Sahar Ghumkhor
Maree Pardy

Imagining Muslim Women in Secular Humanitarian Time

Images have agency. This makes them crucial to politics and public feelings. According to W. J. T. Mitchell (1996), the force of images lies not only in what they do but also in "what [they] really want" (71). In other words, their power lies not merely with how they are interpreted but in the relationship between the image and the viewer, and how that relationship transforms the social contexts it also reveals. Images of Muslim women that feature the injustices they are subjected to *as* Muslim women are the focus of this article. The force of these images derives in part from their intended purpose to disrupt, evoke, or incite responses of compassion and solidarity and also from the respectability of the organizations that circulate them. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) have considerable status and authority, which also attaches to the images they circulate. But the power of the images is also partially attributable to the charged environment that precedes their circulation. The temporal context that both produces and mandates these images, we argue, is critical to their power. In turn we claim that their presentation and circulation produces *this* time and its atmospherics anew. So while this article draws attention to the politics and political consequences of the content and messages of the images, it gives principal consideration to time. We thus attempt to conceptualize and name this time, the time that permits and demands certain images. Our concept of "secular humanitarian time" is formulated to capture the politics and atmosphere that allow only some images to transform social and political contexts: an atmosphere in which only some images of Muslim women are representable, and others are not.

Relationships between time and morality in the contemporary era preoccupy a range of scholars, anthropologists in particular. In his attempt to convey something of the moral present, Didier Fassin (2012) emphasizes the current temporal dominance of moral sentiment over politics. The ascendance of what he calls "humanitarian reason" is evident in the contemporary discursive focus on suffering over systemic inequalities and unequal power relations. Similarly, Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) questions the contemporary moment where a hegemonic movement of global common sense

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about the primacy of women's rights has sparked a moral crusade to save Muslim women. Expanding on this notion, Judith Butler (2008) designates the time of now as secular time in which progress is tethered to sexual freedom, through which some bodies and spaces—those that exemplify discernable sexual and gender unfreedoms—are nominated as backward, behind the times, or out of step with existing norms. The present global focus on sexuality and sexual violence in times of uncertainty functions, for Miriam Ticktin (2008), according to logics of cultural otherness, particularly when this violence is articulated through tropes of alterity, including forced marriage, honor killings, and other practices of male-perpetrated violence.

The consistency that inheres in these diverse contributions is that time, specifically the time of now—the present, the current era or moment—is a political juncture. Our claim here is that this is a time in the West in which Muslim women are represented principally as victims who require saving and who qualify for humanitarian compassion but are also increasingly viewed as potential perpetrators who require surveillance, education, and the rule of law (Hussein 2016). This claim resonates with recent attempts by Inderpal Grewal (2017) to characterize this era as both progressive and revanchist, a time that commands both saving and surveillance. These theoretical offerings merge here in what we conceptualize as secular humanitarian time.

We begin with an atmospheric moment in Australian politics that establishes the scene and the sense from which our analysis proceeds. The second section of our essay discusses the power of images to provoke and interpret; what is represented in these images; and, most important for our critique here, that which is *representable* in this time. It is representability rather than representation that underscores the significance of the time and the framing strategies central to our time/frame critique. The third section enlarges the contributions of Abu-Lughod (2013), Butler (2008), Fassin (2012), and Ticktin (2008, 2016, 2017) to develop the concept and political character of secular humanitarian time. In the fourth section we analyze the images that have solicited viewers, either directly or indirectly, to champion the rights of Muslim women against the gender oppression that allegedly inheres in Islam.

Australian atmospherics

In August 2017, Senator Pauline Hanson of the right-wing One Nation Party stunned the Australian Parliament when she entered dressed in a black burqa. She wore it, she said, as a political stunt to spark public debate about face coverings. Hanson has been waging a battle against the burqa for many years, this time suggesting that in five years time Australian women might

be forced to wear the burqa. While senators gasped audibly at this spectacle, it fell to the also conservative attorney general, George Brandis, to respond to Hanson's question of whether the burqa would be banned as a matter of national security. His fiery, emotional censure of Senator Hanson for "mocking" law-abiding Muslim Australians roused emotions and garnered a highly unusual parliamentary standing ovation (Morgan 2017).

Images of the burqa-clad Hanson flooded news and other media outlets, producing for the stunt a power it may have otherwise lacked. Two such images theatrically convey her message. The first, her impassive pose in the Parliament (see fig. 1, top image); the second, a dramatic and energized removal of the veil as she rose to speak (see fig. 1, bottom image). These images encode an already shared social imaginary of the passive and constrained veiled Muslim woman counterpoised with the agential freedom that is unleashed through the removal of this inhibiting object and embodied in the freedom of the speaking Western subject.

Banning the burqa is now a refrain across many Western and non-Western countries. Interestingly, this is not the case in the United States, despite public anti-Islamic sentiment. The modality of secularism particular to the United States, which protects religion from state interference, frees religion from the sort of state incursion that would respond to calls for the burqa's banning. By comparison, in Europe the burqa is now either banned or partially banned in France (the first European country to ban it in public institutions such as schools), Belgium, the Netherlands, Novara in Italy, some regions in Catalonia, and in Switzerland (BBC 2017). In October 2017, Denmark announced its intention to ban what it calls "masking" rather than religious covering, directly linking the veil to security concerns (Jensen 2017). African countries where there has been nonstate violence, including Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Congo-Brazzaville, have also banned the burqa in an explicit effort to foil its use as camouflage (Sanghani 2017). It is a peculiar twist of irony that the war on terror, ostensibly launched to save women from the veil, no longer seeks solely to liberate women from constraint but newly casts these same women as the embodiment of potential danger (Riley 2013). The veil is not merely or predominantly an issue of "their" lack of freedom but of "our" collective vulnerability to "their" potential danger.

