a partially missing leg and internal damage due to a bombing—prohibit him from aiding Parvana in bringing water into the home, and Fatana and Nooria "couldn't carry a pail of water up those uneven broken stairs if they were wearing burqas" (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 20). A lack of indoor plumbing is not presented as the norm for Kabul but a result of Parvana's family continually relocating because of the ongoing conflict. Prevented from working outside the home, the elder women in Parvana's family are unable support themselves; their economic precarity is exacerbated by Father's eventual absence. The extent to which burqas physically hamper women, though, is called into question during Fatana's burqa-clad excursion; soon after her husband is taken, she and Parvana exit the home in an attempt to locate their disappeared family member. The novel traces a careful trajectory that suggests the socio-economic hobbling caused by the burqa is normalized over time.

While the burqa at first appears to physically restrict Fatana, its effect on her emerges as primarily mental. I distinguish between the mental and the physical not to privilege one over the other, but to point out that Ellis theorizes what the burqa literally does to the body of women forced to wear it. In search of Father's location, Fatana leaves the house for the only scene in which she wears a burqa. Parvana narrates: "Helping Mother down the broken stairs was a little like helping Father, as the billowing burqa made it hard for her to see where she was going" (39). Fatana's difficulty in navigating stairs mirrors that of any individual wearing a garment that reaches to the feet. Like Fatana's

burqa, floor-length dresses obscure wearers' vision of their pathway and inhibit navigation of stairs, especially damaged ones. One need only watch a formal award ceremony to ascertain this fact, as women in western formal wear trip on or need assistance traversing stairs. As previously discussed, rural Afghan women tend not to wear the burqa precisely because it complicates manual labor. More troublingly, Parvana likens Fatana's burqa to Father's injuries: the burqa is metaphorically compared to a violently amputated appendage and internal bodily damage.

Despite this comparison, however, the burqa subsequently seems to have no effect on Fatana, as Parvana "had to run to keep up with her mother's long, quick steps" (39). While stairs are difficult to navigate, Fatana easily traverses the streets. Again, this apparent inconsistency reflects incisive awareness of long flowing garments that make travelling on stairs more difficult than level paths. Ellis' experience with the burqa or other long garments may inform her assumption that the burqa impedes navigating stairs but not flat terrain. Further, the text implicitly shows that the burqa enables Fatana to exit the home, albeit in a confined fashion. Historically and culturally, the burqa both enables and restricts the women who wear it: it limits physical labor but also allows its wearer entrance into public spaces to which she would normally be denied entry due to gender segregation (Abu-Lughod 785; Wide 176).

Ironically, Fatana rarely practices her ability to easily walk the potholed streets on which other burqa wearers frequently stumble. Prior to Father's abduction, Fatana voluntarily stayed inside the family home for "a year and a half" rather than don a burqa in order to leave the home safely: "[S]he could have gone out. She had a burqa, and Father would have gone with her any time she wanted" (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 45). Since Fatana was formerly a radio station writer, her husband urges her to observe the city and document events; Fatana refuses because she does not believe she would be able to distribute potential writings and thinks that the Taliban's control of the city will be short-lived (45). The burqa affects Fatana's mental health more than physical movement necessary for her to traverse the streets. Her poor mental state reaches its nadir when she returns home after failing to locate her spouse. She lies unresponsive in bed, forcing Parvana and Nooria to care for themselves and their

young siblings. Fatana's mental, not physical, inhibition exacerbated by the burqa creates the scenario in which Parvana will pass as a boy.

The characters' backgrounds offer context for Fatana's response to the burqa. Prior to Taliban control, the primary adult characters worked as educators and professional writers. The novel's focus on characters with higher education degrees skews its representation of Muslim veiling practices. Both of Parvana's parents have postsecondary education, with Father having obtained his degree in England; their education level previously placed them among the upper class in Kabul (12, 30–31). Notably, this education level was not the norm in Afghanistan in 2000, a reality the text acknowledges: most people in Afghanistan, especially women, are illiterate (9). However, Parvana's parents' atypical educational background is employed in the narrative to decry the burqa. Before Fatana dons the burqa, Nooria and Parvana forge a note of permission from a patriarch, authorizing Fatana's excursion without a male escort:

> The prison was a long way from their home. Buses were not permitted to carry women who did not have a man with them. They would have to walk, the whole way. What if Father was being held somewhere else? What if they were stopped by the Taliban in the street? Mother wasn't supposed to be out of her home without a man, or without a note from her husband.
>
> "Nooria, write Mother a note."
>
> "Don't bother, Nooria. I will not walk around my own city with a note pinned to my burqa as if I were a kindergarten child. I have a university degree!" (37–38)

While Fatana's indignation at being forced to wear a burqa is understandable, her reasoning privileges education as determining one's qualifications to walk unaccompanied, a peculiar argument given the anomalous background of Parvana's family.[10] Fatana's logic does not provide an adult woman without education, the average Afghan woman, reasons for rejecting the burqa.

