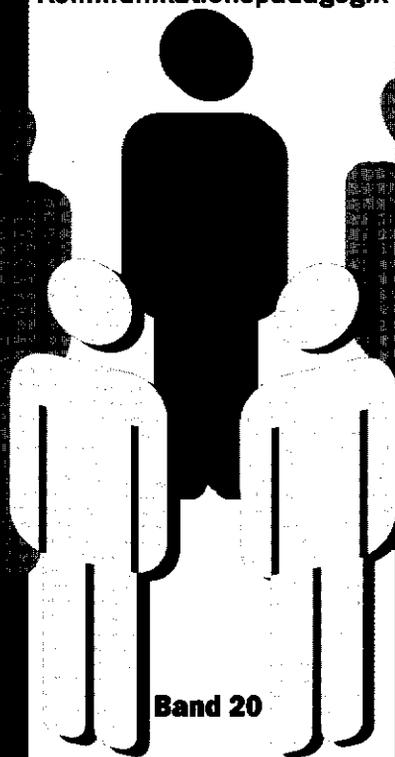


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Revolutionary Afghani Women and Their Internet Rhetoric for Political Change

In 1997 the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) launched its web site, becoming the first political organization in Afghanistan to have an Internet presence. The site has been enormously successful in communicating RAWA's feminist, anti-fundamentalist message to the world and eliciting financial and political support. At the same time, it raises questions about the efficacy of transmitting political rhetoric to a global audience via the Internet.

With over five million visits to its site, and over 5000 guests who have signed its guest book since August 21, 2001, RAWA has attracted many visitors. On September 12, 2001, following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, 700,000 persons visited the site, in contrast to the usual 10 to 15 thousand visits per day. According to one of RAWA's webmasters, supporters in Switzerland, the UK and the USA who had their own servers volunteered to host the web site to help RAWA meet the demand (Matin, May 17, 2002).

This paper examines RAWA's rhetoric for political change revealed by the web site's structure, content, and style, and situates it within the rhetorical norms of Middle Eastern rhetoric (Arabic and Persian). Since RAWA depends on the site to raise consciousness and financial support among a world audience, it is important to evaluate the efficacy of its rhetoric. Many of the web statements were originally designed for live

audiences of RAWA supporters in Pakistan. What are the implications of such rhetoric when it is translated to English or another language and placed on the Internet, for a global audience? Examining comments in RAWA's guest book gives a good indication of the range of responses engendered by the arguments on the web site.

Since RAWA's web site has grown to an enormous size, serving as a library of documents of contemporary Afghan history, viewers can read it in many different ways, and at different times discover new material. In order to limit my analysis to a manageable and meaningful amount of material, I have chosen to examine first the meta-messages and content of the home page that appear when one first opens the web site and scrolls to the bottom. This initial content and style establishes the ethos of RAWA, defines its audiences, and creates a context for interpreting subsequent pages. Within this context established by the initial page, as well as other documents on the web site, it analyzes the rhetoric of RAWA's position paper published on International Women's Day, March 8, 2002, and assesses audience reactions to RAWA's messages through guest book comments and poems published on the web site.

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan was founded in 1977 by a group of Afghan women intellectuals under the leadership of Meena, as an "independent political/social organization of Afghan women fighting for human rights and for social justice in Afghanistan." After the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, RAWA worked in the war of resistance, but unlike the Islamic fundamentalist "freedom fighters," RAWA espoused democracy and secularism. As RAWA's anti-Soviet and anti-fundamentalist rallies gained them recognition and support, both the Soviets and Islamic fundamentalists targeted them for elimination. In 1987, Meena was assassinated in Pakistan, along with two members of her family (RAWA web site 2002).