In Australia Muslim women have not only been subjected to discourses and gestures of saving (as victims of Islam and Muslim men) and suspicion (as trafficking fundamentalist ideology or weapons), they have also been called upon to ameloriate community anxiety about them. The expectation that Muslim women would be sensitive to what they symbolize and attentive to what they can and cannot say came to fruition in a recent national

Figure 1 One Nation's Pauline Hanson takes off the burqa in the Senate, August 16, 2017 (Morgan 2017). © 2017 by the Australian Associated Press. Reprinted with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

backlash against celebrated youth leader Yassmin Abdel-Magied when she declared, in part of a heated exchange with Independent Senator Jacqui Lambie on national television, that "Islam is *the* most feminist religion" (ABC 2017a). Not long after this, Abdel-Magied tweeted on Anzac Day—"Lest

we forget (Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine)."[1] When a Muslim woman who wears a headscarf and identifies strongly with Islam speaks about Australia's history or hypocrisy, she is criticized for speaking out of turn. Abdel-Magied was criticized, threatened, and ridiculed to such a degree that she decided to leave Australia and settle in London (Chalmers 2017). Reflecting on this set of experiences, Abdel-Magied, who has called herself "the most publicly hated Muslim in Australia," says that "the reality is the visceral nature of the fury—almost every time I share a perspective or make a statement in any forum—is more about who I am than about what is said" (ABC 2017b).

The exhortations and injunctions addressed to Muslim women are neither uniform nor static. Indeed, it is the changing narratives and shifting images of Muslim women that motivate this article. For example, Abdel-Magied was publicly perceived as a moderate, modern Muslim woman, but public outrage at her utterances transformed her into a disloyal and dangerous one. Thus, it is not so much our wont to construct coherence around the multiple representations of Muslim women. Instead, we point to something much less fluid—the link between the image, its affect, and its frame. It is the *framing* of the image, we argue, that not only represents but also, and more important, delimits what is and what is not representable.

Pauline Hanson was not the first Western, non-Muslim politician to enter Parliament in the burqa. In October 2001, American Democratic congresswoman Carolyn Maloney wore the burqa to Congress to speak about women in Afghanistan. She congratulated President George W. Bush on his "just war" in Afghanistan and for balancing war with compassion, for freeing the women from the Taliban, which since 1996, she claimed, had "unilaterally declared an end to women's basic human rights" and imposed the sorts of banishments and restrictions on women's freedoms that are "unfathomable to most Americans" (C-SPAN 2001). Maloney went on

[1] Anzac Day is a national day of commemoration that originally honored the members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who fought at Gallipoli during World War I. The day's meaning has expanded to commemorate all Australians who have participated in, and died in, wars elsewhere. In more recent times it has become a day of heightened nationalist sentiment and mythmaking marked by the solemn "Lest we forget." The independent island state of Nauru and Manus Island of Papua New Guinea host Australia's controversial detention centers that function as offshore processing sites for asylum seekers and refugees. Dubbed by the Australian government as part of the "Pacific solution" to boat arrivals of asylum seekers, Nauru and Manus have become sites where people are detained for years in conditions condemned by the United Nations and Human Rights Watch as cruel and inhumane. The detention strategy, which also includes a government policy to *never* resettle refugees from these centers in Australia (even when they are assigned refugee status), is an attempt to prevent boat arrivals to Australia.

to describe the garment she was wearing: "It is an expensive, heaving, cumbersome garment, which covers the entire body, and it includes a mesh panel covering the eyes. The veil is so thick it is difficult to breathe" (C-SPAN 2001). Her impassioned speech pointed to the victimization and persecution of women under the Taliban, including beatings, rape, impoverishment, lack of access to society and food, and executions. These "persecuted sisters in Afghanistan," she added, were engaged in courageous struggles to gain basic rights (C-SPAN 2001).

These two parliamentary performances by Western women in burqas offer insight into the present time. The focus in Maloney's presentation was almost entirely on women as victims, in need of liberation and protection. This speech, together with a host of other feminist claims at the time, stressed care and compassion for Muslim women as a primary motivation for military intervention (Appelbaum 2016). In the Hanson performance, the preeminent concern was not with the discomfort of the burqa but its symbolic and material representation as a threat to Australia's national security. The war on terror has settled in as an institutionalized feature of contemporary geopolitics. What has shifted between 2001 and 2020? What time is *now*? And how do images that still point to women's pain and oppression circulate in the shadow of a darker agenda that is encoded in time? The newly *represented* is that which has become *representable*.

What is representable?

In her considerations of images of the tortured body, Butler (2007, 2008, 2009) attends to the nexus of norms, frames, and human suffering, arguing that images of torture signify what is acceptable to the "domain of representability" (2007, 953). The frames that govern this, she suggests, enable and are enabled by social and political norms that produce what we call "reality." That we approach a scene or an image through its frame raises an obvious question about the texture and type of frame through which we approach images of Muslim women. The focus here is on images that seek to move and incite us: images that Susan Sontag (2003, 9) describes as "shock therapy," as they simultaneously impinge on us, overwhelming, moving, and numbing us. How do such images interpellate viewers as critics and activists who engage in making political judgments (see Butler 2007, 951)?

Context is crucial to the production, circulation, and reception of images. Sontag (1977, 12) is conscious of this when she claims that a photograph cannot shape public opinion unless a certain feeling or attitude is already part of the context. The events captured in the images that concern us commonly

depict violence or constraints imposed on Muslim women. Even though it precedes the reception of the image, the event is already named and the already existing political consciousness of it determines the possibility of being affected by the image (Sontag 1977, 14). Sontag pushes a point here that Butler will later challenge. Photographs move us, says Sontag; they can affect us profoundly but only momentarily. They may shock us, but they lack the power to build an interpretation because they are immersed in larger social and political fields, which are already interpreted. Butler suggests, though, that some images *do* build an interpretation. Images of the tortured bodies at Abu Ghraib are not images awaiting interpretation; they are actively, even forcibly, building the interpretation of, and for, the state and its war perspectives (Butler 2007, 952). The event in both cases is named before the image appears. This name interprets the image while its circulation solidifies the event, its name, and its images. We might call this a representation-representability loop.

