



Research Article

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A Metaphorical & Visual Analysis of Gender in Al Jazeera & BBC coverage of Afghanistan after the Taliban takes over

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Abstract: On April 14, 2021, the 46th President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, announced the end of the U.S. War in Afghanistan by saying, "It is time to end America's longest war. It is time for American troops to come home.". After the announcement, the Biden government planned to move all the U.S. troops from Afghanistan within September 11, on the anniversary of the attack that prompted the U.S invasion 20 years ago. On August 10, U.S intelligence warned the U.S govt that the Taliban might take over Kabul (Afghanistan government) within 30-90 days. However, the city fell within five days of the warning. On August 15, the Taliban took control of the country. The U.S. government set a deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan within August 31. When the Taliban took over the country and the U.S army and other Western troops were withdrawing from Afghanistan, the security and freedom of women and children was one of the biggest concerns. Different media published those concerning stories differently. In this paper, the author compares the published reports by two significant media of the 21st century, the Middle East-based Al Jazeera and the western country-based BBC. Globalization theory has been used to validate the article. Metaphorical analysis of contents has been analyzed to carry out the prospective outcome of this article.

Keywords: Taliban, Western Withdrawl, Erasure of Women, Afghanistan, Media coverage.

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INTRODUCTION

September 11, 2001, also commonly known as 9/11 (nine/eleven), there were four coordinated terrorist attacks in the USA by the militant Islamist group al-Qaeda (Moghadam, 2008). It resulted in 2977 fatalities with 25000 injuries and long-run physical and mental health consequences (Morgan, 2009). After the incident when The Taliban disagreed with expelling al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan, The U.S. government responded by launching the "War on Terror" and Invading Afghanistan (CBC News, 2004). The "War on Terror" has cost money and lives for both, Western troops and the Taliban, including civilians, for the last 20 years (2001-2021) (Hein, 2021). On April 2021, the 46th president of the US, Joe Biden, announced the end of 20 years of the "War on Terror," which cost the death of 1,76,00 lives in Afghanistan, including 2324 US troops and eight trillion dollars for the U.S (Brown University, 2021). After the announcement by Biden, the Taliban took over Afghanistan within a few days. This takeover made the civilians worried about their future as they thought the Taliban could avenge them, who were previously working with the U.S. government (Krauss, 2021). Krauses (2021) mentioned that people fear chaos in the country, women and children's safety, including men, reimposing of harsh interpretation of Islamic law observed during the Taliban govt from 1996 to 2001, and education and fundamental education rights for women. However, the Taliban has promised to become a moderate government respecting women's rights and

forgiving those who fought against the Taliban. However, thousands of Afghans rushed to Kabul airport to find a way to exit the country. The people were so desperate to leave the country that they clung to the sight of a military jet at the time of takeoff resulting in their death, crowded to the airport. Troops opened fire in the air to take control and save the U.S.troops, but the chaos resulted in seven deaths (Krauss, 2021). Later, the Taliban formed an all-male interim government though United Nations and other international communities demanded to include women in the cabinet (Rubin, 2021a).

This article compares the published story by two significant media of the 21st century, the Middle East-based Al Jazeera and the Western-based BBC. The comparison is based on the published content of those two media, emphasizing the security of women and children of Afghanistan after the Western troop withdrawal.

Theoretical Perspective

Taliban, an Islamist fundamentalist organization, was founded in southern Afghanistan by Mullah Mohammad Omar in 1994. Afghanistan was ruled by the Taliban from 1996 to 2001 until the U.S Invasion was topple (Trofimov & Nissenbaum, 2021). d After 20 years of that invasion, In August 2021, the Taliban returned to Afghanistan's power. The U.S. and other western troops went to their home. This war cost thousands of lives and trillions of money. Twenty years ago, when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, women had

limited opportunities for education and freedom. When they returned to power again, the issues also became a burning question. However, Taliban leaders continuously said that these things would not happen this time, and women would be free to continue their daily lives (Aikins & Huylebroek, 2021). Though they said there would be no harm to those against them or the women, the Taliban had already formed an interim government without any women (Trofimov & Nissenbaum, 2021). "Globalization" theory will be used to analyze the stories published on the BBC and Al Jazeera in terms of western withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Globalization Theory

Several sociologists and authors described globalization differently, but the main idea of globalization is the same: connecting people altogether (Colombier, 2006).

"Globalization" means the growing interdependence of the world's economy, culture, and populations brought by cross-border trade, goods, services, and technology. There is significant existence of information, investment, and people (Kolb, 2018). Colombier (2006) added that the values of different cultures are also included in globalization. Global communication is now directly affected by globalization (Ahmed, 2018). Ahmed (2018) mentioned that using the internet and fiber optic cable makes globalization easier, increases business opportunities, and removes cultural barriers by creating the whole world in a global village.