Like *The Breadwinner*'s primary characters, many of Ellis' interviewees are highly educated (although presumably not in England, since Ellis relied on a translator because the women did not speak English).

While *The Breadwinner* reflects the lives of Ellis' interviewees, the character depictions represent the minority rather than the majority for Kabul. Instead of offering nuance by creating other characters without higher education, the notion that the educated minority is the norm is perpetuated by the introduction of Homa, who speaks English, and Mrs. Weera, a former high school teacher. These characters also violently oppose the burqa. Nooria's exclamation encapsulates the novel's emotional response toward the burqa: "As soon as I get out of Taliban territory, I'm going to throw off my burqa and tear it into a million pieces" (139). However, the non-normative status of *The Breadwinner*'s characters calls into question whether their view of the burqa is shared by the majority of Afghan women.

The Breadwinner's treatment of religion compounds the implicitly unusual position of Parvana's family. Admirably, *The Breadwinner* attempts to deconstruct the anticipated, banal Islamophobic prejudice of its western readership. Published before 9/11, *The Breadwinner* pre-dates much of the work produced by western authors that critiques reactive and generalizing Islamophobia. While commendable in its goal, Ellis' approach unintentionally reinforces assumptions about Muslim cultures. Ellis religiously avoids discussing religion to the extent that the words Muslim and Islam do not appear in the novel, a marked choice in representing a population that overwhelmingly identifies as Muslim. The text briefly mentions an unidentified religion to condemn the Taliban: "The word Taliban meant religious scholars, but Parvana's father told her that religion was about teaching people how to be better human beings, how to be kinder. 'The Taliban are not making Afghanistan a kinder place to live!' he said" (14). While well-informed readers may infer Ellis' distinction between "Islamic fundamentalists" and "moderate Muslims like Parvana's family" (Greenlaw 53), this configuration is still troubling because Parvana's family is not marked by Muslim identity. The characters do not openly identify as Muslim or observe any practices that indicate their religious beliefs. Other than the suppositions an informed reader may draw from the cultural context, no evidence suggests that Parvana or her family are, in fact, Muslim. "Moderate" Islam is thus implied to be the absence of religious practices.

The text's erasure of Islam effectively ignores the existence of individuals and communities who are devoted to Islam as well as social justice and equity. By eliding Islam, the text unintentionally reinforces negative stereotypes about Islam generally and Muslim women specifically. While the novel does not condemn religion, its attempt to negate the harmful Muslim terrorist stereotype is less compelling because the Islamic faith is removed from the narrative rather than represented in a nuanced way. By erasing religion from the socio-cultural context, the text suggests that the only valid reason one may choose to cover is cultural or political, a position that contradicts many Muslim women's explanations of their covering practices.[11] Parvana's specific type of family—global, western-educated, not obviously Muslim, previously upper-class—presents challenges in representing Afghanistan's culture broadly.

Depicting a non-normative, westernized family lessens the text's otherwise careful criticism of global interference in Afghanistan. The text, unlike the literary trend Bose identifies, does not indulge in the "curious imperial amnesia" that links Afghanistan's origins with the Taliban (68). In fact, *The Breadwinner* insistently reminds readers of global culpability in Afghanistan's climate in both the text and paratext, historically situating Parvana's story in the manner that Shahnaz Khan suggests is necessary for international feminism. Ellis indicts the nations that have invaded Afghanistan—Britain, the Soviet Union, and the US—and praises Afghan communities for retaining and celebrating their cultural heritage (though ironically not the burqa) despite foreign powers continually invading the country. The novel's critique of global invasions of Afghanistan is lessened by Ellis' depiction of Parvana's family as unusual and westernized.