In order to control public affect, representability comes to the fore as a perspective that is permitted, in Butler's case, around the war on terror in the aftermath of 9/11. For Butler it is not the content of an image that will reveal representability, for there is already too much content that is excluded, cast out by its frame, as it were. The excluded content is thus the always present "non-thematised background of what is represented" (Butler 2007, 953), or in Sontag's terms, the named event or the frame is active in delimiting representability. Frames govern perceptibility and are always suffused with larger norms of race and civilization.

What, then, are the frames through which Muslim women are representable? Or, in Butler's terms, what perspective is permissible? Whereas Butler directs her address to the frame of war, it is our task here to denote the framing that *permits* (Butler) or *produces* (Sontag) images of Muslim women. The war on terror is part of that frame, as are its civilizational and racial presumptions about progress and humanity. Indeed, the act of Pauline Hanson and the response of the attorney general who castigated Hanson's stunt for compromising relations between Australian police, security forces, and members of Australian Muslim communities who work with them on antiterrorism and national security reveal the centrality of terror and security to the context of the images we are concerned with here. This dual optic involves an adjustment from the imperiled Muslim woman (Razack 2004) to the imperiling Muslim woman (Ghumkhor 2020). Since 2001 the Muslim woman has been represented not only as secreted away but also as the symbolic harbinger of secret intentions. Muslim women need to be saved from the terrorizing male domination of religion, and "we" need to be protected from the terror that they portend. What frame permits, produces, and

demands such representability? It is time, we suggest, specifically secular humanitarian time, that frames the production and reception of the images.

Time frame: Secular humanitarian time

Thinking temporally is difficult, in part because as theorists of time suggest, there is never only one time in operation at the same time (Rahman 2014). Already the idea of dividing time into eras, or epochs, as a way of distinguishing intervals relies on an imaginative capacity to partition or spatialize time. Times are demarcated through a periodizing paradigm that organizes them according to themes and premises, some of which intersect with each other. Epochal frames name particular historical periods (medieval period), stages of intellectual history (Enlightenment), geopolitical time (Cold War), geological time (Anthropocene), cosmological time (Christendom), ideological time (neoliberalism and postfeminism). Time also demonstrates a powerful tendency to organize along spatial lines (Nanni 2013), especially when it involves the global movement of peoples, ideas, capital, and politics. Time has been a key rhetorical device for differentiating other people and places, and for portraying these as knowable. As anthropologist Johannes Fabian has argued, "there is no knowledge of the Other which is not also a temporal, historical and political act" (1983, 1). We are concerned in this article with the discursive and generative spatializing power of time and how it works to erect barriers between places, ideas, and bodies that are differentially perceived as *of* this time or of another time. Thus, apparently innocent time vernaculars such as "of its time," "ahead of the times," and "behind the times" are understood here as codes of moral, cultural, or political judgment. Secularism, as a founding principle of the time that is named "modernity" discursively frames and powerfully demands the representability of Muslim women that we analyze here.

The visual has a long trajectory in the spatialization of time. Indeed, Orientalist paintings represented the East as exotic and different while simultaneously claiming to be authentic documents of places and people. In his classic book *Orientalism*, Edward Said critiques this outsider Western tradition of representating and interpreting the East, arguing that it was a political gesture of artists to subsume all of the East into their images, thereby inventing the Orient to justify the West's own imperialist purposes (Said 1978, 1). In tracing the future orientation and forward projection of this imperial imaginary, Anne McClintock likewise observes that modernity produced history as a spectacle of the other and through panoptical time consumes global history at a glance—in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility (2013, 37). The colonizing camera became a way of

documenting evidence of this time of progress, of history marching forward, recording others and otherness as cultures, peoples, and belief systems that were out of step with this time and evidencing their attachment to and dwelling in the past, frozen in time in what McClintock calls "anachronistic space" (16). Due to its capacity to fix the other, photography in particular proved capable of *domesticating* an elusive other (Alloula 1986) through framing and naming difference—a difference romanticized, exoticized, eroticized (Asad 1973; Said 1978; Hall 1997). The name of modernity, and its new technologies of visual documentation, spatializes time through the dialect of linear movement and subsequently embeds time in the spaces where difference finds its "natural" home: in other bodies and places.

Modernity-as-progress, marked by its founding principle of the separation of church and state, is always and necessarily accompanied by its shadow side, backwardness, which is found in places and bodies that belong in times past. The body of the Muslim woman, like Islam itself, carries the load of being trapped in an arrested, childish state of cultural development (Butler 2008). Talal Asad (2003), Judith Butler (2008), and Charles Taylor (2007) have each described the time of modernity and the sequence it implies as secular time—a time that transforms and distances a sacred past, stripping time of religious influence as it progresses toward an ever-perfecting modernity.

While secular time nominally banishes religion from political life, there is in reality, as many scholars have conjectured and demonstrated, no true separation of religion and state. Asad (2003), Butler (2008), Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (2008), Saba Mahmood (2009, 2015), and Joan Wallach Scott (2017) all argue that secularism is not an actual state or epochal descriptor but an ongoing process of power that actively reshapes religion to ensure that its presentation and performances align with modern norms and politics. Thus, the secular rationality of modernity that imbues laws, states, knowledge, and economics also calculates "what constitutes religion and proper religious subjectivity in the modern world" (Mahmood 2009, 195). Secularism therefore, through its civilizational or modernist frame, is only ever ambiguously secular, bestowing upon itself the entitlement to "bring notions of democracy to those who are characterized as pre-modern, who have not yet entered into the secular terms of the liberal state, and whose notions of religion are invariably considered childish, fanatic or structured according to ostensibly irrational and primitive taboos" (Butler 2008, 14). Images of oppressed Muslim women have been central to secular judgments about what is tolerable and intolerable. The images that concern us here are produced through a time that deems Muslim women "not yet secular" and therefore in need of state regulation of their sometimes intolerable

religious practices or demeanors. This is what Mahmood (2015, 21) conceptualizes as "political secularism." Building on Asad's (2003) notion of the secular, Mahmood's political secularism is the "thoroughly intertwined" presence of the secular state's impulse to regulate religion along with and as a precursor to the promise of freedom through such secularism (2015, 21). Mahmood argues compellingly that far from being a neutral arbiter of religious difference, the secular state is composed of legal instruments and political institutions that are constituted through the background norms, religions, and sensibilities of the majority. This not only produces disparity between majorities and minorities (22), it also reinforces religion and religious difference as central to political life. Hence secularism depends for its force and significance on the ongoing presence and legal categorization of religious minorities within majority nations. Consequently, its political character (Mahmood) and its ambiguity (Butler) are founded on and reproduce inequality of religions and a hierarchy of secular tolerability.