RAWA has actively worked to aid Afghan refugees in Pakistan through establishing schools with hostels for boys and girls, a hospital for refugee Afghan women and children in Quetta, Pakistan, and conducting nursing, literacy, and vocational training courses for women. In 1981, it launched its bilingual (Persian/Pashtu) magazine, *Payam-e-Zan*. With the collapse of the Soviet puppet regime in 1992 and the ascendancy of the fundamentalist Mujaheddin, and in 1995, the Taliban, RAWA has intensified its political struggle “against the fundamentalists and the ultra-fundamentalist Taliban criminal policies and atrocities against the people of Afghanistan in general and their incredibly ultra-male-chauvinistic and anti-woman orientation in particular” (RAWA web site, 2002; Richter 2000). RAWA has around 2,000 members who work inside and outside Afghanistan (“Afghan feminists” 2001).

RAWA’s main web site (home page) has been designed for an English-speaking audience. Its fullest graphic elements appear on that site. The translations of the site that appear in German, French, Italian, etc. are much simpler in design and basically consist of a list of links superimposed over a background of the images within RAWA’s logo. The English-language site has a sophisticated appearance. It is easy to navigate and makes numerous direct appeals to the audience, including a welcome to the home page in the upper right corner in both Persian and English, and a pop up window inviting the viewers to TAKE ACTION by helping to distribute RAWA’s literature. Moving boxes with the words “Take Action” appear randomly, and a window with a picture of the Afghan Women’s Mission invites women to “Click here to find out how to help.”

RAWA writes all of its messages in Farsi, or Persian, and then translates them to other languages (Matin, May 25, 2002). Since many of its statements were crafted for Farsi-speaking audiences, they are influenced

by the norms governing effective rhetoric in the Middle East. Scholars have defined several characteristics of Semitic compositions, including:

1. Saying the same thing in other ways, which seems like repetition to native English speakers;
2. Focus on beauty and form over content;
3. Exaggerated, flamboyant style (Lauson and Person n.d.).

The Persian language is heavily influenced by Arabic, and as Bouchra Moujtahid argues, “Arabs pay far more attention to impressiveness than to logic and reasoning,” and their speech and writing “are characterized by exaggeration and emphatic assertion” (1996, 2). Persian speakers are fond of using animal imagery to define the characteristics of other people, whether positive or negative (Graeff 2002).

RAWA uses several framing devices that literally surround the home page and serve several rhetorical functions. The scrolling cautionary statements in a box on the right, near the top, warn the audience that the content could be both gory and disturbing, and while such warnings might discourage some viewers from proceeding further, they no doubt attract others to satisfy their curiosity about the nature of the photographs. RAWA’s “apology” for such images deflects potential viewer criticism, while at the same time asserts the truth value of the images – they are the “reality” in which Afghans live. The words in red directed to the audience – “If you are freedom-loving and anti-fundamentalist, you are with RAWA” – ask them immediately to consider which side they are on, and suggest that pro-fundamentalists are against freedom. The long list of “RAWA in the Media” links so prominently displayed near the top contributes to RAWA’s credibility by implying that it must be quite active and effective to have attracted so much attention from such a diverse and prominent group of media. Meena’s picture and RAWA’s logo on the top left convey important meta-messages about the ethos of RAWA. The

portrait of Meena signals that RAWA itself has come under attack, and though its leader was assassinated in 1987, the membership of RAWA has not been intimidated but has kept up the struggle. The logo depicting the Afghani women with long flowing hair and up-raised fists, carrying their banner of liberation, conveys a heroic, defiant, and feminist ethos. Finally, the scrolled message at the bottom of the page establishes RAWA's adversarial and forceful voice that it uses when speaking about its opposition, whom it characterizes as the epitome of "inhuman, evil-minded and terrorist fundamentalists." This statement gives a voice to the banner-carrying women in RAWA's logo and sets the tone for the often impassioned invective that permeates RAWA's speech about its fundamentalist enemies.