In keeping with the westernized depiction of Parvana's family, one of *The Breadwinner*'s criticisms of the burqa is its erasure of individuality since it covers women's faces. However, the representation's inconsistencies evince Ellis' struggle with the validity of this concern. Walking with her burqa-clad mother, Parvana fears losing her: "There were a few other women in the street and they all wore the regulation burqa, which made them all look alike" (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 39–40). Yet despite Parvana's concerns about identifying her mother, the burqa does

not erase Mrs. Weera's identity. Parvana recognizes Mrs. Weera's "voice behind the burqa" (56), although she struggles to immediately identify her outside of a school context. In a separate encounter, clothing again fails to conceal identity: "Mrs. Weera wore the burqa, of course, but she had such a distinctive way of walking that Parvana was sure she could pick her out of a whole marketplace of women wearing burqas" (84). In this scene, Mrs. Weera rejects the glossary's astonished tone: while the glossary notes that the burqa covers "even" women's eyes, Mrs. Weera even forgets that she is wearing this all-encompassing garment: "Oh, that's right, my face is covered. I keep forgetting" (56–57). Ellis points out, intentionally or unintentionally, that the burqa cannot erase women's identity.

This struggle in depicting whether or not burqas erase subjectivity occurs perhaps because *The Breadwinner* does not question whether individuality is a concept that Afghanistan's culture values. Wendy Kozol observes that burqa-clad Afghan women in media representations "appear to lack a Western ideal of subjectivity predicated on a belief in individuality ostensibly resident in the face" (75). Based on *The Breadwinner*'s critiques, this erasure of facially demarcated identity seems to be a primary concern, but is this really the case for Afghanistan? For example, rural women may wear the burqa because they do not want to be seen by unrelated men; however, this is not a preoccupation with subjectivity but performative of piety and/or class status. Similarly, Huma Ahmed-Ghosh writes that, for Afghan women, "becoming 'victims' of Islamic burqas and Western 'liberation' is the least of their concern" (12). In a collectivist culture, the supposed facelessness that comes with wearing a burqa may not be an overarching worry; therefore, western feminists' attempts at solidarity with women in Afghanistan may need refocusing.

Given its concern about individualized subjectivity, the text also somewhat ironically suggests that the individual should serve the community. The tension between the individual and the collective surfaces in Parvana's haircutting scene. Prior to cutting off Parvana's long hair, Mrs. Weera requests that Parvana pass as a boy and frames it as solely Parvana's "decision" because she must publicly perform the role even if forced to cut her hair (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 65). Parvana agrees that

Mrs. Weera and her family "needed her cooperation. In the end, it really was her decision. Somehow, knowing that made it easier to agree" (66). The choice is framed as highly individual—a marker of western feminist rhetoric. However, Parvana chooses to subsume her insistent individual longing for "beautiful hair" like Nooria's to support her family and the broader community of women seeking to survive their difficult situation (20). Parvana performs solidarity with her community by aiding in the way they request despite her personal desires.

The Breadwinner's praise of Afghan women's resistance emphasizes community. With Father absent, Parvana's family joins a group of Afghan women. This collective collaborates in passing on information to the broader community in the absence of objective journalism (123), starting a clandestine school for young girls (133), and distributing outside of the country a magazine of women's writings to "let the world know what is happening in Afghanistan" (83). Ellis' representation mirrors lived reality; Afghan women have been and are fighting for their liberty. In a text that could easily promote western aid as the solution to Afghan women's plight, Ellis takes pains to incorporate, affirm, and emphasize Afghan women's resistance. Spaces of safety within war-torn Kabul are created by and for Afghan women in the novel; this diverges from the trope that Robin Riley identifies in western representations of Afghanistan in which western humanitarian efforts stake out safety. The text depicts Afghan women as agential without western intervention. Ellis' work rejects the narrative of, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, "white men [or women] saving brown women from brown men" (92). Instead, the novel suggests that those who want to help should join the work that Afghan women are already performing rather than imposing western ideas of aid.

V. Conclusion

In support of my reading of *The Breadwinner* as a productive dialogue with Afghan women's religio-cultural practices, the glossary's definition of the burqa evolves in the fifteenth anniversary edition. The alteration is due, in part, to the twenty-year-long lapse of Taliban control in Kabul, during which the burqa was no longer compulsory: to show this

change, Ellis removed the definition's information about the Taliban. More provocative is the description of the garment itself. In the 2015 edition, the burqa "covers the entire body and has a narrow mesh screen over the eyes" (151). The incredulity of the original "even" and "completely" (Ellis, *The Breadwinner* 169) from the first edition are removed in favor of a more objective tone. This is further emphasized in *One More Mountain* (2022). Published after the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, the text's representation of the burqa includes women who passionately reject it but also points out its potential for protection. Parvana's younger sister Maryam, now a famous singer, uses the burqa to conceal herself from a potential mob (ch. 10), and Parvana, now a grown woman, wears a burqa to protect necessities as she travels covertly (ch. 23).