Secular time, with its need to regulate religion to protect and champion the rights of its actual or potential victims, is key to representability. Muslim women, for example, emplaced and embodied in premodern temporalities, are deemed not *of* secular time and become objects of both compassion and suspicion. Butler (2008) argues, for example, that Europe and modernity are perceived through secular time as sites of gender equality and sexual freedom, rendering them as precious times that may be susceptible to the infectious influence of those who are temporally out of step. Similarly Scott (2017) argues that despite the long history of intellectual inquiry and research on secularism, in today's usage it refers almost exclusively to Islam, and centralizes gender: "In this discourse secularism guarantees freedom and gender equality while Islam is synonymous with oppression" (1). Indeed, she argues that in the wake of 9/11, secularism was tied to gender equality and became the basis for claims about Western superiority over "all of Islam" (2). Secular modernity articulates its desire to bring the Muslim woman to freedom while also attempting to ensure that she is not unfitting or a danger to it.

When secular time, which upholds sexual politics as a leitmotif of progress, regulates and represents Muslim women, it does so, we argue, through the language and logic of humanitarian relief from suffering. This is crucial in the face of increasing critiques of security policies and laws that guard against terrorism as racist and Islamophobic. In this highly charged atmosphere of racialized security, the vocabulary and symbolism of humanitarianism is appropriated to demonstrate that the representability of Muslim women is politically neutral and without political prejudice or racist intent. If humanitarian action has a politics, it is, according to Fassin (2007), a

"politics of life," with a focus on victims and on saving lives (510–11). This logic champions some lives over others; so, for example, Muslim women are supported over and above Muslim men and indeed are the implicit victims of these men. Secular progressive time thus encodes a "humanitarian reason," a logic driven by an indubitable moral impetus to focus on suffering and its relief (Fassin 2012, 244).

Temporality also attaches to humanitarianism according to Fassin (2012), who suggests that humanitarianism's moral sentiment came into being in the last decade of the twentieth century as a general frame of reference in political life. Although humanitarianism is ostensibly a secular project, it is actually an inheritance of Christianity that has survived secularizing processes (Fassin 2012), and it fits with Western notions of the secular that are already imbued with Christianity (Scott 2017). With its companion, human rights, humanitarianism has become the language of choice for most political causes—a secular religion of sorts that focuses on suffering rather than inequality, trauma rather than violence. The "consensual force" of "humanitarian reason" is at work where "inequality is replaced by exclusion, domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering, violence is expressed in terms of trauma" (Fassin 2012, 6). In this schema, concern (for the suffering of the Muslim woman) is hailed as a political virtue, and the dubious politics of such concern become depoliticized through humanitarian sentiment. In what we have coined here as secular humanitarian time, the sentiment of humanitarian concern obscures the acutely political dimensions of secular time as one in which Islam is demonized (Scott 2017) as a political construction that redraws maps of religion and power (Asad 2003) or as an inherently political form of power that establishes a hierarchy of religions in political life (Mahmood 2015). If secular time demands specific representations of Muslim women, humanitarianism depoliticizes this representability.

The Muslim woman is representable as a humanitarian subject of patriarchal and religious oppression, suffering at the hands of religion and its men, both of which are alleged to intensify their influence and control in times of war and conflict. Muslim women then, in this time, are in a state of emergency and are represented as emergency embodied. But there's a twist. As Ticktin (2016) points out, the quintessential humanitarian victim is innocent and bears no responsibility for their suffering. Indeed it is their innocence that "qualifies them for humanitarian compassion" (Ticktin 2016, 257). While the body of the Muslim woman is represented as a body in crisis, subjected to capricious external forces that impose suffering and violate her rights, humanitarianism falters when it is also attuned to a counterterrorist sensorium. The Muslim woman is innocent because she is a victim of Islam,

but sometimes she is a victim of *radical* Islam. This is a predicament that both signals and sullies her innocence, because in it, she is always impressionable to radicalization. She remains a victim, but she is vulnerable to being victimized into radical Islam. Her victim status is thus always present but sometimes smeared.

Muslim women (as victims, injured, innocent) and Muslim men (as patriarchs, perpetrators, guilty) are central to representability in this time. Indeed, as Abu-Lughod (2013) notes, a melding of humanitarian sensibility and feminism has produced an urgency about going to war for women, occasioning a new "common sense" that has taken hold globally (55). The seriousness of gender discrimination and women's suffering, taken up as a mainstream issue of public concern by liberals and conservatives, takes the form of a "moral revolution" (57). Abu-Lughod suggests that today's concerns establish an analogy between gender relations and campaigns against women's oppression on other issues in other times. Campaigns against foot binding in China and against slavery were both conducted through the register of abolition, each placing the West at the center of their moral crusades and each attaching reform to an emerging but repressed desire for modernity (64). As with slavery and foot binding, the focus on Muslim women presents an opportunity for outsiders who wish to end problems elsewhere (66).