RAWA's web design is linear and easy to navigate. To the left is a column of the 19 major sections on their site, including movie clips, poems, publications, recent events, reports from Afghanistan, social activities, patriotic songs (MP3), RAWA Awards, and an extensive photo gallery. Centered in the middle of the page is a list of recent protest rallies, RAWA policy statements, testimonies, appeals, and press conferences. Below these are the images and links to four books on Amazon.Com about the struggle of women in Afghanistan. These are followed by a long list of 78 links to "Recent Reports from Afghanistan." If one clicks on "more" at the end of the list, one can find several more pages of reports, going back to 1993. The titles to many of the reports are indicative of the wide range of human rights abuses and suffering documented by RAWA: "A female worker was gang raped in northern Afghanistan," "Lifting the Veil on Taliban Sex Slavery," "Afghan Girls on Sale for 100 kg Wheat," "Afghans Eat Grass as Aid Fails to Arrive (with photo)," "US Bombs Wipe Out Farming Village."

Eight thumbnail photographs of the suffering in Afghanistan immediately follow the recent reports. These photos are representative of

the hundreds of photographs that serve as documentary evidence for RAWA's claims. Although some of these photos are gory and violent, there are many within the site that are more so, such as a close-up of a smiling boy carrying the amputated feet of "criminals" through the streets. Indeed, perhaps the most effective evidence within the web site comes from the high density of photographs that accompany many stories. For example, 31 photographs appear with the story "RAWA's Aid to Biggest Kabul Orphanage." The photographs serve as iconic and visceral evidence that appeals to the audience's sense of pathos.

Following these pictures are eight other links to such information as RAWA's recent projects, news, interviews, and poems. An invitation to view and sign the guest book follows, along with links to two awards won by the web site, and a Backwash approval icon.

An effective way of amplifying its message and creating solidarity with visitors to the site is by reflecting audience viewpoints on the site. RAWA has posted 20 poems in English and one Persian poem. Most were submitted by web visitors. The American and European voices echo and amplify the anger engendered by the stories and pictures of the widespread human rights abuses, particularly against women and girls.

One of RAWA's most recent comprehensive articulations of its position on a number of key issues was issued on International Women's day, March 8, 2002, shortly after the majority of the Taliban had been removed from power. One of the biggest burdens of the speech is to clarify RAWA's controversial stance against US military involvement in Afghanistan as well as its strong critique of the Northern Alliance and the makeup of the new Loya Jirga.

The speech begins by reflecting on the celebration of last year's International Women's Day (2001), in which RAWA expressed the "fond hope" that in a year, it would be celebrating International Women's Day

inside “a free and liberated Afghanistan.” Despite the “fumigation of the Taliban pestilence and their al-Qaeda carriers,” RAWA expresses “bitter disappointment” that “our unhappy land is still far from enjoying freedom and liberty.” The paper covers the following nine issues, and ends with a peroration of 250 words:

1. RAWA and the US military campaign against the Taliban and the Osama band (548 words);
2. RAWA and the war on terrorism (231 words);
3. The situation after the fall of the Taliban (1,508 words);
4. The establishment of peace (119 words);
5. Neighbouring countries (385 words);
6. Afghan Reconstruction (145 words);
7. Loya Jirga (Grand Council) (472 words);
8. The Constitution (267 words);
9. The future Afghan State (403 words).

To analyze the speech, I identified all of the images created by metaphor, metonymy, and other figurative language and looked at the image patterns and entailments that the speech creates around the following key agents in the ongoing political drama in Afghanistan: RAWA, fundamentalists (including Taliban, al-Qaeda, Northern Alliance, and the Rabbani gang), Afghanistan, the U.S., Mr. Karzai, and neighboring countries (Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). The following discussion focuses on the images associated with RAWA, fundamentalists, Afghanistan, and the U.S.

The results of the image analysis reveal a highly agonistic rhetoric in which RAWA appears like a resolute and unyielding Sophoclean heroine in the midst of a profound tragedy, in a struggle with powerful, blind, monstrous, and inhuman forces. The majority of the images within the speech define and describe the Taliban and other fundamentalist groups in

extremely negative ways as monsters, animals, criminals, pestilence, and vermin. Twice in the speech RAWA calls them “vampire fundamentalists” and “religious vampires” (par. 2, 10), and evoking another horror show, calls them “Frankenstein monsters” useful for the pursuance of U.S. policies.