Indeed, Ellis' approach to women's oppression in Afghanistan is not static. The penultimate installment of the series, *My Name is Parvana* (2012), overtly criticizes the US's occupation of Afghanistan; the plot revolves around Parvana being detained because she was found near "a staging area for the Taliban" (Ellis 15). The text continues to affirm Afghan women's agency: Mrs. Weera, now a member of parliament, intervenes to release Parvana rather than relying on western humanitarian or military interventions. In this novel, Parvana voices arguments about how practicing Islam is not antithetical to feminist convictions (*My Name* 105). Ellis transitions from eliding religion in *The Breadwinner* to having her heroine passionately debate Islam's compatibility with feminism. In *One More Mountain*, observance of Islamic prayer times is represented as a unifying community event. Ironically, Julia L. Mickenberg and Philip Nel note that Ellis' later texts have provoked "controversy" for their "positive portrayal" of Muslims (453–54). The nascent stages of this evolution from ignoring religion to defending it are found in *The Breadwinner*'s grappling with Muslim veiling practices. Through praise of Afghan women's resistance and dialogue with unfamiliar cultural practices, *The Breadwinner* evinces respect for Ellis' global counterparts. In this way, Ellis engages with and supports collective feminist politics. Creating this collective is vital to enact change in lived realities. Political and social change depends on the collective, as no individual woman can

single-handedly dismantle all the systems that bind her. While flawed, *The Breadwinner* engages in global women's issues and respects cultural differences. In contradictory and ambivalent representations of sartorial practices, Ellis grapples with her understanding of Muslim coverings in a way that differs from the long history of feminists viewing such practices as inherently patriarchal and anti-feminist. *The Breadwinner* illustrates Ellis' feminism-in-action, her attempts at living out solidarity.

As I write this article, we do not yet know the extent of the Taliban's most recent infringement on women's rights; however, women's clothing and place in society are already being targeted. What I want to make clear is that feminism-in-action requires potentially flawed activity rather than purist silence. Feminists demonstrate solidarity by amplifying the concerns of Afghan women. To remain silent is to ignore the global culpability in the current situation. Due to the exigency of women's experiences of oppression, actions of solidarity will not always be perfect. However, in the endeavor to enact solidarity, let us learn from past mistakes and take care to contextualize our own responses. We live in a moment in which "the tendency to chastise the veil has seen a revival through the proliferation of affectively charged discourses about the so-called problem of Islam in Europe and North America" (Guessous 623). Fixating on the amount of fabric covering women's bodies can unintentionally be co-opted into this discourse. Afghan women's struggles cannot be distilled into a garment. Let us listen to what Afghan women are asking for before a so-called feminist invasion (re)occurs to impose western liberation models.

Notes

1 I use the term "western" to indicate its ideological sense as used by theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty.

2 See Cooke, Kensinger, S. Khan, and Ivanchikova for insightful critiques on the ways in which feminist activism has projected western mores onto global debates. In using phrases such as "Muslim veiling" and "covering," I am describing the wide variety of sartorial practices Muslim women use to cover their heads and/or faces. While I realize that there are customs of face and head covering for men, I am narrowing in on Muslim women's practices for the purposes of this article.

3 While tracing the historical trajectory of cultural productions about Afghanistan, Ivanchikova notes an increased "disillusionment with humanitarianism" (15).
4 For discussions of the unsettling number of negative reactions Muslim women who choose to cover have encountered from feminists around the world, see Hoodfar, M. Khan, Mahfouz, and Guessous.
5 For the scholarly conversation about *The Breadwinner*, see Dunkerly-Bean and Bean; Bean and Harper; Greenlaw; Griffith; Mickenberg and Nel; Mitchell et al.; Schmidt; Sensoy and Marshall; and Steffler.
6 Unless otherwise noted, in-text citations for *The Breadwinner* refer to the first edition.
7 Parvana's father is unnamed in the novel and is referred to simply as Father.
8 See Emadi; Girardet and Walter; N. H. Dupree; and L. Dupree for elaborations on women's sartorial customs in Afghanistan.
9 Ellis first traveled to Afghanistan in 2011 to conduct interviews for a non-fiction children's book (*Kids of Kabul* 10).
10 I am not suggesting Fatana should be condemned for not wanting to leave the house in a garment she sees as oppressive, any more than most audiences would condemn a woman for staying in her home if there was a compulsory bikini law. In comparing these garments, I am illustrating that other articles of clothing may cause discomfort for the wearer, not an exact equivalence: the burqa holds infinitely more cultural and religious significance than the swimwear.
11 See L. Ahmed, Abu-Lughod, M. Khan, Mahmood, and Scott for examples of Muslim women's reasons for covering.