To summarize so far, our formulation of secular humanitarian time that produces certain campaign images of Muslim women rests largely on the spatializing power of time. Time, organized through secular modernity, is the time of now. The time of now, or now-time, produces knowledge of the present. That is, as knowledge about things in the here and now, it constitutes how things and bodies become visible and known in the present. The "here" of the here and now is critical to our formulation of secular humanitarian time because it spatializes the now *as* the here. In our case, the here is the West. We have suggested that the visual has long been implicated in this spatialization of time, referencing Orientalist paintings and colonial photography, both of which produce panoptical time from the vantage point of historical progress and of gazes at the backward and the elsewhere. This is the time of modernity, a founding principle of which is the separation of church and state. Modernity is thoroughly secular. Or so it seems, because the voluminous academic work on secularism has pointed to the ambiguity and partiality of this secular separation and challenges its role in ushering in modernity. Indeed, Asad points out that the secular builds on a particular conception of the world that already exists, and we would all do better to examine the *idea* of the secular rather than analyze secularism as an actually existing state or condition (2003, 191). The idea of the secular

is a powerful political device for enlightening the premodern about the irrationality of their ways and promising freedom from the strictures and constraints of backwardness. Secular freedom, though, is simultaneously coercive in its articulations and enforcements of the limits of tolerability. The images of the "not yet secular" Muslim women that we analyze below are imbued with secular time that explicitly sanctions the tolerable and its excesses. Finally, we have asserted that secular time intersects with a charged atmosphere of racism, Islamophobia, and intensifying regimes of national and international security. In this heightened atmosphere, secularism has been accused of serving Islamophobia and is criticized for its racialized and colonialist sensibility. We have argued here, however, that in relation to Muslim women, the suspect credentials of the secular are neutralized through the deployment of humanitarian sentiment and its concern for victims.

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of campaign images of Muslim women, it is important to foreshadow and respond to at least some justifiable challenges to our schema of secular humanitarian time. How do we account for changes in representability between 2001 and 2020? Are these different times? Is one more secular, more humanitarian, more Islamophobic, more securitized than the other? It is not novel to argue that in 2001 the Muslim woman was unequivocally represented as a victim. In 2020 we have suggested that she remains a victim but also presents as a potential security threat (see also Hussein 2016). This is a radical shift, the direction and effects of which are still unfolding. For example, these two representations also mediate the growing visibility of Muslim women in the entertainment and fashion industries, even as these women appear to be subverting them (BBC 2018). Does our formulation hold in the face of such change? In response, we insist that 2001 and 2020 are of the same time. In order to make good on this claim, it is necessary for us to restate the concept of the time of now.

Reflecting on temporality, Butler (2008) suggests that time is not one-dimensional; rather it is contested, and it is at the borders of these contestations, borders that are corporeal and geographical, that the time of "now" is located. Time is spatialized—it is when, but more significnantly it is where—not *what* is this time, but *where* is this time? Epistemologically, the time of now produces knowledge of the present. How do we understand the present? We understand it through secular time as the place where hegemonic ideas about progress, freedom, and justice are defined "over and against a premodern temporality" (Butler 2008, 1). Sexual politics, specifically the sexed body, is the symbolic demarcation of the time of "now," similar to what Taylor (2012, 55) has called "ordinary time." We propose here that this time of now and its knowledge production are features of both 2001

and 2020. The trajectory of a corporeally and geographically signified West, whose borders are demarcated by its capacity to offer, nourish, and protect freedom, has remained constant over this time. The images of Muslim women we examine below span a ten-year time period, yet we argue through this spatializing concept of the time of now—the where of the when, the here and not there—that the time between 2001 and 2020 is constant.

Following Mojha Kahf, we urge that today's representations are not "culminations" of historical periods but are better apprehended as "current episodes in a series of subjugations" (1999, 3). Representations of the Muslim woman pivot around her victimization. She may be a willing accomplice or escaping her victimization, but the statement "the Muslim woman is being victimized" undergirds most Western representations (1). The Muslim woman as representable through secular time is one more episode of victimization, this time as passive victim *and* as a subject victimized into fundamentalist agency. The episodic character of the images of Muslim women speaks to such historical contingencies as the "war on terror" and the "clash of civilizations," yet she is caught up in a stillness of time, where Muslims and Islam are conjured as belonging to or stuck in another time. We therefore argue against an understanding of secular humanitarian time only as a periodization or ephocal descriptor and emphasize instead the discursive power of a time that spatializes between here and elsewhere and refers to a present, a future, and *the* past. Secular humanitarian time is contingent on actual historic events and contexts. It incorporates the atmosphere of racialized security but travels through the language of the humanitarian ethic to be "on the side of the victims" (Fassin 2007, 511). This "remarkable mimetism" (511) obscures the racialized sentiment of the representability of the Muslim woman, to which we turn in the following section.

The images and their powers

In this section we present a selection of the images that motivated this article. We do not present a comprehensive visual analysis of each image; instead, we read the images as cultural objects and messages and understand them as part of the political and cultural milieu that we designate secular humanitarian time. The images are, we suggest, iconic insofar as they represent this time. Their circulation in traditional and social media reminds us that "what counts as 'time,' how it is defined or measured, or why it's important in our lives, always comes wrapped in media-structured perceptions of the world" (Keane 2016).

Women's rights in Afghanistan

In 2009 Human Rights Watch produced a report on the deteriorating conditions of women's rights in Afghanistan. The report, titled "We Have the Promises of the World," highlights the failure of the Afghan government and international donors to pritorize women's rights and their choice to focus instead on the armed conflict rather than the rule of law (Human Rights Watch 2009, 3). The report chose five areas as "exemplars" of the government's failure to advance the basic rights of women and girls, and also identifies shortcomings in donor priorities. The five exemplars are attacks on women in public life, violence against women, child and forced marriage, access to justice, and girls' access to secondary education.