Global village describes the phenomena created by the propagation of the media convergence resulting in more interconnection between people worldwide (McLuhan, 1962). People use technology to remove the digital divide. Nowadays, social media has become a digital home for individuals, which allows people to become more concerned about the world's issues (McLuhan et al., 1995).

Dixon (2009) mentioned that people tend to raise their voices when society faces any inequality because of cultural globalization. They raise questions about enriched diversity, equal representation, mutual understanding, and reciprocal sharing. Media are using the internet in their favor to distribute and publicize the contents they want to publish (UKEssays, 2018). In this way, media helped enhance globalization by facilitating cultural exchange and multiple flows of information (Matos, 2012), contributing transmission of ideas and values (Santos, 2001).

As people intend to respond to the inequality (Reese et al., 2014), the ongoing Taliban issues have become a global issue. Though the Taliban ruled Afghanistan 20 years earlier, the world is not the same anymore. People are now more connected and more

concerned about gender and other issues (UNICEF, 2020), And; the media is not far behind this. As media are closely connected with globalization, global village, and global communication, almost every media is publishing stories of inequality and other gender concern issues worldwide. Afghanistan and the Taliban are no exception to this.

Research Questions

In order to analyze the metaphorical and globalization aspects of the published story of Al Jazeera & BBC, a number of research questions guided the study. To carry out the comparison following research questions are informed:

- How did Al Jazeera & BBC discursively construct gender issues in Afghanistan after Western Military withdrawal?
- How did they report the visual erasure of images of women in Afghanistan after western withdrawal?

RESEARCH METHODS

In order to answer the research questions, the author employed a multi-method research approach that involved:

- analyzing the contents (stories, pictures, videos, opinions) published by Al Jazeera and the BBC regarding the gender discourses (mainly women and children);
- metaphorical analysis of the cultural globalization of the issues collected from the published article and images on the Al Jazeera & BBC; and
- visual analysis of the contents that the Al Jazeera & BBC has published.

The timeframe of the published contents of both media (Al Jazeera online and BBC online) is from August 16 to October 30, 2021, as when the author started analyzing the issues, it was the closest date. Both media publishes lots of news regarding Afghanistan and Taliban issues. Still, in this paper, the author will go for that news that has "Women" in the headline or subheadline" to maintain consistency and validity.

RESULTS

How did Al Jazeera & BBC Discursively Construct Gender Issues in Afghanistan after Western Military Withdrawal?

Al Jazeera published at least 100 news articles and opinions, including many images and videos, from August 16 to October 31, 2021. On average, they published at least 5-6 stories in a day in different dimensions. They published at least 21 articles that include the word "Women" in their headline in this timeframe. Five reports have "women" in subheadings.

On the other hand, the BBC has at least nine articles that have "Women" in the headline. Aljazeera and the BBC published several news articles that do not

have "women" in the headline but indicate gender issues and safety.

At that time, Afghanistan, Taliban & western withdrawal was the burning issue worldwide, and almost all of the media published continuous articles on those issues. BBC & Al Jazeera was not different from them. In this context, the author found that Al Jazeera published more stories, videos, and images than the BBC. Even Al Jazeera Journalists published stories like A Day with Taliban 2.0, close to Taliban leaders (Javaid, 2021).

Additionally, Al Jazeera's female journalist Charlotte Bellis covered several stories for Al Jazeera, including interviews with the Taliban leaders (Bertrand, 2021). She was one of three women present at the first conference of Taliban, where she asked questions about women's rights and freedom (Murphy, 2021). Both BBC & Al Jazeera published endless stories concerning women and children's safety in Afghanistan. They also covered several remarkable stories on those issues. In this context, the BBC published stories like people staying abroad fearing the safety of their families. On August 17, they published a report containing four images and one video indicating that people worldwide are concerned and worried about their family and friends (BBC News, 2021c). The author found that, As BBC is a U.K. based news agency, BBC tried to find out about people who are living in the U.K. and being worried about their families. Beyond ongoing events, they emphasized that people living in the U.K. are concerned about their families. BBC published several stories like Refugees who settled in Northwest tell of fears (Mulla, 2021), Welsh woman trying to help translator flee Kabul (Price, 2021), Coventry shopkeeper fears for his children (BBC News, 2021a), Coventry daughter of a woman stuck in Kabul asks for more troops there (BBC News, 2021d), Daughter's relief as mother escapes Kabul (BBC News, 2021b), etc.

On the other hand, As Al Jazeera is a Middle East-based news agency, Al Jazeera did not publish this type of story. Rather than that, Al Jazeera covered some core stories that indicate women's security and human rights. They published articles like "Is the Taliban's treatment of women really inspired by Sharia?" (Mogahed, 2021), Afghan women's losing battle to remain visible under the Taliban (Wilczewska, 2021), How international organizations are failing Afghan women (Koo, 2021), etc.