In addition to being monsters, the fundamentalists are also dogs, according to RAWA. Using irony by placing quotations around the word “gentlemen,” the authors expand on the dog imagery by saying that “The ‘gentlemen’ of the Rabbani gang, ex-fundamentalists and reborn ‘democrats,’ have worn the collar of fealty to the ilk of Abdullah Ozam and Osama bin Laden much more than the Taliban and have fed much longer on the crumbs falling from their tables” (par. 12). In the same paragraph, they describe fundamentalist groups from different provinces “falling upon each other” and “growling and snarling,” and refer to their activities as “thuggeries,” “political whorings,” “intrigues,” and characterize some of them as a “gang of scoundrels” and a “murderous band,” all of which “show the cloven hoof” (evoking an image of the devil). The hell motif combines with dog imagery when RAWA calls them “hellhounds” (par. 16).

Evoking the dog metaphor through the verb “unleashing,” RAWA likens the dog-like fundamentalists to psychopaths and criminals who have been “unleash[ed]” on the people of Afghanistan (par. 17, 19). RAWA acknowledges that the current Pakistani government has taken steps “to muzzle” terrorist Pakistani fundamentalist parties. To highlight the animal-like actions of these fundamentalists who are trying to seize power in the post-Taliban Afghanistan, RAWA describes their new European dress with the animal metaphor, “aping,” along with a powerful metonymy: “With their ridiculous newly-acquired obsession with their ‘civilised’ appearance and their aping of the latest European menswear fashions, they may

succeed in masking their real political and ideological features and backgrounds from the eyes of superficial people particularly in the West, but they will never succeed in hiding their bloodstained sleeves from the eyes of our people” (par. 12).

RAWA is aware of its use of animal metaphors for its enemies. Another RAWA statement about a fundamentalist enemy, Zardad, begins by referencing “the truth of “RAWA's oft repeated assertions regarding the beastly nature of the entire gamut of Islamic fundamentalist parties” (RAWA web site, 2002).

By far the greatest number of metaphorical epithets hurled at the fundamentalists are those associated with criminals, such as thieves, scoundrels, bands, whores, thugs, and cutthroats. The term criminal, in all its forms, is used 11 times as an epithet for fundamentalists, gang is used three times, and bands is used four times. RAWA calls the fundamentalists “scoundrels” twice and speaks of Mr. Karzai’s “concurrence with Jihadi cutthroats” (par. 14). In the same sentence in which depicts various fundamentalist groups as growling and snarling, it speaks of the “the thuggeries of Rashid Dostum and his gang of scoundrels in the north of Afghanistan, the most recent political whorings of Ismael Khan in the Herat area, and the intrigues of Rabbani and his murderous band in Badakhshan.” The animal-like nature of these criminals is highlighted by the use of “den” to describe their abodes, as in “the den of these evil criminals in Afghanistan is under siege” (par. 8) and “other terrorist dens” (par. 37). Twice RAWA uses names for famous criminal groups to describe the fundamentalists, such as “fundamentalist mafia” and “religious Cosa Nostra” (par. 21).

To intensify the venality of these criminal terms, RAWA uses adjectives such as “depraved criminals” (par. 15), “crazed religious fundamentalism” (par. 2), “evil criminals (par. 8), and speaks of the “horrendous” (par. 9)

and the “bone-chilling” crimes of the Northern Alliance (par. 15). These fundamentalist enemies of RAWA are guilty of “heinous atrocities and treacheries” (par. 15). Joining the “depravity” image with animal metaphors, RAWA says that it prefers UN troops to keep the peace rather than the “unleashing of Jihadi psychopaths on the Afghan population” (par. 17). RAWA speaks of the “trademark barbarism” of Taliban and Osama & Co. (par. 8), and the “savage and vile” war that has been waged on women for the past 10 years (par. 34).

Proceeding down the animacy hierarchy, RAWA moves from “lower” human life forms, such as criminals, the insane, the barbaric, and the savage, to animals, such as dogs and apes, and finally, to still more lowly life-forms, such as vermin, sea-creatures with tentacles, and blight and pestilence, with the concomitant dangers of contamination, filth, stench, and contagion. Calling the fundamentalists “vermin” implies that they should be eliminated, and RAWA discusses the support of the UN and other nations as a way “to shorten the life span of these vermin” (par. 7). RAWA characterizes the Transitional Administration led by Mr. Karzai as being “enmeshed and paralyzed in the tentacles of the avowed enemies of democracy who have them encircled” (par. 31).