The report is accompanied by an image of the by-now conspicuous symbol of Afghan women, faceless women in blue burqas, on this occasion with their backs to the camera, as shown in figure 2. As Mahmood writes, "It was the visual image of the burqa more than anything else that condensed and organized knowledge about Afghanistan and its women" (2005, 197). Indeed, in the language of "exemplars," the blue burqa alone stands in for "an adequate understanding of their suffering" (Mahmood 2005, 197). The word *exemplar* points not to one example among an array; rather, it stresses

Figure 2 Women's rights in Afghanistan. Afghan women attend a rally for a presidential candidate in the 2009 elections. Photo by Lynsey Addario, referenced in Human Rights Watch (2009). © 2009 by Getty Images UK. Reprinted with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

the typicality of the example, or more accurately a "perfect" example of the message being conveyed. Although we may be warned against impulses to judge a book by its cover, this image, presented to the reader as "exemplar" of "their suffering" (Mahmood 2005, 197), acts on us in advance of such reflexivity. Afghanistan is already known as the land of blue burqas and "the world's most dangerous country to be a woman" (Reuters 2011); permissible knowledge of it, that is, its *representability*, frames the perspective of this image and its message.

The permissible image, women's bodies enveloped in blue veils, all but obscures another hidden element of the image. We have to turn to the scarcely visible caption disclosing that this is an image of a rally during the 2009 presidential campaign. In other words, it is an image of women actively participating in the politics of their country. But the camera's angle does not look for this act of agency and collective empowerment, fixating instead on the familiarity of the blue veil. Indeed, we might even argue that this image—its angle, its perspective, and its representability—obscures the women more powerfully than does the burqa.

Arguably the camera is positioned to hauntingly invoke engagement with the five key exemplars in the report. The ensuing content of the report on Afghan women's rights violations, however, is overshadowed by the persuasive power of this image. The power of the image lies in its capacity to reinforce existing knowledge, reminding rather than informing the spectator about the plight of women in Afghanistan. It is beyond our scope here to reprise and analyze the textual content of the report. It does make very important findings about women's engagement in political struggle, human rights, law reform, and girls education, but while it amplifies the attacks and risks associated with these, it chooses to absent any discussion of gains that are being made by the women themselves. If the image promoting the report does nothing to indicate these stories of activism and struggle, the text itself underplays these too, as it warns of the deteriorating status of advances expected or promised by the world (hence the title of the report—"We Have the Promises of the World"). While it is undeniably the task of a human rights organization to identify rights violations, the powerful image above shrinks rather than enlarges our understanding of the lives of women in Afghanistan. We are left with the worn-out story of the knowable third-world subject (Khoja-Moolji 2017, 391), in this case, the imperiled Muslim woman (Razack 2004).

Afghan women wearing miniskirts in 1972 Kabul

The symbolism and representability of images of Afghan women in blue burqas becomes all the more forceful alongside the image of past freedoms

Figure 3 Afghan women wearing miniskirts in 1972 Kabul. Image used by Amnesty International UK (2014). A color version of this figure is available online.

that began circulating in 2014 after Amnesty International posted a report titled "Women in Afghanistan: The Back Story" (Amnesty International UK 2014; see fig. 3). Its "back story" narrates the steady progression of women's rights in Afghanistan, including the right to vote in 1919 (a year before women in the United States had the right to vote) and a 1960s constitution that brought equality to many areas of life, including political participation. According to Amnesty, women's rights began to be rolled back in the 1970s during civil conflict between mujahideen groups and the state and again under Taliban rule. In 2017 H. R McMaster, an advisor to the forty-fifth president of the United States and an advocate for more involvement in Afghanistan, used this and similar images to convince the president to continue military involvement (Rucker and Costa 2017) because "western norms had existed there before and could return" and because Afghanistan was "not a hopeless place" (Warren 2017). Indeed, this image and memes based on it (see fig. 4, fig. 5) are now circulated most prolifically among ultra-right-wing groups.

Before and after the veil

These replicated visual messages circulate on social media, stirring angst about Islam in the West. Time is central to these cultural anxieties, suggesting that dangerous migrants will repeat the backward Afghan slide in European nations. Progressive time, if not sufficiently vigilant about political

Figure 4 Before and after the veil. A color version of this figure is available online.

secularism's capacity to regulate and manage the veiled threats contained in multiculturalism and migration, is in danger of being derailed. This is the slippage witnessed in Abdel-Magied's identification with an Islam that is "the most feminist religion," demonstrating that even the "good" Muslim subject can be radicalized into regression at any time.

As stated above, the Amnesty image and its subsequent viral recreations are saturated with the concept of time. Figure 3, which dates from the early 1970s, portrays young Afghan women unveiled and with bare legs, wearing Western attire, carrying books, and smiling. The image is framed by a question: "How did Afghanistan become the most dangerous place to be a

Figure 5 The girl child. Women lined up for treatment at a health clinic in Kalakan, Afghanistan, 2017. Photo by Paula Bronstein, Getty Images. © 2017 by Getty Images UK. Reprinted with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

woman?" The affect of the frame is one of mourning for freedom lost, but it also serves as a projection of hope that perhaps these women of Afghanistan will not be lost to the past forever. The image instructs that "Kabul circa 1970s" was *in time with* Europe. The visibility of Afghan women's bodies, their smiles, their confidence, what Western audiences may grasp as their shared humanity or sameness, is carried in this image through the *absence of the veil*. Indeed, while the veiled Muslim body is imbued with backward, religious time, the unveiled secular body embodies such freedoms as education, self-expression, sexual freedom, and even consumption. As Butler observes, the unveiled face is a condition of the process of humanization (2004, 141–42).

It seems to matter little that these images are of a small community of Afghan elites who would travel often to Europe and America, and wear Western attire, or that many nonelite women wore the veil and other head coverings at the time (Abu-Lughod 2013, 37). Moreover, there is no inkling that war, which is also evacuated from the image, would be dangerous for *any* women, in *any* country. The image organizes time as a regression, a temporal lag, where freedom has been rolled back. The temporal lag of Afghanistan, stuck in or returned to a time long past, is embedded in secular humanitarian time to the extent that there is still "time" to "save" these women (Abu-Lughod 2013).