Works Cited

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 104, no. 3, 2002, pp. 783–90. *JStor*, www.jstor.org/stable/3567256. Accessed 20 Feb. 2018.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Anchor, 2014.

Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, From the Middle East to America*. Yale UP, 2011.

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke UP, 2017.

———. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Psychology, 2000.

Ahmed-Ghosh, Huma. "A History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2003, pp. 1–14, vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol4/iss3/1. Accessed 5 Sept. 2019.

Bean, Thomas W., and Helen J. Harper. "Exploring Notions of Freedom in and through Young Adult Literature." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 50, no. 2, Oct. 2006, pp. 96–104.

———. "Reading Men Differently: Alternative Portrayals of Masculinity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction." *Reading Psychology*, vol. 28, no. 1, Jan. 2007, pp. 11–30.

Bose, Purnima. *Intervention Narratives: Afghanistan, The United States, and the Global War on Terror*. Rutgers UP, 2020.

Cooke, Miriam. "Islamic Feminism Before and After September 11th." *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002, pp. 227–35.

Corboz, Julienne, et al. "Bacha Posh in Afghanistan: Factors Associated with Raising a Girl as a Boy." *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, vol. 22, no. 5, May 2020, pp. 585–98. *MEDLINE*, doi:10.1080/13691058.2019.1616113.Accessed 4 Aug. 2020.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, July 1991, pp. 1241–99. *JStor*, www.jstor.org/stable/1229039.

Dunkerly-Bean, Judith, and Thomas W. Bean. "Exploring Human Rights and Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy with Global Young Adult Literature Multimodal Text Sets." *New England Reading Association Journal*, vol. 50, no. 2, Jan. 2015, pp. 1–7.

Dupree, Louis. *Afghanistan*. Princeton UP, 1973.

Dupree, Nancy Hatch. "Afghan Women Under the Taliban." *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, edited by William Maley, New York UP, 1998, pp. 145–66.

Ellis, Deborah. *The Breadwinner*. Groundwood, 2000.

———. *The Breadwinner*. 2000. 15th Anniversary Edition, Groundwood, 2015.

———. "Deborah Ellis: Profile with Dave Jenkinson." Conducted by Dave Jenkinson, *Canadian Review of Materials*, 28 Feb. 2003. *Canadian Review of Materials*, cmreviews.ca/cm/profiles/ellis.html. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019.

———. *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-ending War*. Groundwood, 2012.

———. *Mud City*. Groundwood, 2003.

———. *My Name Is Parvana*. Groundwood, 2012.

———. *One More Mountain*. Ebook, Groundwood, 2022.

———. *Women of the Afghan War*. Greenwood, 2000.

Emadi, Hafizullah. *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Greenwood, 2005.

Fluri, Jennifer L. "The Beautiful 'Other': A Critical Examination of 'Western' Representations of Afghan Feminine Modernity." *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 16, no. 3, May 2009, pp. 241–57. *Alternative Press Index*, doi.org/10.1080/09663690902836292. Accessed 16 Oct. 2021.

Ghumkhor, Sahar, and Maree Pardy. "Imagining Muslim Women in Secular Humanitarian Time." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 46, no. 2, The U of Chicago P, Jan. 2021, pp. 387–416. *LGBTQ+ Source*, doi.org/10.1086/710809. Accessed 28 Sept. 2021.

Girardet, Edward, and Jonathan Walter, editors. *Afghanistan*. 2nd ed., Media Action, 2004.

Greenlaw, James C. "'The World Is Our Classroom': Developing Global Awareness in Adolescents by Teaching Deborah Ellis's Breadwinner Trilogy." *French Canadian Children's Literature/Littérature Canadienne Pour La Jeunesse*, vol. 31, no. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 44–59.