Assessing the composition of the Loya Jirga, RAWA argues that the “crucial issue” for selecting representatives should be “freedom from fundamentalist contamination” rather than ethnic or religious affiliation, lest the Loya Jirga becomes “carriers of the fundamentalist contagion” (par. 23). In discussing its proposed amendments to the Constitution of Afghanistan, RAWA argues that separation of religion from politics and the State is “the only way for preventing our nation from being blighted by fundamentalism or any other pestilence in the garb of religion...” (par. 27). In speaking of the U.S. attacks on the Taliban and al-Qaeda, RAWA calls it

“the fumigation of the Taliban pestilence and their al-Qaeda carriers” (par. 2).

Given the repetition of extremely negative metaphors for its fundamentalist enemies, it is not surprising to find that the verbs RAWA uses to describe its policies toward its enemies are logically entailed from the metaphors. For example, a “top RAWA political priority” is the “total obliteration not only of the Taliban and their al-Qaeda props but also of the criminal Jihadis” (par. 7). RAWA speaks of “total eradication of terrorism and fundamentalism in all its forms in our country,” the “pulverization of the Taliban and the al-Qaeda” (par. 9), the “fumigation of the Taliban pestilence and their al-Qaeda carriers” and “to shorten the life span of the vermin” (par. 7).

Another key agent that RAWA evaluates is the United States. In contrast to its position paper of October 11, 2001 criticizing the U.S. strikes on Afghanistan, this statement separates its critique of U.S. policy from its assessment of U.S. citizens in general. It also acknowledges the suffering of U.S. citizens caused by the terrorist attacks on the U.S. Thus, this section of the Women’s Day speech serves as a corrective to the October statement and as a response to the angry email responses by Americans to this statement that are recorded in the guest book.

The chief image that RAWA uses to characterize the U.S. government is poor vision and blindness, as they argue that the fundamentalist bands in Afghanistan are “creatures of myopic U.S. policies” and that the U.S. has “turned a blind eye to the higher interests of the people of Afghanistan” (par. 5). Indeed, the U.S. that has “supported Frankenstein monsters” who “were useful for the pursuance of U.S. policies” is now involved in “a fracas between patron and ex-proteges.” Critiquing the U.S.’s policy of supporting the Northern Alliance, RAWA says “the U.S. is in fact abetting the worst enemies of our people and is continuing the same tyrannical

policy against the people and the destiny of Afghanistan which successive U.S. administrations adopted during the past two decades” (par. 8). But the American nation is “a great people,” and RAWA has been “inundated by thousands of emails from across the United States expressing sympathy with our people and condemning the U.S. bombardments which claim innocent victims” (par. 6). Using water imagery to unite both Afghans and Americans, RAWA describes bereaved Americans who lost “dear ones in the September 11 tragedy” visiting Afghanistan “to sympathise and commiserate with the victims of the bombardments” and says “The tears of anguish of thousands of mourning Americans and grieving Afghans will give rise to a fountain of love and sincere bonding of the peoples of the two countries” (par. 6). The logical entailment following from RAWA’s characterization of the U.S. government as blind and myopic is that it is incapable of providing vision or leadership that will improve the situation in Afghanistan.

In contrast to the venality of the fundamentalists and the blindness of the U.S. government, RAWA depicts Afghanistan itself as a victim of fate and circumstance, and indeed, as a tragedy. Despite the recent “fumigation” of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, women in Afghanistan “still don’t feel safe enough to throw away their wretched burqa shrouds, let alone raise their voices in the thousands in support of freedom and democracy” (par. 2). The term shrouds, in association with burqa, suggests death, and RAWA speaks of the women in Afghanistan as “bereaved, agonised” (par. 40). RAWA speaks of the “dire misfortune of our ill-fated country (par. 19), and of “the renewed Afghan tragedy” (par. 23). It is the “most pauperised nation on earth” (par. 2) and a “fundamentalism-scourged people” who have endured the “euphemistically-called collateral-damage” which is really “bloodshed and misery” that the U.S. has “meted out” as punishment “to its rebellious

former agents.” Such action, says RAWA, “cannot but incite our opposition to America’s war in Afghanistan” (par. 7).