Here the body is a boundary crossing between geographies and time. There is a seductive and erotic quality to this preoccupation with Muslim women's bodies, a pondering about what they reveal and how they enjoy. Peeking behind the veil, tearing it off, gently removing it, and even seeing that its absence was once possible conjures a sensuous if not titillating atmosphere. Encountering the flesh of these once-visible bodies seduces one into imagining and identifying the return of freedom. But for freedom to return and flourish, there is a point *from* which it progresses—always there is the time and place where freedom is absent.

The camera produces absence and presence, past and present, *human* and *nonhuman*. In the idiom of humanitarianism, the camera seeks to help. In the 1970s image of the freewheeling Afghan women, the burqa is outside the frame. But as Butler reminds us, the frame never fully contains the scene it is meant to illustrate because there is always already an outside that makes the inside recognizable (2009, 9). The burqa, with all its tropes and symbolism of colonial backwardness, religious oppression, and racialization, allows freedom to be grasped in the image. The Afghan women lost in time are found via the moral sensibility of humanitarian time, which promises to relieve their suffering and bring them to freedom.

The girl child

If many Muslim women are lost to or in time, the nexus of time and the Muslim girl child brings an urgency and intensity to the humanitarian drive to relieve suffering and save lives. Images of children feature repeatedly in campaigns by rights, humanitarian, and development organizations that seek to disrupt the inertia or unfamiliarity of those they aim to reach. The child is represented as possessing two principal qualities: one is their innocence and vulnerability, which Ticktin (2017) suggests makes them a perfect object of humanitarian desire—they are victims who bear no responsibility for their suffering and thus unquestionably qualify for humanitarian compassion. Images of children are powerful representations of innocence. If innocence is defined as "freedom from both the worldly and unworldly" (Ticktin 2017, 577), the Muslim girl child is at extreme risk of this lack of freedom from the unworldly (religious) world she must inhabit. The second quality, and not unrelated to innocence, is the "not yet" aspect of the child and its representation as the potentiality of community (see Faulkner 2010). Figure 5 features the Muslim girl child positioned portentously between veiled and unfree Muslim woman. The "not yet" in humanitarian time translates to there still being enough time to save or protect this child from the world of suffering endured by the women who accompany her.

The image of women lined up outside a health clinic positions a piercingly innocent child floating amid a sea of blue veils. This image is attached to a report on the "High Price of Virginity" in Afghanistan (Pazhohish 2017). It is a curious article. It begins with an anecdote about Aisha, who married her cousin, who in turn wanted to take another wife and so accused Aisha of not being a virgin at marriage. Aisha is now divorced and has no wish to countenance another marriage because, as she tells us, "If you are 14 years old and divorced, you have the same status as a widow. You won't be valued like a virgin is valued." The article then presses the issue of "forced" and "degrading" virginity tests, although it is unclear about who is forcing the tests, families or the state, and the forms of force or the nature of the "degradation" at hand. It also reports that the state has promised to ban the tests, while those who perform the procedure argue that they "consider the rights of the patient to be their priority and take into consideration all moral and legal ethics." These two issues are described as the "public health authorities . . . downplay[ing] the impact of such examinations." That this is indeed the case is plausible, but we read confusing and conflicting accounts of virginity and its testing regimes and consequences. Nonetheless, the girl in this image, with her imploring gaze and solemn expression, assists in convincing the viewer that she is at risk of "paying a high price." Not yet, but soon. Perhaps.

NATO and women's rights

In the lead-up to the May 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, Amnesty International found itself ensnared in controversy after it plastered the city's bus shelters with posters featuring two women in the notorious blue burqa, striding purposefully while sheltering a young girl between them (fig. 6). The poster was a message to NATO and to the public—"Human Rights for Women and Girls in Afghanistan. NATO: Keep the Progress Going!" Antiwar protestors and long-term Amnesty supporters were shocked by the poster, interpreting its message as support for NATO and an endorsement of its decade-long occupation. The outrage forced Amnesty to respond rapidly and to release a statement affirming that it was not taking a pro-war stance. Titled "We Get It," Amnesty's statement asks, "Is the poster confusing? Yes, especially as it is plastered all over a city packed with NATO protestors" (Amnesty International USA 2012). Amnesty makes a plea, however, for this confusion not to stop protestors from attending Amnesty's shadow summit, at which it planned to showcase its support for Afghan women. The shadow summit did not assure the protestors, who were additionally perturbed by Amnesty's decision to invite Madeleine Albright, controversial US secretary of state in the Clinton administration, to keynote the

Figure 6 NATO and women's rights. Poster mounted on Chicago bus shelter by Amnesty International, May 2012. Photographer unknown. A color version of this figure is available online.

event. The protestors' indignation and Amnesty's response indicate that it was the text rather than the image that sparked controversy. Moreover, it was also only part of the text that aggravated. As the Amnesty response states, "You can guess which sentence triggered the controversy," making it plain that while the image may well have been appropriate for the first sentence "Human Rights for Women and Girls in Afghanistan," NATO's involvement in the realization was the problematic issue.

A striking feature of this image is the luminosity of the girl's colored clothes, her piercing gaze, and the intimate contact she makes with the spectator. Positioned between two burqas, she is partly protected by their drape

but "not yet" disappeared by them. The question becomes not *whether* but *how best* to protect her from the other women's fate—with NATO or without? Whatever Amnesty's explanation or intentions—and to be sure, it was resolute about its lack of support for war and remaining impartial about NATO—it is clear that Amnesty's "feminist" justification for its NATO campaign aligned with NATO's motivations and self-congratulations regarding its occupation of Afghanistan.

