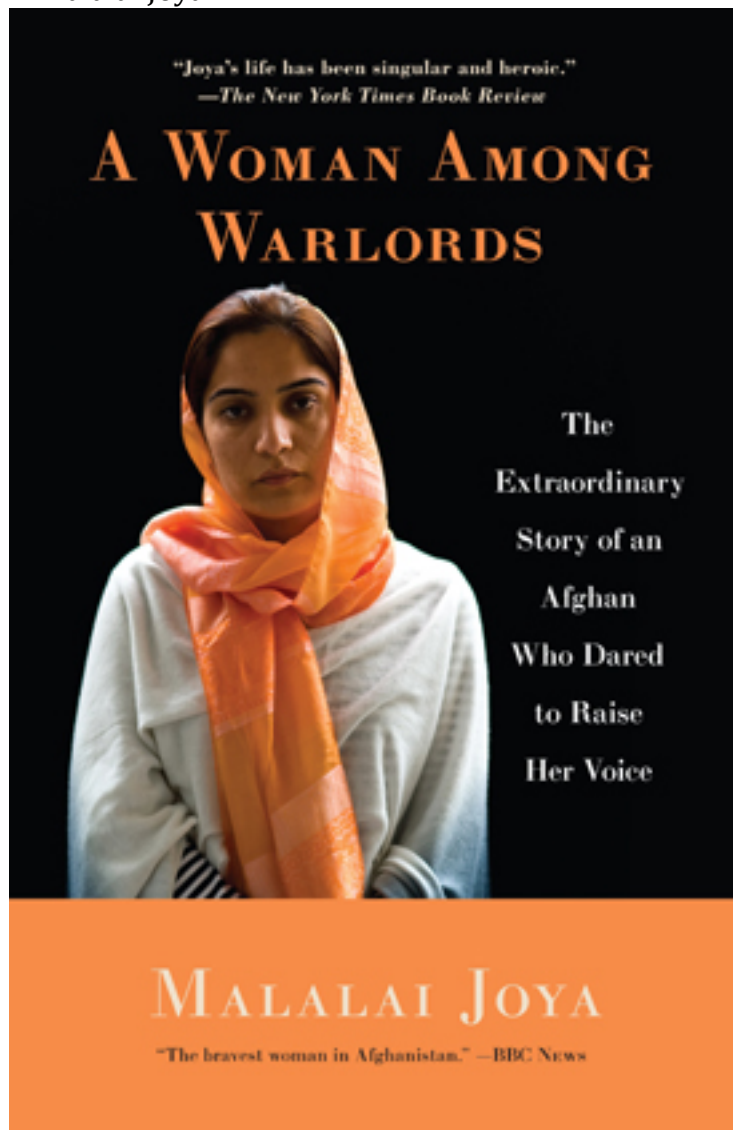


Tearing Off the Masks of Those Who Hide behind Women's Skirts: Malalai Joya

by Mary Beaudoin

"From the sky, Occupation forces are bombing, killing civilians—mostly women and children. On the ground, Taliban and warlords together continue their fascism. If the U.S. and NATO left my country, the backbone of the Taliban and warlords would be broken."

—Malalai Joya



Malalai Joya, Afghan feminist and activist.

"The Afghan War Logs," released last summer by WikiLeaks, revealed that the CIA advised using the plight of Afghan women as "pressure points" to rally flagging public support for the US/NATO war on Afghanistan. For that reason, the CIA must have been thrilled when last July Time Magazine featured on its cover the shocking

photo of a young Afghan woman with her nose missing, reportedly cut off on Taliban orders. Next to the photo Time posed the question, "What happens to the women of Afghanistan if we leave?"

The story is a perfect example of institutional synergy between an administration waging war and supportive media producing propaganda. In a message to readers, Time's managing editor Richard Stengel announced: "The stated intention is to counterbalance damaging WikiLeaks revelations—91,000 documents that, Time believes, cannot provide emotional truth and insight into the way life is lived in that difficult land." The term "cover story" took on added meaning with the article. Despite disclaimers to the contrary, the Time report on conditions of women in Afghanistan served as a rationale for the war/occupation, giving cover for US/NATO involvement—a gift the CIA could only have hoped for.

But it did not go unchallenged. This April, Afghan activist Malalai Joya gave a talk in Minneapolis while on a national book tour for the new edition of her book *A Woman Among Warlords*. Countering the question posed on the Time cover, she asked another question with the direct honesty that has gained her honors, awards, and respect from peace and justice communities worldwide: "I'm telling you on behalf of my people, it would be better [for the US and NATO] to ask: 'What's happening to the women of Afghanistan while we are there?'"