Against the backdrop of a poor and tragic country, RAWA presents itself as a fearless and steady sojourner “treading a precipitous path of tears and blood.” Twice it describes itself as both intrepid (par. 3, 40) and steadfast (par. 3, 24), even “in the face of death and worse...” (par. 2). RAWA’s own voice is something that it is proud of, especially its persistence, consistency, and strength. RAWA “takes great pride” in “persistently condemn[ing]” U.S. policy and in the fact that it has “never caved in to pressure nor ‘circumspection’” (par. 5). It defines itself in “contradistinction to some mealy-mouthed, colluding women’s organizations” by making a “top RAWA political priority” the “total obliteration” of its fundamentalist enemies” (par. 7).

As if to emphasize its courage, RAWA ends its speech in the vocative voice, challenging its opponents to “level any base accusation they wish against RAWA.” Saying that “We will not flinch from reactionary and misogynist defamation and vituperations leveled against us,” RAWA evokes military metaphors, depicting itself as marching forward and fighting at the “vanguard of our country’s legion of women.” Constituting “a battalion of the great army of women partisans of freedom around the world, the women of the world will find us [RAWA] at our posts” (par. 41). These metaphorical military images seem to clash with one of RAWA’s anti-war principles, articulated near the end of the speech: “Let the succour and support for the fight of the women of Afghanistan against war and fundamentalism and for freedom and democracy strengthen and expand as never before!” (par. 42).

The Impact of RAWA's Web Site Rhetoric

With avowed enemies in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, RAWA's web site serves as a virtual headquarters, with its leadership operating clandestinely, using a P.O. Box number in Pakistan as an official address (Richtel 1999, 74-75). RAWA's enemies have tried to hack its site, twice setting up counterfeit sites full of pornographic images. Some of the entries in RAWA's guestbook contain threatening and vitriolic statements attacking RAWA's principles. In December, 2001, after Oprah Winfrey featured RAWA on her show, 300,000 persons visited its site, crashing the system (Scheeres 2001). Sympathetic Oprah viewers sent funds to RAWA to buy small cameras for women to hide under their burqas to document the Taliban human rights abuses. The photos and video clips on RAWA's web site, taken at great danger by the photographers, serve, in many cases, as the only documentation of life under fundamentalist rule in Afghanistan. Marina Matin says that they never delete any of these visual images, nor any of their reports from their web site, since they "are part of Afghanistan history and they should be there on our web site accessible to everyone" (May 17, 2002).

RAWA's intense rhetoric, much of which has been designed for live Farsi-speaking audiences, has evoked strong responses. One woman from the U.S. writes: "The photos in your gallery bring me to tears. Please understand that ignorance is rampant in this most 'educated' country – hence the idiotic remarks by some Americans here" (RAWA Guest Book, January 18, 2002). Indeed, this woman was one of several Americans apologizing for the strong words of fellow Americans who objected to RAWA's rhetoric against U.S. policy on Afghanistan. One reader, who was about to contribute money to RAWA, decided not to after reading critiques

of RAWA's rhetoric in the guest book. She writes: "Your rhetoric about the United States' involvement in Afganistan [sic] is quite unnerving and frankly, very offensive! How dare you talk about how the U.S. has wrongly killed innocent Afgans? [sic]" (RAWA Guest Book, January 12, 2002). On the same day, another reader, who had come to the site prepared to donate money, was angered by RAWA's "sanctimonious" and "very anti-American" rhetoric, and wrote: "until you retract or tone down your offensive RHETORIC against the United States of America, you will not get much support from me" (RAWA Guest Book, January 12, 2002).