A return to darkness

Secular humanitarian time recently produced a nationwide reaction against a video by women of the Australian branch of Hizbut-Tahrir, a global Islamic movement described by the Australian Broadcasting Commission as "radical." The video (a screenshot of which appears below) features a discussion about Qur'anic verse 4:34, which is often cited as evidence that Islam condones, even incites, violence against one's wife. The discussion that took place in the video was widely condemned by commentators and politicians as having "no place in modern Australia," as "offensive," "unacceptable" (Cash 2017), and "disgraceful" (Belot 2017). The video features two young women, Reem Allouce and Atika Latifi, both wearing hijab and discussing gender roles according to Islam and specifically referencing this verse in the Qur'an. They cautiously arrive at the consensus of Islamic scholars that this controversial verse can be understood as aiming to prevent the violence that was deemed common, even acceptable, in seventh-century society (Brown 2014; Alkiek et al. 2017). Following publicity about the video, outrage ensued and the ABC (Australia's national broadcaster) conducted a special investigation into the relationship between Islam and violence against women. The investigation culminated in a web-based report by Hayley Gleeson and Julia Baird (2017) titled "Exposing the Darkness Within: Domestic Violence and Islam." The title is provocative for the way it positions the ABC as the agent of enlightenment, by shedding light and revealing the truth of abuse in Islam and by reporting firsthand the plight of Islam's victims and the processes by which it radicalizes those victims.

The exposé captures myriad discussion points, including the scholarly hermeneutics on the verse together with community insights and interpretations, and it also reflects on the diversity of views within the debate. This nuance and complexity, however, are undercut by the series of images the report uses to convey its concerns and findings. All images, no matter their major focus, feature a cartoonish illustration of a heavily veiled dark female figure who is simultaneously central and marginal to the image. The first (fig. 7, top image) is a screenshot of the videos' presenters and chief discussants. As they smile and chat, the one holding a pen reaches over to tap the

Figure 7 A return to darkness. Two images used in the ABC special report on domestic violence and Islam (Gleeson and Baird 2017). Photo by Rocco Fazzari. © 2017 by Rocco Fazzari. Reprinted with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

other to demonstrate the symbolic gesture of chastisement that they claim verse 4:34 refers to—the moment in the video that provoked the most intense censure. This upbeat moment is in stark contrast to the miserable, isolated figure of the veiled woman in the foreground, who is also perhaps the

dark truthful element of the image. These young women may well laugh, but the darkness of which they speak is captured by the darkly veiled Muslim woman who slouches away from the scene.

In the second image (fig. 7, bottom image), the same shrouded figure walks away from the women's entrance to the mosque, which is itself cast in a long shadow that follows her. Enveloped in this looming darkness, she again appears to be turned away, this time from the mosque. The other images in the report include two sketches of a bearded male figure, one enacting the sanction of hitting one's wife with his hand and another appearing to find justification for his violence in the shelf of books that flanks him.

These haunting images plunge the imagined Muslim woman in crisis into a lonely life, shunned, in shadow, draped in darkness and silent. This ABC investigation was followed by two others, one about domestic violence and the Christian church and one about the Jewish community. The images in those reports are worthy of their own analysis, though curiously they contain images of agential women deciding to leave or "break the chains," and there is even an image of a man in front of a synagogue who has clearly been shunned. The repeated depiction of the veiled Muslim woman in darkness not only frames as it simplifies, it also strengthens the representability of Islam and Muslims. ABC's readers are invited to be vigilant of this shrouded danger as they witness a twofold victimization—women who are shunned and harmed by religion and those who become radicalized by religion to perform harm. Islam, in this image, is absolutely unrepresentable as the "most feminist" religion, as Abdel-Magied scandalously declared. Indeed, it is representable as a most antifeminist religion.

Conclusion

Like the body, time gestures to something natural, universal, and beyond politics. In this article we have examined the political nature of this supposition through a discussion of images of Muslim women in what we call secular humanitarian time. We conjectured that time is a prominent feature of these images. We suggested that an investment in the visual paradigm to shock, connect, and produce civic activism cannot be fully grasped in the absence of an engagement with time. We brought together the concept of representability—that which frames, produces, and demands images of Muslim women—and secular humanitarian time—that which conceives of Muslim women in precarious states of crisis, requiring support, relief, and sometimes saving. The "secular" moves history through an accumulation and distribution of freedom. The production and circulation of images of

Muslim women may have their geopolitical and domestic rationale, but the certainty of knowing what these images represent—the deplorable lives of others—is not possible without imagining them in relation to a secular time of the now, the past, and the future.

Images of Muslim women in humanitarian and human rights campaigns are produced, at least partially, as heroic narratives of alleviating suffering. The way we see and identify violence has become self-evident, Fassin contends (2012, 8), but this preoccupation with the ocular is also a fantasy of triumph that masks the coercion in the Western modernity. In this article we have argued that Western hegemony not only claims knowledge of suffering and emancipation but that modernity is invested in secular humanitarian time, which makes possible the representability of these images.

We have traced time in these images as something detected through a departure from one bodily state to another, which organizes the way we relate to the past and present as well as to others. These bodily snapshots are "once upon a time" rituals that form narratives of the past and future and that make time visible, approachable, and measurable (Lindroos 1998, 179–81). Bodies are a visible terrain through which time can be detected. In this time sequence of bodies, discourses of culture, sexuality, and religion come to mark out a civilizational fault line. As Sherene Razack states: "The Muslim woman's body is used to articulate European superiority. We cannot forget for an instant the usefulness of her body in the contemporary making of white nations and citizens. Her imperilled body has provided a rationale for engaging in the surveillance and disciplining of the Muslim man and Muslim communities" (2008, 168–69). As the war on terror draws on, humanitarian time has also become strained, faced with an imperiled Muslim women accentuated by the danger of her radicalization. In the images we examined, the camera's surveilling gaze searches for the veil, for the cultural afflictions and injuries believed to be already there on the body of the Muslim woman. Detecting these marks, we argue, is a mode of creating and recreating time where the moral imperative of the temporal camera, to capture the image of the victim, becomes a way of looking with care and compassion but also and always with a judgment that excludes and stigmatizes as it condemns.

School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Melbourne (Ghumkhor)

School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Deakin University (Pardy)

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