Moreover, both media published regular stories like Afghanistan women protesting for their rights to work (Latifi, 2021a), for including in government (Latifi, 2021b), education, etc. Even BBC and Al Jazeera both highlighted the stories of protest of Afghan women demanding their rights and the after-effects of the protest, like beating up the protesters

(Limaye & Thapar, 2021) and the journalists who covered the stories (Latifi, 2021c), continuous warning of U.N. in those issues (al Jazeera, 2021e), etc. Afghan women worldwide followed a trend, "Do not touch my clothes," where they posted photos of their traditional clothes and asked Taliban leaders not to touch their history (al Jazeera, 2021e). Both BBC and Al Jazeera published the stories with great importance.

Al Jazeera published at least ten more stories in this context of regular stories than the BBC. On September 8, 2021, Al Jazeera published a series of images that indicates the whole story of Afghan women's fear and protest (al Jazeera, 2021b).

How did They Report the Visual Erasure of Images of Women in Afghanistan after Western Withdrawal?

Both BBC and Al Jazeera emphasized the women and children's security regarding the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan and the removal of the presence of women from several places.

Al Jazeera covered six stories about the women's protest against the Taliban government, whereas BBC covered 3. Al Jazeera has also emphasized the other issues of women like sending working women their home (Al Jazeera, 2021a), education at schools (Latifi, 2021d), university (Al Jazeera, 2021c), etc. Al Jazeera even published a remarkable story of a woman who dreams of becoming an athlete, but now she hides for fear of the Taliban (Wilczewska, 2021). Not only about education or rights, but Al Jazeera also published four stories about women in sports like cricket. They interviewed the Afghan cricket board chairman (Ghani, 2021) and about the existing fear of the Afghan female football team (Al Jazeera, 2021d).

BBC tried to emphasize the stories differently. They published and feared the lifelong mental trauma of Afghan women who fled from Kabul (Johal, 2021). They also covered 3 minute, 33-second visual representation of the "shattered dreams" of the Ariana Airlines Cabin crew, where they were told not to work anymore (Wright, 2021). BBC emphasized the mental strengths of Afghan women by covering stories like Giving birth Under the Taliban (Jung & Maroof, 2021), "Imran Khan: Afghan women are very strong" (BBC News, 2021e), etc. Alongside Afghan female cricket and footballers, the BBC also emphasized the fear of Afghan volleyball players (Wright, 2021). Both media published several stories that indicate women's direct and indirect erasure from the government, universities, schools, jobs, and pictures.

Metaphorical & Visual Analysis

BBC mentioned that Afghan women are strong and fearless. They have been facing social obstacles all the time in their life. Even BBC framed their concern

about the mental health of the Afghan Women who fled from Afghanistan in this took over (Johal, 2021). The BBC also thought about Afghan women's dreams, and they used the word "Shattered" to contrast the scenery (Wright, 2021). The BBC compared Afghan women to struggling warriors who gave birth under Taliban rulers without pain relief, no medicine, and food (Jung & Maroof, 2021). They mentioned the baby as a torchbearer in the darkness.

Al Jazeera presented women as "everything," using the term "medical workers to warriors" by giving examples from the first generation of Muslim believers (Mogahed, 2021). In her opinion, Mogahed (2021) mentioned the name Rufaida Al- Aslmia, who was recognized as a surgeon by the Prophet for her care of the wound and her training for other nurses. In this article, the author mentioned the first known university globally, the University of Al-Qarawiyyin in the Moroccan city of fez, was also founded by a Muslim woman named Fatima al-Fihri 1000 years ago. Al Jazeera represented the history created by the Muslim women previously in various sectors like politics, research, and medicine and questioned the Taliban's treatment of women. Al Jazeera also compared the Afghan girls in sports as fighters sighting against all the odds just after they were born (Wilczewska, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The article analyzed and compared the published reports by Al Jazeera and BBC after the Taliban took over in Afghanistan. At the time of the takeover, the Taliban promised they would not cause any harm to people who went against them before. They would ensure education and rights for the women (Rasheed et al., 2021). However, by the reports published by several media worldwide, it can be readily observable that the thing is not happening in Afghanistan. Women are being removed from the workplace (Suliman & George, 2021), even from educational institutions (BBC News, 2021e). Women have already lost their place in the government (Rubin, 2021b). Though United Nations and international organizations expressed their concern about the issues, the Taliban govt did not include women in the govt. They even changed the name of the ministry of women (Ganon, 2021). Those women who are trying to protest against these issues, demanding their rights, are being beaten and threatened to be killed (Limaye & Thapar, 2021). Some of the women involved in sports fled away from Afghanistan for fear of life (Al Jazeera, 2021d). Some of the journalists who covered the protest news of women were also tortured by the Taliban (Latifi, 2021c). The author analyzed the stories published by Al Jazeera and BBC. It is visible that, because of the media responsibilities and globalization, both Al Jazeera and the BBC tried to present the scenario to people worldwide. Both Al Jazeera and the BBC played an extraordinary role in raising the issues regarding gender discourses and tried to help women get their rights

back. They presented Afghan women as vital, strugglers, Warrior, and "everything."

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