RAWA's strong anti-fundamentalist rhetoric, with its dehumanizing metaphors may prompt some readers to believe that RAWA is against Islam in general. One reader from the U.S. writes: "RAWA is not fighting against the people or any individual but against the Islamic thoughts which are not practical in today's world" (RAWA Guest Book, August 17, 2001). In one of its rare responses to a guest book entry, RAWA writes: "we are not fighting against Islam. We are fighting against fundamentalism [sic] who misuse Islam for their political ends (RAWA Guest Book, August 17, 2001).

Despite RAWA's clear statements that it opposes fundamentalism, but not Islam, many comments in the guest book are filled with extreme diatribes against Islam, with calls to destroy it that echo, in tone, RAWA's own calls for the obliteration and pulverization of its fundamentalist enemies. For example, one woman writes, "The civilized world should turn Mecca into a garbage dump for nuclear wastes. Muslims are ignorant barbarians" (RAWA Guest Book, February 17, 2002). An hour later, a man echoes this angry response with the statement: "Mosques are like giant reservoirs for sewage. When Israel nukes Saudi Arabia I hope the Israeli soldiers go in and urinate in the face of every dead Muslim Saudi. I didn't care before, but the elimination of the Muslim religion from the face of the

earth should be the goal of every rational human being.” (RAWA Guest Book, February 17, 2002).

Conclusion

After reviewing one of RAWA’s representative policy papers and comparing its style and content to the home page, it is clear that RAWA’s speeches are consistent with the frame’s meta-messages of struggle, feminism, and anti-fundamentalism. Further, RAWA’s use of arguments based on pathos, with ad hominem attacks on fundamentalists that are comprised of insulting animal metaphors, is in keeping with its own statement about its rhetorical strategy, which appears on the web under “RAWA’s Standpoints.” In its first point, RAWA says that the “nature and range” of crimes against the women of Afghanistan perpetrated by fundamentalists “has no precedence in modern history.” If it had been facing “civilized opponents, we might have convinced them of our rights through logic and words of reason [...] We are of the opinion that any collaboration with the fundamentalists will only lead to further ravaging of Afghanistan by these bandits.” Based on RAWA’s own assessment of the nature of its enemies and the struggle ahead, it has adopted a rhetorical style that does not invite reconciliation, compromise, or coalescent argumentation (see Gilbert 1997, 111-112). Its metaphoric imagery of its opponents suggests that only if the disease and blight of fundamentalism is cured, the insane made sane, the barbaric made civilized, and animals transformed into humans, could real dialogue take place. The logical entailments of RAWA’s metaphors suggest that a violent solution is

necessary to achieve its goals. “Metaphors can kill,” as George Lakoff argues in “Metaphor and War” (Hallett 1991, 95-111).

Seen in the context of the scale of human suffering in Afghanistan, as depicted in the hundreds of photos on RAWA’s web site, perhaps RAWA’s language does not seem too strong. Yet its abusive imagery may inflame those with anti-Islamic prejudices to falsely generalize RAWA’s attacks on Islamic fundamentalism to an attack on Islam in general. Such incendiary responses will make peace between Islamic and non-Islamic peoples more difficult. One German professor who attended the International Colloquium on Communication and heard this paper, said that the negative animal metaphors, such as “vermin” reminded her of the rhetoric of the Nazis, and did not make her sympathetic to RAWA.

RAWA has such powerful rhetorical devices on its web site that it might be better served by toning down its level of invective against its enemies. The pictures alone serve as strong evidence about the level of human rights abuses and atrocities perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalists. Moving poetry contributed by poets from around the world expresses solidarity with RAWA and builds audience identification. Numerous media articles on the web site also amplify RAWA’s voice and credibility.

Leading an underground, on-line revolution for women’s rights, human rights, and democracy has put RAWA at the forefront of those developing Internet rhetoric for political change. Its very successful web site raises questions about the effectiveness of political rhetoric that grows out of a specific culture when it is translated to the Internet in order to reach a global audience. Such a diverse audience may respond better to statements that are especially crafted for the wider audience of the Internet, rather than translations of speeches given to audiences in Pakistan.

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