Like the child in the fable "The Emperor's New Clothes," but with mature moral clarity, Malalai Joya pointed out an important fact that unfortunately is often avoided. The tragedy that afflicted the young woman of the Time cover happened while U.S./NATO forces are in Afghanistan.

Joya criticizes big media for complicity in the atrocities of war/occupation: "They misuse the women of my country for their propaganda machine. They never let you see disfigured women and children when they [the US/NATO] use white phosphorus and plastic bombs on them." On her tour, Joya shows slides of a few of the thousands of civilian casualties known to have occurred from US/NATO attacks. She said she was told by media sources that they could not publish such photos of Afghan casualties because it would offend the sensibilities of children. But, she asked, who is protecting Afghan children? It is they who truly suffer the effects of war. This wasn't even a question that big media in Minneapolis/St. Paul asked—none of them reported on her visit here, though independent media did.



Photos the Pentagon doesn't want the public to see: Injured child, Kunar province, Afghanistan, Feb. 20, 2011. Over a period of four days 64 civilians were killed here by NATO airstrikes.

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Joya continues to state that she will not be silenced, because she needs to speak for the voiceless—"my people, the poor, suffering people of Afghanistan." This is something she has done for years. At a young age, she opened and managed a much-needed medical clinic and an orphanage in Farah, her province in Afghanistan, and then won a seat in Parliament. In 2005 she was the youngest person elected, but after denouncing the warlords and drug lords as criminal elements who didn't deserve to be seated there, she was assaulted, threatened, and evicted. There have been several assassination attempts on her life.

Joya was originally denied a visa, which she later received after supporters mounted a campaign pressuring the US State Department, because she has said Karzai's US-backed regime is full of warlords/drug lords and people who have killed, tortured,

and looted her people for decades. She told the Minneapolis audience that cynical US/NATO policy empowers and enables the criminal regime in Afghanistan by providing them with money and guns, and that they are further supported by the opium business. It was a major goal of the CIA to make Afghanistan the biggest opium producer in the world. Each year 8,000 tons of opium are transported out of the country on US B52s. The drug money goes to Afghan warlords/drug lords, and, she said, “it goes into the pockets of the foreign masters as well.”

While certain elements get rich off opium sales, there are reports of widespread hunger, malnutrition, stunted growth, starvation, and diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera among the people. Afghanistan now ranks 181 out of 182 on the UN Human Development Index.

What about the Taliban? Joya says that no one in Afghanistan can believe that the most powerful country with the biggest military in the world can't defeat the Taliban, who, she points out, were created by the US government with the support of ISI (Inter Service Intelligence agency of Pakistan). She believes that the media portray the Taliban as a much more formidable force than they are. Having a monstrous enemy justifies the occupation.

The occupation keeps her country “lawless, insecure, especially for the women, and then they have a very good excuse to stay there longer for their own interests... During the nine years of occupation, tens of thousands of civilians have been killed—most of them innocent men, women, and children. Since Obama came into power, civilian death tolls have increased...” For these reasons, she said, “at least for my people, Obama is just a second and even more dangerous Bush.”

Joya said talk of troop withdrawal is only to deceive people, and US/NATO troops will not leave. “They are there because of their strategic, political, and economic interests... When in Afghanistan, they make their military bases more powerful [so that] very easily they can control other Asian powers like Iran, China, Russia, etc. Then very easily they will have access to the gas and oil of the Central Asian republics.”

The media, although they report the resistance of the Taliban, never report about “the second kind of resistance, which is a hope for the future of Afghanistan: the resistance of ordinary Afghan people—men and women, resistance of students of the universities. Nineteen members of the student [body] of one university in one day have been killed by this blind bombardment of US and NATO troops. All students when they hear this news in Kabul they come on the streets with banners against the occupation. Who hears their voice? Every day more and more people in my country come on the streets and raise their voice against the occupation, but who will listen to the voice of these voiceless people? Also, the resistance of some few democratic parties that we have—parties and intellectuals. They never give you these reports.”

She believes that if the US and NATO just left her country in peace, the backbone of the Taliban and warmongers would be broken and people would know what to do: "Liberation doesn't come from the outside. Only the people can liberate themselves."

A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan Who Dared to Raise Her Voice. Simon and Schuster. New York. Paperback edition 2011. Visit her web site www.malalaijoya.com



When U.S./NATO bombings killed civilians including many children, Afghans in Kabul protested in the street showing pickets with the children's photos and signs demanding Obama "Stop killing Us!" and "Leave Afghanistan!"
Mudsadeq/Sadeq: AP

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