Griffith, Susan C. "Children and Bread in Time of War." *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2005, ojs.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/116. Accessed 17 Apr. 2019.

Guessous, Nadia. "Feminist Blind Spots and the Affect of Secularity: Disorienting the Discourse of the Veil in Contemporary Morocco." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 45, no. 3, Mar. 2020, pp. 605–28. *MLA International Bibliography*, doi.org/10.1086/706551. Accessed 22 Oct. 2022.

Hoodfar, Homa. "The Veil in Their Minds and On Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women." *Resources for Feminist Research*, vol. 22, nos. 3–4, Fall 1992/Winter 1993, pp. 5–18.

hooks, bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2000.

Ivanchikova, Alla. *Imagining Afghanistan: Global Fiction and Film of the 9/11 Wars*. Purdue UP, 2019.

Jinje, Safa. "Groundwood Releases 15th-Anniversary Editions of Deborah Ellis's The Breadwinner Series." *Quill and Quire*, 11 May 2015, quillandquire.com/childrens-publishing/2015/05/11/groundwood-releases-15th-anniversary-editions-of-deborah-elliss-the-breadwinner-series/. Accessed 22 Feb. 2019.

Kensinger, Loretta. "Plugged in Praxis: Critical Reflections on U.S. Feminism, Internet Activism, and Solidarity with Women in Afghanistan." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, Nov. 2003, pp. 1–28, vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol5/iss1/1. Accessed 13 Nov. 2019.

Khan, Mariam. "Feminism Needs to Die." *It's Not About the Burqa: Muslim Women on Faith, Feminism, Sexuality and Race*, edited by Khan, Picador, 2019, pp. 105–14.

———, editor. *It's Not About the Burqa: Muslim Women on Faith, Feminism, Sexuality and Race*. Picador, 2019.

Khan, Shahnaz. "Between Here and There: Feminist Solidarity and Afghan Women." *Genders*, vol. 33, Mar. 2001, pp. 1–26.

Kozol, Wendy. *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*. U of Minnesota P, 2014.

Mahfouz, Sabrina, editor. *The Things I Would Tell You: British Muslim Women Write*. Saqi, 2017.

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton UP, 2005.

Marshall, Elizabeth, and Özlem Sensoy. "Save the Muslim Girl." *Rethinking Schools*, vol. 24, no. 2, Winter 2009/2010, newrts.staging.aidcvt.com/articles/h1-save-the-muslim-girl-h1. Accessed 14 Oct. 2021.

Mickenberg, Julia L., and Philip Nel. "Radical Children's Literature Now!" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 4, Johns Hopkins UP, Nov. 2011, pp. 445–73. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/chq.2011.0040. 8 May 2020.

Mitchell, Diana, et al. *Children's Literature: An Invitation to the World*. Allyn and Bacon, 2002.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke UP, 2003.

Nordberg, Jenny. *The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan*. Crown, 2014.

Riley, Robin L. *Depicting the Veil: Transnational Sexism and the War on Terror*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

Schmidt, Renita. "'I Didn't Know There Was a Place Called Afghanistan': Fifth Graders Think About War." *English Quarterly Canada*, vol. 41, nos. 3–4, Winter 2010, p. 47–64.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *The Politics of the Veil*. Princeton UP, 2008.

Sensoy, Özlem, and Elizabeth Marshall. "Missionary Girl Power: Saving the 'Third World' One Girl at a Time." *Gender and Education*, vol. 22, no. 3, May 2010, pp. 295–311. *Sociology Source Ultimate*, doi:10.1080/09540250903289451. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 1994, pp. 66–111.

Steffler, Margaret. "The Production and Use of the Globalized Child: Canadian Literary and Political Contexts." *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2009, pp. 109–24. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/jeu.2010.0014. Accessed 13 Aug. 2020.

"*The Breadwinner*." *Amazon*, 17 Oct. 2021, www.amazon.com/dp/B00IN8OTAI/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1.

Watkins, Mary Bradley. *Afghanistan: Land in Transition*. D. Van Nostrand, 1963.

Wide, Thomas. "Astrakhan, Borqa', Chadari, Dreshi: The Economy of Dress in Early-Twentieth Century Afghanistan." *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress*, edited by Stephanie Cronin, Taylor & Francis, 2014, pp. 163–201.